

Contemporary Adaptation among Taiwanese Austronesian Peoples

Shu-min Huang* and Shao-hua Liu, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan
#128 Academy Road, Sec.II., Nankang, Taipei, Taiwan 11529, Republic of China

[smhuang@gate.sinica.edu.tw*](mailto:smhuang@gate.sinica.edu.tw)

shaohua@gate.sinica.edu.tw

This paper examines Taiwan's indigenous Austronesian peoples, who constitute approximately 2.2% of the national population, or 504,531 out of 23,119,722 in 2009. Among the Taiwanese indigenes, we find a development trajectory of rising ethnic consciousness and identity formation that must be contextualized in the grand wave of global social change from the colonialism of past centuries to contemporary globalization. This paper proceeds from previously published research findings to review major policy changes over the past quarter century (1983-2008) and their consequential developments—both the positive improvements in general well-being and the persistence of ingrained problems among these marginal groups. Employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study's multidisciplinary research team canvassed the entire island during 2006 and 2007. Major findings indicate that the increasing tempo of globalization has resulted in two contradictory trends among Taiwanese Austronesians. On the one hand, the rise of national consciousness has engendered renewed interest in their cultures and supported efforts to preserve and restore selected indigenous customs and practices, such as ritual healings, age-grade systems, and annual harvest festivals. The opposite trend is a continuous outflow of the indigenes from traditional tribal communities to urban centers for employment, education, or health care; those numbers had reached close to half of the entire indigenous population by the timeframe under consideration here. Their increasing urbanization also contributes to mixed marriages and the loss of indigenous languages and practices. This paper points to some of the issues related to these developments, such as the syncretic merger of the old and new, and the persistent problems indigenous communities face in daily life. The case of Taiwanese Austronesians illustrates the impacts global historical and politico-economic processes are having on indigenous peoples around the world.

Keyword: Austronesian, Taiwan, Autonomous Conservation, Participatory Elevation, Cultural Revival.