

*From the Village to the United Nations and Back Again: Aboriginal Taiwan and International Indigenism*

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**Abstract:**

In the past three decades, indigenous peoples have asserted their place in international law, including the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Taiwan has participated in this process, as Taiwan's indigenous people have attended the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and related activities in New York and Geneva. Delegates to these events, legislators as well as social movement actors, return to Taiwan with new ideas about indigenous rights. These ideas have been incorporated into ROC law, including the 2005 Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples and subsequent legislative reform. But political and social movement leaders also return to their villages, where they have to explain new ideas, such as the creation of autonomous zones, to ordinary community members. This paper looks back at the past decade of the author's field work in Seediq and Truku villages, but also looks forward to the new century. What happens when indigenous leaders return to the villages with ideas learned from international forums? How do ordinary villagers interpret this process and its implications for their lives? Which ideas resonate best with their lived experience in Taiwan and point the way to improvement in the new century?

*From the Village to the United Nations and Back Again:  
Aboriginal Taiwan and International Indigenism*

In the past three decades, indigenous peoples have asserted their place in international law, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) adopted in a General Assembly Resolution on September 13, 2007. This Declaration, albeit without the enforcement mechanisms of a Convention, now serves as a moral compass for state-indigenous relations and has become a basic reference in negotiations and court cases regarding state-indigenous conflicts. As such, the Declaration is becoming an important part of international customary law. The first three articles of UNDRIP set out guiding principles, on which the rest of the document is based. These guiding principles are: 1) the collective and individual rights of indigenous peoples to all human rights and fundamental freedoms recognized in the UN Charter and international human rights law; 2) the collective and individual rights of indigenous peoples to be free from discrimination; and 3) the right to self-determination. Indigenous rights are thus enshrined as the collective rights of peoples. The concluding article 46, which was added near the end of negotiations at the request of certain General Assembly members, specifies that UNDRIP does not imply the right to encourage “any action that would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent states” (United Nations 2007).

UNDRIP, a product of nearly three decades of indigenous lobbying at UN organizations (Bellier 2009, Niezen 2003, Schulte-Tenckhoff 1997), thus gives indigenous peoples the right to nested sovereignty, or political autonomy, within existing states, but does not imply separatism of any kind. McGill University anthropologist Ronald Niezen, as the title of his book (2003) indicates, calls this three-decade-old political movement “indigenism.” These changes at the global level, happening at a historical moment when “international personality” is no longer limited to states (Anaya 2004: 50), have added a new variable in the study of indigenous peoples. In addition to studying indigenous cultures and social structures, as well as exploring the complexities of state-community relations, which may or may not lead to anthropological advocacy of indigenous rights, there is a need for a legal anthropology of how states and indigenous communities position themselves in relationship to new international legal norms and values. Tania Li once defined indigeneity as a “positioning which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle” (Li 2000: 151). The goal now, after new identities have been formed, positions taken, and legal reform promised, is to understand how these

communities and states work through new legal values to implement, negotiate, or perhaps even hinder the political change hoped for after decades of the global indigenous movement. Taiwan is a fertile ground for such studies.

Taiwan has participated in global indigenism since the beginning, as Taiwan's indigenous people have attended the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and related activities in New York and Geneva since the beginning of those institutions. Delegates to these events, legislators as well as social movement actors, return to Taiwan with new ideas about indigenous rights. These ideas have been incorporated into ROC law, including additional articles to the ROC Constitution, the 2005 Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples, and subsequent legislative reform. But political and social movement leaders also return to their villages, where they have to explain new ideas, such as the merits of "name rectification" or the creation of autonomous zones, to ordinary community members. As this paper will show, this work is full of challenges at the local level. The result, to a large extent, has been a perceived divide between indigenous elites, who have the means to participate in international indigenous rights events, and ordinary people in the villages. This is not surprising, since not everyone has the means to attend UN events, or even to participate in church-based, consciousness-raising activities held in Taiwan. As Niezen wrote:

The most significant division to be overcome in any distinct people is between those who are in the forefront of the political representation of difference and those who are a-political, who don't understand the advantages to be gained by the restless strivings for rights and recognition (Niezen 2010: 103).

Drawing attention to this dynamic in Taiwan, Hsieh Shih-chung referred to Taiwanese indigenous activists as "elites without people" (Hsieh 1995: 414). This theme was picked up by sinologist Michael Rudolph (2003, 2004), who provides ample anecdotal evidence that the "common people" are cynical toward the elites who speak in their names. International indigenous activism, because relatively better educated, better connected and wealthier individuals speak on behalf of entire communities and peoples, risks becoming a new element in a class-based division in communities, even as the benefits of indigenism should benefit all. The visible correlation between class and indigenous activism, especially in formerly egalitarian societies, may reduce the legitimacy of such movements in the eyes of some people who feel that indigenism does not adequately represent their needs, especially if the introduction of capitalism has given new elites and working class people different positions in the larger capitalist mode of production. This dynamic has been observed, not only in Taiwan (Lin 2011; Rudolph 2003, 2004; Simon 2011), but also in other parts of the world (Clark 2005, Petras and Veltmeyer 2010, Rata

2000, Schröder 2003, Sider 2006). This does not mean that progress in indigenous rights is impossible. In fact, what appears to outsiders and cynical poorer members of communities as neo-colonial collaboration may be the best option for real autonomy within the limits of existing political structures (Camacho 2008). As for anthropologists, no matter how we personally choose to position ourselves vis-à-vis indigenous or class-based movements, indigenism has become an unavoidable part of the communities we study. It is certainly useful to include it as part of the analysis.

This paper looks back at the past decade of the author's field work in Seediq and Truku villages, but also looks forward to the new century. After having lived in Taiwan and done research with Han Taiwanese from 1996 to 2001, I began my research in Seediq and Truku communities when Truku environmental activist Igung Shiban asked me to write an article about her struggle to reclaim land lost by members of her community to Asia Cement (Simon 2002). Shortly thereafter, I began my indigenous research in earnest in the summer of 2002 by participating as a student in training of the Presbyterian-run Urban-Rural Mission at Chang Jung Christian University in Tainan. During that event, I first learned about the emotional importance of hunting to indigenous men, and their perception that legal restrictions against hunting constitute a violation of their human rights (Simon 2004). From 2004 to 2007, I conducted eighteen months of field research in three Truku/Seediq villages. During this time, I was a participant/observer in various activities of Taiwan's indigenous social movements, interacted with indigenous politicians and members of the Legislative Yuan when they returned to their villages, and also spent hours daily conversing with ordinary people, who were often quite frank in their opinions about these other political actors. I also conducted surveys in two Truku villages.

This paper will begin with some theoretical reflection on indigenism, as well as the positioning of anthropologists in relationship to this global movement. This is important, especially since anthropologists gain their data by cultivating relationships with political actors and ordinary people in the villages where we work, but also because anthropologists' understanding of their data is influenced by their own psychological states (Pulman 2003) and wider social cosmologies (Stoczkowski 2007). Some limited self-reflection is thus useful in understanding the wider power dynamics. In a second section, I will then examine the trajectories of two different sets of actors pursuing relationships with local villagers: the social movement leaders and the political actors. In the third section, based on village surveys I did on behalf of local NGOs, I will discuss what villagers think about various goals of indigenism. In the conclusion, I show that this research has implications for both political anthropology of indigenism and for the indigenous movement itself. What happens

when indigenous leaders return to the villages with ideas learned from international forums? How do ordinary villagers interpret the promises of indigenism and its implications for their lives? How can we best interpret the “elites without people” hypothesis?

### **Anthropology and Indigenism: Archaeology of a Relationship**

Anthropologists have been a part of the global indigenous rights movement since the very beginning. Niezen sees a connection, perhaps even a causal one, between the sentiments of “salvage anthropology” and the indigenous movement’s theme of “cultural virtue” (Niezen 2010: 67). Within all of this, there is a certain affinity to an even older missionary drive. Anthropologists, albeit in very different ways, become secular missionaries in a goal to “save” the poorest, remote indigenous peoples of the globe. Rather than saving souls, some seek to save cultures and languages. In applied anthropology, others save communities with development projects. With postdevelopment perspectives, yet others try to save indigenous peoples from development with promises of indigenous autonomy.

With this heritage, it is no surprise that anthropologists have been among the founding figures of indigenous non-governmental organizations, or indigenous people’s organizations (IPOs), including Cultural Survival in the US, Survival International in France (with the assistance of no less than Claude Lévi-Strauss), and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. In Canada, many anthropologists (including Niezen) spend at least part of their careers working for IPOs. In the 1970s, McGill University anthropologists led by Richard Salisbury helped the James Bay Cree in their negotiations for the James Bay Agreement (Salisbury 1986). Anthropologists have thus emerged as some of the strongest proponents of indigenous rights, far too numerous to even credit them all in a brief paper about Taiwan.<sup>1</sup> At anthropology meetings such as the American Anthropology Association and the Society for Applied Anthropology, professional anthropologists are now relating stories about their applied projects to promote UNDRIP in indigenous communities worldwide (e.g. Ferreira 2011).

Taiwanese anthropologists have also been supportive of the indigenous social movements, also to the extent that they cannot all be named in a short paper. In 1981, Chen Ch’i-nan spoke out publicly about the negative influence of the Wu Feng legend depicting Chinese Confucianism as civilised and the indigenous as savage headhunters (Rudolph 2003: 255). In 1983, a group of anthropologists at Academia Sinica wrote a human rights report on the condition of what were then called *montagnards* (山地人). Among their suggestions, they concluded that the mountain

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<sup>1</sup> For some prominent examples, see Asch 1984, Blaser, Feit and McRae 2004, Hedican 1995, Scott 2001.

people deserved political autonomy (Li, et.al. 1983: 50). In 1992, 25 graduate students at Tsinghua University signed an open letter accusing elder academics of complicity in the domination of indigenous peoples, and demanding support for the indigenous name rectification movement (Rudolph 2003: 256). Hu Tai-li, who founded an indigenous dance troupe in 1990, has devoted much of her career to making ethnographic films with indigenous peoples, drawing attention to such issues as the storage of nuclear waste on Orchid Island. Although some indigenous activists accuse anthropologists of *not doing enough*, and some anthropologists remain critical of any academic involvement in the movement at all, it is fair to say that anthropology and the indigenous rights movement, in Taiwan as well as in North America, have nourished one another.

Many anthropological proponents of indigenous autonomy, sometimes perceived as an alternative to development (see Blaser, Feit and McRae 2004), are inspired by the work of Arturo Escobar (1995). Inspired by Foucault and Said, Escobar criticized development as a discourse that justified Western domination of the “Third World” by defining certain regions of the globe in terms of poverty, malnutrition, etc., that can only be solved by western modernity. He looked to indigenous social movements, with a research interest with black Columbians, for an alternative. He called for indigenous and other social movements, with help from ethnographers to create locally-grounded theory, to oppose capitalist modernity around two principles: “the defence of cultural difference, not as a static but as a transformed and transformative force, and the valorization of economic needs and opportunities in terms that are not strictly those of profit and the market” (Escobar 1995: 226). Similarly, Petras and Veltmeyer see indigenous movements as part of a worldwide struggle against multinational corporations and capitalism (Petras and Veltmeyer 2003: 191). In these radical approaches, that echo the discourses of indigenous activists in the UN, indigenous peoples come to represent salvation for all of humanity. As Niezen wrote, they become:

living representatives of a virtuous form of life uniquely adapted to the world, a corrective to an oppressively rationalist, destructive, hyper-industrial modernity, and, more than this, the privileged bearers of the secret knowledge needed to interpret the coming apocalyptic transformation of the world (Niezen 2010: 133).

If we were to make a typology of anthropological involvement with the indigenous rights movement, there are four approaches that can be used in specific research and publication projects. These approaches are not mutually exclusive to any person, but rather different intellectual and activist strategies that may be employed by the same individuals in different contexts and in different projects over

the course of a career. Some people may focus on only one approach, even rejecting other possibilities for moral and ideological reasons. All of the approaches claim to represent the best interests of the wider community, whether this be the broader scientific community or the indigenous partners in the projects. These approaches are:

1. **Traditional intellectualist approaches:** In these projects, the anthropologists focus solely on their theoretical interests derived from the discipline, e.g. linguistic anthropology, most topics in social and cultural anthropology. These approaches are probably the most effective in an academic career, due to the relative availability of funding and publishing venues.<sup>2</sup> By far, most research done by Taiwanese anthropologists fits into this model. Many indigenous people, however, resent being treated like “laboratory rats,” especially in the absence of any benefit to the community.
2. **Liberal activist approaches:** In the projects, the anthropologists may do applied research on such issues as indigenous health, poverty reduction, entrepreneurship, etc., all of which, if successful, integrate indigenous individuals and communities into the capitalist market and state structures. This research may be done in collaboration with local institutions such as churches or township offices; or with the Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP). This is the approach of some Roman Catholic village projects, as well as those of the Protestant NGO World Vision. Most work toward indigenous autonomy also falls into this category, as they work primarily to integrate indigenous communities into a bureaucratic state system. The Indigenous Autonomy Bill proposed by the Legislative Yuan in 2011 fits into this approach; but is probably the only form of autonomy that can realistically be approved by the Legislative Yuan. State funding is available for such projects, but they give anthropologists less social capital in the academic market and are thus less visible there.
3. **Radical activist approaches:** Due to Taiwan’s history of martial law by a right-wing government, these approaches are by no means absent, but certainly far less common in Taiwan than in Canada. In both Marxist and postdevelopment currents, the assumption is that a vanguard of intellectuals can and should work with indigenous activists on theory building and activist strategy. Due to the influence of Liberation Theology (see below), this approach resonates with certain factions of the Presbyterian Church, as well as with new social movements such as the

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<sup>2</sup> The highest prestige in academia still goes to those lonely thinkers who, true to Enlightenment epistemologies, position themselves as objective, detached observers.

Hunter Smoke Action League. These approaches include strong support for indigenous autonomy, but oppose such liberal forms as that proposed in 2011. Anthropologists taking this approach are less likely to get funding for research projects, and may be accused by intellectuals working in other approaches of “romanticism,” but can gain social capital in certain niches of the academic market. This happens to be a larger niche in Canada than in Taiwan. In Taiwan, sociologist Chi Chun-chieh is a good example of a scholar who has combined academic research in indigenous communities with environmental activism. Some of his work (e.g. Chi 2001) falls into the category, as does some international collaboration (Hipwell, et.al. 2008).<sup>3</sup>

4. **Critical intellectual approaches.** These approaches, which have made important contributions to political and legal anthropology, make the indigenous social movement, in both international and national dimensions, as the object of study itself. In Taiwan, Hsieh Shih-chung (1995) and Ku Kun-hui (2005) have been leaders in this type of research. This approach brings us full circle around to traditional intellectual approaches, as it is also of high social capital for academics and likely to attract funding.

In thinking through these approaches, as well as the strategies of the political actors discussed below, it is useful to recall the definition of development proposed by Jean-Pierre Oliver de Sardan:

all of the social processes induced by the voluntary operation of transformation of a social milieu, undertaken by means of institutions or actors exterior to this milieu, but which attempt to mobilize this milieu, and rest upon an attempt to grasp resources and/or techniques and/or knowledge (Olivier de Sardan 1995: 7).<sup>4</sup>

It may seem like an intellectual long jump, perhaps even morally repugnant to apply this definition of *development* to anthropological research and even to anti-development researchers and activists. All of the approaches listed above, however, as well as all of the strategies yet to be discussed, share a number of commonalities with this definition of development. The activists and politicians all hope to transform the local milieu, and come to it by means of external institutions, whether those be Canadian granting agencies and universities, World Vision, the Presbyterian Church, the CIP, or the township office. They all attempt to inspire

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<sup>3</sup> These approaches, which highly value the inter-relational, community aspects of research, are part of another intellectual tradition, at least as old as the Enlightenment (Niezen 2010: 107), that emphasizes community rather than individuals.

<sup>4</sup> Translation by the author from the French: « l'ensemble des processus sociaux induits par des opérations volontaristes de transformation d'un milieu social, entreprises par le biais d'institutions ou d'acteurs extérieurs à ce milieu, mais cherchant à mobiliser ce milieu, et reposant sur une tentative de greffe de ressources et/ou techniques et/ou savoir » (Olivier de Sardan, 1995: 7).



action among local people, even if only as apparently innocent as in an ethnographic interview, and with the goal of gaining something from the local community. In anthropology, we enter the villages with the goal of gaining new knowledge which we subsequently, no matter which of the above approaches we use or how well-intentioned we may be, transform into our own social capital. We may not be digging mines, but we are ultimately *extractive*, which makes it legitimate for local people to ask what they get in return. Reflection on anthropological self-interest is not meant to discredit any approach, not only because self-interest is a basic part of human society, but also because self-interest can also lead to cooperation and altruism. The collective work of all these people, social activists and politicians supported by scholars, has made substantial progress in Taiwan on indigenous rights.

### **Indigenism in Taiwan: a Retrospective**

If anything, we need to reflect on why Taiwan's indigenous movement has had such remarkable success amidst real political constraints. In Latin America, indigenism was based on decades of peasant (*campesino*) movements who transformed themselves into ethnic-based social movements (Niezen 2010: 122). In Canada, indigenous groups such as the Grand Council of the Cree (Niezen 2010: 79) began as IPOs with guaranteed federal and provincial funding under the Canadian treaty structure – which allowed them to hire teams of professional lobbyists and lawyers. Yet, across the Americas, indigenous activists and their supporters have met with political resistance, even violence, disappearances, and murders. Although the violence is more wide-spread in Central and South America, Canada has also had its share of incidents, such as the shooting of Anishenabek protester Dudley George by the Ontario Provincial Police in 1995 (Hedican 2008). Taiwan, at least in appearance, has peacefully moved to an avant-garde position in the global movement.<sup>5</sup> The following table summarizes some of the milestones in Taiwanese indigenism.

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<sup>5</sup> If one were to examine in detail the higher mortality rate of indigenous compared to non-indigenous people in Taiwan, one would find a high number of deaths in work-related accidents (e.g. on construction of the high speed railroad) as well as public health issues (e.g. deaths caused by excessive use of alcohol). The problem is that these deaths are not considered to be politically-motivated deaths.

**Table 1: Selected milestones in the history of Taiwanese indigenism**

1983	Establishment of the indigenous newspaper <i>Gaoshan Qing</i>
1984	Foundation of the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines (Taiwan's first IPO) <sup>6</sup>
1990	The ATA first participates in the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (Geneva)
1991	Quota established for six <i>montangard</i> (山地人) seats in the Legislative Yuan
1994	Inclusion of indigenous people (原住民) in the Additional Articles of the ROC Constitution
1996	Creation of the Cabinet-level Council of Indigenous Peoples
1997	Inclusion of indigenous peoples (原住民族) in the Additional Articles of the ROC Constitution; indigenous legislative seats raised to eight.
1998	Promulgation of the Indigenous Peoples Education Law
1999	Presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian signs a "New Partnership Agreement" with indigenous activists
2001	Promulgation of the Indigenous Identity Law
2001	Promulgation of the Indigenous Peoples Employment Protection Law
2004	Discussions at the CIP on how to incorporate indigenous rights into the Constitution of Taiwan
2005	Promulgation of the Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples
2005	Number of legislative seats halved; number of indigenous seats reduced from eight to six

**Sources: Allio 1998, Simon 2011b, Simon 2012.**

Through this, we can see that Taiwan has participated in the global indigenous movement since the very beginning. The first UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations met for the first time only in 1982. Taiwan has participated in this since 1983. After this was replaced by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York, Taiwan has also been active in those deliberations. China has tried to exclude Taiwan's indigenous groups from those events (Allio 1998), but has been largely unable to prevent ECOSOC-registered IPOs from including Taiwanese representatives in their delegations. Even on occasions when the Chinese delegation to the UN has prevented ROC passport holders from accessing the formal events at the Permanent Forum in New York, Taiwanese delegations have managed to get their views expressed at side events outside of UN buildings. Generally, the international IPOs have welcomed Taiwanese IPOs in their midst, as their goal is to facilitate non-state influence in the UN system. They have been much less sympathetic to the presence of the CIP or legislative delegations, which are perceived as trying to represent the ROC state, which is not recognized by the UN (Françoise Morin, personal communication).

<sup>6</sup> The ATA is a member of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, which enjoys consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. This is thus one of the rare instances where Taiwan has a voice in the UN system.

The ideals of global indigenism have entered Taiwan, and been gradually incorporated into ROC legislation, partly as a result of these meetings. The social movements, including those groups that join UN events and related church-based groups with international networks, have been at the forefront of the changes. Their visible street protests, as well as less visible lobbying efforts, have had an impact. Indigenous peoples, although they have not managed to get legal reform implemented as quickly or as radically as they would like, have become part of the multicultural imagination of Taiwan. Indigenous rights legislation, first promoted by indigenous legislators or the CIP, is inevitably “watered-down” (at least from the perspective of the social movements) by the compromises that must be made with non-indigenous legislators and interest groups along the way, but has nonetheless been remarkably rapid.

To a large extent, the changes are less revolutionary than they appear. The CIP, for example, did not arise from nowhere. Its institutional predecessor was the montagnard affairs section of the provincial Civil Affairs Section. Considering that the Taiwan provincial government was about to be “frozen” in 1998, it would be perhaps more accurate to say that these changes were part of a larger government reorganization, in which the central government took on many responsibilities that were previously under the control of Taiwan Province. Similarly, indigenous people already had a quota of legislators in the provincial government, as well as experience in local elections in 30 “mountain townships.” An existing legal principle of indigenous political representation was thus transposed to the Legislative Yuan after the implementation of direct election of legislators. And, as early as 1962 under President Chiang Kai-shek, the ROC was a signatory to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention 107, the predecessor to ILO169. Like everywhere else in the world, breakthroughs in indigenous rights were mostly successful because they could build up from existing local institutions. These institutional histories, which actually have their earliest roots in the Japanese period, are often eclipsed in a celebratory academic discourse of Taiwan’s “democratic miracle.” The innovation under study is a gradual reframing of the issues as part of a common global identity of “indigenous.”

Since the KMT, under the leadership of Ma Ying-jeou, regained the presidency, there has been a notable slowing of the state reaction to the indigenous movement. In 2008, all candidates had a clearly defined indigenous plank in their platforms, which was easily available on the internet, and in which candidates promised at least limited forms of indigenous autonomy in accordance to the 2005 Basic Law and UNDRIP. Already in November 2008, scarcely half a year after Ma took office, KMT legislator and close collaborator of Ma as former Chair of the Taipei City Indigenous

Affairs Division was already explaining, “what Aborigines need is not to join the UN or autonomy – they want repairs for roads and bridges in their disaster-devastated areas” (Loa 2008: 2). This is in spite of the fact that Kung had been a prominent supporter of a Truku autonomous region during previous years. In 2011, the KMT proposed an indigenous autonomy law, which immediately provoked protest from certain segments of the indigenous movement who were disappointed with its legal basis in “3 no’s”: no modification of existing administrative units, no modification of the authority of existing units, and no change in the rights on non-indigenous people in the newly created zones (Simon 2012).

The indigenous movement, as well as local elites, were split between those who supported the government, saying that having an autonomy law is better than not having an autonomy law; and those who opposed the government for not proposing a stronger version of indigenous autonomy closer to the spirit of UNDRIP. In this context, it is not difficult to understand why ordinary people in indigenous villages would perceive these political struggles as merely the strategies of legislators and their supporters (*thiâu-á-kha*) to improve their own positions, with no visible benefits to the majority of indigenous people, who are merely struggling to make a living in difficult labour and agricultural markets. The mystery is why they would be equally alienated from the indigenous social movements that position themselves in opposition to the government.

If indigenous social movements demanding autonomy were really a part of a global movement against capitalism, then one would expect a rather enthusiastic embrace of these movements by those most marginalized by the capitalist system. Yet, “ordinary people” in Taiwan’s indigenous villages seem somewhat removed from the radical social movements that inspire Escobar and others working in Latin America. Michael Rudolph even quoted one villager on the creation of indigenous autonomous zones, describing the proposed new institutions cynically as “only a means to get aborigines locked up in a cage so that people could look at them like monkeys in the zoo (Rudolph 2004: 250). Indeed, when I accompanied the Taroko Autonomy Promotion Team to meetings in villages, I found that they were very poorly attended. Instead, local people expressed to me their concerns that “autonomy” was a new strategy for local politicians to increase their own power, and with very little benefit for the ordinary people. Even if such leaders are inspired by the global indigenous movement, and even if scholars are sympathetic, the ordinary people seem apathetic, just as suggested by Niezen. To understand this apathy, it is important to examine which actors are bringing indigenist ideas to the villages. We must also keep in mind that possibility that such movement are not entirely counter-hegemonic; and that perhaps the visions of Escobar and other radical

scholars are merely projections of their own romantic yearnings on the political projects of others. As I show below, we also have to consider the possibility that ordinary people may only *seem* apathetic due to other reasons.

### **Political Actors and their Indigenist Projects**

In this paper, I focus on the two main groups of actors, the politicians and the church-based activists. It is important to remember that these actors are all members of the same closely-knit communities. They are linked by kinship, and communicate with one another when in the communities. The same individual may even move from one group to the other in the course of a career, as when an idealistic young activist joins the KMT and gets elected to a township or county position; or when a jaded KMT supporter gets involved in church activities related to indigenous rights. I thus summarize the history of both blocks of actors, before turning to two brief biographies of individual actors.<sup>7</sup>

There are basically two categories of actors who bring the ideas of the indigenist movement back to the villages. These are, first of all, the political elite composed of indigenous legislators, but also affiliated politicians at the local levels. In electoral campaigns, even for positions such as mountain township magistrate that are reserved for indigenous candidates, some of the candidates emphasize their indigenous identity, whereas others downplay it in the name of “ethnic harmony.” In these traditional political arenas, the main competition has been between KMT candidates on one side, and People First Party (PFP) or independent candidates on the other side. Local candidates with personal leanings toward the DPP have even explained to me that they need to affiliate with the KMT if they expect to win the election, since the DPP remains extremely unpopular with indigenous voters.<sup>8</sup> Iwan Nawi (2005) has written a rather extensive study of indigenous legislators. Work still needs to be done on the work of township magistrates and local politics.

Secondly, there are the teachers, pastors, and other actors who have been affiliated with the ATA, or indigenous rights activities of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT), including the Urban-Rural Mission. During the Chen Shui-bian presidency (2000-2008), some of them attempted an uneasy alliance with the DPP, as good be seen in such events as meetings at the Council of Indigenous Peoples on how to include indigenous rights the a new constitution for Taiwan. The Liberation Theology of the PCT has included indigenous rights in a number of programs. These include 1) the URM, which trains social activists in a Marxian framework, 2) Third-Party Neutral (TPN), which teaches conflict resolution practices in

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<sup>7</sup> These two examples are chosen because they are prominent political figures in the village where I did research.

<sup>8</sup> See Simon 2010 for an anthropological analysis of these elections.

collaboration with St. Paul University in Ottawa, and 3) Open Space Technology (OST), a way of organizing meetings and protest movements, which was used in 2010 by the Hunter Smoke Movement, and led to their participation in anti-nuclear protests.<sup>9</sup> Other religious forces in indigenous communities, including the True Jesus Church, Evangelical churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and even some factions of the PCT, have maintained a distance from these variants of Liberation Theology.

Since 2008, these oppositional forces have been strongly critical of the KMT government. In addition to church networks, there is also the Hunter Smoke Movement, organized by indigenous youth, which has a strong internet presence and has organized both protests and consciousness-raising events. Although their events are attended by pastors and church members, the link with the church is informal and there is a greater emphasis on traditional indigenous values, indicating that this may be the beginning of an indigenous traditionalism in Taiwan. Their web page, revealing a distrust of all state-based solutions, says, "Land is not possessed, it is lived; land is breathe, history, life, and mother. Law cannot determine the value of respect. State power has no power to deny our existence."<sup>10</sup> They are uninvolved in UN events, as they lack the necessary funding, but nonetheless do spread ideas of the international indigenous movement. The Presbyterian networks, as well as the Hunter Smoke Movement, share common goals of name rectification, indigenous autonomy, and state recognition of indigenous rights over natural resources on their traditional territory.

In order to understand the reception of indigenous rights in the village, it is important to keep in mind that villagers do not learn about the goals of indigenous rights by reading UNDRIP or by studying indigenous rights in abstract legal terms. Instead, these ideas are brought to them by political entrepreneurs who are already members of their clans and communities. The role of the individual is thus very important. In the case of the Truku people, these individuals are not judged by community members in the light of indigenist political values, but rather in light of their own political philosophy. In this previously egalitarian society, ruled by the sacred law known as Gaya, any suspicion of individual accumulation of power or wealth is met with widespread distrust. The following two biographical sketches are examples of Truku social activists who have become public figures and taken Truku concerns to the United Nations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> A fourth movement, Civilian-based Defence (CBD) has less explicitly included indigenous rights in its practices.

<sup>10</sup> <http://tw.myblog.yahoo.com/hunter-motion>

<sup>11</sup> In both cases, the author has publicly supported their causes. Both of them seem sincerely motivated by a desire to improve the welfare of their communities.

**Igung Shibana** (田春綱): Igung Shibana gave a report to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva in 1997. Igung, daughter of the founder of the True Jesus Church in her home village, is a graduate of URM. Born in 1943, she lived in Japan from 1975 to 1995 and married a Japanese man. When she returned to Taiwan in 1995, she found that land owned by her father and other members of her clan (in Kele District of Fushih Village) had been fraudulently transferred to Asia Cement. She documented cases of fraud at the township office, sought the aid of DPP politicians, and unsuccessfully ran as a DPP candidate for the Hsiulin Township Council. In 1997, she presented her case to an international audience in Geneva, focusing on land. She said, "To the indigenous people, land is not just the means of livelihood, it is also the meaning of life, and source of history, culture, oral traditions, religious beliefs, rituals, and the solidarity of the group" (Igung 1997).

**Tera Yudaw** (李季順): Tera Yudaw is a retired school principle, PCT elder, owner of a bed-and-breakfast business, a graduate of TPN, and a proponent of Truku (Taroko) nationalism (Tera 2003). Having participated in the name rectification movement that led to the 2004 recognition of the Truku tribe, he was a founding member of the Taroko Tribe Autonomous Region Promotion Team (*Tailugezhu Zizhiqiu Tuidong Gongzhu Xiaozu*, 太魯閣族自治區推動工作小組). This IPO drafted a Taroko tribal constitution and lobbied the government for the creation of an autonomous region, working closely with legislator Kung Wen-chi as well as local politicians. In 2004-06, they held information sessions in all Truku villages in Hualien. In May 2006, his daughter represented the Taroko at the UN Permanent Forum in New York, asking for international support for Taroko and other indigenous autonomy in Taiwan.<sup>12</sup> In later years, Tera asked for co-management of the Taroko National Park, frequently repeating the slogan, "The land is our blood; the mountain forest is our home" (土地是我們的血，山林是我們的家).

Examining the strategies of these two political activists, among others in the region, Chi Chun-chieh and Hsang-te Chin concluded that the Truku name rectification and tribal mapping projects excluded members of the Tuda and Tkdaya subgroups of the Sedeq Nation and led to elite accumulation of political resources. They argued that "instead of establishing a decolonizing force, the 'return of the Truku' appears to have achieved 'colonialism from within'" (Chi and Chin 2010: 1). They compare the official tribal maps to those that Igung made to make her case against Asia Cement, saying that Igung's hand-made map "is the only genuine tribal map that we have seen regarding this socio-political event" (Chi and Chin 2010: 7). It is a challenge for anthropologists to understand these movements, their reception in

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.lihpao.com/?action-viewnews-itemid-81185>.

the villages, and what they mean based on anthropological methods of fieldwork and interviews. This is where other methods may be useful for triangulation.

### **Social Surveys in Two Truku Villages**

As part of my participatory research protocol, I partnered with the local community development association in two Truku villages in Hualien and one Seediq Tkedaya village in Nantou, spending approximately six months in each village. In each village, I asked the president of the community development association if he wished me to include any questions or issues to my study. In Hualien, they both asked me to conduct a social survey. Together, we drafted a set of questions.<sup>13</sup> The surveys both consisted of about 60 questions, with some variation between the two villages, but with most questions the same. The surveys were done in the first half of 2006, when the ruling DPP was speaking on behalf of indigenous rights and the “red shirt” campaign had not yet begun to discredit President Chen Shui-bian. In Bsngan (population 2,224), we ended up with 102 valid surveys and in Cyakang (population 1,496), with 99.<sup>14</sup> I employed local research assistants to administer the survey, but accompanied them as much as possible. This allowed me to enter the homes of people whom I would otherwise not have met, and it also allowed me to learn from the conversations around the survey questions. Eleven questions were about the relevant social movement issues of the time: mining, national parks, name rectification, autonomy, the legal status of indigenous peoples, and management of natural resources (hunting).

The results of this survey, although they cannot be generalized to the indigenous population of Taiwan as a whole, do not support the “elites without people” hypothesis well, and thus suggest that this intellectual framework needs to be carefully nuanced, if not rejected altogether. On all of these questions, a majority of the respondents answer in ways that demonstrate an agreement with the goals of the global and national indigenous rights movement. It is worth noting the two issue on which there is particularly strong agreement. 91% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the state should return indigenous traditional territory; and 90% strongly agreed or agreed that indigenous hunting should be legalized. This mirrors a strong collective resentment about the loss of territory to the Forestry Division, the Ministry of Defence, national parks, agriculture, etc., and

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<sup>13</sup> In Hualien, both of the men were involved in local political debates (as well as elections). In Bsngan, the president of the development association opposed Truku name rectification, as he preferred the name Seediq. In Cyakang, the president supported Truku name rectification and was a leader in the movement for the creation of a Truku autonomous zone. In Nantou, the president was more interested in rice irrigation, and did not ask me to carry out a survey for him.

<sup>14</sup> Although it proved difficult to follow a strict random sampling technique due to the absence of people from the village, we followed the principle when necessary of interviewing an available person as near as possible to the house selected for the survey.



the corresponding loss of the right to hunt. This idea of self-determination rests at the core of the global indigenous rights movement (Anaya 2004).

**Table 2: Social Survey in Two Truku Villages (N=201 unless otherwise noted, in %)<sup>15</sup>**

Note: The number in parentheses shows the % of respondents with opinions consistent with the goals of indigenism; with strongest support in bold letters.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>LEGAL STATUS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES</b>					
1. The inclusion of IP in the Constitution is helpful for indigenous development <sup>16</sup> (56)	15	41	34	6	2
2. The Basic Law on IP will help indigenous tribal development. (73)	40	33	22	2	1
<b>ETHNIC IDENTITY AND AUTONOMY</b>					
3. I think that the Taroko is an independent ethnic group and does not belong to the Atayal. <sup>17</sup> (73)	54	19	15	7	5
4. The Taroko should quickly establish an autonomous zone (75)	50	25	19	2	2
<b>5. The state should return indigenous traditional territory (91)</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>MINING</b>					
6. Mining companies should be able to operate on Taroko traditional territory (65)	2	6	26	25	40
7. The presence of Asia Cement increases our life quality <sup>18</sup> (63)	6	4	28	18	45
<b>NATIONAL PARKS</b>					
8. The state should be able to establish national parks on Taroko traditional territory (46)	13	9	31	24	22
9. The establishment of national parks increases our life quality. (36)	6	9	48	18	18
10. National parks should forbid hunting and trapping <sup>19</sup> (74)	4	6	14	25	49
<b>HUNTING</b>					
<b>11. The State should legalize indigenous hunting (90)</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>1</b>

**Source: Field work, 2006**

Looking at these survey results, it is important to note areas of disagreement. Although a majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed to the ideas that

<sup>15</sup> In some cases, the total is less than 100% due to one or two people not answering the question. I have eliminated the “no answer” column due to the low number of “no answer” responses.

<sup>16</sup> N=99, Cyakang only.

<sup>17</sup> Since both villages are majority Truku, the results are probably very different than if the surveys had been taken in Teuda or Tkedaya villages.

<sup>18</sup> N=102, Bsngan only. Asia Cement is located in this village. Percentage more than 100% due to rounding.

<sup>19</sup> In Bsngan, 20 people (20%) say they hunt, whereas in Cyakang, 37 (37%) say they hunt. Together, 57 people (28%) hunt. The difference is definitely due to the presence of the Taroko National Park.

constitutional provisions (56%) and the Basic Law (73%) are beneficial to indigenous development, a solid minority (34% on the Constitution and 22% on the Basic Law) chose to neither agree or disagree. To a certain extent, this may reflect a lower interest in legal issues. On the constitutional issue, this may also reflect a certain disaffection with the DPP, and larger debates on the time about whether to revise the ROC constitution or implement a Taiwanese constitution. Taroko name rectification and Taroko autonomy both received strong support, although with slightly less support for the name rectification cause than for autonomy.<sup>20</sup> These are issues about which conversations with villagers reveal concerns that they benefit village elites more than ordinary people.

The issues of mining and national parks also received quite nuanced responses. In both cases, more than a third of respondents felt a need to weigh the respective merits of these institutions; and a minority even supported them, usually noting the contribution of mining to employment. Nearly half of the respondents chose to neither agree or disagree with the statement that national parks increase life quality. Although the majority of the people disagree with hunting bans in the parks, they also spoke out about the benefits of the park in terms of species preservation, education for children, and leisure. Hunters in Bsngan were even willing to point out the paradox that the Taroko National Park is both an inconvenience (as it raises the risk of being arrested for hunting) and a benefit (as it increases the numbers of animals available). Without the park, they acknowledge, the forests may have been destroyed for tea plantations, forestry, or more destructive uses. Most importantly, the strongest support in the surveys was for a return of lost territory and the decriminalization or legalization of hunting. Since these are key elements of the indigenous rights movement, we cannot support the “elites without people hypothesis that ordinary people reject the movement, at least not in these two villages. This leads to the question of how to best interpret the perceived gap between elite and ordinary people. This has implications both for political anthropology and for the indigenous rights movement.

### **Conclusions**

The gap between a critical political anthropology focusing on “elites without people” and empirical data from the field, reflected only partially through the social survey analyzed in this article, merits explanation. The first observation is of a methodological order. Voiced critiques of the social movement and social movement actors, such as Michael Rudolph’s apparent quotation, cited above, of a Truku

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<sup>20</sup> This result may be a result of the fact that the research assistant in Bsngan was known to be Atayal, married into the community, and that her husband was a known proponent of the Seediq name for the tribe. Nonetheless, the fact that so many people still supported the Taroko name, to her surprise, shows that they are quite willing to express their own opinions.

villager saying that autonomous zones are like zoos, are certainly more memorable than moments of silence or even expressions of support. Such opinions, which go against the common sense of the indigenous movement, more likely to get written down in field notes and more likely to get included in publications. But, without adequate triangulation, it is difficult to judge the validity and generalizability of such observations. Furthermore, ethnic identity and claims to special collective group rights conflicts with the liberal ideas held by many researchers. The influence of pre-existing social “cosmologies,” which shaped Lévi-Strauss’s anthropology (Stoczkowski 2007), surely shapes all research in the social sciences.

Secondly, these impressions are likely to be confirmed by interviews with indigenous movement leaders, who often complain about the difficulties of mobilizing members of their communities to political action. Igung Shiban, for example, was disappointed by her electoral defeat for the township office, which makes it easy for her to believe that the community does not support her adequately. Like anthropologists, social movement leaders also find it easier to remember the criticisms than the silences and affirmations of support. Igung, for example, recalls that villagers spread rumours about her, even saying that she had earned large amounts of money from Asia Cement as a result of her protests. Although social movement leaders may be disappointed with slow progress and small crowds at protests or other events, scholars working with them should not misinterpret this as a sign of low support for their causes.

Thirdly, there are social reasons why villagers may critique their local social movement leaders, even as they agree with the content of their goals. This is where Jean-Pierre Oliver de Sardan’s observations about development projects are insightful. Like development projects, indigenous movement projects are attempts at social transformation carried out by specific political actors. Villagers are quick to notice the irony of a retired schoolteacher, who once beat them for speaking Truku, getting involved in the causes of Truku name rectification or autonomy. They may question the legitimacy of an autonomy promotion team when they notice that some individuals in the meetings are the same individuals who once profited from selling land for the creation of the industrial parks and national parks they now seem to oppose. In a traditionally egalitarian society like the Truku, they are especially critical when they perceive that individuals, almost without exception already wealthier members of the community, may gain further political or financial benefits from new indigenous institutions. None of this means that the villagers disagree with the goals of the indigenous movement; what it does reveal is that they judge it through the lens of their own egalitarian values. They are also aware that the goals of indigenism are brought to the villages and implemented by fallible individuals,

whose political histories are known to all. If anything, a sense of indignity about not being invited to autonomy meetings, or of the risks of elite appropriation, reveals a strong attachment to those goals.

The indigenous rights movement over the past 30 years in Taiwan has raised new hopes, contributed to the creation of new institutions, and created new arenas for political competition, which some political scientists and their followers may think of as elite competition. In egalitarian communities such as the Truku, there is also public criticism of the movement. This shows that it may be useful to study the institutional innovations of indigenism with the same methodological tools and concepts that we have long used to study development. It also points to new research hypotheses, e.g. egalitarian societies such as the Truku may find it more difficult to create indigenous institutions requiring formal leadership positions than do rank societies like the Paiwan and Rukai. These questions still merit exploration.

In conclusion, it should not come as a surprise that legislators, bureaucrats, scholars, and ordinary villagers debate the applicability of the legal term *indigenous peoples*, especially as the concept has a relatively recent genealogy and its ultimate ramifications are still unclear. It can also be expected that there be political conflicts about new institutions, and that there be disappointment as well as hope in the global implementation of UNDRIP. Such dynamics are happening around the world (LeClair 2011), with Taiwan being only one local refraction of a global movement. Taiwan has been with the indigenous movement from the very beginning. Considering this fact, it should come as no surprise that indigeneity is also one of the most contested arenas in the ongoing constitution of Taiwan.

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