

Ontologies of Taiwan Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Anthropology

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Abstract

Indigenous studies and Taiwan studies have a rather tenuous intellectual relationship. From a Taiwanese perspective, the study of indigenous peoples has been a part of the inward-turning indigenisation (本土化, *bentuhua*) of Taiwan scholarship; 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. For indigenous scholars, indigenous studies can also contribute to a pride of their places and cultures, meaningful on their own terms. Applied and action research can also be helpful to indigenous goals of local self-determination. Reflection on the ontological implications of indigeneity suggests that indigenous studies cannot be relegated to a sub-field of Taiwan studies. There is thus a need for reflection on the ontology of our studies.

Keywords

Taiwan studies – indigenous studies – indigeneity – ontology

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Many unwanted nations rested in the bodies of other, more powerful nations. Those nations did not want to contemplate the smaller group's agency or growth.

BORROWS, 2010: 46

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Introduction

2015, the year of the Second World Congress of Taiwan Studies, marked an important anniversary in the field. Twenty years earlier, one year after the first conference of the North American Taiwan Studies Association (NATSA) in 1994, the Research Group on Taiwanese History and Culture was incorporated in New York State. The European Association of Taiwan Studies was founded in 2004 in London. As Taiwan studies reaches maturity, it is perhaps difficult to remember the laboured birth of this intellectual project.

Taiwan studies began contemporaneously with the publication of *Taiwanese Culture, Taiwanese Society* (Murray & Hong, 1994), which criticised anthropologists of looking through Taiwan to see China. Influenced by Edward Said (1979), the authors looked at sinological anthropology within wider webs of power, arguing that this field was imperialist, as it helped the U.S.-backed Chinese Nationalist Party (i.e., KMT) justify its rule over Taiwan. Anthropologists were interested in China, but, due to the difficulties of doing field research there until the 1980s, went to Taiwan in search of traditional Chinese culture. The anthropological community reacted voraciously to *Taiwanese Culture, Taiwanese Society*. Many saw it as an attack on their own cherished projects about understanding Chinese culture. Few were interested in the tiny seed of a Taiwanese nation already growing within the body of the Republic of China (ROC). Taiwan studies seemed radical, attached to a dangerous political project from which scholars should keep a prudent distance. But the authors made an important point: scholars had not yet taken seriously the ontological status of Taiwan, neither as a legitimate object of academic inquiry nor as a nation in its own right.

Twenty years later, Taiwan studies has achieved a respectable institutional form, with annual conferences across the world, an MA in Taiwan Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Taiwan studies research chairs in several countries, and publications such as *Taiwan in Comparative Perspective* and the *International Journal of Taiwan Studies*. The diverse viewpoints that emerge in these venues make it clear that Taiwan studies no longer reflects any one political viewpoint, but has matured into an interdisciplinary discussion around a common geographical space, the peoples who inhabit it, and the political struggles that have made it into a place of contested statehood, history, and memory. A generation of scholars now dedicate their careers to Taiwan studies, even in competitive university environments where such studies may seem marginal to administrators and threatening to Chinese studies colleagues. The lessons of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979), especially the need to pay attention to how representations of peoples are related to issues of power,

are relevant. It is no coincidence that Taiwan studies emerged from sinology at a turning point when power and representations became important preoccupations in anthropology and other social sciences.

Taiwan studies was challenged in the beginning because people identified it with an emerging Taiwanese nationalism and projects of Taiwan independence. In the 1990s, when I started arguing at anthropology conferences that we need to study Taiwan as a society in its own right rather than as an avatar of Chinese culture, senior colleagues warned me against being 'so political'. They were reluctant to admit the political implications of their own statements, such as: 'You must admit that Taiwan is culturally Chinese.' This arduous birth of Taiwan studies made it obvious that the way in which we write engages us in choices about how we position ourselves vis-à-vis existing and emerging national yearnings among our research participants (Shih, Thompson, & Tremlett, 2007).

In this article, I make the argument that we are now faced with a similar challenge: the rise of indigenous nationalisms. This is especially relevant after the 2005 Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). A new form of national identity, based on concepts of indigenous inherent sovereignty, has taken form. Anthropologists in Taiwan and around the world have had an ambiguous relationship with these nationalisms that emerged from among the peoples who have long been the privileged objects of anthropological attention. For legitimate reasons, scholars (especially indigenous scholars) from Taiwan have taken the lead in decolonising the study of Formosan indigenous nations, with only a handful of Western scholars taking an interest in these debates. I argue that respect for indigenous nationalisms can nourish anthropology's understanding of the human condition, even stimulating theoretical innovation in the discipline. Taiwan might even be a paradigmatic case in the study of this new form of nationalist identity, or indigeneity.

1 *Reframing the Debates in an Era of Indigeneity*

My reflections are inspired by three main sources. The first is Stéphane Corcuff's argument (2010) that we are faced not with a question of epistemology, nor with a political debate about the future of China, but rather with a fundamental philosophical question of being.¹ Corcuff defines ontology as reflection on 'the very existence of the object under discussion and the conditions of

1 'La question n'est ainsi pas seulement épistémologique ; à proprement parler, elle porte la réflexion sur l'ontologie des études taiwanaises, c'est-à-dire sur l'existence même de l'objet dont on parle et sur ses conditions d'être' (Corcuff, 2010: 236).

its being' (2010: 236). We need to ask these fundamental questions: What is Taiwan? But also, what is indigenous? In short, we need to think about Taiwan studies and indigenous studies as ontological questions.

The second inspiration is Maōri scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), who calls on researchers to pay respectful attention to the needs of people reclaiming control over indigenous ways of knowing and being (epistemology and ontology). As she said, 'Research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions' (Smith, 1999: 5). Indigenous activists in Taiwan have long drawn attention to this issue, interrupting the First Aboriginal Culture Congress in Pingtung in 1994 with a 'cultural head-hunting raid proclamation'. They accused anthropologists of wasting time on purely academic debates and of understanding indigenous issues from a Han-centric worldview (Rudolph, 2008: 77). Anyone wishing to conduct research with indigenous peoples in an ethical manner should take heed of these concerns.

A third inspiration stems from the wider moral and legal context of research with indigenous peoples, recognising the principle that indigenous peoples have *sui generis* rights to inherent sovereignty. The UNDRIP, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007 after over 25 years of indigenous lobbying and negotiation, states in Article 31 that:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions. In conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognise and protect the exercise of these rights.

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 2007

Evolving international customary law and national legislation makes it clear that indigenous people(s) and their cultures can no longer be treated as *objects* of research. Instead, indigenous peoples are the *subjects* of research, with a right to maintain, control, protect and develop their knowledge. To protect this knowledge, research done on their territories and about them thus requires mechanisms for consent—not unlike many postcolonial countries that

require foreign researchers to gain clearance and a research visa before entering the country. Taiwan's 2005 Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples therefore requires researchers to obtain the free, prior, informed consent of indigenous peoples before conducting research. Indigenous studies is thus more than an interdisciplinary study of certain peoples. It is an emerging new way of doing research *with* certain peoples, in ways that challenge long-standing epistemological and ontological assumptions. What do Taiwan studies and indigenous studies mean in this context?

2 *Delimiting the Subject Matter*

In Taiwan, a vast literature of monographs, edited volumes, conference proceedings, disciplinary journals, and several academic journals is dedicated to indigenous studies.² Academic publications include long-established journals of the Institute of Ethnology at Academia Sinica. There are also relatively new journals, such as the *Taiwan Journal of Indigenous Studies* at National Dong Hwa University College of Indigenous Studies, and some that provide indigenous perspectives on specific disciplines, such as the *Journal of Natural and Human Environment of Indigenous Peoples* (原住民自然人文期刊, *Yuanzhumin ziran renwen qikan*) and the *Aboriginal Education Quarterly* (原住民教育季刊, *Yuanzhumin jiaoyu jikan*). Taiwanese anthropologists, such as Tai-li Hu and Futuru Tsai to name only two prominent examples, have produced innovative ethnographic films. Japanese scholars established a scholarly association and journal dedicated to indigenous peoples in Taiwan, and also have a long history of colonial archives and scholarship.

Groundbreaking research in indigenous communities has also been done outside anthropology in sociology, geography, education, law, political science, linguistics, and even natural sciences. Because this article is written for an audience outside of Taiwan, I focus here on anthropology published in English between 1994 and 2014, during the maturation of international Taiwan studies.³ The goal is to draw in broad strokes a portrait of indigenous studies in relationship to Taiwan studies.

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- 2 There is a very broad literature intended for more popular audiences, including a series of short yet elegant ethnographies on each of Taiwan's indigenous peoples by Sanmin Press. These high-quality works, such as M. Wang (2006), Huang (2006) on the Bunun, S-w. Huang (2008) on the Amis, and Chen (2010) on the Puyuma, introduce a general reading audience to both indigenous peoples and anthropology.
 - 3 Anthropologists in Taiwan addressed these issues beginning in the 1980s, as democratisation made room for indigenous social activism and anthropologists took their demands seriously. Due to space limitations, I focus only on developments after the first NATSA meeting in 1994, as this marks the international debut of Taiwan studies as a distinct field of studies.

This essay is composed in two major sections. In the first section, I explore various ways of doing indigenous studies in Taiwan. The various research agendas do not interact in a Kuhnian way as evolving scientific paradigms. Considering that many of the projects to be discussed have entirely different goals and fundamental philosophical orientations, and have developed often in indifference to each other, it is more useful to think in terms of literary genres. I will call these Austronesian studies, indigenisation (本土化, *bentuhua*), ethnography, and critical indigenous studies (with liberal and Marxist variants). These are not mutually exclusive categories, especially in longer book-length ethnographies that can address multiple audiences. In the second section, I will explore possibilities of decolonising research with indigenous peoples and what this means for the relationship between indigenous studies and Taiwan studies. The most important issue is that a number of different projects referring to 'indigenous peoples' on Taiwan are based on different ontological premises. Indigenous studies is not a topic among others, but rather an interdisciplinary and inter-national encounter. The ontological questions raised here may have implications for the evolution of anthropology, which is currently going through an 'ontological turn' (Venkatesan, 2010).

Genres of Anthropological Research on and with Formosan Indigenous Peoples

In 2014, the Academia Sinica Institute of Ethnology, the Council of Indigenous Peoples, and the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines co-organised the 'International Conference on Formosan Indigenous Peoples: Contemporary Perspectives'. This conference, which brought in leading scholars from all over Taiwan, as well as from Japan, Australia, Europe and North America, revealed the diversity of genres within indigenous studies. Keynote speakers Peter Bellwood, Roger Blench, and Paul Jen-kuei Li situated archaeological and linguistic data from Taiwan into a broader Austronesian context. The panels presented research in archaeology, linguistics, history, ethnography, applied anthropology, and policy. The eclecticism of these studies is reflected not only in the conference, but also in the edited volumes available on Taiwan's indigenous peoples (e.g., Blundell, 2001; Faure, 2001; Peschek, 2012) that have often emerged from similar conferences. These intellectually stimulating projects bring together diverse ways of doing research on and with peoples on Taiwan who have affirmed indigenous political identities. Such work makes it possible to reflect on the ontological assumptions of the genres employed in the field.

1 *Austronesian Studies*

Taiwanese indigenous peoples play an important role in Austronesian studies. Anthropologists such as Peter Bellwood (1979), linguist Robert Blust (1995), and to a much lesser extent Jared Diamond (1988, 2000), have gained recognition in Taiwan with their 'out-of-Taiwan' models that posit Taiwan as the origin of the Austronesian dispersal throughout the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Bellwood, professor at Australian National University, argues that Austronesians emanating from Taiwan came to dominate Oceania due to the superiority of their maritime and agricultural technology, farmers pushing out or assimilating hunter-gatherers as they made their way across the Pacific (and Indian) Oceans.

In the Sociological Abstracts database for peer-reviewed articles since 1994, a search for the keywords 'Austronesian' and 'Taiwan' brought up ten articles, including five in dialogue with Bellwood's work, mostly in *Current Anthropology*. Hage and Marck (2003), noting that linguists and archaeologists are in general agreement that the Austronesian dispersal began on or near Taiwan around 3000 B.C.E, explored apparently contradictory genetic evidence that shows a predominantly Asian origin of Polynesian mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), yet a preponderance of Melanesian Y chromosome haplotypes throughout Oceania. They hypothesise that the societies were matrilineal and matrilineal, as language and material culture were brought through the region by Austronesians, but who married local men (Hage & Marck, 2003). In 2010, Donohue and Denham attempted to challenge Bellwood's theory that Austronesians from Taiwan brought a package of linguistic, agricultural, and material innovations with them throughout the Pacific, stating that:

A Taiwanese cultural package, whether Austronesian or Neolithic, is illusory . . . it did not originate in one place and disperse outward but formed through the increasing co-occurrence of used and traded items by people . . . who were increasingly connected through an expanding network of exchanges.

DONOHUE & DENHEM, 2010: 239

Playing down the Taiwanese origin, they highlighted the diversity of Austronesian origins. In a subsequent article, Bellwood refuted Donohue and Denham by elaborating how technological advances in agriculture on Taiwan underpinned Austronesian expansion through the Pacific (Bellwood, 2011). Partially influenced by these debates, Thomas Currie (2013) expressed hope for the development of a phylogenetic approach to cultural data.

Austronesian studies mention Taiwan and the island's indigenous peoples, and are very useful for understanding the prehistory of Oceania. They remain

an important baseline for understanding the wider historical context of contemporary indigenous peoples. These studies, moreover, are based on different ontological assumptions than those that animate other academic genres about living indigenous peoples. The focus on maritime expansion may appear irrelevant to mountain peoples, like Atayalic groups who have no legendary traditions that mention the sea and instead trace their origins to ancestors who sprung from a rock or tree in the centre of Formosa (Ferrell, 1969: 31). The ubiquitous language charts seem to selectively emphasise words that resonate throughout Oceania, like *asu* for dog (Blust, 2002: 91), while overlooking local exceptions, like the Seediq *hulin* (Ferrell, 1969: 144). The argument that Austronesians were agriculturalists who pushed out hunter-gatherers resonates little with indigenous people who self-identify as hunters and base political claims on their knowledge of the forests.

This area of inquiry is also undergoing rapid change. The Academia Sinica Institute of Ethnology has established a Comparative Austronesian Studies Research Group, with a strong group of indigenous studies and indigenous scholars as core members. They plan to expand Austronesian studies to include the lifeworld experiences of contemporary peoples, a project which may gain urgency as Pacific peoples share the results of climate change and rising ocean levels. As indigenous studies scholars engage with this long-established anthropological current, Austronesian peoples may emerge with new lessons about the maritime environment and its living creatures that transcend national boundaries. Those boundaries are questioned by the more insular ontological question that has always been at the centre of Taiwan studies: What is Taiwan?

2 *Bentuhua and Ethnic Relations*

Two important and interrelated areas in Taiwan studies are *bentuhua* and ethnic relations. *Bentuhua*, often translated as indigenisation, began as a literary movement in the 1980s, to turn away from sinocentric thinking and toward Taiwan. As John Makeham defined it, it is 'a type of nationalism that champions the legitimacy of a distinct Taiwanese identity, the character and contents of which should be determined by the Taiwanese people' (2005: 1). Looking at *bentuhua* in the social sciences, Mau-kuei Chang (2005) argued that it first developed as a reaction to perceived Western dominance in the social sciences and a growing critique of positivism. In Taiwan, a Sinicisation movement was followed by Taiwanisation. This movement has led Taiwanese and foreign scholars alike to engage in Taiwan-centric scholarship. This includes an affirmation of Taiwanese indigenous cultures, especially as evidence that the island society cannot be reduced to an extension of China.

This new ontological status for Taiwan meant thinking about Taiwan as a distinct multicultural society. A large body of literature on ethnic relations in Taiwan emerged from this intellectual project, most notably by scholars at the Academia Sinica Institute of Sociology. Attempts to classify Taiwan's ethnic groups go back to practices of governance during the Japanese period, and have remained a part of Taiwanese social life ever since. Hill Gates was the first anthropologist to bring ethnic relations, which she called a 'popular social analysis', into international discussions about Taiwan (1979: 288). She referred to Aborigine, Hokkien, Hakka, and Mainlander subgroups, but observed that the Taiwanese–Mainlander distinction was most salient for class relations and thus had little to say about the Aborigines. The dominant discourse is that Taiwan is a multicultural society composed of four ethnic groups.⁴

The discourse of ethnic relations fits uneasily with that of indigeneity. Firstly, the focus of such works is nearly always on the numerically more important groups, especially the highly salient Mainlander–Taiwanese distinction. This makes 'Aborigine' an internal 'Other' category, overlooking the diversity between various indigenous groups, as well as their perspectives on ethnicity. This also demonstrates that 'Aborigine' and 'Indigenous' cannot be used interchangeably. 'Aborigine' is used to identify ethnic classifications from an etic perspective; whereas 'Indigenous peoples' (原住民族, *yuanzhuminzu*) have adopted this identity themselves while claiming space as autonomous political subjects. Just as sinological anthropologists once looked through Taiwan to see China, there is an equally large risk of looking through Pangcah, or Seediq, or Rukai, to see Taiwan. Secondly, the discourse of four ethnic groups has become politicised in Taiwan, especially since the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) incorporated ethnicity into formal written documents in 1991 (F. Wang, 2014). This creates the perception that attention to ethnic difference is a way of instrumentalising indigenous voters to serve a political agenda that many indigenous people find anathema.⁵ Focus on Taiwanese ethnic groups is relevant to ontological claims about Taiwan, but risks eclipsing indigenous

4 Anthropologist Yih-yuan Li (1989), just before the emergence of Taiwan studies, gave the same data a Chinese interpretation. Noting that Taiwanese society is marked by ethnic relations between Mainlanders, Hakka, Hokkien, and aboriginal tribes, with subethnicities within these groups, he argued that 'the Chinese' use a model of 'segmentary opposition' to deal with ethnic or dialect group problems. His China-centric view of Taiwanese ethnicity has since been replaced with a Taiwan-centric ontology.

5 In this context, many indigenous people remain loyal to the KMT and pan-blue parties that emphasise 'ethnic harmony' in campaign discourse (Simon, 2010).

claims to sovereignty especially if it frames them as one ethnic group among others in multicultural Taiwan.

Anthropology has become the discipline that focuses on the cultural and social specificity of Taiwan's indigenous peoples, even if it does not always explicitly address issues of indigenous sovereignty. There is a risk that ethnography of indigenous peoples fills what Trouillot (2003: 8) calls the 'savage slot', especially if research on or with indigenous peoples is fitted into a conference or volume on Taiwan studies to highlight Taiwan's multicultural identity. Most anthropologists, however, avoid this awkward positioning by focusing their efforts on disciplinary academic production rather than on area studies.

3 *Ethnographies of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples on Taiwan*

Within Taiwan, there is a long and rich ethnography of aboriginal cultures, going back to the Japanese period, when research about aboriginal peoples was either classificatory survey research or part of natural history projects.⁶ After the arrival of the ROC and subsequent modernisation, many studies focused on the adaptation of aboriginal people to the new context, such as Mutsu Hsu's focus on psychosocial acculturation (Hsu, 1991). A generation of scholarship influenced by modernisation theory focused on acculturation and integration of aboriginal people into modern society. It is only in the previous two decades that the focus has shifted to indigenous peoples, and the possibility that indigenous subjectivities may have political salience.

In Western languages, there are few ethnographies of indigenous groups in Taiwan, and there was even a three-decade gap beginning in the 1970s when almost nothing was written (Formoso, 2005). Since 1994, these include Melissa Brown's work on plains aborigines in Tainan (2004), Josiane Cauquelin on the Puyuma (2004), Michael Rudolph's comparative work on the Taroko, Paiwan, and Rukai (2003a), as well as his work on the Amis and Taroko (Rudolph, 2008), Scott Simon on the Seediq and Taroko (2012a), Shzr-Ee Tan's ethnomusicology of the Amis (2012), and Mark Munsterhjelm on genetic research on indigenous people (2014). Brown's study is not on groups currently recognised as indigenous, but rather a historical study of plains aborigines that looks at how their identity changed over time, from savage to Han and then to affirmation as indigenous, due to the wider political and social context. Cauquelin produced a solid ethnography of Puyuma social institutions, showing how they have persisted despite Japanese colonialism and Republican Chinese

6 The Academia Sinica Institute of Ethnology has recently translated volumes of these important sources into Chinese, making these invaluable sources available to scholars who read Chinese but not Japanese.

modernisation. Rudolph and Simon both incorporate rather sociological perspectives, situating the demands of the indigenous rights movement within the wider sociopolitical context. Tan and Munsterhjelm explore, respectively, the commodification of indigenous music and genetic material in a neoliberal context. The overarching themes of these books are the incorporation of formerly autonomous societies into states within colonial and postcolonial history, as well as indigenous strategies for dealing with that situation. Such studies were nearly unthinkable in the past. When foreign anthropologists went to Taiwan in search of Chinese culture, the indigenous communities were at best marginal to their projects. It is only after anthropology began exploring issues of power, coloniality and postcoloniality that the ROC appeared as an imposition, moving indigenous peoples back to the centre of anthropological inquiry about Taiwan.

A keyword search for ‘Taiwan AND (indigen* OR aborig*)’ in Sociological Abstracts and Web of Science reveals an emerging body of literature on specific indigenous cultures in academic journals. Anthropological interests include age-sets (Cauquelin, 1995; Desveaux, 1996), conversion to Christianity (S-w. Huang, 1996; P. Liu, 2003; C. Tan, 2002; Yang, 2008), cultural perspectives of time (S-w. Huang, 2004a), performance studies (Yang 2011), ethnohistory (Simon, 2012b), political anthropology (Ku, 2008; Simon, 2010a; Yang, 2005), and economic anthropology (Simon, 2010b). Melissa Brown, interested in the history of plains aborigines in the Tainan area, has studied ethnic identity, often by comparing Taiwan and China (2001, 2003, 2010). Beyond these journals, Amis specialist Shiun-wei Huang has been introducing Maurice Bloch’s cognitive anthropology to Taiwan (S-w. Huang, 2004b), suggesting that Taiwan indigenous studies may make important contributions to these emerging debates in international anthropology. Looking forward, the Shamans and Ritual Performances in Contemporary Contexts Research Group, formed at Academia Sinica under the leadership of Tai-li Hu and Pi-chen Liu, is becoming an international centre of shamanic studies—with some of Taiwan’s indigenous practices becoming paradigmatic for the discipline (Hu & Liu, 2010). Liu (2003, 2011) has made important contributions to Francophone anthropology.

A review of anthropology journals suggests that the study of indigenous Taiwan is shifting from studies of Taiwanese ethnic relations to issues of broader relevance to international anthropology. Many scholars have demonstrated a willingness to engage with wider theoretical debates within the discipline, including those about indigenous political identity, or indigeneity. Just as the emergence of Taiwan as an autonomous political subjectivity challenged sinological anthropology, the emergence of indigenous nations as political actors will also influence Taiwan studies. The notion that indigenous groups have

ontological status as emergent *nations* has become a new theme in anthropology.

4 *Critical Indigenous Studies*

Two broad currents of indigenous studies can be considered as critical indigenous studies. On the one hand, there are studies that take a very distanced and critical approach to the political agendas of indigeneity itself. Some studies echo the liberal views of Karl Popper, who thought sceptically of 'tribalism', developing the ideas of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* while living in New Zealand and being exposed to Maōri political demands from 1937 to 1945 (Maddock, 2002: 42). In liberal traditions, the argument is often made that indigeneity has led to the formation of indigenous elites, who use the political opportunities created by indigenous rights regimes to shore up their own power and wealth, without benefiting the larger populations of common people who are often dealing with more mundane yet pressing issues of poverty, unemployment, ill health, paucity of educational opportunities, and discrimination. In North American anthropology, the avatar of this approach is Adam Kuper who denied entirely the ontological validity of indigenous identity and indigenous rights demands. He concluded that indigenous demands 'rely on obsolete anthropological notions and on a romantic and false ethnographic vision. Fostering essentialist ideologies of culture and identity, they may have dangerous political consequences' (Kuper, 2003: 395). Some studies of indigeneity in Taiwan address similar concerns, as in Michael Rudolph's interpretations of social movements (2003a, 2003b, 2008), which he bases on Paul Brass's theory of ethnic elite competition. In a related vein, Kun-hui Ku (2005) examines Taiwan's indigenous social movement as part of a wider political field in which Taiwan seeks a nationalist identity distinct from China. Some studies appear critical of indigenous elites in Taiwan's name-rectification movements (Chi & Chin, 2012; S-w. Huang, 2013). Mei-Hsia Wang's (2008) ethnographic and historical perspective on Truku name rectification is much more nuanced, as she demonstrates that cultural reinterpretation is widespread throughout Truku society rather than confined to elite competition within social movements.

A second current of critical indigenous studies places indigenous issues within a broader context of colonialism or capitalism. They thus fit into a decolonising agenda, to the extent that, in the words of Franke Wilmer, 'The indigenous voice speaks critically to the narrative ... of the nation-state—the hierarchical, incorporative, coercive state that exists, in part, to facilitate the process of creating economic surplus on an international scale' (Smith, 1999: 111). One of the first such studies was by Taiwanese anthropologist Shih-chung Hsieh, who analysed indigenous 'stigmatised identity' within a situation of

‘internal colonialism’ (Rudolph, 2003a: 14–24). Fred Chiu (2000) was similarly interested in Taiwan’s indigenous populations within broader dynamics of orientalism and imperialism. In a special issue of the interdisciplinary Marxist journal *New Proposals*, Simon (2011) and Ching-hsiu Lin (2011) did separate analyses of class and capitalism in Truku communities. Mei-hsia Wang (2014) shows how Seediq people enter capitalist relations—but partly on their own terms. Ying-kuei Huang has produced a three-volume exploration of Bunun ‘civilisation’ under subsequent regimes of colonisation, modernisation, and neoliberalism (Y. Huang, 2012). In medical anthropology, Jennifer Liu (2012) takes a Foucauldian approach to biopolitics of aboriginal identity. Kerim Friedman (2010) explores the colonial origins of indigenous education. The abovementioned books by Munsterhjelm and Simon also address issues of incorporation of indigenous peoples into capitalism. The goal of many of these works is to balance a recognition of indigenous agency with careful analysis of wider sociopolitical hegemonies.⁷

These theoretical currents play important roles in our understanding of Taiwan’s indigenous peoples in larger political contexts. The first current explores well the sociological context of Taiwanese politics, in which indigenous elites play important roles. The second current of Marxist and related approaches shows that this dynamic is itself embedded in a wider history of capitalist expansion. These studies are both relevant to comparative studies of indigeneity. With the exception of approaches that deny the legitimacy of indigenous rights, they provide useful background for a decolonising research agenda and may, in fact, help this agenda to achieve legitimacy within the academy.

Decolonising Indigenous Scholarship

There is a long history of applied research collaboration between anthropologists and indigenous peoples. Although applied anthropology is often perceived as attempts to integrate or assimilate peoples into existing systems of power, many applied or engaged anthropologists aim to support indigenous rights and sovereignty. Trevor W. Purcell (1998: 268) argued that applied anthropologists, in order to facilitate indigenous autonomy, need to put indigenous and ‘Western’ knowledge on a comparative analytical plane and seek epistemological parity. Taiwanese anthropology seems ahead of the curve, especially

7 Some analyses in this vein have come from outside anthropology, for example, sociologist Chun-chieh Chi (2001) on capitalist expansion and indigenous land rights, and geographer Yih-ren Lin (2011) on traditional ecological knowledge.

since Chih-huei Huang and others at Academia Sinica established the Action Anthropology Research Group to facilitate collaboration between indigenous social movements and university-based scholars all over Taiwan to advocate for indigenous rights. A number of young anthropologists from the Dong Hwa University College of Indigenous Studies participate in this project, positioning this college as an intellectual centre of indigenous action anthropology.

In Taiwan some anthropologists have made it their goal to facilitate indigenous autonomy through applied research that valorises their knowledge in such areas as disaster mitigation and natural resource management.⁸ At the 2014 International Conference on Formosan Indigenous Peoples, papers working in this direction were given by Shu-min Huang and Shao-hua Liu on the damming of the Mudan Creek, by geographer/anthropologist Da-wei Kuan on Atayal land management (see also Kuan, 2014a, 2014b), by Bien Chiang, Ruey-ling Chu, and Yuh-huey Joy on Paiwan community resilience after disaster (see Chiang, 2010), and Yung-ching Lo on river co-management. An important policy-oriented publication in Taiwan is Huang and Chang (2010), edited by an anthropologist and a sociologist, with a strong interdisciplinary team of authors, many of whom are indigenous and involved in indigenous rights issues. They explore various dimensions of Taiwan's recent indigenous policy and make suggestions for the future. The National Taiwan University anthropologist, Shih-chung Hsieh, has explored indigenous customary law and its (often conflicting) relationship with state law (e.g., Hsieh, Guo, Yang, Liu, & Li, 2007; Hsieh, Liu, & Yang, 2009).

Applied anthropology in Taiwan appears in leading international journals. Sasala Taiban, himself Rukai, has done work on Rukai conceptions of territory in the context of disaster and relocation (2013), with the hope that such research can influence policymakers. Scott Simon (2013) published a policy-relevant article in *Human Organization* on Sejiq/Truku hunting practices and implications for proposed co-management regimes. Simon has also collaborated with Sediq legal scholar Awi Mona (a.k.a. Chih-wei Tsai), leading to several articles about prospects for indigenous self-government in Taiwan (Awi & Simon, 2011; Simon & Awi, 2013a, 2013b). These studies usually highlight the importance of indigenous sovereignty.⁹

8 This literature articulates with international interest and recognition of the value of indigenous ecological knowledge since the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 2014.

9 Relevant to such projects, but outside anthropology, are Tang and Tang (2001) on self-governing land management institutions, and studies by William Hipwell about how indigenous groups in Taiwan create autonomous development projects based on their own cultural and social assets (Hipwell, 2007, 2009).

Applied research has risks, especially if it is undertaken on behalf of the state or other outside interests, even with good intentions. In Taiwan, for example, anthropologists have been employed to evaluate the claims of the name-rectification movements (e.g., Lim, 1999), which can get the anthropologist caught in the crossfire of local political conflict. Yet, engaged research can contribute to decolonising projects, especially when research protocols are developed with indigenous communities with the goal of facilitating self-determination. In fact, studies are often done at the initiative of communities or certain community members. Much significant work goes under the radar of international disciplinary journals, but is very important to the goals of indigenous communities and contributes to a mutual trust between communities and university-based scholars. Nga-ping Ong, for example, in addition to the ethnohistory of several groups, has also done research on post-secondary indigenous education and, based on Maōri precedents, language nests for linguistic revitalisation in urban indigenous communities (Ong, 2011).

Promotion of indigenous autonomy within applied projects is not necessarily political. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith argued, 'Self-determination in a research agenda becomes something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural, and economic terrains' (Smith, 1999: 116). Her well-known graphic successfully expresses an indigenous research agenda (figure 1). Looking at this figure, it seems that many applied studies in Taiwan contribute to such an agenda. What is lacking are studies that address healing as well as decolonisation of indigenous spirituality. Perhaps Christianity has contributed so much to the indigenous rights movement that it even permeates scholarship and occludes serious consideration of other forms of indigenous spirituality.

Smith argues that indigenous scholars should take the lead in a decolonising agenda. This is already happening in Taiwan, as indigenous scholars have been making important contributions to all disciplines. There is a growing number of scholars in other disciplines, such as geographer Tibusungu'e vayayana (a.k.a. Ming-hui Wang) and legal scholar Awi Mona, to name two scholars with international reputations. The Taiwan Indigenous Professor Society was established in March 2006 in order to decolonise indigenous scholarship in Taiwan and publishes a biannual journal. This initiative promises to change the way that research is conducted in indigenous communities. Their work can make important contributions to indigenous research and advocacy.

Another body of literature remains to be explored. Throughout Taiwan, there are individual private scholars (民間學者, *minjian xuezhe*) who may not have university-based research positions, but who possess the skills and motivation to do original research in their communities. Their publications,

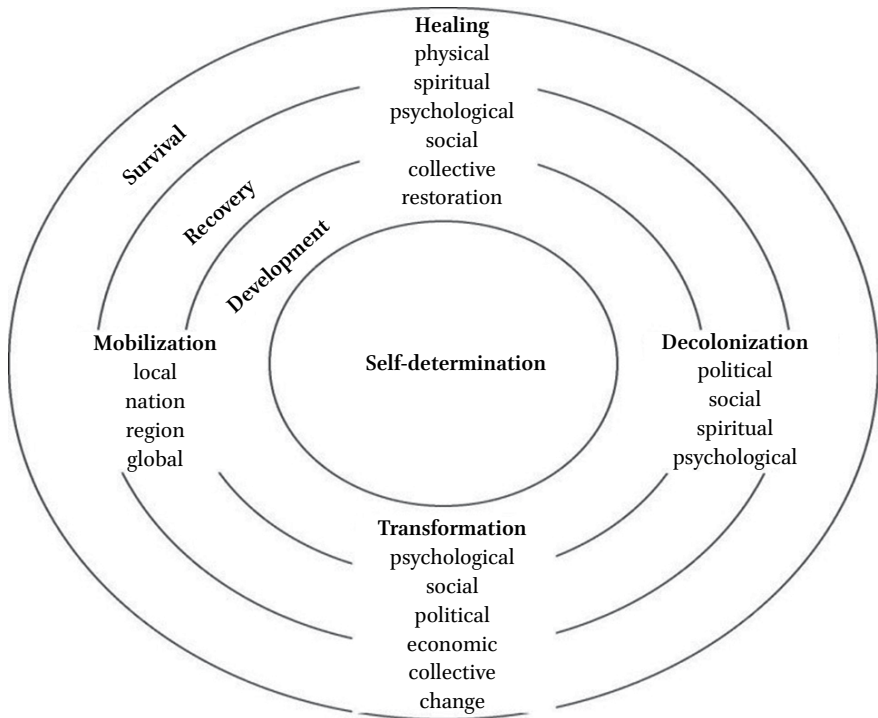


FIGURE 1 *The indigenous research agenda. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999. Reproduced with written permission of the author.*

often considered to be grey literature, are usually self-published or published through non-academic publishers, but are relevant to anthropology. In Seediq communities, my work has been influenced by collaborating with and reading the works of such local scholars as Dakis Pawan (2002, 2011, 2012), Dagon Walis, Kumu Tapas (2004, 2014) and Bawan Dnaha (1998); as well as Shian-yang Deng (1998). In Truku communities, there is also the late Dr Masaw Mowna (1998), Chang-hsing Huang (1996), Kaji Cihung (2011), Tera Yudaw (2003), Siyat Ulon (2004), and retired police officer Kuhong Sibal (Tian, 2014). They provide new perspectives on key historical events such as the Musha Incident of 1930 and the Taroko Battle of 1914, as well as important knowledge about traditional culture and contemporary society. Sincere collaboration with such scholars can take the decolonisation of indigenous scholarship to a new level, as Mei-hsia Wang (2008) has convincingly done in her studies with the Truku. Collaborative research is not always visible, as it may take the form of policy reports or even oral research reports in indigenous villages, but it is important to local

communities and thus to ongoing relationship-building between scholars and local people.

Conclusion: A Final Reflection on Ontology

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, whose work sparked the ontological turn, identified the cardinal value of anthropology as ‘working to create the conceptual, I mean ontological, self-determination of people[s]’ (Venkatesan, 2010: 153). Indeed, this is why we have to reflect upon Chinese studies, Taiwan studies, Austronesian studies, and indigenous studies, and so forth, as not just different topics of research, but as different genres of writing that are based in fundamentally different ontological projects. Going back to Corcuff’s definition of ontology, this means reflection on the existence of the object under discussion and the conditions of that existence. I have shown here that there are diverse ways of studying the lives of Formosan indigenous peoples.

Ontologically, these are very different projects. Austronesian studies is interested in exploring the nature of Oceania, a project in which the peoples of Taiwan are of interest as ancestors of today’s Pacific Islanders, and for the genetic, linguistic, and archaeological data they may provide to support or reject hypotheses that are ultimately about other parts of the world. Taiwan studies is more about the existence of Taiwan as an autonomous society, within which indigenous peoples may occupy the ‘savage slot’ (Trouillot, 2003: 8). This research is often valued by scholars and indigenous people, but the question is more the existence of the savage slot than what happens within it. The existence of the savage slot means that indigenous peoples are incorporated into the ontological projects of others. Critical indigenous studies and decolonising research approaches problematise this, making the point that indigenous nations merit recognition as the sovereign entities that they are. They are also smaller nations growing within the bodies of larger ones.

Edward Said (1979) long ago made us aware that orientalism as an ontological project justified Western intervention in the Middle East. At the beginning of Taiwan studies, Murray and Hong (1994) argued that Chinese studies on Taiwan was similarly an intellectual edifice justifying the continual ROC regime on Taiwan, not to mention a supporting American role in the region. Indigenous studies can take this decolonising approach a step further. If one can reproach China studies for looking through Taiwan to see China, then Taiwan studies could equally be reproached for looking through the Sediq, or Amis, or Rukai, and so on, to see Taiwan. From the perspective of Taiwan’s emerging indigenous nationalism, there are at least 16 indigenous First Nations seeking

ontological self-determination. Especially with the new legal framework that requires researchers to gain free, prior, informed consent before doing research in indigenous communities, it is likely to become increasingly important to take these perspectives into consideration.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, reflecting on how imperialist discourse labelled 'primitive peoples' as somehow less than fully human, said that 'the struggle to assert and claim humanity has been a consistent thread of anti-colonial discourses on colonialism and oppression' (Smith, 1999: 26). This means that we have to consider seriously, for example, the meaning of such words as *seediq* or *bunun*, not merely as the name of a tribe in some state-centric classification scheme, but in the sense of being human. The people we meet while doing research in indigenous communities see their perspectives as fundamentally *universal*, and there is great potential in embracing these perspectives on terms of ontological parity.

This type of study is only in its beginning in Taiwan. The possibilities are exciting, especially if we can do this within an intellectual framework of decolonisation, building up new relations of solidarity and mutual trust between anthropologists and indigenous peoples. Such a project begins by recognising indigenous groups as emerging nations and as ontological subjects on their own terms. Decolonising indigenous research has the potential to both challenge Taiwan studies and contribute to new ways of doing anthropology. The epistemological and ontological diversity within indigenous studies on Taiwan is its strength. Based on this intellectual wealth, indigenous studies on Taiwan will surely make important contributions to the international discipline of anthropology as well as to a better understanding of emerging indigenities.

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10 In Seediq and Truku naming customs, a person's personal name is followed by the name of his or her parent (not a surname). Awi Mona thus means that Mona is the father of Awi. Since he has no surname, it is most appropriate to list his works in the bibliography by his personal name. No comma is used because that would mistakenly indicate that Awi is his surname.

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