The Past, Present and Future of CAGE

: Beyond National ideological Interests, Fulfilling the Responsibilities of Civil Association and Cooperating with Asian Partners for General Education

Wang, Chung-Ming
Professor, Dean of Po-Ya School for Liberal Arts, Tunghai University, Taiwan, cmwang5001@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of the entire report will focus on three perspectives: why it is necessary to beyond national ideological interests, how to fulfill the ideals of civil society organizations, and how to serve as a partner of the ALEN (Asian Liberal Education Network), and will be divided into six parts to share what I would like to report here: the background of its establishment, the problems that have to be faced, how to solve the problems that have to be faced, what problems still need to be faced, how to contribute to the East Asia General Education Alliance, why insist on the Republic of China instead of Taiwan as a status symbol of CAGE?

Key Words: CAGE, national ideological interests, civil society organizations, ALEN
Teachers must be grateful to teachers, schools, and students, especially students. Because these students entered our classrooms in their youthful years of 18 to 22 years old, in the blooming season of their lives, we must make every effort to give them a pair of hand-stitched spiritual leather shoes so that they can be able to graduate from college, wearing through the thorns and pains on the road of future life is the most profound meaning of educators. (Huang, 2015, p. 262)

It is my honor, on behalf of CAGE, to share CAGE’s past achievements, current efforts, and future. The content of the entire report will focus on three perspectives: why it is necessary to beyond national ideological interests, how to fulfill the ideals of civil society organizations, and how to serve as a partner of the ALEN (Asian Liberal Education Network), and will be divided into six parts to share what I would like to report here: the background of its establishment, the problems that have to be faced, how to solve the problems that have to be faced, what problems still need to be faced, how to contribute to the East Asia General Education Alliance, why insist on the Republic of China instead of Taiwan as a status symbol of CAGE? Although the above report is written and reported based on my observations and understanding of the CAGE’s operations as much as possible, it is inevitable that there will be personal subjective opinions and interpretations. This article is not so much a representative CAGE report as it is my personal observation and participation in CAGE.

1. The Social Background of the Establishment of CAGE

The Chinese Association for General Education (hereinafter referred to as CAGE) officially obtained the certificate of establishment from the Ministry of the Interior on April 14, 1994, and this day is regarded as the birthday of CAGE. It has been 30 years. The English translation of CAGE is Chinese Association of General Education, but the correct English translation should be Association of General Education in Republic of China. This is an Expedient method to deal with diplomatic issues. In fact, many academic societies established in Taiwan have changed their name from Chinese to Taiwanese. Taking the Chinese Sociological Society established in 1930 as an example, it was renamed the Taiwan Sociological Society in 1995. Why does CAGE still stick to Chinese and not change to Taiwanese? It is not so much a matter of political identity as it is the persistence of cultural identity (more on this later).

When CAGE was established, Taiwan had just left authoritarian political rule, and its political and cultural identities were in the process of being reshaped. Taiwan's long-suppressed political and cultural identities were about to begin to be relieved. It can be said that CAGE was born at a time when political and cultural identities were about to diversify. Especially after mainland China recognized the “socialist market economic system with Chinese characteristics” in 1992, Taiwan's economy officially faces competition from China, which will become the world's factory. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., Ltd. (TSMC), now ‘the sacred mountain’ (This not only means that TSMC is the mainstay of Taiwan’s economy, but also TSMC keeps Taiwan safe from armed attack by China), was also officially listed on the Taiwan Stock Exchange that year, but at that time, it was not optimistic about TSMC's future development.

At that time, whether Taiwan's democratic politics and economic development would reach the current state, to be honest, no one should have confidence, and they could only find the way while lost. However, what is worthy of attention is that political and economic or the development of CAGE, the main driving force is not only the promising government, but also the civil society playing an extremely critical role. Even if TSMC does not have many small and medium-sized enterprises as its network partners of the industrial system, TSMC is unable to develop its competitive advantages (Chang, 2023). In addition, Taiwan's democratic politics also relies on...
civil society forces—local factions and social organizations such as temple fairs and agricultural societies—to carry out bloodless transformation for democracy.

CAGE was born under such political and economic background. Whether it is democratic politics, economic development or cultural identity diversity, the establishment of CAGE has a common feature, that is, the “conscience emerges” (致良知) from all walks of life of scholars, farmers, industry and commerce - the awakening of civil power is like the sincere words of Professor Huang, Junjie (黃俊傑), one of the important driving forces behind the founding of CAGE, in the CAGE 20th anniversary documentary. They are the conscience of the current scholars. He honestly stated that he helped to establish CAGE out of his regret and confession. On the one hand, Professor Huang feels that when he was as the student at college, there was a lack of general education; on the other hand, he reflects that he was too devoted to professional research and paid less attention to general education. Whether his regret or confession, it should be Professor Huang’s self-encouraging words. However, Professor Huang’s regret and confession represent the heartfelt words of all the sponsors who were willing to do their best for CAGE at that time. CAGE is not only an academic group, but also a social practice group with self-awareness of civil power. As the quotation from Professor Huang at the beginning of this article, he said ‘conscience emerges’ of educational work, which is based on gratitude.

2. Problems that CAGE must Face

CAGE was established without any help from national government departments. Although many outgoing education ministers became directors or supervisors of CAGE, CAGE did not become the spokesperson of the Ministry of Education. Instead, it often became a critic of the Ministry of Education's policies. However, the relationship between CAGE and the national government is sometimes not so clear-cut. If the national policy has the same ideas as CAGE, they will work together, such as the Taiwan Teaching Resource Center (TTRC). As a non-governmental organization that does not receive support from national government departments, self-funding is the biggest challenge. Fortunately, the operation of CAGE adheres to its due responsibilities as a non-governmental organization, especially adhering to the ideals of general education. It has won the respect of universities in Taiwan. It not only has stable university donations (55%), but also has lifelong members and general membership dues income (45%). However, due to the challenge of the declining birthrate, especially private universities, several universities have stopped donating money.

In addition, some scholars who are close to the ruling party are trying to use state resources to dominate the development of higher education in Taiwan, constantly launching large-scale projects led by the National Science Council or the Ministry of Education and struggling to apply for the financial constraints of each university. Therefore, it is unknowingly controlled by a few “scholars who consider themselves good for higher education” and their affiliated scholars. This is the biggest problem that CAGE must face. The independence that it has worked hard to establish as a non-governmental organization over the past 30 years is facing severe challenges in how to continue to exert influence.

What is general education? Since the establishment of CAGE, there have generally been two views. One is that general education and life education are synonymous; the other is that general education is about opening multiple perspectives. In fact, these two views are not inconsistent with each other, but when each takes one side, there will be great conflict. The former will think that the latter is too frivolous and loses solemnity, while the latter will think that the former is too old-fashioned and not easily accepted by students. Excellent general education should be accessible from various fields, guiding students' life exploration and teachers' life wisdom to complement each
other. In fact, the dispute between the two is like the conflict between Confucianism and Taoism. Confucianism attaches great importance to the etiquette and rules of life education, but Taoism believes that it should not be limited by etiquette and rules, and everything should be true. A closer look at what Confucianism and Taoism seek is to “investigate the relationship between heaven and man,” but they have different approaches.

However, Taoist internal martial arts require life experience to achieve success. Just like the protagonists Pao Ding (庖丁) and Lun Bian (輪扁) in the fable of “Zhuangzi” (莊子) both used their life journey to gain mastery, while Confucianism is the study of human relations and daily use. However, whether it is life experience or daily use of human relations, the teacher's life wisdom is needed to help guide students' life exploration. Therefore, if the teacher is willing to be generally knowledgeable, students can be generally knowledgeable. This is the second problem that CAGE must face.

If general education cannot face up to this problem, the general curriculum will be either rigid or dazzling, either too authoritative, too flattering to students, or too accommodating to the teacher's profession. The relationship between CAGE and national government departments, as well as how to reasonably implement the purpose of general education. CAGE as a civil association not only can do its best, but also cannot ignore any challenges what it has to be faced.

3. What Problems has CAGE Faced?

CAGE is aware of the above-mentioned problems that have been faced. When it was founded, it prioritized the general education teacher training camp and the issuance of general education journals. Among them, the publication of the General Education Journal has not been interrupted to this day and has become an important journal for Taiwan's general education. ‘The general education teacher training camp’ was combined with the later development of the General Education Evaluation to develop into the ‘Improvement of General Education Project’. Further explanation is as follows:

3.1. General Education Teacher Co-learning Workshop

The General Education Teacher Co-learning Workshop is held once or twice a year, in spring or autumn, in rotation by various universities in Taiwan. A total of 37 sessions were held from 1994 to 2018. From 2019 to 2022, we will cooperate with Taiwan University (台灣大學) and recognize the development characteristics of the host university to jointly hold the ‘Coconut Grove Lecture and Conference’ (椰林講堂), which will be held in January and June every year. In 2023, it was changed to be hosted by Fengjia University (逢甲大學) and renamed ‘Spring Rain Lecture and Conference’ (春雨講堂). In addition, it also organizes international seminars or lectures in response to current issues and international exchanges, such as the online ‘Blue Wave Lecture’ (滄波講座), which is organized by Korean Association of General Educational (KAGEDU) and CAGE join it to co-organizer.

3.2. Journal of General Education

In 1994, it first published the “General Education Quarterly” in cooperation with Tsinghua University (清華大學), and in 2005 it published “General Education Online”. To improve the academic research quality of general education, it transformed into the “General Education Journal” in 2008 and became a professional journal. A general education academic research journal, there will be two issues per year by 2023, and 32 issues have been published. Currently, we are working hard to apply to become TSSCI (Taiwan Social Sciences Core Index), the first-level academic research journal in Taiwan.
3.3. To Assist in Promoting General Education Evaluation

The Ministry of Education commissioned CAGE in 1998 to conduct a comprehensive general education interview and evaluation of seven universities, which are focus on research (Liu et al., 2006). In 2012, the Higher Education Evaluation Center Foundation (a non-governmental organization) invited core members of CAGE to serve as evaluation committee members to comprehensively evaluate the general education of universities in Taiwan (Wang, 2012). The general education evaluation during this period has indeed caused pressure on universities, which need to be evaluated. For fitting the requirement of evaluation, most universities have upgraded the general education center as first-level administrative or teaching office to show that the university authority attaches great importance to general education and improves it. Not only the curriculum committee and teacher recruitment committee of the general education center have begun to establish, but also evaluation mechanism for student learning effectiveness have been done. Although general education evaluation has a positive impact, negative effects also follow like a shadow. Some university only adopt it in form and have no significant effect on the actual improvement of general education teaching. The general education evaluation has indeed made the general education system of each university more perfect, but it has also caused the negative effect.

3.4. General Education Improvement Project

To make general education evaluation more substantive, CAGE promoted the general education improvement plan in 2018.

The General Studies Association plans to gather outstanding teachers and general education supervisors in the general education field across the country to build a professional “General Education Improvement Group” to help diagnose the fundamental problems in general education teaching, propose solutions that can hit the point, and provide guidance.’ (Juang, 2018)

The improvement plan led by CAGE is responsible for substantive guidance that respects the characteristics of each university, rather than inspecting the general education of each university based on the personal standards of the evaluation committee. It can really assist the development of general education in each university and is deeply loved by each university, which have accepted assistance by CAGE. (Qiu, Juang: 2018).

4. What Issues in CAGE Still Need to be Worked On?

Since its establishment in 1994, CAGE has indeed made universities pay more attention to general education and has also actively introduced new concepts in general education around the world, especially the training of general education teachers. It has also specially established the General Education Model Teacher Award and the Model University Award, as well as the Lifetime Achievement Honorary Award, and the honorary title of General Education Fellow to lead the development of Taiwan's general education.

However, efforts over the past 30 years have mainly focused on promoting general education from the perspective of teachers, with less attention paid to students’ perspectives. Based on the General Education Improvement Project's spirit of recognizing the subjectivity of each university's development, the 2024 general education teacher seminar will be transformed into a seminar from the student perspective. However, the training of general education teachers must also be continuously promoted. CAGE will promote the General Education Improvement
Project 2.0 to assist the development of general education teachers and supervisors in each school.

Although universities in Taiwan no longer dare to ignore general education, general education will bear the brunt of the competition among universities with a declining birthrate, especially private universities that are already stretched. Not only that, but online learning resources are also becoming more and more abundant. World famous universities have taken advantage of their academic and economic resources to develop online universities on a large scale and provide many high-quality online courses. At the same time, there are a wide range of simple and clear knowledge introductions launched by Internet celebrities. Does general education still need to be taught in the classroom? If general education is just the transfer of knowledge, it seems that there is no need to sit in the classroom to attend classes. Why does general education still have to be held face-to-face?

Professor Chengshu Gao (高承恕), the current chairman of CAGE, announced at the joint meeting of executive directors and supervisors that CAGE will fulfill its due responsibilities as a civil association and should always put students’ education first, beyond national ideological interests. He also believes that education is to give students confidence and win all the approval of the representative of CAGE. Therefore, how to fulfill its responsibilities as a non-governmental organization, combine it with the ideality of general education, and promote pragmatic idealism has become a problem that CAGE have to face currently.

5. What Contribution Can CAGE Make to the East Asia General Education Alliance?

In 1895, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan became a community with a shared future due to the joint aggression of Western imperialism and capitalism. However, the supremacy of nationalism has also caused harm to the three places. Not only Japanese militarism, but also the national ideologies of Taiwan and Japan have deepened their conflicts with each other. Since World War II, Taiwan has created a unique collaborative network of small and medium-sized enterprises due to its unique social culture and emphasis on humane connections between people. It has also reached the peak of Taiwan's industrial and economic development. Many industries are world-class ‘hidden champions’, quietly manufacturing for world-famous brands. Not only that, it also creates a close connection between TSMC and local industry partners, creating a production model that is difficult to surpass in the semiconductor industry around the world.

Chairman Gao himself is a research expert on small and medium-sized enterprises in Taiwan. He is also very familiar with the production model of the plate conductor industry led by TSMC. To date, he has personally participated in field research surveys of more than 800 small and medium-sized enterprises. At the same time, he has also served as a chair professor of EMBA at Fengjia University for a long time. More than 5,000 small and medium-sized business owners have benefited from Chairman Gao’s teaching. CAGE, led by Chairman Gao, is not just a slogan, shouting about fulfilling its responsibilities as a civil association. With more than 40 years of practical experience in research and teaching, especially as the chairman of board directors of Fengjia University, it has made Fengjia University to become the best private university in Taiwan, and to have the civil characteristics of a private university. With all these practical experiences, Chairman Gao is very confident to lead CAGE to fulfill its due responsibilities as a civil association, transcend national ideological interests, and promote East Asia General Education Alliances to network together. As a partner of the East Asia General Education Alliance, CAGE is not only willing to contribute its 30 years of practical experience, but also to leverage Taiwan’s advantages in social network management to cooperate with South Korean and Japanese partners. It is also willing to leverage Taiwan’s network connection capabilities to
assist Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, achieving common good connection.

6. CAGE vs TAGE

CAGE continues to insist on ‘Chinese’ rather than ‘Taiwanese’, not a political identity but a cultural identity. CAGE is willing to fulfill its responsibilities as a civil association and exert the same spirit of connecting small and medium-sized enterprises as the same as TSMC's local social network in Taiwan. This is precisely the recognition and respect for Taiwan's existing culture. Not only is it unwilling to fall into the trap of Taiwan's national ideology, but also unwilling to fall into the trap of Taiwan's national ideology. Not to be manipulated by the national ideology of Greater China, but to recognize the existing wisdom of life of Chinese civilization - based on Taiwan, not forgetting Chinese civilization, connecting East Asia, and looking at the world.

South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan are the geographical peripheries of mainland China, but they are not the spiritual "peripherals" of Chinese civilization. After the Song (宋) and Ming (明) dynasties, Confucianism, Xi's Zhu (朱熹) Neo-Confucianism, and Yangming Wang's (王陽明) Neo-Confucianism flourished in Korea and Japan, which was closely related to the development of Zhu and Wang's motherland. Confucianism goes hand in hand, and the life and wisdom of Chinese civilization stretches across Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. Although the East Asia General Education Alliance is a geographical periphery of mainland China, it should have the courage to serve as a promoter of the creative transformation of Chinese civilization.

7. Conclusion

CAGE cooperates with KAGEDU and JACUE, to work together for East Asian general education, not only for the development of general education in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, or for the development of East Asian general education, but also for the development of general education in the world, after all, general education is the education of “what is it like to be a human being?” Although the national power, social and economic development of the three places have their own particularities, they share a common civilization tradition. However, the three places share a common civilizational tradition. What they have in common is not only East Asian Confucianism, but also the connection between Buddhism (Indian civilization), Christian spirit and Western democracy and science.

In the arduous process of inheriting Western civilization, although compared with mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea still retain the East Asian civilization that originated from Chinese civilization: ‘respect and trust are the subject, doubt is the method’ (敬信為體，懷疑為用). However, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea are still completely invaded by the alienation of Western civilization. Higher education has long been secularized. Under the impact of declining birthrate, it has been completely commercialized or capitalism. The ideality of higher education can be said to be in the wind and rain. Drifting in the middle. The combination of individualism and skepticism has plunged modern young people into a black hole of nihilism.

Fortunately, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan still adhere to the high-quality cultural tradition of protecting common good. As partners of the East Asia General Education Alliance, we should use this fine tradition to actively guide young people to devote themselves to doing good to themselves, to others, and to nature. Sharing a good relationship and establishing one's own life value of “becoming a human being” is exactly the value of general education.

References

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CAGE의 과거, 현재 그리고 미래

- 국가의 이념적 이해관계를 넘어 시민단체의 책임을 다하고 교양교육을 위한 아시아 파트너와 협력하기

Wang, Chung-Ming
대만 동해대학교 포야교양대학장, 교수

초록

이 논문은 국가의 이념적 이해관계를 넘어서는 것이 왜 필요한가, 시민사회단체의 이상을 어떻게 실현할 것인가, 아시아 교양교육 네트워크(ALEN)의 파트너로서 어떻게 역할을 수행할 것인가라는 세 가지 관점에 초점을 맞춘 것이다. 이 논문에서는 다음의 6가지로 나누어 보고하고자 하는 내용을 공유하고자 한다: 설립 배경, 직면한 문제, 직면한 문제를 해결할 방법, 여전히 해결해야 할 문제, 동아시아 교양교육 네트워크에 기여할 방법, 왜 CAGE의 상징으로 대만 대신 중화민국을 고집하는가?

주제어: CAGE, 국가 이념적 이해관계, 시민사회단체, ALEN