All Our Relations: Indigenous Rights Movements and the Bureaucratization of Indigeneity in Contemporary Taiwan

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Abstract: Taiwan’s indigenous social movement, active since the 1980s, has successfully lobbied to get indigenous rights included in the Republic of China Constitution, to create a cabinet level Council of Indigenous Peoples, and to pass the 2005 Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples. Taiwan’s indigenous social activists have also become regular participants in United Nations indigenous events. Especially during the Chen Shui-bian presidency, foreign observers often suspected that the state instrumentalized “indigeneity” to claim a distinct identity from China. Events since 2008, however, demonstrate that the indigenous rights movement has maintained its own momentum and that the indigenous peoples have interests that cannot be reduced to issues of national identity or party politics. In fact, the indigenous people overwhelmingly support the KMT, and indigenous movements are involved in both “pro-unification” and “pro-independence” political networks. Most indigenous social movement leaders, as well as ordinary indigenous people, hope that their movement can make progress in indigenous rights in ways that transcend the “blue” and “green” division between Han Taiwanese. This paper reflects upon the diversity of the indigenous movements, their mobilization strategies, and values since Ma Ying-jeou was elected President of the ROC in 2008.

Biography: Scott Simon, Professor in the School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies at the University of Ottawa, holds a Research Chair in Taiwan Studies. With a Ph.D. in Anthropology from McGill University, Simon began his career working in the anthropology of development. Two separate research projects led to his books Tanners of Taiwan: Life Strategies and National Cultures (2005), as well as Sweet and Sour: Life-Worlds of Taipei Women Entrepreneurs (2003). Now specializing in the political anthropology of the Austronesian communities of Taiwan, he has done ethnographic research with Truku and Sediq groups in Hualien and Nantou since 2004. The results of this research have been published as chapters in edited volumes and journals such as Human Organization, Oceania, American Ethnologist, and Anthropologie et Sociétés. Since he teaches in French as well as in English, he published his third book in French with Laval University Press. Sadyaq Balae! L’autochtone formosane dans tous ses états, is an exploration of state-indigenous relations, including the social movements that often contest state projects on indigenous territory. He has in recent years, in annual trips to Taiwan, been working more closely with Truku-speaking trappers and hunters, who have been teaching him about ethno-biology and human-animal relations in addition to sharing their discontent about Taiwan’s legal regime that criminalizes most hunting activities.
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[I come from the University of Ottawa, which is on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Nation. I acknowledge and thank the Muwêkma and all of the Ramaytush ancestors and peoples of this area for the land on which Stanford University is built].

For many observers of Taiwan, the election of Ma Ying-jeou as President of the Republic of China in 2008 seemed like a watershed moment in the island’s history and even to some like a mysterious step backwards. A generation of Taiwan Studies scholars had come to maturity since the inaugural conference of the North American Taiwanese Studies Association in 1994. Over two and a half decades, Taiwan has transformed in intellectual discourse from a laboratory of Chinese culture to an ontological subject in its own right that merited a world-wide network of conferences, book series, journals, and even the creation of Taiwan Studies programs. In Taiwan, intellectual and literary currents of bentuhua with increased valorization of a local Taiwanese identity as opposed to a state-sponsored Chinese identity, followed by dynamic social movements of feminism, labour, environmental, anti-nuclear, and, not least, indigenous movements, made it appear as if the Taiwanese were becoming masters of their own island and their own destiny. The new emphasis in intellectual discourse was on the vibrancy of Taiwanese democracy, especially since the end of martial law had led to a flowering of social movements (Fell 2012: 178), rather than on the stagnancy of Chinese tradition.

The rise of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), with the election of Chen Shui-bian in 2000 and his re-election in 2004, seemed to confirm teleological notions of a Taiwanese Volksgeist emerging from the tragedies of an externally-imposed government that anthropologist Hill Gates had early-on described as a “rump” government propped up in a state of dependency by an imperialist United States (Gates 1979: 393). Murray
and Hong (1994), who caused much brouhaha in anthropology when they argued that social scientists had ignored the real Taiwan while looking for China on the island, seemed vindicated, but for less than a decade. The 2008 presidential election and 2012 re-election of Ma Ying-jeou has been interpreted as the triumphant return of the Chinese Nationalist Party, whose sino-nationalist essence is easily obscured in English by habitual use of the acronym KMT, but is never ignored in Taiwan. This political change in a democratic system made it appear as if a sizable portion of Taiwan’s population were at ease after all with being somewhat Chinese, especially as the new government made it clear from the beginning that they sought rapprochement with the People’s Republic of China and that the new president embraced symbols of pan-Chinese identity in public speeches and rituals.

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Chinese-ness was back in vogue, or was it? Were “Asian Values” coming back to Taiwan? Was the chaos of social movements about to take a backseat again to Chinese notions of social harmony? One productive way to understand change and continuity is through an analysis of Taiwan’s social movements before and after 2008. Were they ever really bound so intimately with the emergence of a Taiwanese Volk on the world stage of democratic yearnings? Is the rise or fall of social movements dependent on the vagaries of electoral politics, perhaps even contingent upon the Great Power politics of a rising China and a declining United States? Or do they have a momentum entirely of their own? The social movement for indigenous rights is especially relevant to this discussion. The vibrancy of all social movements are a sign of the strength of Taiwanese democracy; but the indigenous movement is special because it draws attention to a non-Chinese
specificity of the island. There is a risk, however, in any analysis that frames it as “non-Chinese” rather than on the terms of its proponents.

A Brief History of Taiwan’s Indigenous-State Relations

This paper examines political change in Taiwan since 2008 through the prism of the indigenous rights movements that claim to speak for the half a million people of Austronesian descent and identities on the island. To a degree that is not surpassed by any other social movement on Taiwan, the indigenous social movement is plural, referring to a vast range of disparate actors and events from new state institutions to protests in Tokyo against the inclusion of indigenous Formosan warriors at Japan’s nationalistic Yasukuni Shrine (Simon 2006a), or alliances between indigenous activists and pro-independence groups to promote the creation of indigenous autonomous self-government (Simon 2006b).

In this paper, I will reflect upon four recent unfoldings in the indigenous movements. I prefer to refer to them as unfoldings rather than as developments, in order to avoid any impression of linear development or teleological assumptions. In a process like what many social scientists call path dependency, they are rooted in history, the results of seeds planted by others in very different contexts. Yet, not every path becomes a road and not every sapling becomes a tree. By referring to unfolding, I mean that, like the unfolding of blossoms on a tree, some of the developments of today will mature into fruit whereas others will merely whither and fall off the branches. The four most visible unfoldings are an increasing emphasis on livelihood issues, the rise of non-church actors,  

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1 The reflections in this paper are intended to update observations initially made in a research project from 2004 to 2007 that included 18 months of field research in three Truku communities on development and resistance; and are based on observations and participation in social movement actions in annual visits from 2008 to 2013.
the use of new social media, and a radical rethinking of party politics. It will, however, be necessary to place these unfoldings within a longer historical context.

From a historical perspective, the political experience of the Austronesian peoples is very different from that of Taiwan’s Han Chinese groups (despite the important differences between Mainlanders and so-called “Native Taiwanese”) for the very basic reason that the Austronesian groups had never been governed by a state, whereas those who came from China inherited a habitus of dealing effectively with state bureaucracies, tax collectors, etc. In fact, some of the classical theory of the evolution of the state comes from Chinese data collected by anthropologist Morton Fried in Anhui and Taiwan. The Qing Dynasty, in over two centuries of colonization prior to the Japanese annexation of the island in 1895, subdued the pingpuzu, or “plains aborigines,” largely assimilating those groups into Chinese polity and cosmology (Brown 2004, Shepherd 1993, Zheng 1995). They classified the native groups as “raw” (shou) or “cooked” (sheng) “savages,” depending on whether or not they had politically submitted to the Chinese state. Military-enforced boundaries between the territories of the two groups were intended to protect plains peoples from head-hunting expeditions; but also protected mountain peoples from the encroachment of Hokkien and Hakka farmers onto their territory. During the Qing Dynasty, as plains communities lost wars to incomers from China, refugees fled to the mountains and eastern coastal communities, making everyone aware of the danger posed by the settlers from China.

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In the Formosan Highlands, loose bands of acephalous societies remained autonomous until they were subjugated by the Japanese military, with the final decisive
battle happening as late as 1914. They were subsequently then integrated into the state as new institutions and organizations were created around property rights, political representation, identity, and social welfare in ways that separated them from the other ethnic groups and reinforced local identities. These “raw” groups incorporated into a state for the first time in history during the Japanese period groups were those that eventually adopted identities as “indigenous” by the end of the 20th century. From their perspective, the state is a relatively new imposition. In fact, today’s elderly people still remember what their parents told them about the social change that entailed.

Policy innovations for the newly subdued Austronesian peoples in Japanese Formosa amounted basically to a “bureaucratization of indigeneity” (Simon 2012: 229) that continued to evolve in processes of path dependency after Taiwan was transferred from Japan to the Republic of China. Local people often accepted these as state protection against encroachment on their lands by Hokkien and Hakka people. In terms of politics, the Japanese had required groups, even those with relatively “nomadic” inclinations, to settle in permanent villages and create tribal councils with chiefs who would manage relationships with the Japanese police authorities. This system was modernized by the ROC with the establishment of 30 mountain townships in 1945, followed by local electoral innovations created under the slogan of “local autonomy” (地方自治). This institutional innovation contributed to the formation of a local indigenous elite centered around township offices, indigenous politicians and their supporters, all very dependent upon KMT patron-client networks (Simon 2012: 123). Nonetheless, the social expectations toward chiefs were transferred to the new elite; creating some continuity in the informal institutions of local leadership. The Sadyaq groups, to give an
example, refer to the expectations ordinary people have of these leaders in terms of the sacred ancestral law of Gaya (Simon 2012: 230-232).

A reserve land system, based on Japanese precedents that were in turn inspired by American Indian policies (Simon 2012: 95-96), made it difficult to sell land to outsiders, even as individual landowners could return their land rights to the township office that could lease to corporate interests. The reserve system (like its precedents in North America) also did not include vast traditional territories that became classified as state property. Nonetheless, the reserve land system gave indigenous villages a land base and provided individuals with the option of staying in, or in many cases, returning to the countryside after years or decades of work elsewhere. This land base, in spite of the social upheaval that happened with indigenous people sold to land to other indigenous people – an emergent elite who enriched themselves from land deals as much as from politics – kept indigenous societies more intact than they would have been if people had simply been able to sell land to outsiders when moving to the cities to work.

A contestatory indigenous rights movement arose within, partly against, but always intricately entwined with, these resulting village networks in the 1980s, giving impetus to further political change in the 1990s. Even as the first social rights movements were based in Taipei and initiated by educated urban aborigines, activists always referred to their origins in the countryside and hoped that their idealism would take root there. The leaders of the new movements, as well as many relatively apolitical people in the villages, were fully aware of the full political autonomy their groups had before colonialism, the limited autonomy their fathers enjoyed during the Japanese period (often as chiefs or members of tribal councils), and the promised autonomy of the ROC. Their communities
were kept relatively intact, in locations mostly designated by the Japanese, due to the land reserve system that gave them a material base for their livelihoods (Simon forthcoming). The subsequent demands, strategies, and limitations of the indigenous social movement are all rooted in this history.

**The Indigenous Social Movement before 2008**

The indigenous social movement, which anthropologist Fiorella Allio (1998) dates back to the establishment of the magazine *Gaoshanqing* in 1983, followed in 1984 by the establishment of the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines (ATA), emerged within a larger opposition movement and was nourished by networks of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT). Protestant influences on the movement, which included a pro-indigenous theology taught at Yushan Theological Seminary and the involvement of Canadian missionaries in the Urban-Rural Movement (URM) training school for social activists, were so influential that Michael Stainton summed it up in the title of his M.A. thesis as “counterhegemonic Presbyterian aboriginality” (Stainton 1995). Ku Kun-hui observed a discursive shift in the movement in the mid-1980s from an initial concern for social welfare and individual rights to a focus on collective rights (Ku 2005: 100).

One of the first demands of the nascent movement was name rectification (正名), which in the first case meant the collective name to be used for all Austronesian tribes of Taiwan. This name had changed from the shengfan 生番 and shoufan 熟番 (“raw” and “cooked” savages) distinction during the Qing Dynasty and early Japanese period, to the Japanese takasagozoku 高砂族, a word with positive connotations of bravery that had supposedly been designated by the Emperor himself in 1935 (Yamaguchi 1999: 32). After the ROC took over Taiwan, the government terminology became shanbao 山胞, or
“mountain compatriots,” with somewhat confusing inflections as “plains mountain compatriots” 平地山胞 and “mountain mountain compatriots” 山地山胞.

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The leaders of the emergent indigenous movement, influenced by the global indigenous rights movement and inspired by URM training taught by Mohawk activist Donna Loft, deemed these terms pejorative and demanded that it be replaced with indigenous people, yuanzhumin 原住民 (Allio 1998a: 56). They successfully lobbied the National Assembly to incorporate this new terminology in the 10 additional articles to the ROC Constitution in 1994. Remarkably, they were able to get the wording subsequently altered in Constitutional revisions in 1997 to yuanzhuminzu 原住民族. The addition of one Chinese character at the end of the word, like adding the letter –s at the end of the word “people,” effectively guaranteed the political status and participation of indigenous peoples as collectivities (Simon 2012: 182). The indigenous movement also lobbied successful for the creation of a cabinet level Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1996, a move which basically moved government bureaucratization of indigenous affairs from the provincial to the national level. This is not just a question of terminology or of bureaucratic reorganization, because identity is crucial to formulating and claiming rights. As Niezen noted, “Membership in a legally defined community with the potential to call upon public sympathies in defense of rights has become the single most important form of belonging” (Niezen 2010: 14). It is important to keep in mind that the names of indigenous groups and the legal definitions of community boundaries and membership were already established in the 1930. This means that Taiwan’s indigenous identity has a longer institutional history than any other social movement in the country. The end of
martial law enhanced the potential to call upon public sympathies, thus enabling indigenous people to launch a new social movement that could interact with other political actors.

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In the 1990s, the “Return our lands” movement demanded the return of traditional territories and reserve land that had been, through various methods, transferred to state or private non-indigenous use for such purposes as national parks and mines. As the United Nations began creating various venues for indigenous peoples to express their concerns, Taiwanese indigenous activists began attending international meetings in Geneva and New York. The main theme of the movement became political autonomy, based on the concept that indigenous peoples, as a result of their ongoing presence on a given territory before colonization, possessed inherent sovereignty. In 1999, this concept was the cornerstone of the New Partnership Between the Indigenous Peoples and the Taiwanese Government signed by DPP presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian during a campaign stop on Orchid Island (Simon 2012: 183). No matter what Chen may have thought of the document, indigenous activists interpreted it as an important state-to-state treaty.

This momentum culminated in the 2005 Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples, which promised to meet most of the demands of the indigenous social movement, including political autonomy. As the Council of Indigenous Peoples expanded in size, many indigenous social activists joined the ranks of the public service, including as Chair. Some activists even became concerned that the movement would lose its radical edge as its leaders took government positions. In addition, indigenous legislators – guaranteed a quota of seats in the Legislative Yuan since the begin of direct elections for legislators –
became important spokespeople for indigenous rights. Although most of them tended to represent the KMT and allied pan-blue forces (Simon 2010), the Executive Yuan and the Legislative Yuan (still dominated by the KMT throughout the entire Chen administration) actually seemed to compete to demonstrate which party best represented indigenous interests.

The apparent success of the indigenous movement to quickly achieve so many of its stated goals led some observers to speculate that the state instrumentalized “indigeneity” to claim an identity distinct from China. Tsinghua University anthropologist Ku Kunhui (2005) showed how indigenous activists exploited political opportunities to assert their rights at a moment when Taiwan was actively seeking a non-Chinese identity. She concluded with an analysis of how the state manipulated indigenous themes to legitimate a new national identity, most prominently by the use of indigenous performers at the 2000 inauguration ceremony of President Chen Shui-bian. German sinologist Michael Rudolph took an instrumentalization hypothesis even further, even asserting that “all these efforts of course had not only the aim to demarcate Taiwan culturally, but also politically from China” (Rudolph 2006: 46 ff. 12). Such arguments explain well why the DPP claimed to support indigenous rights, but they overlook many internal dynamics of the indigenous movements; as well as the long institutional history of indigeneity on the island with roots in the colonial period.

**Four Unfoldings Since 2008**

Events since 2008 reveal the need to moderate claims that indigeneity is a state effect of the last two decades, or that attention to indigeneity was *only* a way to demarcate Taiwan from China. Those arguments over-emphasize the roles of Presidents
Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian in creating the conditions for an indigenous social movement. In fact, path dependency means that the institutions of indigeneity are much older than those two politicians, as the first institutions of indigeneity were created in the Japanese era and the forms of the current system gained shape mostly under the leadership Chiang Kai-shek. The grassroots social movement, of course, gained steam only after the end of martial law along with other social movements and Taiwan-centric intellectual currents (Blundell 2012). There were changes after 2008, but the most important changes did not necessarily begin in 2008; and they were rarely caused by the election of Ma Ying-jeou. It is useful to think of them instead in terms of four unfoldings. The first unfolding is a shift in emphasis from name rectification to livelihood issues. A second unfolding has been the rise of non-church actors. A third unfolding, which has happened world-wide, is a dramatic blossoming in the use of new social media. Finally, a fourth unfolding is a new challenge to traditional political parties. The return of the KMT to the Presidency certainly changed the wider context, but the indigenous movement seems to emerge according to its own internal dynamics.

**The First Unfolding: A Shift from Name Rectification to Livelihood Issues**

The first generation of the indigenous movement was necessarily focused on name rectification, getting recognition as *yuanzhuminzu* rather than as *shandi tongbao*. Arguably, the previously used name of “mountain compatriots” already entitled Taiwan’s mountain groups to certain political and economic rights. The ROC signed the ILO107 (International Labour Organization Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention) as early as 1962, created mechanisms at the provincial level for governance of mountain communities, and, through the land reserve system, continued in altered form the
Japanese system of recognizing a specific form of property rights for mountain groups. Even with limited privatization of land, the law prohibited mountain compatriots from selling to non-indigenous people. Like ILO107, however, the intention of these measures was to “modernize” the targeted communities and eventually assimilate their members into mainstream society.

At the international level, indigenous peoples worldwide began demanding recognition of their collective rights, including rights to land, to recognition of their inherent sovereignty, and the right to remain distinct from the wider society. These changes led to the replacement of ILO107 with ILO169 to protect these rights. This shift in discourse from indigenous people to indigenous peoples, which became a cornerstone of indigenous activities at the United Nations and in customary international law, was translated in Chinese in Taiwan as constitutional recognition of yuanzhuminzu with political rights. This fundamental change, further elaborated in the 2005 Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples that promised the creation of autonomous zones, offered the possibility that each “tribe” could become a legal person in its own right with some kind of recognition of tribal inherent sovereignty.

Attention to name rectification led to name rectification for specific local groups, as local elites saw the potential in tribal recognition to bring benefits for themselves and for their communities in terms of representation at the Indigenous Peoples Council, perhaps eventual formation of autonomous tribal self-governing bodies, and funding for such things as language curricula and cultural activities. Successful demands for state recognition led the number of state-recognized groups to expand from nine from the entire period from 1945 to 2000, to fourteen by the end of the Chen Shui-bian presidency.
In August 2014, the Kanakanavu and the Hla'alua were recognized by the state as independent from the Tsou – demonstrating that the DPP has no monopoly on ethnogenesis. Observers, including involved indigenous activists, have been quick to note that the timing of these changes has tended to be strategically planned to influence the results of local and legislative elections. Once groups are established, in what can become highly contested political struggles (see Chi and Chin 2012; Hara 2003, 2004; Huang 2013; Simon 2007, 2012: 177-206), the emergent leaders have to convince local people to change their household registration papers to the new tribal identity and support the changes. They thus have a need to gain what Anna Tsing (2005) notably called “friction” to support their claims.

From a village level, the rather abstract and political nature of identity changes made their necessity difficult for local people to understand. Local people often perceive the creation of new organizations, or institutional change related to new ethnic groups and proposed forms of self-governance, to be attempts by indigenous leaders to create new positions for themselves. On the subject of indigenous self-determination, Rudolph thus quoted one person describing such proposals 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). The problem was that these issues, as pressing as they seemed to activists and township political leaders, seemed remote from the livelihood issues of rural workers and farmers. This social division, between those at the forefront in political representation of difference and those who remain apolitical, is characteristic of collective rights movements everywhere (Niezen 2010: 103). In the communities where I have worked and where name rectification was a major issue, fewer people were interested in whether
they were called Atayal, Truku or Sediq than in the price they could earn for peanuts or in how to take legal action against labour contractors who failed to pay wages.

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Once the institutional framework for indigenous rights is created, however, the movement can more effectively organize around local livelihood issues such as control of forests and shores, the danger posed by nuclear waste, and the right to hunt. The list of indigenous social movement issues raised during the Ma administration is long. Non-livelihood issues that probably seemed less pressing to ordinary villagers included protests against the conversion of “mountain townships” into city districts as Taiwan revised its municipal structure to convert several counties into municipalities. The issue of laws for indigenous autonomy attracted the attention of indigenous activists and intellectuals, but gained little traction among ordinary people. During the Sunflower Movement, several indigenous rights groups took public action in support of the movement against ECFA and the Services Agreement and indigenous students claimed their own public space at the demonstrations. In the villages, people tended to show disapproval of these actions, saying that the students had broken laws and were manipulated by larger political forces.

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To ordinary villagers, there was far more sympathy to livelihood issues such issues as post-typhoon reconstruction after Typhoon Morakot, protests against the Meiliwan Resort, the Hongye Hot Springs, and the Gaotai Dam; as well as against road construction that involved displacement of graves in Katipul. There have also been protests against deforestation on Bunun and Truku land, and against proposals to store
nuclear waste near the Paiwan village of Nantian. Perhaps the most widely supported demands were those for expanded hunting rights (Simon 2009, 2013), which eventually led to a reform in firearms legislation to permit indigenous men to possess home-made rifles and to hunt, after application via township offices to county officials, for cultural reasons; even as trapping and any form of hunting in national parks remain illegal. Ma Ying-jeou’s 2014 initiative to establish indigenous courts may lead to further reform on this front. All of this has led to a second unfolding, the rise of non-church actors in the social movements.

**The Second Unfolding: The Rise of Non-church Actors**

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As noted by nearly all observers, the Presbyterian Church has played a central role in the creation of the indigenous rights movement. The first indigenous rights organization, the Alliance for Taiwanese Aborigines, was essentially a Presbyterian political alliance relying on Christian concepts of social justice and Marxian Liberation Theology. Beginning in the 1980s, and relying largely on international alliances that included Dr. Ed File and his Mohawk wife Donna Loft from Canada, the church trained a generation of indigenous social activists in training camps known as the Urban-Rural Mission, or URM for short. During this training, promising social activists learn to focus on group identity, define visions for social change, identify the causes of social pain in their communities as well as obstacles to change, and then create strategies for action. During the training, instructors proudly give examples of their direct action, as when they toppled a statue of Wu Feng, a mythical Qing Dynasty official who supposedly sacrificed his own life to convince the Tsou people to stop head-hunting, from its pedestal in Chiayi,
noting that the statue has subsequently been replaced with a commemorative statue to the 2:28 Incident (Amae 2012). Graduates of URM have launched social movements including a drive to reclaim land from the Asia Cement quarry and factory in Hualien, but also the various name rectification movements. Due to this history, an estimated 90% of indigenous activists in Taiwan are Presbyterian (Amae 2012: 139).

The main weakness of this form of political organization is that it has been so closely associated with the Presbyterian churches that it has alienated members of other churches, including the Roman Catholics and the True Jesus Church. The training camps have also been held outside of the local communities, meaning that they are available only to individuals who have the time and the resources to attend, creating the impression that the subsequent political demands are strategies of local elites to gain power. Even the organizers of the movement against Asia Cement, for example, were greeted with local skepticism and rumours that it was an attempt to gain a seat on the township council, or rather mysteriously, to extort financial gain from Asia Cement, as if companies paid people who organize public protests against them.

Although the Presbyterian Church was an important incubator of social movements, it is noteworthy that activism has moved beyond church networks. Although these groups are largely organized by well-educated urban-based activists, they have managed to create secular groups that also transcend ethnic or tribal identification. These new groups include the Indigenous Youth Front (原住民族青年陣線), the Taiwan Indigenous People Society (台灣原社) which is more overtly tied to demands for Taiwanese independence from the ROC, the Association of Taiwan Indigenous People Development (台灣原住民學院促進會), the Indigenous People Action Coalition of
Taiwan (台灣原住民部落行動聯盟), the Association for Taiwan’s Indigenous Peoples’ Policy (台灣原住民族政策協會), and the Hunter Smoke Action League ( 狼煙行動聯盟). There is also the NGO Millet Foundation ( 小米穗原住民文化基金會), with strong involvement of anthropologists, which funds research and advocacy. Most of these associations are still urban-based, with meetings and public events held mostly in Taipei. Members are educated indigenous people, with some support from sympathetic non-indigenous academics. There are also indigenous student associations at many universities. Although participants in these groups are often also involved in the PCT, and although PCT ministers and other leaders are active in the events they organize, these new movements are less tightly associated with the church and reach a wider public.

An interesting example is the Hunter Smoke Action League, which is rural-based and active in communities along the East Coast. Village-based members of these groups meet regularly, and organize local meetings. They have in some cases used Open Space Technology (Owen 2008), which basically means occupying public space to attract participants, holding meetings in ad hoc circles in which anyone can express their concerns, and then planning protest demonstrations or other strategies to address the concerns raised. The Hunter Smoke Action League has been more successful than URM at reaching out to villagers, not least because they have also been able to offer legal aid to people involved in land disputes with non-indigenous people. Participants in this movement note, however, that most people are too busy with farming and other forms of employment to pay attention to indigenous rights issues or get involved in social movement activities. Prominent in Hunter Smoke Action League activities, as well as in the environmental and anti-nuclear movements, are indigenous singers Panai Kusui
(Puyuma) and Nabu Husungan Istanda (Bunun). Through their music as well as through the Hunter Smoke Action League, they promote a post-colonial understanding of indigenous issues in Taiwan.

The emergence of a social movement external to the church means that it is less infused with Protestant theology, a tendency which may have pleased Presbyterians, but which was equally likely to alienate members of other churches or traditionalists. A new tendency, exemplified by the Hunter Smoke Action League, is a move away from officially registered NGOs with elected boards, an organizational form which easily becomes a tool for elite competition and which can alienate grassroots people. Instead, the Hunter Smoke Action League is a loosely interconnected network of people concerned primarily with local livelihood issues, such as opposition to particular development projects or to encroachments of the Forestry Division and other government bodies on indigenous sovereignty. Every year, the Hunter Smoke Action League draws attention to their existence by lighting bonfires in villages nation-wide on the emotionally salient date of February 28, when many Taiwanese commemorate those who lost their lives in 1947 when the newly arrived ROC government violently oppressed local calls for self-rule. On a day when many Taiwanese reflect on their difficult relation with governments arriving from China, the indigenous activists affirm that they are the true masters of the land.

For the rest of the year, the Hunter Smoke Action League provides a platform for communication between local activists across Taiwan. They thus permit activists involved in a diversity of local projects to share concerns and strategies, as well as information about upcoming protests so that they can travel to other communities and
mutually provide support for common struggles, especially around the aforementioned livelihood issues. Their platforms involve, above all, creative use of new social media.

The Third Unfolding: Use of Social Media

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Alternative media, or what Lee Chin-chuan called “guerilla media” (2003), have played an important part in Taiwan’s social movements from the beginning in the forms of privately published and mimeographed magazines and newspapers and underground radio stations. The indigenous people have also felt marginalized in mainstream media, which led to Article 12 of the Basic Law calling for the establishment of indigenous media. In 2005, Taiwan began broadcasting the first indigenous television network in Asia with the 24-hour Indigenous Television Network (ITV) providing news and educational programming. Established under the auspices of the CIP, there was a requirement that 70% of staff be indigenous. The CIP also distributed satellite receivers to households in mountainous areas; and took steps to make televisions affordable to poor families (Alia 2012: 144).

Although indigenous social activists initially hoped that the new broadcast media would give them a platform to spread a political platform on indigenous rights and many of them took up employment at ITV, this state-funded media has remained sensitive to political considerations and threats to continued funding. ITV has thus taken a relatively conservative approach, focusing on cultural and language content which, nonetheless, does reinforce the ethnic identities of the officially recognized groups. They also have news programs dedicated entirely to indigenous issues, providing nation-wide coverage of events, including protest actions, and other information that in the past was rarely
known outside of the immediate context. Most disappointing to indigenous activists has been the programming on tourism in indigenous areas, emissions that are clearly created for non-indigenous viewers.

These traditional media outlets were soon surpassed by the internet and growing social media, especially those such as Facebook and Twitter available on the ubiquitous mobile telephones. Indigenous youth have been active in blogging, with the result that they can both reinforce their own identities by using their indigenous names and make their concerns better known to non-indigenous readers. By coincidence, the Taiwanese translation of “blog,” based on a phonetic rendering of the English word as bu-luo-ge (部落格), literally means “tribal grid” and uses the word used for indigenous communities (Zheng 2011). Many indigenous blogs are published on Coolloud.org.tw., a web-based media for social activists established in 1997. Although this web site was originally most closely tied to the labour movement, it has become an important site for the publication of new and blogs by groups marginalized in the mainstream media. A bilingual site known as the International Platform for Taiwan Indigenous Peoples provides blogs and news for and about Taiwan’s indigenous peoples and international indigenous peoples in English and Mandarin.²

Most of the afore-mentioned groups have their own web sites. Most notably, however, nearly everyone in Taiwan owns smart phones. This has become the platform for the widespread use of Facebook, Youtube and (to a lesser extent) Twitter to spread social movement ideas and information about protests or other political actions. A Google search in Chinese for Hunter Smoke Action League turns up contributions to

² [http://iptip.wordpress.com/](http://iptip.wordpress.com/)
Facebook, Youtube, Google Groups, Pixnet, Coolloud, and Civilmedia.tw (which archives video footage for Taiwanese social movements). A search for the Indigenous Youth Front reveals they are active on Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Coolloud, but have also established an autonomous bilingual web presence as “Mata Taiwan.”

Mata, which “eye” in many Austronesian languages and some (but not all) Formosan languages, indicates that the web site is intended to be an eye on Austronesian Taiwan. This group, which like Hunter Smoke Action League is active in many livelihood issues, has also taken a strong public stance against the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement.

Indigenous students from this group participated in the Sunflower Movement and also launched their own protests against that agreement in Spring 2014. The Indigenous Youth Front uses Twitter and Facebook to publicize lectures and book discussion groups on indigenous rights, most of which are meetings of university students in Taipei. Mata Taiwan, in sites marked by striking photography, uses Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and even the Chinese blogging site Sina-Weibo in simplified Chinese characters. The postings on this latter site, compared to those on the Chinese sites, are conservative and apolitical, probably indicated some degree of censorship or self-censorship.

[Slide 12: video clip]

Those who are interested in indigenous rights are thus better informed than ever about events happening across Taiwan. Images and information about land disputes in other communities are easily available, as well as notification of protests and other events. These new social media serve multiple purposes as they can simultaneously connect local

3 [http://www.pure-taiwan.info/about-us](http://www.pure-taiwan.info/about-us)
activists, while reaching out to the rest of the world with postings in English and simplified Chinese.

An inundation of information, however, makes it unclear how people actually use the social media without further research. Although most bloggers and creators of online content hope to reach out to a global audience, it is possible that they reach mainly people who are already interested in indigenous issues. As Niezen observed about these movements for social justice, “outreach to publics is almost always in some way like sending a message in a bottle, oriented toward a future audience of unknown provenance and uncertain sympathies” (Niezen 2010: 26). Even at the local level, in the indigenous villages, one cannot assume that people without previous involvement in the indigenous social movements will use these media or be influenced by them in the way hoped by tech-savvy social activists. It is quite plausible that most people are more interested in playing games or sharing photos of cute animals than in following indigenous social movements; and that those who access social movement information on new media are exactly the same people who were already politically motivated. The most recent group visible through its online presence on Facebook is a new political party, the Taiwan First Peoples Party. This also is an unfolding with roots that predate the Ma Ying-jeou era.

The Fourth Unfolding : a New Political Party

[Slide 13]

Since the 1950s, indigenous people have been able to elect in democratic elections their own local representatives as township magistrate, township council members, and village heads; and only indigenous people are permitted to be magistrates in the 30 mountain townships. Yet, since direct legislative elections in the 1990s, most
political energy has been devoted to a quota of indigenous legislators, half of whom are from designated mountain groups and half from designated plains groups. In 2005, when constitutional revisions reduced the total number of legislators from 225 to 113, the quota for indigenous legislators was reduced from eight to six. This suggests that indigenous groups have adequate legislative representation. Although they constitute 2.2% of Taiwan’s population, they have 5.3% of the seats in the legislature. Yet, indigenous activists have long been frustrated with the fact that indigenous people vote overwhelmingly for the KMT; and that indigenous legislators often, but not always, tend to follow the party line rather than represent indigenous interests. Since politicians must campaign island-wide and gain votes from all tribes, moreover, small tribes have little chance to see their members elected (Allio 1998b: 47).

This electoral system has contributed to a dialogic relationship between indigenous groups and the state, through which national parties and state actors negotiate deals with powerful local individuals, groups, and factions; but can have the effect of delegitimizing indigenist strategies if they become perceived as merely electoral strategies (Simon 2010). Although all candidates promise to defend indigenous rights, there is a strong tendency for the KMT and other “pan-blue” or “pro-unification” independent legislators to win elections. The DPP has so far only succeeding in getting elected one plains legislator, and some legislators on island-wide non-indigenous electoral lists (Simon 2010: 731). Indigenous legislators have sometimes been able to make important changes in state-indigenous relations, most notably by creating the Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1996 and by passing the Basic Law on Indigenous Peoples in 2005. They are most successful in negotiating deals with other politicians
when the major parties are near parity in the Legislative Yuan and indigenous legislators can sway the balance of power in either direction (Iwan 2005).

Indigenous activists have long been dissatisfied with this situation. After President Chen Shui-bian promised that state-indigenous relations would be considered to be “quasi-state-to-state” relations, indigenous leaders and activists met at the Council of Indigenous Peoples in the summer of 2004 to draft indigenous clauses for an eventual Constitution of the Republic of Taiwan (Working Group on Constitutional Indigenous Policy 2005). During these discussions, they examined the precedent of the Canadian Assembly of First Nations (AFN). This body, which emerged from and replaced the National Indian Brotherhood in 1985, is envisioned as a place for diplomatic and political relations between sovereign First Nations and, collectively through representation of chiefs from across the country, as the organization for inter-national relations with Canada. This precedent has since inspired indigenous activists in Taiwan, who proudly refer to their own groups as First Nations and who aspire to a similar organizational framework in Taiwan. In 2004, they hoped that a new constitution for their country would include such provisions as an indigenous vice-president and an indigenous assembly in Parliament to institutionalize state-to-state relations. This dialogue between indigenous activists and supporters of Taiwan Independence proved short-lived as their dreams crashed on the shores of political reality, and long before the end of Chen’s tenure. In 2005, none of this was even debated in the last round of constitutional revisions by the National Assembly, which dissolved itself in those revisions, and by 2006, President Chen was already too embattled by “red shirt” protests against corruption (Shih 2007) to propose any more radical changes in indigenous policy.
After Ma Ying-jeou’s election in 2008, indigenous activists decided to take independent action, with Thao Nation activist Shi Qinglong taking a leading role. Inspired by the AFN, they debated at meetings across Taiwan if they should seek to establish an Assembly or a new political party. Some even proposed a bit of a compromise by creating the “Assembly of First Nations Party.” On December 12, 2012, veteran activists from all over Taiwan met in Taipei to formally established the Taiwan First Nations Party. At the opening ceremony, Shi was elected Chair of the First Nations Party nearly unanimously. At the opening ceremony, he explained that “First Nations” means that the indigenous people were originally in Taiwan and that outsiders should not simply declare it to be *Terra nullius*. The first goal is to obtain autonomy and other rights to order to gain equality and justice, so it is important that indigenous peoples and the state can build a new relationship on equal footing. He set the goal of getting some people elected in the 2014 local elections, and hopefully for one legislator in both mountain and plains quotas in the 2014 legislative elections. In 2014, Shi presented his own candidacy as county representative in Nantou.

Shi Qinglong, arguably an ethnic political entrepreneur in the sense meant by anthropologist Fredrik Barth, was the driving force behind this party. Shi’s Thao Nation, located near Sun Moon Lake, has since the Japanese period, been classified by the to be a part of the Tsou tribe. The Japanese converted the natural lake into a reservoir for hydro-electric power, and relocated the group. After the ROC came to Taiwan, they encouraged

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4 The author of this paper was present at the meeting, as he was in Taiwan doing research on another topic and was invited to attend. This summary of the meeting was reported in the Taiwanese media, as in this report on ETToday, 台灣第一民族黨成立 進入國會爭取原住民權益, http://www.ettoday.net/news/20121212/138865.htm, (last accessed September 6, 2014).
Han Taiwanese to move into the area and promoted it as a tourist destination. On September 21, 1999, the area experiences a major earthquake, which destroyed most of their homes and left most of them unemployed. In the subsequent reconstruction, they demanded to form rebuild their former community, including architecture, according to Thao cultural norms. This strengthened their ethnic identity. In 2001, the Thao were the first new indigenous group to gain recognition by the Chen Shui-bian administration as Taiwan’s tenth indigenous tribe. They remain Taiwan’s smallest tribe, with a population of 747 in May 2014. Shi Qinglong became their first representative to the Council of Indigenous Peoples, where he learned about the Canadian Assembly of First Nations, and began adapting to the Taiwanese situation ideas about indigenous rights that were concurrently gaining importance in customary international law. The name rectification movements of the Chen Shui-bian period thus created new institutions that incubated new political entrepreneurs and new networks. Even with a change in President, these institutions and political actors have gained a momentum of their own, and may still take the state-indigenous relation in Taiwan into unexpected directions.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to draw a few comparisons with other social movements in Taiwan. Most importantly, the indigenous social movement is fundamentally different from all others because its starting point is the law of self-determination (Niezen 2010: 113). Built around communities that existed on the territory before the arrival of foreign states, the indigenous rights movement demands recognition in meaningful ways of a nation-to-nation relationship. In Taiwan, this was the spirit that attracted indigenous leaders to accept the formation of chiefdoms and tribal councils
during the Japanese period and “self-government” (自治) and township electoral politics after the arrival of the Republic of China on their territories. This is the same spirit that also animates indigenous protest movements and new political actors, including leaders of the First Nations Party. It is not surprising to indigenous people when the same individuals show up at protests and at state-sponsored events.

[Slide 14]

What does all of this mean? In my book Sadyaq Balae! L’autochtone formosane dans tous ses états, I demonstrated that all of the political and social measures taken for and by the formerly acephelous societies of Taiwan, from township elections to name rectification, contributed to a bureaucratization of indigeneity. The charismatic leadership of these formerly egalitarian societies has been routinized into forms of state leadership, albeit not without resistance from “ordinary people” whose perspectives, like those of the international indigenous movement, are still infused with ideals of equality between men, of autonomy between local groups, and spiritual notions of law. Their main preoccupations have never been to distinguish Taiwan from China; but rather to preserve their own autonomy. Historically, this has often meant accepting alliances with foreign state bureaucracies, whether Japanese or Chinese, in order to limit Hokkien and Hakka access to their territories. Considering the historical tension between these ethnic groups, it is not surprising that indigenous people are reluctant to vote for what they perceive to be a Hokkien-dominated DPP (Simon 2010). They are often distrustful of other social movements, especially the environmental movements which they perceive as being opposed to hunting.
We can better understand the indigenous social movements, and their resilience in the face of political change, if we think of them as composed of individual actors who continue to pursue their own livelihoods and strategies among changing circumstances. We can thus better perceive continuity in terms of the indigenous legislators, township authorities, and public servants who have maintained and even entrenched their positions in Taiwan as the KMT returns to the presidency and the Executive Yuan. We can also see the importance of livelihood issues as thousands of people outside of these privileged positions seek to maintain their own lifestyles based on farming, productive labour, fishing and hunting. Taiwan’s indigenous movement seems to best gain traction if it can relate to the livelihood issues as these lifestyles are threatened by coastal development, nuclear waste storage, or the criminalization of hunting, etc.

But to see the social movements as only elite competition misses most of the picture. After all, these supposed elites, whether they are legislators, township council representatives, Presbyterian pastors, musicians, or underemployed youth with university degrees, are also members of their communities, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters of “ordinary people.” And these elites are not the only people involved in the social movements, which indeed rely for their success on the time and resources of thousands of students, workers, small entrepreneurs, farmers, and unemployed individuals. These people are also capable of judging the other people in their situations, and they do so quite critically when speaking to outside observers, and their intellects are just as keen when they decide to join a demonstrate or vote for a candidate than when they denounce the political activities of their pastor or an elected politician. The actions and strategies of social movement entrepreneurs and their sometimes fickle supporters are neither those of
isolated “rational actors” nor of beings over-determined by culture, but of human beings embedded in social networks, motivated not just by power and money, but also by emotion and faith.

All other social movements in Taiwan, whether they be labour, environment, feminist, or GBLT, face the challenge of reaching out to millions of unrelated individuals, mostly in the urban areas from Taipei to Kaohsiung. The indigenous movement has the also quite daunting challenge of reaching out to small communities anxious to protect their own autonomy. All four of the unfoldings described here can be viewed in this light. The shift to livelihood issues is a way of reframing indigenous rights in terms of local issues, mostly conflicts with forestry officials, national parks, and externally-imposed development projects. The local protest events attract social movement activists from other communities and indigenous legislators, but are still composed primarily of people from the directly affected community, most of whom are related to one another through what anthropologists would call agnatic and affinal kinship, through patrilineal lines and marriage networks. The rise of non-church actors is an attempt to reach across denominational lines, but largely as individual activists reach out to relatives who are members of other churches. The new social media promise to produce new networks; but are in fact more likely to reproduce existing networks. Even the First Nations Party will propose candidates first in local elections and will succeed only if, like the KMT, if it can successfully mobilize kin-based networks.

The long history of indigeneity on Taiwan, its ontological grounding in nation-to-nation relations in spite of a century of bureaucratization, and its embeddedness in tightly-knit kin-based communities, mean that the indigenous social movement is unlike
any other. The indigenous movement is not about the emergence of a Taiwanese *Volk*; in fact, indigenous people often stress that they alone are the true Taiwanese as they deny Hokkien and Hakka the ontological status of non-Chinese alterity. Their social movements, although they emerged at the end of martial law and at the same time as many other social movements that drew energy from dissatisfaction with the KMT, have their own internal dynamics. Eager to remain autonomous from electoral politics dominated by others, they sometimes position themselves as allies of the pan-Green forces but, have also been allies of the pan-Blues. This was very evident when we consider that indigenous activists showed up at both the red shirt rallies in 2006 and at the Sunflower protests in 2014. In fact, they often stress that even debates about independence and unification are debates between Han Chinese. Ever since the Qing Dynasty, but more explicitly during the Japanese period, they are more interested in indigenous-state relations, no matter who controls the state on the other side. From an internal perspective, the indigenous movement is not about Chinese vs. Taiwanese identity. It is not about electoral politics; and even less about Great Power politics in International Relations that go beyond Taiwan. Indigenous activists are concerned internally with relations as they reach out to kin and allies in their own villages. They are concerned externally as they seek to create inter-national relations with other political formations in Taiwan; and even with allies abroad. But true to their ancestral law, it is all about maintaining moral relations that respect the autonomy of the kin-based community.

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