

Practical Experiences from Big History: Middle School in Taiwan

Albert T. Wang
Mingdao High School, Taichung City, Taiwan

Correspondence | **Albert T. Wang** atwang@ms.mingdao.edu.tw

Citation | Wang, Albert. (2023) Practical Experiences from Big History: Middle School in Taiwan. *Journal of Big History*, VI(2); 77–78.

DOI | <https://doi.org/10.22339/jbh.v6i2.6210>

From the Big Bang to the recent development of human civilization, we are exploring the future and examining the past. Big History includes knowledge about the universe and the composition of the chemical elements, which represent the macrocosm and microcosm for the whole picture. In the frame of Big History, we connect everything that seems irrelevant to the relevant, bringing it all together. At Mingdao High School, we focus on multi-performance and development, so we introduced a big-history course to our tenth-grade students. Instead of accepting knowledge passively in a classroom, we train them by cultivating their concept-creative ability and problem-solving skills. For such a course, it represents an unprecedented step forward in their lives.

Learning the meaning of learning is a crucial lesson in one's life. Under Asia's traditional education system, students are used to assimilate knowledge passively. As a result, thought has been limited. During the fifty years of Mingdao High School's operation, we have cultivated the solid root of student's learning, because we believe that 'besides the scores, there is something more important!' In addition to the requirements for student performance, we develop student's multiple abilities outside of the curriculum, including logic and critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and diverse interest development, etc.

With reading speculative expression as our central axis, students are able to face future challenges and develop abilities to carry around after they graduate. As Mingdao's concept says: 'You must discover yourself first in order for others to know you more.' The Big History course is like a piece of the puzzle, appearing at the right time and place, stimulating and helping the students to think outside of the box in Mingdao's campus.

In the big-history class, you need to leave your comfort zone as the very first step. The students have to not only study the course materials independently before class, but the group discussion during the class encourages students to see the world from a different perspective. Learning is no longer limited to textbooks. A peer's different viewpoints are indispensable nutrients that help students construct multi-thinking. In the two years of the big-history course, we have seen student's abundant investment in this course. Although this elective does not count for a high proportion of overall grades, students not only work hard, they actively absorb knowledge in different fields in the classroom,

cultivating and deepening their cross-field abilities. Moreover, they have also learned how to be a practical learners. At the end of the course, students have to utilize what they have learned from this course to complete a case study, such as a marketing project for a family company / booking system optimization / hosting a forum for youth from Taiwan / setting goals for the school magazine's / Mingdao United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Summit.

As an educator, I'm dedicated to discovering problems and embracing new knowledge. At Mingdao, encouraging learning is not only for students, we also encourage our colleagues to actively absorb new knowledge. Just like multiple levels of knowledge brought to us by Big History, which let us think about how knowledge acquisition should focus on the cultivation of cross-domain capability. With the core purpose of Big History, 'thinking from the big picture,' even under the influence of the covid epidemic, Mingdao is still a pioneer of online learning, including for the Asia Pacific Youth Leaders Summit, Mingdao Model United Nations, and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Those activities reflect core perspectives from the Ministry of Education: autonomous action, communication and interaction, and social participation, each corresponding to the other. In the era of endless learning, the potential of every student is like an iceberg under the water, full of tremendous possibilities. With the guidance of multiple activities, students can also reflect on and adjust to the upcoming future.

Just as the planets in the universe affect each other to form outer space, so too is the cultivation of every student's ability to the world. We must break away from the frame of traditional thinking style, see the world from a global perspective, and learn how to be a learner.

As a pioneer big-history course in Taiwan, I hope this course can be implemented in the rest of Taiwan's education system and can take education in Taiwan to the next level. Therefore, more students can be leading under the non-traditional teaching of 'global thinking' and 'discovering and solving problems,' which will stimulate different sparks and become global citizens who have to break their comfort zone. In the future, we hope that we will gain more big-history exchange opportunities with high school students from different cultures around the world.



Scenes of Big History at Mingdao High School. From the authors' collection.

