

The Impacts of the September 21st Earthquake on Indigenous Peoples' Land Rights and the Reconstruction of Place Identity in Taiwan

921 地震對原住民土地權益與 地方認同重構的衝擊

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Abstract

Many of Taiwan's indigenous peoples' struggles on land rights are related to the maintenance of ethnic cultural traditions, local resource management, and the establishment of place identity and sense of place. The earthquake of September 21st, 1999, has provided an opportunity to re-examine (1) the land rights issues among the Han people, the state, and the indigenous people and (2) the relationship between tribal and communal reconstruction and place identity.

Indigenous land rights struggles have accelerated since the establishment of the "Plains Peoples' Rights Association" (PPRA) in 1993 in Ho-Ping *Hsian*, Taichung County. The PPRA demands that indigenous reservation land policy be abolished and that all reservation land be open to market forces and free trade. The illegal land transfers from indigenous people to Han people have been a politically thorny

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question concerning Taiwan's mountain development policy since the intrusion of market forces in the mid-1960s. Moreover, the devastating earthquake could force some tribes in Ho-Ping to relocate their whole population to new areas where their land rights are even less secure. How the PPRA and the indigenous people will respond to this new situation and the impact of the earthquake on land rights conflicts are the questions explored in this research.

Furthermore, in addition to the indigenous land rights issues, place identity and sense of place of tribes people are also closely related to the land. The rebuilding of tribes and communities after the earthquake, which coincided with successive waves of the PPRA's call for the "liberation" of reservation land, provides an opportunity to investigate critically the potential changes in place identity and sense of place among local residents.

The paper employs various theories of identity, each anchored in the broad field of New Cultural Geography. Theories of political economy are also applied to analyze land conflicts between two ethnic groups, with emphasis on the spatial dimension. This paper aims to reveal the geographical, economic, social, and political marginalization of Taiwan's indigenous peoples and provides a theoretical base for future research on land-related topics.

Keywords: place, indigenous people, land

摘 要

台灣原住民的土地抗爭經常連結到族群文化傳統的維護、在地資源的經理、以及地方認同與地方感的建構。921 地震及其重建讓研究者有機會重新檢視漢人、國家、原住民三者之間的土地權糾結，以及部落與社區重建過程中的地方認同轉變。

原漢之間的土地爭議在 1993 年和平鄉的平權會成立之後更趨激烈。平權會以其一貫開放原住民保留地自由買賣的立場，挾帶豐沛的政治人脈與金融關係，要如何回應地震後和平鄉地區土地價值的貶低與經濟的衰退？此外，災區原住民部落重建的規劃，包括重建初期遷村的提議在內，如何呈現出與西方地理學理論所發展出來之「地方」概念的族群與社會差異？這些是本文想要探討的實證研究個案。

「地方」在早期人文主義地理學中常被呈現為固定不變動、和諧、同質、有明顯邊界的特定空間。本文以新文化地理學關於地方概念的詮釋，及政治經濟學的觀察與批判，突顯「地方」概念、認同政治與地方感在全球化時代的實質轉變。藉由原住民在地理、經濟、社會、與政治的邊緣化過程，本文也指出了新的與土地、社區相關的研究領域。

關鍵詞：地方、原住民、土地

Introduction

The earthquake that struck Taiwan on Sept. 21, 1999, registering 7.6 on the Richter scale, killed more than 2,100 people, left at least 100,000 others homeless and displaced, and caused a series of landslides and mudslides in the subsequent rainy season that continuously threatened the safety of the earthquake survivors in central Taiwan. What collapsed was not only the fragile physical environment, but also the living space, the familiar place, and the social networks and the emotionally attached landscapes for the people in central Taiwan. Among the disaster areas, the central mountain zone in which most indigenous Atayal people reside is primarily the spatial focus of this paper. The lengthy reconstruction process involves tremendous resource distribution and socio-political struggles within both the local and central governments, and this enables us to critically examine the ethnic relations in Taiwan. For this paper, the earthquake provides an (unfortunate) opportunity to re-examine the relationship between the reconstruction of indigenous tribes and their land-based place identity, which is overwhelmingly considered to be the fundamental element for those who identify themselves as indigenous peoples (Wilmer, 1993). Part of this re-examination is an investigation of the conflicting land rights issue among the Han people—the major ethnic group constitutive of Taiwan's population, the state, and the indigenous people in Ho-Ping *Hsian* (a sub-county administrative unit), Taichung County.

The Atayal people, whose major living area is the mountainous areas in central and northern Taiwan, is one of the ten officially recognized indigenous peoples in Taiwan. Many indigenous peoples are forced to leave their ancestral homeland in the mountains to make a living in the cities and are often situated at the bottom of social stratification in the labor market.

Place and its relevant polemics surrounding the notion of sense of place and identity construction have been the central concern for humanistic and cultural geography since the post-positivist revolution. The review of theoretical development of place identity within the framework of sense of place in contemporary cultural geography constitutes the first part of the paper. Secondly the paper investigates the land-related discourses, particularly after the earthquake, of both the dominant Han people organization in the earthquake-affected region, "Plains Peoples' Rights Association" (PPRA, *Ping-Chuan-Hui*, 平權會), and the relatively socially disadvantaged aborigines. A discursive analysis of the post-quake reconstruction and rehabilitation projects shows that the locally specific and yet ethnically varied place identities have emerged from the temporary shelters.

Many of the indigenous peoples' struggles on land rights are, at the same time, inevitably associated with the maintenance of ethnic cultural traditions, local resource management (in this case, slope land development and land ownership), and the establishment and transformation of both place identity and sense of place. There seems to be an interesting contrast between the different senses of place developed by the PPRA and by the indigenous activists. While the indigenous peoples' reclamation of their ancestral land, embodied in a series of movements calling for the return of the reservation lands to the aborigines, is thought

of as politically progressive, the PPRA's claim on the Han people's ownership of reservation lands, mostly slope farmland, is considered 'reactionary' As the paper will point out, the underlying ideologies about lands and the different senses of place form the basis to distinguish these two groups' claims on lands.

Place, Sense of Place, and Place Identity

In the early literature of humanistic geography, the notion of place is often associated with stasis, fixedness, and immutability, a sense of caring and concern for the immediate 'lifeworld' (to borrow the term from Husserl), and a significant spiritual attachment to a particular 'somewhere' (see the review by Peet, 1998). The post-modern cultural and social theories, which were prevalent later in the general social sciences, perceived the concept of place from a different theoretical vein. Place is conceived as a peculiar position, a symbolic terrain, and a "third space" from which postmodern theorists and the marginalized groups launch their attacks on the mega-narratives of modernity (Smith, 1999). Modernity and place are, therefore, conceived by the recent intellectual trend as conceptual opposites (Oakes, 1997). However, from the perspectives of new cultural geography, as Oakes argues, place represents the intrinsically unstable terrain of modernity, rather than its incompatible conception. Modernity, with its paradoxical vision oscillating between emancipatory possibility (as the Enlightenment promised), and its increasingly oppressive totalizing tendency, produces an ambivalent and unstable sense of place, which stands in contrast to what the traditional humanistic and cultural geography literature outlines (Oakes, 1997). The modern landscape of place, therefore, has the characteristics of, and the geographical expression of, modernity's ambivalence and contradiction (Oakes, 1997).

Place, in a world of fragmentation and disruption, is no longer a supposed homogenous and coherent community where all people maintain a single pure identity, possessing the same interests and having identical geographical/ historical experience. Instead, place is "a creative yet ambivalent space carved out somewhere between the oppressiveness of the new order and the imprisonments of tradition" (Oakes, 1997). The multiple and often hybrid identities co-presented in the same place demonstrate that the place identity, and with it, the sense of place, should be defined by both individual experience and sentiments, and by a complex and broader connection with the political economy 'outside the boundaries' of the place in question (Massey, 1993; Oakes, 1997). Moreover, the advance of telecommunication technology and increasing international trade in an era of globalization provide the base for the creation of a global sense of place (see also Massey, 1991). Globalization in all its meanings challenges the traditional notion of place as settled, clear-cut and internally coherent enclosure.

The idea that defining a place requires the drawing of boundaries helps to distinguish between inside and outside, and between 'us' and 'them.' This distinction, at least partially, gives rise to the reactionary, defensive, and xenophobic responses to newcomers and 'outsiders' (Massey, 1993) and lays the foundation for the recent surge of exclusivist nationalisms, regionalisms and localisms (Harvey, 1989). The maintenance

of place boundaries in order to keep out the 'outsiders' is to ignore the inevitable openness in the process of the formation of place characters (Sibley, 1992). With the recognition that a place is constructed by both more local and wider social relations, the characters of place can be conceived as the outcome of the accumulated history of the specific linkages with the 'outside' world (Massey, 1993). A progressive, outward-looking sense of place, therefore, would recognize these dynamic connections and blurred boundaries without being threatened by them (Massey, 1993).

Place (in all its meanings) is often endowed with the geopolitics of resistance in a large body of 'new' cultural geography literature (see the papers in Keith and Pile, 1993; Pile and Keith, 1997). Place-based identity, as this progressive perspective implies, stems from political awareness of collective or individual actions against the hegemonic power and the dominant representation of place in which the marginal group lives and works (Oakes, 1997). However, as Oakes convincingly argues, despite the fact that place tends to be constructed as "site of resistance" and a crucial base for marginalized culture, the conception of place and the place-based political movements, should not be necessarily and unproblematically linked to a progressive politics of space (see also Massey, 1991; 1993). As I will point out later, the Han people's PPRA organization in Taiwan's central mountain areas set out a campaign, which, by Sibley's definition (1995), is the embodiment of geography of exclusion.

The Land Rights Struggles Between the PPRA and the Aborigines¹

Taiwanese aboriginals make up around 1.7 percent of the total of 23 million people island-wide. As many other indigenous peoples around the world, Taiwan's indigenous peoples suffer socially, politically, and culturally from hegemonic state policies. The Kuomintang (KMT) regime, which fled to Taiwan after the Chinese Communist revolution in 1949, inherited the Japanese colonizers' Aboriginal Reservation Land system, which conferred a certain amount of lands from national forest land to each indigenous household. Despite the official claims that Reservation Land aimed to preserve indigenous peoples' subsistence economy and improve their living conditions, the system exposed indigenous peoples to a constant police surveillance and confined their traditional economic and social practices within limited spaces. However, in 1966, the KMT government, under claims of modernizing aboriginal economy and for the purpose of relocating retired military personnel, officially introduced a capitalist mode of production into mountain areas and allowed both the public and private sectors to rent reservation lands from the aborigines to develop the 'mountain economy.' This led to a market-oriented production of temperate fruits and vegetable and virtually destroyed the subsistence economies, as well as the social and political structures of the aboriginal societies (Chen, 1998). Indigenous ancestral lands were either taken by eminent domain, first in the name of national security and later for the establishment of national parks, or alternately fell into the hands of Han farmers and business groups for economic development, despite the fact that an executive decree governing the Reservation Land prescribed that only the aboriginals were entitled to land ownership in the particular

mountain areas. A series of social movements, "Land Recovery Movements," which calls for returning lands to original aboriginal owners, was initiated by urban indigenous activists during the period of 1988-1993. Another new wave of indigenous land rights struggles have accelerated since the establishment of the Han people's political organization, the PPRA, in 1993 in Ho-Ping *Hsian*.

The "illegal" land transfers from indigenous people to Han people have been a politically thorny question concerning Taiwan's mountain development policy since the intrusion of market economy in the mid-60s. Han farmers with relatively abundant capital purchase lands from the aborigines who are in urgent need of cash. Although the government does not recognize these under-the-counter land sales, the aborigines continually lose their lands to Han farmers and, more seriously, to delegates of financial consortia (Good and Chang, 1999). There is no surprise to learn that the PPRA demands that the reservation land policy be abolished and that all the reservation lands be open to the market force for free trade, given the close tie of the PPRA's president to a major business group and this group's record for land speculation (Good and Chang, 1999).

The establishment of the PPRA was in response to Taiwan's pan-indigenous movement which climaxed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Particularly, the "Land Recovery Movements" were perceived by the organizers of the PPRA as major threats to their positions in the current establishment, because the movements requested the State return or restore to aboriginal control reservation lands that were either illegally utilized by the non-aboriginals or taken by eminent domain.

Within a few years, the PPRA has become a powerful local political organization and pro-growth coalition which quickly absorbed several other smaller social organizations in the Ho-Ping area. What makes the PPRA unique is the party's strategy to present itself as a marginalized, oppressed group of victims persecuted under current laws which, in its view, are overwhelmingly preferential to the aborigines. The organization's broad political affiliations span three major political parties (the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, the KMT, and the former New Party ²) and include abundant financial resources. The influence of the PPRA is most evident in Ho-Ping *Hsian* but certainly also reaches the central government in Taipei where the PPRA mobilizes tremendous resources to lobby lawmakers and successfully block or alter the directions of relevant legislation and constitutional revisions (Chen, 1998; PPRA, 1997a).

The emphases on social justice, as well as the protection and promotion of the rights of underprivileged indigenous groups, were conceived as intimidation by some Han people living within the mountain *Hsian* of Taiwan. Cultural difference and, of course, economic interests contribute to the formation of the different views of these two ethnic groups on the land issues. In the rise of the PPRA, racial discrimination certainly plays an implicit role in the views of, at least, some core members. At the Constitutional level, the PPRA opposes the term "indigenous peoples" and suggests a return to the previous term of "mountain compatriots" or the politically neutral, academic name of Austronesian. In fact, core members of the PPRA deny the existence of indigenous peoples in Taiwan altogether (PPRA, 1997a ; 1997b). By denying the indigenous status of the aborigines, the PPRA suggests that the aborigines' demands on the ownership of the Reservation

Land will lose ground. With potentially tremendous support from some financial syndicate giants which are renown for their real estate business and land speculations, and well-connected political and social networks, the upsurge of the PPRA organization in several mountain *Hsians* appears not only much easier, but also more effective in terms of achieving political gains than those of its indigenous counterpart, the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines (*Yuan Chuan Hui*, 原權會).

The Post-quake Reconstruction in Aboriginal Communities

Following the devastating earthquake, some tribes in Ho-Ping were forced to the brink of removing the whole population to new grounds where the land rights are even more insecure. However, the relocation programs were too complex and thorny to put into effect. The social and geographical imagination provided by the rehabilitation measures for reconstructing the new rural landscape in central Taiwan and in the indigenous communities deteriorates as the post-quake reconstruction programs led by both the central and local governments are frequently being criticized for their lack of appropriate planning and local participation. The national rehabilitation programs involve huge resource distribution that has no precedent in the rural area. Several politicians have been prosecuted for their possible corruption. As many planning teams and volunteer NGOs have argued, the restoration efforts should contain not merely the physical dimension, but also the social relationship embedded in the newly built environment and the social values that are altered after the earthquake (Teng, 2000). However, the restoration resources, both material and humanistic support from reconstruction planning teams and NGOs are concentrated in some “disaster spotlights” and tend to ignore the aboriginal tribes³ in the mountain area. The planning teams from the academic and other NGOs, particularly the charity groups, withdrew from the disaster areas when the people were temporarily settled and the daily basic needs were met. Left were the State and a few long-term, community-based organizations, whose activists came mostly from social reform groups, to establish several “work stations” in order to face the extensive and extremely complicated restoration process⁴.

Tensions exist between the State and the indigenous communities in areas where the official Council of Aboriginal Affairs recommends relocation of whole tribes, mostly due to the potential mudslide threats in the wake of the earthquake and the ensuing rainy season. Some residents of aboriginal communities in Ho-ping suggested that the government should make greater efforts and adopt special measures to revitalize local economic activities so that they do not have to leave their villages and ancestral lands. Land is probably the single most important symbol for the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity for the indigenous peoples. Land also provides income sources from temperate fruit and vegetable growing in the subtropical island. On the one hand, from the perspective of cultural continuation, the elders are reluctant to evacuate their homes, despite the danger and hardships they face. On the other hand, the sudden relocation without considering economic potential of the new location will jeopardize the material base of cultural practices.

In the face of the post-quake ground instability that could cause a mudslide and endanger the lives of

people in the tribes, relocation seems a possible option from the standpoints of bureaucrats in charge of aboriginal affairs and even for some local inhabitants. However, up to this date, no aboriginal tribe has been relocated either by its own collective will or by compulsory state actions. Partly due to the complicated social, economic and legal concerns in the proposed relocation program, and partly to the aborigines' place identity and their emotional attachment to lands, the whole program is downgraded to an inferior option. In the fast-changing situations shaped by and in response to the wider political and economic restructuring, relocation is equivalent to detaching aborigines from cultural roots and subsistence resources and, therefore, is resisted by many designate tribes.

Collective relocation has, for a period of time, become a hotly debated topic and created tensions among residents in the disaster area in both Han and indigenous communities where unstable slopes and mudslides threaten safety and property. Just as identity of place and place characteristics are constructed out of interrelations with elsewhere (Massey, 1994:169), and are subject to individual variance rather than to collective coherence, the decision of relocation also involves different considerations and is subject to various individual connections with the outside world. For aborigines who have the necessary skills and better connections to make livings in the Han-dominated capitalist society, relocation poses fewer problems than those who work exclusively in the orchards for a living – moving to the towns would cause them to lose their livelihoods. The “degree” of sense of belonging to a specific place is, thus, partially determined by and related to not only the broader socio-political connections to the “outside” world, but also to the individuals' abilities to forge new sources of income. The multiple degrees of place-based identities have evolved in various supposed highly homogenous aboriginal tribes. Thus, the post-quake reconstruction measures, which are associated with the rebuilding of social relations, highlight the challenges to the original concept of sense of place and place identities as stagnant and stable entities.

The reconstruction policies announced by the government are normally applied nationwide, taking into consideration, neither the characteristics of aboriginal traditions and cultures, nor the socio-political and ethnic differences in the mountain areas. Aborigines lost their drive for tribal reconstruction, partly, as the result of a universal rebuilding policy which makes no distinctions between Han and indigenous peoples. Reconstruction projects involve more than the physical construction of crumbling buildings. They also contain the re-establishment and re-creation of locally specific social and economic networks. However, throughout the post-quake relief and reconstruction period, the government was criticized for not giving up its urban- and Han-centered perspective, and the compensation was not tailored to the aborigines' special needs. For example, the offer of preferential loans is not as appealing to aboriginal people as to the Han people, since aborigines tend to have lower incomes and higher unemployment rates than most Taiwanese (Taipei Times, 1999).

The unilateral program to evacuate aborigines from their homelands without incorporating relevant social and economic policies to help them settle down demonstrates the insensitivity of national policy-making in regards to the particularity of aboriginal affairs; i.e., the evacuation or relocation programs after the

earthquake fail to consider changes in indigenous communities in both physical landscapes and social connections. The reluctance of indigenous people to relocation, to a large extent, justifies the allegation that the evacuation plan is nothing but a product generated in air-conditioned offices. The interesting question then is, "Will the aborigines relocate to safer places if the basic social and economic needs are guaranteed?" This is, of course, not an easy question to answer.

Lands have always been acclaimed in much of the research literature as the ultimate source of personal and cultural identity for indigenous peoples. Judging both from the above analysis of post-quake rebuilding measures in aboriginal communities and from recent theoretical reevaluation which emphasizes the dynamic and multiple senses of place and place-based identities, we, mostly as "urban" scholars, should ask (to which this paper cannot provide answers) to what extent is the inclination to perceive lands as the invariable origin of cultural identity for aborigines a manifestation of idyll romanticism and nostalgia? Or we should ask the question from a different viewpoint. In other words, do our theoretical analysis to conceive the concept of place as a constantly changing and unstably bounded area neglect the socio-cultural peculiarities often associated with the underprivileged ethnic groups, to whom the stability and rootedness are, perhaps, still the important elements of the concept of place? To what extent can Massey's 'global sense of place,' which was developed in a global city (London), be applied to the more rural areas where aborigines reside?

Land Rights Conflicts and Community Rehabilitation after the September 21st Earthquake

The earthquake resulted in great damage across a wide area in central Taiwan, and the location of the PPRA's headquarter in Ho-Ping, Taichung County, is within the most severely devastated area. The unnecessary red-tape for relief applications, constantly changing criteria for destroyed and half-damaged housing, and poor communications both in terms of road traffic and between the state and the local communities, hindered the government's relief efforts (Taipei Times, 2000). According to the PPRA's manual of annual members' meeting, 2000, most Han people in Ho-ping are not qualified to receive any compensation, preferential loan, or subsidies from the government because of their lack of official land ownership in the aboriginal *Hsian* where only aborigines are entitled to own lands (PPRA, 2000). Most indigenous people, on the other hand, either are not the official owners of reservation lands currently held by the state, or are disqualified from obtaining special loans from banks after the earthquake because the slopelands have too limited a market value to obtain a mortgage. Land conflicts in the mountain areas seem to intensify in order to compete for financial resources invested for reconstruction measures in the wake of the earthquake. However, there is another trend that works against the observation above. Since the destructive western section of the Central Cross-island Highway was unable to assume its original transportation function after the earthquake and led to increases in production costs, the cultivation of temperate fruits and vegetables in Ho-Ping area experienced dramatic decline. Therefore, the price of land

fell and the competition between Han and aboriginal people for land ownership seem to diminish. The two opposite forces work simultaneously and apparently the latter force predominates and leads to the overall decline in land values and the exodus of plains Han people from Ho-ping. Nevertheless, the combination of the tribal rebuilding scheme, the land rights conflicts, and the struggles for aboriginal autonomy renders the post-earthquake reconstruction work in mountain areas a potential ethnic “hot potato” if the PPRA’s ideology continues to prevail.

The high unemployment rate in the disaster regions worsens the financial burden for rehabilitation. Moreover, the way to enforce feasible and fair reconstruction policies designed to shoulder financial losses suffered in the earthquake stricken areas has become a contested arena among local political factions, professional planning and reconstruction teams, and various interest groups (Teng, 2000). The rebuilding of tribes and communities after the earthquake, which is happening in the midst of successive waves of the PPRA’s call for “liberation” of the reservation lands, is also the testing ground to critically investigate the effectiveness of the long-promoted concept of holistic community building and the indigenous rights movement.

The global economic downturn in 2001 also generated multiple effects on the rebuilding area. The direct influence is that the core members of the PPRA and their associated business conglomerate are likely to suffer some financial difficulty and are less likely to manipulate further land speculations in Ho-Ping. Moreover, the head of the PPRA, who is also the president of the Ho-Ping Council, was accused of corruption and bribery and fled to China to avoid imprisonment. This escape from the law and the economic recession have resulted in the significant slump of the PPRA’s influence during the reconstruction period.

The overall reconstruction problems faced by communities in mountain areas can be attributed partly to the lack of contact and the geographical uneven development between Taiwan’s urban-centered official agencies and the aboriginal peoples. Although the concept that a comprehensive regeneration of communities must incorporate grassroots participation in the reconstruction process is widespread, and the implementation of the Holistic Community Awareness Program since the early 1990s is intended to enable administrators and professionals to accept and respect localized differences. Still a bottom-up operational approach is a great challenge to the bureaucratic system, and it highlights the elitism which is pervasive in many planning teams. Community participation in reconstruction has been undertaken in some aboriginal tribes in which ethnic awareness and sense of place seem to be relatively well developed. Similar phenomena have occurred in Japan after the 1995 Kobe quake. To this day, that region of Japan is noted for the strength of its community activism and mobilization (Tedards, 1999).

The earthquake caused simultaneously the loss and the creation of the communities’ collective memory that is considered a part of the foundation for the formation of both sense of place and place-based identity. The efforts to revitalize the devastated regions bring socio-cultural reflections to some grassroots organizers and planners who have stayed in indigenous communities since the earthquake (see the conference papers by ACT, 2001). These reflections include the ubiquitous insufficiency of public space in Taiwan’s countryside,

the commercialization of indigenous cultures through crude ethnic tourism intended to satisfy the mainstream imagination of what indigenous people should be, and the lack of political and economic empowerment of the aboriginal tribes (ACT, 2001). The overall failure of the government hierarchy in distributing crucial information and relief materials, and unnecessary red tape associated with official subsidies, contrasted with the highly praised performance of NGOs, mostly the charity groups, in the post-quake restoration period, have unintentionally turned the disaster areas into a space of resistance in which personnel of the community 'work stations' offer reconstruction blueprints emphasizing grassroots participation and resisting the top-down planning approach imposed by some state-sponsored professional teams (Tedards, 1999; also see Moore, 1997). Place, in this regard, becomes the site where the mutual empowerment is exerted between the socially marginal groups and the community activists.

Conclusion: Place, Identity, and Power

Senses of place relate to identity in multiple ways: they might induce identification with a specific place, or they might be socially constructed to identify with a place that is called "home" or "community" by contrasting it with other foreign places where no such 'emotional attachment' exists (Rose, 1995). From the 'post-humanistic' theoretical perspective, senses of place and their associated place identity are to be understood in terms of wider context, with the characteristics constantly shaped by social, economic, cultural and political circumstances (McDowell, 1999: 4). Place, therefore, is contested and fluid, particularly in an era of globalization when capital, labor, and people are moving with unprecedented speed. This perspective challenges the phenomenological perception which conceptualizes senses of place as rootedness, stasis, permanence, and internally generated product. Senses of places are, therefore, caught up in process of power, inequality, and resistance (Rose, 1995).

The power relations among different ethnic groups and the uneven capitalist development between plain and mountain areas help to carve out the 'ethnic space' in Taiwan's marginal region. Taiwan's indigenous rights movements initiated in the mid-1980s can be viewed as a result of both an uneven ethnic power structure and the unleashing of social forces after the long oppressive martial law was lifted. Indigenous rights movements joined other socio-political movements to become the progressive social forces which facilitated the authoritarian transition to democracy in Taiwan. In the wave of democratization, aborigines' place of origin became a symbol to characterize and distinguish them from the majority Han people. In other words, how the society defines aborigines and the way the aborigines identify themselves are symbolized by certain qualities of their original places (see also Rose, 1995). Places thus forge the basis for ethnic characteristics and cultural identity for Taiwan's aborigines. Place, therefore, is not only spatial, but also social.

However, some critics express their concern for the development of a "territory-bounded sense of place" which, as defined by Massey (1991), is constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion.

Under this definition, place becomes a social and political enclosure with stationary boundaries that define and distinguish insiders from outsiders for that specific place. The ultimate form of the territorial sense of place is the xenophobia and ethnic nationalism that is demonstrated by the actions of ethnic cleansing and genocide. It is the description of aborigines as the Other and the manipulation of the fear of being excluded from the mountain areas as soon as the aborigines attain autonomy status and exercise their right in monopolizing land ownership that explain the powerful emergence of the PPRA in many mountain *Hsians*. Ironically, in Taiwan's mountain area, the fact is that the indigenous people continually lose their reservation lands and remain the politically marginal groups, while the PPRA continues to perform as the victim of Taiwan's "mountain policy". It is the underlying power structure that allows the PPRA to portray itself as the sufferer and represents the aborigines as the "privileged" Other.

One thing worth noting, in dealing with the ethnic relationship between the aborigines and the Han people, is the danger of treating both the aboriginal groups and even the PPRA as homogenous organizations. I have demonstrated the multiple senses of place within the indigenous communities when the issue of relocation comes to the fore in the post-quake reconstruction, not to mention the almost invincible differences between the Han people and aborigines living in the same administrative mountain *Hsian*. Disasters can change the perception of sense of place in a short period of time, and relocation might be seen as one of the results of the (forced) changed sense of place. The PPRA's core members possess a much more extreme ideology in their racist perception of indigenous peoples than many Han fruit and vegetable farmer members do. The internal diversity is revealed in the new annual members' manual (PPRA, 2000), which is filled with warnings that have not appeared in previous manuals and are apparently from the head of the PPRA. One example of such warnings is to ask members not to discuss "organizational secrets" in public and to homogenize the stance toward the reservation lands and the indigenous people.

Butz and Eyles (1997) identified three core components of senses of place—social, ideological and ecological. Among the three factors, ecological sense of place can be singled out as the most distinctive component for aborigines, given their long-term labor relationship with land and the ecological surroundings. However, the large scale temperate fruit and vegetable cultivation by both indigenous and Han farmers in the Ho-Ping area has been accused as being the major cause of the environmental problem downstream. Moreover, the September 21st earthquake alters physical landscapes and hydrological conditions and may fundamentally change the land use patterns in a wide range of regions. Along the Crossing Island Highway, the traffic trunk road in and out of Ho-Ping, large-scale landslides occurred repeatedly, and the road has been severely damaged. Environmentalists' proposal to "close" the road and access to the mountains to avoid dumping countless resources into fixing the fragile road and let the nature regain its balance, has invited severe attacks both from the PPRA and some aborigines who may lose their livelihoods as fruit farmers. In a place where people have a stable sense of place, the economic pressures can still force many to leave.

It will take several years to see the primary result of the reconstruction project's promised "new rural landscape" propagandized by the public sector, and perhaps much longer for the natural environment to

regain its stability. The September 21st earthquake and the following rebuilding process intensify the land struggles in a way that forces the aborigines to an even more marginalized status in terms of both physical location and social hierarchy. This will be true even if the proposed relocation projects are not implemented. It is in this sense that the concept of fluid place-based identity and unstable sense of place can possibly be understood in Taiwan's context.

Acknowledgements

The research is funded by the National Science Council, NSC 89-2415-H-415-003. The author would like to express his gratitude to the NSC and all the informants in the earthquake-affected areas. In particular, he would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and editorial suggestions.

Footnotes

- 1 Although "Aborigines" are sometimes reserved exclusively for the indigenous peoples in Australia, a new trend is to consider "aborigines" as the general title for peoples who suffer similar plights around the world. In this paper, aboriginals, aborigines, and indigenous people are used interchangeably.
- 2 The New Party virtually disintegrated after the 2001 election, with no one elected to a congressional seat. Many of the New Party members shifted their affiliation to the People First Party established after the presidential election in 2000. The party realignment indicates how rapid the political landscape changed in the past few years.
- 3 The concepts of tribe and community in aborigines' living areas point to the temporal difference of two terms. Usually, in Taiwan's context, tribe is used in a more or less nostalgic situation or when internal solitary is emphasized. Community is often referred to the similar modern "substitute" of tribe.
- 4 The so-called 'work stations' are best described as groups of social activists who organized into several teams to assist the reconstruction measures in various communities. Most members of 'work stations', who later organized into a new group—ACT (Association of Community-activists in Taiwan), insist that the rebuilding process is not only about the physical restoration, but also an opportunity to enforce social justice.

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90年7月16日 收稿

91年5月11日 接受