

Indigenous People and Indigenous-Han Relationship in Taiwan: A Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

Over the past few hundred years, indigenous Taiwanese encountered waves of colonial domination, which resulted in their breaking down of economic, cultural, and social lives. This paper first points out the lack of concern about indigenous people's daily life not only from Taiwan's government and common people but also from academic communities; indigenous leaders since the 1980s have been very critical of such fact. The paper then discusses about indigenous people's lost of their homeland with the succession of Japanese and Chinese colonial governments. Even when an "indigenous reserve land" system was enacted by the latter following the Japanese model, it is a common practice that the government and the capitalists can apprehend their land with much ease. While over the past decade, indigenous Taiwanese have tried to learn from both Canada and Australia's land claim experiences, multiple factors such as Taiwan's land scarcity and political deadlock made their land claims difficult to materialize. This paper will also discuss about identity politics of the indigenous Taiwanese. While indigenous groups have much success in ridding off their stigma since the 1990s, their difficult task is to balance between their own tribal identities and pan-indigenous identity on the one hand, and the identity of the dominant Han Chinese that have been superimposed on them through their education and socio-economic lives. Finally, this paper will evaluate the status of ethnic relations between indigenous people and the dominant Han Chinese people in light of the constitutional amendment which affirms Taiwan as a multicultural state. The effects of political changes since 2008 will also be taken into account. As KMT is moving toward building closer ties with China, using indigenous peoples as leverage to claim Taiwan's unique national identity is no longer favored by KMT as it was to DPP between 2000 and 2008. This is a major factor contributing to the lack of substantial progress in advancing Taiwan indigenous people's rights since 2008.