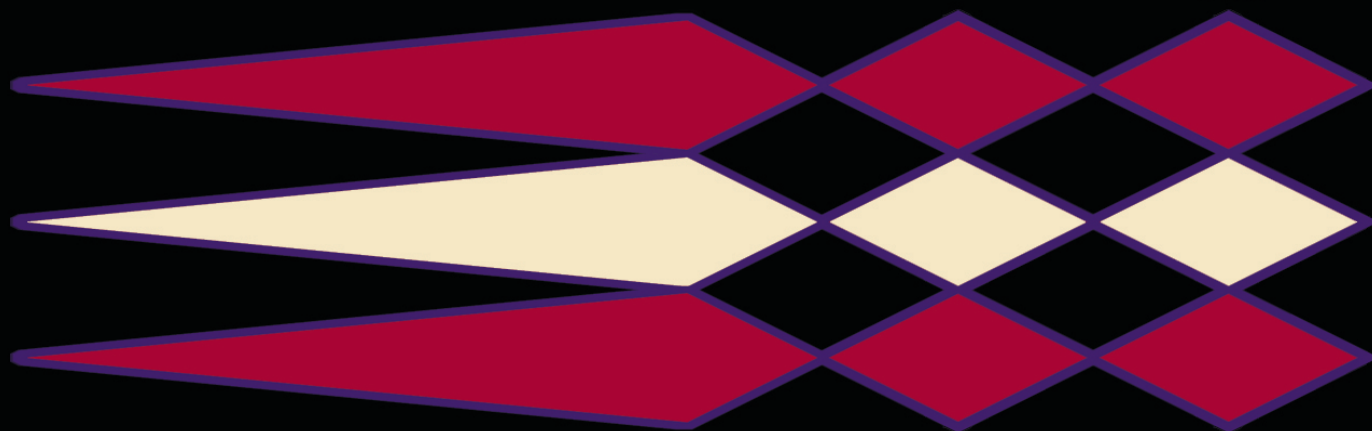


# NAIS



## Indiana University®

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Committee on Native American  
& Indigenous Studies

Dr. Brian Gilley (Anthropology), chair  
bjgilley@indiana.edu

Newsletter Editor: J. Christopher Upton  
Email: jcupton@indiana.edu

Publisher: American Studies Department  
Ballantine Hall 544, Indiana University  
1020 E. Kirkwood Ave  
Bloomington, IN, 47405

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# Global Issue: Indigenous Land, Territory, and Natural Resources

Indigenous peoples' lands, territories, and natural resources are a crucial site of conflict in many settler contexts. Native communities' unique relationship with their lands, territories, and natural resources are central to their cultures, identity, spirituality, and worldviews.

Consequently, protecting this special relationship is vital for indigenous peoples' continued existence as distinct peoples.

Indigenous peoples' lands remain under threat in many parts of the world. These threats derive from colonial and postcolonial state intrusions through dispossession and inadequate legal redress; environmental degradation of land, fisheries, and forests from capitalist development activities; and other incursions, all of which have a significant economic, environmental, social, and spiritual impact upon indigenous peoples. The recent controversy

surrounding the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines in North Dakota, USA, for example, serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of indigenous lands, the limitations of legal protections for native peoples, and the need for strengthening political will to safeguard indigenous rights to lands, territories, and natural resources.

This issue of the NAIS newsletter introduces indigenous land issues in Taiwan. Taiwan provides an interesting example of how indigenous land issues are arising in East Asia. Further, it shows how these issues are shaped by particular colonial experiences and how they impact different indigenous communities in different ways. Taiwan has over 400 years of continuous colonial occupation, with the most recent occupying power, the Republic of China, taking control in 1949. As a result, Taiwan's indigenous communities have been subjected to centuries of

mistreatment and discrimination by colonial authorities, including dispossession of indigenous land, environmental degradation from development, and interference in accessing lands and natural resources.

This issue considers the experience of three indigenous communities—the Bunun, Puyuma, and Truku. Drawing upon interviews with members of these groups, this NAIS newsletter considers the significance of land to indigenous communities in Taiwan and their struggles to protect and use their lands, territories, and natural resources.

The NAIS newsletter staff would like to thank these communities for their time and willingness to share an important part of their lives with us. The staff further thanks Dr. Fang Chun-wei and Dr. Awi Mona for their support in preparing this issue. ■

# Global Issue: Indigenous Land



Bunun tribal territory, Central Taiwan  
Photo credit: J. Christopher Upton

## Bunun Tribe, Taiwan

The Bunun people reside in the central mountain ranges of Taiwan. They number approximately 42,000, making up just over 10% of Taiwan's indigenous population. The following is from an interview with a Bunun elder.

### **1. Tell us about the relationship between Bunun communities and the land.**

The land is very important to us, because we go to the mountain to hunt for food. We hunt muntjac and boars and goats using muskets that we make ourselves. The mindset of the Bunun about land is that it is very open and not restrained. If you have

power, you can open a new space. But, unlike other groups, we do not have sacred places, because we believe we can call our ancestors anywhere. They are not tied to a specific place. Instead, we see our homeland as our place of birth.

### **2. What land issues have Bunun communities historically faced?**

Our community has faced many challenges related to land. Our tribe used to live in the high mountains, from where we are standing here [in the village] about one week's hike farther into the mountains, but we were forced to move to the lowlands by the Japanese around 1945. The Japanese felt that the Bunun



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were difficult to manage, so they made us move closer to the towns.

The area where we live now was part of a disputed boundary with the neighboring group, the Puyuma tribe. In this area, headhunting was sometimes used to mark the boundary between our groups. The Japanese forced the Puyuma people living here to move out, putting them all together at another village to manage them better, like they did us, and made us move to this location. The Japanese then divided this place into two categories, a lower area near the plain where they assigned each family to a different plot for cultivating rice and millet, and a higher area up on the mountain that was regulated according to Bunun traditional customs. Later, some people moved partway back to our original territory and then moved all the way back, so there has been lots of movement by our people during the colonial periods.

### **3. What land issues are Bunun communities currently facing?**

We are dealing with many land issues now. For example, in our community, during September 2016 we had many weeks of rain, which caused a massive landslide that destroyed part of our village. In the early morning, one of the

members of the village heard dogs barking and went outside to check on the dogs. He saw them looking up at the mountain and saw the mountain beginning to slide down. He then ran to all the houses, telling the people about the landslide. They all ran away—about fifty people—down the mountain to the local school for protection, which saved many lives. The damage was so severe that the village had to move another area for six months.

The Taiwan government recently built new houses for the fifty families affected by the mudslide in another part of the mountain. The government wants the people to move there, but the government owns both the land and the houses. And, the government said that one of the conditions for taking possession of the new houses is that we must give up our rights to the old land and that they would destroy our houses to make it into a national park. We think this is unfair. We have decided as a group not to take any of the new houses. We have also appealed this policy to the local county government and asked the help of indigenous legislators. The outcome is unclear at this point. For now, we continue to live in our old homes. It is dangerous for us, because another mudslide may happen, but we



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cannot give up our land.

## **4. What efforts have been undertaken to resolve these land issues?**

We are fighting very hard for our land. For example, we must fight against the development of our land. In the 1980s, the local county government created a new urban plan to develop a hot spring near our village. As part of this plan, the government divided our village into different parcels and categorized the parcels according to certain uses, such as education, business, living, etc. This significantly limited our ability to freely use our land as we used to do. During this time, the local county government had a public hearing and invited village elders to visit and hear about the urban plan. While the elders thought the hot spring would benefit the village, they did not understand Mandarin Chinese language very well and did not know that their land would be parceled when they signed the agreement. Also, the hot spring business invited many hotel and amusement park developers to construct buildings in the area. Because villagers owned the land and Taiwan law listed the land as reserved land, the developers used Bunun people, mostly young Bunun people, to buy the land on behalf of the company. So, the village quickly

began to lose its land to developers.

We have recently appealed to several government agencies to stop the urban plan. The Taiwan Ministry of Interior finally instructed the local county government to stop, but also told us that because the plan is set, it could not be terminated, only modified. To protect our land, we must get more involved in the political process and submit modifications to the local county government to change the parcel categories, which will then allow us to use our land freely as we did before. ■

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Puyuma tribal territory, Southern Taiwan  
Photo credit: J. Christopher Upton

## Puyuma Tribe, Taiwan

The Puyuma, or Beinan, people reside in the south of Taiwan. They number approximately 14,000, making up 2.4% of Taiwan's indigenous population. The following is from an interview with a Puyuma elder.

### 1. Tell us about the relationship between

### Puyuma communities and the land.

It is very important to understand that our land is held as a community, not individually. Our culture is deeply connected to our land. Two main values among the Puyuma originate from our relationship to the land: sharing (*fenxiang*) and taking responsibility for others (*chengdan*). Our land was an open resource for everyone. Our relationship to land is inclusive, not exclusive. We shared it with one another and took care of one another using its resources. If a newcomer came to the community, we would share our land with them and make sure they would be taken care of. But when colonists came they brought with them the concept of property and ownership. They made us register our land and divide it up. The introduction of these ideas about private property created many new conflicts within the tribe that were never there before. It was also the source of many conflicts with the colonial powers.

### 2. What land issues have Puyuma communities historically faced?

Taiwan has over 400 years of colonial occupation. These occupiers have taken indigenous peoples' land and imported new ideas about property that created

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conflict within and among the tribes, and between the tribes and the colonial occupiers. They came with ideas about ownership of property and when they saw that groups like the Puyuma held land communally and not separated as private property, they thought no one owns this land and they took it, which was incorrect.

The Puyuma's traditional territory was located farther north in the mountains. We were moved to this village by the Japanese colonial administration and they relocated, among other groups, the Bunun tribe to our traditional territory. When they moved us here, this placed us close to other indigenous groups, like the Paiwan peoples and Amis peoples, which created new kinds of conflicts with these groups.

Historically, we held our land as a community. We treated it as a resource open to the entire tribe. If you worked hard, then you could use a bigger portion of the land. But, we moved a great deal, because we practiced slash and burn agriculture. If another group wanted to live on our land, they would need to pay annual tribute, often in the form of rice or millet. If they did not pay tribute, then we would defend our land, sometimes through headhunting. During our grandfather's generation, the Japanese made us stop the tribute system, because they saw this system as challenging their authority as the new

power over the island. Then, the Republic of China government destroyed our social structure by creating a rival leadership system to challenge the traditional leadership system. And, so we lost both our land and our social structure. It was not until decades later that we began to have the room to revitalize our culture and rediscover our land.

### **3. What land issues are Puyuma communities currently facing?**

We are currently dealing with many land issues. Recently, we have had a conflict concerning a dairy farm and tourist attraction in the local area, which is located on Puyuma tribal territory. When the Republic of China government acquired Taiwan from the Japanese in 1945, the government told the tribe that this land was national property and was not our land, because they won the war against Japan and they took over the land rights from the Japanese government. We told the government that this is our land, but they do not listen. They told us they could not believe us, because we only have oral history, not written history, to prove it is our land. But just looking around at the place names in this region, they are all Puyuma names translated to Mandarin Chinese language. Our history and relationship to this land can be seen everywhere. Even the Japanese accepted



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our oral history, but the Republic of China did not. Our elders reminded the Republic of China government that they only came to Taiwan because they were also defeated, by the Chinese Communists, so by their own thinking it was wrong for them to take this land. We told them the Japanese came and robbed our land. We asked the government, are you robbers, too?

Later, the Republic of China government had a hearing about our land. They came to two conclusions. First, our tribe would rent the land from the government. Second, the government agreed to give land back to the tribe with full legal rights. Like so many other times, the government never followed through with the second decision. As a result, we can only rent our own land from the government. When they finally agreed to allow us to buy the land back, they classified it as reserved land, which makes the land nearly valueless, because you cannot do anything with it. As a result, many Puyuma people simply abandoned their land.

## **4. What efforts have been undertaken to resolve these land issues?**

Indigenous people are the original owners of the land, so we believe our opinions should be respected. We want to share with the immigrants who have come to our island, but they should not forget that we

are the original inhabitants of the island. Colonial powers, like the Republic of China, should consult us and ask our permission regarding the use of our land. We are not a majority in Taiwan, but a critical minority. We are like salt at the table: a little has a powerful impact on the entire meal.

The best resolution is to not follow the current complicated piecemeal process of returning land to indigenous peoples, taking the land, giving back parts, making indigenous people pay rent for parts, not giving back other areas. Give us our land back and we can figure out how to share the land with everyone. They should respect us enough as the first inhabitants on this land to allow us to be part of the decision about how to share the land. We want to share the land. Sharing is part of our culture. We always share; it is who we are. And we use the land to take care of others, not to keep its resources for ourselves, unlike the colonial powers. So, giving us back our land will create greater harmony. ■

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Truku tribal territory, Eastern Taiwan  
Photo credit: J. Christopher Upton

## Truku Tribe, Taiwan

The Truku, or Taroko, people reside on the east coast of Taiwan. They number approximately 20,000, making up 2.6% of Taiwan's indigenous population. The following is from an interview with a Truku elder.

### **1. Tell us about the relationship between Truku communities and the land.**

Our ancestors loved to protect the land and they grew upon it a beautiful environment. From them, we have inherited the crystallization of our cultural practices as well as wisdom about the forests. This has enabled the Truku people to live in the mountains, forests, and rivers, and make it our home, which has required over a hundred of years of hard work and guardianship. This land warms our home.

This land gives us food and clothing.  
This land gives us the ability to survive.  
This land gives us our historical and cultural heritage. The importance of land and our reliance upon it simply cannot be stated in words.

### **2. What land issues have Truku communities historically faced or are they currently facing?**

The land of the Truku tribe is rich in forest, water, and mineral resources. As a result, the Truku tribe is often subject to political manipulation in order to access tribal forests and minerals. Developers are not required to consult with tribal landowners or tribal people and developers can freely develop and claim the land. The government's public power is also used to invade and intervene in the assets of tribal people.

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The intention was to create a pattern that led to expanded ethnic intrusions into Truku territory, as well as to change the status of our original land to being classified as either private or public land. Additionally, because of vigorous promotion of sightseeing in the area, there are no adequate environmental protection measures or management methods. Tourism has caused serious pollution and other ecological damage to the tribe's forestlands. Moreover, this tourism has cultivated even less respect for the rights and interests of indigenous peoples, and a serious loss of hope for promoting the local economy. Garbage, roads, air quality, environmental quality, and agriculture are all unmanaged on the mountain, and tourists and tour buses arbitrarily invade our villages and homes creating additional grievances. At the same time, the tourism culture of consumption and waste has created filthy conditions, causing more controversy to continue and spread.

### **3. What efforts have been undertaken to resolve these land issues?**

To solve these issues, the tribe has adopted autonomy, self-governance, and co-management approaches. To achieve indigenous rights and tribal respect, the tribe has applied to the government to incorporate as a tribal body to discuss and

mediate with the public sector.

Additionally, the tribe has been working with environmental groups and legal aid foundations to obtain assistance, instructions, and advice. At the same time, it has been important for the tribe to use media and the internet to promote our land rights. It is also important for us to work with the 16 officially recognized tribes in Taiwan to form an alliance emphasizing the rights and dignity of indigenous peoples, and prohibit the government and related organizations from abusing public power and wasting public funds to destroy the environment. For tribal autonomy, it is necessary to build upon tribal solidarity, which will create conditions for implementing indigenous rights, respect, and self-determination effectively. ■



# Upcoming Events

Please visit the websites below for more information and upcoming NAIS events!

IU First Nations Educational and Cultural Center

<https://firstnations.indiana.edu>



Past NAIS Newsletters

<http://www.indiana.edu/~amst/NAIS/newsletters.shtml>

The American Indian Studies Research Institute

<http://www.indiana.edu/~aisri/>



Mathers Museum of World Cultures

**Mathers Museum** <https://mathersmuseum.indiana.edu/index.html>

The Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology

<https://gbl.indiana.edu/>

