

# Comparisons in Aboriginal Education: Taiwan and Canada

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## Introduction

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This paper is an assessment of directions, goals, and achievements in higher education for Aboriginal people in Taiwan, with comparisons to Indian higher education in Canada. While there are many features that distinguish Aboriginal people of Taiwan from Indian people of Canada, there are many similarities in their experiences including their minority status at about two percent of the total populations, a history of colonial influence over the past several hundred years, realities of exclusion from the mainstream of society, and close ties to the land as part of a holistic philosophy of life. Today another similarity is apparent between Indian people of Canada and Aboriginal people of Taiwan; the desire for greater opportunity through education.

## Background

One underdeveloped area in international relations is in the field of post-secondary education for Aboriginal people. It is a topic that suggests comparisons due to the similar issues and needs, desires and goals common to Aboriginal peoples throughout the world. The following background and history for Aboriginal people in Taiwan and for status Indians in Canada will demonstrate these commonalities.

Aboriginal people of Taiwan number about 390,000 and are found in nine tribal groupings. These tribes and their demographic distribution listed from north to south are: Tayal at 22.57 percent, Saisiyat at 2.82 percent, Amis at 38.35 percent, Bunun at 10.94 percent, Tsou at 1.79 percent, Rukai at 3.04 percent, Puyuma at 2.67 percent, Paiwan at 17.78 percent and Yami (Tao) at 1.05 percent (Kung, *Report n.pag*). The tribal people may be divided roughly into village agriculturists living on the coastal plains, mountain agricultural villages of traditional hunter-gatherers, and fisher folk living along the coast and on Orchid Island in the south. However, researchers have identified about twenty different

“ethnic languages” indicating that the number of tribal groups are likely greater than those officially recognized (Republic of China 3).

In Canada there are about 675,499 status Indians (Government of Canada, *Census* n.pag) who are members of about sixty tribal groups as defined by separate languages within ten language families (Morrison and Wilson 29-30). This study refers to Aboriginal people of Taiwan as those recognized as indigenous to the Island, and to status Indians of Canada as those Aboriginal people recorded in the official Indian Registry. This study does not refer to the more general category of ‘Aboriginal people’ as defined in the Canada Act as “The Indian, Inuit, and Metis, people of Canada” (n.pag). Rather, the comparative focus with Aboriginal people of Taiwan is limited to ‘status Indian people’ of Canada who most compare with Aboriginal people of Taiwan in their history of colonial experience, dislocation from their territories, pressures for assimilation, and a modern movement towards autonomy, including autonomy in education.

In Canada post-secondary education specifically designed for Aboriginal people has been developing over the past quarter century. In Taiwan that process is just beginning, but is taking place at a rapid rate that, in some respects, outstrips the process in Canada. This paper identifies directions, goals, and achievements between the two experiences, and by use of these comparisons, and with recognition of the distinct developmental environments between Taiwan and Canada, tries to determine areas of mutual interest and how best those interests can be advanced.

### **Historical Background**

Aboriginal people everywhere have evolved systems of education for the passing on of their skills, traditions, knowledge, and values as part of their cultural heritage. In the modern world Aboriginal people are seeking recognition of their inherent rights, including the right to education, and in many cases are developing their own formal education programs which reflect the special nature of their cultural heritage to ensure its survival and continuity into the future.

By the late 1960s there was a growing recognition of Aboriginal rights throughout the world, including the rights to education. This was formalized in 1981 through the *United Nations International Bill of Rights*, and included the right

to the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples (Davies 745-749). This was followed in 1992 by the *United Nations Draft Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights* in which rights to both traditional knowledge and to education are secured in articles 13 through 16 (Voice of Indigenous Peoples 159-174).

In 1992 aboriginal education gained legal recognition in Taiwan when Indigenous rights were incorporated into the *Additional Articles of Taiwan's Constitution*. In 1998 the *Aboriginal Education Law* was enacted as a specific law dealing with the development of education for Aboriginal people. In 1999 the International Conference on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples held in Taiwan drafted the *Taipei Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in which cultural rights are protected, including the "control and development of their cultural heritage" (Hsu 293-297). In December, 2000 the *International Conference on the Policy of Urban Indigenous Peoples* held in Taipei put forward a declaration to "maintain and develop actively their history, culture, education and languages" (n.pag).

### **Brief History of Aboriginal Education: Canada**

In Canada formal education for Indian people came out of two interacting streams of colonial influence. One was the mission schools that were first established by the Catholic Church in French Canada in the sixteenth century. The other were the federally administered and church-operated residential schools which were part of a policy of assimilation of Aboriginal people as administered under the federal legislation of the Indian Act (Woodward 389-390). However, there was a third initiative for aboriginal education which came out of the treaty process in Canada in which Indian leaders negotiated with the Crown of England the right to education through demands for a school and teacher on every reserve. Within the numbered treaties of western Canada were provisions for education in terms of a school and teacher for each Indian reserve as allotted to each Indian Band at the expense of Her Majesty's government of the Dominion of Canada (Government of Canada, *Indian Treaties* n.pag). The treaty right to post-secondary education is assumed as part of the intent and spirit of the treaties and the law.

Equal access to education for Indian people in Canada, as for Aboriginal people in Taiwan, have yet to be fully realized. In Canada status Indians who have

completed secondary and vocational school are 16.8 percent of the total status Indian population (Government of Canada, *Census* n.pag). In Taiwan 26.45 percent of Aboriginal people have completed secondary and vocational school (Republic of China 12). It is apparent that Aboriginal people in Taiwan have a greater rate of completion of secondary and vocational school than for status Indian people of Canada.

Status Indian people of Canada with university degrees are about three percent of the total status Indian population. However, 16.45 percent of the status Indian population aged 20 to 24 years have university degrees (Government of Canada, *Census*). In Taiwan the rate for college graduation is 5.08 percent of the total aboriginal population, and for those aged 18 to 24 years is 13.35 percent (Republic of China 12). These figures indicate that achievement in post-secondary education for both jurisdictions is rapidly increasing for the younger generation. While Taiwan leads Canada in aboriginal vocational training, post-secondary education for Indian people in Canada is somewhat more developed than it is for Aboriginal people in Taiwan. The reason for this is that while Taiwan is only recently focusing on aboriginal post-secondary education, Indian post-secondary education has been established in Canada for over a quarter of a century.

In Canada the first Native Studies program was established at Trent University in 1969 (Stonechild and McCaskill 2). Since that time there have emerged fourteen university departments of Indian/Native studies across the country, providing courses in Native cultures and languages within a distinct academic discipline, designed and implemented as interdisciplinary programs. In 1976 the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College came into being as the only Indian controlled university/college of the time, operating under the jurisdiction of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) and within a federated agreement with the University of Regina.

### **Brief History of Aboriginal Education: Taiwan**

The Aboriginal people of Taiwan, like the Aboriginal people everywhere, have occupied their lands since time immemorial, a time that goes back to the beginning of their cultural memory. Over the past four-hundred years Aboriginal people of Taiwan have had a colonial experience not unlike that of the Aboriginal

people of Canada and other parts of the world. Colonial intrusions began with the Dutch who came to the Island in 1624 and remained until 1662. The Dutch were followed by the Han Chinese from Fukien and Kwangtung provinces in mainland China. The migration of Han Chinese to the Island began during the late Ming dynasty and continued throughout the Qing dynasty from 1683 until the arrival of the Japanese following the Sino-Japanese war of 1895. After World War II mainlanders migrated to Taiwan in 1949. Today the distribution of ethnic groups in Taiwan is Mainlanders 14 percent, Fukien Taiwanese 74 percent, Hakka Taiwanese 10 percent, and Indigenous people 2 percent (Kung, *Indigenous* 58). Each period of immigration and occupation had its impact on the Aboriginal population with dislocations, impositions, attempts at assimilation, and foreign control.

In Taiwan formal education for Aboriginal people began, through Christian missions, primarily out of efforts by the Presbyterian, Baptist and Catholic Churches. Christianity came to Formosa (Taiwan) with the Protestant Dutch who occupied the Island from 1624 to 1661. However, while the Dutch converted the plains aborigines to Christianity, they had little influence or long lasting effect on the mountain tribes. Christian influence on the more remote Aboriginal populations began in earnest in the nineteenth century with the arrival of the Catholic missionaries in 1859 followed by Presbyterian missionaries from England in 1865 and from Canada in 1872 (Kennedy 17-22). One of the most influential Christian missionaries to the Aboriginal people of Taiwan was Dr. George Leslie Mackay (1844-1901), known to the people of Taiwan as Mai Rui-li. He not only established over eighty churches among the northern Plains and Mountain people, but also set up schools to teach theology and science. With the end of World War II and the end of Japanese occupation, Christian missionaries returned to Taiwan. Today, over 38 percent of aboriginal families are Protestant in their faith, over 26 percent are Catholic, about 9 percent are Buddhist and about 11 percent are Taoist (Republic of China 5-6).

### **Directions for Aboriginal Education**

Today, the need for the development of post secondary education for Aboriginal people in Taiwan and in Canada is acute. In Canada the Indian population is the

fastest growing ethnic group and is likely, in some parts of the country, to outstrip the non-Indian population within the next century. This rapid growth is due to increasing rural to urban migration of young people and a natural population increase. According to the 2000 Canadian census, 42 percent of the aboriginal population in the cities of Regina and Saskatoon, where SIFC is located, are under 15 years of age. Statistics also indicate that the population of status Indians in Canada has increased from 312,405 in 1996 to 675,499 by the year 2000, an increase of over 100% as reported. Of these 273,175 or 40.4 percent are under the age of 25 years (Government of Canada, *Census n.pag*).

Census figures for Taiwan also indicate a high rural to urban migration, especially by the younger generation. Aboriginal people living on reservations in mountain and plains regions total 36.97 percent, leaving 63.03 percent living in the cities. The cities of Taipei and Kaohsiung alone account for 53.83 percent of the total aboriginal population. (Republic of China n.pag). Of the total aboriginal population of 407,950 persons, 190,442 or 46.68 percent are under the age of 25 years. For both Canada and Taiwan the phenomena of rural to urban migration by Aboriginal people coupled with the rapidly increasing aboriginal population suggests an acute need for increased opportunity, including opportunity for post-secondary education.

### **Taiwan's Aboriginal College**

The emergence of aboriginal post-secondary education in Taiwan has its roots in many directions, and is bearing fruit in the establishment of the College of Indigenous Studies at the National Dong Hwa University in Shou-Feng, Hualien county, Taiwan. The location is rural, yet only a short distance from the city of Hualien and able to serve the tribal territories of the Ami, Atayal, Bunun, and Tsou people. Existing programs at Dong Hwa University are available to support Indigenous Studies, including programs in Social Science and Humanities, and especially the Institute of Ethnic Relations and Culture, which provides an interdisciplinary opportunity so necessary for aboriginal education.

The College of Indigenous Studies at Dong Hwa University is well on its way to realizing its goals. Four departments have been established; the *Department of Indigenous Culture*, the *Department of Indigenous Language and*

*Communication, the Graduate School of Indigenous Development, and the Graduate School of Ethnic Relations.* All of these are under the Dean of the College of Indigenous Studies. At this time seven faculty have been secured as a foundation for future growth, four of whom are of aboriginal descent, including the dean of the College. Furthermore, a sense of balance has been struck that is encouraging for the future harmony of the new College. The faculty of the College of Indigenous Studies provide an interdisciplinary capability including Arts and Anthropology, Geography, Literature, Political Science, Comparative Culture Studies, and Communication Arts. The four aboriginal faculty are representative of three of the nine aboriginal tribes of Taiwan, the Ami, the Paiwan, and the Tsou. All of the faculty have doctoral degrees, an advantage not yet secured in Indian education at SIFC. Of the seven new faculty, three are female, an important balance to consider as aboriginal education at its outset tends to attract a high percentage of female students. Student enrollment began at the College of Indigenous Studies for the fall term of 2001. One hundred students passed the entrance exams. The College of Indigenous Studies at Dong Hwa University has a provision for a minimum of 50 percent aboriginal enrollment. Under the Aboriginal Identity Law, aboriginal descent for eligibility is established by use of maternity and documentary proof of identity. Students of aboriginal descent who are accepted into the College are provided with government subsidies for tuition, fees, and housing. All these provisions are incentives and support which are also available to status Indians attending Canadian universities.

Finally, funds are in place to build the new College of Indigenous Studies at Dong Hwa University. This is a most significant achievement that is paralleled at SIFC where the new building for the College is established. The construction of a physical space meets one of the parameters for success for an aboriginal college. Others include a majority of aboriginal faculty, staff and administrators, as well as overall control through the appropriate aboriginal political organization.

### **Conclusion**

Development of aboriginal education in Canada and in Taiwan has been an ongoing struggle for over a quarter of a century. However, many roadblocks have

been overcome. The next challenge in aboriginal education is to continue development of international exchange. Because Aboriginal people everywhere have a history of similar colonial encounters, and similar aspirations, aboriginal education may be said to have a global perspective. Indian education in Canada requires a global research and exchange strategy that calls for building partnerships, team building, organization and network building in the pursuit of academic excellence in aboriginal education. The educational experience of Canadian Aboriginal people has gone to promote and support these aspirations, and sharing those experiences can help Aboriginal people in other places to achieve the same goals within their own realities. International exchange can be supported by two initiatives. The first is to involve international scholars in the program to promote international perspectives in aboriginal curriculum and course delivery, and to promote international exchange for faculty and students. The second is to create linkages with other aboriginal institutions of higher learning in order to encourage exchange of ideas, experiences, programs and people. As linkages develop and exchanges occur, mutual support will be gained and experiences shared for the betterment of aboriginal post-secondary education, and ultimately for the future of Aboriginal people in Canada, Taiwan, and other places.

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