

## INDIGENOUS CURRICULUM REVIVAL IN TAIWAN

Yann-Ru Ho begins by informing us that “Taiwanese Indigenous languages [have] suffered the threat of extinction throughout history due to marginalization by colonial powers,” but “since the 1980s, the status of Indigenous languages began to improve due to the continued efforts of Indigenous advocates,” and as “the government realized that Indigenous languages were in a dire situation and [supported] revitalization initiatives,” an instance of “colonial responsiveness to Indigenous advocacy.”<sup>1</sup> Ho notes that “Taiwan has 16 Austronesian Indigenous groups [with] their own unique language and culture,” that fact despite “overseas colonial powers approaching during the 1600s,” a consequence of which “the language and culture of Indigenous populations began to suffer and were subjugated.”<sup>2</sup> The first colonists were Dutch and Spanish, those leaving between the “late 1600s to the 1800s,” followed by “large numbers of Chinese settlers,” resulting in “many conflicts between the Chinese and Indigenous populations.”<sup>3</sup> The “Japanese colonized Taiwan in 1895 and the colonial government enacted a modernization movement in Taiwan,” aimed at altering traditional Indigenous customs,” so that many “shed their indigeneity.”<sup>4</sup> With their defeat in World War II, the “Japanese colonizers left the island,” followed – after Chiang Kai-shek<sup>5</sup> fled the mainland on December 10, 1949 – by “the Chinese Nationalist government arrived in Taiwan, ... enacting a dictatorship state and imposing a Mandarin-only policy.”<sup>6</sup> Its effect was “so dire that UNESCO has pronounced the Indigenous languages in Taiwan as nearly extinct.”<sup>7</sup>

Not until the 1990s was a “democratic government” established, allowing the appearance of “political movements [that] were underlined with a recognition of diverse local cultures and languages,” resulting in “governmental support for Indigenous languages” that eventually enabled languages of sixteen “officially recognized Indigenous tribes” to be deemed “national languages of the Republic of China.”<sup>8</sup> Ho tells us that “the education system has also begun to democratize and diversify, including reviving Indigenous language education,” featuring a “curriculum reform gave birth to a native-language education policy mandating the teaching of mother tongues.”<sup>9</sup> A “2019 amendment was advertised as incorporating more Indigenous viewpoints in the curriculum,” and the “*Curriculum Guidelines of 12-Year Basic Education Language Arts—Native Languages* is a policy document that is part of the newest education reform in Taiwan.”<sup>10</sup>

Ho then reviews the “history of Indigenous language textbook compilation,” dividing it into “four stages,” the first (before 1995) characterized by compilation by “individuals or local non-governmental Indigenous groups and organizations,” the second (1995-1998) marked by a “nationwide standardized textbook series for each of the officially recognized Indigenous languages,” the third (2002-2005) a “nine-level

textbook compilation era in which the government commissioned a set of textbooks compiled by National Cheng-Chi University<sup>11</sup>,” and the fourth characterized by “a more comprehensive compilation of Indigenous language textbooks” that was “commissioned by the government, then developed by the Council of Indigenous Peoples and National Cheng-Chi University.”<sup>12</sup> In this fourth stage, “textbooks” were composed collaboratively by both Indigenous scholars and non-Indigenous scholars; they “were influenced by similar Indigenous rights concepts that stressed Indigenous subjectivity.”<sup>13</sup>

Ho underlines the “importance of analyzing indigenous policy and textbooks,” noting that those “sanctioned by the government ... may serve certain groups while marginaliz[ing] others.”<sup>14</sup> Moreover, “examining policy and textbooks allows for examining how Taiwanese society constructs Indigenous knowledge and investigating language revitalization efforts through policy documents and textbook analysis.”<sup>15</sup> In a “literature review,” Ho references previous studies in the formulation and implementation of “Indigenous language policy” as well as studies in “the representation of Indigenous cultures in textbooks.”<sup>16</sup> In Hawaii, for example, “Indigenous peoples and cultures” were represented on occasion according to “Indigenous tourism stereotypes.”<sup>17</sup> A comparative study of Indigenous science knowledge in Canadian and Australian textbooks found representations of “Indigenous science practices as belonging in antiquity without modern continuity.”<sup>18</sup> A “study of Māori knowledge in the New Zealand science curriculum ... found that Indigenous science knowledge is included without the background explanation of Indigenous knowledge context.”<sup>19</sup> Taiwanese studies have focused on “how Indigenous elements have been incorporated into Chinese language, history, and social studies classes,” as well as on “Chinese and English textbooks,” finding “that Indigenous cultures were included but were portrayed as primitive and uncultured.”<sup>20</sup> Other studies found “underrepresentation of Indigenous cultures in history and social studies textbooks” in Taiwan.<sup>21</sup>

“Since Indigenous policy and textbooks aim for ... liberation of oppressed Indigenous languages,” Ho reasons, “it follows that this study utilizes an emancipatory education theory to examine the Indigenous curriculum data,” namely that of Paulo Freire.<sup>22</sup> Ho writes that “Freire’s work is influenced by postcolonial scholars who studied how the colonized internalize colonial viewpoints,” a questionable assertion given that postcolonial theory emerged in the 1980s,<sup>23</sup> a decade after Freire’s theorization of a “pedagogy of the oppressed.” Ho lists Frantz Fanon – who died in 1963, so not a postcolonial theorist – who “theorized how the mindset of colonized peoples is subjugated by accepting colonial values often to the detriment of the colonized community,” such “internalization of colonial values fractur[ing] the psyche of the colonized so they identify with the colonizer,” disabling “the oppressed” from nurturing a “self-identity to embrace their own agency,” thereby creating “obstacles for emancipation.”<sup>24</sup> Ho continues: “To combat this colonial mentality, Freire contends

that a consciousness-changing pedagogy, '*conscientização*', is necessary to emancipate the oppressed" ... [to be] achieved "through a 'problem-posing education' that 'stimulates true reflection and action upon reality' (...) [and] which promotes language education to expose the dominant societal structures and illuminates the worldviews of oppressed peoples."<sup>25</sup> Ho then links Freire with his topic by telling us that "through the voices of the oppressed, Freire contends that the curriculum and education should come from Indigenous experiences," implying to Ho that the language education and textbooks should represent people's 'existential experience' to 'analyze [the] reality' of the oppressed," the "key point" being that "textbook compilation aligns with Indigenous language education goals of documenting and recognizing the actual state of Indigenous communities"<sup>26</sup> Ho emphasizes that "for Freire, the textbook content should not only include Indigenous experiences but the manner in which the content is explained and portrayed is also crucial for recognizing Indigenous identity," so Ho concludes: "Hence, Freirean theory advocates using Indigenous voices to tell Indigenous experiences."<sup>27</sup> While Freire – I was privileged to spend an evening with him in São Paulo in 1988 – would probably be in accord with the Indigenous educational agenda Ho is proposing, Freire's focus was not primarily the Indigenous, although no doubt many of the peasants with whom he worked were either Indigenous or mestizo.<sup>28</sup> Freire's focus was the political and linguistic illiteracy of the peasants, an illiteracy disabling them from comprehending and resisting their economic and political exploitation by landowners and politicians. Although Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" is secular, its progenitor is Liberation Theology.<sup>29</sup> There has been resistance to using Freire's theory to rationalize Indigenous struggles.<sup>30</sup>

Ho does acknowledge a cultural incommensurability between Freire's literacy campaign and Indigenous culture, noting that "the act of reading and writing may seem unfamiliar to Indigenous students as Indigenous languages in Taiwan are transmitted orally."<sup>31</sup> But "Freire also taught in communities with oral traditions" – yes, his "students" were illiterate – Ho admitting that "Indigenous research analysis in Taiwan frequently utilizes theories not from Taiwan; less research constructs local emancipatory theories," citing the work of H. H. Chen as "one of the few that explored Taiwanese Indigenous theory development," critiquing his work as "not fully developed" but still "echo[ing] Freirean theory," reiterating that: "I utilize a Freirean view to analyze whether or how the mixture of forces in curriculum design is reflected in the new textbooks and curriculum to negotiate emancipatory agency for the Indigenous peoples."<sup>32</sup> Ho examined "the new Indigenous language policy document and textbooks in Taiwan (commissioned by the government and developed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars/ educators) [to see the extent to which they] incorporate Indigenous culture and experiences," yes "utilize[ing] Freirean theory (an emancipatory education framework) to critically explore whether the policy and textbooks advocate for Indigenous emancipation in the context for language revitalization."<sup>33</sup> Ho's research questions are: (1) "What are the Indigenous

emancipatory experiences, voices, and actions included in Indigenous language policy documents? (2) “What are the Indigenous emancipatory experiences, voices, and actions portrayed in Indigenous textbooks?” (3) “How do policy documents and textbooks portray critical consciousness about emancipatory Indigenous experience, voices, and actions?”<sup>34</sup>

Among the materials Ho examined were “the Indigenous language education policy curriculum guidelines, which is the *Education Act for Indigenous Peoples* (amended 2019) and the *Curriculum Guidelines of 12-year Basic Education Language Arts—Native Languages (Indigenous Languages)* (2018), both issued by the Ministry of Education.”<sup>35</sup> The textbooks Ho examined were “commissioned by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with Indigenous initiatives, the editors and writers of the textbooks are a combination of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars.”<sup>36</sup> They are “the most frequently used materials in Indigenous language learning.”<sup>37</sup>

**Table 1. Summary of data materials.**

	Policy documents	Textbooks
Total number	2 documents	48 books
Description of data	1. <i>Education Act for Indigenous People</i> 2. <i>Curriculum Guidelines of 12-Year Basic Education Language Arts—Native Languages</i>	3. secondary level textbooks (Book I, Book II, Book III) from each of the 16 languages (Amis, Atayal, Bunun, Kanakanavu, Kavalan, Paiwan, Puyuma, Rukai, Saaroa, Saisiyat, Sakizaya, Seediq, Taroko, Thao, Tsou, Yami)

Ho employed a “textual analysis method ... with the themes informed by Freirean theory ... to analyze the contents of the documents and textbooks.”<sup>38</sup> Because “textual analysis is an analysis method that examines textual data to ‘to gain information regarding how people make sense of and communicate . . . life experiences’ and find out how people conduct meaning-making with text,” Ho notes that “sociological and critical theories are often utilized to accompany the textual analysis to reveal topics and patterns influenced by social structures,” and so: “I examine[d] the emancipatory themes of internalization and critical consciousness of *experiences, voices, and actions* embedded in the Indigenous language education policy documents and textbooks.”<sup>39</sup> Ho discovered that “within a total of 480 chapters, 409 chapters cover Indigenous experiences, constituting approximately 85% of all the textbook chapters,” and “of those 409 chapters, some were written by Indigenous authors and others were short narratives written by the editors for these textbooks.”<sup>40</sup> There were as well, “in each textbook, ... non-Indigenous experience narratives, constituting 71 out of the total 480 chapters, which is approximately 15% of non-Indigenous-related textbook chapter topics within the total chapters,” and “among “the 71 non-Indigenous topic chapters, 42 chapters contain quotations from the Bible, 20 are topics from world literature not including the Bible, and 9 are from Chinese literature.”<sup>41</sup> Ho consulted “with two Indigenous researchers to verify the trustworthiness of the data analysis,” and “emancipatory topics in the contents were discussed with the professors and they

pointed me to research that supports Indigenous viewpoints to ensure that this study reflected Indigenous viewpoints.”<sup>42</sup>

Ho found that “there are contradictory contents in the Indigenous language education policy documents and Indigenous textbooks concerning portrayal of Indigenous emancipatory themes.”<sup>43</sup> And Ho’s “overview of the policies (...) reveal[ed] snippets of content addressing the oppressed plight of Indigenous peoples” that “advocate[d]” for content based on ‘the cultural subjectivity and worldview of the Indigenous peoples, through actions . . . to solve the difficulties faced by the development of Indigenous peoples’.”<sup>44</sup> Ho found that “the *Education Act for Indigenous Peoples* includes sections that advocate placing ‘priority on Indigenous historical justice and transformative justice’ to overturn oppression of Indigenous peoples,” positions in contrast to other sections where “opposing themes also emerged,” as when “policy documents assert[ed] ‘supporting the multicultural society’ and ‘multicultural understanding’,” positions that “subsume Indigenous peoples under a large umbrella of mainstream culture,” a position that “has long been critiqued as a mainstream tactic to pacify Indigenous peoples.”<sup>45</sup> The 2019 *Education Act for Indigenous Peoples*, Ho continues, “states that the government should provide ‘civic services for Indigenous peoples in Indigenous languages’,” although not exclusively, as Ho notes that that “the same Article 13 states that ‘[l]ocal governments shall . . . provide opportunities for indigenous children to access educational services’ for mainstream education ... [.] a default for Indigenous students to ‘adjust better in society’ with the mainstream language.”<sup>46</sup> Ho also notes that “the same 2019 document mandates accommodating Indigenous students in mainstream education system and states that ‘indigenous education shall be organized by the government’.”<sup>47</sup>

Concerning the textbooks Ho examined “there is a conflicting portrayal of emancipatory themes ...: some chapters advocate for Indigenous emancipation while others lack critical consciousness and often reproduce mainstream dominant viewpoints.”<sup>48</sup> Seventeen of the thirty-six chapters “on emancipatory topics ... embed a critique of oppressed experiences of Indigenous peoples throughout history and in modern times,” including acknowledgement that “before modern oppression, there were also historical injustices mounted against Indigenous peoples by previous colonial powers.”<sup>49</sup> Textbooks registered that “in addition to brutal massacres, the cultural lifestyle and means of resistance of Indigenous peoples were also jeopardized by colonists,” repeating a “Rukai story [that] tells of Japanese colonialists confiscating guns so that Indigenous peoples could not hunt nor resist against the colonialists.”<sup>50</sup> Within the seventy-one chapters on non-Indigenous topics, “the majority of quotations are from the Bible, dotted with occasional world literature and Chinese literature excerpts.”<sup>51</sup> In Ho’s judgement, the “relative prevalence of Christian stories incorporated in the Indigenous language textbooks (...) reinforces the stereotype that Indigenous peoples are Christians and lack Indigenous religions,” a fact due to Indigenous peoples’ “internalization of Christian values,” and many “would like a

more prominent focus on Indigenous religions,” including “critical reflection on the colonial roots of this [Christian] religion.”<sup>52</sup>

Textbooks also “evoke[d] stereotypes that Indigenous cultures are primitive by contrasting them with industrial developments of mainstream culture.”<sup>53</sup> Another stereotype textbooks expressed – “multiple times” – was that of “the mainstream stereotype of alcoholism in Indigenous communities.”<sup>54</sup> Ho points out that “drinking, not rampant alcoholism, is actually a traditional element in the Amis culture, as mentioned in a sidenote by Indigenous editors of the textbook: ‘In ancient times, the Amis people had a good drinking culture. . . . Most of them were used for offering sacrifices to the ancestral worship of the ancestral spirits and drinking at important gatherings’ . . . Yet, the authors’ disregard of the traditional meaning of Indigenous drinking culture and internalizing a foreigner’s criticism of the author’s own Indigenous culture is concerning.”<sup>55</sup> Ho notes that “one textbook includes this sentence, ‘we can never forget our songs and our language’, indicating that this chapter is narrated from an Indigenous first-person point of view that refers to Indigenous peoples as part of *us* in *our* (the Atayal) group.”<sup>56</sup> In fact, five chapters – of the thirty-six “emancipatory chapters” – registered “emancipating voices of Indigenous peoples,” narrations “from a first-person point of view of an Indigenous person, using the pronouns *us* and *we* to indicate Indigenous peoples.”<sup>57</sup> Ho also points out that “a considerable number of chapters include confusing and arbitrary insertions of non-Indigenous voices to narrate Indigenous stories,” including the “voice” of a “non-Indigenous tourist narrator [who] implies that the Indigenous community is uncivilized and describes the Indigenous elder as exotic and strange.”<sup>58</sup> In “some chapters” Indigenous groups are referred to as “them,” which, Ho notes, implies “the mainstream viewpoint of regarding Indigenous peoples as outsiders and not part of ‘us’, the mainstream group.”<sup>59</sup>

Fourteen of the thirty-six chapters “on emancipatory topics” acknowledge “actions of reclaiming Indigenous identity through name restoration,” actions that “help,” Ho believes, “Indigenous peoples advocate for social participation to emancipate Indigenous cultures from mainstream culture.”<sup>60</sup> Such emancipation apparently includes “sovereignty,” a “declaration” of which was made “in recent years by the Thao people,” sovereignty rejecting the multicultural concept of “Indigenous peoples under the umbrella of multiple cultures in one mainstream government.”<sup>61</sup> From Ho’s point of view, “an emancipatory textbook that supports ‘praxis’ for Indigenous peoples needs to include an unveiling of the social inequities to induce action” – here Ho again references Freire – “yet contradicting themes appear,” citing “the Thao textbook [that] depicts their traditional territory from a tourist’s point of view, stating the Thao as ‘living happily around the [Sun Moon] Lake’, oblivious to the pollution of the land and the current grievances of the Thao people.”<sup>62</sup> Ho emphasizes that “tourism at Sun Moon Lake has inflicted years of pollution and damage,” that “Indigenous peoples near Sun Moon Lake [have] suffered from tourism development

impacts and exploitation of Indigenous land,” a point the Indigenous scholars Ho consulted confirmed.<sup>63</sup>

“Through the Freirean emancipatory theory analysis” – as Ho terms it, supplementary this non-Freire-like phrasing with mainstream social science phrasing – “a pattern of contentions between Indigenous viewpoints and mainstream viewpoints were [sic] revealed in the data,” a “summary” of which follows. First, Ho found that “the policies intertwined two competing viewpoints in experiences, voices, and actions: (a) *Experiences*: The language of some of the policies supports Indigenous decolonization while others still aim to maintain mainstream *status quo*. (b) *Voices*: The language of the policies advocate revitalizing and speaking Indigenous languages while focusing on mainstream language use simultaneously. (c) *Actions*: The language of the policies partially endorses establishing autonomous Indigenous education while other sections subsume Indigenous education under the mainstream national system.” Concerning the second research question, Ho found that a “frequency count of textbooks shows that approximately 409 textbook chapters cover Indigenous culture and among them, 36 chapters specifically engage in emancipatory themes,” the latter “juxtaposed with mainstream viewpoints”: “(a) *Experiences*: Indigenous decolonization experiences are present in textbooks while mainstream stereotypes of Indigenous experiences such as alcoholism are depicted. (b) *Voices*: Textbooks includes chapters on revitalization of Indigenous languages which are inserted with chapters evoking mainstream voices. (c) *Actions*: Indigenous name reclaiming and self-determination actions are discussed in textbooks but mainstream culture practices are also depicted.” Both “policies documents and textbooks accentuate a juxtaposition of Indigenous versus mainstream viewpoints,” and “both sets of data embed an inconsistency in terms of critical consciousness of the oppressed realities of Indigenous experience, voices, and actions. “<sup>64</sup> Surely, such “inconsistency” reflects the contemporary situation of Indigenous cultures not only in Taiwan, but everywhere cultural revitalization – “emancipation” – is undertaken while Indigenous cultures are embedded in non-Indigenous societies.

## REFERENCES

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- Ho, Yann-Ru. 2021. Indigenous Language Curriculum Revival: An Emancipatory Education Analysis of Taiwanese Indigenous Language Policy and Textbooks. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 54(4), 501–519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.2003435>
- Pinar, William F. 2015. *Educational Experience as Lived*. Routledge.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> 2021, 501.
- <sup>2</sup> 2021, 502.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Chiang-Kai-shek>
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid. Concerning UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en>
- <sup>8</sup> 2021, 503.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.nccu.edu.tw/app/home.php?Lang=en>
- <sup>12</sup> 2021, 504.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> 2021, 505.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid. Regarding Freire, see: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Paulo-Freire> and <https://freire.org/paulo-freire/>
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0069.xml>
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid. Regarding Fanon and decolonization, see Pinar 2015, 188-200.
- <sup>25</sup> 2021, 506.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> <https://iep.utm.edu/freire/>
- <sup>29</sup> On Liberational Theology and curriculum studies, see Pinar 1995, 643-652. See also: <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2021/11/22/paulo-freire-brazil-pedagogy-oppressed-241593#:~:text=A%20leading%20liberation%20theologian%2C%20Frei%20Bett%20pointed%20out,for%20political%20rights%20repressed%20during%20Brazil%20E2%80%99s%20military%20dictatorship> and [https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/education\\_articles/213/](https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/education_articles/213/)
- <sup>30</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/34959234/Paulo\\_Freire\\_Critical\\_Literacy\\_and\\_Indigenous\\_Resistance](https://www.academia.edu/34959234/Paulo_Freire_Critical_Literacy_and_Indigenous_Resistance) See also: [www.ualberta.ca/~rmorrow/Resources](http://www.ualberta.ca/~rmorrow/Resources)
- <sup>31</sup> 2021, 506.
- <sup>32</sup> 2021, 506-507.



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- <sup>33</sup> 2021, 507.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> 2021, 508.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> 2021, 509. But not only Indigenous viewpoints: Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed – concerned with (especially political) literacy – does not represent an Indigenous “viewpoint.”
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid. That within single quotation marks is the Ministry’s language.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid. Pacify? If so, it’s hardly worked. More likely it’s a strategy to incorporate Indigenous peoples within the nation-state, even when conferring upon them “nation” status.
- <sup>46</sup> 2021, 510.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> 2021, 511.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> 2021, 511-512.
- <sup>53</sup> 2021, 512.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> 2021, 512-513.
- <sup>56</sup> 2021, 513.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid. By asserting Indigenous identity and sovereignty, Indigenous peoples are demanding *not* to be part of the mainstream.
- <sup>60</sup> 2021, 514.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>64</sup> Page numbers not included; for specification return to the original article.