

Capitalist Expansion and its Socio-environmental Consequences: Rural-Urban Divide and Environmental Injustice in Taiwan

Chun-Chieh Chi^{1*}, Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao², Shih-Jung Hsu³

1 Department of Ethnic Relations and Culture, National Dong-Hwa University,
Hualien, Taiwan

2 The IHDP National Committee-The Academy of Sciences located in Taipei;
Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan

3 Department of Land Economics, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan
jjjih@mail.ndhu.edu.tw*

Taiwanese Government strategy of export-led economic development began in the 1960s, and by early 1980s, Taiwan has become rich and famous internationally with its catchy “economic miracle” name. To sustain a high level of economic growth, the government further orchestrated the development of high-tech industries starting mid-1980s and continues through today. However, half a century of capitalist expansion came at tremendous social and environmental costs to different groups of people. In the east coast of Taiwan, some indigenous Taroko people lost their pristine traditional homelands because these “homelands” were deemed more valuable either as raw material for cement production or as national park for the enjoyment of urban middle class. In the western plain of Taiwan where the population concentrates, agricultural mode of production had to give way to industrial mode of production in terms of land use, labor supply, and waste disposal. As a result, by the 1980s, much of agricultural lands and irrigation water in the western plains of Taiwan have been polluted, and most farmers were no longer able to sustain their lives with agricultural income alone. This paper discusses about Taiwan’s capitalist expansion over the past 50 years and its impact on rural and indigenous areas from environmental justice perspective.