

Taiwan: Han Farmers Protest Protection of Indigenous Territories

Saturday 2 November 2019, by [HIOE Brian](#) (Date first published: 15 May 2019).

The frustrations of small farmers from the Han majority are being channeled against their indigenous neighbours.

The demonstration on 15 May 2019 involved over one thousand members of the Taiwan Association for the Rights of Non-Aboriginal Residents in Mountain Indigenous Townships (TARNARMIT, or 台灣原住民族權利促進會) protesting against the Council of Indigenous Peoples' efforts to protect indigenous traditional territories. Apart from demonstrating outside of the Executive Yuan, the demonstration also later moved to encircle the Council of Indigenous Peoples.

Demonstrators appeared to primarily be farmers and came from across Taiwan, arriving in Taipei in 27 tour buses from Nantou, Taitung, and other locations. Members of the TARNARMIT, who were ethnically Han, claimed that efforts to preserve or restore indigenous traditional territories would drive Han farmers off of their land, violating their rights to their land, and their rights to subsistence.

Representatives of the Council of Indigenous Peoples, as well as indigenous lawmakers as legislator Chen Ying, also known as Asunai Daliyarep, [have emphasized that the intention of restoring indigenous traditional territories is not to deprive Han farmers of their rights.](#) According to statements by the Council of Indigenous Peoples, so long as they are not violating the terms of their lease or illegally occupying territories, [it will be possible for Han residents to rent indigenous traditional territories for use with the permission of the indigenous owners of the land, continuing to reside on such lands.](#)

To that extent, Chen emphasized in her public statement that the concept of indigenous "original ownership" of the land is in accordance with international law and is not a concept newly invented by the Tsai administration. Chen cited that "original ownership" existed as a legal concept even during the presence of previous colonial regimes in Taiwan, such as in the constitution used during the Japanese colonial period.

Nevertheless, members of the TARNARMIT claim otherwise, with the view that "original ownership" of the land was a concept newly invented by the Tsai administration. Members of the TARNARMIT also demand that they have ownership of the land, rather than renting it from indigenous original residents, claiming that they have rights to the land after living on it for several generations.

Several prominent indigenous activists, such as Namoh Nofu Pacidal, Savungaz Valincinan, and members of LIMA, among others, were present to observe the demonstration by the TARNARMIT. Apart from that members of the TARNARMIT at one point physically grabbed indigenous demonstrators present, [twisting the arm of one demonstrator.](#), much outrage from indigenous activists has focused upon the discriminatory language and views espoused by the TARNARMIT at the demonstration.

Pamphlets handed out by the TARNARMIT, for example, [attacked the institution of the Council of Indigenous Peoples itself as a waste of public expenditure, claiming that the operating budget of the Council of Indigenous Peoples was better spent on subsidies for housing, construction, and entrepreneurship](#). Placards also claimed that the Council of Indigenous Peoples was stirring up “ethnic hatred”, that “pingpuzu are the only real indigenous”, and called for “racial equality.” Indigenous activists have pointed out that, as an organization, the TARNARMIT has opposed the protections for indigenous territories since the 1980s.

Indeed, it may not be surprising to note that the demonstration by the TARNARMIT had a strong Han ethnic tinge to it. Apart from the basic fact that demonstrators were all observably Han, traditional Daoist religious ceremonies were carried out at the protest, and many of the speeches were in Hoklo.

Unfortunately, this demonstration may only go to show the long path to be walked for transitional justice for Taiwanese indigenous to be realized. It still remains the case that simply trying to restore or even just to make basic amends for the deprivation of indigenous rights after hundreds of years of colonization in Taiwan is viewed as threatening by many members of the Han majority. This may be another case in point.

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