Fashioning curriculum reform as identity politics—Taiwan’s dilemma of curriculum reform in new millennium

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Abstract

This paper explores indigenization and globalization, the double issue of curriculum and identity as a dialectical contradiction that characterizes the ambivalence of “Taiwanese identity.” “Taiwanese identity” is treated as a social, political, and cultural construct rather than a fixed term in an essentialist sense. Curriculum, as culture’s medium of social identity construction, represents a struggle over who constructs whose identity and what is constructed. Therefore, when curriculum reform is called for, it is also a time when a society transitioning and redrawing its socio-political and cultural boundaries to resolve internal social conflicts and identity anxiety. Curriculum reform, in this paper, is analyzed not only as a question of shifting explicit ideas of educational practice but also a question of shifting configurations in power relations that signify a politics of identity.

The historical context that brought about the question of identity in Taiwan is introduced first. The second section discusses how emerging curricula were politically, socially, and culturally implicated in the process of constructing a Taiwan-centric identity. The third section analyzes the political, social, cultural, and educational implications of new curricula on the formation of a Taiwan-centric identity. Finally, the paper discusses the effect of globalization on the practice of new curricula and points out an ambivalence of local–global identity construction and the conflicting roles of education, especially curriculum, in this ambivalence.

Keywords: Curriculum reform; Identity politics; Globalization; Indigenization; Local–global ambivalence

1. Introduction: curriculum reform and identity politics

Curriculum is not merely an aggregate of courses taught in schools. It is also the site where various groups struggle for representation in the public sphere. Curriculum debates always extend beyond the subject of “what is taught” and lead to the more troubling question of “who we are.” Contemporary interest in the issue of identity has grown out of a context in which the all-too-familiar class analysis cannot grapple with the complexity of political conflicts and contradictions in which new political subjects and social identities emerge. Taiwan is in the midst of social transition caused by the women’s movement, indigenous human-rights movement, community revitalization movement, nativist cultural movement, and others. These movements nudge the
general public a step closer to a more democratic and multicultural society. The wave of these social movements reflects a reality that curriculum, the crucial medium of cultural practice, represents an expression of struggle over who represents whose identity in complex social relations across gender, class, race and other borderlines. When curriculum reform is called for, society is molding its transition and redrawing its socio-political and cultural boundaries to resolve internal social conflicts and identity anxieties.

This paper asserts that curriculum reform is not only about changes in the forms and contents of curriculum, but also about changes in how a society sees itself. That is to say, there is a relationship between curriculum reform and identity politics. This paper explores this relationship by discussing how Taiwan’s curriculum reforms from the 1990s until the present represent a shifting configuration of power relations that signifies a politics of identity.

The following sections introduce the historical context that brought about the question of identity in Taiwan. The second section discusses how emerging new curricula were politically, socially, and culturally implicated in the construction of Taiwan-centric identity. Section three analyzes the political, social, cultural, and educational implications of new curricula on forming a Taiwan-centric identity. The conclusion discusses the effect of globalization on the practice of new curricula and points out an ambivalence between local–global identity construction and the conflicting role of education, especially curriculum, in this ambivalence.

2. Historical context: an emerging question of “Taiwan-centric identity”

... Identity, ..., is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything, which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall, 1990, p. 227)

Stuart Hall stated clearly that “identities come from somewhere, have histories.” To assert the historical essence of identity formation does not mean that identity is something fixed, waiting to be discovered. Rather, this perspective points out that identity fluctuates along with historical, social, and political transformations. Stuart Hall’s conception of identity is helpful in understanding the nascent question of “Taiwan-centric identity” in the 1990s. Hall viewed identity as something in a state of continual transformation without assigning identity to its eternity. This state of transformation brings about the possibility of new identity formation which in turn reflects the changing conditions of “being.”

This section describes how the historical context in which Taiwan-centric identity emerged in that “Taiwan-centric identity” was “called into existence” under shifting socio-historical conditions. The characteristics and features of “Taiwan-centric identity” were not predetermined but were given at a particular historical moment. This identity also caused various social groups to come forward, claim their voices, and reestablish their new identities in the process of building Taiwan-centric identity.

2.1. Early history of immigration and colonization

Aborigines lived on the island of Taiwan thousands of years before Chinese immigrants arrived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Spanish and the Dutch were both attracted to Taiwan’s geographical advantage during the age of European exploration and colonization. Taiwan’s position was perfect for reaping the benefit of trading in the sea lines between Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. The Dutch even established the Dutch East India Company in Taiwan to export Taiwan’s native products, such as deerskin and sugar, to China and Japan (Bluss and Everts, 2000). Cheng Cheng-kung, the son of a famous Ming pirate, led his refugee band across the Taiwan Strait in 1662, forced out the Dutch, and made Taiwan his personal kingdom and a fortress from which to counterattack the Manchu (or Ching) dynasty (Mendel, 1970, p. 12; Clements, 2004, pp. 213–228). Cheng’s mission was never fulfilled. Taiwan was handed over to Japan in 1895 as the first Japanese colony when China surrendered to Japan in a war.
Taiwan was returned to Kuomintang (KMT) China after 50 years, but KMT corruption, arrogance, and violence caused an outbreak of Taiwanese resentment and led to the 1947 revolt known as “the 2–28 Incident.” It was not simply an incident without any political concerns, but rather a Taiwanese rebellion against the KMT government and a massive massacre by the state that deliberately destroyed a generation of Taiwanese elite (Kerr, 1966, pp. 254–255; Mendel, 1970, p. 27). The 2–28 Incident was repressed as a political taboo until the late 1980s, when a strong desire emerged to know “the buried past.”

Chiang Kai Shek fled to Taiwan in 1949 leading more than a million and a half civilians and military personnel. Under existing political circumstances, the KMT government declared a state of national emergency and implemented martial law on 20 May 1949, justified on the ground that China was under communist rebellion. The educational system, media and cultural affairs were under the direct control of KMT leadership and censorship. Mandarin was taught as the only official language (Gates, 1981). Although acknowledging Taiwan’s particularities to China, the state assiduously promoted the idea that Taiwan was the repository and guarantor of Chinese tradition as well as the location of legal government representing all China. People’s civil rights were truncated by monopolizing state power.

This repressive political and cultural control does not tell the whole story of KMT’s rule in Taiwan. The state also earned credit for bringing affluence to society in general (Cheng, 1990; Gold, 1986; Haggard and Chang, 1987; Wu, 1989). When the KMT state relocated to Taiwan, it gradually shifted its focus from military preparation to economic development under changing international relations. The expanding world market provided Taiwan opportunities to compete in the capitalist world system in the 1960s with its low-wage labor of relatively high productivity (Ho, 1978, p. 258). Taiwan’s economic growth had been called a “miracle.” Taiwan’s per capita GNP increased from US$ 402 in 1950 to US$ 10,215 in 1992 (The Government of Republic of China, 1993, p. 199). It was registered as one of East Asia’s “Four Tigers”—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. Its rapid economic growth paved the way for other extensive changes in the non-economic sectors of society. Economic development, the increase of wealth among the people, the rise of the middle class, the low rate of illiteracy and the high rate of school enrollment, improvements in the social welfare system, and increasing political democratization all interactively set Taiwan on a new course of historical development.

2.2. A different historical trajectory since 1980s

When the KMT focused on economic development, liberalization and democratization seemed to slip in through the back door of political control (Gold, 1986; Wachman, 1994, p. 41). When the larger socio-economic and political transformation was under way, it “hit” common Taiwanese people who had long lived in a culture of silence under the repressive control of the KMT state. The burgeoning wave of political and social movements in the early 1980s resulted from this larger socio-economic and political transformation. These movements challenged socio-political boundaries set by the state, and opened up a possible space for cultivating a Taiwanese consciousness. This was a precondition of the formation of Taiwanese identity. Freedom of speech, association, and demonstration granted people the right to position themselves in an emerging new social context and explore what it meant to be Taiwanese in the domestic sense. State dominance over civil society was challenged as various social groups came of age.

The Taiwanese population is generally categorized into four ethnic groups: aborigines, Hoklo, Hakka, and mainlanders. The aboriginal people, as indicated before, are people who originally resided on the island. In general, they were categorized into nine major tribes—Atayal, Saisiyat, Bunun, Tsou, Paiwan, Rukai, Puyuma, Ami, and Yami. Early Plain-dwelling aborigines (the Pingpu) are now extinct. Aborigines currently account for about 1.7% of the total population of Taiwan. The Hoklo, whose ancestors came mainly from the Fukien province in China, account for approximately 73.3%. Hakka immigrating from the Kwantang province of China account for about 12%, and mainlanders compose the remaining 13% of Taiwan’s population (Huang, 1995, p. 21). People in Taiwan created a word—“tsu-chun” (meaning “ethnic groups”)—to indicate a social category referring to these groups based mainly on their ancestor’s origins, although there are only two ethnic groups in Taiwan (aborigines and Han-Chinese). The term was invented under mounting ethnic conflicts in the late 1980s. Ethnic antagonism commonly rose in tensions between mainlanders
and so-called “native Taiwanese” (the Hoklo and Hakka). Tensions between Taiwan’s Han and the aboriginal people was not lacking either, but was ignored or put aside until the voice of aboriginal people became politically significant.

The KMT’s policy of discrimination widened the gap between mainlanders and “native Taiwanese.” Nearly all key posts in both the party and the government were held by mainlanders who had followed Chiang Kai-shek to Taiwan. A similar discrimination was maintained in schools and other institutions. Mainlander political domination and various forms of social discrimination made the distinction between mainlanders and Taiwanese apparent in almost every aspect of everyday life (Gold, 1993). The resentment of native Taiwanese was severely repressed under the control of KMT state, but it crystallized and exploded as political dynamite when politicians mobilized this resentment during major elections in late 1980s.

More and more “native Taiwanese” assumed political and economic positions through the 1990s, and mainland politicians learned native Taiwanese languages (such as Hoklo and Hakka) to “be closer” to their Taiwanese voters (Chiao, 1992). The unequal relationship between mainlanders and the majority of Taiwanese began to shift in 1990s. At the same time, most marginal aborigines become visible when they organized themselves into a social organization fighting for their rights. Their culture, which had been gradually disappearing under the force of assimilation, began to be recognized by the Han-Chinese. Their culture (rather than the Hoklo and Hakka cultures) was considered to be the most authentic and legitimate culture in Taiwan, especially in claiming Taiwanese distinctiveness from China (Wang, 1994, p. 265). Subordinate, obedient, and silent Taiwanese women also came forward to criticize patriarchal society by challenging gender stereotypes in textbooks.

Shifting state–society relationships, changing ethnic relationships between mainlanders and native Taiwanese, the increasing significance of the aboriginal cultures, and the growing assertiveness of Taiwanese women all indicated that an entire set of social relations was shifting due to the increasingly democratic atmosphere. Restricted socio-political boundaries that once aided the KMT’s iron rule were no longer easily justified, and were increasingly contested in the late 1980s.

Various protests and rallies in the late 1980s to 1990s revealed that society had begun to make demands upon the state using collective action. Civil society was awakening. This social movement wave was historically significant because it marked the first time that the masses voiced their opinions. The rise of social movements in the 1980s shook long-standing social relations with an established configuration of power relations. Restricted and unbalanced socio-political boundaries were no longer easily justified, and were increasingly contested. Within this shifting configuration of power relations, the state chose to relax socio-political boundaries by eliminating martial law and allowing civil rights such as freedom of speech, association, and demonstration. Political reform was one aspect of social practice that redrew socio-political boundaries in a concrete sense. Freedoms of speech, association, and demonstration gave people ways to “find” themselves or to “redefine” themselves. A politics of recognition and a democratic society developed simultaneously (Hsiau, 2000).

Within this deconstruction of regimes of truth, the unthinkable “being Taiwanese” became thinkable. The unmentionable “2–28 Incident” taboo became mentionable. Repressed and suppressed social memories became memorable. These unthinkables-become-thinkables are at the epicenter of politics of recognition. Boundaries on how the Taiwanese defined themselves were not only redrawn in the concrete sense of relaxing restrictions on civil rights. This also occurred in the abstract sense of exclusion becoming more inclusive. The popular rhetoric of “tai-wan min-yun kong tung te” (Taiwan as a community in which everyone shares the same destiny) reflected this trend of social inclusion. It reflected a social need that attempted to establish a new social order using the “community” concept to include everyone in the project of “constructing Taiwanese community.” It became a monotonous concept that tended to conjure up an imagined community in which everyone was included regardless of ethnicity, class, gender, and the like. Yet, this rhetorical inclusion skipped over conflicts and contradictions among and within groups. It ignored the struggle to forge identities and tensions inherent in the fact that various social groups had differential historical experiences and differed in their positions in the social structure. “Tai-wan min yun kung tong te” rhetoric was invented in order to relieve increasing conflicts within society, and was an empty concept lacking any concrete action.
Taiwan’s curricular reforms in the 1990s faced challenges from various social groups struggling over who constructs whose identity in curriculum. Curriculum became a contested terrain where the rise and fall of social groups and the inclusion and exclusion of social cultures shaped the contour of how Taiwan’s inhabitants perceived community and identity, and in turn shaped their own future (Mao, 1997a).

3. Curriculum reforms between indigenization and globalization

This section discusses how indigenization curriculum countered sinoization curriculum, which was once regarded as politically taboo, and became mainstream in curriculum reform in 1990s. Under the impact of economic globalization during the 2000s, a new curriculum (the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum) was initiated to incorporate democracy into curriculum-making and instruction. The focus of curriculum reform shifted to the discourse of global competition.

3.1. “Sinoization” curriculum

Taiwan’s curriculum reforms in the 1990s could be seen as part of the identity construction process in which various social groups fought with the state to set new social and political boundaries and reestablish some certainty into Taiwan’s social fabric. Criticisms about Taiwan’s curriculum in the early 1990s emphasized the KMT state’s ideology and hegemony, which included the “speaking Mandarin only” language policy, the state’s “one China” policy (which was under the definition of KMT state), the marginalization of Taiwanese history and culture, the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, and discrimination against ethnic minorities (Ou, 1985; Lin, 1987; Shih, 1993; Sun, 1994). These critiques made visible a type of cultural hegemony sustained by an ideological drama in which the national curriculum played a crucial role.

A national curriculum, called sionization curriculum, was set up when the KMT arrived in Taiwan in 1945. The KMT thought that Taiwanese residents were overly influenced by Japanese colonial culture. Suspicious of the loyalties of the Taiwanese, the KMT established policies intended to “sinoize” the Taiwanese in the name of decolonization (Yeh, 1993). This curriculum taught students geography, history, and literature from a sino-centric point of view. Mandarin was taught as the only national language, and Taiwanese dialects were prohibited in schools. The KMT’s attempt to maintain emotional and cultural attachment with China marginalized, and even dismissed, Taiwanese languages, history, geography, and folklore. People resented being caught between an abstract notion of a remote China, about which they learned much, and a concrete reality in Taiwan, about which they learned too little, or were not allowed to learn. Criticisms about the national curriculum in the late 1980s and early 1990s rose from this resentment because people were confronted with a reality that did not match the lessons they were taught in school.

3.2. “Indigenization” curriculum

In the early 1990s, indigenization education began to challenge the national sinoization curriculum. Indigenization curriculum, loosely defined, referred to a new curricular reform which was concerned with teaching Taiwan in terms of its indigenous culture, history, language, arts, and the like. The explicit and implicit connotations of indigenization education were always associated with concepts, such as hsing-tu (literally, one’s hometown), pen-tu-hwa (literally, nativism), and pen-tu-i-shih (native consciousness). Indigenization education emphasized areas such as language, history, geography, local environment, and culture (Ministry of Education, 1995a). Indigenization education was quite provocative in the sense that it challenged existing intolerance for the development of a Taiwanese consciousness under the KMT’s promotion of Chinese identity.

In the 1989 election of county and city mayors, the candidates of the opposition political party, the Democratic Progressive Party (thereafter the DPP), promised their voters that they would practice native language education and introduce local history and culture in elementary and junior high schools if they were elected (Lin, 1995, p. 5). In 1990, the newly elected DPP mayor of Ilan County announced that native language education would be incorporated into public schools at the elementary and junior high levels in Ilan. Later, Pintung, Taipei and other counties followed in its footprint. Without violating the national curriculum, three local governments utilized 40–50 min of extracurricular activities each week to teach indigenization curriculum in elementary and junior high
schools. At first, native language education was the focus. Later, this developed into a full range curriculum, including native language, history, geography, folklore, local environmental issues, and more.

The introduction of indigenization education was not simply an educational event. It was in accord with a social trend of searching for “roots” and reestablishing a sense of pride in one’s identity. The politicians were sensitive to people’s desires, and were able to mobilize sentimental feelings for “the lost Taiwanese culture.” They evoked people’s resentment for the KMT cultural policy which neglected their native experiences in Taiwan.

The head of the Ministry of Education announced that the government would reform curriculum in accordance with the trend of indigenization under massive pressure from DPP legislators and social critics in 1993. As a result, new departments were established in universities, including departments of Taiwanese Literature Studies, Multicultural Education, Hakka Studies and Aboriginal Studies, etc. Government approval of indigenization curriculum helped introduce curriculum standards for “Hsiung-Tu (meaning ‘homeland’) Instructional Activities” in elementary schools and “Getting to Know Taiwan” curriculum standards in junior high schools in 1995 (Ministry of Education, 1995a, b).

3.3. A new curriculum in the face of globalization

The discourse of indigenization and related curriculum reforms reached a climax during the 1990s. Beginning in 1998, the international economy situation changed rapidly. The advantage of the Four Asian Tigers’ (including Taiwan) economies gradually shifted to the big tiger—China. While Taiwanese society confidently claimed its much more democratic political transformation and became more conscious of its Taiwan-centric cultural indigenization, it found itself besieged by the hardest competition in the global economy. A new kind of discourse arose, challenging Taiwan-centricism. It was argued that Taiwan might use its “Chineseness” rather than “Taiwanness” to maintain its economic competence as the global market shifts to China. This rhetoric delegitimized the Taiwan-centric discourse.

Another new curriculum was conceived within the process of economic globalization and cultural–political indigenization. It was the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum (1999–present). This curriculum did not aim to change teaching content as indigenization curriculum had opposed sinoization curriculum. The significance of this curriculum reform was to make establish a flexible policy for producing what and how to teach in the school curriculum. It carried the spirit of democracy into the public school system, and at the same time was sensitive to the development of the global economy.

The new curriculum guidelines only stated goals and principles rather than a conventional Curriculum Standard that detailed what and how to teach. The goals of this new curriculum were to help students after study in grades 1–9 gain the capacities of “knowing themselves, creativity, life-long learning, communication, respect others and cooperation, cultural learning and international understanding, using information technology, actively exploring and resolving problems, and independent thinking,” among others (Ministry of Education, 2001). Local teachers and schools determine the details of what and how to teach. These ideas of school-based management and teacher-as-professional were introduced by academic elites and became part of discursive field of educational reform in accordance with the democratization of curriculum and pedagogy. It was claimed that with the new curriculum principles, a school can decide what and how to teach by its own professional judgment, taking its local distinctiveness into account. Much more radical reforms, such as school-based management, teacher-as-researcher, were being realized with the implementation of the new curriculum. In a way, this embodied the idea of democracy in the daily life of schools.

4. The implications of two new curricula on the construction of new social identity

As discussed, the emergence of two new curricula—Indigenization Curriculum and Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum—is a part of an identity construction process. What curriculum includes and excludes and what forms it takes are not merely educational issues concerning educators. They are also identity questions tied to each member of the society. There is a connection between curriculum and identity, but it is very ambiguous. It does not follow a linear process of translating the Taiwanese identity issue into the practice of indigenization curriculum, as if the new curriculum could be a cure to the identity crisis. The making and practice of
indigenization curriculum were complicated with socio-political dynamics that diffused its effects on the formation of Taiwanese identity in several ways. The Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum is taking a far more democratic root in curriculum practice and being besieged by global capitalism in the process.

The following section discusses the implications of indigenization curriculum and the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum in shaping a locally and globally mixed ambivalent Taiwanese social identity.

4.1. Ethnicity as a highly politicized issue

The emergence of indigenization curriculum in the early 1990s was regarded as a symbol of the redemption of the “Taiwanese voice”—the voices of subordinate groups. The introduction of indigenization curriculum in the early 1990s enabled the Hoklo, the Hkahka, and the aborigines to articulate their cultures and languages and generate “positive” images of themselves. In a way, the appearance of indigenization curriculum in the early 1990s was a pattern of socially integrating subordinate ethnic groups into new Taiwanese social relations. The numerical Hoklo dominance (about 74% of the whole population) reflects the fact that the Hoklo had more resources, politically and culturally, to claim and promote their own culture and language. The practice of indigenization curriculum was dominated by Hoklo notions of “indigenization.” Indigenization textbooks and teaching materials were criticized for casting a Hoklo cultural framework shadow (Mao, 1997b). Ethnicity divided society into ethnic enclaves, which posed a critical challenge for curriculum-makers trying to produce a multiethnic curriculum.

The KMT’s sinoization policy and cultural exclusion stimulated the call for indigenization. That policy resulted in serious ethnic antagonism between mainlanders and the Hoklo and Hkahka. Though politicians ceased inciting ethnic antagonism in the early 1990s and the aborigines and women found their voices, society had to confront the rising issue of multiculturalism. This concept had been broadened to include social differences not confined to the concept of ethnicity.

The multiculturalism celebrating cultural diversity in the indigenization curriculum had another political purpose. As discussed earlier, the native elements of aboriginal culture were employed by the Hans to fabricate a Taiwanese culture that was expected to be distinctive from the Chinese culture. From the aboriginal point of view, recognition of their cultural nativeness was one thing, but the survival of their culture was another. Society remained sino-centric in the eyes of Taiwanese aborigines if the promotion of their native culture was simply to construct an identity different from the Chinese.

4.2. A benign view of multiculturalism?

The term “multiculturalism” has become popular in Taiwanese academia over the past few years. The popularity of “multiculturalism” reflects society’s pressing need for social harmony in the face of ethnic antagonism. However, the term “multiculturalism” describes Taiwanese society as simply pluralist. An interviewed school principal said that indigenization curriculum was a form of multicultural education teaching students how to respect others. “Respect” was a popular word in the development of students’ positive attitudes towards “cultural others” in indigenization curriculum. In a society whose education had been very authoritarian and mono-cultural, it was a progressive view and a critical step for schools to teach students to be sensitive to and respect others. However, indigenization curriculum celebrating cultural diversity tended to blur the issue of cultural hierarchy and depoliticize the profound issue of economic-political inequality.

It was easy for the Han-Chinese to talk about multiculturalism as a way of inclusion and tolerating cultural differences, but for the most disadvantaged group, the aborigines, this was not the case. Even though the majority of Han-Chinese tolerated their differences, aborigines remained in an unequal social structure in which they felt discriminated and exploited. Subject to an unequal social structure, the aborigines were misrepresented by the dominant Han-Chinese and had little control over the projection of their cultural image. The aboriginal culture was exotically attractive in the eyes of Han-Chinese. When everyone was talking about indigenization, the aboriginal culture became the most authentic indigenousness among other Han immigrant cultures. However, this kind of authenticity was modeled after nativeness and used as to promote tourism by Han-Chinese. An aboriginal principal exclaimed:

I think culture is in the daily life, which cannot separate from our everyday life. It is meaningless
that we are talking about culture which is separated from people’s life. That is a dead culture, a window culture. Our culture is not just clothes, festivals, folklore arts, and the like. That is very shallow ... If our social and economic situations do not improve, talking about native culture is no use.

He pointed out,

Our kids are overwhelmingly influenced by the dominant society. Truly, we are unable to change the [Han-dominant] society ... Through indigenization curriculum, we teach our children to know and learn about our native culture and emphasize our identity as aboriginal. But in the future, when growing up, they have to face this [Han dominant] society, to compete with Hans under unequal situations.

The aborigines are at an impasse, caught between the issues of cultural preservation and socio-economic and political integration. A teaching method to help aboriginal children get out of the above dilemma in the long run remains to be realized, especially when the discourse of indigenization curriculum is linked to a benign view of multiculturalism which does not pay attention to social and economic inequality issues.

Taiwanese society, like many others, is differentiated into social groups with unequal accesses to economic and political resources and the representation system. The benign view of multiculturalism tends to disqualify and discount the discourse of social inequality. Multiculturalism as an officially recognized idiom was an authoritative argument in support of indigenization curriculum. The linkage between multiculturalism and indigenization curriculum was an attempt to dismiss the criticism of provincialism. Yet, the association of multiculturalism with indigenization curriculum was culturally insensitive and politically uncritical. Talking about nativeness became an expression of cultural fashion, or a symbol of cultural indigenization in the discourse of multiculturalism as a celebration of pluralism. Without equal access to economic, political, educational and other resources, the aborigine’s struggle for recognition and representation was much harder than the struggle of marginal Han-Chinese reclaiming their own definition of nativeness. As Fraser (1997) argued, “[I]njustices of recognition are thoroughly imbricated with injustices of distribution. They cannot be ade-

4.3. From discourse of indigenization to globalization

Curriculum is not only about what to teach and how to teach. It also relates to how curriculum makers understood learning and the organization and production of knowledge. Their ideas about curriculum and pedagogical practices do not come from an empty history. They mix global academic knowledge with their local interests. Schooling, therefore, becomes an institution producing systems of governing that tie the local and national with the global through pedagogical practices and knowledge mediated by local elites. Schooling constructs the national imaginations that teaching national history and cultural knowledge gives cohesion to a Taiwan-centric identity. It also constructs the images of cosmopolitan subjectivities that flexibility and adaptability are the main characteristics of future productive workers and world citizens.

The significance of the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum was that it tried to connect the earlier indigenization discourse with the globalization discourse. However, while society recognized differences within the texture of social entity and emphasized the teaching of local and ethnic languages and cultures, the majority of curriculum practitioners and parents are gradually giving more attention to learning subjects of Science, Computer Technology and English. Policy-makers assert that these subjects will move the country to a higher level of economic competitiveness. Individual parents and students are only concerned with subjects which could prepare them to compete with others in the job market.

The discursive construction of educational reform was gradually shifting to economic concepts around 2000–2003 (Mao and Chang, 2005). According to official documents and legislators’ interpellation records, interpellators and officers in the Ministry of Education stressed the “realities” of global competition and made a closer linkage between education and the future of the national economy. They argued that the quality of students was
decreasing due to the past 10 years of soft-liner’s educational reform that over-simplified curriculum content and added local cultural learning. Some argued that students were becoming less competitive internationally. Learning English at an earlier school age (grade 2, and even starting at the kindergarten level) has also become a major issue in the discourse of enhancing global competitiveness. Educational reform talks of rigid standards and English-learning were naturalized as the only weapons to fight the “realities” of global competition. This tended to depoliticize discussions which were highly politicized by the DPP government and its supporters over the past 10 years. In catching the economic anxiety of the majority of middle class, this process of depoliticization made it very difficult for those with less economic, political, and cultural power to be heard accurately.

Bauman (1998) pointed out that in the globalization of the world, except for extra-territorial elites who have the freedom of mobility, a bulk of the population exists in the local. This is the new middle class. They bear the burdens of emerging global processes that set global competitiveness at fever pitch and a changing identity-providing social milieu. They suffer from economic survival anxiety, political powerlessness and disinterestedness, and a continually shifting cultural identification reference. Their situations make them vulnerable to the anxiety of competitiveness, and they easily buy into talks of rigid standards and English learning. Businessmen have targeted this anxiety and generated a desire to create a market of language and cram schools. Besides carrying the task of educational reform, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan is facing the problem of marketization. English learning and other related learning are promoted by cram-school business and other private educational institutions as a required commodity which should be purchased as early as possible. In 2003, the government took on the impossible task of de-marketizing a market that has already taken on a life of its own.

On the other side of the society, some people are more “localized” than ever before. Unpacking the social roots and consequences of globalizing processes, Bauman (1998) pointed out that what appears as globalization for some means localization for others. As the freedom of mobility becomes a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, this privilege becomes the main stratifying factor of society. While trans-national imaginaries were created through discourses of global economy competitiveness, there is a growing gap between official institutions (including schools) and the everyday realities of those who do not fit into the economic logic of the new global order. This implies that there is a growing gap between metropolitan cities and rural areas. Children who live in rural areas went to schools with limited economic resources and human capital, with no teachers for their English learning. Some of them graduated from elementary schools without, or with the most basic, skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Their parents went to cities to work and left them at home with their grandparents. They saw their teachers come and go, and they were left far behind the moving society. Global processes appear as an uninvited and cruel fate to them. Without any control of their fate, they see the world moving and passing them by. Social divisions are being widened, which is also an integral part of the globalization process.

5. Conclusion

Based on the Taiwanese experience, curriculum reform is an intrinsic part of identity politics. In a state of transformation, Taiwan is undergoing a process of identity reconstruction. The proliferation of political and social movements in the 1980s was a social phenomenon in which the pre-defined social identity was deconstructed, and a new sense of Taiwanese identity was simultaneously cultivated consciously and semi-consciously. Indigenization superseded sinoization as the dominant social-capital-building element of public education, and gained political legitimacy in cultivating a new sense of Taiwanese identity. When society entered a new millennium and faced the problem of economic regression, the urge for globally economic competition made the discourse of curriculum reform shift to a concept of global competition. Curriculum reform is caught by its ambivalence—indigenization and globalization.

Constructing social imaginaries by introducing indigenization curriculum gained political legitimacy in the 1990s, but also caused cultural and political anxiety. Forming a new social identity entails a deconstruction of old images and memories. People were dissociated from the old collective identities and re-imagined with other, more Taiwan-centric collective narratives. This intensified ethnic antagonism and political disputes. From
1987 to the 1990s, society experienced more democratic ways of life, but at the same faced a serious challenge in resolving social conflicts by recognizing social differences. A new era dawned when Taiwanese society began to realize what it means to live democratically.

The new sense of Taiwanese identity is in the process of breaking away from the view that Taiwan is a bearer of Chinese culture. There are two senses of Taiwanese identity within this process. One is a sense of sameness: another is a sense of difference.

As discussed early, Taiwanese identity was called into existence as a formation of social capital: it was not waiting to be discovered. It emerged at a historical conjuncture of changing state–society relationships and destabilizing long-standing social relations. The excluded voices of the marginalized, which were suppressed and withheld during the martial law era, broke out and called for change. Society needed to reset boundaries to reestablish a new social order, and boundaries were redrawn along the line of linguistic and cultural traditions. The introduction of indigenization curriculum in early the 1990s was a way of redrawing boundaries. Language, history, and culture were important reference points in the indigenization curriculum. Teaching native languages, recovering the hidden story of the “2–28 Incident,” recounting the legacy of Japanese colonization, returning to cultural roots, and connecting social issues were all indigenization curriculum strategies for constructing Taiwanese identity. Indigenization curriculum tried to cultivate a sense of community, a feeling of togetherness. People have to find some ground, some place, some position to stand on and to speak from in a time of identity crisis. The rediscovery of history and the return to the roots (either cultural or social) were acts of re-identification with “the homeland”—Taiwan. Without such an enormous act of re-identification, constructing Taiwanese identity would not have been possible. Indigenization curriculum came at this moment of identity construction, when extensive ideological training has to take place in school and in society to produce “new Taiwanese” image in which people recognize themselves. This is the sense of sameness that Taiwanese identity is being constructed.

Yet, the production of sameness is always in tension with the discovery of difference. A new sense of Taiwanese identity is not simply a linear change from mainland nationalism emphasizing “the Chinese cultural heritage” to Taiwanese provincialism emphasizing the island’s distinctive culture and history. As the Taiwanese society becomes more democratic and diversified, the voices of different social groups cannot simply be perceived as the binary opposition between “being Chinese” and “being Taiwanese.” The tension between “being Chinese” and “being Taiwanese” has evolved into a multi-faceted question of “who we are.” Different social groups with different historical experiences have different positions in the social structure, and therefore identify themselves with different reference points. To construct a collective identity, in fact, is a war of positions. In the process of making and practicing indigenization curriculum, Taiwanese identity was constructed exclusively on the Hoklo notion of “Taiwanese-ness,” other minorities were silenced, especially aborigines. However, the root of democracy reached into the soil and soul of Taiwan, and the articulation of differences in the process of making and practicing indigenization curriculum became more urgent in the 1990s. The capacity to address people through the multiple positions in which they are located and identified is a crucial quality of Taiwanese society. It is only with this quality that a society is able to deal with its question of identity domestically.

It seems that the introduction of the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum was to deal with social differences by democratizing the process of making and practicing curriculum. In the face of economic regression and urge of global competition in 2000, curriculum reform concerns shifted to an economic concept. This caught the existential anxiety of the majority of the new middle class—a fear of being left behind by global society. There is a gap between those at the globalized top and those at the bottom. Will education, as capital that is convertible into other capital, become the main stratifying factor rather than the equalizer of the society under the impact of globalization? Or will education become an important agent that provides an avenue for articulating social differences, thus creating an imaginary community in Taiwan by the force of indigenization? The processes of this struggle constitute the ambivalence of Taiwanese identity.

References


