

CONTESTING ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY MAPPING: A CRITICAL VIEW FROM LOCAL ABORIGINAL PARTICIPATION IN THE NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT OF TAIWAN

Yih-Ren Lin¹, Hwei-Chung Hsiao²

School for Social Transformation Studies, Shih Shin University, Taiwan¹

Department of Geography, Taiwan University, Taiwan²

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the social and political meanings of aboriginal community mapping process in the context of concerning the issue of natural resources management in Taiwan. The methodology of aboriginal community mapping has been widely regarded as a means of achieving the community integrity and enhancing social development of minority peoples through its powerful spatial function of identifying significant natural and cultural entities related to the community. Recently, it is also applied to the arena of local people's participation of managing natural resources. It is interesting to note that a similar trend is occurred in Taiwan as well. Therefore, this paper concerns the following questions: How does the trend develop? what will be the possible social consequences? And what is its impact on the management of protected areas in Taiwan?

The aboriginal community mapping is indeed a new social phenomenon in Taiwan. This study thus adopts a sociological qualitative approach to explore the social process of its emergence. Data is collected through participation observation, documentaries, workshops, and individual interviews. An environmental discourse analysis is employed. According to the analysis, the key agents involved include aboriginal activists, scholars, governmental officials, and local peoples. Different agents' discourses show a complex socio-political relationship amongst them. Three significant factors are identified as closely related to the development of discourses about aboriginal community mapping. First, it is the tense relationship between local aboriginal communities and Taiwan's centralized protected areas management system. Secondly, it is the "partnership relationship" between Taiwan's aborigine and the state, promised in President Chen Sui-Bien's aboriginal policy. Thirdly, it is a "co-management" mechanism proposed through the controversies of establishing a new national park (Maqaw) based on active aboriginal participation. Key agents of discourses contest the governing legitimacy of managing natural resources. The development of different agents' discourses show that this is not just an issue of nature conservation, but also one about the social development of aboriginal communities. It is sure that the success of both nature conservation and aboriginal community development will heavily depend on the process of aboriginal community mapping. Almost all the agents emphasize the mapping of aboriginal communities can provide the most comprehensive understanding about the traditional land use, natural resources distribution, aboriginal ecological knowledge and cultural identities. However, a critical question raised by some agents to argue who should be the main subjects to map the communities. Would it be the state or the local aboriginal communities? Or is there any alternative? In our observation, it seems that the state, aboriginal activists, and the local communities are all involved, but with different interests. Ironically, the local

communities are the weakest amongst all. The paper concludes that aboriginal community mapping should be regarded as a social process in which the interests of all involved agents cannot be avoided. However, whether the mapping will be the empowerment of local communities and their sound ecological practices or otherwise the exploitation of local communities will very much depend on the balance of diverse interests.