

## Indigenous Studies and Taiwan Studies: A Complex Relationship

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Indigenous Studies and Taiwan Studies have at best a rather tenuous intellectual relationship. From a Taiwanese perspective, the study of indigenous peoples has been a part of the inward-turning *bentuhua* of Taiwan scholarship; and has been part of the affirmation of a locally-rooted, non-Chinese national identity. The idea that Taiwan is the starting point of the Austronesian diaspora makes Taiwan important to the world in new ways, and can be a source of Taiwanese nationalist pride. From the perspectives of indigenous scholars, indigenous studies can also contribute to a pride of their places and cultures, meaningful on their own terms. Applied research, moreover, can be helpful to indigenous goals of local self-determination.

Some indigenous thinkers, however, may question the ontological validity of including their knowledge under a larger rubric of “China studies,” “Taiwan studies,” or even “Austronesian studies,” all of which are intrinsically linked to wider political projects created beyond indigenous communities. This relationship is further complicated by the addition of scholars from outside Taiwan, who come to the field with notions of indigeneity from their own countries or from the global social movement of indigenism at the very moment when local people are also thinking through the relevance of this new global identity for their own local political struggles.

In an era in which countries are finding ways to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Taiwan’s legislators continues to draft legislation to fulfill the requirements of the Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples, it is thus important to step back to reflect on the positioning of “Indigenous Studies” and “Taiwan Studies” in relationship to the evolving expectations of indigenous social movement actors and grassroots scholars. Their perspectives may allow us to think outside the box about the meaning of Taiwan Studies and the place of indigenous studies within those interdisciplinary reflections. They certainly show us that Indigenous Studies cannot be relegated to a subfield of Taiwan Studies.

In this paper, I will explore the complex relationship between indigenous studies and Taiwan studies in a reading of the expanding research literature on Taiwan’s

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indigenous peoples. This will involve not only a review of scholarship by Taiwanese and international scholars in academic institutions; but also a careful reading of the works of local scholars, including Dakis Pawan, Dagon Walis, and Kumu Tapas from the Seediq communities. Perhaps what is most appealing about their work is that their explorations of local reality have universal implications about what it means to be truly human.

What are the ontological differences and convergences between Taiwan Studies and Indigenous Studies? How are the expectations of indigenous social movement actors and indigenous scholars met and/or betrayed by Taiwan Studies scholarship? How do disciplinary conventions enable or frustrate attempts to collaborate on projects of mutual interest? What can scholars learn from indigenous worldviews? What are the possibilities of moving beyond the borders of nationalist and ethnic imaginings to find a scholarship that is universally human?