

Indigenous Autonomy: Constructing a Place for Ethnic Minorities in Taiwan's Emerging Civic Society

Scott Simon, professeur agrégé
Département de sociologie et anthropologie
Université d'Ottawa, Canada

Chercheur invité
Institut d'Asie Orientale, ÉNS-LSH
Lyon, France

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Abstract:

For more than two decades, indigenous autonomy has been one of the main demands of Taiwan's indigenous rights movement. Indigenous autonomy was incorporated into Chen Shui-bian's campaign promises in 1999, and subsequently adopted as a policy goal in the 2000 *DPP White Paper on Indigenous Policy*. In 2005, the passage of the *Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples* made it seem as if this goal could soon be fulfilled. The Taroko Nation, recognized by the ROC in 2004, initially seemed poised to create Taiwan's first indigenous autonomous region. Those goals, however, have been slowed down by the emergence of communities and individuals in their defined territory who refuse Taroko identity and have launched a competing drive for recognition as the Sediq Nation. Some Taroko people also resist the project of autonomy on the grounds that it merely empowers a small elite and does nothing to address their more immediate economic problems. These counter movements suggest that more is at stake in "autonomy" than indigenous rights.

This paper thus looks at the creation of indigenous autonomy as part of an emerging civic society for an independent Taiwan. How do name rectification and autonomy campaigns contribute to the incorporation of indigenous individuals and communities into Taiwanese civic society? What does the reconfiguration of power implied by such changes mean for ordinary people in indigenous communities? Do these struggles mean that indigenous people are taking a place in broader Taiwanese civic society? Or are they merely being used by others in struggles beyond their own control?

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On September 13, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* by a vote of 144 in favour, 4 against, and 11 abstentions.¹ This document, drafted in negotiations between States, indigenous peoples, and human rights activists over two decades, is a strong statement in favour of indigenous self-determination. In spite of the fact that the Republic of China is not a member of the United Nations, the influence of this document has been strong on Taiwan. Immediately following the UN vote, for example, the Executive Yuan Council of Indigenous Peoples asserted that the *Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples* passed in 2005 accords with the UN Declaration.² During the 2008 presidential campaigns, moreover, candidates Frank Hsieh (Democratic Progressive Party, DPP) and Ma Ying-jeou (Chinese Nationalist Party, KMT) both promised that their indigenous policies would be based on the UN Declaration.

Indigenous autonomy is the central component of this global trend toward indigenous rights. Article 4 states clearly: “Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions” (United Nations 2007). Articles 4 to 6 of the ROC *Basic Law* likewise concern autonomy. Article 4 sets out the basic principles as: “The government shall guarantee the equal status and development of self-governance of indigenous peoples and implement indigenous peoples’ autonomy in accordance with the will of indigenous peoples. The relevant issues shall be stipulated by laws”

¹ Those voting against were Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

² See 行政院原住民族委員會回應《聯合國原住民族權利宣言》：
http://www.apc.gov.tw/chinese/docDetail/detail_TCA.jsp?docid=PA00000001231&linkRoot=0&linkParent=0&url=, last accessed March 28, 2008.

(Executive Yuan 2005).³ Again in the 2008 presidential elections, both candidates included autonomy in their platform for indigenous issues. In spite of the fact that different actors all use the term “autonomy,” there are nuances in interpretation. In the UN Declaration, for example, autonomy is an inherent right, while in the ROC Basic Law it is a policy to be implemented by the government.

Indigenous autonomy is currently understood largely as the creation of regional autonomous zones recognizing the sovereignty of indigenous groups over a defined territory. Throughout this discussion, one should keep in mind Québec anthropologist Paul Charest’s distinction between substantial autonomy (« *l’autodétermination* ») and merely taking charge (« *la prise en charge* ») of administrative responsibilities. Taking charge refers simply to “administration by Indian bands and their representatives of various programmes and services for the populations they represent, accompanied by the management of related budgets” (Charest 1992: 56). Autonomy, on the other hand, means the power to avoid dependence on federal and provincial governments. In Canada and Québec, indigenous communities are quite aware of this distinction. They thus assert an identity as *First Nations* and resist any attempt to reduce their status to that of municipalities. The struggle is long from over, however, as can be seen in debates about Canada’s refusal to vote for the UN Declaration. Taiwan’s indigenous peoples face similar issues.

This paper looks at indigenous autonomy within a longer historical perspective and a broader sociological view as part of an emerging civic society on Taiwan. How do related campaigns for name rectification and autonomy campaigns contribute to the incorporation of indigenous individuals and communities into Taiwanese civic society? What does the reconfiguration of power implied by such changes mean for

³ 政府應依原住民族意願，保障原住民族之平等地位及自主發展，實行原住民族自治；其相關事項，另以法律定之。Translation provided by Luo Yong-ching.

ordinary people in indigenous communities? Do these struggles mean that indigenous people are taking a place in broader Taiwanese civic society?

History of Indigenous Autonomy on Taiwan: the First Decades

Although an analysis of Japanese colonial policy is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the creation of Taiwan's tribal identities and reinforcement of community power structures (often newly created) is a product of Japanese indirect rule in those communities before 1945 (Harrison 2001: 57).⁴ Before the Japanese period on Taiwan (1895-1945), the mountain groups of the central mountain range were largely dispersed kin-based groups living from swidden agriculture, gathering and hunting. They moved when necessary for subsistence purposes, and determined territory through labour and warfare. Without a State, they were able to organize small societies around the natural law of Gaya. The Japanese changed this by forcing groups to settle and adopt modern agricultural practices. They classified hundreds of small groups into larger groups known as "tribes" and created maps demarcating their territories. Even in communities with no institutionalized forms of power, what French anthropologist Pierre Clastres (1974) called "societies against the state," they created chiefdoms and village-level "tribal councils."⁵ In reality, however, real power in the villages was in the hands of the Japanese police (Masaw 1998: 49).

Just as the rise of printing media created nationalist expectations for larger groups worldwide (Anderson 1991), these precedents created new expectations for indigenous people. At the time of the transition from Japanese to ROC rule, Gao Yisheng of the Tsou tribe (which had already been under indirect rule during the Qing

⁴ There is often a certain reticence in anthropology to use the word "tribe" because of its connotations of backwardness. I use it to refer to colonial classifications of ethnicity. Indigenous "Nations" (e.g. First Nations), are in contrast groups imbued with self-conscious claims to collective power and sovereignty.

⁵ The establishment of band councils and land reserves was based on a study of US policy toward American Indians at the time (Fujii 1997: 151).

Dynasty) called on Taiwan's indigenous peoples to unite and establish a single autonomous district in a new democratic Taiwan. After participation in the 2:28 Incident, however, including cooperation with the Taiwan Communist Party to attack the airport in Chiayi, Gao was arrested, tried, and finally executed in 1954 (Harrison 2001: 63-66). His ideal of autonomy was unachievable in the short run, but surely made KMT administrators aware of the importance of indigenous peoples.

In the early years of ROC rule, Taiwan's indigenous peoples were not a priority for Chiang Kai-shek's government. During the 1940s, the KMT was still engaged in a Civil War against the Communists. Taiwan was considered marginal, and its 162,000 indigenous peoples were the "margins of the margins" (Fujii 2001: 155). In the 1945 *Plan to Take Administration of Taiwan* (臺灣接管計畫), they simply declared that the "savage tribes" (*fanzu*, 蕃族) would have the same rights to self-determination and autonomy (*zijue zizhi*, 自決自治) as those promised for all Chinese national minorities in Sun Yat-sen's *Plan for National Reconstruction* (建國大綱). A close reading of this text, however, shows that promises of "self-determination" and "autonomy" for the Tibetans, Mongolians, and other minorities were intended to promote gradual assimilation and integration into a Han Chinese nation-state (Fujii 2001 : 156). Until the 1990s, almost all documents concerning Taiwan's indigenous peoples were prefaced with the relevant citations of Sun Yat-sen.

The first important change in indigenous administration under KMT rule was the transfer of responsibility from the police to the civil administration of the provincial government (*minzhengting*, 民政廳). In their interpretation of the *Three Principles of the People* for "mountain compatriots" (*shandi tongbao*, 山地同胞), they promised economic development (*minsheng*, 民生), status as Chinese peoples (*minzu*, 民族),⁶

⁶ "民族方面，認為山地人民是我們中華民族的一份子，改變過去對山地同胞稱"蕃"的錯誤" (Taiwan Province Minzhengting 1954: 6). The contrast between KMT officers who called them *tongbao*, and local Hoklo people who still called them *hoan-a* did not go unnoticed in the communities.

and local autonomy (*defang zizhi*, 地方自治) as *minquan* (民權). The goal was to protect them and assimilate them into the norms of other areas (Taiwan Province Minzhengting 1954: 6). As for local autonomy, the State created 30 mountain townships and 159 villages. Villages were endowed with primary schools, clinics, police stations and administrative offices. The positions of mountain township magistrate and village mayor could be held only by indigenous people. Quotas for indigenous representation were established for the township and county councils, the Provincial Assembly (Taiwan Province Minzhengting 1954: 14); as well as eventually for the Legislative Yuan. On the ground, the administrative boundaries did not coincide with local identities. This sometimes led to the division of previously existing communities into different villages and townships; and sometimes to the forced inclusion of sometimes hostile groups into the same unit. The new system thus exacerbated local conflicts in some localities. It was based on a foreign ideology rather than the *Gaya* they had known previously and still remember.

This administrative system created an indigenous elite beholden to the KMT (Rudolph 2003: 89-91). It did not, however, lead to indigenous autonomy. Township magistrates and councils, for example, could come under the effective control of non-indigenous council members. It was thus a system of “taking charge” rather than real autonomy. This system eventually came under criticism from Taiwanese anthropologists and indigenous social activists. In 1983, a group of Academia Sinica anthropologists argued that indigenous self-government is more than the election of township magistrates and assembly members. Among other suggestions, they called for judicial protection of substantive local autonomy (Li, et.al. 1983: 50). Calls for

Many indigenous people mention the different attitudes toward them as one reason why they prefer the KMT (which they perceive to be a Mainlander party) to the DPP (which they perceive to be the party of Holo people).

substantial autonomy would become an important part of the social movements and democratization process of Taiwan.

Demands for Autonomy: Social Movements and Beyond

The Democratic Progressive Party, rising out of the *dangwai* and social movements of the 1980s, embraced a discourse of indigeneity from the very beginning, although initially to construct a non-Chinese identity for Taiwan. In 1999, presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian met with representatives of eleven Taiwan's indigenous nations and signed a "*New Partnership Agreement*" (新夥伴關係協定). Indigenous autonomy was among the seven points of that document, which was signed by Igung Shibani for the Truku Nation (德魯固族) and Watan Jiro for the Sediq Nation (塞德克族).⁷ The seven points are 1) to recognize the natural sovereignty of Taiwan's indigenous peoples; 2) to promote indigenous autonomy; 3) to sign land treaties with Taiwan's indigenous peoples; 4) to restore traditional names of villages, mountains and rivers, 5) to restore traditional territory; 6) to restore traditional use of natural resources, and promote ethnic self-development; and 7) to replace indigenous legislators with tribal delegates. This document, signed with one party's candidate rather than with the government, has no legal force. It has, however, shaped the expectations of a generation of indigenous social activists and influenced policy. It also led to disappointment, as the promises were left unfulfilled.

In 2000, these themes were incorporated into the DPP's *White Paper on Aboriginal Policy* (DPP 2000), as well as in a more moderate proposal by the KMT/PFP candidates in 2004 (KMT/PFP 2004). During Chen Shui-bian's first term in office, the Council of Indigenous Peoples invested heavily in studying indigenous

⁷ The original document is available on-line at Wikisource: <http://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E5%8E%9F%E4%BD%8F%E6%B0%91%E6%97%8F%E5%92%8C%E5%8F%B0%E7%81%A3%E6%94%BF%E5%BA%9C%E6%96%B0%E7%9A%84%E5%A4%A5%E4%BC%B4%E9%97%9C%E4%BF%82>, last accessed March 28, 2008.

law in other countries, holding scholarly conferences, and consulting with indigenous communities in Taiwan. They drafted an *Indigenous Self-Determination Law* (*yuanzhu minzu zizhiqu fa*, 原住民族自治區法) consisting of 104 clauses defining the rights, responsibilities, and scope of future autonomous areas. When the law passed the Executive Yuan on June 3, 2003, however, it had been reduced to 15 clauses. In general terms, it promised to create ethnically-based regional autonomous zones.⁸ It failed subsequently to pass the Legislative Yuan and become law.

Progress was made in Chen's second term. In 2004, meetings were held at the Council of Indigenous Peoples to discuss how indigenous rights can be included in a new constitution for Taiwan; and the creation of autonomous regions was a major concern (Constitutional Indigenous Policy Team 2005). In 2005, the *Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples* passed the Legislative Yuan. In terms of autonomy, it called for the creation of autonomous zones, promised state funding, and gave the central government responsibility for conflict resolution between zones. The *Basic Law* had an implementation deadline of 2008. This deadline not having been met, the legal status of the *Basic Law* is now unclear. It remains, however, an important policy document and is likely to be an important reference in the years to come.⁹

In the 2008 presidential campaigns, both candidates promised indigenous autonomy and implementation of the *Basic Law*. Having won the election – *with over 90% of the vote in indigenous townships* – President Ma's platform is of particular relevance. Autonomy was the first of twelve policy points:

In terms of the desire for autonomy of indigenous peoples, the government should promote solid and feasible policies. It should not carelessly make promises that disappoint indigenous peoples. We think that we should, in accordance with the spirit of the *Indigenous Peoples Basic Law*, quickly

⁸ The draft law is available on the web page of independent legislator May Chin: <http://www.abo.org.tw/maychin/epaper/maychin027-1.htm>, last accessed March 28, 2008.

⁹ See Simon 2007 for a summary of legal developments up to that date.

establish an *Indigenous Peoples Autonomy Law* or *Administrative Units Division Law* as well as related laws and regulations. We will, in places where conditions are ripe, make first attempts at substantive content in indigenous autonomy (limited to endowing them with rights to hiring personnel and budget, etc.). This includes establishing an Indigenous Council to decide items related to indigenous autonomy. Having accumulated enough experience and developed successful examples, we will gradually promote indigenous autonomous regions.¹⁰

Ma's policy is thus one of gradually devolving more administrative responsibility to yet-to-be-established autonomous regions. In fact, his policy does not mention indigenous sovereignty (the guiding principle of the *UN Declaration*) and instead emphasizes state support of development initiatives in indigenous areas. Referring back to Charest's conceptual distinction between "taking charge" and "autonomy," this policy resembles "taking charge" more closely than recognition of Taiwan's *First Nations* and their inherent right to autonomy. Ma, however, was elected with nearly unanimous support of indigenous people. His policy aligns closely with local political realities that limit the possibility of regional autonomy in the short run. As I show below, conditions may not be ripe for Taroko autonomy.

Dreaming of Tarokoland

The Taroko, one of the tribes recognized under the Chen administration, was born under politically difficult circumstances. The local identity as Taroko in Hualien has its roots in the Japanese period. The people of the Taroko Gorge called themselves Truku. They were considered by Japanese anthropologists to be one of the three branches of the Atayal sub-group Sediq originating in what is now Nantou, but with groups in Hualien (Kojima 1996 [1915] : 5). Unable to pronounce Truku, the

¹⁰ “一、試辦原住民族自治區，分階段實現自治願景：面對原住民族自治的願望，政府應以穩健可行的政策推動，不應隨意承諾，讓原住民族一再失望。我們認為應依「原住民族基本法」之精神，加速制定「原住民族自治法」或「行政區劃分法」以及相關配套法令，在條件成熟地區，先行試辦有實質內容（賦予人事、財政等權限）的原住民族自治，包括設立原住民族議會，議決有關全體原住民族自治事項。透過經驗累積，發展成功範例，進而逐步推廣原住民族自治區。” The document is available on-line at: <http://www.ma19.net/policy4you/aborigines>, last accessed 31 March, 2008.

Japanese called them Taroko. This identity crystallized in Hualien due to the 1914 Taroko Incident when the Japanese repressed the people of the Taroko Gorge (Hara 2006). It was reinforced through creation of the Presbyterian Taroko Synod in the 1960s, when demand started to grow in the church for recognition as a tribe distinct from the Atayal. The community was divided about whether to call themselves *Delugu* (德魯固族) or *Tailuge* (太魯閣族) in Chinese, and whether or not the group includes the other Sediq branches of Teuda and Tkedaya. This became contentious after the “*New Partnership Agreement*” because recognition as a tribe held out the promise of resources through the creation of autonomous zones and tribal delegates at the national level. The participation of both Sediq and Truku representatives at the signing of the “*New Partnership Agreement*” suggests that they were then interested in forming a Truku tribe in Hualien and a Sediq tribe in Nantou.

In 2003, proponents of “Name Rectification” (*zhengming*, 正名), organized through the Taroko Synod of the PCT and the Hsiulin Township Office, submitted a petition of 972 names to the ROC Executive Yuan demanding legal recognition of the *Tailugezu* (太魯閣族). They created a nationalist literature (Tera 2003, Siyat 2004) arguing that the Taroko constitute a nation distinct from the Atayal because of their collective name, sense of common blood, collective memory of struggles against the Japanese, a shared culture, heritage, and experience of living together (Siyat 2004 : 28). Not everyone agreed. Especially in Ren'ai Township of Nantou, but also in some Hualien villages, there was a belief that the Truku – who constitute over 90% of the so-called “Taroko” in Hualien rather than only one-third in Nantou (Hara 2003) – were imposing their own identity on the other subgroups without their consent. Igung Shiban, who had signed the New Partnership Agreement as the Truku representative was uninvolved. Two of her brothers publicly opposed the creation of a Taroko Nation. This is the point at which national and township politics became involved.

On January 14, 2004, after two consultative meetings with proponents of both Taroko and Sediq, the Executive Yuan recognized the *tailugezu* (太魯閣族 translated as “Truku” on the website of the Council of Indigenous Peoples) as Taiwan’s 12th “tribe.” In interviews conducted in Hualien and Nantou, partisans on both sides said that Premier Yu Shyi-kun had made the rapid decision according to an electoral calculus calculated to gain votes for the DPP in Hualien. 2004, after all, was a time of three important elections: the presidential election in March, the run-off election for the Hualien County Magistrate, and legislative elections in December. In the legislative elections, when six aboriginal MPs were elected, neither Walis Beilin (a discredited Catholic priest and Sediq proponent in Nantou) nor Chen Dao-ming (the DPP candidate) won a seat. Truku candidate from Nantou Kung Wen-chi (KMT), head of Taipei’s Indigenous Affairs Bureau under Mayor Ma Ying-jeou, took his place in the Legislative Yuan. Walis Beilin, who was opposed to the Taroko Name Rectification, was subsequently made chair of the CIP. The DPP candidate likewise lost his bid for Hualien County Magistrate. Yu Shyi-kun thus lost his gamble that the DPP could gain from recognition of the Taroko. He succeeded, however, in flaming opposing nationalist sentiments in their communities.

The new tribe was composed of some 26,000 people formerly registered as Atayal in Hualien and Nantou; who now had the choice of changing their household registration records to Taroko or keeping their legal identity as Atayal. In Hualien, nearly 21,000 people changed their registration. Some, however, said that township office employees had threatened that they could lose welfare benefits or land if they refused to change their legal status. In Nantou, it was almost only those villagers of the Truku subgroup (and not all of them) who changed their status. With the township head in support of Sediq, there was no similar pressure as in Hualien for change.

Motivated by their perhaps pyrrhic victory, Taroko nationalists, once again largely from the church and township offices in Hualien, established the Taroko Autonomy Promotion Team (*Tailugezu zizhiqu tuidong gongzuo xiaozu*, 太魯閣族自治區推動工作小組) in 2005. Tera Yudaw, Presbyterian elder and school principal, formed a committee to draft a Taroko constitution and organized meetings to explain the idea to local communities. This team lobbied the Executive Yuan for the establishment of an autonomous region and even took the issue to the United Nations. In 2006, a committee for Taroko autonomy decided to follow the Canadian example of First Nations by calling themselves the Taroko *Nation* in all English language documents, such as those they present at the United Nations. The hope was that they would establish Nation-to-Nation relations with the Republic of China, gain recognition of their natural sovereignty, and take control of all decisions regarding education, development, etc., on their defined territories.

Taroko nationalists defined their autonomous region to encompass Hsiulin, Wanrong and Tsuohsi Townships of Hualien as well as Ren'ai Township of Nantou County. The Hsiulin and Wanrong Township Offices were generally helpful to them in this project. After all, they could potentially benefit if regional autonomy were to separate them from Hualien County and elevate them to a higher administrative status. Some said that the new autonomous region would have the status of a county. Others said it would have equal status as the Executive Yuan. Tsuohsi, with a majority Bunun population, was less involved. Ren'ai took an opposing position and gave financial support to proponents of a new Sediq Tribe.

The movement for Taroko autonomy was restrained by the competing claims of the Nantou Sediq, with whom they already had tense relations. Walis Beilin and his main supporters from his electoral campaigns began promoting Sediq identity in both Hualien and Nantou, circulating their own petition for recognition from the ROC state.

During reconstruction after the 9:21 Earthquake of 1999, the Sediq were able to change the names of churches from Chinese to names in local dialects. A number of Sediq cultural NGOs were founded, as well as projects for language instruction in schools (Hara 2004). Like the Taroko, the Sediq launched a movement for tribal recognition, including scholarly conferences and publication, petitions to the Executive Yuan, and protests. They were particularly offended when they discovered that plans for the Taroko Autonomous Region included Ren'ai Township – and this without consulting the people involved.

On April 7, 2006, a group of more than twenty Sediq advocates from Nantou and Hualien presented a petition to the CIP to request legal recognition of their tribe as independent of both the Taroko and the Atayal. Anthropologist Lim Siu-theh, shown in an on-line photo of the Epoch Times with the Sediq activists, was present at the meeting. Noting that both groups claimed to represent the Teuda, Tkedaya and Truku, he suggested that if the Sediq and Taroko cannot agree on either of those two names, they should decide on a third alternative (Wu 2006).¹¹ Just before presidential elections in 2008, the Executive Yuan repeated this argument to again reject a new Sediq petition, saying that the issue should be decided by the new government.

Like the proponents of the Taroko Nation, the partisans of the Sediq Nation were largely well-educated Presbyterians, school teachers, and employees of the township office. A former Ren'ai Township magistrate is a strong proponent of Sediq nationhood. In the 2007 run-off election, however, his wife lost to a candidate less interested in indigenous nationalism. The sociological fact that the movements are dominated by well-educated elite – common to both nationalist movements – means that none of them have widespread support in their communities.

¹¹ On that precise day, I was in Hualien attending a meeting of the Taroko to work through a draft of their law on autonomy. It was on that day that, drawing upon the Canadian experience I shared with them, they passed a resolution to call themselves the Taroko Nation in all English-language documents.

The “Common People” and Indigenous Nationalism

In each village, I spent a good part of my research periods socializing with people who often combine temporary working-class jobs with periods of “resting” in the village. These people tended to perceive the social movements as led by elites in pursuit of their own self-interest at the expense of the community. It was nearly universal for them to accuse elected politicians of vote-buying and corruption; but they expressed a similar hostility toward successful businesspeople and the organizers of NGOs. As for Tera Yudaw and his drive for Taroko autonomy, they accused him of earning money from the government for his work or of wishing to become “king of the Taroko.” They often added that they have not been consulted about the project of autonomy, and referred to some autonomy proponents and supportive politicians as *lohei*, or “thieves” behind their backs.

These accusations have to be taken with a grain of salt. When Igung Shibani in Hualien, for example, organized protests against a mining company that had occupied tribal land, there were rumours that the company had paid her to do so and that she had run away to Japan with the profits. It is highly unlikely that any company would pay the person who organizes protests and eventually takes them to court; in addition to the lawyers working on their own defense. Tera Yudaw has likewise taken no money for his work. His wife has even used her own salary to purchase lunch boxes when they hold meetings.

The same problem of low trust afflicts the Sediq proponents as well. In Nantou, the common people expressed a similar hostility toward the promoters of Sediq nationalism. At one level, there was a conceptual difference. Arguing that Sediq means “human being” and thus should not be reduced in meaning to one group of 6000 people, they often addressed me as a foreign anthropologist saying, “*You* are also Sediq.” They suspected that the Sediq promoters were seeking recognition as an

ethnic group for electoral purposes; or because they hoped to gain future lucrative posts at the CIP or in new tribal based positions. With township funding, they decorated the villages with flags promoting Sediq identity; and organized local meetings and larger conferences. Yet these were poorly attended. As one woman in Gluban said, “Why should I support them so that only those people can get power and money? My life won’t change either way.” She added, “My mother always told me: there are good and bad *mugan*,¹² just as there are good and bad *Seediq*, but the most evil person of all is one who betrays his own people for personal gain.”

Michael Rudolph, who has done field research with the Taroko, Paiwan and Amis, offers one possible explanation. Developing Hsieh Shih-chung’s idea that Taiwan’s indigenous movement consists of “elites without people,” he argues that the movement is alienated from the “common people” in the communities. His theoretical base is Paul Brass (1991), who argued that “ethnic self-consciousness, ethnically-based demands, and ethnic conflict can occur *only* if there is some conflict between indigenous and external elites and authorities or between indigenous elites” (Rudolph 2004: 241, italics added). Rudolph compares the demands of the indigenous movement to what he portrays as “the view from the countryside.” His informants thought little of reserve lands or autonomous zones, preferring instead to be able to sell land and perhaps “afford an estate or home in the city” (Rudolph 2004: 250).¹³ I think, however, that there are better ways to understand indigenous autonomy and the relationship of its proponents with their communities.

Conclusion

Indigenous autonomy is a discourse of liberation, promising sovereignty to the marginalized groups that historically lost land to colonial forces. It is not a return to

¹² This is the term used to describe “Native Taiwanese” of the Hoklo ethnicity.

¹³ Of course, this could only possibly be true of those aboriginal individuals who own land. Many aboriginal people do not own land and would suffer from a privatization of reserve land.

the past, but rather a new relationship with the State. Considering that policies of assimilation as practiced in both Canada and Taiwan have not succeeded in giving equal status to indigenous peoples, there are good reasons to perceive autonomy as progress toward social justice. Autonomy promises to incorporate indigenous communities into civic society as equal partners and in accordance with their values. Ultimately, however, it is a new way of legitimizing the power of the state that recognizes autonomy. It is thus what Weber called the *routinisation* of authority, noting also that “as a general rule, the routinisation does not happen without struggle” (Weber 1971: 332). The struggle between the Taroko and the Sediq illustrates his point well. Their struggle for recognition, as Rudolph observed, is largely a struggle between elites. Autonomy is equally so if it is merely a reorganization of the township system and the promise of tribal delegates to the national government.

In the intermediate term, however, the *process* of indigenous autonomy may be beneficial to the common people, on the condition that it involves them personally and is based on their values (see Alfred 2005). This is true regardless of whether or not the state promotes autonomy. To demonstrate what I mean by “beneficial,” it is necessary to look beyond the discipline of anthropology to public health. Throughout the world, indigenous peoples suffer from higher rates of suicide and self-destructive behaviour than non-indigenous people. Taiwan is no exception. In Taiwan, the gap in life expectancy between indigenous and non-indigenous people has actually increased under policies of assimilation. By the year 2000, Taiwanese indigenous men had an average life expectancy of 59.2 years, as compared to 72.7 years for non-indigenous men. Indigenous women had a life expectancy of 70, compared to 78.4 for non-indigenous women (Wen et.al. 2004: 323). Mortality from cirrhosis of the liver, accidents (both related to alcohol abuse), suicide, and infectious disease are substantially higher than in the general population.

Indigenous autonomy and public health may seem unrelated to many. In Canada, however, transcultural psychiatrists Michael Chandler and Christopher Lalonde conducted a study of suicide in British Columbia First Nations communities. Looking for determinants of youth suicide rates, they found that communities with more “cultural continuity” had significantly lower rates of suicide than other communities. Cultural continuity was defined as a set of features including self-government, land claims, band-controlled schools, health facilities and police administration, as well as cultural facilities. Self-government led to the most significant decrease in suicide (Chandler and Lalonde : 211). It is logical to assume that cultural continuity, reinforced through projects of autonomy, would contribute to lower rates of other forms of self-destructive behaviour, and in Taiwan as well as Canada.

In conclusion, campaigns for name rectification and autonomy have given aboriginal elites increased visibility. Presidential candidates from both parties take their concerns seriously and work with them to create policies they hope will be effective. These are certainly steps toward increased equality for indigenous peoples and greater inclusion in Taiwan’s broader civic society. Without increased grassroots work similar to that done in Canada by Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2005) and the *Wasáse* movement, however, the benefits are unlikely to reach ordinary people.¹⁴ Fortunately, however, there are many young people in Taroko, Sediq and other communities who are committed to the goals of cultural revitalization and a return to Gaya. Their work, above all crucial for the health of their own communities, may someday lead to self-determination and a confederation of peoples of the Gaya. It will also inspire Taiwan Studies for years to come.

Seediq balae, Gembiyax!

¹⁴ Due to space limitations, I cannot discuss this in detail here. Suffice it to say that Alfred hopes for a decolonization based on local values and in daily practices. Indigenous Taiwanese and other interested readers are encouraged to consult his web site at <http://web.uvic.ca/~gta/home/> to learn more.

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