

## American Indian and Taiwan Aboriginal Education: Indigenous Identity and Career Aspirations

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This article investigates the interactions between identity and career aspirations among Taiwanese Aborigines and American Indians. While many similarities exist between the two indigenous groups, several differences remain as well. In comparing the identity issue between these two groups, this study shows that American Indians generally live in a more multicultural society than Taiwanese Aborigines. American Indian students do not experience the same degree of stereotype or racial discrimination from their teachers and peers as experienced by Taiwanese Aborigines. However, affirmative action policies are more favorable in Taiwan than they are in the United States. Drawing from a critical standpoint theory, we argue that families, tribes, and communities should play a more prominent role in the education of indigenous peoples.

Key words: Indigenous education, Taiwan Aborigines, American Indians, identity

With the surfacing of the multicultural movement in the 1960s, and the establishment of a new sociology of education in the 1970s, critical theory, cultural studies, and critical pedagogy have emerged as necessary underpinning thoughts in the "public sphere" of education (Champagne, 1999, 2003; Champagne & Strauss, 2002; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Nye, Hedges, & Konstantopoulos, 2000). The concepts of ideology, exploitation, and class struggle continue to gain precedence among educators and sociologists (Baker, 2001; Banks & Banks, 2001; Benham & Stein, 2003; Erdrich & Tohe, 2002; Greaves, 2002). Discussions on social justice, marginality, and equity of educational opportunities have become the leading issues in the realm of educational reform (Champagne, 2003;

Hawkins, 2003; Torres & Aronott, 1999; Torres, 2003; Weiss, 2001).

Minority issues play an increasing and crucial role in this trend of educational thought (Hawkins & La Belle, 1991; Nakanishi, 1975; Torres, 1998; Torres & Mitchell, 1998). Educators point out that though students of minority groups encounter some struggles (Folds, 1987; Hatch, 2001; Taylor, 1996); they should maintain and be proud of their heritage but not use it as a barrier to isolate themselves or be isolated by others. The connection between students of color and literature are palpable (Dilg, 1999; Kao & Tienda, 1998; McDonough, 1998; Olneck, 1990).

There were 446,473 people in Taiwan officially recognized as Taiwan Aborigines as of 29 February 2004, which is about 1.9% of the total Taiwan population (Council of Aboriginal Affairs Executive Yuan, 2004). According to the Census 2000, the United States population was 281.4 million on 1 April 2000, of which 4.1 million, or 1.5%, reported American Indian and Alaska Natives (Ogunwole, 2002; Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

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While the geographic size pales in comparison between Taiwan and the United States, Taiwanese Aborigines and American Indians surprisingly share many similar characteristics not only in population percentages, but also in their historical, social, and cultural backgrounds (Cheng, 2004; Cheng & Jacob, 2007; Chiago, 2001; Jackson, 2002; Sorkin, 1976; To, 1972; Wilkins, 2002).<sup>1</sup> Based on years of research, conference presentations, and panel discussions, we have learned somewhat more about the educational pitfalls of Taiwanese Aborigines and American Indians. From this body of research, we discovered that the topic of identity was a significant academic issue because virtually all of the students, parents, and tribal members expressed the same problems concerning self-identification. Did they view themselves as aboriginal people or not part of modern society? We also reviewed the information about the practice of aboriginal education abroad and focused on examples from Australia, China, Fiji, New Zealand, Canada, Uganda, and the United States. After our survey was administered, we realized that Taiwanese Aborigines and

American Indians encounter similar social, political, cultural, and educational circumstances, and that there appears to be a gap in the literature such that there is no comparative study that tackles the educational realities that both aboriginal peoples face in their everyday lives.

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, over two-thirds of the country's Native Americans live in urban areas; only about 700,000 live on or near Indian reservations (Champagne, 1999, p. 7). By contrast, there are 159,518 Taiwanese Aborigines now living in urban areas, or roughly 35% of the total population in 2004. Furthermore, only 159,407 Taiwan Aborigines live in mountain tribal regions, which constitutes only about 35.7% of the total indigenous population (Council of Aboriginal Affairs Executive Yuan, 2004).

Therefore, in this research, we will review the political, historical, economic, and psychological backgrounds of American Indians and Taiwan Aborigines. First, we will analyze the various influences upon the two forms of urban indigenous schooling. Then we will provide a discussion

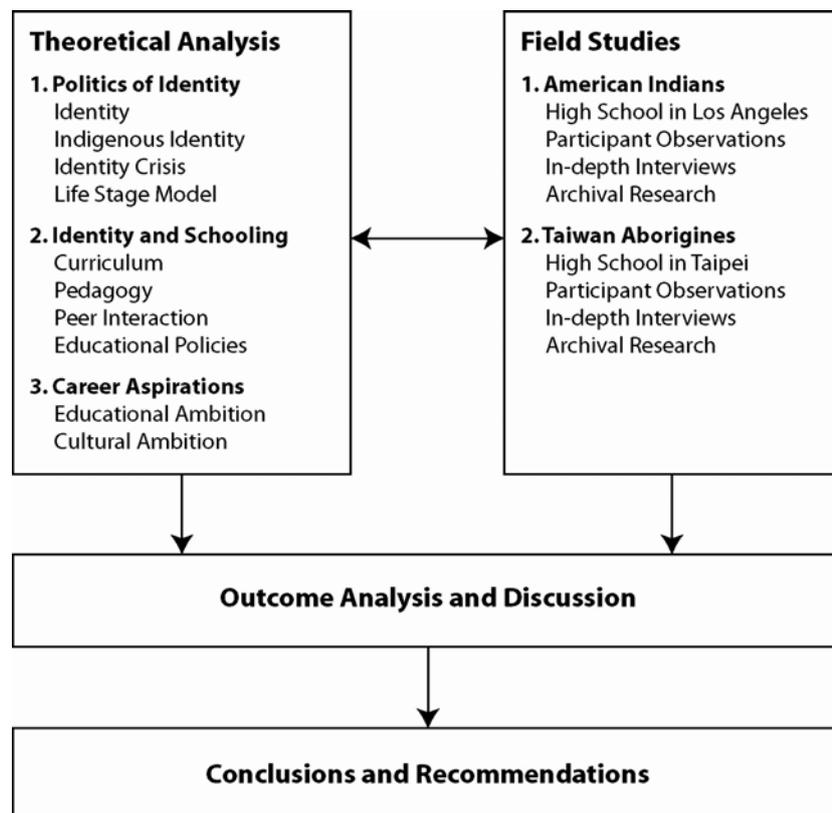


Figure 1. Comparative case study research structure

of the key concepts at work today in the politics of identity and schooling. Third, we will analyze qualitative and quantitative findings from data collected at two senior high schools—one in Taipei and the other in Los Angeles—towards interpreting the personal and social realities of schooling amongst the indigenous students in each location. Furthermore, we will compare the similarities and differences of these two target-school environments, with an eye towards better understanding the relationship between the students' identities at school, within their families, and at large in their communities (tribes). Finally, we will present the primary conclusion of our analyses along with the significance and limitation of our research as such (see Figure 1). The guiding research questions for this study address each of these issues:

1. Which factors influence the formation of native students' indigenous identities?
2. What is the relationship between indigenous identity and native student's educational experiences?
3. How do indigenous identities and educational experiences influence native students' educational aspirations and cultural aspirations?

## **Methodology and Research Design**

The key concern of this study is to figure out the relationship between indigenous identity, educational experiences, and career aspirations within the social contexts of the United States and Taiwan. To compile information regarding the indigenous identity, educational experiences, and aspirations of native students in high schools, we turn to standpoint theory. We then follow a comparative case study analysis to dissect the similarities and differences between one high school in Taipei and the other in Los Angeles. As a qualitative research approach, we also collect data via participant observations and in-depth interviews.

### ***Methodology***

Our study is grounded in the work of Paulo Freire (1970), especially pertaining to his idea surrounding education and empowerment. Freire's critical appraisal of education offers a powerful venue to portray minority

student voices. Borrowing from gender studies, we interpret the milieu of American Indian and Taiwan Aboriginal students using standpoint theory. Furthermore, we compare the similarities and differences of indigenous identity and schooling between American Indians and Taiwanese Aborigines.

### ***Standpoint Theory***

Sandra Harding highlights the importance of standpoint theory to empower the oppressed, and, in particular, women (Harding, 1987, 1998; Hintikka & Harding, 1983; Harding & O'Barr, 1987; Jacob & Cheng, 2005). A standpoint is a place from which to view the world that determines what we focus on as well as what is obscured from us. Standpoint theorists suggest that social inequalities generate distinctive accounts of nature and social relationships.

The crucial core of this study is indigenous identity and we use standpoint theory to empower aboriginal students and give them a voice. Due to the complicated meanings of indigenous identity, we observed the daily school life of native students and then corresponded this with their self-discourse and conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

### ***Comparative Case Study***

Comparative case study is a powerful qualitative research approach. The aim of a comparative case study is to describe the similarities and differences from two or more political, cultural, and social settings (Merriam, 1997). The procedure of a comparative case study includes three parts: design stage, conducting stage, and analysis stage.

In the first stage, we identified our research as a kind of exploratory case study and conducted the study through the following procedures. First, we selected one high school in Taipei and the other high school in Los Angeles. Then we obtained letters of compliance from both high schools. Next we submitted a proposal to the Office for Protection of Research Subjects at the University of California, Los Angeles and received approval shortly thereafter.

In the stage of conducting the survey, we compiled the information concerning indigenous identity, educational experiences, and aspirations through participant observations and in-depth interviews. We observed two class periods per week over three months in each of these two high schools.

These class period observations were conducted in a social studies and the native student association/club. In each school, we also conducted 30-minute oral interviews with twelve native students stratified by gender. In the final stage, we provided an analysis of the data collected from the two high school observations and interviews and explained the relationship among indigenous identity, educational experiences, and aspirations towards higher education.

### **Research Design**

To finish this comparative case study, we spent at least three months in each site, Taipei and Los Angeles. In Taiwan, we conducted our research at one high school in Taipei from September to December, 2003. In September we gave the teachers, parents of students, and students consent forms to obtain their permission; all consented to participate and expressed interest in the results of the study. The high school in Taipei had recently established a new program for Taiwanese aboriginal students to give them extra academic and counseling support. There were tutors for math, English, physics, and chemistry for native students and each native student also had his/her own counselor. During this period, we went to the high school in Taipei at least two times a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, to conduct classroom observations. We chose two history

classes and collected the text books, quizzes, handouts, and examination results related to the issue of Taiwanese Aborigines.

We also interviewed twelve Taiwanese Aboriginal students stratified by grade, gender, and ethnicity (see Table 1). Most interviews lasted from 20 to 30 minutes but some participants talked for an hour discussing their educational and cultural experiences. We took field notes and recorded each interview with a digital recorder. After the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed and coded for cross analysis.

In the United States, we followed an identical research design at one high school in Los Angeles from January to April, 2004. In February, we obtained consent from participants to proceed with the study. Visits were made at least two times a week, to conduct classroom observations. There is a special American Indian Education Program supported by Los Angeles Unified School District in this high school. The topic of the special program during the time frame of this study focused on language art and history and social sciences analysis skills among California tribes. We also interviewed twelve American Indian students stratified by grade, gender, and ethnicity (see Table 2). Data collection, coding, and analysis procedures mirrored the Taiwanese portion of this study.

Table 1  
*Taiwan Aboriginal Students*

Code	Grade	Gender	Tribe	% Indigenous Blood
TAS01	Eleven	Male	Atayal (1/4)	25
TAS02	Eleven	Male	Thao/Atayal (1/2)	50
TAS03	Eleven	Female	Saisiya (1/2)	50
TAS04	Twelve	Male	Amis	100
TAS05	Twelve	Female	Amis	100
TAS06	Twelve	Female	Amis/Tsou (1/2)	50
TAS07	Twelve	Male	Paiwan/Puyuma	100
TAS08	Ten	Female	Atayal/Paiwan	100
TAS09	Ten	Male	Atayal	100
TAS10	Ten	Female	Paiwan (1/2)	50
TAS11	Eleven	Female	Amis (1/2)	50
TAS12	Ten	Male	Amis (3/4)	75

Table 2  
*American Indian Students*

Code	Grade	Gender	Tribe	% Indigenous Blood
LAS01	Eleven	Female	Navajo	50
LAS02	Eleven	Female	Cherokee	50
LAS03	Twelve	Female	Cherokee	25
LAS04	Twelve	Female	Cherokee	25
LAS05	Twelve	Male	Pueblo	25
LAS06	Ten	Female	Pueblo	25
LAS07	Eleven	Male	Cherokee	50
LAS08	Twelve	Male	Cherokee	25
LAS09	Ten	Male	Yurok/Karuk	50
LAS10	Ten	Male	Sioux	13
LAS11	Eleven	Male	Cherokee	6
LAS12	Ten	Female	Sioux	50

Table 3  
*Interview and Observation Encoding Examples*

Field Notes and Interview Transcriptions	Sub-category	Category
My father is Thao, my mother is Han, my grandpa is Thao, and my grandma is Atayal. (I-TAS02-22/10-23-2003).	Percentage of indigenous blood.	
I now live with my parents. My father is Paiwan and my mother is a Mainlander. (I-TAS10-20/11-26-2003).	Stay with parents that belong to indigenous tribes.	
My mother frequently uses my tribal language at home and she also hopes that I can use it as my daily language. But my father uses Mandarin often. (I-TAS09-44/11-21-2003)	Parents encourage them to speak tribal languages at home.	Factors that impact indigenous students' tribal identity
Four of my uncles live in the tribal area and we often visit them during summer vacations. (I-TAS09-52/11-21-2003)	Relationship with relatives in the tribes.	
I participated in several traditional ceremonies and visited almost all indigenous museums and will like to join as a volunteer for the Taiwan tribal culture. (I-TAS03-54/10-24-2003)	Participation of traditional tribal ceremonies.	
I visit my own tribe very often, almost twice a year. (I-TAS07-44/11-21-2003)	Parental relation with their tribes.	

### *Qualitative Data Treatment and Analysis*

Interviews were transcribed and field notes generated for all observations. These documents were then coded using ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software. The following procedure was followed to decode field notes of observation

and interviews as follows.

1. Data information codes: *I* represents interview transcription and *O* represents observation field notes.
2. Participant codes: TAS02 indicates that the participant is a Taiwan Aboriginal student and

he/she is the second interviewee.

3. Section codes: the 22 of I-TAS02-22 represents the section of the interview transcription of the second Taiwan Aboriginal participant.
4. Date codes: mm-dd-yyyy represents the date of interview/observation.

For instance, I-TAS02-22/10-23-2007 indicates that this data came from the second Taiwanese indigenous student we interviewed during on October 23, 2003, and the referenced section came from the section 22 from the interview transcription using ATLAS.ti.

### **Limitations**

Due to time restraints and limited resources, there are several possible limitations that can apply to this study. First, there is only one extant case study in both aboriginal cultures; therefore it will be difficult to falsify the conclusions that emerge from this work and provide a generalized account. The major goal of this study is to compare issues between indigenous identities and urban schooling. Second, the authors are non-indigenous members from each of the case countries and constituted by a variety of other subjective factors, we bring a personal view point to this research that could affect the objectivity of its findings. Third, the study aims to compare the situations between Taiwan and the United States. However, geography, culture, and other elements of Taiwan and the United States have significant differences and it is not easy to conduct comparisons under the same contexts.

### **Comparison and SWOT Analysis**

To interpret the differences between American Indians and Taiwanese Aborigines, we borrowed the evaluation strategy from business to examine the *strengths* and *weaknesses* of the politics of identity and schooling as well as the *opportunities* and *threats* presented by the programs. This evaluation method is usually called the *SWOT* analysis (Lewis, 1995).

The SWOT analysis is a very effective way of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the indigenous education in both nations and of examining the opportunities and threats indigenous students face everyday.

Carrying out an analysis using the SWOT framework helps both countries to focus the activities into areas where indigenous education is strong and where the greatest opportunities lie.

### **Strengths**

**Indigenous identity** Taiwanese Aboriginal students have a higher percentage of Indigenous blood than the American Indians in our study. In this case, there are five full, one three-quarter, five half, one one-quarter-blooded indigenous students. There were no full blood American Indians and though five were half indigenous students. Most Taiwanese Aboriginal students live with their Indigenous parents. Of the ten Taiwanese students who participated in this study, all were raised by their native parents. Most of the Taiwanese students use their tribal languages at home with their parents and grandparents. One female student said, "My father and grandfather sometimes talk with me in our tribal language. In addition, I have tribal language classes every Sunday" (I-TAS03-22/10-24-2003). Six Taiwanese students still speak their tribal languages at home and their parents encourage them to continue learning their tribal languages. Most Taiwanese Aboriginal students visit their tribes frequently. There are nine indigenous students visiting their tribes at least once a year and some of them visit their tribes up to four times a year. Many Taiwanese Aboriginal students' parents still have close connections with their tribes.<sup>2</sup> Nine of the students' parents visit their tribes on a regular basis and some of them go back to their tribes every two weeks. A male eleventh grader stated that "my father has his own business in our tribal village and thus usually returns to our tribe every two weeks" (I-TAS02-35/10-21-2003). Furthermore, one student's mother is a part-time tribal language teacher in their own community. A lot of Taiwanese Aboriginal students had taken part in their traditional ceremonies before. Eight of the ten had participated in at least one traditional ceremony like the Harvest Festival or PaSta'ay.

In contrast, the indigenous identity strengths of the American Indians in our sample included a strong degree of participation in local indigenous ceremonies. There are a lot of Powwows in the greater Los Angeles area every year and it is convenient for indigenous students to join some near their urban residences. Seven of the students visited

Powwows at UCLA a couple of times, enjoyed the camaraderie, and found that they were sometimes fun. Largely because Los Angeles is such a diverse and multicultural setting, indigenous students do not feel like strangers in society to the same extent as Taiwanese Aboriginal students do. One senior male student from Los Angeles said, “my mother likes American Indian culture and she decorates our house with American Indian frames and artifacts” (I-LAS05-54/4-10-2004).

**Educational experiences** There are several strengths in the Taiwanese education system that cater to Taiwanese Aboriginal students. First, participation in at least one course related to tribal languages each week has been required for students since 2000. Second, the Extra Score Policy<sup>3</sup> helps many indigenous students attend better schools and overcome disadvantages created by their society and the environment. Third, there are several scholarships and fellowships that focus on Taiwanese Aborigines. Some specialized academic programs for indigenous people also exist, such as teacher education and nursing programs. And fourth, there are some tribal language competitions for indigenous students. Winners of these competitions receive scholarships to top higher education institutions (I-TAS03-54/10-24-2003).

The educational strengths we identified among American Indian students relate to the fact that the US comprises a multicultural education environment. The Los Angeles high school in this study has a large ethnic minority population made up of Chicano/as, Asian Americans, American Indians, Whites, and others. Indigenous students generally do not feel any stronger stereotypes from teachers and students than do other ethnic groups. Many students felt that their teachers were open-minded and that they would not practice racial discrimination. Classmates and colleagues were also open-minded and generally accepted different kinds of ethnic groups and cultures. Second, various school districts support American Indian education programs and encourage cultural development programs. Third, there are several scholarship programs throughout the country that are available to American Indian students at the primary, secondary, and higher education levels (I-LAS05-20/4-24-2003).

**Career aspirations** In both case countries, the majority

of indigenous students believe that education plays a very important role in achieving success in life; they therefore generally have a strong motivation to graduate from high school and attend college. Success was viewed by an eleventh grade male student from Taipei as a “way to make my dreams come true. I hope to graduate from high school and go on to National Taiwan University. Education provides me with the necessary knowledge to succeed” (I-TAS01-45/10-15-2003). To an eleventh grade female from Los Angeles,

Success means achieving your goal. My goal is to be a cop. I think education is very important and I believe that without education there can be no success in a future career. It is my desire to graduate from high school, go on to college, and then attend police academy (I-TAS02-24/10-18-2003).

Regarding cultural ambitions, indigenous peoples from both countries take pride in their rich heritages and hope to one day give something back to their communities and to their tribes.

### **Weaknesses**

**Indigenous identity** There were several weaknesses of indigenous identity that we found among Taiwanese Aborigines in our study. Some native students’ parents do not maintain contact with their tribes. Actually, three of the participants had never returned to their tribes and did not have any relatives who lived in tribal villages. Three native students had never had the chance to visit their tribal villages and were deprived of an opportunity to learn about and experience tribal life. Traditional ceremonies are not very popular in urban areas throughout Taiwan. This lack of popularity limits both the opportunities and the desire on the part of student to participate in traditional cultural activities.

According to the interviews and classroom observations, the fragilities of American Indian students’ indigenous identity comprised five points. First, many American Indian students were raised by non-American Indian parents and grew up for the most part outside of their Indian heritage. Their Indian blood heritage is relatively low, especially compared the Taiwanese student sample (see Tables 1 and 2). Next, only five students are half blood, five are one-quarter, one is one-eighth, and the other is one-sixteenth. Several American Indian participants had mixed blood with

Mexican decent and identified themselves firstly as Chicano/a. Language loss was a third identity weakness among the American Indian participants. None of the participants used their tribal language at home and most of their parents could not speak their indigenous tongue. Only one of our interviewees could speak basic daily conversational language in her native tongue with her mother; the other eleven could not communicate at all in their native languages. Fourth, most American Indian students never had the opportunity to visit their reservations and did not have a chance to experience tribal life, societal norms, and values. Only three indigenous students in our study had visited their tribal reservations. Finally, most of the American Indian students' parents did not have a strong connection with their reservation/community, providing few opportunities if any for students to visit or experience life on the reservation.

**Educational experiences** The drawbacks of Taiwanese Aboriginal students' educational experiences were not limited to curriculum but also involved learning additional languages, dealing with existing stereotypes, and racism. The Taiwanese secondary curriculum is very limited in terms of indigenous education and does not offer much about indigenous cultures, values, and perceptions. Indigenous students need to learn at least four languages to meet the demanding pressures of job attainment in a market-oriented economy: Chinese, English, Taiwanese, and finally their tribal language. This is a particularly daunting task for most students. Some teachers do not have enough information regarding indigenous cultures and maintain long-held stereotypes and practice racial discrimination. Some of these stereotypes portray Taiwanese Aborigines as alcoholics and likely to use drugs. Some non-Taiwanese Aboriginal students made fun of their ethnicity and felt that the government's affirmative action policy was unfair by awarding extra points to native students on their higher education entrance examination scores. An Amis female student in grade ten shared with us her experience of a difficult time she had with some of her peers while attending elementary school. "My elementary school peers would frequently run around my table and yell "O-O-O" like American Indians," she said (I-TAS05-70/10-28-2003).

Deficiencies in American Indian student's educational experiences were similar to those experienced by Taiwanese Aborigines. For instance, the high school curriculum at the

Los Angeles case school offered very little about American Indian cultures, world views, societal norms, and traditional values. Teachers also had very little, and often inaccurate information and knowledge related to Native American cultures. This was especially noticeable in classroom discussions of indigenous history and government. Unlike in Taiwan, few non-American Indian classmates made fun of American Indian students' ethnicity. Yet sometimes we would observe students jokingly saying something they had heard through the media such as where American Indians would run around a fire and yelled "O-O-O."

**Career aspirations** Both Taiwanese Aboriginal and American Indian students faced similar situations regarding their educational aspirations: they did not do very well in schools and had very poor academic performance. American Indian students have a very high dropout rate, especially while attending high school. During the four-month field study, three of the participants dropped out, one went to an adult school, one went to a training center, and the other just left the school altogether.

Regarding cultural ambitions, both Taiwanese Aboriginal and American Indian students did not think very much about how to connect their future with their tribes and reservations. While they maintained a desire to help their tribes and people, when they were asked how they could help, the answer was always "I do not know how" (I-TAS03-70/10-24-2003; I-LAS10-80/5-2-2004).

### **Opportunities**

A useful approach to looking at opportunities is to examine the strengths and ask whether these open up any opportunities for indigenous peoples. Alternative ways to view opportunities is by identifying weaknesses and find ways to eliminate them.

**Indigenous identity** Parents were a strong source of encouragement for Taiwanese Aboriginal students learning their tribal languages. Some parents also spoke their native tongue at home to their children. In addition, some students attended tribal language classes at least once a week to help sharpen their native language fluency. Increasing numbers of Taiwanese Aboriginal festivals are held in different areas. Although they have not been traditionally viewed as a

popular activity for youth in Taiwan, this trend is slowly changing. More activities are available each year and urban students should have additional opportunities to experience their culture on a regular basis, even away from their tribal villages.

By contrast, three opportunities surfaced as likely opportunities to strengthen American Indian identities in our study. First, Powwows and cultural gatherings are held in many places in the Los Angeles area. Many of these cultural events are close to the student participants offering venues for participation. Second, most student participants demonstrated media literacy skills that question the reality of the negative discourse that is so frequently portrayed in print, on television, and in the movies. This was evident by the response of a female eleventh grader when asked about the most challenging experience she had had while attending school:

When I was a little girl, classmates often made fun of me due to my own tribe. It bothered me a lot at the time. But it is okay now, because I have change. I now feel proud of my heritage. My classmates behaved in this manner due to their misunderstanding about my culture and heritage (I-LAS02-70/4-16-2004).

Thirdly, an increasing number of literature, television shows, and movies are discussing issues pertaining to American Indians. Often these issues are portrayed in a critical and positive light. This is a shift from the largely negative print and media representations of the past.

**Educational experience** The potential for increasing the positive educational experiences for Taiwanese Aboriginal students include the further development of counseling programs that are focused on learning adjustments of Taiwanese Aboriginal students. Tribal language courses are also available at least once a week and may help indigenous students encounter greater exposure with their traditional cultures. An educational policy that began in January 2005 requires Taiwanese Aboriginal students to have tribal language certificates in order to qualify for the extra scores on their examinations. This policy was established to help encourage indigenous students to learn more about their traditional languages and cultures. A twelfth grade female in Taipei felt that “it is fair to add tribal language skills as criteria for the extra score policy because indigenous students who come from their tribes need more help and

educational opportunities than do students from predominantly urban areas (I-TAS06-80/10-27-2003).

American Indian students also have opportunities to advance the development of their educational opportunities. Two national educational reforms have in some degree addressed American Indian education. For instance, in 1965, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) Title I gave disadvantaged students additional instruction and assistance. In 2000, the *No Child Left Behind Act* provided additional support for American Indians in elementary and secondary schools. Funds were allocated to hire additional teachers and provide additional materials to help American Indian students improve their reading and mathematics performance. Many teacher education programs now include multicultural education in the training curriculum to help student teachers better understand different cultures and world views.

**Career aspirations** There appeared to be no differences in terms of educational ambition between Taiwanese Aboriginal and American Indian students in the study. They shared similar educational ambitions even though most students did not fare very well in terms of school performance. Indigenous students in both countries realized the overall importance of education and hoped to graduate from high school and go on to college. Although three of the twelve American Indian students withdrew from their high school, they mentioned in their respective interviews with us that they planned and wanted to graduate from high school and eventually attend college.

Regarding cultural ambitions, some of the indigenous student participants in our study mentioned that they did not have a chance to visit their native reservation or village. Yet most students dealt with this cultural dearth by taking advantage of local cultural events, Powwows, and ceremonies. Furthermore, several students from both countries told us that they hope to do something in the future for their own tribes and people. For instance, one Taiwanese Aboriginal student told us that he would like to write the history and story of his tribe.

### **Threats**

**Indigenous identity** Threats that hinder indigenous identity development were apparent in both countries. Some

of the Taiwanese Aboriginal students in our study had culturally marginalized identities and did not affiliate or self-identify with their own tribal or mainstream identities. Many indigenous students cannot speak their respective tribal languages. Students with this perspective expressed little desire to study or learn their tribal languages. Many indigenous students do not maintain close connections with their indigenous tribes. This displacement gap has a potentially great influence on the formation of their indigenous identity. One student commented, "I would like to help my tribal people but I do not plan to ever return to my village because work opportunities are elsewhere" (I-TAS01-27/10-13-2003). A female classmate had a different perspective, than this youth. She said,

I definitely plan to go back to my own tribe to be a medical doctor. Education is life. You can't force your people to do anything and the only thing you can do is to help them learn something in their indigenous environments (I-TAS03-60/10-24-2003).

Issues threatening American Indian student identities include language loss, urbanization, and being raised in non-American Indian homes. Most native students and their parents cannot speak their indigenous languages. Lack of language acquisition is a precursor to a lack of cultural immersion, lack of cultural understanding, and eventual culture loss. Most American Indian students' parents do not maintain close or regular ties with their own tribes or reservations. This threat is only exacerbated by urbanization and the enormous geographical distances between indigenous reservations and where students currently reside in US cities. Tribes are generally far away from most urban centers and are not easy for most students to remain in close contact with. Many American Indian students are raised away from their non-American Indian parents and are unable to share experiences that they might have gained if they were raised in their own culture and by their own families. However, American Indian students under these circumstance do learn about the richness of the cultures of other races that they have exposure to while schooling.

**Educational experience** The relationships between indigenous identities and educational experiences in Taiwanese Aborigines are limited by four factors. First, the curriculum students are exposed to does not comprise

enough information about different cultures and values, including those of Taiwanese Aborigines. Second, while they are improving, some teachers hold to traditional stereotypes about indigenous peoples. Third, the extra-score policy for Taiwanese Aboriginal students creates benefits for students when they advance to higher education, but often creates friction between them and non-Taiwanese Aboriginal students. Finally, some classmates actually make fun of native students on account of their ethnicity.

Threats that have surfaced from the findings in this urban study of the interaction between indigenous identities and American Indian educational experience are threefold. First, there are several minority groups in the United States which include Africa Americans, Chicano/as, American Indians, and Asian Americans. American Indians are just one of many minority groups and may be overshadowed or even ignored at large by the public educational system and government reforms. Second, the curriculum relative to each school district does not cover significant portions of American Indian culture and world views. Third, most teachers do not possess enough information and knowledge about indigenous cultures in the United States. They will undoubtedly require in-service training and access to information on the history and continuation of indigenous peoples in North America.

**Career aspirations** Regarding educational ambition, both indigenous student groups do not perform very well in the public school system compared with other students and are generally located in the bottom 5% of the total academic achievement. In US schools, the high dropout rates of American Indian students has become another critical issue. Another issue of cultural ambition for Taiwanese Aborigines and American Indians is that many indigenous students do not feel any desire to go back to work for their own tribes and reservations. "The main reason I will not go back to my tribal village is because there is no opportunity for me to work there," one male student from Taipei said (I-TAS07-76/10-30-2003). "I would like to return and work on my reservation. My family would want me to do this. But there are not many jobs," a female Navajo student said in Los Angeles (I-LAS01-45/4-2-2004). This lack of desire to return to their homelands could lead to a vicious cycle of cultural removal and potential deterioration.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The overarching goals of this research focus on two key factors: (1) to identify and understand power relations between the formation of indigenous identities and educational systems, and (2) to discover the interrelationships among indigenous identities, educational experiences, and career aspirations within the contexts of the United States and Taiwan. To interpret the politics of identity and schooling, we reviewed the unique backgrounds of indigenous education among both American Indians and Taiwanese Aborigines. While we recognize the great disparity in terms of geographic size between the two case countries, we also realize that both groups share similar historical, political, social, economic, and educational backgrounds. Both groups lived in their lands for a period of over one thousand years, and were forced into contact with Euro-American and Han-Chinese about four hundred years ago. After that, they were forced to leave their original living areas to other poorer regions. For instance, American Indians were obliged to move westward and Taiwan Aborigines were forced to migrate to higher, mountains regions.

From a political standpoint, Taiwanese Aborigines have experienced domination by different foreign colonizers: the Dutch, Cheng Royalty, Ching Dynasty, Japan, Chinese Chiang family warlords, and the Republic of China. By contrast, American Indians also were victims of European colonists including the Spanish, British, French, and Americans for several hundred years.

Regarding their social and economic backgrounds, both American Indians and Taiwanese Aborigines come from relatively low socioeconomic status families. Therefore, their household income and health insurance opportunities are generally lower than the average person in each country. Even with the addition of educational policies focused on increasing educational opportunities for indigenous students, the achievements of both American Indian and Taiwanese Aborigines are well below national averages.

According to the literature (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Konstantopoulos, Modi, & Hedges, 2001; Olneck, 1990), identity is an ongoing process to identify selfhood and usually excludes other perspectives. Moreover, identity is dynamic and multifaceted rather than permanent and individual. Finally, the process of recognition and misrecognition is based on power and exclusion. Therefore,

we interpret indigenous identities into three subcategories: individual identity, community identity, and external identity. We are careful to note that there are generally struggles associated with identity during the life stage of identification, which include pre-encounter, encounter, emersion/immersion, and internalization. Due to the identity crisis that inevitably exists between mainstream culture and tribal culture, the formation of indigenous students' identities could be comprehended as one of four quadrants: mainstream identity, tribal identity, bicultural identity, and cultural marginalized identity.

After conducting field studies in Taipei and Los Angeles, we discovered that indigenous identities are highly related to native students' blood heritage, the parents who raised them, tribal language usage in the home, reservation/tribal visits, traditional tribal ceremony participation, parents' tribal connections, and media/cultural critiques. Students who have a higher percentage of indigenous blood heritage, raised by their native parents, use their tribal language at home, visit their reservations/tribes on a regular basis, and join their traditional ceremonies (i.e., Powwows) tend to possess robust indigenous identities and view themselves as indigenous people first and foremost. They also understand more about the reality and culture of their own tribes, are dissatisfied with the limits of the state- and district-sponsored curricula, and critical of existing stereotypes as portrayed by the media. Compared to urban American Indians in this study, most urban Taiwanese Aborigines from our sample have higher indigenous blood percentages, are raised by their native parents, use their tribal language more frequently, visit their reservation/tribe at least once a year, join traditional ceremonies on a regular basis, and have parents with strong ties to their tribes. Based on these findings, urban Taiwanese Aborigines generally hold stronger indigenous identities than do urban American Indians in the two case study cities. However, again we recognize the limitations in generalizing these findings as our study consisted of one urban school in Los Angeles and we expect that these findings may vary in other US metropolitan areas.

To analyze the interaction between indigenous identities and schooling, we noticed that students who held stronger indigenous identities are inclined to question the existing curriculum and are cognizant of stereotypes and racial discrimination from teachers and peers. For instance,

their traditional indigenous education revolved around character and skills development with a special emphasis on the child. Rather than the traditional European teacher-guided model of education, indigenes believed that every part of community life was responsible for the education of the indigenous child (Jacob & Bradshaw, In Press; Reagan, 2005). Moreover, indigenous students with strong identities of their native heritage comprehend the limitations of educational reforms and hope that existing and new policies can help offset the social imbalances that exist between mainstream and indigenous student learning in both countries. However, native students who possess weaker indigenous identities generally have little or no discord with the existing curriculum, pedagogy, peer interaction, and educational policies they encounter in their schooling experience.

According to the Cultural Identity Axis (Figure 2), indigenous students could be grouped into four quadrants due to the proportion of their mainstream and tribal culture exposure. Native students who have weaker indigenous identities and accept all the mainstream values and worldviews in the curriculum, pedagogy, and peer interaction of their school life have what we call *mainstream identities*.

Those who have weaker indigenous identities but argue for the importance of education and other mainstream values could be categorized as *culturally marginalized identities*. Those who retain strong tribal identities and also wish to follow the mainstream values could be classified as *bicultural identities*. Finally, those who hold stable tribal identities while simultaneously criticizing mainstream values and world perspectives we consider to have *tribal identities*.

Compared to their American Indian counterparts in this study, more Taiwanese Aboriginal students consider themselves as possessing bicultural identities. They maintain their tribal knowledge, values, and worldviews on one hand, and learn how to fit into mainstream society on the other. Generally, these students perform very well in terms of academic achievement. Those who were identified as having cultural marginalized identities actually did not recognize their cultural heritage and rarely performed well on school assignments. For instance, due to their poor academic achievements and failure to finish their credits before eighteen years of age, three American Indian students who possessed weaker tribal identities also had lower educational aspirations and decided to drop out of high

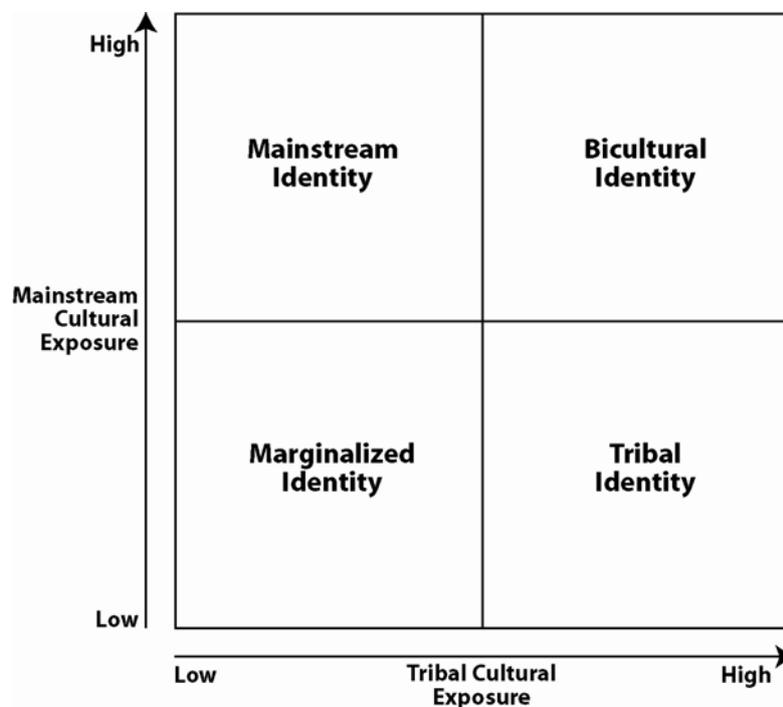


Figure 2. Cultural Identity Axis

school during the academic year of this study.

Some participants in this study in Taipei and Los Angeles could be considered to have mainstream identities. They lived in urban areas and had never had the opportunity to return to their reservation or tribal village. Even though they knew that they had an indigenous heritage, they had no way of experiencing cultural immersion with their indigenous tribes. In Taiwan, due to the government's extra score policy, some Taiwanese Aboriginal students are willing to announce that they are Taiwanese Aborigines only when they need help getting into a good college. After the entrance exam, however, some of these students actually disguise their ethnicity among friends and teachers in order to blend in with mainstream students.

On the contrary, some Taiwanese Aborigines showed strong tribal identities. These students actively learned their tribal language every Sunday, their parents always spoke their tribal language in their homes, and their families would visit their tribal village up to four times a year. These students did not perform as well in school, but they frequently contemplated how to help their tribes and were concerned about doing something for their indigenous people in the future.

In short, the issue of indigenous identity formation is highly complicated and depends on different families, communities, schools, societies, and contexts. Families play the most important role in helping indigenous students mold their own indigenous identities. If native students can be raised by their indigenous side, use their tribal language at home, visit their tribes frequently, and join their traditional ceremonies, they would maintain stronger indigenous identities than those who do not have these opportunities.

Furthermore, if parents of indigenous students kept a closer connection with their own tribes, their children would possess stronger indigenous identities than those whose parents did not. In terms of the role of schooling, James and Cherry Banks (2001) remind us that multicultural education should include content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure. Many indigenous students feel dissatisfied with the design of their existing curriculum, pedagogy, peer interaction, and educational policies. How to meet the educational needs of indigenous students is an increasingly tough issue facing educators, policy makers, and social workers in Taiwan and

the United States.

Regarding career aspiration, most participants in this study recognized the importance of education and planned to go to college. However, at least three of the indigenous students in Los Angeles dropped out from their high school studies. Following our identity categorization model, these three belong to the culturally marginalized identity quadrant. These participants reported being ostracized and experiencing disappointment with the school system. Learning how to balance mainstream society with their tribal values is an ongoing process of identity and self-reflection (Ward, 2005). In this study we do not advocate that bicultural identities are the best or only identities in Taiwan and US societies. However, we believe that additional emphasis should be placed on family and community involvement in indigenous students' overall schooling experience. Tribes could do more to provide avenues for cultural outreach programs that could help students appreciate their origins and learn more about their rich cultures. Schools could do more to support multicultural curricula and increasing the understanding of their student bodies, teachers, and administrators regarding indigenous histories, multiculturalism, and eliminating ethnic stereotypes. In general, families, tribes, and schools could play a more active and collective role in helping indigenous students throughout their identity formation and help build strong American Indian and Taiwanese Aboriginal generations for the future.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> We recognize that there are significant internal differentiations within the two indigenous groups, noting that each group constitutes multiple languages, cultures, and traditions.

<sup>2</sup> The situation between the two case countries is significant due to sheer size of the United States compared to Taiwan. The distance between where American Indian students live in urban cities and where their reservations are located is a for the most part a significant geographical difference from the distance between urban Taiwanese Aboriginal students and their tribal villages.

<sup>3</sup> This could be also considered as a weakness due to the side effect of the Extra Score Policy.

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