

Aboriginal rights key to statehood

Written by Chiang Tzu-yang 張子揚

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Transitional justice has played an important role in recent historical democratization processes. In some democratic nations, transitional justice has focused on the state's past oppression and assimilation of ethnic communities. The US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have come to grips with the oppression of indigenous ethnic communities under government policies of the past.

Juan Chun-ta (陳俊達), a researcher specializing in indigenous affairs, has published a thesis titled *Indigenous Peoples and Transitional Justice: An Ethnic Mainstreaming Perspective*.

Juan's thesis proposes two viewpoints: ethnic mainstreaming and the characteristics of indigenous transitional justice.

Juan wrote that ethnic mainstreaming requires a government at all levels to have basic ethnic sensitivity and to raise public awareness that everyone is part of ethnic relations, opening the door for all ethnic groups to participate in the construction of mainstream society.

Government departments need to avoid discrimination, but they must also recognize differences between ethnic communities and reject preconceived notions favoring the advantaged community when formulating policies. They must promote opportunities for all ethnic groups at all levels of society to "participate in the construction of mainstream society," Juan wrote.

In Taiwan's case, this would allow Aborigines to enter mainstream society and ensure that communities can interact on an equal footing.

The second point concerns the characteristics of indigenous transitional justice, especially with regard to "enduring injustice."

Consider this in the context of Taiwan's recent history. After the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) transferred its government to Taiwan in 1949, its policy orientation regarding Aborigines

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was basically a continuation of what happened under Japanese rule. In other words, the then-KMT government went on oppressing Aborigines and abusing their rights.

Notably, during the 1950s, the government promoted a series of policies aimed at “turning mountain dwellers into ordinary citizens.”

These policies harmed many Aborigines in many ways, including their language rights, land rights, cultural rights and educational rights, not to mention their right to use their names and pursue development.

During the White Terror period, the then-KMT government killed leading Aboriginal figures, such as Losin Watan, Uyongu Yata'uyungana and Yapasuyongu Yulunana. This clearly demonstrates how the human rights abuses that Aborigines experienced have been both collective and individual.

Taiwan's Aborigines are not just the original masters of the land, they are also the starting point and origin of the nation's historical development. Later, they were subjected to the rule of alien and colonial governments. They have undergone multiple colonizations.

The restoration of Aboriginal rights is important and urgent, as are questions of historical justice. This is one of the roads that Taiwan must travel to become a normal country.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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