

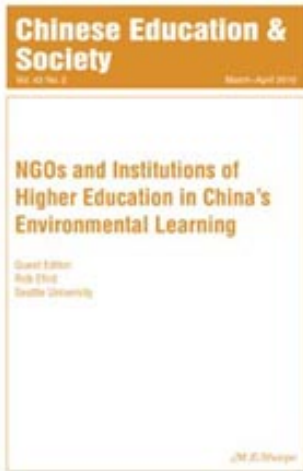
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HSIEH HSIAO-CHIN AND LEE SHU-CHING

The Formation of Gender Education Policies in Taiwan, 1995–1999

Abstract: This article discusses the formation of gender equity education policies in Taiwan between 1995 and 1999. The first part of the article presents a general description of Taiwan's women's movement, the education reform movement, and the development of women's/gender studies after the lifting of martial law in 1987. The second part of the article focuses on a discussion of the process of formation of two important policies: the announcement of gender equality education as a part of the education reform agenda by the Education Reform Council, Executive Yuan in 1996; and the inclusion of gender issues as an integral aspect of the elementary and secondary school curriculum reform from 1997 to 1999. The social, political, economic, and educational contexts within which these two policies emerged and the critical factors affecting their formation are analyzed.

Gender equity education policies have developed rapidly in Taiwan in recent years. The decade 1995 to 2004 was crucial to the development of Taiwan's gender education policies. The article "Education: From the Reproduction of Patriarchy to Women's Liberation," in the 1995 *White Paper on the Status of Women in Taiwan* pointed out that, in the past, gender education policy:

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was led by men. Along with educational changes under the goal of national development and economic growth, women's education and employment opportunities increased, but imbalanced education expansion policies, a school personnel structure in which women were inferior to men, curriculum and content filled with stereotypes associated with gender bias, and low investment in and pay rates for women in education, collectively served to support the reproduction of patriarchal ideology in education. (Hsieh 1995: 218)

At the end of 1996, the Concluding Report of the Executive Yuan Council on Educational Reform (referred to below as the CER) included gender equity education and recommended establishing a "Gender Equity Education Committee to handle and supervise matters associated with gender equity and institutionalize the promotion of gender equity in education." In January 1997, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan passed the Sexual Assault Crime Prevention Act and, in March of the same year, its Ministry of Education established the Gender Equity Education Committee. In 1998 the Ministry of Education published the Master Outline for a Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum in Elementary and Junior High Schools, with "gender education" included as one of six major topics. It was formally included in the elementary and junior high school curriculum and started being gradually implemented in 2001. On June 4, 2004, the Legislative Yuan passed the Gender Equity Education Act, and the president announced its implementation the same month.

In ten years, Taiwan's education system had progressed from fully patriarchal, gender-blind policies to the inclusion of gender equity in its curriculum outline and the comprehensive promotion of gender equity education through legislation. This development process was rapid; it covered a broad scope and attained impressive results. In examining the promotion of gender equity education policies in countries around the world, Stromquist (2007) highlighted Taiwan's Gender Equity Education Act, which by global standards was highly distinctive and forward-looking. In the process of promoting gender equity education in Taiwan, how did the question of gender equity enter the education policy decision-making process? What strategies did feminist and education reform organizations use, and did they collide with and encounter resistance amid prevailing mainstream values?

To answer these questions, this article focuses on the formation of the two earliest gender education policies. (1) How gender was formally included as a topic in the text of the 1996 education reform policy document, the CER Report. (2) How gender education became an important topic in Taiwan's 1998-99 curriculum reform document, the Master Outline. We examine these two issues from a feminist viewpoint, the historical context, and a sociological perspective, to present the political, social, and cultural context for the creation of these two important gender education policies (Harding 1987; Taylor et al. 1997). In addition to a literature review, our data collection involved elite interviews (Ball 1994) in order to obtain in-depth discussions with actors who were important in formulating the policies.

They provided factual information and also captured values-based struggles and conflicts among insiders during the policymaking process. In this way, we were able to probe into the dynamic process of policy formation and present the deep political and social implications behind the final policy texts.

Building a Context for Gender Education Policy

After World War II, Taiwan experienced political turmoil and poverty in the 1950s, economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, and an astounding accumulation of social energy in the 1980s, which resulted in continuous popular protests and a succession of political opposition movements. In 1987 the government announced the abolishment of martial law, which set Taiwanese society on a path to comprehensive democratization (Hsiao 1992). The feminist and education reform movements rose up during this democratization process, along with other new social campaigns.

How did the seemingly parallel threads of the feminist and education reform movements begin to intertwine? As early as 1988, Taiwan's first feminist organization, the Awakening Foundation, examined gender bias in elementary and secondary school textbooks in the subjects of Chinese, citizenship, history, social studies, and others,¹ and published the *Gender Equity Education Handbook*. In addition, in 1989 the *Humanistic Education Journal* also published an article, "Gender Awareness in Education," which analyzed various aspects of the gender bias phenomenon in school education. The same year, the Humanistic Education Foundation and other education reform organizations joined with feminist groups such as the Awakening Foundation to convene the Civil Society Education Conference, the agenda of which included gender equity education. The 1990s saw a gradual accumulation of discussion and research on gender and education and a convergence of discourse in the feminist movement, women's studies, and education. In 1995, the Taiwanese Feminist Scholars Association published the *White Paper on the Status of Women in Taiwan*, and the National Taiwan University Women's Research Program produced *Ten Years of Women's Studies: Review and Prospects for Women's Human Rights (1985–1995)*. Both of these studies proposed policy for gender education. Despite the earnest appeals of civil society groups, however, the policy direction reflected in the Ministry of Education's 1995 *Education Report of the Republic of China: Toward a Vision of Twenty-First Century Education* did not address gender at all.

Between 1994 and 1996, the Executive Yuan's CER included the topic of gender education in its major report and, in 1997–99, gender was included in the Master Outline for the elementary and secondary education curriculum. These were certainly early milestones in the development of Taiwan's gender education policies. Using data from our in-depth interviews, we summarize below the dynamic policy formation process.

Breaking the Ice for Gender Education Policy: The CER Stage (1994–1996)

The Executive Yuan's Council on Educational Reform was established in September 1994 as a task group expected to last two years, and charged with planning Taiwan's twenty-first century education blueprint. At the outset, the CER did not even consider the issue of gender. Only in the summer of 1995 did a number of feminist scholars secure a research project from the CER for "gender equity education." The conclusions of this project were ultimately embedded in the text of the CER's reform policy.

Making Proposals: Connecting Through Social Networks

The topic of gender first appeared in volume 17/18 of the CER's *Education Reform Bulletin* in 1995. Su Chien-Ling, professor of English literature and then vice-chair of the Awakening Foundation, said, "During the CER's wave of reform in 1994, we wanted to propose our own policy research and get this policy included." Only five of the thirty-one members of the CER at the time were women. Feminist groups needed the help of a CER member to make a proposal. With a recommendation by the executive secretary, Tseng Hsien-Cheng, they decided to ask member Chou Li-Yu, a high school principal with a chemistry background, to assist. Chou thereby became a "bridge between research groups and the CER." Proposing that the CER examine the gender issue was a result of Chou's own budding gender awareness, which continued to develop. Some friends who had long supported the feminist movement and women's studies offered her knowledge associated with gender and gave her confidence. Chou then "made use of [her] position" (as a member of the CER) to raise the proposal. At this point, social connections were the key to turning it into policy.

The executive secretary, Tseng Hsien-Cheng, a former professor of chemical engineering, also played a critical role in finding a place for gender among the many concerns of the CER. Tseng had already been in contact with the Awakening Foundation, and was also influenced by his wife Wu Chia-Li, a professor of chemistry and activist in the feminist movement. He therefore became concerned about the gender topic and made sure that feminist voices were frequently heard as the CER proceeded with its business, so that gender was not forgotten amid the clamor of the education reform discussion.

The vital role of social network connections was clearly demonstrated in ensuring that the final text produced by the CER addressed gender equity. While the policy was under development, however, the mainstream gender values and constraints of the existing structure also made themselves known.

Becoming Policy: Gender Encounters Mainstream Values

Although Chou Li-Yu's proposal was vetted by Tseng Hsien-Cheng, gender equity education was not inserted into the CER's policymaking process without

resistance. Few CER members had an awareness of gender, and many had diverging views on the gender equity issue. “Some senior professors would say: ‘It can’t be (unequal); in our home my wife is the boss, because I hand over all of my salary to her. . . .’ They used their personal narratives to view gender” (interview with Chou).

Fortunately, the greater Taiwanese society had a politically correct atmosphere just beneath the surface with regard to reform, which kept CER members from refusing, despite their discomfort with the notion of gender equity. In addition, the gender issue did not threaten “resource allocation,” and Chou “was not extreme, and did not start stripping away men’s interests right off the bat” in her policy strategy (interview with Chou). This lowered the psychological defenses of the other CER members. In addition, a small number of senior members supported the gender issue, which may have provided an important boost. Chou felt that Li Yi-Yuan, an academician and renowned anthropologist, was especially supportive with regard to gender equity. The Research Program on Gender and Society at National Tsing Hua University’s College of Humanities and Social Sciences was established when he was dean of that college. Women’s studies networked with senior academics in the university environment during that time, providing another impetus for the creation of gender equity education policies.

To summarize the process, the feminist and education reform movements “developed in context,” thus contributing to the establishment of the CER and providing a platform beneficial to making connections with noneducation professionals. Feminist organizations were very keen on this “platform,” and a viable strategy developed as the network expanded. Although few CER members at the time were women and even fewer had an awareness of gender equity, they still found a way to bring the issue of gender into education reform policies. Feminist activists actively selected and worked to cultivate influential policy sponsors with positions on the CER. They took every opportunity to keep an eye on the gatekeepers, and the support of some key policymakers for the gender topic meant that feminists were able to step onto the policy dialogue bridge during the education reform process.

Not long after the CER Report came out at the end of 1996, the rape and murder of feminist Taiwanese politician Peng Wan-Ru reverberated throughout society. Feminist organizations held large demonstrations on the theme “Light the night streets with the torch of women’s rights.” They protested the government’s disregard of women’s most basic right to personal security and freedom from fear. The Legislative Yuan hastily passed the Sexual Assault Crime Prevention Act, which had been drafted many years previously by feminist organizations. Article 8 of the act provided that elementary and secondary schools should teach four hours of sexual abuse prevention education each school year. In 1997, the Ministry of Education established the Two-Sex Equity Education Committee and promoted various gender equity matters. It also responded to calls from nongovernmental organizations and recommendations from the CER.

Above and Below the Surface: The Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum Reforms (1997–1999)

Curriculum is at the core of education; teachers rely on it to teach and it is the object of student learning. It occupies a crucial position in the education process. Successfully inserting gender education into the curriculum would determine its attainment of a legitimate position in Taiwan's education system. After the CER completed its work and disbanded, the Ministry of Education began to promote the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum Reforms in elementary and junior high schools. The social connections between the feminist and reform movements continued to have an influence in the first phase of these reforms. In the second phase, however, various forms of resistance appeared when the teaching objectives and capacity indicators were determined for each subject area, due to the diverging standpoints of education reformers and gender advocates.

Like Water Flowing Downhill: Placing Gender in the Overall Curriculum Outline

Chou Li-Yu, who was responsible for having gender education included in the CER's education reform proposal, was also one of three conveners of the Elementary and Junior High School Curriculum Development Working Group during the first phase of the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum Reform.² Her experience on the CER gave her a clear objective and put her in a position to seize the initiative by striking first to make gender a part of the curriculum reforms. "When I was working on curriculum, I naturally wanted to say that we should go and promote this thing, make provisions for [gender equity education] in the legally defined curriculum. I took the initiative to say to them, 'Let's find a way to put a gender provision in the curriculum standards'" (interview with Chou). In Taiwan's education system, which tended toward centralized authority, the only way to obtain teaching hours, content, and faculty was to place gender education in the official curriculum.

Following the proposal in the CER Report, having gender education included in the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum Reform process could be described as "water flowing downhill" (interview with Chen Po-Chang). "There was no dispute; there was no resistance" (interview with Chou). Chen and Chou both believed that the prevailing political and social atmosphere in Taiwan and international influence affected the first phase of the curriculum reforms, in which representatives of reform-minded civil society organizations participated in the policymaking, including the Awakening Foundation, the Homemakers' Union, the Jendo Education Society, and the Humanistic Education Foundation. Their presence ensured that the policy process went relatively smoothly. In addition, because "gender" was an important "topic" in the curriculum outline and not an independent "subject," it did not involve the problem of allocating teaching hours. "So, you are not taking up my teaching

hours, and are not robbing me of my time, either” (interview with Chou). Under such nonthreatening conditions, gender education was quite smoothly included in the curriculum outline.

Resistance and Compromise: Gender in the Subject Area Curriculum Outlines

On the surface, including gender education in the curriculum appeared to be as smooth as water flowing downhill. The second phase, however, involved allocating teaching hours and resources for the curricula of each subject area. Tensions arose at these lower levels.

Ming-Jane Chuang, a professor, was a convener for the gender topic, one of six major topics during the second phase of the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum Reforms. Chuang had just returned to Taiwan to teach in 1993, when she became acquainted with some feminist activists. She also engaged in research on gender education during the CER period; her curriculum research specialty and position as director of the Institute of Curriculum Studies, National Taipei University of Education, led to her service as a curriculum reform convener on the topic of gender.

The curriculum policy task during the second phase was to research and formulate a curriculum outline for each subject area. As soon as gender was brought into each of the seven subject areas,³ the problems of domain knowledge structures and blindness to gender issues surfaced. Gender was viewed in domain specialist circles as a type of “knowledge pollution.”

“Knowledge pollution . . . for example, in the natural sciences area” . . . he [the convener] said, “if you want to discuss physiological differences . . . we can certainly talk about this issue; if you want to discuss that stuff about equal rights for men and women . . . go and do that in social studies.” . . . Then I tried to talk about it with social studies . . . but the convener told me that they already address it in human rights, so it’s enough. . . . From the beginning, the area of health and physical education opened their doors to us, but in fact they had been doing it themselves all along. In the end . . . it is already done; you come and take a look. So I saw that they had already implemented (their own version of) gender education. (Interview with Chuang)

The final compromise was to place the six major topic areas, including gender, at the end of the curriculum outline for the seven subject areas, creating an “eighth area.” Gender education had at least been included as a topic in the text of the curriculum policy.

Conclusions and Discussion

In this article we have attempted to discuss the connections between the context, background, feminist movement, women’s and gender studies, and the education

reform movement that lay behind the formation of gender education policies in Taiwan after the end of martial law. We interviewed important participants in the policymaking that took place between 1995 and 1999, and have presented the dynamic relationship between these actors and policy, law, and regulation during the policy formation process. We discovered in our research that Taiwan's rapid political and social changes in the 1980s incubated the development of the feminist and education reform movements of the 1990s. Women's and gender studies provided strong support to the feminist movement, which was thereby able to push the topic of gender education onto the education reform platform in the early stages, making it a formal part of the curriculum. The resistance encountered during the policy formation process reflected a conflict between the prevailing mainstream values of the knowledge elites and the concept of gender equality. During the CER stage, policymakers believed that gender was a personal and biological issue. In the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum Reform stage, gender confronted existing knowledge and power in the individual academic subject areas. Beneath an apparently smooth surface, a valiant struggle took place amid more hidden turbulence. The mature reform atmosphere and cooperation of actors at the decision-making level resulted in the gender topic being included in the curriculum outline, which gave it legal status and made it compulsory. Nevertheless, the subsequent drafting of teaching materials and selection of textbooks, and actual teaching and assessment, were not under the control of feminist and education reform activists. The various circumstances involved in putting gender education into practice are therefore worth further exploration.

Notes

1. Schools at the compulsory education level, that is, elementary and junior high, in Taiwan were mandated to use standard, uniform textbooks during the martial law period.

2. The other two conveners were professors Chen Po-Chang and Lin Ching-Chiang. Lin had passed away by the time we conducted our research, so we were only able to interview Chen and Chou Li-Yu.

3. The seven major subject areas were language and literature, mathematics, natural and life sciences, health and physical education, social studies, arts and humanities, and integrative activities. The six major topic areas were gender, environmental protection, information, home economics, human rights, and career development.

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