

**Politics and ethnicity:
A study of the role of state security
interests in the maintenance of
Aboriginal difference in Taiwan**

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has neither been previously submitted for a degree, nor submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis was written by me. Any help that I received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all sources of information and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Dedicated to:

my mother and my father

the memory of my grandmother, Constance Howland (1919-2003)

and the memory of Lai Hung-yen (1934-2004).

Preface

A few years ago I attended a party thrown by Taiwan's de facto consulate in Sydney at what is now called the Sofitel Wentworth Sydney hotel. It was a celebration of the 10th of October, or "Double Ten," the national day of the Republic of China. It was noisy and well attended – mostly overseas Taiwanese and local businesspeople. Various dignitaries, including the garishly dressed head of the consulate, spoke on stage but no one seemed to listen to them, preferring to talk with their companions rather loudly; the speeches were drowned out despite a microphone being used. Formalities over, two white Australian musicians performed a rendition of *New York, New York*, but the lyrics had been altered throughout: "I wanna be a part of it/Taipei, Taipei" is still lodged in my mind. I turned my attention to a screen on the stage. It was showing images of Taiwan: the geography, people, architecture, schools, food, various cultural goings-on. And as the barely watched slide show progressed, it appeared that fully one quarter to one third of the slides depicted Taiwan's *Aboriginal* people and culture.

It strikes me now that this familiar state appropriation of indigenous culture contains a delicious irony in the case of Taiwan. As with indigenous peoples elsewhere, for hundreds of years Taiwan's Aborigines were subject to profound intervention that killed countless thousands, changed community power configurations and deliberately destroyed "traditional" material and spiritual culture. This process entered what could have been its final phase when the Japanese secured – somewhat precariously – the most remote and best-defended Aboriginal territories on the island in the first decades of the twentieth century. But with the Japanese and the Chinese Nationalists having tried so hard, for various reasons, to assimilate indigenous culture and Aboriginal identity out of existence since that time, here in Sydney were unofficial representatives of Taiwan's government, none of whom was Aboriginal, now employing that same culture to visually define its national identity before international witnesses in a battle against *political assimilation by China*. Taiwan's Aboriginal culture, seemingly so weak in the face of assimilationist policy, had in a sense assimilated the state – and it didn't even have to try. The question that follows is how the presence of an ethnic minority so vulnerable can endure and, after a time, be so powerful.

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A note on Romanisation, Chinese characters and abbreviations

Place names and the names of authors of Chinese-language works whose English names are not available are written using the bastardised Wade-Giles system of Romanisation peculiar to Taiwan. Terms and expressions are written in italics in Hanyu Pinyin. To compensate for this clash of Romanisation systems, Chinese-language references are accompanied by a corresponding English title or translation, together with the title in Hanyu Pinyin and the title and the name of the author(s) in Chinese characters.

The characters for all Chinese- and Japanese-language names, places, terms and organisations are listed in Appendix C.

Some of the more frequently used sources are abbreviated in the footnotes after the first reference. For convenience, a list of these precedes the references at the back of the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis analyses the conflicting relationship between Kuomintang (KMT) security measures and assimilation policies in relation to Taiwan's Aboriginal population from 1945 to the beginning of the modern Aboriginal movement. I refer to the social anthropological model of ethnicity in examining the impact of these policies on Aboriginal leaders and expressions of Aboriginality. New evidence is presented showing that expressions of pan-Aboriginality prior to the 228 Incident existed, but that in the main, Aboriginal involvement in the 228 Incident reflected a growing identification with Han Taiwanese in the face of an unpopular administration. I provide the first comprehensive analysis of this involvement, together with the impact of the security census that followed it, which involved replacing the emerging dialectic of ascription between Han Taiwanese and Aborigines with a remote form of assimilationist control.

Primary sources of data included newspapers on microfiche between 1945 and 1952, which produced more than one thousand items relating to Aboriginal affairs, and which filled a sizable gap in research on this period. Extensive use was also made of archived material on the 228 Incident and the White Terror, while fieldwork and interviews were conducted in the Aboriginal townships of eight counties.

I conclude that Aboriginality was sustained and shaped by the incompatible policy requirements of a martial-law era administration. Factors causing the failure of assimilationist policies include the presence of Christian denominations in Aboriginal communities – which nourished Aboriginality so that they could survive – and the KMT's own appropriation of Aboriginality. From this I conclude that sustained and forcible uses of categorisation in the context of an Aboriginal population are more capable of reinforcing and creating ethnic boundaries than destroying them.