

Nonrecognition of the Siraya People and the Status of the Plains Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan*

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The thesis is that our identity is partially shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or a group of peoples can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.

Charles Taylor (1994: 25)

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007: Art. 33.1)

Introduction

As of 2010 May, the Indigenous population of Taiwan is 507,690, constituting roughly 2.2% of the total population of Taiwan. These Taiwanese Indigenes belong to 14 officially recognized “Indigenous Peoples,” including the Amis, the Atayal, the Bunun, the Kavalan, the Paiwan, the Puyuma, the Rukai, the Saisiyat, the Sakizaya, the Sediq, the Thao, the Truku, the Tsou, and the Yami. In addition, there are some 8 “Plains Indigenous Peoples” (Pin-Pu Tribes), who have lost their indigenous status after the War: the Babuza, the Hoanya, the Ketagalan, the Makattao, the Pazeh, the Papora, the Siraya, and the Taokas. While the Siraya and the Makattao, along with the above mentioned Kavalan, may be found in the east coast, the rest scatter around the great plains of the west.

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At the first glance, the Plains Indigenes seem to have enjoyed both the identity of the Han People and that of the Indigenous ones as they stand strategically between these two peoples (Fig. 1). While only very few Plains Indigenes are lucky enough to be accorded indigenous status, the great majority of them have lost their ones. In reality, they are neither Han nor Indigenous enough to be accepted and trusted as bats are nothing but mammals that can fly.

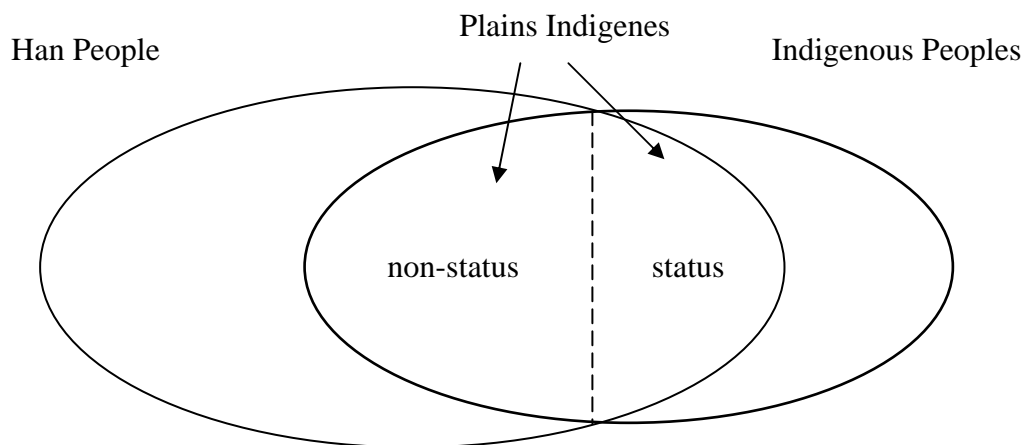


Fig. 1: Status of the Plains Indigenes

Recognized or not recognized by the government, all of these peoples share the same Austronesian stock both ethnically and linguistically. Nonetheless, the Taiwanese government has so far adamantly refused to accept the latter's attempts to register themselves as Indigenous Peoples. While the sympathetic Tainan County government has been enthusiastic to undertake the registration for the Siraya People under its jurisdiction, the cabinet-level Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) has collaborated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to block the efforts, which has prompted the former to sue the latter for administrative negligence.

Meanwhile, the frustrated Taiwan Association for Rights Advancement of Pingpu Plain Aborigine Peoples (TARA-Pingpu), led by the Pazeh, recently filed a complaint to Professor James Anaya, the United Nations Human Rights Council Special

Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People, who is said to have accepted the case (Central News Agency, 2010). As a result, the fretted CIP is forced to accelerate its response to the grief and promise to set up a task force to deal with the issue.

After this brief introducing, we like to probe the collective identity of the Siraya People as the test case for the Plains Indigens. Secondly, we would look into how official practices of indigenous recognition have evolved over the years after the War. Thirdly, we examine current policy controversies over official recognition of Indigenous Peoples. Finally, we would explore possible ways to solve the intractable issue.

Collective Identity of the Siraya People

Although there is no agreement over the origin of Taiwanese Indigenes, there have been some linguistic and biological evidences that Taiwan may be the cradle of the Austronesian Peoples, who subsequently migrated to Micronesia and Polynesia over the millenniums (Gray, et al., 2009; Moodley, et al., 2009). Furthermore, Paul Jen-Kuei Li (2010), an internally renowned linguist from Taiwan, posits that all Taiwanese Indigenes started their diffusions from contemporary Tainan County and scattered around the whole island in waves of internal migrations and settlements. Accordingly, the Siraya People may not only be the proto-Taiwanese Indigenes but also the proto-Austronesian.

As deer-hunters sojourning the great western plains, the Siraya People had eventually established cohabitations with the Dutch, who colonized Taiwan from 1624 to 1662, after their first encounters. While the Dutch provide for food to the Siraya People, the latter would serve as mercenary against the Han settlers for the former. It is no wonder that after the Ming Dynastic loyalist Koxinga defeated and expelled

the Dutch, the Siraya had to move inward to the hillsides. During the Manchurian reign, facing massive influx of the Han settlers and their discriminatory practices and assimilative pressures in everyday life, the Siraya, along with other Plains Indigenes, had to accept the fate of acculturation. They changed their hair style, adopted Han-Chinese names, and learned Amoy Chinese. They lost their last cultural distinction to the Han after the Japanese forbade the Han women to wrap their legs in the 1930s.

Over the years, the proto-Siraya had evolved into three subgroups: the Siraya, the Taivuan, and the Makatau. The Chiao-ba-nien Uprising against the Japanese colonists in current Taiwan County in 1915 is believed to have been linked to the Siraya Peoples. After event, the Japanese forcefully relocated some of the tribesmen further east to the remote mountainous ridges in present Kaohsiung County as punishment. Their village was termed “Kobayashi,” literally means “minor woods” in Han-Chinese, after the Japanese policeman guarding them. The whole village was covered by landslides when Typhoon Morakot engulfed Taiwan in 2009, causing 491 deaths out of 815 residents. A rudimentarily rehabilitated Siraya culture in the form of a mysterious night festival thus came to a regrettably sudden end.

Nevertheless, the Siraya, except for those who had migrated southward to Pingtung and eastward to Taitung and Hualien under the new identity as the Makatau, are thriving in their homeland. With the assistance for the successive Tainan County governments, especially the present Magistrate Huan-jhih Su, there have been encouraging signs of cultural renaissance. With the help of the Filipino son-in-law Edgar L. Macapili, they have managed to compile a Sirayan Dictionary based on Matthew translated by Dutch minister Daniel Gravius in 1661.

Whether politically motivated or not, the Tainan County government seems determined to help the Siraya recovering their Indigenous status deprived by the

Nationalist Government. In 2006, it established the Siraya Indigenous Affairs Commission. Efforts have been made to encourage the tribesmen to be enrolled. Before the war, the Japanese would mark either “cooked” (civilized) or “plains” on the racial category of the residential records. Similar practice was made by census-takers. According to the Civil Affairs Bureau of the county government, there were 20,248 residents with the racial marks with 5,788 still alive. So far, the County Government has taken 1,000 plus in the roll even though the CIP is disputing their legality.

As a famous native legend goes “There is only Han grandfather but no Han grandmother.” The folk wisdom expresses the fact that most of the earlier Han settlers must have come to Taiwan along and thus had no choice but to take the Plains Indigenous women as wife. As a result, except those who himself migrated to Taiwan after the war and their offspring, most citizens of Taiwan must have at least some Plains Indigenous blood.

Originally, this matriarchal assertion is intended to distance the Taiwanese from the Chinese by resorting to seemingly biological reasoning. However, it becomes alarming to some at the CIP as they have to guard against the prospect of competition over limited resources available to those who enjoy the status of being indigenous. It is thus legitimate for them to suspect how “authentic” those Plains Indigenes’ “indigenous” identities are and how “sincere” those kinsmen want to become indigenous, especially if the Plains Indigenes outnumber the status-Indigenes. More bluntly, the status of being indigenous, conferred by the government, stands for welfares as well as indigenous rights. In other words, it is strongly suspected that Plains Indigenes may have had a hidden agenda to grab political power and/or economic interests disguised as reclaiming cultural identity and social status.

In order to enlist sufficient support in their cause so that the CIP would provide

for a new legal definition with flexible indicators to embrace them, the Plains Indigenes need to represent their own collective identity to those already enrolled. In other words, they need to make their own self-identity, the recognition by others, and the legal definition converged (Fig. 2).

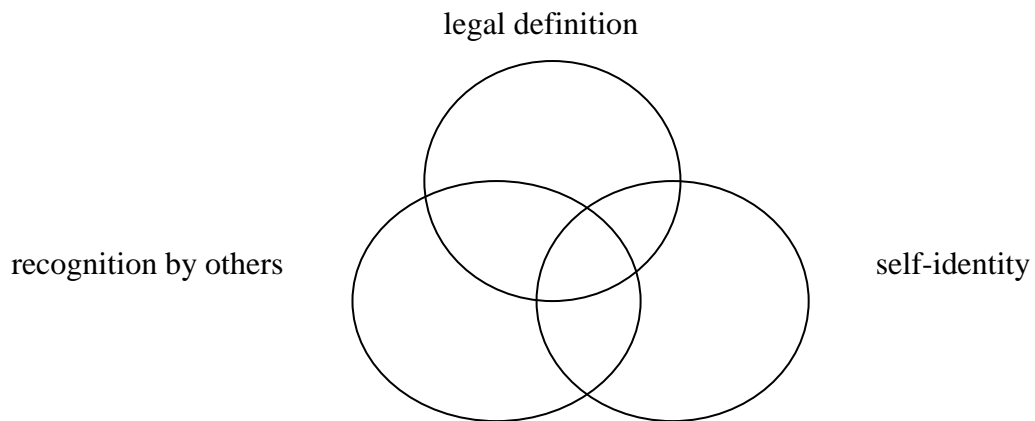


Fig. 2: Self-identity, Recognition by Others, and Legal Definition

There is no denying that Plains Indigenes have intermarried with the Han Peoples over the past four hundred years and thus are endowed with, if not diluted by, Han culture. Neither is the fact that they are Indigenes refutable. The only thing that matter is how they consider themselves. When two peoples encounter, four ideal types of collective identity may have developed: maintenance, acculturation, merger, and multiculturalism (Christian, 2000: 12; Smith, 1983: 136-37; Serge, 1980: 139-40) (Fig. 3).

While the CIP propose that they have been converted into the Han People, the Plains Indigenes would insist that they have largely retain their subjective identity even though they may have lost most their objective characteristics. Some may want to explore the possibility that there may have been a new conglomerate identity has come into existence as the Métis in Canada (Shih, 2010). Finally, there may be some compromised identity in need of definition and yet in a position to embrace both

Indigenous and Han identities simultaneously without jeopardizing each other.

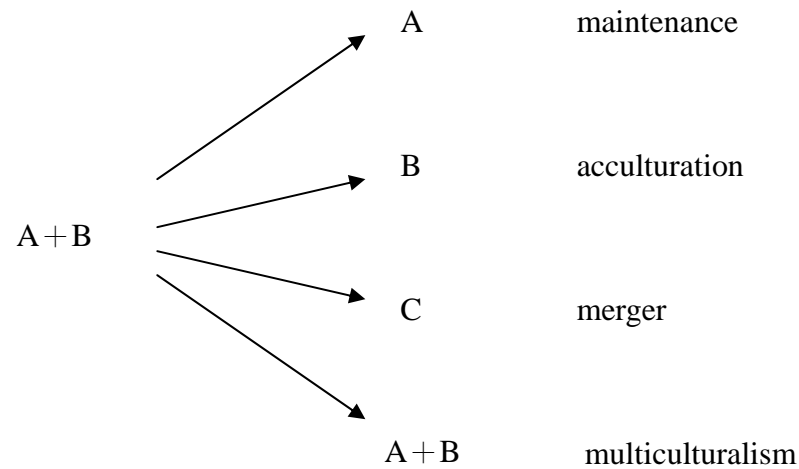


Fig. 3: Development of identity after Encounter

Official Practices of Indigenous Recognition

Traditionally, Chinese peoples were dichotomized into “Han” and “Fan” (Barbarians). While Han stands for “human beings,” Fan, being non-Han, represents non-human, who, as a result, deserves no humanistic treatments. The practice was implemented in Taiwan when Han settlers moved in. Further, the indigenous Fan peoples were subdivided into civilized and uncivilized ones: “Sou Fan” (literally domesticated, mature or cooked barbarians) and “Shen Fan” (literally untamed or wild barbarians) according to the degree that how they had successfully embraced Han culture.

Having contemplated to woo the Indigenes minorities against the Han majority, who was designated as “Islander,” the Japanese colonial government switched Sou Fan into “Plains” tribes and Shen Fan into “Gao-Sa” tribes (Takasagun in Japanese, meaning native Taiwanese as the Japanese used to call Taiwan “Takasago”). The practice was encoded for census-taking and residential recording purposes.

When the Nationalist Chinese government¹ took over Taiwan after the war, while Gao-Sa was slightly adjusted as “Gao-San,” meaning high mountain peoples, the category Plains Tribes were totally abolished given the assumption that the latter have been transformed into Han over the years. Thereafter, the Plains Indigenes have been deprived their indigenous status and accrued indigenous rights ever since. Underlying this *de jure* and *de facto* disenfranchisement of the Plains Indigenes is the longstanding policy to depopulate the Indigenous Peoples. Ostensible, it was benevolently designed to induce assimilation as was that found in Canada. As long as you are deemed civilized, you are treated as human. Consequently, you are no longer stigmatized if your indigenous status is discarded rather than being deprived. In reality, as the Indigenous Peoples are becoming civilized, they not only lose their cultures and identities, they are being turned in to minorities in their own homeland. In the process, the Han settlers have turned themselves in to the natives and legitimate owners of the land.

In addition to the degree of becoming Han, the government seemed to have postulated that all Indigenous Peoples had traditional resided in mountainous areas, hence “Gao-San Tribes” and thus disregarded the existence of Plains Indigenes residing the prairie since time immemorial. Later on, Gao-San Tribes was replaced by “San-Dee Tong-bau” (mountain brethren) without losing its connotation as non-Han peoples. Realizing that fact that some high mountain Indigenes had moved to the urban areas, the government would accept the distinction “San-dee San-bau” and “Pin-dee San-bau.” Recalling that “San-bau” is the shorthanded of “San-Dee Tong-bau” (mountain brethren), “San-dee San-bau” would stand for “mountain brethren residing in mountains,” a redundant term while “Pin-dee San-bau” would symbolize “mountain brethren residing in plains,” an oxymoron. In this way, Plains

¹ The government has long self-claimed as the Republic of China even if it is now relocated in Taiwan

Indigenes either become Plains Peoples (reads Han) or evaporate for the classification scheme (Fig. 4). In the 1990s, the government substituted “Indigenous Peoples” for “Mountain Brethren” (San-Dee Tong-bau or San-bau) in order to reflect international usage and to eliminate any discriminating connotations from the latter. Henceforth, there is the new binary between the “Mountain Indigenes” and the “Plains Indigenes.” Nowadays, have been taken place by the “new” Plains Indigenes, the “original” Plains Indigenes are nonetheless left out.

		residence	
		plains	mountains
族別 Indigenes	Plains	plains people = Han	?
	Mountain	plains mountain brethren	mountain mountain brethren

Fig. 4: Classification Scheme Now

Policy Controversies

So far, only 1,218 Plains Kavalan are enrolled as indigenes in the official list. The Kavalan tribesmen had disguised themselves as Amis after their unsuccessful uprisings against the Ching government in the late 19th century. They have only regained their tribal name in recent years. In other words, it appears that they have possessed indigenous before their tribe is recognized by the government.

We have cumulated an array of reasons, ostensible and hidden, to explain why the Plains Indigenes have yet failed to regain their indigenous status (Fig. 5). First of all, the CIP maintains that the Plains Indigenes need to have their tribes

acknowledged by the government before they can reclaim their individual status. Since it is reluctant to adjust its existent practices, there is no way the Plains Indigenes may register their indigenous status unless the Legislative Yuan (Parliament) the draft *Indigenous Peoples Recognition Bill*. Nonetheless, questions will be raised against the fact that the Thao (2001), the Kavalan (2002), the Truku (2004), the Sakizaya (2007), and the Sediq (2008) were recognized in the last decade without the bill passed.

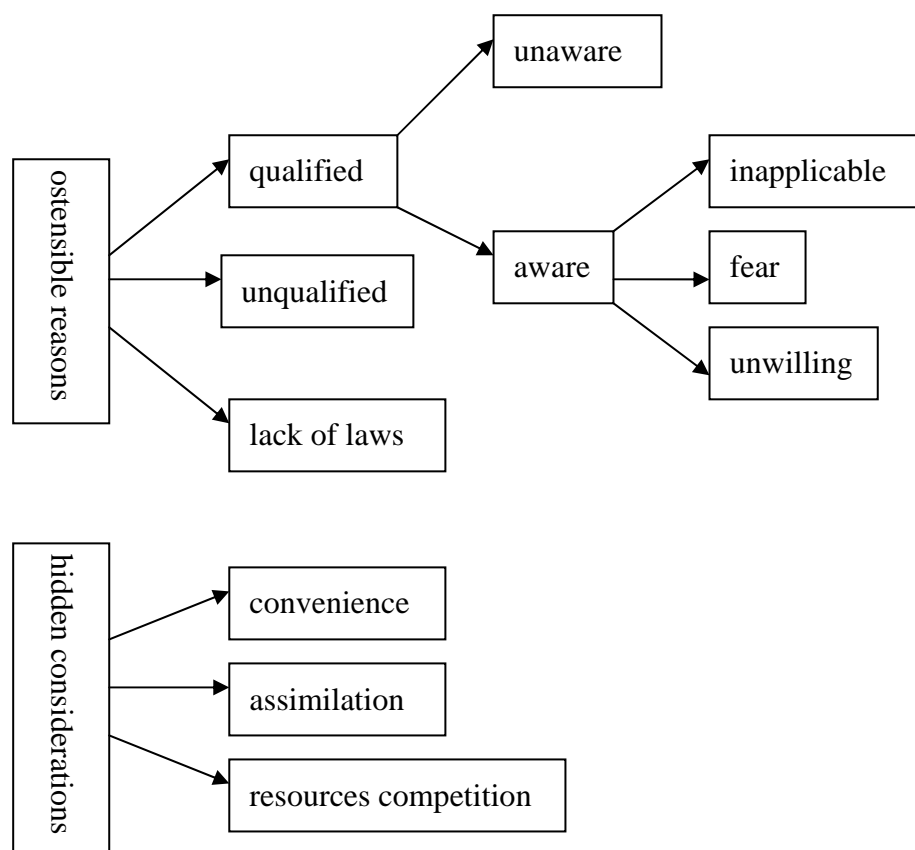


Fig 5: Possible Explanations

Actually, upon scrutinizing related laws, we discover the opposite. According to the *Indigenous Basic Law* (2005, Art. 2.2), Indigenous Peoples means the Amis, . . . and other Peoples who consider themselves as such and are approve by the Executive Yuan upon recommendation by the CIP. Nothing is said about individual status. Therefore, the so-called “collective (tribal) identification first, and

individual status second” principle is nowhere found.

Also, the *Indigenous Identity Law* (2001, Art. 8.1) stipulates that whoever may recover his/her indigenous identity as long as valid documents are provided. Consequently, the old residential record kept by the local government that carries the mark of either “cooked” (civilized) or “plains” would be sufficient as claim by the Plains Indigenes and accepted by the Tainan County Government. Since this is a retroactive clause, the Plains Indigenes are entitled to recover their indigenous status.

Secondly, The CIP would retort that the Plains Indigenes are too “un-indigenous” (too human?) to be considered as indigenous. Then, what are the objective indicators in order the Plains Indigenous to be qualified? Isn’t the residential record sufficient? So far, none have been seriously put forward. It must be cautioned that by resorting some primordial criteria for official identification would be a double-edge sword. It is true that most Plains Indigenes speak in Holo-Taiwanese rather in their indigenous languages that have long suppressed and lost hundreds years ago. But the status Indigenes also have to face the looming fact that most of their tribesmen can only speak scanty indigenous languages. As a matter of fact, most of their mother tongue is Mandarin, especial for the urban Indigenes. It is estimated that indigenous language will become distinct in 2 or 3 generations. If they have foreseen their own fate from the Plains Indigenes, they have to expect their own indigenous status revoked by the Han majority in the future.

Thirdly, the CIP disputes that since the window opportunity offered by the government in the mid-1950s was lost, the Plains Indigenes are not entitled to a second chance to make the application. In reality, numerous cases whence non-Plains descendents have regained their indigenous status without bumping into any hidens would be difficult to refute the charge by the Plains Indigenes that the CIP

is discriminating against them. Meanwhile, the Taiwan County Government, on behalf of the Siraya People, protests that it had not received the administrative order for the registration in the past as the government seemed to have assumed that there were no Indigenous Peoples in Tainan County. Therefore, the Siraya should not be punished and deprived their indigenous status because of administrative negligence.

Even if the Siraya and other Plains Indigenous had been aware of the deadline for the registration as Indigenous, they may have assumed that it was not relevant to them since they consider themselves as Plains Indigenous rather than as “Mountain Brethren” (San-Dee Tong-bau or San-bau). This perception of inapplicability was later verified by the fact that 6,192 Siraya subsequently did report to the census-takers in 1956 that they were indeed Plains Indigenous.

On the other hand, some senior civil servants at the CIP would reckon, if the Plains Indigenous were not willing to admit their indigenous identity to the government, they have no legitimate right to claim their indigenous status after “Mountain Brethren” have fought for the protection and promotion of indigenous rights for more than 2 decades. But past participants of the Indigenous Rights Movement would testify that none of the present civil servants at the CIP have taken part in the movement at all. Are they equally unqualified as Indigenous? Certainly not since indigenous status is not assured based on merits.

The most critical test to morality is whether Plains Indigenous are condoned and entitled to indigenous status if they dared not come out to admit indigenous identity and register their indigenous status when they were forced to accept assimilation under circumstances of negative socialization. In fact, only until recent years do status Indigenous would admit their indigenous identity to their non-indigenous neighbors or coworkers after the Constitution was amended to enshrine multiculturalism.

So far, we have arrived at various professed justifications against or for Plains Indigenes to reclaim their indigenous status in a spectrum from being unqualified, unwillingness, fear, inapplicability, to unawareness (Fig. 6). Reservations must be made that there must be some hidden considerations that are not to be taken to the floor. First of all, while it must be embarrassing for the government to admit their ignorance of the diversity among Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan when they issued the administrative order for the registration, the officers in charged may only have had administrative expedience.

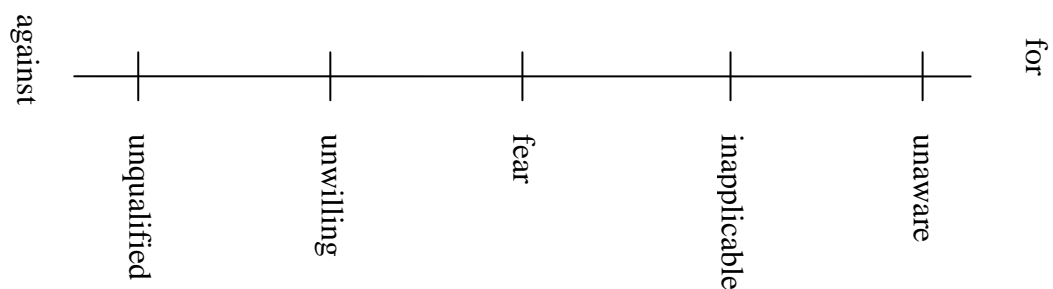


Fig. 6: Justifications for/against Plains Indigenous Rights

On the other hand, when contemplating the classification scheme, the government may have harbored the policy to assimilate the Indigenous Peoples as did its predecessors. In order to help the Indigenous Peoples becoming Han/human, measures must be taken to prevent them from retreating to Indigenes/barbarian. In other words, this is a one-way route: while the Indigenes can only turn into Han, no assumed Han is allowed to recede to Indigenes. Eventually, the Indigenes would be minority in their homeland. It is essentially a policy of killing by benevolence.

Finally, the CIP officers is not shy to suspect whether these ersatz, if not fraudulent, Indigenes are unquestionable opportunists jealous of affirmative action programs, social welfares, and reserved seats in the parliament. While this anxiety

deserves further considerations, there may be some potential conflict of interests involved in that the CIP is representing the state rather than the status Indigenes only. A watchful eye will guard against any self-serving biases.

Conclusions

Without due process, the Plains Indigenes were stripped their indigenous status without their own consent. So were their indigenous right accrued from that status. We believe that automatic reinstatement is made immediately. What is more important, the President of Taiwan needs to make a formal apology for the state's former mistakes. In addition, some forms of compensation to them collectively and individually must be made.

Nonetheless, the Plains Indigenes must figure out ways to mend their differences with the status Indigenes. Resources competition aside, there is no denying that fact that the Plains Indigenes had been pitted against their Mountain Brethren when the alien rulers embarked on pacifying the mountainous areas. Vivid memories of how the Plains Indigenes, as converted Han, had long scorned their Mountain Brethren as barbarians in the past are still lingering. While recognizing that divided-and-rule has been a colonial practice against the colonized, there will be no reconciliation without admitting the wrongdoing. As a result, the Plains Indigenes need to apologize to their Mountain Brethren and ask for forgiveness before any official measures to recognize their indigenous status are taken. Eventually, the Plains Indigenes must speak to themselves, what is the meaning of being indigenous? From expressing indigenous identity to recovering indigenous status, are they pursuing historical justice, social status, economic benefits, or political power?

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