

The Humanist Challenge in Taiwan's Education: Liberation, Social Justice and Ecology

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Education must respect persons and make developing the whole person its sole goal. Only when people come to understand that the "person" is its goal, and cannot be reduced to a means of servicing other goals, is education reform possible. (Shi 1993, 11.)

Introduction

Two decades ago, Taiwan's education system was shaped by the authoritarian capitalism that characterized the Kuomintang (KMT) regime. General Chiang Kai-shek certainly understood the importance of education for regime stability. Education officials maintained extensive control over the curriculum, admission, school organization, and teaching personnel in order to cultivate mass political allegiance, produce human capital, and perpetuate the status quo. Additionally Chiang enlisted schools in the anti-communist campaign as "the national spiritual defense force." Schools treated pupils like military cadets: secondary schoolboys wore khaki uniforms and shaved heads, while fascistic rituals with flag-raising, marching and patriotic-songs were a common sight in school grounds. Such images are emblematic of the way the state prioritized rigid soldier-like loyalty, obedience, and conformity in education. The military ethos pervading the education system was further evident in the harsh discipline and the strict uniformity and orientation of the curriculum. For example, Mandarin was strictly imposed, and use of native languages strictly punished. Just as the education system sought to dominate children, it was also imbued with the high modernist mission of dominating nature to further national progress. School textbooks glorified major government construction projects, such as huge dams and nuclear power stations, as great achievements and exhorted students to "conquer nature" with the power of modern science and technology.

Yet although political control was pervasive, the KMT never subscribed to the ideal of free, universal public education. Compulsory schooling was extended from six to nine years in 1968. But public primary and secondary schools were not free of charge, and stories abounded of impoverished pupils humiliated at school because they were unable to pay their fees. Furthermore, state control coexisted with a large private education sector, and except for the nine compulsory years, many students were obliged to attend the more expensive and often lower quality private institutions. In 1994, for example, private sector enrolment figures were: 77.4 in percent kindergarten, 1.2 in percent primary school, 6.6 in percent junior high school, 53.0 in percent senior high school, and 72.5 percent in university.¹ This highly privatized system reproduced class divisions through compulsory streaming and generated other structures of privilege and disadvantage. Mainlanders, for example, were disproportionately represented in the higher ranks of the education bureaucracy and professions, and as public servants their children enjoyed subsidies and privileged access to the better funded, higher quality state institutions. But perhaps the contrast that best illuminates the inequalities in the system is that while students at elite public universities received grants, it was common in peasant and working-class families for older daughters to leave school early to start work and

¹ Calculation by Ming-sho Ho, based on Ministry of Education data.

help pay their brothers' tuition fees.²

The KMT regime's lack of financial commitment to education paralleled its *laissez faire* approach to social welfare more generally. Even by 1980, when Taiwan's "tiger economy" was being internationally acclaimed, only 17 percent of the population had medical insurance. The low priority given to social justice was a corollary of "the larger imperatives of rapid and aggregate economic growth, the authoritarian developmental state's first priority" (Wong 1994, 43). Education officials, it seems, had internalized these priorities as norms. By the late 1980s, for example, primary school provision was so inadequate in Taipei County³ that children were organized into morning and afternoon shifts, and Hsiulang Primary School, the largest in the world, had more than 120,000 pupils. In sum, Taiwan's education system, which official discourse celebrated as a key factor in the so-called economic miracle, was over-crowded, underfunded, illiberal, and unfair. Consequently, the quality of education provided was poor.

Following the end of Martial Law in 1987 and the gradual dismantling of state-party political controls, in the mid-1990s Taiwan's education system underwent tremendous changes. A significant number of decision-making powers were delegated to schools, teachers, parents, and textbook publishers. Competition was encouraged in place of bureaucratic allocation in resource distribution, and private universities expanded dramatically, both in number and capacity. The age of rigid uniformity was over, and diversity supposedly brought about by market competition was officially celebrated (Fwu & Wang 2002). For some observers, Taiwan's case signified the growing influence of global neoliberalism as policy makers became more responsive to international trends (Mok 2000 & 2003). Others saw domestic factors playing a crucial role in pushing through education reform. As the polity democratized, they argued, autocracy was replaced by a more open, participatory style of educational decision-making (Hawthorne 1996; Law 1996). These explanations echo the official rationale for education reform, which stressed internationalization and competition, and seem to assume that education systems automatically adjust to broader changes. They take politics out of the process and neglect the role of one of the most important social movements in Taiwan's transition: the education reform movement. By doing so, they gloss over the way that academics, teachers, students, and parents mobilized in countless campaigns, converged in a national movement for whole-scale reform, and contributed both to humanizing education and securing democracy in Taiwan.

This article is about the humanist movement at the core of Taiwan's education reform movement. It documents and analyzes the evolution of their ideas and initiatives since the formation of the Humanist Education Foundation (HEF) shortly after Martial Law ended in 1987. The HEF was the first organization to demand the "normalization of education" in Taiwan (HEF 1993, 63) and became the principal voice in the national education reform movement. HEF activists provided a cogent critique of the authoritarian education system, participated in numerous campaigns against abuses and controls, and played a key role in coordinating the national movement in the early to mid-1990s. But, we suggest, the strength of their movement lies in the fact that they developed a positive, counter-hegemonic project. Educational humanists didn't just critique the utilitarian instrumentalism underpinning the authoritarian education system.

² For further information on these inequalities, see Luoh 2001, and Yu & Su 2006.

³ Taipei County is Taiwan's most populous administrative territory. It has large numbers of rural migrants from Southern Taiwan.

Their “humanity-based” philosophy was grounded in a theory of human potentialities and respect for the “whole person” and nature. So it provided a generative foundation for experimenting with progressive pedagogies, developing initiatives, and integrating ecological awareness into educational praxis. Moreover, the strength of the vision gave activists the resilience to pursue their mission despite a major setback in relation to state education policy. In 1996, when the government responded to the national reform movement by marketizing education without allocating more public resources, they refused to give up: they refocused their energies and constructed an alternative community university system so as to embed their project in civil society instead.

Finally, this article is a tribute to the commitment and vision of the chief architect of educational humanism, Huang Wu-hsiung—a little known math professor at National Taiwan University in 1987 who today is one of the country’s best-known public intellectuals. In our discussions we focus on Huang’s role, ideas, and writings because of his exemplary intellectual and moral leadership within the movement. He was the thinker who came up with the idea and elaborated the philosophy of humanity-based education. He has also shown the unusual gift of being able to translate ideals and principles into coherent proposals for self-sustaining initiatives. It is for these reasons that he is often regarded as a guru not just by HEF activists, but also among environmentalists and in other social movement circles. While there were undoubtedly debates and differences within the HEF, and other members played important roles, these issues are for another paper.

The Origins of the Education Reform Movement

The extent of the KMT’s control over all levels of the education system in Taiwan under Martial Law seems almost inconceivable today, and the systematic way that non-conformism and dissent were policed is still shocking. In the 1950s this policing was quite ruthless: the elimination of the underground student movement linked to the Chinese Communist Party, for example, was particularly brutal; and in the 1960s and 1970s there were several mass arrests of students involved in either pro-Independence activities or Marxist and Maoist reading groups. However, from the early 1970s, KMT control was exercised more through surveillance and incorporation than the direct use of force. Censorship and strict curtailment of intellectual freedoms and rights of association were facts of everyday life in schools and universities, enforced by the presence of KMT security agents and military officers. Control was also exercised by incorporating teachers, parents, and students into party-organized official associations which acted as “transmission belts,” communicating changes in policy and mobilizing participation in pro-regime events.

It was only in the early 1980s, as the regime’s grip on power weakened, that dissent within the education sector started to become visible. In 1984, a group of teachers established the Chento society to express their dissatisfaction with the quality of teacher training (C.J. Ho 2004, 490). Around the same time, students at National Taiwan University (NTU)—the country’s most prestigious public university—started organizing against controls on speech, association, and student elections. In 1986, after a political science student was expelled for his activism, student action escalated into the Love of Liberty movement and mass protests at the NTU campus. If these two early riser movements presaged the shape of the broader movement to come, the lifting of Martial Law in July 1987 formally announced that the political opportunity structure had

changed. Despite uncertainty about whether the regime would resort to force, the full extent of discontent within the education system quickly became evident as informal organizations mushroomed and protests proliferated.

Initially, between 1987 and 1989, these mobilizations were, to use Gramsci's term, economic-corporate in form: they involved particular constituencies and grievances. Students at teacher training colleges protested against the conservative curriculum and bureaucratic regulation (Hsung and Chi 2002). Dissident schoolteachers risked their jobs by demanding the right to unionize. Urban, middle-class parents called for more participation in school affairs, while pro-independence activists and feminists protested against the blatant Chinese nationalism and male chauvinism in textbooks. There were numerous protests in universities as well. Liberal professors criticized party-state control of higher education and championed academic freedoms. Students were the most radical: in public universities they challenged restrictions on liberal freedoms, and in private universities they started protesting about inequalities in higher education and called for subsidies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many also joined social and political movements off-campus.⁴

It was in this context, after the end of Martial Law in 1987, that the Humanist Education Foundation was formed by a small group of activists and intellectuals. Among the initial group were five or six university professors, mainly based in public universities in the Taipei area, at least two of whom worked in education departments, as well as several non-academics. Politically they tended to be liberal and sympathetic to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). They were all concerned about the low quality, over-crowding, poor facilities, and authoritarianism of the education system, and most were already involved in issues such as liberalizing teacher training, banning physical punishment, and curriculum reform. The idea for the Foundation seems to have come from their shared realization that a common front was needed to coordinate particular campaigns and demands and that Huang's proposal for education "based on humanity" (*jenpen*) would provide a unifying framework.

The full scope of this idea had yet to be explored. At this early stage, it seems to have provided a moral discourse for denouncing the abuses and pathologies in the system and demanding that children and students be treated humanely, with respect for their human dignity. But in the highly charged context after the end of Martial Law, the political advantages of this ethical language of contention would not have been lost on the HEF founders—especially Huang whose father-in-law had been a political prisoner.⁵ The call for a humanity-based education bypassed ideological divisions of left and right and the pro-independence/unification cleavage that was already dividing the emergent opposition. Put simply, it was a discourse that had the potential to unify associations demanding changes in education irrespective of their ideological or nationalist orientation.⁶

From the start educational humanists took the rights of school children and

⁴ For more information on these movements, see M. Ho 2006; T. Ho 1990; Lin 1989; and Wright 2001.

⁵ Huang's father-in law was Su Tung-ch'i, a veteran opposition politician who was sentenced to death in 1962 for his involvement in a pro-independence movement. Due to international pressure, the KMT regime commuted it into life imprisonment. Su was released following the Chiang Kai-shek's death in 1975.

⁶ Many of the sectoral organizations that emerged in education were divided by this cleavage. For example, the University Law Reform League did not have a position, but the Taiwanese Association for University Professors was pro-independence.

students seriously and launched numerous campaigns to expose the ugly realities of bullying, harassment, and physical punishment suffered in Taiwan's education system. But they were also keen to develop and share their ideas and liaise with other nascent organizations. In January 1988, for example, they co-organized the First Civil Education Conference with the Awakening Foundation and the Homemaker's Environmental Protection Union,⁷ which was repeated the following year (C. Ho 2004, 490). By 1989, as the regime started to open up and with the passage of the new Civic Associations Act, it seems the humanists' ideas had already attracted some wealthy supporters able to pay the initial fund needed to register and obtain formal status as a foundation. This formal status and financial support would give them a secure, stable base from which to develop and publicize their ideas, plan initiatives and campaigns, and pursue their mission of "developing humanity-centered education in Taiwan" over the long term.

Educational Humanism in Theory and Practice

As in transitions from authoritarian rule occurring in other countries at the time, the demand for liberal freedoms was a central axis of the emergent opposition in Taiwan, and was often supported by the international human rights movement. But when Huang set about elaborating a philosophy of educational humanism in the monthly columns he wrote for the HEF journal between 1989 and 1994 (which are published in his 1994 book *Childhood and Liberation*), he also drew on other experiences and intellectual traditions.

Huang was from the generation that grew up in the 1950s during the most repressive years of military rule when dissent and radical thinking were ruthlessly suppressed. However, because Taiwanese universities did not offer higher degrees in the 1960s, his generation also benefitted from grants to study in the U.S. Ironically Huang ended up studying for his Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley between 1968 and 1970. This was the time when Berkeley was a crucible of radical New Left thinking, with its extraordinary combination of anti-authoritarian socialism, pacifism, feminism, anti-racism, and environmentalism. Moreover, such ideas were being fought out both on campus and in the surrounding streets and neighborhoods in the face of the police violence deployed by then Governor of California, Ronald Reagan. While the university was at the center of the student movement for free speech and university reform, the Black Panthers were organizing to defend African Americans' civil and political rights in nearby Oakland. Huang was not simply a witness to these events: he participated in the People's Park movement, attended Black Panther rallies, and was also active in an underground organization of Taiwanese socialists—an involvement which continued after he returned to Taiwan.

While the experience of studying in Berkeley was formative for his left-wing political outlook, Huang came to focus on education, because in 1972, once he was back in Taiwan, the government assigned him the task of reforming the math curriculum. As part of this project, he volunteered to teach in a rural high school to gain first-hand experience of classroom realities. Around the same time, he was also active in organizing university students for a rural survey. Ostensibly collecting statistics for the government,

⁷ The Awakening Foundation, originally a feminist publisher founded in 1982, was Taiwan's first women's movement organization. The Home-makers' Union was an organization of housewives that campaigned for environmental protection and had a committee on education. It was formed in 1987 and became a foundation in 1989.

the real mission was to train young activists to help impoverished peasants organize cooperatives and improve their livelihoods—a very risky endeavor under Martial Law. Although this rural project failed, Huang’s intellectual interest in education remained. Additionally, this experience of living in the countryside working with peasants may have shaped the love of nature and ecological sensibility that became a central axis of his thinking. As early as 1980, well before the environmental movement emerged, he wrote an essay about the destruction of nature, expressing concern for the way Taiwan was embracing American-style consumerism without thought for the environmental consequences (Huang 1995, 121-136). In a 1989 essay, he developed these ideas further, arguing that the two fundamental problems facing Taiwanese society were the contradictions between individual development and collectivism, and between natural ecology and economic growth. It was these contradictions that he would seek to reconcile in his educational humanism.

Huang took the New Left’s anti-authoritarianism seriously and sought to outline an ideal education system in which people could learn without coercion. Although he drew on many other sources as well, it is easy to find affinities between his educational philosophy and the optimistic belief in the possibility of fully developing human capabilities shared by the New Left and the early Marx. But Huang was a realist about the political context in Taiwan and thought explicit reference to socialist or Marxist ideas would antagonize the government and alienate potential readers. At the core of his vision was a belief that children are born free from prejudice and ready to embrace the world: they have both a “natural capacity” and “civilizational capacity.” Huang’s concept of “natural capacity” refers to the intellectual ability to apprehend and engage with the external world analytically and is primarily based on Piaget’s developmental child psychology. “Civilizational capacity,” on the other hand, drew on Chomsky’s linguistics and refers to the ability to lead a social life, understand others inter-subjectively, and have a sense of morality. It is the task of humanist education to foster and cultivate these innate qualities.

In contrast, the education system in Taiwan with its harsh discipline, uniform curriculum, and rigid streaming stunted and deformed children’s potentialities. Rather than foster individual potentialities and flourishing, the system was designed to train children to slot into a specific position in the labor market. It was the result of a utilitarian approach to education that subordinated the individual child to the collective goal of national economic growth, a goal that was also based on the subordination of nature. Therefore if education was a means to develop children’s potentialities and shape their orientation to the world in a way that respected nature, then the school itself had to be redesigned according to democratic and ecological principles.

Huang’s humanist education philosophy also had implications for adults. He argued that humanism meant reclaiming the bias-free, creative human nature of early childhood. Humanist education should help remove the fetters artificially imposed by civilization and be freely available to everyone. In 1990, Huang outlined a project for an alternative, Community University that would aim at the “liberation of knowledge”: overcoming the separation between practical experience and theoretical knowledge. They would serve adults denied opportunities to enjoy further or higher education, so admission would be open, and degrees would be granted on completion of a required number of credits. To minimize costs and foster local linkages, CUs would be funded by local governments and use primary schools as their campus. However, this project would have to wait until the late 1990s to be implemented, as HEF activists were already busy

with another experiment.

While Huang was developing a humanist education philosophy, other HEF activists had been working to put these ideas into practice and set up an experimental school. If successful, they reasoned, it would serve as a ground-breaking model for public schools and the eventual normalization of education (HEF 1993, 63). In 1990 they opened the Forest Primary School in Taipei County. The first director was Chu Tai-Shang, an HEF co-founder, and it was to be run on democratic and ecological principles. It seems that the school's founders were also influenced by A.S. Neill, whose book *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education* was translated and published in Taiwan in the late 1980s. Neill first developed his ideas about the innate goodness of children, and became an advocate of pedagogies based on freedom, play, and participatory democracy in the 1920s when he set up Summerhill. His approach was an alternative to the harsh discipline and mechanical rote learning in British schooling since the 19th century. So his work had an obvious resonance in Taiwan. His book was widely read by anyone concerned about education, and his experimental pedagogies would have been especially valuable to anyone thinking of starting a progressive school.

The Forest Primary School rejected hierarchical teacher-pupil relationships and encouraged free learning without a rigid curriculum. It attracted progressively minded middle-class parents disenchanted with public schooling and able to pay the high fees. In contrast to the huge, overcrowded primary schools in Taipei County, initially the Forest Primary School was tiny: with just 17 or 18 pupils. The rural setting also contrasted with the barrenness of urban schools, and even the name challenged the modernist logic of official education: you couldn't have a school in a forest and a forest couldn't be a school (Shi 1993, 20-21). The core curriculum emphasized the study of nature and tried to foster ecological understanding through innovative teaching methods. So, for example, when there was a drought, for homework, pupils were asked to research the source of their tap water and practice water-saving measures with their parents (Chou 1994, 43). Similarly, for their 1991 excursion, the school deliberately chose to visit Lanyu, a beautiful aboriginal island off southwest Taiwan where the government had sited a nuclear waste storage depot. During the trip, teachers carefully explained the history of colonization and local indigenous activists were invited to talk to the children about their experiences of fighting radioactive pollution (Chu 1993, 95-119).

If the Forest Primary School was intended to provide a new model of what a primary school could be, the way it was harassed by Ministry of Education officials made it famous around the country. Initially, there were eviction notices on the grounds that the school violated zoning and building regulations. Then director Chu Tai-Shang was prosecuted for violating education laws. Although she was eventually found innocent, the case generated a lot of coverage in the national press. Liberal academics wrote letters of support and commentators published features on the school. Local DPP politicians, who had just won control of Taipei County Government, also gave support. They helped to solve bureaucratic obstacles such as allowing pupils to register at a nearby state school. In this way, the Forest Primary School cleared the ground and provided inspiration for other experimental schools and homeschooling in Taiwan. More importantly at the time, the way the Forest Primary School became big news also publicized the humanists' wider ideas, demands, and campaigns. By the time the Ministry backed off, the HEF had become notorious among conservative education officials; it was also the most prominent organization dedicated to education reform.

The Market and Social Justice

The Alliance for Rescuing the Next Generation, the first alliance between education reform groups in Taiwan, formed in 1991 by the HEF and a number of social movement organizations focused on women's rights, disability, and welfare (C. Ho 2003, 488). By this time, the extent of organizing and protest showed that the old education system had lost all legitimacy and could no longer survive. Moreover, the implications of Huang's philosophical explorations were clear: the abuses and problems in education originated from institutional designs that failed to treat children and students humanely or respect their human dignity. These designs, in turn, were the product of the utilitarian principles underlying the system, which viewed children as human resources and aimed to produce (and reduce pupils and students to) loyal subjects and productive workers. As such, they could not be solved by piecemeal campaigns; what was needed was a fundamental reform of the whole system.

The formation of the Alliance marked the start of a new phase in the HEF's campaigning. The next few years were increasingly focused on building a coalition for reform, and the writing of both organizations increasingly focused on policies. The public controversy over the Forest Primary School and the status the involvement of university professors conferred certainly amplified the HEF's voice. But it was the HEF's and the Alliance's powerful diagnosis of the common root of educational ills that gave the demand for a fundamental reform such strong resonance. As the Alliance's name shows, it wasn't necessary to be a professional philosopher to understand their diagnosis: the "crudeness" and "managerialism" of the education provided in factory-sized schools were all too familiar to most people. Equally, many parents and teachers who were deeply dissatisfied with the existing system welcomed their humanist principles and basic demands: "Respect for the whole person," smaller schools, smaller classes, greater democracy in decision-making, diversification and liberalization of the curriculum, the end of streaming, and wider access to and expansion of senior high schools and universities.

In considering how to reform the system, humanists were not averse to private education or introducing market reforms. If current ills originated from the strong controls exercised by education bureaucrats, they reasoned, why not enlist the market in the campaign against authoritarianism? Expanding the private education sector, they thought, would both restrict the reach of state power and stimulate experimentation and innovation, thereby diversifying the options available for children, students, and parents. Apart from the labor movement, this type of reasoning was shared across the wider political opposition at the time, including environmentalists, feminists, and the DPP—as well as many political scientists and commentators analyzing transitions from authoritarian rule in East Asia and other regions.

This belief in the democratizing effect of the market was most pronounced when it came to pre-school education. Huang was disillusioned by the bureaucratic uniformity of public kindergartens and attracted by the vitality of the private sector, which he thought had greater freedom for pedagogical experimentation. So although public opinion strongly favored universal public kindergarten because of the lower fees, the HEF supported a mixed system.⁸ Expanding the availability and quality of higher

⁸ Later, Huang expressed his preference for a voucher system that would minimize differences in fees and offer parents real choices (See Ho 2006, 83; Huang 1998, 12).

education was another key issue on the HEF's agenda. Huang, in a 1992 essay (1997, 259) proposed a two-pronged strategy: the government should invest in building 20 new public universities and withdraw from regulating private universities. But on how to fund the expansion of public universities he remained vague, and he failed to address the problem of low standards in Taiwan's private universities.⁹

In retrospect, this faith in the ability of the private education sector to foster higher standards, fresh approaches, and diversity seems an article of ideological faith, ungrounded in the realities of Taiwan's already highly privatized education system. There were voices speaking out on this, but they failed to puncture the humanists' reform agenda. The Forest Primary School, for example, was criticized as an experiment affordable only to middle-class families, largely irrelevant to state schools. Additionally, since 1987, students in private universities had been campaigning about low standards and high fees, demanding subsidies for "students from worker and peasant families" (*kungnungtzuti*) and increased state funding for private universities (C.C. Chi 1993, 227-229; Teng 1993, 216-218). In 1993 they were even more vociferous about the new University Law that lifted caps on private university fees—arguing that business, which benefitted from skilled workers, should pay higher taxes instead. Yet their high profile campaign, supported by the Taiwan Labor Front,¹⁰ did not, it seems, affect Huang's sanguine view of private universities.

With the benefit of hindsight, perhaps the simplest explanation for this faith in the private education sector as a source of diversity is not so much that the humanists were influenced by the rise of neoliberal ideas, but that they failed to see that neoliberalism was the rising force and failed to orient their arguments against it. For actors living through transitions, it is much easier to grasp the familiar contours of the old regime than those of the new regime that is in the process of configuration, and it is difficult to foresee the new cleavages that will emerge from processes of reconfiguration. The humanists were familiar with the arguments of neoclassical economists like Chu Ching-yi and Chang Chin-hsi who had been researching education since the early 1990s and criticized government controls while proposing privatization and marketization. Both worked at NTU and participated in early struggles for academic freedoms; thus HEF activists viewed them favorably and treated them as comrades rather than contenders.¹¹ Huang was certainly aware that they started from utilitarian premises diametrically opposed to his humanist principles, yet he was willing to draw selectively on their research to buttress his arguments.¹² As he revealed during an interview on March 9, 2010, for tactical reasons he was also willing to sideline their differences in public—a fact that was evident in the largest demonstration the humanists organized.

⁹ In an interview (May 5, 2010), Huang revealed that he was more concerned about the quality of university education than the public-private choice. He wrote many articles against the proposal to upgrade junior universities into full universities, which he saw as driven by bureaucratic expedience, but only one piece stating his preference for American-style state universities. On the whole, Huang has been consistent in his belief that public universities should expand available opportunities, while private universities should be encouraged to develop diversity.

¹⁰ See Hsueh 1995 and TLF 1993 for further details of these campaigns.

¹¹ Interview with Lee Chung-chi, May 30, 2008.

¹² Chang's research, for example, showed that because Taiwan's industrial upgrading had created a high demand for skilled labor, state manpower planning and streaming in secondary education was obsolete, so a laissez-faire approach should be adopted instead. These findings supported the HEF's demand for ending streaming and expanding higher education in order to create a fairer system.

The humanists' efforts at building a broad alliance culminated on April 10th 1994, when the HEF took the lead in the Education Reform March in Taipei City. It was co-sponsored by 219 organizations—ranging from students, women's, parents', publishers', and medical and religious and community organizations to political parties—and somewhere between 20,000 and 100,000 people participated. Huang was responsible for writing the statement of demands, which had four main sections:

1. Small classes and small schools for primary and junior high education.
2. Expansion of places in senior high schools and universities
3. Education Modernization
4. Enacting the Basic Education Law

The march demonstrated the strength of support for reform, which the government could not ignore, but the vagueness of the demands over higher education left it wide room to maneuver. Huang did not specify whether he preferred public or private solutions or how they should be funded, and while some of the class-based demands of private university students and the TLF were listed, they were given secondary status. Demands relating to redistribution and social equality—such as “respect the educational autonomy of aboriginal, disabled, worker and peasant students” and “provide student loans”—were listed under the heading “Education Modernization.”

The Government's Adoption of Neoliberalism and the HEF's Leftist Turn

In September 1994 the government announced that it would establish a Deliberative Committee on Education Reform. It would be chaired by then President of Academia Sinica and Nobel Laureate in chemistry, Professor Lee Yuan-tseh and would report to the government in 1996. This was widely seen as a positive response to their historic march by members of the April 10th Alliance for Education Reform, a view that seemed warranted due to a number of different factors. Lee, who was well known both as a political liberal and for his long career in American academia, was expected to make innovative proposals for reform. The choice of an ad hoc Deliberative Committee was also seen as positive, as a way of bypassing conservative Ministry of Education officials and minimizing their influence. The Alliance's optimism, however, proved misplaced. The humanists seem to have failed to grasp the full extent of changes that were occurring inside the regime, especially the influence of neoliberal ideas.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that since the mid-1980s, the combined pressures from the U.S. government, currency appreciation, and growing business influence had been pushing Taiwan's government to adopt a series of pro-market policies, such as liberalizing trade and investment, deregulating state-controlled industries and finance, and privatizing state-owned enterprises.¹³ So by the time officials turned to reforming the education system, they had already become habituated to neoliberal doctrine and were far more open to the proposals being put forward by economists than the humanists. This became apparent when the Committee started work. Whereas Chang was recruited onto the subcommittee responsible for drafting the Advisory Reports and Chu was asked to produce a tract on the role of the state in education, the Humanists were largely ignored. Huang, for example, was only formally invited to present his ideas to the Committee on one occasion during the whole process. By April 1995, when the

¹³ For further details, see T. Cheng 2001, 34; Y. Chu 1994, 121-122.

Deliberative Committee published its First Preliminary Report, a marketizing orientation was already visible. It argued that government finances were overburdened and greater public investment in education was unfeasible and that increased funding should come from raising tuition fees and encouraging private schooling (1995, 50-53).

Huang seems to have been quick to grasp that neoliberal solutions were proving more palatable to conservative officials than the humanists' proposals. He abandoned his previous political caution and became increasingly vocal about left-right differences. In his preface to *Towards the Reconstruction of Taiwan's Education* published in the summer of 1995, he emphasized that a bona-fide reform would replace "elitism" by "mass line" (*tachung chui*), a euphemism he used for socialism (Huang 1995, 18). Another catalyst for the humanists' leftward shift was a direct challenge from radical students. In July 1995, a group of socialist students from private universities, calling themselves Student Opposition, disrupted an Alliance event protesting that the humanists' program was too middle-class and that their support for private schools and universities would turn education into a profit-making business for capitalists (Cheng 1995: 74-75). Huang took this critique seriously and invited these activists into the Alliance, and from then on educational humanists gave much greater attention to social justice.

The Alliance's shift is evident in *A Blueprint for Education Reform: Structural Change toward Social Justice* published in 1996. This was the most comprehensive policy proposal ever produced by movement activists. It upheld non-discrimination, gender equality, and multiculturalism as core values, and explicitly challenged elitism:

The most urgent challenge of education reform is not how to let the next generation (usually those from privileged families) have freedom to pursue excellence, but rather how to ensure that the next generation (especially the disadvantaged) have equal rights!" (April 10th Alliance 1996, 64)

It attacked the "monopoly by vested interests" and argued that a radical redistribution of resources was a necessary component of education reform (1996, 65). But this leftist turn came too late. Although the Alliance worked hard to maintain the momentum of the 1994 March, they fought an increasingly uphill battle. The passion of their constituencies was dissipating, the media was not interested, and by the time the *Blueprint* was published, the Deliberative Committee had almost completed its task.

It was Chu's co-authored book *De-regulating Education*, also published in 1996, that became the government's blueprint. The preface written by Lee Yuan-tseh signified no less than an official endorsement of neoliberalism. The Committee's Final Advisory Report included a couple of recommendations that departed from neoliberalism: the "gradual implementation of universal and free preschool education" (Deliberative Committee 1996b, 31); and, a 1 percent business tax to finance more primary teachers (Deliberative Committee 1996b, 52)—which was never implemented. But neoliberal deregulation was the prescription for higher education expansion. The report advised against expanding public universities but recommended that the government should scrap caps on fees and places in private universities and allow them to expand substantially (Deliberative Committee 1996b, 60). Although the report paid some lip-service to social justice, it was relegated to minor issues such as school management, student protection, and consultation. The humanists' demands were only incorporated into official policy insofar as they did not affect the existing distribution of power and resources or oblige the state to shoulder new fiscal responsibilities. Neoliberalism—which challenged state regulation without questioning social inequalities—had proved

more palatable to the government.

Educational Humanism since 1996

The 1996 *Blueprint for Education Reform* turned out to be the swan song of the April 10th Alliance for Educational Reform, which ceased to be active after its publication. But the HEF continued in a role as an education watchdog over state policy and legislation and supporting more micro-level campaigns against injustice and abuse. While the founders were still involved in these campaigns, they also began to turn their attention to the non-state arena and the Community University Project that Huang first outlined in 1990. This project would enable them to challenge dominant ideologies and put their educational, environmental, and social ideas into practice. By focusing on local communities, they would be able to foster substantive social and environmental changes.

The three missions of the Community Universities were “deepening democracy,” “developing a new culture,” and “liberating knowledge.” In particular, Huang (2003, 387) argued that Community Universities should challenge elitism (decision-making by the few, with the consequent exclusion of the majority) and expansionism (reckless resource extraction and exploitation). In his 1998 proposal formally launching the community university movement, Huang insisted on including courses in practical arts, such as carpentry and plumbing. These, he argued, would be a vehicle for challenging class prejudice against manual labor and for changing the wasteful behavior of alienated consumers. When people master the practical arts necessary for their everyday lives, he reasoned, they will cherish resources and the products of their labor. He also envisioned activities dedicated to researching and reforming local environments. A more solid community consciousness would facilitate initiatives in environmental protection and conservation (Huang 2004, 30, 36).

Huang’s project has proved remarkably popular. In 1998 when activists from the HEF, local community organizations, and left-wing scholars set up the first CU, Wenshan Community University in Taipei City, around 750 students enrolled. In the following year, the National Association for the Promotion of Community Universities (NAPCU) was formed along with five more CUs in Taipei County and Bamboo CU in Hsinchu City. While HEF activists were directly involved in these early initiatives, as advocates of decentralization and participatory democracy, they did not seek to oversee or control the subsequent expansion, coordination or operation of the CU movement. Rather, the NAPCU assumed an autonomous status, and most later CUs were set up by environmental and community activists. By 2003 there were 66 around the country (C. Ho 2004, 487) and today there are over 80.¹⁴

Although each CU is different, as C. Ho stresses (2004, 493), there are commonalities in the way movement CUs are organized and operate. Yung-ho Community University in Taipei County (where co-author Ming-sho teaches in addition to his job at National Taiwan University) exemplifies some of these core characteristics. It is located in a secondary school, has a dedicated office space, and uses the facilities in the evenings and weekends. In line with the principle of equally valuing different types of knowledge, teachers do not need formal qualifications and have diverse backgrounds:

¹⁴A few are CUs in name only. Set up by local politicians cashing in on the CUs’ popularity, they are run like regular adult education institutes or contracted to private universities as extension centers.

university professors, Ph.D. students, amateur historians, cooks, craftsmen, martial arts teachers, architects, artists, and performers. As Huang originally envisaged, Yung-ho's admission is open, and it mainly attracts older people and housewives who left school without higher studies. They can sign up for a single course or a full program of study based on a credit system that leads to a final diploma.¹⁵ Yung-ho's three-part curriculum also follows Huang's proposal: academic courses covering mainstream and more socially oriented subjects, like Ming-sho's current course "Aspects of Social Development in Taiwan"; second, practical courses like carpentry, languages, and computer skills; and third, university clubs or societies, like the Yung-ho Historical Society. The university is also currently engaged in a campaign to develop an ecological vision for Yung-ho city. This includes a weeklong workshop during which students develop and present a vision for ecologically sustainable urban life that will conclude with a public forum where DPP and KMT politicians will present their environmental policies.

As this brief description suggests, the curriculum and alternative pedagogies of CUs are oriented towards encouraging students to become active citizens and giving them the competence and confidence to engage critically in public affairs.¹⁶ This is especially important given the schooling in obedience and conformity so many older students received under the old regime. But CUs also perform a number of other valuable functions in relation to sustaining and strengthening civil society after the intense period of social movement formation and protest that characterized the initial phase of democratization between 1987 and 1995. In any given locality, CUs are focal points for activists from different social movements. They also provide bridges between activists working in mainstream universities and teachers and students with other occupational backgrounds—thereby reducing social distances and combating the "ivory tower" mentality induced by the ethos and status hierarchies of mainstream universities. At the same time, the NAPCU facilitates personal networks, communication, and mutual learning between activists based in different parts of the country. The annual conferences, for example, are important meeting places as well as alternative forums for debating current social, environmental, and political issues outside the limitations of political party programs and the commercial agendas of the mainstream media. Moreover, the form of the CU movement as a loose, decentralized civil society network anchored in Taiwan's major towns and cities make it well suited for mobilizing activists around the country in support of new campaigns and initiatives. In sum, by fostering citizenship and strengthening civil society in these different ways, the CU project has undoubtedly contributed to the mission of deepening democracy in Taiwan.

Following on from the success of the CU movement, in 2006 Huang, along with his HEF veterans and other environmentalists, launched another major initiative: the Natural Trail Movement. Putting into practice the ideals of "education outside the classroom" and reconciling society and nature, the aims were to build a thousand kilometers of natural trails, promote the value and pleasure of walking, and foster the appreciation and protection of nature. Huang and his co-initiators envisaged following the British model of securing legislative protection for "Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty" where construction and use of vehicles would be tightly controlled. But they insisted on building the movement from below rather than relying on top-down organizing or state-sponsorship. In 2006–2007 for example, they resisted the DPP government's attempts to adopt their proposal as policy because of their conviction that

¹⁵ The state does not recognize these diplomas as degrees, but Taiwan's National Open University allows some credits to count towards its degrees.

¹⁶ For further details on these points related to citizenship and civil society, see C. Ho (2004).

environmental awareness can only be firmly established through grassroots education.

Although the Natural Trail Project has a coordinating office at Yung-ho CU, like the earlier CU initiative, the aim has been to encourage activists all over the country to take responsibility for projects in their own localities: from researching and planning a suitable trail to persuading private landowners to set aside land voluntarily for this purpose and negotiating recognition from local authorities (Wu 2007). This campaign has received enthusiastic support from environmental organizations around the country. However, until now, rather than developing new trails, the movement has largely been saving existing trails from destruction. This has become an increasing problem over the last fifteen years as many rural and coastal beauty spots have become vulnerable to developers' plans for hotels or residential and leisure complexes providing second homes and recreation for Taiwan's wealthy elites. If the campaign has mobilized activists to challenge such plans, it also seems to have raised awareness and influenced policies within some official agencies. Some National Park Authorities, for example, are organizing working holiday programs to renovate and maintain ancient trails without using heavy or motorized equipment.

Conclusions

Although the HEF did not succeed in getting its full agenda adopted as state policy, humanist ideals and their sustained campaigning up to 1995 have, nevertheless, changed dominant views about what was acceptable in education. They not only influenced a generation of parents, students and teachers, but also contributed to radically transforming and humanizing the ethos of the education system.

This is most evident in the school system. The monster schools have gone, and smaller schools and class sizes are now the norm. Young children have much more freedom to play and experiment in their early years of schooling. Teachers at all levels of the system, professors and teachers have much greater autonomy about pedagogies and the curriculum, and count on a diverse range of textbooks and resources. Relationships between schools, parents, teachers and children and young people are unrecognizable. And after a sustained campaign, the HEF succeeded in getting physical punishment legally prohibited in the 2006 revision of the education law. There are still some vestiges of the military regime visible in the school system, but they are largely restricted to marching and school organized contests for military-style bands and choirs, which are popular. In terms of alternative schooling, the Forest School has just celebrated its 20th anniversary, and around the country about ten other progressive "whole-person" schools opened in the 1990s. Some parents have opted for homeschooling their kids, without harassment.

In higher education, although the quality of human relationships may have improved and access has widened, many of the inequalities highlighted by private education students in the 1990s persist or have deepened. The removal of state control over higher education certainly increased the chances for lower-income people to obtain a university degree. But once allowed to enter universities, they have tended to be concentrated in the private sector, where standards are still lower, fees higher, and grants fewer than in public universities. Moreover, the commodification of knowledge and the instrumental approach to education fostered by neoliberalism is an increasingly salient problem. In this regard, it is worth stressing that Huang's philosophy and the principles of educating the whole person and liberating knowledge are just as valuable as a critique

of neoliberal instrumentalism and commodification as they are for critiquing the authoritarianism against which they were conceived. Moreover, because his philosophy and principles are anchored in the CU system and embedded in civil society, they represent a living tradition rather than a vestige of the past. Thus they continue to provide a counter-hegemonic vision of what education can be, which may well generate and inspire further activism in the future. In this regard, Huang's humanist philosophy and principles are not just relevant to Taiwan. They may also be inspiring and valuable for anyone facing deepening neoliberalization in other systems and other countries. Moreover, just as Huang highlighted the link between the domination of children and nature under the authoritarian capitalism of Taiwan's developmental state, there is much more intellectual work to be done in drawing similar linkages in relation to today's neoliberal capitalism.

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