The Quest for Ethnic Reclassification in Multiculturalist Taiwan: The Case of the Sakizaya

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INTRODUCTION¹

Following the decrease in legitimacy that Taiwan’s KMT government suffered after Taiwan’s withdrawal from the UN in 1979, a growing number of disadvantaged groups (ruoshi zuqun 弱势族群) began to voice their claim for the recognition of their ethnic, cultural, and political rights. Emerging in 1984 as an offshoot of an organization connected to Taiwan’s political opposition (Dangwai (黨外),² the pan-ethnic movement of Taiwan’s aborigines (Yuanzhumin 原住民)³ was one of the first of these movements. Apart from dealing with pressing social issues such as the exploitation of aboriginal workers, the leaders of the movement had three main concerns, i.e., the legal anchoring of aboriginal rights in the ROC’s constitution, the reclamation of aboriginal land, and the rectification of ethnic names (zhengming 正名). Perceiving name rectification as an instrument for destigmatization and as a means of promoting and protecting their distinct ethnic and cultural identities, these young aboriginal elites⁴ fought in particular

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² In 1986, the Dangwai became the Democratic Progress Party (DPP). From 1986 until 2000, the DPP was Taiwan’s main political opposition party, and from 2000–2008 the ruling party. In opposition from 2008–2016, the DPP regained the presidency and a majority of the Legislative Yuan in the January 2016 elections.

³ After the official recognition of Taiwan’s indigenous peoples’ self-chosen pan-ethnic name in 1994, Taiwan had used the term Yuanzhumin (= original inhabitants or “aborigines” in English translation) for its indigenous population. Since the beginning of the new millennium, however, aboriginal institutions and organizations in Taiwan have begun to use the term “indigenous” in their English language translations in order to ally themselves with other groups around the world under the rubric provided by the UN. Kerim Friedman, “The Hegemony of the Local.” In this publication, I therefore use “aboriginal” and “indigenous” synonymously. Because Taiwan’s aborigines all belong to the Austronesian language family (nandao yuxi 南島語系), they are also frequently referred to as “Taiwan’s Austronesians.” Their sixteen different officially recognized peoples have different socio-cultural systems and speak mutually unintelligible languages.

⁴ In 1987, Taiwan’s anthropologist Xie Shizhong distinguished three kinds of aboriginal elite (yuanzhumin jingying 原住民菁英): the aboriginal “traditional elite,” such as chiefs and shamans; the KMT regime loyal aboriginal “political elite,” who had not yet been educated in the modern
for the recognition of the self-chosen pan-ethnic name “Yuanzhumin” (原住民 = aborigines) instead of the official name “mountain compatriots” (shandi tongbao 山地同胞) and the commonly used term “mountain people” (shandiren 山地人). In the same vein, they demanded the recognition of individual aboriginal names, and the recognition of the ethnic names of the respective ethnic groups.\(^5\)

As a consequence of Taiwan’s democratic and multiculturalist development in the 1990s,\(^6\) many demands of the island’s indigenous population were able to be realized by the end of the old millennium. Parcels of land that had originally been designated as state land were redefined as aboriginal land, the pan-ethnic name Yuanzhumin was recognized in 1994 and, after 1995, it was possible to use individual aboriginal names on identity cards, etc.\(^7\) After the establishment of the Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) in 1996, the constitutionalization of the Yuanzhumin status was further enhanced, and aborigines became fully recognized and well-respected members of Taiwan’s society, with strong political representation.\(^8\) After many decades of stagnating population growth, aboriginal society now began to prosper again in terms of numbers.\(^9\)

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\(^5\) Chiu and Chiang, “From the Politics of Identity to an Alternative Cultural Politics.”

\(^6\) Jens Damm, “The Multiculturalization of Taiwan.”

\(^7\) For a thorough discussion of the development of Taiwan’s aboriginal movement and its demands, see Kun-hui Ku, “Rights to Recognition,” as well as Michael Rudolph, “The Quest for Difference vs the Wish to Assimilate.”

\(^8\) In Taiwan’s parliament, the Legislative Yuan, which has 113 members in total, Aborigines, who only make up 2.3% of Taiwan’s population, are currently represented by six members, three each for highland (or mountain) and lowland aborigines.

\(^9\) Yen Liang Chiu points to the low growth rate (1%) of Taiwan’s indigenous population between 1964 and 1988. In the years until 1956, the natural rate of increase had still been more than 3%. According to Chiu, the main reason for the low growth rate thereafter was that “aboriginal girls had been purchased by Han military personnel” for marriage. Since these women were no longer registered as aborigines in Taiwan’s patrilineal society, they were no longer visible. Chiu Liang, “From the Politics of Identity to an Alternative Cultural Politics,” 85.
This paper seeks to trace some of the factors that have led to a large-scale ethnic resurgence in Taiwan since the new millennium. Aboriginal society has not only considerably increased in population during this time, but also in the number of ethnic groups. Two trends seem to be of particular interest in this respect, i.e., the trend to reclassify from non-indigenous to indigenous, and also the trend to reclassify from one indigenous group to a different indigenous group. After describing these two trends, I will argue that a specific national and international environment was supportive of a large-scale ethnic resurgence in Taiwan during the first decade of the new millennium. Another major factor, however, was the elitist character of the movements for ethnic reclassification. I will illuminate this latter point by taking a closer look at the reclassification movement of the Sakizaya (Chinese: Saqilaiya 撒奇萊雅), a group that succeeded in becoming officially recognized as being different from the Amis aborigines in 2007. The leading elites knew very well how to manipulate cultural and ethnic features in a way that fit the national requirements and fulfilled the national and international criteria of an ethnic group or an indigenous people, such as historical continuity, a unique language and their own customs and culture. However, despite the success of the elites, it was not possible to convince most of the common people with regard to the new ethnic constructions and they decided to stay Amis.

From an anthropological perspective, it will of course be interesting to explore the considerations and convictions of both segments of society that made them behave in their respective ways. While some authors are convinced that “ethnic actors are rational actors who make choices about their ethnic statuses as (ecological/economic/political) circumstances make this instrumental,” others rather believe that ethnic groups are more than just any other societal group and that “a psychology of primordially defined ethnicity” still plays a strong role in the making of ethnic boundaries. This article will show that instrumental and expressive motivations are both relevant in the Sakizaya’s expression of their ethnic identity. However, because of the different living experiences and impulses/stimuli of ethnic elites and common people, cultural perspectives also differ and impact people’s behaviour and orientations in different ways.

This paper is partly based on personal empirical research (participant observation) and partly on text analysis. During my research on the rituals of the Truku and the Amis from 2002–2006, I also observed Sakizaya festivals and

10 See, for instance, the ILO’s Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 1989 (No. 169), where such criteria are named.
11 Frederik Barth, Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, quoted from Francisco Gil-White “How Thick Is Blood?,” 792.
had the opportunity to interview Sakizaya scholars, such as Li Laiwang 李來旺 (1931–2003) and Huang Jinwen 黃金文 (b. 1948). Regarding the text analysis, I particularly focus on the academic contributions of scholars in Taiwan engaged in examining the Sakizaya movement, as well as on the accounts of the movement’s protagonists.

1. ETHNIC RECLASSIFICATION IN TAIWAN SINCE THE NEW MILLENNIUM

1.1 Reclassification from Non-indigenous to Indigenous

During the 1990s, Brazil’s indigenous population, which comprised less than 1% of the country’s total population, exhibited a rapid 10% per year growth rate.13 Apart from demographic factors, scholars identified “changing racial-ethnic identities” as one of the main causes. Supported by an altered international context and indigenous movements that “valorised indigenous identities as a means to reassert political and territorial claims,” “identity politics prompted ostensibly non-indigenous people to reclassify their race-ethnicity and self-identify as indigenous.”14

If we look at the situation of Taiwan’s aborigines and some of the developments of recent years, we are able to discover some interesting similarities. According to statistics released by the Ministry of the Interior (Neizhengbu 内政部) in 2011, the nation’s aboriginal population increased by 90,000 during the early part of the new millennium – from around 420,000 in 2001 to more than 510,000 in 2010. This was a growth rate of 33% in 10 years. Of this growth, less than 1/3 (28.77%) can be attributed to “natural growth.” The unnatural growth is 71.23%, which the Ministry of the Interior attributes to the fact that people previously registered as non-aborigines had chosen to become registered as aborigines.15 As Sun Dachuan

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13 While the number of indigenous people in Brazil was estimated at around 300,000 in 1991, the 2000 census showed an indigenous population of over 735,000. Stephen G. Perz et al., “Contributions of Racial-Ethnic Reclassification,” 14.

14 Ibid., 9, 8.

15 Neizhengbu, 100 nian shiyuedi yuanzhumin renkou gaikuang. By 2014, both the trend of rapid growth (six times faster than Taiwan’s Han population as documented in the statistical report of the Ministry of Interior in 2011) and an unusually high unnatural growth rate had diminished, a phenomenon which may be attributed to the impact of lower levels of encouragement for ethnic diversity under the government of Ma Ying-cheou. However, the growth rate of Taiwan’s aboriginal population (1.2%) was still higher than that of Taiwan’s Han population (0.9%). Today, aborigines make up 2.3% of Taiwan’s population. Neizhengbu, 104 nian yuanzhumin renkou gaikuang.
孫大川（b. 1953） – chairman of the Council of Indigenous Peoples, Taiwan’s quasi-ministry of aboriginal people – made clear in 2011, the increase in Taiwan’s aboriginal population was stimulated to a certain degree by a more positive self-view and self-identity, which aborigines were able to develop under conditions of diminishing ethnic discrimination. However, he also stated that the increase was also related to welfare incentives. In order to make up for the disadvantages experienced by aborigines in the economy, education and employment, certain benefits are provided by Taiwan’s government. Compared to ordinary people in Taiwan, aborigines currently enjoy advantages such as better old-age pensions and the right to buy or sell aboriginal reserve lands. Younger people in particular can profit from bonus points on entrance exams as well as subsidies for preschool education, study abroad, and tuition. The educational benefits explain why the number of students between the ages of 15 and 19 was particularly high among those who had reregistered as aborigines. At the same time, however, it must be mentioned that students do not receive the bonuses simply in recognition of their aboriginal ancestry. Those who want to take advantage of the bonuses have to pass the National Proficiency Test of Aboriginal Languages (PTAL) in their respective aboriginal language. In 2011, the PTAL was offered in forty-three different language variants.

It is evident that in Taiwan – as in Brazil – the valorisation of indigeneity following de-stigmatization, welfare incentives and other related rights has encouraged many indigenous people to reclassify from Han to aborigine, which in turn has led to a faster growth of the aboriginal population in recent years. The trend has been supported by new regulations according to which even people with only 25% or 50% aboriginal blood are able to change their ethnic status from Han back to aborigine.

16 Shu-hui Lin et al., “Statistics show Aboriginal population increased by 33 percent in past 10 years.”
17 Lilian M. Huang, Strategies in Revitalizing Indigenous Languages in Taiwan, 36–37.
18 Yuanzhuminzu weiyuanhui (Council of Indigenous Peoples), Yuanzhumin shenfenfa. The “Status law of Taiwan’s Indigenous Peoples” was first established in 1994 under the name “Aborigines Status Identification Standard” (Yuanzhumin shenfen rending biaozhun 原住民身分認定標準). In the past, if the father were Han and the mother indigenous, the children were classified as Han. A change in the status law meant that people could gain indigenous status if one parent were indigenous. Since they could subsequently also register their children as indigenous, this meant that people with 50% or even 25% of “aboriginal blood” could obtain indigenous legal status. This being said, the very concept of “aboriginal blood” needs to be questioned, as was achieved by Mark Munsterhjelm in his book Living Dead in the Pacific.
1.2 Reclassification from One Indigenous Group to a Different Indigenous Group

While the trend in Taiwan to reclassify from non-indigenous to indigenous obviously has its analogies in Latin America, as well as in other parts of the world (in the case of China, it is also reported that certain people try to take advantage of minority rights by changing their ethnic status), another more unique phenomenon observed in Taiwan, particularly during the first decade of the new millennium, has been the quest to be reclassified from one indigenous group to a different indigenous group.

A classification of nine different ethnic groups was used by state organs until after the state finally yielded to pressure from the aboriginal movement and its Han supporters to officially acknowledge the political status of Taiwan’s aborigines and their pan-ethnic legal classification in 1994. However, this categorization was soon heavily contested by various members of aboriginal society. One of the main reasons for this was that the existing classification mainly relied on the records of Japanese anthropologists from the time of Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan before World War II. While the classifications generated by the colonizers relied on meticulous and detailed field-work, it was also clear that they were all carried out with the aim of better controlling the island’s aborigines. As Wu Jingyi describes, a typical strategy during the colonial period was to structure villages and townships in such a way that the original cohesion of families and clans was destroyed.

Because after 1993 Taiwan became committed to a multicultural policy and promised to take indigenous rights into full account, the government started large-scale investigations to better understand the reclassification quests of indigenous activists. However, the classification of nine basic groups stayed intact until the year 2000.

19 Lin Meilian, “Joining the Minority.”
20 Some minority groups in Mainland China also voice such requests, although up to now only very reluctantly and unsuccessfully. “Zhijin meiyou guishu,” Zhonghua wang wenhua, October 12, 2009.
21 These are the Amis, Atayal, Bunun, Paiwan, Rukai, Puyuma, Saisiyat, Tsou, and Yami.
22 In an article in Panorama, Sun Dachuan summarized the classification work of the Japanese as follows: “The Japanese also increasingly applied objective criteria to the subject of indigenous peoples. For example, they categorized the aborigines into groups based on criteria like mutual intelligibility of language, physical characteristics, social structure (for example, the Puyuma and Amis had matriarchal societies, the Rukai and Paiwan had aristocratic classes), and religious beliefs (e.g., ancestral worship, the belief in pygmy spirits). It was only at this point that the division of Taiwan’s aboriginal peoples into nine tribes appeared.” Coral Lee ed., “Who Are the Aboriginal Peoples?,” 96.
23 Wu Jingyi, Tansuo Taiwan Huadong diqu de wenhua guanguang.
During Chen Shui-bian’s administration from 2000 to 2008, five additional ethnic groups (xin zuqun 新族群) were officially recognized. The Thao, who were formerly believed to belong to the Tsou, were recognized as an independent group in 2001. With only a little more than 200 members today, the success of the Thao was made possible by enormous support from Han scholars. The Thao were able to be classified as such not because of their language, which had more or less become Hokkien, but because of their specific religion, the Gongmalan religion, which marked their differentiation from the Tsou.

The Kavalan were recognized as Taiwan’s eleventh aboriginal group in 2002. The Kavalan are one of the more than ten Plains Aborigines groups or “Pingpu” (pingpuzu 平埔族) who started to claim their existence in the early nineties. The Kavalan’s recognition was sensational because the Pingpu in general had been classified as Han due to their strong assimilation in Taiwan’s majority society during the time of Japanese colonial rule. Most of the Kavalan, however, were assimilated in the ethnic group of the Amis, so their reclassification (today 1,200 members are registered) did not imply a major increase in Taiwan’s aboriginal population as would have been entailed by a recognition of all Pingpu groups. The Kavalan accumulated many expert research reports with the help of scholars and from 1998 to 1999 they also accumulated Kavalan language educational materials for use in schools. They were mainly recognized because of their still-living language.

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24 This group’s name was originally Cao. They changed their ethnonym from Cao to Tsou after 1996.
25 However, in the past the Thaos’ classification had also been problematic. During Japanese colonial rule, the Japanese ethnologist Inō Kanori 伊能嘉矩 (1867–1925) had classified them as a group from the Pingpu or Plains Aborigines, while Torii Ryūzō 鳥居龍藏 (1870–1953) classified them as belonging to the Highland Tribes (Jap. kosagozoku), to which all nine official aboriginal groups from before 2001 belong and which are again divided into mountain aborigines and lowland aborigines.
26 “Hokkien” is the name of the Taiwanese language. Hokkien (also “Hoklo”) originally derives from the Fukien dialect and is used as the second official language on the island, next to Mandarin.
27 Chen Junnan, Saqilaiyazu de shehui wenhua yu minzu rending, 201ff.
28 The Plains Aborigines or Pingpu must not be confused with the Lowland Aborigines (pingdi yuanzhumin 平地原住民) who are—together with the Mountain Aborigines (shandi yuanzhumin 山地原住民)—officially recognized as “Taiwan Aborigines” today. The Pingpu are a number of aboriginal groups who became assimilated into Taiwan’s Han society over the course of time. For an account of this assimilation process, see the chapter “Where Did the Aborigines Go? Reinstating Plains Aborigines in Taiwan’s History” in Melissa Brown, Is Taiwan Chinese?, 35–65. For a comprehensive account of the Pingpu movement, see Jolan Hsieh, Collective Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
29 Out of 1,700 petitioners 1,073 already had an aboriginal background. Chen Junnan, Saqilaiyazu de shehui wenhua yu minzu rending, 201ff.
The Truku were included as a twelfth group in 2004. Like the Dekedaya and the Toda, the Truku had originally been considered to be a subgroup of the Sediq, which itself was a subgroup of the Atayal. Following the cultural reconstruction efforts of politicians and Presbyterian-Church-ministers, the Truku were – after 8 years of campaigning – reclassified as an independent group, causing a lot of confusion among the other subgroups with respect to their status. The reasons for the success of the Truku recognition movement are complex. As I argue in my study of cultural and ritual construction work during the first years of the new millennium, one of the most salient characteristics of the movement was the gap between competing elites and the common people. While local and national elites who promoted or supported the movement all gained obvious advantages in the process, common people were rather indifferent.

Given the fact that Truku recognition had been prompted to a large degree by the political power considerations of the national and indigenous elites, the recognition of the Sediq occurred four years later in 2008 because there was not much alternative after the Truku, being the largest subgroup of the Sediq, had been reclassified as an independent ethnic group. However, the problem was that at least on the east coast, the Truku, Dekedaya, and Toda (the latter two now with the common ethnic name Sediq) lived in mixed communities. After reclassification, people suddenly found that new rifts began to occur within their villages.

In 2007, the Sakizaya were recognized. The members of this group, which had been classified as a sub branch of the Amis during Japanese rule, were now able to reregister as Sakizaya. By 2015, however, fewer than 900 had done so. This contrasts strongly with the number of Sakizaya that were mentioned in the original petition for recognition, i.e., 15,000.

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30 Michael Rudolph, *Ritual Performances as Authenticating Practices*, 103–32. The argument that Truku recognition was the result of elite competition has also been made by Chi and Chin, “Knowledge, Power, and Tribal Mapping.” For a detailed account of the Truku movement, see also Scott Simon, *Sadyaq Balae!*

31 While local politicians promoted Truku cultural reconstruction because of the officially allocated financial resources, the Taiwan-independence oriented Presbyterian Church of Taiwan hoped to gain more influence in a future autonomous zone. The Democratic Progress Party, which ruled Taiwan from 2000–2008, supported the name rectification campaign in order to win local elections. Chen Junnan, *Saqilayazu de shehui wenhua yu minzu rending*, 200–201.

32 Personal communication with Gariyi in Tongmen in January 2013. Many of the nowadays-aboriginal villages are actually conglomerations of different tribes or tribal groups. Beginning in the Japanese period (1895–1945), people from mountain kin-based hamlets (*buluo* 部落) were moved into mixed-group administrative villages.

33 865 Sakizaya had registered by the end of 2015. Neizhengbu, *104 nian yuanzhumin renkou gaikuang*.

34 Chin Ling-Ling, “Wenhua de faxian yu faming,” 121. The application for the establishment of a Sakizaya ethnic group had been signed by 4,000 people.
In the summer of 2014, during the KMT’s governance under Ma Ying-jeou, two more aboriginal groups were recognized, i.e., the Kanakanvu and the Hla’alua. Both groups had formerly been classified as subgroups of the Tsou.

Other groups, especially from the former Plains Aborigines or Pingpu, still continue their struggle for recognition. Their struggles however proceed with little hope of success because the Council of Indigenous Peoples is disinclined to share its resources with the Pingpu, most of whom (except for the Kavalan as stated above) want to be reclassified from Han to aborigine. For this reason, a significant further increase of indigenous people as a result of reclassification from non-indigenous into indigenous people is not very likely in Taiwan, at least for the time being.

2. INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXTS

Because Taiwan’s aborigines look back on a long history of domination by foreign powers and regimes, it is all too easy to understand that people wanted to return to their own subjective understandings and feeling of belonging under the liberal conditions of democratic Taiwan. As closer observation reveals, however, the phenomenon described is not necessarily only the result of the deep-seated feelings of primordial attachment of people in a post-colonial society. It seems also to be connected to Taiwan’s specific ideological environment as well as to the elite-dominated character of the movements that have fought for ethnic reclassification.

In their study on the reasons for indigenous population resurgence in Brazil, Perz, Warren, and Kennedy state:

Some have explained the indigenous population resurgence as the result of a changing international context in the post-war period .... The United Nations (UN) Declaration on Human Rights signalled this shift and led to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the International Labour Organization Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, and growing attention to mistreatment of indigenous groups. This international context fomented pressure for national policy changes to recognize and protect indigenous people, land claims, and cultural practices. National projects predicated on ethnic homogeneity became less acceptable, and state policies that once involved forced assimilation and ethnic cleansing were curtailed.⁶

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⁵ Iok-sin Loa, “CIP rejects Pingpu status claim.”
As a consequence of increasing global networking in indigenous population issues and Taiwan’s precarious international position after its exclusion from the UN, Taiwan’s aborigines have learned, since the late eighties, to use the international community’s caring attitude as leverage. On the one hand, Taiwan’s anthropologists, such as Xie Shizhong (today a professor at National Taiwan University), introduced aborigines to the Fourth World Movement; on the other hand, Western missionaries such as the Canadian Michael Stainton (today an anthropologist) helped them to understand their indigenous status theoretically. In so-called Urban Rural Mission (URM) training opportunities organized by Canadian religious social activists, aborigines were taught how to struggle and fight for their internationally endorsed rights. Since 1991, representatives of the aboriginal movement have participated regularly in the meetings of the World Group of Indigenous Populations (WGIP), a UN organization in Geneva.37 According to the former leader of the Alliance of Taiwanese Aborigines (ATA), Liu Wenxiong, the contact with the WGIP significantly broadened the horizons of this leading organization in Taiwan’s aboriginal movement. They now felt even more convinced that Taiwan’s aborigines, once recognized, would be entitled to collective ethnic rights similar to those of indigenous peoples of other countries – to cultural rights, intellectual property rights, land rights and the right to self-determination.38 Consequently, on December 10, 1993, the International Day of Human Rights, the ATA and other aboriginal groups marched on the Ministry of the Exterior “to initiate a dialogue between the Han nation and Taiwan’s aboriginal nations.” They handed in a petition entitled “The Struggle of Taiwan’s Aborigines against Intrusion, for Survival and the Return of our Lands.” Referring to intrusion, they demanded that the occupation of aboriginal reservation land by private companies, as well as by the state, be stopped and that aborigines’ intellectual property rights be safeguarded in order to limit the damage caused by the marketing of aboriginal culture. With regard to the crisis of survival, they demanded better surveillance of the physical and cultural development of aboriginal society and improved economic assistance.39 Regarding the return of lands, they demanded that property rights on reservation lands be given to aborigines40 and that the remaining

37 The first time that a member of the Alliance of Taiwanese Aborigines took part in the meetings of the WGIP (defunct since 2006) in Geneva was in July 1988. Since the founding of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in 2002, Taiwan had sent non-governmental delegates to attend the Forum.

38 Liu Wenxiong, “Taiwan Yuanzhuminzu yundong fazhan luxian zhi chubu tantao.”

39 Such demands had strong legitimacy. In 1993, the mortality rate of aborigines was still twice as high as that of the Han. The most frequent causes of death, directly following accidents owing to drunkenness, were a very high suicide rate, tuberculosis of the lungs and liver-cirrhosis. Wang Minghui, Taiwan shandixiang de jiulei xiaofei yu yinjiu wenti.

40 Reservation land was state land. Aborigines had only usufruct rights on this land.
confiscated reservation lands be returned. Generally, it was demanded that the state give legal status and the cultural and autonomy rights connected to this status to aborigines. At the end of the petition, it was stated:

As long as the Han government does not recognize and respect Taiwan’s aborigines’ fundamental human rights and their status as a people, it has neither the right to condemn the PRC for suppressing Taiwan’s international right of existence, nor does it have the right to claim any international right of existence before the international community.

This of course was hard for Taiwan’s government to accept, especially as they had just begun to apply internationally for Taiwan’s return to the UN.

Although the kind of criticism of Taiwan’s government described above ebbed considerably after the recognition of Taiwan’s aborigines as “Yuanzhumin” in 1994 and the establishment of the Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1996, occasional outbursts from aboriginal activists who fought for aboriginal land rights or from groups of people who wanted to be reclassified as aborigines continued. One memorable example occurred in May 2010. Here, the Taiwan Association for Rights Advancement of Pingpu Plain Aborigine Peoples (TARA-Pingpu), led by the Pazeh, filed a complaint with the special rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Council on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People about a human rights violation. Because the recognition of the Pingpu was denied by the responsible government institution (in this case the CIP), their cultures and languages were close to extinction. The situation of the Pazeh was named as a striking example – the Pazeh is one of the Pingpu aborigine groups whose language was classified by the UN in May 2010 as one of the world’s 18 languages close to extinction.

Although the government had increased the reservation lands of aborigines in reaction to the protests in 1988 and 1989, this increase was considered to be too small.

“Taiwan Yuanzhumin ‘fan qinzhan, zheng shencun, huan wo tudi’ yundong xuanyan,” Zili wanbao, Dec. 7, 1993, 4. More on the context within which these claims were articulated can be read in Michael Rudolph, “From Forced Assimilation to Cultural Revitalization.”

Kun-hui Ku observes also that aboriginal activists try to use international human rights organizations’ proclamations as leverage to put pressure on Taiwan’s government. As she puts it, “activists employ a global rhetoric to advance their causes and to demand that the government grant indigenous peoples their basic human rights and status as a distinct group, seeing these demands as a prerequisite for re-entering the international community.” Kun-hui Ku, “Rights to Recognition,” 100–101.

Taiwan minzhu jijinhui, “Shijie minzhu da shiji.”

Lianheguo lie yanzhong linwei de yu yan. Bazaiyu zai qizhong,” NOWnews, May 20, 2010. Only one old woman was still able to speak Pazeh.
The chairman of the CIP, Sun Dachuan, however replied that any recognition of the Pingpu would be difficult because they had mixed with the Han over the previous 300 to 400 years, meaning that currently almost 80% of Taiwan’s Han had Pingpu genes.\(^{46}\)

These incidents show that knowledge about the UN’s pronouncements concerning the rights of indigenous peoples had a real impact on the actions of Taiwanese aborigines, as well as on ethnic resurgence in Taiwan, as seen also in the case of Brazil.

On the other hand, Taiwan’s liberal cultural environment after the beginning of multiculturalism in the early nineties, and especially after Chen Shui-bian’s take-over in 2000, also supported the quest for ethnic reclassification. The main reasons for the establishment of a multiculturalist policy in Taiwan had been a social and a political need: the social need to mediate between different ethnic groups in a previously homogenized, multi-ethnic society, and the political need to demarcate Taiwan politically and culturally from Mainland China.\(^{47}\) Because of aborigines’ exemplary contribution, they were accorded high priority in the multiculturalization process. Their societies had been extremely marginalized in the past and had developed severe social problems which needed to be faced; after Taiwan’s political turn to nativism, aborigines also increased in symbolic value since they were now perceived as strong indicators of the island’s distinctiveness vis-à-vis the mainland. This development even intensified during DPP-rule and became, as it is argued here, one of the reasons that propelled the movements for reclassification forward in the New Millennium.

In the case of the Truku reclassification movement, social anthropologist Mei-hsia Wang writes in her study “The Reinvention of Ethnicity and Culture”:

The Truku Name Rectification Campaign successfully used its political opportunity. The people actively made name rectification an issue during the election of the

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\(^{46}\) “Pingpuzu zheng zhengming kongsu huji dang’an zao yinni,” Ziyou shibao, May 25, 2010. Previous similar actions undertaken by the Pingpu had been handled in an even harsher way by the CIP. In an incident in June 2009, the CIP stated very clearly that the Pingpu were bullying the CIP and all other aborigines by requesting to be included. After all, they had chosen to mingle with the Han during the Qing and were never present when aborigines stood up against the Han. Iok-sin Loa, “CIP rejects Pingpu status claim.”

\(^{47}\) Today, Taiwan’s multiculturalism is not only limited to such social and political considerations, but has also a strong economic angle. Kerim Friedman points to the neoliberal and commercialised nature of Taiwan’s multiculturalism, which, for instance, exploits exotic phantasies of Taiwan’s Han concerning the aborigines for better product marketing or the tourism industry. And both the KMT and DPP find Austronesian consciousness useful when promoting neoliberal free trade agreements with other countries with Austronesian heritage in the Pacific region. Kerim Friedman, “The Hegemony of the Local.”
head of Hualien County in August, 2003. In order to gain votes, the government in power supported the name rectification campaign.\(^{48}\) This process presented that understanding the Taiwanese political background is necessary for understanding the name rectification campaign. The campaign leaders always quoted President Chen Shui-bian’s treaty – “New Partner Relationship”\(^ {49}\) which he proposed in the presidential election in 2000, and Chen’s declaration that “the relationship between aborigines and the Republic of China is the relation between countries” after he won the election in order to gain support from outside. No matter whether the treaty or declaration were made because of election strategy or for showing that Taiwan is an independent country with multiple ethnic groups, they did help elite aboriginals to participate in politics. In the future, it is anticipated that the numbers of aboriginal members in Congress [Taiwan’s Legislative Yuan] will increase and a self-governing movement will take place."\(^ {50}\)

The Truku case shows that calculations with regard to the national and international environment had a strong impact on reclassification issues. The fact that the national political environment heavily influences the motivation to campaign for ethnic classification is also emphasized by social anthropologist Chin Ling-Ling in her study “The Representation and Invention of Culture” about the reclassification movement of the Sakizaya. Chin writes:

When the Sakizaya first applied for reclassification, they did so after close examination of the preceding movements for reclassification by the Thao, the Kavalan, and the Truku. There developed the general assumption among Sakizaya elites that the nativization movement of the Democratic Progress Party had been successful and that it was necessary to seize the opportunity.\(^ {51}\)

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\(^{48}\) The incident is explained in greater detail in Chen Junnan, *Saqilaiyazu de shehui wenhua yu minzu rending*, 200–201: “In order to influence the re-election outcomes of the Hualian county’s head commissioner in 2004, Executive Yuan Premier You Xikun single-handedly announced the establishment of the ‘Truku ethnic group’ without taking into account that the Council of Indigenous Peoples under the Executive Yuan was just making an ethnic classification in that issue. This led to the deplorable situation that the field of ethnology was toppled by political considerations.”

\(^{49}\) *New Partnership Agreement (Yuanzhuminzu he Taiwan zhengfu xin huoban guanxi xieyi)* 原住民族和台灣政府新夥伴關係協議. What Wang here calls a treaty, was actually only a campaign promise with absolutely no legal validity of any kind.

\(^{50}\) Mei-hsia Wang, “The Reinvention of Ethnicity and Culture,” 13. The point that multiculturality is considered to be an asset in Taiwan is also emphasized by the Sakizaya Kilang: “It is very valuable that Taiwan, being a small island, can have such a great diversity of both peoples and cultures.” Zoe Cheng, “The Secret’s Out.”

\(^{51}\) Chin Ling-Ling, “Wenhua de faxian yu famille,” 139.
And having difficulty finding enough proof of the linguistic particularity of the Sakizaya language in her analysis of the differences between the Sakizaya and Amis languages, Lin Shih-hui, a linguist researching indigenous language, states:

It seems to me that this ethnic reconstruction is motivated by the current Taiwan political environment rather than the ethnic group itself. … Some people even consider the Sakizaya recognition by the Taiwan government to be a political show, instead of real ethnic reconstruction.52

As Canadian anthropologist Scott Simon points out in his elaborations about the DPP-government’s plans to implement aboriginal autonomy, there were indeed breath-taking developments during the years 2000–2008, which must have led many people to believe that self-government was imminent and that forming individual ethnic groups would be advantageous.53 There was an increasing trend towards no longer treating Taiwan’s indigenous people as one big homogeneous group artificially divided into mountain and lowland aborigines, but rather as members of a multitude of ethnic groups who deserved autonomy. A first step in this direction had actually already occurred as early as 1997 when, for the first time, aborigines were identified in the amendments of the constitution as “aboriginal” or “indigenous peoples” (Yuanzhuminzu 原住民族) and not just as one monolithic ethnic group as before.54 In the above-mentioned “New Partnership”-election campaign promise of Chen Shui-bian from 1999, this understanding was made even clearer. More and more attention was now paid to the concerns and rights of individual groups. In the preparations for a special “Taiwan” constitution instead of a “Republic of China” constitution, it was even pointed out that the different aboriginal peoples should not only get control over

52 Shih-hui Lin, “Sakizaya or Amis?,” 120. Chin Ling-Ling puts it in a very similar way: “… is the ethnic recognition of the Sakizaya perhaps only the result of the social actors’ rational calculation in the actual political environment?” Chin Ling-Ling, “Wenhua de faxian yu faming,” 122–23. S. W. Huang also emphasizes that in the “Sakizaya’s new ethnic group movement, the influences of the greater society play an important role.” Sakizaya leaders simply did not get around government requirements in designating a new ethnic group and therefore engaged in the objectification of their linguistic differences and cultural traditions. In the same way, they did not get around their inextricable relationship with the Ami and therefore had to act in a prudent way in order not to hurt people’s feelings. S. W. Huang, “Cultural Construction and a New Ethnic Group Movement,” 67ff.

53 Scott Simon, Sadyaq Balael!, 188ff.

54 Scott Simon, All our Relations, 182. At that time, even the UN organization WGIP (defunct 2006) still used the term “indigenous populations” instead of “indigenous peoples” because in international law “peoples” have the right to self-determination. Kun-hui Ku, “Rights to Recognition.”
their respective traditional territory, but that 2% of the state budget should now be allocated to aboriginal autonomous zones. Although such a “Taiwan” constitution was never implemented,\textsuperscript{55} the right of all aboriginal peoples to autonomy was again spelled out in the “Indigenous Basic Law,” which was adopted by the Legislative Yuan in 2005.\textsuperscript{56}


In this section, I will look at the case of the Sakizaya reclassification movement more closely because it bears two characteristics that are exemplary of the larger phenomenon of ethnic recognition movements in Taiwan. As stated above, one of these characteristics is that such movements were strongly inspired and even prompted by Taiwan’s multi-culturalist ideology to which the ROC government had committed itself in the course of nativization and self-differentiation from the Chinese mainland. The other is their elitist character, in the sense that all activists were intellectuals, cultural workers, or politicians. In order to gain official recognition as independent aboriginal groups with their own political representations and own autonomous zones, these elites endowed cultural reconstruction with a high degree of creativity during the initial years of the new millennium. Most illuminating in this respect is Chin Ling-Ling’s study of the reclassification movement of the Sakizaya.\textsuperscript{57} As Chin herself states, one

\textsuperscript{55} In fact, it was never formally proposed to the government. Most likely, Chen used the discourse of a new “Taiwan” constitution to distract his own constituency.

\textsuperscript{56} Scott Simon, \textit{Sadyaq Balae!}, 182–89. Regarding the Indigenous Basic Law, Mark Cherrington points out, “The law foreshadows the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but in some respects it goes even further than that landmark document. The law not only guarantees Indigenous Peoples autonomy, but also provides funding and resources for tribes to implement that autonomy. It not only defines indigenous rights to language, but also establishes programs to research and promote those languages. It restores traditional indigenous names for tribes, rivers, and mountains. It supports the development and promotion of indigenous biological knowledge and provides for education and health services and most of the other rights found in the UN declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.” Mark Cherrington, “Reclaiming Paiwan Culture – Resurrection,” 1.

\textsuperscript{57} Chin Ling-Ling, “Wenhua de faxian yu faming.” Chin’s study is seen as controversial in Taiwan since it “only provides an insight into Sakizaya identity issues and cleavages among the leaders before the recognition in 2007 and is thus more a flash-light on a certain situation than a comprehensive understanding of the development of Sakizaya identity” (personal correspondence with Luo Zhengxin, ethnology professor at National Dung Hwa University, on January 10, 2013 (Luo: “One should not over-sensationalize identity issues”)). An author
of her main research motivations was to discover the actual drive behind the establishment of a Sakizaya identity, considering that most of her informants thought that the Sakizaya had actually been extinct for more than 100 years and that fewer than 600 Sakizaya had registered by 2011, even though the petition with which the Sakizaya had successfully gained recognition as a unique ethnic group in 2007 claimed a total of 15,000 members.\(^{58}\) Whose perceptions were satisfied by this recognition as a unique ethnic group different from the Amis? And “was the drive behind aboriginal nationalism a cultural or a political one?”

In order to find answers to these questions, Chin Ling-Ling looked at several categories in which Sakizaya activists had tried to establish ethno-cultural differentiation between the Sakizaya and the Amis, i.e., with respect to ethnic identity, language, history, traditional costumes, place of origin and rituals. In the following pages, I will sum up Chin’s findings with regard to these six aspects. During her research, Chin discovered that there were actually two competing camps of elites in the Sakizaya movement. On one side there was the school director, Li Laiwang, who was considered to be the “leader spirit” and who, after his death in 2005, was followed by his son Dugu 督固, a commissioner of aboriginal issues in the Hualian county government. On the other side there was the local politician Huang Jinwen, who was a primary school graduate who had worked as a mine worker in the past. Although the scholar Chin Ling-Ling gave Huang the deferential title “tribal elder” in her research, it must be noted here that both Huang and Li were quite detached from their tribal communities and well integrated into the cosmopolitan environment of Taiwan’s Han society. Both of them were very knowledgeable about international concepts of indigenous rights and were well known among Han academics and people interested in Taiwan Studies because of their frequent lectures and talks about the Sakizaya and about aborigines in general.

who discusses the development of the Sakizaya from a broader perspective is Wang Jiahan, *Saqilaiya zuyi rouza jiaocuo de rentong xiangxiang*. Adopting theories from Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, she puts the focus on the high degree of hybridity of the Sakizaya and not on the rifts between the elites as Chin does. Wang, however, admits that she gathered all her knowledge after the reclassification movement. She also frequently points out the high degree of self-centred ambition and arrogance among the leading elites. In the same way as Chin, Wang describes the suspicion of the common people who had observed these leaders’ commitment to Amis identity issues in earlier times.

\(^{58}\) Shih-hui Lin, “Sakizaya or Amis?,” 116.
3.1 Ethnic Identity

The most difficult task faced by the leaders of the Sakizaya recognition movement was to encourage the Sakizaya to talk openly about their ethnic identity and to admit to it. Many Sakizaya believed that they were indeed Amis because of their long history of settling with the Amis, their intermarriage in a matrilineal society, and because of the strong influence of the Amis language. Furthermore, even people who identified with being Sakizaya harboured strong feelings of respect toward the Amis. During the movement, many elderly people incessantly reminded the elites that the feelings of the Amis should not be hurt. The elites were actually very clear about this point: Since “most of the members of the CIP were Amis,” one had to make one’s requests in a way that did not offend the Amis. Thus, it was pronounced that the Sakizaya revered the Amis as the “eternal mother-ethnie.” Facing these difficulties, some tribal elites used the results from genetic research to show that there were differences in the distribution of certain antigens between Sakizaya and Amis.59

Nevertheless, strong feelings of ethnic loyalty arising from intermarriage finally proved to be one of the largest obstacles in the shift from an Amis to a Sakizaya identity. As the Sakizaya scholar, Chen Junnan, argues, most of those tribal members who in the end refused to register as Sakizaya had Amis relatives.60

3.2 Language

While previous research had argued that Sakizaya was a branch of Amis, new research results emerged in the following years demonstrating that 60% of the Sakizaya language differed from Amis. This was considered to be sufficient proof that Sakizaya had its own system.61 In the Sakizaya recognition movement, one of the most important claims used by the Sakizaya elites was the language.62 However, only people over 60 years of age still use both Amis and Sakizaya in daily life; younger people can speak only Amis. As the local politician Huang Jinwen emphasizes, it is usually considered to be more polite and decent to speak Amis in public; furthermore, it ensures that one is understood by others. Another problem with the Sakizaya language is that it consists of too many different dialect

59 Chin Ling-Ling, “Wenhua de faxian yu faming,” 133.
60 Chen Junnan, Saqilaiyazu de shehui wenhua yu minzu rending, 234.
61 Paul Li Jen-kuei, Taiwan nandao minzu de zuqun yu qianxi, quoted in Chin Ling-Ling, “Wenhua de faxian yu faming,” 134. Chin insinuates that the differences in research findings might have also been influenced by the changed political climate.
variants, which has led to constant quarrelling among the tribes about the correct lexical uses of words. After several years of standardization efforts, the language controversy stagnated because too few people were using the Sakizaya language. Despite the desolate state of the Sakizaya language, it became a component of the indigenous special admissions requirements to universities. It can be assumed, however, that under the prevailing conditions of language proficiency, students believe that they are better off remaining Amis and being tested in the Amis language.

3.3 History

The biggest influence on Sakizaya identity was the Takobowan incident in 1879. There are two different versions of what happened. In one version, the Kavalan-Pingpu from the Jialiwan settlement united with the Sakizaya against the harsh politics of the Qing court, which led to the Jialiwan incident and the destruction of Takobowan – until 1879 the biggest settlement of the Sakizaya in the Hualian basin – by Qing troops. In the other version according to the interview results of Huang Jinwen, the Takobowan-Sakizaya stood up against the exploitative Qing soldiers and killed many of them. The Kavalan-Pingpu from Jialiwan heard about this and also tried to rebel but were defeated in an incident, later called the Jialiwan incident. When captured and tortured, they admitted that the idea originally came from the Sakizaya. The Qing troops took revenge by destroying Takobowan and burning the Sakizaya chief and his wife openly in front of their people. Subsequently, the Sakizaya fled to the neighbouring Amis tribes and assimilated themselves with the Amis in order to remain undiscovered. The elderly today still say that one should not speak Sakizaya because one will be decapitated. Since they did not dare to reveal their identity, they were also categorized as Amis in the Japanese registers.

The discourse about Takobowan provides a convincing reason for the Sakizaya “to hide” among the Amis for such a long time. Even today, they are often called “a hidden ethnic group,” as observed by Lin Shih-hui. It also provides historical

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63 Ibid., 120. Lin contends that this fact seems to have increased the Sakizaya’s motivation to learn their language. This, however, seems doubtful to me.
64 For a detailed description of the incident, see also S. W. Huang, “Cultural Construction and a New Ethnic Group Movement,” 48–49. Huang’s article contains an excellent map of the distribution of the Sakizaya in the past and today.
66 Shih-hui Lin, “Sakizaya or Amis?” The local politician Huang Jinwen describes that the Sakizaya were once called Sakilikil (beggars) by the Amis, because they were always begging for food. Chin Ling-Ling, “Wenhua de faxian yu faming,” 131.
proof for the claim of ethnic rectification. However, because of the century-long silence surrounding the Sakizaya and Takobowan, young people have had even greater difficulty in accepting an identity shift than the elderly. Until recently, they had never even heard about Takobowan.

3.4 Traditional Costumes

The traditional costumes of the Sakizaya were originally black – the same as the clothing of the Amis, which was only recently changed to red because red was deemed to be more attractive for tourists. As long as they were considered to be Amis, the Sakizaya had always worn the red Amis costumes at traditional events. During the campaign for reclassification, however, the elites developed a new style of traditional clothing. Using six different colours, they tried to create a new narrative: light brown for the Sakizaya soil, green for the bamboo, red for the loss of blood during warfare, blue for peace, white for the firegod, and black for the ancestor souls. Nevertheless, as Chin Ling-Ling discovered, most people did not throw away their Amis clothing, but kept them in their wardrobes “for later use.” The new costumes were totally unfamiliar to other people and many wearers experienced the new clothing as being impractical as it caused confusion during the united ethnic festivals; some even experienced discrimination.

3.5 Place of Origin

Until very recently, most scholars in Taiwan actually believed that the Sakizaya were a branch of the Nanshi-Amis and had always lived close to Hualian. This view was first challenged by Li Laiwang. In order to find proof for the Sakizaya’s differentiation from the Amis, the Sakizaya school director undertook his own investigations. After a journey to Tainan on Taiwan’s west coast, he found similarities between the languages of the Siraya-Pingpu and the Sakizaya, which led him to the hypothesis that the Sakizaya must have originated in Tainan. He concluded that it was not before the mid-17th century and the arrival of Koxinga’s

67 Ibid., 135.
68 Ibid., 139.
69 Ibid., 146.
70 The local politician Huang Jinwen in ibid., 146.
71 Ibid., 147.
72 The Nanshi-Amis also called themselves Qilai-Amis after the ancient name of their location, the Qilai-plain (i.e., Hualian-plain). However, with respect to legends, social habits, and language, academics never reached an agreement as to which group the Sakizaya belonged. Some even pointed to similarities with the Pazeh. Ibid., 129.
forces in Tainan that the Sakizaya were forced to leave the west coast and settle on the east coast.73

On the contrary, interviews carried out by Huang Jinwen showed that the Sakizaya had always lived in the Hualian plain, even before Koxinga [1661–83]. Huang contends:

The old people say that all Nanshi-Amis are actually Sakizaya; the ignorant Japanese classified them all into Nanshi-Amis. In this region, the language is a mixture of Amis and Sakizaya. But after the recognition of the Sakizaya, the Nanshi-Amis don’t admit that they are actually Sakizaya. And when you say yourself that you are an Amis, they declare that you are a Sakizaya.74

The view that the Sakizaya had settled in Hualian even before the arrival of the Koxinga has recently found support among non-Taiwanese academics. According to studies by the Spaniard Jose Eugenio Mateo Borao, sources among the Spanish colonizers show that the Sakizaya were once an independent group in the Hualian basin. The dispersal of the Sakizaya happened only after the Takobowan incident in 1878.75

Amazingly, however, almost all of the people over 60 adhered to the version established by Li Laiwang, i.e., that the Sakizaya originally came from the west coast. As Chin discovered, they tended to believe the school director rather than the local politician Huang Jinwen, who was only a primary school graduate. One of Huang’s informants even stated that his people from the Maliyun tribe also actually came from the Sakizaya’s ancient tribe of the Takobowan, but that he had not dared tell Li Laiwang since the latter was such a revered authority. Huang Jinwen himself angrily remembered an incident during which Li said to him that he had read “more about history than Huang and that Huang must therefore listen to him.” In the movement’s circles, Huang’s version was eventually accepted in so far as it pointed to the fact that the Sakizaya had always existed but had been ignored by the state and wrongly classified by scholars.76 Chin Ling-Ling, however, wonders whether the low number of registrations was perhaps due to divisions among the leading elites of the Sakizaya, the more so since similar divisions could also be observed in other fields of cultural reconstruction. To many common people, the different discourses that suddenly popped up just

73 Ibid., 136.
74 Ibid., 130–31.
76 Ibid., 140.
seemed too fantastic: “You can reconstruct, that’s no problem, but you should have some foundation for that and not take it from nothing.”77 This built up to such a degree that ordinary people just did not “care anymore,” while at the same time they did not dare to intervene since the elites “had read so much more.” As Chin puts it, the inconsistencies of the discourses only fuelled the underlying doubts of the Sakizaya, who had hidden their identity for so long.78

3.6 Rituals

Another major issue of contention among elites was ritual reconstruction. Until the beginning of the 1990s, the Sakizaya had participated in the festivals and rituals of their respective Amis settlements. In 1990, school director Li Laiwang revitalized a so-called ancestor reverence ceremony (jizu dadian 祭祖大典) which, however, was very similar to the Christianized annual performances that were enacted in Amis tribes during the 1990s. The ceremony itself was framed by square dances and speeches by the tribe’s local political elites. I observed one of these performances in 2004 in Hualian. Members of altogether six different tribes of the Sakizaya took part and the language used was invariably Amis.79 The only exceptional aspect was that the dancers themselves did not sing as villagers did during the ceremonies performed in the less urbanized Amis settlements such as Taibalang or Matai’an. Instead, they danced to popular songs by the Betelnut brothers, an Amis pop group.

In order to create a specific Sakizaya ritual, Dugu, the son of school director Li Laiwang, “revitalized” the so-called “firegod ritual” (huoshenji 火神祭; Balamal in Sakizaya language) in 2006. The ritual portrays the burning of the Sakizaya’s chief and his wife in 1878 by Qing Forces. Since the firegod ritual stood for the exclusive and incontestable experience of the Sakizaya during the Takobowan incident, it was considered not to offend or deny the common traditions with the Amis.80 Asked about the authenticity of the ritual’s contents, Dugu emphasized that the Sakizaya had not only always had rituals in which they worshipped spirits with fire, but that it was also normal to welcome, feed, and worship spirits and see them off again. This was tradition, and the Han had this, too.81

The local politician Huang Jinwen, however, made it very clear that he did not approve of this new creation because it was not aimed at a real firegod, but

77 Informant of idem, “Wenhua de faxian yu faming,” 141.
78 Ibid., 141–42.
79 The activity took place on September 4, 2004 in a southern suburb of Hualian city.
81 Ibid., 135, 142.
only at the souls of the deceased chief and his wife. There were other ways to commemorate the deceased. Meanwhile, the ordinary people did not seem to object to the firegod ritual. As Huang himself stated, they appreciated the correct relationship between their Christian religion (more than 80% aborigines are Christians) and the reconstructed rituals, which existed in the case of the firegod ritual since it was about the reverence of ancestors and not the worshipping of gods.\(^82\) Huang’s ambivalence concerning the correct manner of Sakizaya ritual revitalization mirrors one of the big dilemmas in all reclassification and cultural revitalization movements in Taiwan’s multiculturalist setting in general. Only the revitalization of the ancestor gods or spirits, but not the revitalization of mere ancestor reverence, was deemed capable of testifying to the aborigines’ strong foothold in an authentic aboriginal tradition.\(^83\) Last of all, however, common people were much too devoted to Christianity and their Christian god and thus reluctant to accept any essentialized traditionalist performances.\(^84\)

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

After the aborigines’ recognition by Taiwan’s government in 1994 and the establishment of special institutions for indigenous peoples at the ministerial level in 1996, the pan-ethnic aboriginal movement, which had been so strong during the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, began to dwindle. A number of disconnected sub-movements of separate ethnic groups now evolved, movements that strove on behalf of social matters, land rights, or for ethnic reclassification of their own ethnic groups.

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\(^82\) Ibid., 143–44. In one interview, Huang Jinwen states: “I have also been acting as ritual leader in rituals. Before the ritual, I always pray to God and say that my upcoming performance is solely meant as a representation of the things my ancestors did. In the ritual I am not calling to the gods of my ancestors, but to my own god. I won’t depart from him, I am only performing …,” ibid. As Wang Jiahan describes, another ritual – the sea god ritual (haishenji 海神祭) – was developed as another variant of revitalized ritual in subsequent years. Wang Jiahan, *Saqilaiya zuyi rouza jiaoecuo de rentong xiangxiang*, 30.

\(^83\) Friedman also considers this requirement in Taiwan’s multiculturalism – the requirement to be “more authentic than authentic” – as highly problematic. Taiwan’s multiculturalism emphasizes not only the necessity of profound subjectivity, but also – at least in the case of Taiwan’s Austronesian heritage – the strong importance of “authentic” tradition. It is the impossibility of reaching this goal that hampers the independent development of Austronesians in Taiwan and in turn lets them, and especially their elites, fall into the trap of “fractal recursivity,” that is the temptation to form ever-smaller entities of alleged authenticity. Friedman warns that such a development will in the end weaken rather than strengthen Taiwan’s Austronesians. Kerim Friedman, “The Hegemony of the Local,” 21ff.

\(^84\) Michael Rudolph, *Ritual Performances as Authenticating Practices*, 212.
In this article, I have focused on the aborigines’ quest for ethnic reclassification in contemporary Taiwan. I have argued that efforts to be recognized as an independent ethnic group are not only the result of deep-seated feelings of primordial attachment of people in a post-colonial society. As in the case of Brazil, the phenomenon is also supported by a national and international context that valorises indigenous identities as a means of reasserting political and territorial claims. Another related reason is the strong elitist influence in the movements for ethnic reclassification.

Regarding the international context, Taiwan’s aborigines are well connected with indigenous peoples from other parts of the world and participate regularly in international meetings. In this way, they have a thorough knowledge about the rights indigenous groups should have. As we can see from various undertakings of the aboriginal and the Pingpu movements, members often try to use the UN for political leverage in order to implement their political claims.

Taiwan’s national context was supportive in so far as aborigines received increasing attention as members of individual indigenous groups in the years from 2000–2008 when the DPP ruled Taiwan. During that time, the right of every single aboriginal group to autonomy was particularly stressed and must have served as a particular incentive to form individual ethnic groups.85 During that time, five new peoples were recognized. However, as one can see from the acknowledgement of the Kanakanavu and Hla’alua as distinct aboriginal peoples in 2014, ethnic reclassification has also been possible under the KMT government. Scott Simon suggests that the government – very similar to the processes adopted in the Chen Shui-bian era – nodded through the acknowledgement to please voters before the legislative and local elections at the end of 2014.86 A significant difference between the two eras is nevertheless that the DPP government was particularly interested in displaying Taiwan’s multiculturality and ethnic diversity with regard also to non-Han groups on the island. And – as Simon emphasizes – since the DPP itself was pursuing self-determination, it was better able to understand the aborigines’ requests regarding autonomy.87

85 Autonomy has not yet been realized. During the first years of Ma’s administration, natural disasters hindered further discussions of the issue because the infrastructure in aboriginal areas first needed to be renewed. Since 2010, autonomy has been – under the guidance of the CIP – under discussion again, although in a very conservative fashion, one which is not accepted by the more radical activists because, in this version, the extension of aboriginal territory through the apposition of traditional territory and the guaranteed allocation of a state budget are no longer designated. Scott Simon, Sadyaq Balae!, 204.

86 Scott Simon, All Our Relations, 13.

87 Scott Simon, Sadyaq Balae!, 183.
A common characteristic of all movements for ethnic reclassification is that the main actors were intellectual and political elites. Their visions and ensuing cultural constructions, however, did not always reflect the perspectives of the common people and therefore served as another affirmation of the “elites without people” phenomenon observed in the activities of the pan-ethnic aboriginal movement of the 1980s and 1990s.88 Simon, for instance, describes the strong aversion that the common people among the Truku and the Sediq (both groups who had previously belonged to the Atayal people) developed against the creation of independent Truku and Sediq groups by their peoples’ elites.89

Focussing on the example of the Sakizaya, who were recognized as Taiwan’s 13th aboriginal group in 2007, I have described how – also in this case – the process of campaigning was dominated by ethnic elites who had a thorough understanding of national and international requirements and frameworks. As in the reclassification movements of other groups, common people showed little interest in these efforts. However, the assiduousness with which Sakizaya elites attempted to create ethnic differentiation vis-à-vis the Amis and implement their newly constructed cultural symbols, despite the lack of empathy displayed by the common people, is striking.90 Very obviously, without the efforts of the Sakizaya elites, no independent Sakizaya ethnic group would have been established.

As Chin Ling-Ling explains, one of the reasons for the gap between Sakizaya elites’ and the common people’s perceptions was the difference in the understanding of the situation of their ethnic group. While most ordinary people did not have any feeling of crisis and continued to identify with the Amis along with their Sakizaya identity, the elites worried incessantly that the Sakizaya language and culture might become extinct.91 As another reason for the gap between the elites and the people, Chin identifies the division among the leaders of the movement concerning the question of cultural reconstruction. She sees their quarrel as one of the reasons for the low rate of registration and the lack of cohesion of the ethnic groups:

88 Michael Rudolph, *Taiwans multi-ethnische Gesellschaft*; idem, “The Quest for Difference vs the Wish to Assimilate”; idem, “From Forced Assimilation to Cultural Revitalization.”


90 “By historical investigation, representing the ritual and cultural tradition, the elites acknowledged their new identities. But gaps between the ethnic definition and knowledge of legends exist between the elite promoters of the new identity and the masses.” Chin Ling-Ling, “Wenhua de faxian yu faming,” 161, English-language abstract of the Chinese language article.

91 Ibid., 151. As Dugu makes clear, one of their initial motivations had also been to prevent the Sakizaya identity being further concealed in front of the Amis. And he adds: “If we do our best to preserve, the government will also provide some funds in order to manage these things,” ibid., 151.
... only the influential can acquire resources that allow them to construct their ideal Sakizaya identity, while common people do not have much opportunity to participate. ... There is so much individual competition concerning the question of cultural reconstruction, a situation which can be observed in all aboriginal tribes. The present subsidization policy of the government for the promotion of aboriginal culture is actually the reason why the ethnic group(s) do not hold together.92

Here, Chin puts her finger on one of the weak points of Taiwan’s multiculturalism. In a publication about the change of aboriginal ritual in the era of multiculturalism,93 I described how cultural activities were often used by elite factions or individuals as “authenticating practices” through which they could show their power and influence. Subsidies received for the events were then often re-channelled into resources needed during political election campaigns.

Whether it was their feeling of crisis, their search for authenticity, or their competition among each other – elites reconstructed history and culture in sometimes-fantastic ways. While the reconstructions did not convince the common people of their group identity, they satisfied the national and international prerequisites necessary for the establishment of a unique ethnic group and were thus supported by scholars and governmental bodies.94 Euphemistic manipulations on the part of the tribal elites, however, also played a role in the reclassification process. In an interview with Chin Ling-Ling, the Sakizaya scholar Chen Junnan – one of the promoters of the movement – admits that from the beginning he had estimated the number of possible registrants at 4,000 at the highest. They had written the number 15,000 into the petition on purpose. “Especially when one strives for recognition, one has to make the number particularly big; only in this way would the Council of Indigenous Peoples pay attention.”95 Chen Junnan lists the following reasons for his belief that no more than 4,000 people would register: Reregistration would not make any difference in terms of welfare issues. Furthermore, reregistration would be bothersome and humiliating, since the responsible officials in the township administration had most likely never heard of the Sakizaya. Unfortunately, the Sakizaya did not have their own township as the Truku and Sediq did. In these latter cases, the reregistration had more or less been automatic. The township administration of Xiulin, for instance, sent a document directly to the registration

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92 Ibid., 153.
94 Chin Ling-Ling states with a slight touch of resignation: “The paradox is that the crucial point why ethnic groups are “seen” at all is because academic research convenes with the determinations of state power.” Chin Ling-Ling, “Wenhua de faxian yu faming,” 128.
95 Ibid., 149.
office in which they stated that the whole group in the region was Truku. Thus, everybody reregistered from Atayal to Truku. This strategy would not have worked for the Sakizaya who did not have their own administrative region. Even worse, the history, culture, and language had been too long forgotten and the experience of intermixture with the Amis was too strong to be abandoned ad hoc. In many cases, reregistration might also have implied the division of family fortunes, all things one had not thought about before.

For the elites, on the other hand, there were more promising opportunities. Similar to the leaders of other reclassification movements, the Sakizaya elites were organized in a Tribal Development Association, whose aim it was to lead their people to an autonomous future. “We want to be autonomous, definitely,” says Dongieman, acting chairman of the association, in an interview with Taiwan Info in 2007.96 Taiwan Info then provides the following interpretation for Dongieman’s euphoric attitude:

Being formally identified as a separate tribe has its advantages. Tribes get their own representatives in the CIP and also access to government funds for language and cultural programs. … In the future, if the Indigenous People’s Autonomous Area Act, now being drafted, comes into force, tribes will have autonomy over the land designated to them as a result of negotiations between various bureaucracies, political interests and other tribes.97

This short paragraph insinuates what was also at stake in the movements for ethnic reclassification. The view that the prospects regarding an increase of administrable land and positions were a major reason for large-scale “ethno-genesis” and the struggle for autonomous zones for each people is also shared by anthropologist Scott Simon. He sees the phenomenon as part of a process he circumscribes as the “bureaucratization of indigeneity” where the once charismatic leaders or “Big Men” of the past were replaced by paid bureaucrats. Under the new conditions, the idealistic aims of the earlier pan-ethnic movement (particularly the ethnic survival of the aboriginal collectives) often yielded to more “material motivations” or the wish to satisfy individual interests. For Simon, this dilemma became particularly clear during the drafting process of the Indigenous Autonomy Act (Yuanzhumin zizhifa cao’an 原住民自治法草案). When the CIP presented the draft for the first time in 2010, most members of Taiwan’s

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96 Zoe Cheng, “The Secret’s Out.”
97 Ibid., 6. The argument that ethnic elites’ efforts were motivated to a large degree by the expectation of filling vacant positions in their respective autonomous zone’s institutions is also put forward by Scott Simon, Sadyaq Balae!, 204–5.
aboriginal elite seemed to be satisfied with it, although the draft only envisaged the realization of autonomy and the reorganization of tasks and positions within the aborigines’ territory’s current borders instead of requesting the return of the vast traditional territory. The original idea behind autonomous zones – i.e., to provide the aboriginal public with more resources and a refuge to which they could retreat in a time of massive influxes of guest workers from South-East Asia – had not been considered in the CIP’s act. In the course of the dispute that evolved, Scott Simon observes, only the church ministers and other members of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan still kept their fundamental belief in the possibility of establishing social justice via the establishment of autonomous zones. “For them, it was a real mission.”

Although PCT church elites did not play a noteworthy role in the Sakizaya recognition movement, this does not of course mean that the Sakizaya’s ethnic elite zeal to create their own ethnic group had developed out of pure self-interest. It rather seems that both instrumental considerations and primordial feelings played a role here. The same is true in the case of the divergent attitude of the common people. A closer look shows that the contradicting views of both segments of aboriginal society were caused by strong differences in people’s socialization and living experiences. Because of the constantly changing character of ethnicity according to subjective perceptions, many ethnologists today agree with Brubaker’s notion of “ethnicity as cognition,” which advocates that ethnicity should not be regarded as fixed “entities” in the world, but rather as “ways of seeing” or perspectives on the world.

Apart from the discussed practical considerations, the Sakizaya’s ethnic elites harboured a deep ideological belief that the paternalism and flawed classification system of the “colonial” Han regime had to be overcome and that authentic ethnic labels and the attached cultural rights needed to be reinstalled. As my article has shown, these convictions were fostered in an environment which was “post-traditional” in Anthony Giddens’ sense and which was characterized by the

98 Scott Simon, Sadyaq Balae!, 205–6. The drifting apart of interests of the different elites can be partly explained by the fact that the PCT’s system is ideologically and financially independent of the state. The church raises its own elites in a number of colleges and church institutions where PCT ideology is incessantly re-enforced. For a discussion of the PCT system and ideology see Michael Rudolph, Taiwans multi-ethnische Gesellschaft, 168–200.

99 One of the main reasons for this phenomenon is the low representation of the PCT in the Amis-communities where the Sakizaya movement developed. In these communities, the Catholic Church has a much stronger position. Another reason is that headmaster Li Laiwang strongly opposed the interference of Christian religion in any matters concerning Sakizaya tradition. S. W. Huang, “Cultural Construction and a New Ethnic Group Movement,” 64–65.

global flow of ideas. As most ethnic elites had grown up in the Han system, they were relatively detached from their societies and worried incessantly that the Sakizaya’s language and culture might become extinct. Being aware of the dynamics of Taiwan multiculturalism, they were convinced that this was the very last opportunity to salvage Sakizaya culture. Name recognition and cultural construction were necessary preconditions for this salvation.\textsuperscript{102}

On the contrary, common people who still lived together in their common settlements together with Amis did not harbour these feelings of crisis. They experienced their mixed Sakizaya-Amis ancestry intensely every day through their interaction with their Amis relatives and therefore continued to identify themselves with the Amis. For most of them, a separation from their Amis identity not only seemed impractical, but also uncomfortable.\textsuperscript{103}

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\textsuperscript{101} Anthony Giddens, “Living in a Post-Traditional Society.”

\textsuperscript{102} Chen Junnan in Chin Ling-Ling, “Wenhua de faxian yu faming,” 153. Chen makes it very clear here that subsidies will not flow forever. If one did not act now for the sake of the Sakizaya, other groups would register their stakes first, and the salvation of the Sakizaya would no longer be impossible.

\textsuperscript{103} Also, see Michael Rudolph, \textit{Taiwans multi-ethnische Gesellschaft}, and idem, \textit{Ritual Performances as Authenticating Practices}, where these differences are explored in greater detail in relation to the instrumental and expressive motivations of aboriginal elites and common people.


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