

## Negotiating imagined community in national curriculum: The Taiwanese case

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*Due to its historical and geopolitical contestations, Taiwan is a country whose people possess divergent imaginations of the national community. Such a condition has been described as institutional liminality, which captures Taiwan's status as not a complete nation state nor a non-nation state; not China nor non-China. Under such a condition, people recognize themselves either as Taiwanese, Chinese, or both. Through utilizing the concept of imagination, especially Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" and Harvey's interpretation of "geographical imagination," this paper investigates the representation of imagined communities embedded in various revisions and makings of the national curriculum in Taiwan. A specific focus is put onto the revision of the national historical curriculum at the senior high school level and the resistance to it during 2014–2016. It is argued that through organizing protests and boycotts against the revision, students are no longer simply pure receivers of official knowledge, they actively express their imagination of the national community and participate in the negotiation of official knowledge, which gives the national curriculum a more democratic base.*

*Keywords: national curriculum; democracy; imagined community*

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history, Taiwan had been colonized by different empires/countries, such as the Netherlands, Spain, Ming Empire, Qing Empire, and Japan. After World War II, Taiwan was taken over by the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, henceforth KMT) government from the Japanese regime. Along with the democratization of its political realm since the 1980s, Taiwan has undergone a reconstruction of its national identity.

In the process, there have been correspondent curricular reforms and accompanying revisions of the national curriculum. In a reification of official knowledge (Apple, 2014), revisions of the content of the national curriculum reflect the ideology and interest of the political parties in power and represent voices of the dominant group in the society. In addition, the modification of the national curriculum casts significant impact on the reconstruction of the national identity from the former colonial conditions in Taiwan. Anderson (1983/2006) considers the formation of nation states as imagined communities. He argues that print capitalism and, subsequently, mass schooling that ensured general literacy of the common were together central to the creation of the "imagined community" of the nation. Harvey (2006) identifies the geographical imagination of nation states; that is, national identity needs a territorial base to build upon. For the reason of solidarity, it is desirable and a must for nation states to create and to equip their citizens with geographical, historical, and cultural knowledge of the states. Because of its colonial

history and geopolitics, the imagination of the Taiwanese national community is at the centre of revisions time after time.

The focus of this paper is on the discourse surrounding the revisions of the national curriculum and the resistance against a restructuring of official knowledge as represented by the national curriculum. The study argues for the significance of participation and contribution made by the students, at the levels of both secondary and higher education. Through actively participating in the making of official knowledge, the student should no longer be seen as a mere passive receiver in the process of socialization but as actively contributing to the negotiation/shaping of the communal imagination of nation.

The paper begins with an analysis of the coerciveness of the national curriculum, which functions in relationships with the credential systems as well as the publishing industry. In the following section, the dominance and hegemony of the national curriculum from the perspectives of culture, society, and economy are discussed against the conceptual tools developed by Anderson (1983/2006), Harvey (2006), and Apple (2014). Then the dividing imaginations of national community embedded in the various curriculum revisions throughout the history of education in Taiwan are analysed. Based on the analysis, the paper goes on to discuss students' role in the protest and their representation in the new curriculum review committee as of importance in the negotiation of official knowledge. The paper concludes by discussing the imagination of the national community and how it is linked to democracy in Taiwan.

This Taiwanese case is analysed in light of considering education from the perspective of democracy: whose imaginations of national community are legitimized or marginalized in the construction of official knowledge, the (non)functioning of democratic mechanism in education, and students' role in constructing the national curriculum.

### **THE COERCIVE MECHANISM OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM**

In Taiwan, the power and the function of political socialization in relation to the national curriculum operates in three ways. First, the Ministry of Education (MoE) legally recognizes schools that run according to the national curriculum. Only such schools are able to offer officially recognized credentials to their students. In other words, the national curriculum in Taiwan represents not only a random version of curriculum but also the only official and legally operating curriculum. Very few international/private schools (26 in the total number of 3,871) are allowed to adopt different curriculum systems in Taiwan. Usually, student recruitment to these international/private schools is limited to those who hold a nationality/passport other than Taiwanese. This reflects the normative characteristic of the national curriculum.

Second, there is a strong link between the publication of textbooks and the textual representation of the curriculum, namely, the *Curriculum Standards* (MoE, 1971, 1983, 1994) and successive curriculum guidelines (MoE, 1998, 2005, 2010). Before 2000, textbooks used in schools were restricted to those composed and published by the National Translation and Compilation Centre, an institute established as the sole supplier of textbooks under the MoE. As a result of societal demands more educational liberalization in the 1990s, curriculum guidelines were introduced that were less directive and domineering than previous ones. At the same time, the compilation of textbooks ceased to be exclusive to the National Translation and Compilation Centre. Private publishers

were allowed to publish their own textbooks and put them into the market for use in elementary and secondary schools as long as they followed the curriculum guidelines and passed the textbook review stage organized by the National Academy for Educational Research. Although the private sector was given permission to publish, it should be noted that there is little variations in the compilations of different publications.

Third, the common external entrance examinations taken by students in year 9 and year 12 is designed according to the curriculum guidelines. Textbook editors and publishers are required to provide readers with the information needed to pass the exam. In other words, the national curriculum secures its representation in textbooks and its impact on the publishing industry through both the review processes and the entrance examinations.

### **THE REPRESENTATION OF OFFICIAL KNOWLEDGE**

The national curriculum has served the function of social integration and the formation of community in Taiwan throughout the country's history. In the period of Japanese colonization, the Kominka movement was an assimilation policy aimed at making Taiwanese people imperial citizens and loyal to Japanese Emperor (Peng & Chu, 2017). Through public education, it was intended that Taiwanese people, as the colonized, would one day be integrated into imperial Japan and would share a similar national identity to Japanese citizens. In the Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo's presidency, the national curriculum was designed to make the Taiwanese people genuine 'Chinese' who supported the KMT government and its bid to retake Mainland China (Lin, 2003).

Taiwan is not the only nation that uses its national curriculum and mass education to craft a particular identity or sense of community. For instance, Anderson (1983/2006) examines the making of 'Indonesian-ness' and the function of the education system that develops and helps such a creation. In the period of Dutch colonization, some Indonesian were educated as bilingual elites who spoke both the language of the colonizer and of the colony for the purpose of regime and serves to develop a revised imagination of a national community.

In Anderson's analysis (1983/2006), the education system works in a few ways and contributes to the making of a new imagined community. First, bilingual abilities enable local elites to engage with modern Western thoughts, including the models of nationalism and growing national-states elsewhere. Second, there were education ladders made for colonial elites which corresponded to the colonial territories. In undertaking colonial education, local elites were made to travel from the colonial locales and regions to metropolitan centres. Such education ladders provided the territorial base for the imaginary of the colony as well as the new national community. People lived in those territories and thus can be identified as the 'nationals' of the new nation. Third, the expansion of the education system produces a growing group of subordinate cadres and corporate bureaucrats, such as engineers, administrators, schoolteachers, and police, for the state. Fourth, the dissemination of education increases the literate mass and leads to the development of the community imagination. Print-literacy, Anderson (1983/2006) argues, makes it possible to imagine a community with homogenous temporality. He points to the standardized organization of mass education, including standard textbooks and materials, credentials, teacher training, and class divisions which all benefit the solidarity of the new imagined national community.

Harvey (2005) employs the concept of geographical and sociological imagination to depict the relationships between the political communities, that is, the nation states and geographical knowledge. In shaping the imagined community, not only do the territorial bases become potential geographical imaginations of nation states they also impact the formation of nation states. In other words, the establishment of nation states relies on creating particular geographical understandings upon which the national identity can be built. In Anderson's (1983/2006) notion of imagined community, the print-literacy of the mass, which is produced by the education system, creates certain homogeneous temporality. In other words, it is the mobilization of a coherent geographical imaginary that demarcates the boundaries of nation states.

The development of school systems and the compilation of curricular content becomes the means that ruling classes or dominant groups use for shaping a certain 'imagination' of the national community. For example, during the presidency of the former South Korean president, Park Geun-hye, her government introduced the policy that all private published history textbooks used for teaching history in middle and high schools were to be substituted by state-issued ones. The rationalization was the need to instil in students a sense of patriotism. The controversial policy was accused of putting history textbooks into the battlefield of political ideologies, that is, the pro- and anti-North ideologies (Kim, 2018).

A similar move was made in Hong Kong, after its return to China, when the government implemented the "Moral and National Education" (The Curriculum Development Council, 2011, 2012) project, provoking a debate over the boundary of nationalistic and patriotic education. When the authority proclaimed that national education is for making Hong Kong children Chinese citizens, it was criticized as a program of political indoctrination. The introduction and the boycott of the policy reveals the contesting dual identity of Hong Kong, the ethno-cultural 'Chinese-ness' and the civil 'Hongkong-ness' (Morris & Vickers, 2015).

These Asian cases indicate how government and the dominant groups project their imagination of national community onto the curriculum. Through producing the official knowledge (Apple, 1993, 2014), particular ideologies, as part of the selected tradition, are made legitimate and passed down to the people. While some knowledge is marked as important, others are marginalized. Not only those included into the curriculum but also those that are not included. The way knowledge is organized tells us who has power in the society. The national curriculum and its making should be understood in the larger social context so that the hegemonic structures are revealed (Apple, 2009).

The language planning policy and its impact on education in Taiwan during 1946–1987 is an example. The KMT government enforced a strict official language policy in schools. Mandarin, the official language of Mainland China, was promoted as the only language allowed for communication in Taiwanese schools. Other languages, such as Southern Min, Hakka, and Austronesian languages, were marginalized. The policy not only mandated Mandarin as the only teaching language in schools, it also required that pupils who used their mother tongues, that is, local languages such as Southern Min, Hakka, and Austronesian languages, be punished for not speaking the official language in schools (Huang, 2000). In other words, native speakers of non-official languages became the linguistically disadvantaged groups in the society. The Mandarin-only National Language Policy, along with the Mainland Chinese-orientation, created extra difficulties for students whose mother tongues were not Mandarin, as well as increased the obstacles for building

linguistic and cultural identities. As a result, the languages of the subordinate status were neglected and became less relevant, while Mandarin obtained the prestigious status in the school system and in most public domains (Chen, 2006).

In Apple's analysis, the national curriculum of the US designates the convergence of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. However, what we see in the cases of South Korea and Hong Kong is that, in the name of creating a 'common culture' or the 'solidarity of society,' certain ideologies are neutralized and disguised as the consensus of the society and legitimized as official knowledge. In the Taiwanese example, the implementation of the Mandarin-only National Language Policy causes the dying out of other local languages. And under the policy of official (linguistic) knowledge, those whose mother tongues are categorized as subordinate languages become disadvantaged in the society. Apart from language planning policies, the representation of official knowledge in the Taiwanese national curriculum has been employed as a means of manipulating the common imaginary of the national community of the next generation.

### **DIVIDING IMAGINATIONS OF THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY**

As a postcolonial society, Taiwan has been continuously undergoing a process of decolonization and citizenship reconstruction. In some nation states, there is a consensus among the ethnic, cultural, and institutional elements of national identity. This is not the case in Taiwan; the geopolitics and historical development of the nation has resulted in its complicated relationship with China, and the complications lead to a division in the imaginations of the national community. Doong (2008) identified four different accounts of national identity tracking through the citizenship education content of Taiwan: pan-China identity, cultural China identity, Taiwan identity, and contradictory/vague identity.

It is critical to note here that Chinese is not the only colonial influence causing the divisions in the Taiwanese national imaginations. However, the intertwined histories and complex geopolitics results in the Taiwanese liminality. The status of being Chinese and non-Chinese at the same time leads to the fact that the presence of China/Chinese-ness has to be a focus when discussing Taiwanese national imaginations. As Peng (2004) puts it, the disagreement in the historical narrative of Taiwan is located in the central political differentiation between pro-unification and pro-independence. The former stance places Taiwanese history as one of local histories under the grand Chinese historical narrative, while the latter stance tends to take Taiwanese history as a national history and sees the Chinese one as a regional history.

### **SINOCENTRISM 1940–1990**

After the end of Japanese colonization, in 1945, the KMT, a political party in power on mainland China, took over Taiwan. The national curriculum was dominantly occupied by a pan-China identity and cultural China identity (Doong, 2008; Tsai, 2002). During the presidency of Chiang Kai-shek and his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, education was made compulsory in Taiwan and extended from a compulsory six years to nine years; the latter enacted with *Curriculum Standards* produced by the MoE. The standards are detailed guidelines for principals and schoolteachers on how to run their schools and teach in their classrooms. The aim of education was printed boldly on workbook covers' "to be an active student, to be a righteous Chinese" (做個活活潑潑的好學生/做個堂堂正正中國人)

(n.d.). Embedded in the national curriculum at that time was an ideological underpinning of patriotism towards China.

In textbooks designed with such pan-China identity, the territorial claim in geography not only included Taiwan and surrounding islands (Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu) but also the Mainland, with the 5,000-year Chinese history emphasized (Doong, 2008). Built upon these geographical and historical claims, the symbolic significance and institution of the Republic of China (ROC) that was established in 1911 were rationalized and legitimized. The cultural Chinese identity emphasised the close relationship between Taiwan and the Mainland in terms of consanguinity, national sentiments, and cultural similarities, and constructs the identity towards Chinese culture as a whole; usually, the excellence and exquisiteness of Chinese culture was stressed.

### TAIWANCENTRISM 1990–2000

During the time of the presidency of Lee Teng-hui and in the beginning of the presidency of Chen Shui-bian, the first Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) president, there emerged pressure from society for deregulation and indigenization in education. The “Getting to Know Taiwan” (*Renshi Taiwan*, 認識台灣), a three-volume official textbook was produced, published, and used in junior high schools in the 1990s. In 2001, in response to societal pressure, the new national curriculum *Grades 1–9 Curriculum for Elementary and Junior High School Education* (MoE, 1998) was introduced. Curriculum guidelines were introduced in place of the *Curriculum Standards*. In the new curriculum, the territory of the ROC is delimited as Taiwan and surrounding islands (Doong, 2008). The curriculum acknowledges the fact of separate governance between China and Taiwan and claimed that students should be cultivated as citizens who have “feet on Taiwan, reminiscence of Mainland China and eyes on the world” (MoE, 1994).

Such an imagination of community was designated as a concentric circular historical conception (*tongxinyuan shiguan*, 同心圓史觀), which was developed by Tu (2004), a historian who later became the Minister of Education in 2004–2008 in Taiwan. He argued that what geographically surrounds students should be taught first and, in most detail, and the more peripheral knowledge should be taught later and granted less significance. He suggests, from the inner to the outer circle, putting local history in the centre, arranging Taiwanese history in the second circle, and Chinese history as the third. The fourth circle is Asian history, which is followed by the fifth circle of world history. Tu’s (2004) subjectification of the local and Taiwanese identity was accused of de-Sinicization in education that attempted to pursue Taiwanese independence and to eliminate the cultural influences of China (Li, 2008; Liu & Hung, 2010). The critics, especially from the perspectives of the pro-reunion camp, argued that, by subjecting Taiwan, Tu makes Taiwanese history a national history rather than a local history under the grand Chinese narrative (Peng, 2004).

However, Tu refutes the accusation and contends that the concentric circles he created are more a historical conception of a separate China rather than that of an independent Taiwan (Han, 2016). For Tu (2004), the Sinocentric worldview failed because of its ignorance of the multicultural facets within Chinese nationalism, the chauvinism of the Han civilization, and the local characteristics of Taiwan. Therefore, he suggests putting the knowledge of China back into its position in Asia and in the world and establishing new historical perspectives. These new historical perspectives can thus “broaden the

worldview of students and form profound historical viewpoints and build students' international competitiveness" (Tu, 2004, p. 72). What is evident here is the intentional revelation of the tension between localization and globalization/internationalization. Under the Sinocentric worldview, Taiwancentrism was regarded as localism and parochialism. Tu (2004) acts against the notion by taking up a multiculturalist rhetoric. Through deconstructing Sinocentrism—or the Chinese identity—with a multicultural perspective, he asserts that Taiwancentrism would not be regarded as merely a localism.

### **OBJECTION AGAINST SINOCENTRIC WITHDRAWAL**

With the election of Ma Ying-jeou to the position of President, the KMT returned to power in May 2009. The MoE put off the issue of 98 *Curriculum Guidelines*, which had been planned for implementation in September 2009, and claimed that the senior high school curriculum guidelines needed to be reviewed again because of contentious content in the Chinese and history curriculum (Yang & Hung, 2016). For such a revisionist agenda, the MoE set up a project group to oversee the original curriculum review committee, which was accused of being biased by academics, historians, educators, and parents. In the formation of the project group, most scholars specialized in Taiwanese history were replaced by those specializing in Chinese history (W.-y. Chou, 2015). Furthermore, the committee set up to author the history textbook was not formed by historians but by academics of political science who had pro-China stances. The controversial additional editions and revisions to the curriculum guidelines and textbooks were not declared and explained by the MoE until they were unveiled and spread in Chou's blog article (cf. W.-y. Chou, 2015) and read by the public.

The MoE rationalized the initiative by claiming that the adjustments were not substantial. It contended that the modification of curriculum guidelines was an administrative act rather a legislative one (Hsiao, 2015), and the project group and textbook review committees were only temporary appointments (Yang & Hung, 2016). However, these declarations did not convince the public, especially not the stakeholders of the history curriculum. After the spread of Chou's Facebook post on 1 February 2014, individuals and associations of schoolteachers who taught history and social studies joined to protest against the curriculum revision.

The Apple Tree Commune Club (ATCC), whose members are mostly students in National Taichung First Senior High School, was one of the first student unions to boycott the revisions in public. On 1 May 2015, they organized a protest event against the curriculum revision on the 100<sup>th</sup> school anniversary in National Taichung First Senior High School, a prestigious and historic senior high school in the middle of Taiwan island. The event quickly spread throughout Taiwan and inspired students in other districts to line up and express their objections in public.

The best-known alliance was the Anti-Black Box Curriculum Alliance, a union established in 2015 by high school students to object to and call for protests against the reviews of the history curriculum and textbooks. Some former curriculum review committee members, academics, and schoolteachers also joined the protest. Several civil societies, such as the Humanistic Education Foundation, Taiwan Association for Human Rights, National Alliance of Presidents of Parents Associations, Civics Teachers Action Alliance, and History Teachers' Engagement Union, together started the Anti-Black Box Curriculum Alliance. In the midst of the protest, one of the students chose to end his own

life to call for wider public attention to the unjust government decisions on the history curriculum (Hioe, 2015). In order to boycott the curriculum revision, the Anti-Black Box Curriculum Alliance organized a protest to occupy the MoE and contended they were acting upon the spirit of citizen disobedience. Their concerns over the new revisions were two-fold: they argued that the process of making the revisions was opaque, lacked legitimacy, and was without enough societal consensus; they argued the new revision on the content of the history curriculum was not insubstantial, as claimed by the MoE, but leads the curriculum towards de-Taiwanization. After a one-week sit-in outside of the MoE, the students chose to disband because of the threat of a typhoon.

Later that year, Tsai Ing-wen won the presidential election and became the second DPP president since May 2016. The new government announced an administrative ordinance to abolish the previous curriculum revision (The Executive Yuan Gazette, 2016). Amendments of the *Senior High School Education Act 2016* and the *Primary and Junior High School Act 2016* were also passed to legislatively confirm students' rights to participate in the curriculum review committee.

### **STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN NEGOTIATING OFFICIAL KNOWLEDGE**

Although regarded as the focus of education, students are rarely allowed to take part in making decisions about what they learn at school. According to Yang and Hung (2016), teacher representatives, parent representatives, and social association representatives have joined the curriculum review committee since the 1990s. Student participation was once discussed and called for action in a consultation conference in 2004, but the opportunities are few.

For instance, in the curriculum development committee set up during 2004–2005, one of 39 committee members represented students, and during 2006–2007, only one out of 50 was a student. It is not clear whether these students were allowed to join as committee members and student representatives or as social association representatives. At the time, the students belonged to the High School Student Rights Association (中學生學生權利促進會, HSRA), which had become a registered social association in 2003 (People organisations worldwide web, 2015; Yang & Hung, 2016). As well, student representatives were only allowed to participate in the development committee for the *General Curriculum Guideline*. At this stage, the student representatives on the committee represented were only a façade of a democratic process. They were not given enough opportunity to make meaningful contributions for change because of professional concerns.

Yang and Hung (2016) explain that because of concerns for the need to make professional decisions, committees set up for individual subjects used to meet without any student representatives. Thus, opportunities for students to contribute to negotiations and discussions of what to teach in schools were few and restricted. In creating 'official knowledge,' students were thought not to have sufficient capabilities so that they were less represented. The under representation does not mean Taiwanese students are indifferent to their rights. As mentioned above, some students managed to take part in the policy-making process through organizing social associations, such as the HSRA, and succeeded in participating in the education reform initiatives (Huang, 2003). Although not given enough power, students act actively to empower themselves in order to participate in the negotiation of the national curriculum.



## **FROM READING GROUPS TO PROTEST ALLIANCES**

ACTT is a student club in National Taichung First Senior High School born from another activity spontaneously and regularly held by local students in Taichung, called the Nights in Mingsin Hall. Named after a building in National Taichung First Senior High School, it is an activity that students, sometimes teachers included, read, talk, and stay together every Thursday evening (Liao, 2018). They share with each other what concerns them in their daily lives and invite people from outside of the school to give lectures and lead discussions. Together, they engage in a wide range of reading, from literary works to sociologies, and make contact with people, including academics, politicians, local historians, and artists. They are interested in issues ranging from the Yugoslav wars to Taiwanese indigenous cultures and land justice. The event provides students with an opportunity to think and reflect on things that happen around the world and around them.

From time to time, there are more senior high school students in Taichung attending the Thursday night event. Some of them also participate in the operation of student unions as well as student parliaments in their own schools. And sometimes, it becomes an occasion that students from different schools discuss and exchange with each other the experiences of fighting for student rights in high schools. The networking becomes a base for setting up associations like the ACTT and the Anti-Black Box Curriculum Alliance after the outbreak of protest against curriculum revision.

## **STUDENT MOVEMENTS IN TAIWAN**

Noticeable when studying the earlier student participation in the making of the national curriculum—the case of HSRA, to the latter student associations—like ACTT is that organizations have become more localized and membership is younger. While the members of HSRA are mostly university students who care about secondary school students' rights, the members of ACTT themselves are secondary school students. These later student associations tend to claim their local bases and their local links, such as ACTT, Northern Taiwan Anti-Curriculum Revision Secondary School Association, Taoyuan Secondary School Association, and Eastern Taiwan Secondary School Association. One of the students mentioned in an interview that “my school was established under Japanese colonization by local elites due to their local identity (against Japanese national identity). It is a school tradition to be concerned about what happen in the society and to take part in social movements” (Chen, 2017, p. 74).

Apart from the traditions of individual schools, there is also a tradition of student movements and activism in reacting and responding to critical social issues along with the development of democracy in Taiwan. In 1990, the Wild Lily student movement gathered thousands of university students at a sit-in at Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, Taipei, demonstrating for the popular election of all representatives of the National Assembly. The Wild Strawberry student movement in 2008 held sit-in demonstrations throughout Taiwan, claiming that police conduct against the people during the China governmental representatives' visit are against human rights. The most recent instance is the Sunflower Student Movement in 2014, in which university students, research students, and civil groups occupied the parliament for 23 days, protesting against intimate economic cooperation with China without public supervision. The movement successfully stopped the Ma Ying-jeou government from signing a Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement with

China. For high school students participating in the Anti-Black Box Curriculum Alliance, “they’d like to have their own demonstration and to protect their own rights” (F.-y. Chou, 2017, p. 198). The student movement experiences are passed down from generation to generation, and students are inspired by each other.

### SHAPING IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

As the naming suggests, the protest by the Anti-Black Box Curriculum Alliance pursued anti-black box and anti-brainwashing. While the “anti-black box” aims to advance procedural justice in curriculum review, the “anti-brainwash” pursuit is against de-Taiwanization (F.-y. Chou, 2017). In other words, the protests are not only against the paternalism in the creation of the national curriculum but also about expressing the youth’s imagination of the national community. Sinocentrism is considered, by these students, as working towards de-Taiwanization and brainwashing. In other words, the Chinese cultural legacies and prestige are no longer at the centre of their imagination of the national community.

It might be of worth noting that, despite the growth of self-determination in the young generations, these student activists are not necessarily ideologically in opposition to the older generations affected by the previous Sinocentric education. There were still disagreements on how to deal with the Chinese elements in the geographical imaginary. The central opposition lies in the disfunction of the democratic process in terms of curriculum revision (Liao, 2018).

The recognition of Taiwan and Taiwancentrism does not mean anti-Chinese cultural heritage for the young generation. Rather, what binds them together is a strong agreement and respect for the fact that Taiwan is a multicultural society and everyone’s cultural identity should be respected. The point is to keep on discussing and leaving it to open dialogues rather than arriving at a fixed conclusion. The national curriculum is, itself, a political action and is about passing down political ideologies; there is no way for education to be depoliticized (Chen, 2017). To these young people, the imagined communal community is more inclusive than being exclusively Chinese or exclusively Taiwanese. As one of the student representatives stated in a recent curriculum review committee meeting:

We were always talking about if the curriculum de-Sinicization or pro-Taiwan independence, or the Great Chinese perspectives, of course I know this is compulsory education for every national . . . It is not that if we interpret the history from the indigenous perspectives then it would become single ethnical history . . . The point is that we should try to put ourselves in others’ shoes. (MoE, 2018, Xiao's statement).

### DISCUSSION

Through the conceptualization of the imagined community (Anderson, 1983/2006) and official knowledge (Apple, 2014), this paper investigates the politics of the formation of the national curriculum and its representations of the national community. In a Sinocentric perspective, genuine Chinese culture and virtues are emphasized. Students are usually regarded purely as learners and receivers of the curriculum which adult/experts edit and arrange for them. However, along with the development of democracy and Taiwanese subjectivity, the Sinocentric worldview as well as the legitimacy of official knowledge become problematic and questionable. In the movement led by the Anti-Black Box

Curriculum Association, what is clear is students' challenge to the legitimacy of former Sinocentric official knowledge. To the new generations, the legitimacy of the national curriculum should be built on democratic participation and inclusive and multicultural representation.

In his work on recent Taiwanese demonstrations, Cole (2015) depicts Taiwanese developing patriotism as a new brand of "civic nationalism." Different from the old ethnicity-based nationalism, it is related more to "shared values, a way of life, and the country's democratic system" (p. 8). In the context of Taiwan's complicated geopolitics with China the nation sits in an ambiguous status of liminality, an unstable and disintegrated relationship between society and nation state (Wang, 2010). In confronting China's attempt at eliminating Taiwan's independence, Taiwan's niche is its pursuit of being 'as a state that avoids identification with a nation, but emphasizes, instead, its political virtue', an idea arguably close to Habermas's notion of "constitutional patriotism" (Rigger, 2002, p. 354). To the high school students who fought for better participation and representation in making the national curriculum, the imagined community represented in the curriculum should be a democratic and multicultural one, which empowers the youth to act against the dominance of official knowledge.

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