

CONCLUSION

“Every time we interview an elder I learn something significant and profound about Laipunuk and Bunun culture”

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The island of Taiwan has a rich and diverse history. Much of this history has remained hidden under the dominant cultures that have embedded themselves into the land and the minds of the people over the last centuries. However, the history of the land and people of Taiwan is much older, and its diversity is a goal worthy of pursuit.

Methodological Issues

Whereas this thesis methodology was originally centered on oral ethnography and focused on primary sources, it became apparent that cultural depredation and loss of native lands in the twentieth century were key issues requiring further study and broader perspectives. Antithetically speaking, the evidence of foreign cultural incursions prompted the research method to shift toward secondary sources and socio-political history. In the face of irreversible cultural homogenization the research addressed imminent issues of cultural reconstruction and conservation and synthesized into a genuinely ethnohistorical research. *Table 12* displays the dialectics of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

DIALECTICS OF THESIS, ANTITHESIS, AND SYNTHESIS

dialectics	methodical focus	research focus
thesis	oral ethnography	indigenous peoples
antithesis	socio-political	foreign cultural incursions
synthesis	ethnohistorical	cultural conservation

Table 12: Dialectics of Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis

Source: Author

This thesis offers an authentic and substantive examination of Laipunuk in the context of ethnohistorical case study of the Bunun people. This case study has provided an understanding

of the sociocultural relationships among the Bunun and other indigenous peoples, the Bunun peoples' relationships to the Chinese, and it advances the knowledge of cultural interaction and adaptation within Laipunuk. The antithesis of socio-political history and foreign cultural incursions became a significant component to this study, and cultural conservation and reconstruction were a natural outgrowth.

Profound socio-politic change has resulted in the loss to the indigenous peoples of their land, resulting in severe cultural degradation that was especially brutal in the twentieth century. Contemporary ethnohistorical research is a worthy method to gain vital understanding, necessary for cultural reconstruction and conservation. As land and culture are inseparable for the original inhabitants of this island, ethnohistorical research will ultimately contribute to an integrated body of knowledge necessary to protect what remains to be conserved on many levels. This material provides useful information for the Bunun people of Laipunuk, all indigenous peoples of Taiwan, as well as researchers, scholars, and historians. For example, ethnohistorical research among the remaining indigenous peoples will contribute greatly to the fields of anthropology, linguistics, and prehistory; and advance scientific inquiry into medicinal use of regional botanicals and the original ecosystem comprised of native flora and fauna; and promote the development of the case for protection and preservation of the land for *all* the people, indigenous and resident.

Raison d'être

This thesis serves to document previously unavailable ethnographic material, creating a new ethnohistorical work that establishes the indigenous peoples of Taiwan as the island's *first residents*. The research demonstrates clearly that ethnohistorical case study is an integral component of the reconstruction of the history of Laipunuk and Taiwan, providing a link for future generations. With respect to Laipunuk, the situation is critical – calling for *rescue ethnography*. Through the recordation, translation, and documentation of primary resources, and the examination of existing literature, scholars, and Bunun descendants, this research is an authentic and unique compilation and record of the people, place, and time in query.

The procedure of data collection and recordation, centered on the narratives of Bunun elders, employed digital video and audio recording equipment. Data was then translated into English by working with elders, their families, and bilingual individuals familiar with the Isbukun dialect once spoken in Laipunuk. In some cases informants also spoke in Japanese or Chinese (or mixed); in such cases the translation process followed the same methodology. This in-depth investigation was conducted to compare and integrate oral history with limited existing

literature in order to reconstruct the cultural tradition and social identity of a people who experienced abrupt and severe cultural degradation in their youth. Cross-referencing with what documentation exists was employed to verify narrative history.

The Findings

The research provides evidence that there have been six distinct socio-political periods, which have had adverse affects on the indigenous peoples over the past four hundred years. During each socio-political period, indigenous peoples suffered the loss of land. These people identify certain regions as *their* land, specifically their *homeland*²¹⁴. Loss of the regional homeland is equated with loss of life. In the case of the Laipunuk region, this loss occurred rather late in terms of the island's history; the official end of the Bunun' residence in their homeland occurred with the *Laipunuk Incident* in 1941, almost at the end of the Japanese Colonial Period. Rapid socialization, acculturation, and integration into the dominant foreign culture then spelled the end of the life the Bunun and neighboring tribal peoples had known for centuries. Although *cultural revival* is underway, much has been lost that can never be recovered. What can be recovered must be recovered, before the last elders die away, their invaluable recollections with them. In the case of the Laipunuk-born Bunun, with respect to the relative lateness of their extradition from their homeland, many of the elders have a clear memory of a relatively pristine and dynamic syncretism of indigenous culture and way of life. The knowledge they have, in terms of language, first-hand experience with the natural environment, and Bunun culture, is one of a kind. It is in the best interests of the wider Taiwan community to preserve these recollections for posterity.

Additionally, we found that the indigenous languages may have a much broader significance for Asian-Pacific studies overall. Indeed, there is speculation that these people and their languages may be an original source for the later peoples and languages that spread throughout the Pacific. Therefore, continuation of these studies on this one island has the potential for a very wide application in the fields of ethnohistorical, linguistics, cultural and even environmental research.

²¹⁴ Laipunuk is the *Busub* site for the Laipunuk-born Bunun elders.

The Broader Issues

Who really *owns* Laipunuk? Who really owns Taiwan? These are critical questions that must be addressed, reflecting the issues of indigenous land rights throughout the world, not merely in Taiwan. As Taiwan continues to attract global attention regarding its dynamic relationship with the field of Austronesian studies, ethnohistorical documentation of cultures such as that of the Bunun are increasingly important and have a new global stage. From the standpoint of the Laipunuk issue, the indigenous position on who owns Taiwan; the argument of who owns Taiwan is not merely between the Peoples Republic of China and Taiwan; there is a third party, the *first residents*, the Bunun, and others who deserve further study.

From a humanities point of view, they hold one last chance for receptiveness of indigenous epistemology; from a scientific point of view, their knowledge contains a link to the critical fields of anthropology, environmental sustainability, and ethno-botany among others. Consider that the indigenous peoples lived in Taiwan for thousands of years without destroying the forests, polluting the rivers, or poisoning the land. They avoided the overexploitation of their environment; this was integral to their culture and is instructive to the larger *cultures* that dominate the Earth today.

Recommendations

The Bunun have much more to say. Other indigenous peoples scattered here and there in Taiwan have much to say. Therefore, first and foremost, I recommend continued ethnohistorical research with Laipunuk elders, as well as the elders of villages surrounding the area, so that we may better understand the social systems in place before the Japanese incursion. Related topics include tribal mapping, toponymy²¹⁵, and long-term projects including archeological survey. The founder of the Bunun Cultural and Educational Foundation, Pastor Bai Guang Sheng (Biung Husungan Istanda), suggests the area be opened for the purposes of cultural education for children (Istanda, B.H., 2006 interview); I am in agreement with this suggestion.

From an administrative perspective, the government of Taiwan should to come to terms with how to manage the area and face the current issue of returning indigenous lands. Today, Taiwan is pressing upon the world their quest for recognition and the right of political freedom, submitting their case for international recognition within such forums as the United Nations. Many citizens and government officials alike seek the continued independence of Taiwan,

²¹⁵ Toponymy is the study of toponyms.

based on a platform of democracy and human rights. Self-rule and self-management can be applied *within* Taiwan as well. Internal recognition of indigenous rights and consideration of matters of retribution have potential to show the world that Taiwan's claims of democracy are valid. Taiwan should address the fact that the Japanese tore the Laipunuk people from their land and homes against their will, and the KMT refused them the right of return to their ancestral homeland. Taiwan should consider the implications of this history and continued policy locally, nationally, and internationally. As an example of a positive policy step, Taiwan can forge a relationship between the democratic government, the Taiwan Forestry Bureau (TFB), and the descendants of Laipunuk-born Bunun, and institute similar policies with other indigenous groups.

Study of this nature must continue; indeed, it must be expanded. The wealth of knowledge contained in the minds and hearts of these people, about whom most of the *civilized world* know little (or nothing!), is critical; its value cannot be overestimated. This study and those like it, as well as those in related fields, should be initiated, supported, and embraced. Together we can put together a strong case for conservation and preservation of land, people, and culture, a case that could stand as a model for those confronting similar situations in other regions. It is my profound hope that we can, and will, do this.

It is my sincere hope that this study has made available a record for Laipunuk descendants, scholars, and the people of Taiwan to open the window of Laipunuk history, and to inspire the enlightened engagement in this topic. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to work with these extraordinary people, and for the opportunity to share their story with you.

內 本 鹿 – 臺灣原住民的最後聖地

Nei Ben Lu – Taiwan Yuanzhuimin de Zuihou Shengdi

Laipunuk – was the last pure land of Taiwan's indigenous peoples

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