

Class and Indigenous Politics: the Paradox of Sediq/Truku Women “Entrepreneurs” in Taiwan

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Abstract: Class is an important concept in studying the political economy of indigeneity. This paper looks at the role of women shopkeepers in Sediq and Truku indigenous communities in Taiwan from a perspective of Marxian class analysis. By creating and controlling social and political space in their shops, they become key players in local political struggles that reinforce a bipolar class structure composed of a small elite class and a vast lumpenproletariat. In some cases, they may even be able to launch themselves or family members into positions of political power. This phenomenon is an integral part of the capitalist system that expropriates indigenous land, labour and natural resources. In fact, the creation of new elites in previously egalitarian societies makes such expropriation possible in the first place.

Key words: indigeneity, class, political economy, Taiwan

Introduction

Certain intellectual currents in the anthropology of indigenous peoples have romanticized the lifestyles of indigenous people, emphasizing cultural relativism, for example, as “differences between their ontologies and epistemologies and those of the Europeans” (Blaser et al. 2010:7). In spite of a tendency toward cultural essentialism, detailed ethnographies of indigenous life in North America and elsewhere enrich anthropological knowledge of indigenous societies and worldviews, making important scientific contributions to such fields as Traditional Ecological Knowledge and human-animal relations. Nonetheless, the emphasis on a radical epistemological and ontological gap between indigenous people and settlers obscures the fundamental mechanisms of a world capitalist system that exploits labour and appropriates natural resources from indigenous and non-indigenous people alike,

albeit through different locally-defined strategies. As Petras and Veltmeyer recently pointed out, such classless approaches underestimate the degree of capitalist penetration, class differentiation, and political polarization in indigenous communities (Petras and Veltmeyer 2010:444-445). In an attempt to reconcile the goals of both class and ethnic social justice, it is important to round out the literature on indigenous studies with greater attention to political economy and the social reproduction of class. That is the goal of this article.

After more than two decades of postmodern reflection in anthropology and a global indigenous social movement seemingly eager to replace class with ethnic identity as the engine of political change, there is a gradual return to fundamental issues of class exploitation and capitalist appropriation of natural resources. In an analysis of Maori “neo-tribalism,” for

example, Elizabeth Rata (2000) reasoned that modern tribes are organizations of capitalist accumulation legitimized through indigenist ideologies that recreate class relations and obscure them in precolonial terms. Ingo Schröder (2003), applying this theoretical framework to American Indian tribes, argued that tribal elites and ordinary people are part of a two-tiered system of categorical inequality maintained by exploitation and opportunity hoarding. Kim Clark (2005) similarly concluded that the indigenous movement in Ecuador is best understood within a context of changing class relations, responses to modernist state projects of inclusion, and a changing international political economy. Gerald Sider, studying the Lumbee of North Carolina, maintains that we must rework our understanding of class, shifting analysis away from production to the social reproduction of inequality (2006: 282). Such Marxian approaches can help us better understand the nature of economic inequality within indigenous communities.

I build here upon these arguments, but with a gendered twist, in a study of village political elites, women shopkeepers, and ordinary people in three indigenous communities in Taiwan. From 2004 to 2007, I conducted research on economic development in two Truku villages in Hualien and one Sediq village in Nantou, with approximately six months spent in each village. I have subsequently made annual field trips to these same villages. The Truku and Sediq groups were considered by anthropologists to be Atayalic groups ever since the Japanese period (1895-1945), but have developed distinct social and political identities fortified by social movement successes in the past two decades. The villages are located on adjacent territories and share relations based on marriage exchange and political contacts. They were classified as the same tribe, parts of the Atayal tribe with different local identities, at the time that this research project began.

The ethnogenesis of the Truku and Sediq is precisely where the competing strategies of local elites, responding to larger political opportunity structures, are most visible (Chi and Chin 2010). In 1999, Truku and Sediq delegates signed the “New Partnership Agreement between the Indigenous Peoples and the Government of Taiwan” as distinct nations with

then presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian of the independence-minded Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). During and after Chen’s presidency (2000–2008), the Truku and Sediq groups, in spite of overlapping claims to populations and territory, forged new ethnic identities, provoking emotionally-laden conflicts about identity within local villages and even within families. The Truku were formally recognized by the Republic of China (ROC) Executive Yuan in 2004 and the Sediq in 2008 (see Simon 2009a), making it possible for Atayal people in the participating townships to register as members of the Truku or Sediq tribe. The Truku and Sediq groups, with the Truku (pop. 26,812) concentrated in Hualien and the Sediq (pop. 7,114) largely in Nantou, have established preparatory tribal councils and are positioning themselves to establish regional indigenous autonomy zones. An Indigenous Autonomy Bill was under debate in a second reading at the Legislative Yuan even as this article was written in June 2011, but is unlikely to arrive at a vote before the end of this legislative session and the January 2012 elections. If the bill were to pass, members of the tribal elite in both groups would gain new positions and control over resources.

In daily life, but especially during election campaigns, autonomy and other issues are debated in the small shops where villagers gather to share drinks and enjoy the company of family and friends. Throughout the day, there is a circulation of people through the grocery stores, karaoke shops, and noodle shops. Inevitably, there will be same-sex groups of friends who have finished their work for the day, taken the day off, or could not find work at all. In the evenings and on weekends, the same shops are sites of beer drinking and socializing.

What is interesting about Sediq and Truku villages, especially in contrast with Han Taiwanese communities, is that businesses are usually owned by women. Ever since the 1980s when men migrated as labourers to cities in larger numbers than women, leaving women behind to farm and run small businesses, women have invested in small grocery stores and/or karaoke pubs (Lin 2010:177-78). An important part of my research was done in these enterprises, as I spent hours each day drinking beer and chatting

with the people who congregate there from early morning until after dark. The owners emerge as strong personalities and respected opinion makers in the villages. The customers are mostly the working class members, or “ordinary people” of the community, who refer to their social class in Mandarin as “*lao baixing*” (“old one hundred surnames”).¹ This article is based largely on conversations with these people, but also with members of the local elite.

Viewed from a purely economic perspective, these small shops pose somewhat of a puzzle. Although some of them are formal businesses with shop signs, others are quite invisible, especially small shops where women merely sell drinks from a refrigerator in their living rooms. An outsider could easily pass by and see only a small group of people drinking in a private courtyard. In interviews, moreover, these women generally insist that they earn very little profit, especially since many people buy on credit and never pay their debts. I personally observed them refuse payment for food and drink, and at times had to insist that they take money even from me. They open and close their shops arbitrarily, seemingly uninterested in profit. Yet these shops are the main sites where commodities and people circulate in the villages. As I demonstrate in this article, these small shops allow women to position themselves as opinion shapers and power brokers in village politics. It is important, however, to situate these activities within large class dynamics; and that is the main purpose of this article. What do small businesses mean to Truku women shopkeepers? How does this work insert them into evolving class relations? How do those women contribute to the social reproduction of class?

Women Entrepreneurs and Class Relations

There is a growing literature in anthropology on women entrepreneurs, with mixed results. Scholars working in Marxian frameworks usually argue that micro-entrepreneurship reproduces poverty and

existing forms of subordination (Ypeij 2000). In a multi-country study, Prügl and Tinker (1997) found that entrepreneurship masks production in subcontracting networks, in which case it may be more exploitive than factory work and reinforce gender subordination in the household. Scholars using Foucauldian perspectives argue that NGOs promoting entrepreneurship (Escobar 1995:143, Lazar 2004) or other development projects designed to integrate women into development (St-Hilaire 1996) incorporate women into neoliberal hegemony without necessarily increasing their autonomy. In these cases, “entrepreneurship” obscures the facts that these women are still subalterns in larger patterns of capitalist labour relations.

Even in cases where entrepreneurship increases social and political power for some individual women, as I argue is the case in Truku and Sediq villages, it is important to place such dynamics in the context of wider class relations and capitalist appropriation of resources. These women, to a large extent, simply gain slightly more advantageous class positions in the larger political economic context in which their communities as a whole are still exploited. They may even promote themselves or family members into relatively well-paid positions as elected political leaders. Under capitalism, however, members of local elite groups, especially township office managers in this case, may end up facilitating the capitalist exploitation of natural resources. It is especially important to reveal these class dynamics on Taiwan’s East Coast, where indigenous people lose land to mining companies, tourism development projects and national parks; and where many villagers are employed as day labourers in local mines, cement factories, and construction projects (Chi 2001; Simon 2002). In this article, we will see that women’s entrepreneurship, at least in the three villages studied here, is more than a study of gender subordination. It is an integral part of the social reproduction of class, thus contributing indirectly to local capitalist penetration.

Taiwan’s indigenous peoples, although they have contributed both labour and land to Taiwan’s capitalist development (Chi 2001), have been rarely studied in western-language anthropology; and even less so from Marxian perspectives. Representing the

¹ There is a certain irony in the use of this term, which like Mandarin itself is a colonial imposition. The Sediq/Truku did not have surnames, until they were forced to adopt Japanese surnames under Japanese colonial administration, followed by a switch to Chinese surnames after the War. In their own naming system, the personal name is followed by the father’s name, e.g. Walis Watan is Walis, son of Watan.

oldest branch of the Austronesian language family stretching from Taiwan to New Zealand and from Madagascar to Easter Island (Bellwood et al. 1995), these peoples have lived on Taiwan for at least 6000 years. They now number more than 500,000, or slightly more than two percent of Taiwan's population.

Taiwan's non-indigenous ethnic groups are descendents of Han settlers who began arriving from China in the 17th century when the Dutch established a colony (1624-1661) on the southwest coast and needed to import sugarcane workers. The non-indigenous Han Taiwanese are usually categorized, according to linguistic classifications and migration histories as Hoklo (from southern Fujian) or Hakka (mostly from Guangdong). They have the historical experience of having lived in Taiwan under Japanese administration (1895-1945), which is why they are often confusingly called "Native Taiwanese" in the academic literature. In addition, there are diverse cohorts of "Mainlanders," who arrived in Taiwan from China following the 1949 Chinese Revolution (Gates 1981). The Hoklo, Hakka, Mainlander and indigenous groups represent, respectively, 70 percent, 15 percent, 13 percent and 2 percent of the island's population (Yang and Chang 2010:110).

From the perspective of the indigenous peoples, 387 years of colonization analogous to European expansion in the Americas brought to Taiwan new forms of economy, agriculture, property rights, and state-organized violence. The Dutch East India Company, at approximately the same time that they established themselves in Manhattan, represented the first state to establish relations with Taiwan's indigenous people. As part of their global trading strategy, they purchased deer skins from the indigenous people, leading to a stark decline in the deer population. They also developed land for agricultural production, especially sugarcane, which necessitated for the first time in Taiwanese history the foundation of long-term Chinese settlement (Andrade 2008). The Chinese rebel Koxinga evicted the Dutch in 1662, bringing in new waves of Chinese settlers, but was soon replaced in 1683 by the Manchurian Qing Dynasty, which ultimately settled the entire western plains (Brown 2004; Shepherd 1993). Plains indigenous peoples, known as *pingpuzu*, resisted fiercely,

but were ultimately resigned to intermarriage with settlers and/or displacement further inland. For nearly two centuries, the Qing state established a boundary between settler-controlled plains and indigenous-controlled mountainous areas, basically leaving Austronesians with effective sovereignty of over half the island.

Austronesian incorporation into capitalist world markets happened only after Japan annexed Taiwan in 1895. In search of mountain resources, including highly valued camphor trees, the Japanese military "pacified" the mountain tribes after two decades of warfare in difficult mountainous terrain. They subsequently transformed the various nomadic and settled groups into modern villages with tribal councils and reservations based on the model of American Indian policy (Fujii 1997). As in South and North America (Clark 2005; Sider 2006), class relations and indigenous tribal communities were simultaneously created by the state through processes of appropriation of tribal land and incorporation of indigenous labour into new economic forms. Without the history of colonialism and expansion of the capitalist system, today's indigenous communities would not exist in their current form. They would not have lost their vast traditional territories in the mountain forests, and would not have been forcibly relocated into settled communities. Without the exigencies of colonial administration, band-centred social identities would not have been fixed into wider ethnic-based tribes with tribal councils, chiefs, and other mediators with the state. All of this was done in order to manage populations, making them "legible" in the words of James Scott (2009:74) to facilitate capitalist appropriation of natural resources. This history on Taiwan is thus part of the global process by which "people of diverse origins and social makeup were driven to take part in the construction of a common world" (Wolf 1982:385).

Japan was forced to cede Taiwan at the conclusion of World War II, and the island was transferred to the ROC, under the leadership of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). Following the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949, Taiwan became positioned on the frontlines of the Cold War. Hoping to offer "Free China" as an alternative future for the

region, the US supported the ROC government for decades militarily and economically. Privileged access to the American consumer market led to further industrialization and rapid economic growth. From an Austronesian perspective, the two major social transformations resulting from this larger political economic situation were land loss (see below) and the insertion of indigenous workers into the wage economy. During the rapid economic growth of the 1970s, often celebrated by liberal economists as the “Taiwan miracle,” indigenous people streamed into cities in search of industrial work. Due to these changes, only an estimated 60.1 percent of indigenous people now live in indigenous townships (Zhang et al. 2009:6).

Indigenous communities and lifestyles, although impacted by these changes, continue to exist in thirty mountain townships, where indigenous people live on the reserve lands originally created by the Japanese. Tense relations between the indigenous and non-indigenous Han Taiwanese have contributed to the development of an indigenist ideology that draws a strong moral distinction between the supposedly communitarian indigenous and the allegedly money-grubbing Han. Indigenous people are keenly aware that Taiwanese investors and corporations have legally and illegally seized indigenous land across the island. Due to the small size of Taiwan and relatively convenient transportation, even village dwellers can seek employment on nearby labour markets, forming part of the subaltern classes. Temporary and seasonal labour migrations are common, and those within relatively short distances from towns and cities commute to work. Indigenous workers usually end up with the most precarious jobs and dangerous working conditions. Many workers claim to have at least one negative experience in which a Han Taiwanese subcontractor failed to pay wages as promised.

Liberal ethnic discourse highlights the cultural differences between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, usually masking the political economic processes that create and attenuate such distinctions. Such discourse tends to overlook class distinctions *within* indigenous communities, as well as class-based solidarity between indigenous and non-indigenous communities. In each village in this study, visible class distinctions stand in stark contrast to the continu-

ing presence of an egalitarian ideology and frequent reference, especially by working class members, to an egalitarian past. In the indigenous townships, the post of magistrate is reserved for indigenous candidates. Most members of the township assemblies, as well as employees of the township office, are indigenous. At the national legislative level, there are six reserved seats for indigenous legislators. An entire political framework, constructed during the past century of colonialism and capitalist accumulation, has contributed to the creation of an indigenous elite in all villages.

Sinologist Michael Rudolph, who has also done limited field work in Truku and Amis villages, strongly criticizes the new indigenous elite, arguing against the indigenous movement with the argument that: “by establishing the concept of ‘*Aboriginality*’ (Stainton 1995), they (aborigine elites) finally achieved a high amount of recognition in Taiwanese society; in contrast, common people felt much more attracted by the value-orientations of a consumption-oriented Han middle class” (Rudolph 2004:252, italics in the original). Rather than examining village level class politics, however, Rudolph draws attention to the macro-level of Taiwan’s relationship with mainland China. As for the indigenous movement, Rudolph argues that “all these efforts of course had not only the aim to demarcate Taiwan culturally, but also politically from China” (Rudolph 2006:46 fn. 12).

This argument, which seemed reasonable during the DPP presidency, has been disproven since the Chinese Nationalist KMT regained power under the leadership of President Ma Ying-jeou in 2008. Since then, Taiwan has moved politically and economically closer to China. At the same time, however, there have also been important advances in indigenous rights, including revision of certain laws and moves toward creation of indigenous autonomous zones. I thus think we should reject Rudolph’s hypothesis that the indigenous movement is a political tool to separate Taiwan from China. It is more useful to see it as a tool of capitalist accumulation, as it legitimizes access to resources on indigenous territory no matter which party controls the presidency. The rituals and other social processes described by Rudolph are thus the product, not of Taiwanese nationalism, but of

political economy. This includes the social reproduction of class.

In addition to the political elite, each village has a cohort of relatively wealthy teachers, military officers, policemen, and firemen,² as well as a small number of unionized factory workers with permanent jobs. These people have become distinct from the majority of villagers because of their work identities. Policemen and firemen, for example, tend to socialize and drink with work colleagues on their days off, maintaining some social distance from other villagers except at weddings, funerals, and other kin-based events that transcend the relatively new class distinctions. The most important moments for cross-class social cohesion are at pig sacrifices to the ancestors that occur most lavishly at weddings, but also at other life transitions. All members of the extended family receive an equal portion of pork at these moments, reinforcing a feeling of kin solidarity. Funerals, preceded by a wake of up to seven days, also strengthen kin networks. Wealthier members of a band are expected to contribute financially to group activities and express generosity to poorer kin. The pressure to share, in fact, is so strong that some indigenous entrepreneurs claim that they have to move away from their home communities if they wish to accumulate wealth and reinvest their profits.

In each village, there is also a large working class. Large numbers of people with no permanent jobs insist that they prefer temporary or seasonal work. Every morning, labour brokers gather up people from the villages to work in nearby factories, construction sites, or farms. From a Marxian perspective, indigenous temporary workers occupy the most subordinate positions in the local class structure, as well as in the Taiwanese economy at a macro level. On the other hand, workers say these arrangements give them freedom to choose when to work and when to dedicate their time to other tasks. These workers spend a good amount of time in the small shops, sharing beer with friends and colleagues after receiving their wages.

The emic perspective of the “ordinary people” cannot be ignored. For men, part-time proletarian work is appreciated because it leaves time for other

important activities including hunting, trapping, fishing, and generous periods of same-sex socializing. They boast that they can provide meat for their families and others by hunting, and prefer to work only when they need cash (Simon 2009b). Women, on the other hand, say that indigenous men spend too much time drinking and socializing with other men.³ With a sense of stoic determination, they emphasize their own labour, which they say is necessary to take care of their families. A full analysis must include both this emic perspective and the etic approach provided by Marxist class analysis.

Indigenous Eastern Taiwan: A Marxist Class Analysis

In a seminal article on class in Taiwan, anthropologist Hill Gates (1979) analyzed class formation in Taiwan as a whole, using statistics from a variety of government ministries. She classified the Taiwanese population roughly into five classes: 1) the lumpenproletariat (5 percent), 2) the grand bourgeoisie (5 percent), 3) the petty bourgeoisie composed of agricultural owner-operators (32 percent) as well as small businesspeople and artisans (15 percent), 4) the permanent proletariat (20 percent), 5) and the new middle class (20 percent) of lower ranking cadres in business and government offices, as well as career military officers. Gates carefully noted the difficulty of trying to place all families into classes, and her percentages fall short of 100 percent. As she noted, however, the five-class classification, rather than being a precise statistical tool, “is merely an attempt to describe the social setting within which a particular pattern of labour use has emerged” (Gates 1979:394). Her main argument is that Taiwan had yet to develop a permanent working class with class consciousness due to the existence of a large petty bourgeoisie that sent its youth temporarily into the industrial workforce with the hope of eventually moving into the new middle class. This development was caused by the dependency of Taiwan on the US market for consumer goods. The larger international

2 The use of the masculine is intentional here, as I encountered no women police officers or fire fighters.

3 Drinking customs go back to the Japanese period, when Japanese officials used drinking and friendship as part of their strategies to bring indigenous communities under Japanese state administration (Barclay 2003).

Table 1: Indigenous Income Distribution, 2009

	No income	Less than NT\$10,000	NT\$10-20,000	NT\$20-30,000	NT\$30-40,000	NT\$40-50,000	NT\$50-60,000	NT\$60-70,000	More than NT\$70,000	NA
All Taiwan Indigenous	28.09	19.64	15.96	17.05	10.04	4.07	1.94	1.15	0.84	1.21
Eastern Indigenous Townships	27.32	24.44	15.75	13.58	9.84	4.37	2.06	1.45	0.70	0.49

Source: CIP 2010: Table B5.

context is the same for indigenous communities, but they remain in an even more subaltern position than the Han Taiwanese groups studied by Gates.

Taiwan has changed greatly since 1979. First of all, rising wages led to an increase in the cost of production. Taiwan thus moved higher up the value chain, and much of the labour-intensive industrial production moved to the People's Republic of China, which in the same period opened up to foreign direct investment. Second, Taiwan began importing foreign workers in the 1990s, leading to a work force composed largely of foreign workers, but also of older Taiwanese women who worked in factories as young women, resigned at marriage, but then returned after their children grew up and left the home (Simon 2000, 2005). Due to these changes, there are fewer job opportunities in urban areas for indigenous people, and the villages are increasingly filled with returnees from the West Coast.

Considering these changes and the specific conditions of indigenous communities, it is useful to conduct a local class analysis of indigenous Eastern Taiwan, in order to better describe the conditions of class reproduction in those villages. Indigenous labour statistics, gathered regularly and made available on the web site of the Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP), make it possible to conduct such an analysis.⁴ CIP data makes it possible to analyze separately the data from the indigenous townships in Eastern Taiwan where the bulk of this research was conducted. This is the best possible statistical description of the wider context of social reproduc-

tion of class analyzed in this article. As Gates found, however, the method permits only a rough classification useful to describe the wider context and analyze the social reproduction of class.

In terms of income and employment, Taiwan's indigenous people remain marginalized relative to other ethnic groups. In 2009, the average monthly salary in Taiwan was NT\$30,707 (DGBAS 2011).⁵ In the same year, the average monthly income for indigenous people above the age of 15 was NT\$14,770. For working indigenous people, the average salary was NT\$24,729 (CIP 2010:XI). In Eastern Taiwan indigenous townships in 2009, 58.01 percent of the population over 15 were on the labour market, and 41.99 percent were not on the labour market for various reasons (CIP 2010:Table C-1). In those townships, there was an unemployment rate of 12.96 percent (CIP 2010:Table C-2). More revealingly, 58.2 percent of indigenous households were below the official poverty line (CIP 2011:x). A study of income distribution shows that the vast majority of indigenous people are concentrated at the low end of the income spectrum. The data thus reveal the existence of an emerging village elite materially better off than the ordinary people. Table 1 shows data from Taiwan as a whole, as well as from Eastern Taiwan.

A classification into five classes, as Gates attempted for Taiwan's population as a whole, is even more difficult to apply to indigenous communities. A four-fold classification is more appropriate, as the grand bourgeoisie, the owners of large firms and high-ranking officials, are not present in these villages and probably have very few indigenous members at all. These are the urban-based employers

⁴ Comparable statistics are not available for other ethnic groups, as only the indigenous people have legally protected minority status and are considered to be in need of affirmative action-style policies.

⁵ During research, CAD\$1 was approximately NT\$30.

who own the cement factories, mines, and construction companies that employ indigenous workers, but who actually run their companies from Taipei or other urban centres. In the case of construction, they do so through dense networks of subcontractors. The Chair of the Executive Yuan Council of Indigenous Peoples and a quota of six legislators are all indigenous, but these short-lived positions are not sufficient to catapult them permanently into the grand bourgeoisie.⁶

The lumpenproletariat, which would include large numbers of temporary workers, is much larger than the five percent of the general population estimated by Gates as belonging to this class. The main issue here concerns the creation in villages of landed and landless families. Some families still have agricultural land from the reform of the reserve land regulations beginning in 1966, when indigenous families were allowed to claim usufruct rights to land they had cultivated. According to law, they received title after ten years of cultivation. Some people, however, were unaware of the need to register land, losing it in some cases to more knowledgeable members of their communities, who registered the land in their own names. Some people subsequently sold or otherwise lost their land. Even though the law technically limited sale to indigenous people only, the reform was basically a form of privatization by stealth and led to the creation of a landless proletariat. Ordinary people still discuss with bitterness how a small minority of township employees benefitted from the sale of reserve land for the creation of industrial zones, especially when they did so by registering land cultivated by others in their own names. They thus remember the creation of reserve land as the policy that crystallized class distinctions in the community (cf. Lin, this issue).

The village lumpenproletariat, landless and without permanent employment, are by no means as poor as their urban counterparts, as they have better access to food. Many villagers, in fact, even told me that they returned from cities to the village



A woman shopkeeper, now village mayor, speaks at a public hearing on indigenous autonomy. (Simon photograph)

partly because of the relative abundance of food. Access to forests means that food is available even to the poorest of the poor. Every morning, women gather wild plants in the surrounding hills. Men contribute occasional protein by hunting and fishing. And, during the rainy season, people wearing headlamps can be seen by the side of the road in search of snails. These strategies, combined with family combinations of wages and welfare provisions for low-income families and senior citizens, mean that most poor families can survive without chronic hunger. Nonetheless, they remain at the bottom of the local class structure. Like Gates, I found it difficult to classify people into this category. Considering that 51.76 percent of the villagers earn less than NT\$10,000 a month, and that a similar percentage are unemployed or outside of the labour market, it is probably safe to assume that at least 45 percent of the indigenous villagers can be classified as belonging to the lumpenproletariat.

The petty bourgeoisie, composed of agricultural owner-operators, as well as small business owners and artisans, is smaller in indigenous communities than in towns and cities. Of employed people in indigenous Eastern Taiwan, 13.17 percent, or approximately 6.35 percent of the population, are in agriculture (CIP2010: Table D-1). Considering that 73.05 percent of the farming population (CIP 2010: Table D-3) report that they must also do temporary labour, however, few can be considered to be professional farmers. Indeed, farming on small plots is part of a diversified family economy, and probably underrepresented in the statistics. In terms of employment status, some 8.3 percent of the labour force, or four percent of the population,

⁶ Their role in the political economy is primarily to facilitate the strategies and interests of the grand bourgeoisie, although they sometimes also can exercise their own agency in unexpected ways and advance an indigenist agenda (see Iwan 2005; Ku 2005).

are self-declared as owner-operators of companies (CIP 2010: Table D-1). These small business owners would include the women shopkeepers described below. Considering these limitations, the indigenous petty bourgeoisie probably represents no more than ten percent of the population.

The permanent proletariat would include most employees in the private sector, accounting in indigenous Eastern Taiwan for 70.17 percent of the labour force, or 32.76 percent of the population (CIP 2010: Table D-7). We can also include police officers and fire fighters, even though they are part of the 18.42 percent of indigenous people who earn over NT\$30,000 a month. A small minority of high earning industrial workers, such as machine operators at Asia Cement, also earn NT\$30,000 – NT\$50,000 a month. The new middle class, or aspiring new middle class, would include some of the 20.39 percent of the workforce in indigenous Eastern Taiwan who are government employees, representing about 10 percent of the population (CIP 2010: Table D-7). Only the higher ranking officials and well-paid workers can be considered new middle class, however. I thus roughly classify 35 percent of the population in Eastern indigenous townships as belonging to the permanent proletariat and no more than 10 percent as new middle class.

The contrast with the communities studied by Gates is stark. She found that a large petty bourgeoisie sent their youth temporarily into the industrial labour force, with the hope that they would join the ranks of the new middle class, and thus had low class consciousness. The main differences between urban Taiwan in her study and rural, indigenous Taiwan include the much smaller petit bourgeoisie and the presence of a large lumpenproletariat in indigenous villages. Class dynamics are thus not about a vast group of petit bourgeoisie families sending their youth temporarily into the industrial workplace in hopes that they will eventually join the new middle class. Instead, stark class differentiation reinforces social and economic cleavages between a village elite and a large mass of “ordinary people.” The number of people working in government offices, or with the qualifications to do so, is probably high enough that most families see joining the new middle class as a

possibility for their children. The lucrative possibility of working class government career paths, such as working as police officers and firemen, also adds legitimacy to the current system.

At the same time, however, the township office is the main government body responsible for authorizing industrial and commercial use of indigenous land. The local government is thus the main mediator of capitalist accumulation and appropriation of natural resources. As mentioned above, villagers accuse township government employees of having gained personal profit from privileged insider’s information that permitted them to acquire and later sell land destined to be developed. The ordinary people believe that these strategies are illegitimate, but they tend to blame individuals rather than the capitalist system as a whole. They even say that the ancestors curse such people, and point out as evidence the presence of handicapped or chronically ill people in elite families. Amidst these polarized class relations, mediation between the two groups is important, especially at crucial elections, when the village elite need the votes of the ordinary people. The petty bourgeoisie, especially women shopkeepers, play a key mediation role in class relations.

Two Life Histories

In daily conversations and formal interviews, most women shopkeepers made it clear to me that they do *not* self-identify as entrepreneurs. For the majority of women shopkeepers, the main theme emerging from interviews and conversations is that they wished to stay in the village and take care of family members rather than migrate or commute to work. They stressed the social side of their work, noting the pleasure they derive from chatting with people who congregate in their stores. They complained about people who purchase on credit and never pay, saying that they are embarrassed to insist on payment from kinfolk in difficult economic circumstances. They pointed out examples of women who had to close stores because they could not keep up with payments to suppliers or creditors. The women understand the financial situations of their neighbours very well, as most of them get credit from or invest in informal revolving credit groups composed of women.

Women shop owners modestly say that they make only “a few hundred” New Taiwan dollars (NT\$) a day in profit. Based on my observations, I estimate that even the smallest shops can earn around NT\$500 (CAD\$16.60) a day, just if they earn NT\$10-20 on each bottle of beer or Whispy (a “medicinal” drink with low alcohol and high caffeine content). In spite of their claims to poverty, this compares well to the NT\$700 a day that women earn as agricultural day labourers. After a month, it may even exceed the income of male construction day workers who earn NT\$1600 a day, but who may work only ten days a month. They may consider themselves to be poor, but they are certainly not poorer than their customers. Their modesty, however, is necessary in a social setting where the private accumulation of wealth is discouraged. The following women’s stories are typical examples.

Cimay, a 43-year-old widow, sells noodles from a tin shack in front of her house. She left Cyakang at 23, moving between factory jobs in Taichung and Hsinchu, where she made such products as ceiling fans or light bulbs and remitted much of her salary to her parents. She always returned to the village at harvest time. After marriage, she settled down in her Truku husband’s village and opened a store. Occasionally, she took part-time jobs in restaurants and in a school cafeteria. After the death of her husband to liver cancer, she returned to her natal village and opened a noodle shop so that she could care for her aging mother and her grandchildren. She estimated that she grosses NT\$2000 to NT\$3000 a day, and costs are minimal, but she is not in business for a profit. The goal, she said, “Is just to have a little extra income. As long as we have enough to eat, we are doing well enough.”

Fifty-year-old Habaw runs a small general store with six rows of shelves. She sells a variety of goods, including betel nuts, snack food, candy, instant noodles, household supplies, beverages, and alcohol. Just outside the store are a table for customers and a coin-operated karaoke machine. She began her work life as a cook at the “Atayal Resort,” a Han-owned amusement park on fraudulently acquired reserve land that is also an important source of employment for the villagers. She complained, however, that the

pay was low (about NT\$12,000 to NT\$16,000 a month) and the work tiring. In 1997, her husband, a construction worker, built the store on land that she had purchased and with materials that she had bought. During the economic boom at the time, she said, there were plentiful construction jobs and villagers were wealthy. She thus grossed tens of thousands of New Taiwan dollars a day, but now earns “only enough to eat.” She initially traded shifts with her husband, but he would frequently get drunk with customers and was unsuitable for the job. He now works with an itinerant crew of betel nut pickers. She also owns paddy fields, which she rents out to Hoklo farmers. As for her motivation to open a store, she said she only wants to be free: “I don’t like to have people telling me what to do.”

Habaw insisted that “of course women are better at business.” Men, she said, don’t like being tied down in one place and have alcohol problems. Her husband could only work for a few days before he would disappear with friends. She said that women are better at “speaking directly,” which is important when a business owner needs to manage disputes with wholesalers, delivery people, or difficult customers. Men are reluctant to express their needs directly, she said, and are thus easy to take advantage of. She works long hours from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., when she has to turn off the karaoke machine, and has little time to sleep. She has three sons, but only one helps out in the store. She said he is not like other men because he doesn’t drink and he doesn’t want to work in a job where he will be exposed to the sun. “He is the only good one,” she concluded.

These life histories demonstrate the strong sense of agency that women gain from entrepreneurship. They tell stories of their work histories and entrepreneurial skills that portray themselves as hard-working, but modest, women who know how to manage both businesses and families. A focus exclusively on work and economics, however, overlooks the greater social significance of these shops. Their modesty, moreover, conceals the fact that some women shopkeepers become wealthier than others and may even gain local political power.



A campaign feast held for a candidate for village mayor in front of his mother's general store. (Simon photograph)

Women's Stores and Village Politics

Women-owned stores play a central role in electoral politics (Chao 2007, Lin 2010). As sites for the circulation of both goods and people, they become political arenas where candidates ply for votes and parties can spread ideas. The dominant political party in indigenous communities is the KMT, which maintains strong networks throughout rural Taiwan. Cadres from the KMT "People's Service Station" make the rounds of the villages, where they discuss political ideas with local people. They frequent grocery shops and purchase beer to share with people while spreading their ideology. One county-level politician even told me that he started his career with the KMT People's Service Station because he wanted to be paid to drink with his friends.

During electoral campaigns, candidates and supporters make the rounds of the villages with loudspeakers blaring music and slogans from campaign trucks.⁷ Because people congregate in grocery stores,

they stop, distribute literature, purchase alcohol, and socialize. They also host feasts in shop courtyards. Some shop owners become actively involved. In Bsngan, one shop owner was so active in the KMT that villagers were afraid to say anything negative about the party in her presence. Another shop owner in the same village ran for village mayor. She won the election during my fieldwork period with a clear majority, partly because she could mobilize the votes of people who regularly congregate in her shop. In fact, each election has women candidates and they have a good record of being elected (Simon 2010a).

Although these women often claim poverty, they can use their social position to help other members of the family gain entry to the new middle class. For example, Lawa, a woman in her 60s, helped her son get elected as Cyakang mayor during my fieldwork period. She runs a shop, as well as a small swimming pool popular among children in the summer. Her business practices were critical in assuring her son's election, because of the fictitious sisterhood she cultivated in drinking with village women every day.

⁷ For ethnographic studies of electoral practices in Taiwanese indigenous villages, see Ku (2008) and Simon (2010b).



An election team distributes literature in front of a woman-owned general store. (Simon photograph)

Since marriages are generally patrilocal, these women are mostly unrelated, but play important mediating roles between families.

Lawa, like most village shopkeepers, has a long-standing habit of giving treats to customers or their children, even if only small drinks or candies, but nonetheless building up goodwill and a general sense of indebtedness. Influential male and female elders often came to her shop during the elections, some urging customers to vote for Lawa's son. Lawa's supply network also gave her access to drinks, snacks, and alcohol at wholesale prices, giving her and her son a cost advantage during the campaign. Lawa mobilized friends and allies to cook meals for election feasts; the meat and vegetables were contributed by her friends, relatives and customers. Her business acumen was also important, as Lawa kept her son's campaign financial records (Chao 2007:60-61).

Even for the majority of shopkeepers who are neither candidates nor supporting the campaigns of kinfolk, these women can broker politics in other ways. In the Cyakang village elections, which were eventually won by Lawa's son, a nearby woman shopkeeper hosted feasts in her noodle shop for a competing candidate. Even when she was not visibly involved in other campaigns, she used her position as shopkeeper to try to persuade customers to support her candidate. In this case, the two women were married into two different clans; and had different social networks based on participation in different churches. These women, and others like them in other villages, play important roles as opinion makers in the public sphere of village (Chao 2007:61).

Women shopkeepers also play important roles in other political arenas such as community development associations, non-governmental organizations and churches. Their stores transform their homes into public space, where "gifts" of meals, drinks, and candy can be used to augment their power in other arenas. To the extent that power comes from controlling circulation, some Sediq and Truku women have learned to use property ownership and shop keeping skills to their own advantage. They can even transform their social capital into political power for themselves or members of their families. Of course, power is always relative. These women gain power relative to the large lumpenproletariat in the villages, and often relative to their own husbands. As shopkeepers, they have less power than high ranking township office employees and other members of the local elite. Nonetheless, they have realistic chances of catapulting their own family members into that new middle class, not unlike the Han Taiwanese members of the petty bourgeoisie previously described by Gates. For indigenous people, however, the entire community is still subordinate within the larger political economy of Taiwan. The strategies of women shopkeepers thus contribute to a larger capitalist system that exploits indigenous labour and extracts natural resources from indigenous traditional territory.

Conclusion

Around the world, new dynamics of class formation are emotionally charged in indigenous communities, especially those with egalitarian traditions such as the Truku and Sediq. Ordinary villagers perceive these dynamics very clearly; many of them even say to visiting anthropologists that the main problems in their communities are the village elites who hoard opportunities and accumulate profits at the expense of other villagers. They are especially concerned that their elites benefit from the construction of everything from mines to elementary schools. They perceive this as a moral issue, and even directly accuse local elites of being *lobei*, or thieves. Yet, technically, these local elites have only in few cases violated the laws of the state. They merely respond to political opportunity structures created by the state. The formation of local elites is encouraged by state actors as

a way of facilitating integration into capitalist markets in communities on the frontlines of particularly intense capitalist appropriation. Policies similar to colonial indirect rule have proven to be effective and efficient ways of gaining access to natural resources on indigenous territories with a minimum amount of resistance and protest.

Close attention to class renders visible processes of the social reproduction of class, which inevitably have special characteristics in indigenous communities. The state, by defining the limits of communities and demarcating their territories with special property rights regimes, has created indigenous tribes as a by-product of the same processes designed to facilitate the appropriation of natural resources on those territories. This is not to say that all members of the new middle class are unaware of their predicament. In Taiwan, as elsewhere, they sometimes participate in the wider indigenous social movements and sometimes make decisions that protect their communities from the most extreme ravages of capitalist appropriation. Even in the colonial period, collaboration as well as resistance can be a form of agency (Camacho 2008).

Resistance to such dynamics is also important. In fact, ordinary people complaining to foreign anthropologists about the actions of their community elites are a strong expression of that resistance. Even members of the elite also described their communities as being in a colonial situation, and expressed displeasure about their inability to bring about substantial change. In Taiwan, an autonomous social movement, often tied in a complex, multi-stranded relationship to certain factions in the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT) (Allio 1998; Stainton 1995), challenges this system.

In May 2011, as I worked on this article in Taiwan, these social dynamics were quite visible. I attended, for example, a public meeting in which a representative from the CIP, as well as delegates from the Truku and Sediq groups, discussed the advantages and disadvantages of a proposed new law on indigenous autonomy. At the same, some factions of the indigenous movement, especially those related to the PCT, expressed misgivings about a system of regional autonomy that did not include collective

property rights over traditional territories and would likely only create new elite positions within existing administration boundaries. The political struggles of indigeneity continue. Marxian approaches give us intellectual tools to perceive them as class-based struggles, rather than merely ethnic conflicts between indigenous peoples and settler groups.

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