



**United Nations Working Group on Indigenous  
Populations 16<sup>th</sup> Session  
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**Statement made by Dr. Wen-chi Kung (Yoshi Dagun, Atayal tribe)  
on behalf of Taiwan Indigenous Peoples' Delegation  
for the UNWGIP's 16<sup>th</sup> Session, Members of Asia Indigenous Peoples  
Pact (AIPP)**

**Item 4: Review of developments pertaining to the  
promotion and protection of human rights and  
fundamental freedoms of indigenous people: general  
statements.**

**Honorable Chairperson**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

**and all sisters and brothers of Indigenous Peoples:**

Thank you for giving me the floors to speak today on behalf of the Indigenous Peoples Delegation from Taiwan. First of all, I'd like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to you, Madame Chairperson, and Mr. Julian Burger's kindest help and leniency in allowing us to participate in this year's UNWGIP's 16<sup>th</sup> Session. As indigenous peoples from the Formosa island in the Far East, we deem it a great honor to have the opportunity to participate in the UNWGIP's annual session, and we have been continuously participating in the conference since 1988. Over the years we have been enriching ourselves greatly by exchanging most useful information and extending warmest friendship with the other indigenous sisters and brothers from all over the world.

This year, our delegation consists of 21 members from 15 NGOs and indigenous associations, representing the 1.7 percent (approximately 380,000) of the indigenous populations in Taiwan. Due to Taiwan's particular position in the international world and other matters, we have run into some difficulties in having us formally registered with this year's UNWGIP's session. But fortunately, as we are also members of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), it has enabled us to attend this session under the name of the AIPP. For this particular reason, we would also like to express our whole-hearted gratitude to the help of the AIPP.

Madame Chairperson, we wish to let you know that our delegation is truly indigenous, genuinely grassroots and authentically representative of all indigenous peoples in Taiwan. Apart from the intention of reporting about the latest development of indigenous peoples' situation in Taiwan, we have neither political purpose nor ulterior motive. However, we have a particular mission this time, that is, we come with a purpose of reconciliation, and we hope that all the misunderstanding happened before because of careless mistakes on our part can be clarified and understood by your kindness and leniency.

Since 1945 when Taiwan was handed over to Chinese government from Japanese colonizer, Taiwan has been a Han Chinese nation-state. Because indigenous peoples have been regarded as backward, primitive and disadvantaged, compared with the Han Chinese, over the years many special administrative measures have been taken to protect them and to assist them in keeping pace with mainstream Chinese society. Therefore, the fundamental tenet of aboriginal policy in Taiwan then was assimilation through modernisation. Due to this assimilation policy, many indigenous tribes have suffered a lot not only in their socio-economic status but in their educational attainment.

### **An Overview of Indigenous Education and Language in Taiwan**

In terms of aboriginal education, during Japanese occupation, only 19 aborigines graduated from junior middle school. However, in 1991 the figure exceeded 44,000 and more than 3,800 graduated from a university or technical college. A few also

participated in master's and doctorate programs in foreign countries. But compared with Han Chinese education, indigenous students, who receive higher education (university and college level), are considerably less than those of Han Chinese. Nowadays, there are approximately four times more non-indigenous Taiwanese who receive higher education than aborigines. Although over the years there has been a slight increase in the absolute number of aboriginal recipients of higher education, compared with the national average, the gap has grown wider.

However, it has to be noted here that education is one of the areas that has been treated more wisely by Taiwan's government. Many preferential treatments to indigenous students have been implemented for several decades, such as reducing the entrance examination scores for universities, colleges and high schools, and having a discount or free for their tuition fees as well as various governmental subsidies for indigenous students. Nevertheless, despite all the encouragements and incentives provided by the government, the progress of aboriginal education is in an apparent backward situation in contrast to Han mainstream society. This is one of the reasons why they are having a strong sense of 'relative deprivation'.

On the other hand, the language policy of the ruling party-KMT (Kuomintang)-has been the primary target of criticisms by many Taiwanese scholars and indigenous elites in the last two decades. Since the nationalist government recovered Taiwan from the hands of Japanese colonizers in 1945, mandarin Chinese has become the sole national language, which has been widely promoted in schools. Children from elementary schools up all over the island, including indigenous children, were taught Mandarin instead of Japanese. Those who spoke Japanese or Taiwan dialects in schools would be severely punished.

In addition, peoples in Taiwan, including the indigenous peoples, used to have Japanese names, but Japanese names were forbidden by the nationalist government and replaced by Chinese names. Therefore, during the late 1940s and early 1950s, a gigantic nation-building process of 'Chinese nationalism' was vigorously undertaken in Taiwan, in which all the Taiwanese peoples, either Han Chinese or indigenous peoples, were forced to learn Chinese language, culture and history and to adopt Chinese names.

So since the late 1940s, Taiwan has been controlled by an authoritative regime from mainland China, in which local dialects and languages of Taiwan were ruthlessly suppressed and forbidden. In other words, under the dominant cultural hegemony of 'Chinese nationalism', coupled with the martial law, which was put into practice in 1947, peoples in Taiwan, no matter who they are, indigenous or non-indigenous, were inculcated to identify themselves as Chinese through learning Chinese language, history and culture, instead of their own mother tongues, history and culture. As a result, many young generations of Taiwanese and indigenous peoples do not know how to speak their own languages. It is even worse among indigenous younger generation, who can not speak their own languages today. So in the wake of the assimilation policy and homogenising educational process enforced by the nation-state, many indigenous peoples have lost their indigenous cultures, languages and identities. On the other hand, due to their weakness and disadvantage in socio-economic terms, they have also suffered poverty and discrimination. In other words, they have become a real 'underclass' in the Taiwanese society today.

### **Review of the Recent Developments**

The political reforms and general democratisation process in Taiwan in the late 1980s have created the condition for a resurgent ethos of cultural localism. The reaffirmation of *local* Taiwanese culture and history symbolises a powerful counter-thrust against the long-term suppression of those terms and narratives by *national* Chinese ones. In addition, the political democratisation and Taiwanisation programs have allowed 'Taiwanese nationalism' to be pitted against 'Chinese nationalism', thus exacerbating a generalised national identity crisis. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that the emergent political change of ethnic politics in Taiwan should not affect or undermine the strong determination of indigenous peoples who are endowed with and dedicated to the inherent rights of self-determination. They are entitled to decide their own destiny, their ways of living and their future.

Along with the rise of *Taiwanization* process stimulated by the political democratization in the 1980s, indigenous cultures and languages have, for the first time in Taiwan's history, been also duly recognized by the government. There have been two significant developments in indigenous society in the 1980s; one was the rise of aboriginal movements stimulated by the entire political reforms of Taiwan, the other was the establishment of aboriginal press and media. As the demand for speaking their own mother tongue-Fukienese-was rising in the mainstream society, the loss of indigenous language and culture were also increasingly concerned by the mainstream society. Since the 1980s, Taiwan has witnessed the resurgence of local Taiwanese culture, language, history, art and geography. The majority language-Fukienese- was taught in primary schools as a supplementary course, and more and more Taiwanese history and culture were being incorporated in textbooks.

Under this circumstance, more attention has been particularly paid to the rapidly-disappearing indigenous languages and cultures. At that crucial period, more and more indigenous elites-intellectuals, activists and representatives- have been playing the leading roles in pushing forward a series of educational reforms for indigenous peoples. For example, indigenous tribal languages were taught during extracurricular hours in primary schools; and an increasing amount of aboriginal histories and cultures were included in school texts. In addition, more governmental budgeting for the long-term development of aboriginal education has been introduced to improve teaching quality and facilities in schools with the hope of upgrading the level of their educational attainment.

It has to be noted here that under the Taiwan's dramatic political reforms and cultural transformation mobilized by the lifting of the martial law in 1987, an increasing attention has been paid to indigenous concerns by the mainstream media. Many indigenous newspapers were established either to publicize government's aboriginal policy or to advocate the causes of aboriginal movements. Among the issues, language and culture have always been the most important ones.

In addition to the educational incentives for indigenous students, the government provided aboriginal scholarships for studying abroad in 1990. Moreover, the first indigenous school for promoting aboriginal adult education was initiated at a university in eastern Taiwan in December 1997. Perhaps, the most encouraging was the promulgation of the 'Aboriginal Education Law', which was passed last month. The

law stresses the importance of the indigenous subjectivity and primacy in aboriginal education, i.e., indigenous peoples are the primary beneficiaries of the education. It also stipulates that, among others, indigenous teachers should have the first priority of being employed in aboriginal education, and a new evaluation committee of aboriginal education should be established. Moreover, it also points to a new direction for the development of aboriginal education that a college or a university for promoting indigenous studies will be necessary in the future. It is particularly noteworthy that this law has stipulated that the annual budget earmarked for aboriginal education should be no less than 1% of the total of national educational budget.

As the aboriginal media are closely related and crucial to the development of aboriginal language and education, I'd like to take this opportunity to give a brief note to the recent development of the aboriginal media in Taiwan. The first Public Television Service of Taiwan was newly established on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1998. With the formal broadcasting of the Public Television Service, indigenous peoples have entered into a new phase of electronic media. Currently, the 'Formosa Aboriginal News Magazine' program is broadcast one hour a week providing news service to all indigenous peoples. This program is designed and produced by 12 aboriginal reporters. It is also anchored by an Atayal tribe reporter. It is not only a milestone for the development of aboriginal media in Taiwan but a promising start for promoting aboriginal languages and cultures. It is fundamentally important for the government to carry out the mission of preserving and promoting aboriginal education and language by means of the electronic media in the future. It does not only conform to the spirit of the 'Aboriginal Educational law' but also correspond to the world-wide trend that the nation-state is unquestionably the 'total institution' in deciding all aspects of aboriginal lives in the Fourth World, including the media, the language, the education and the culture of indigenous peoples.

The debate on nationalism in Taiwan is now at a crossroads because there has been a major dispute on the national identity issue and uncertainty about Taiwan's future. The Han Chinese nation-state has consistently excluded indigenous peoples from the 'national imagination' of Taiwan. Consequently, indigenous struggles for preserving their languages and cultures today can be understood as a rejection of this exclusion and a fight for the reassertion of indigenous identity. Stimulated by the shifts in ethnic politics in the 1980s and 1990s, there has been an upsurge of indigenous demands aimed at reaffirming the values of indigenous cultures, languages and better education.

Despite all the progresses and improvements that have been made mentioned above, it has to be stressed here that these milestones in aboriginal policy are all long-overdue. They were not initiated by the Han nation-state but by indigenous struggles motivated by indigenous movements propelled by the collective efforts of indigenous activists, elites, politicians, and intellectuals. With indigenous peoples' continuous struggles, the aboriginal policy has undergone a tremendous change. It has shifted away from the total assimilation to the vibrant multiculturalism in recent years.

Above all, the recent advances in aboriginal language and education policies have taught Taiwan indigenous peoples that indigenous rights oftentimes have to be initiated and fought for by indigenous peoples themselves, and that little reliance can be placed on tokens of sympathy or benevolence given by the Han nation-state.

Last but not least, once again, Madame Chairperson, we have to thank you for

your concern and support which have inspired us greatly, and for the partnership and friendship which we have endeared so much from all indigenous sisters and brothers all over the world that together have constantly motivated us to strive forward. Your concern and support have strengthened our determination to carry on our struggles to fight for a more equal and just society for indigenous peoples in Taiwan. Please do not forget us and please remember that we, as an indigenous people from Taiwan, still need your full and continuous support in the future.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.

Chiacar  
Secretary for the Aboriginal Work  
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## **The Current Situation of Aborigine Language Survival in Taiwan**

A) **The Overall Environment:** Among the languages of Taiwan indigenous cultures, the Pin-Pu (Plain Aborigines) mother tongues have all but extinct due to ethnic and cultural assimilation. The present 10 indigenous ethnic groups still in existence, the Sao language is on the brink of extinction, while the other groups have serious problem of language loss. One recent study report indicates for the current youth generation, that during their grandparents time, culture and environment for the use and functioning of their mother tongue use was still fairly intact. In their parents' generation, the loss was 15.8 %. Now at the present time, the current youth generation has a total language loss of 31%. From the perspective of linguistic functioning environment, loss of 31% is a very serious erosion. Aborigine linguistic researchers estimate only 49.6% able to retain the native language use in the next generation, if all eligible youths marry within their own ethnic groups. If they marry outside of own ethnic groups, the language loss is much more massive. Many have already concluded the aborigine languages are already on the way to extinction, because the present day usage of mother tongue is below 75%, the stated minimum for the maintenance and continuation of language survival. There are several reasons for the very dangerous situation of severely language loss.

### **B) Factors for Language Losses:**

- 1). During the Japanese Era, all population of Taiwan enrolled in the Japanese Imperial Education System since 1937: a policy designed to make peoples of Taiwan into Japanese imperial subjects. This education policy forced the indigenous native languages to be used only within the family homes. Even though fluent aborigine languages are still being spoken, their mind and thoughts have already been influenced by the Japanese language.
- 2) In the post-World War Two era, the KMT government pushed for a completely Chinese education curriculum. The administration acted forcibly to suppress the use of indigenous languages. Students who spoke their mother tongue were punished. Chinese language was encouraged with prize competition incentives. Even indigenous culture and traditions were expropriated and altered. Names of geographic places, locations, and family names were ruthlessly changed. These caused indigenous peoples to be torn apart from their own cultural roots. They became ashamed of their own aborigine mother tongue. This imposed belief of inferiority thinking and the belief of "our mother tongue is useless" is prevalent among the present indigenous youth generation.
- 3) Because of society prejudice, aborigine parents purposely avoid or neglect the responsibility and efforts to pass on the teaching of mother tongue to children.

### **Re-Building Efforts:**

- 1) The learning of native language and culture is aborigine children's right to education, and the parents can not take them away. This important priority within the family and native community must be established.
- 2) The native names of the surround indigenous environment must be returned: names of the mountains, rivers, geographic places, and family tribal surnames.
- 3) There must be efforts to publish aborigine language textbooks, teaching materials, along with the training of native teachers, and the establishment of pre-school education programs for children.

### **Current State of Education for Taiwan Aborigine Communities**

The health and survival of an ethnic group and its self-identify are dependent on fundamentals of education. The goals must be the sustainable development of the native community's education system, and community participation to set programs and contents of school education, thus enable the proper functioning and success of education for indigenous peoples.

### **Background and Current State**

In the 100 years of colonial rule by Imperial Japanese and then Chinese KMT regimes, Aborigine Peoples of Formosa found themselves under the following current conditions:

- 1) Less opportunities of receiving public education, and lower levels of school education
- 2) Under the Imperial Japanese education system and KMT's assimilation (genocide) education system, indigenous cultures of Taiwan have forgotten their collective ethnic identity. They have lost the traditional liberty and spirit for self-determination and self-rule.
- 3) Because of inadequate school facility and aborigines on average having only 40 % income as compared to the Han-Taiwanese majority, there is chronic under-funding and lack of resources for proper education for the young generation, which leads to reduced opportunity for schooling.
- 4) The right to education for aborigine children is often ignored. Many unqualified teachers are assigned to native communities.
- 5) Due to low enrollment, school districts are being consolidated into large area for management. This causes difficulty for aborigine children having to commute long-distance to school, or face hardship in family living for children having to live in school dorms.

### **Opportunity for Change for Native Education Policy**

As a result of United Nation's effort in promoting indigenous people's rights, Taiwan's native populations also gained awareness to self-identify and self-realization of own cultures. These result in the push for better treatment and activist movements for aborigine peoples in right to education, land right, economic improvement, culture preservation, and human rights. Among all areas for activist work, the gains in legislation for equal rights for native peoples education policy is most representative of the new changes coming. On May 28, 1998, the Aborigine Education Act finally passed through third readings in the National Assembly to come into law. There are 33 items in all. Among those items specific to native education, some indigenous communities are still not satisfied. However, we believe this is a good start, since some rights to education for aborigine peoples are being guaranteed:

- 1) There is the establishment of an education department for native school system, and its aborigine representation can not be under two-third (some degree of control for aborigine education system).
- 2) Legislation set for aborigine education budget, not to be under 1 % of the national total education budget.
- 3) Legislation to set up daycare and kindergarten in indigenous communities, and there must be total subsidy of living allowance and school costs for these pre-school education services.
- 4) Legislation for pre-school education and primary school curriculum for aborigine students, allowing learning of native languages, culture, and history.
- 5) The school programs and teaching material must respect the wishes of aborigine community. Teacher training and school assignment must have priority to employ aborigine teachers.
- 6) The teaching of aborigine language, native culture, and traditional handicrafts must utilize those indigenous persons having such skills and capability.

The passing of the Aborigine Education Act is the culmination of unrelenting struggle and persistent efforts by aborigine peoples. We hope this legislation is a big step forward for indigenous population, starting from education. From this beginning, the native communities can push ahead with more changes and re-establish the focus on our language and culture. From here, we can continue to strive toward the protection and guarantee for human rights, land rights, employment rights, and right to existence as aborigine ethnic groups.

We want to take this opportunity to declare: The voices of Taiwan indigenous peoples are now being heard and recognized by the government. This is because of the efforts by the indigenous populations, along with the direction set by United Nations, and with the care and support by all indigenous friends from all over the world. You have helped to motivate and inspire our soul and our spirits. We are happy to share this small success with everyone here; we really appreciated your support and assistance over the many difficult years. Thank you.