

Learning and Narratives of Identity: Aboriginal Entrepreneurs in Taiwan*

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Over 400,000 people of Taiwan's population of 22.4 million belong to ten officially recognized groups of Austronesian origin. After a century of colonialism and economic development, their lands have rearingly come under the control of the Forestry Bureau, national parks, and Taiwanese corporations. Since historical circumstances have deprived indigenous communities of their former hunting and subsistence activities, aboriginal individuals and families are forced to learn new forms of economic behavior. In the process, they become new members of what Lave and Wegner called a "community of practice" (Lave and Wegner 1991). In Taiwan, that generally means entering the petty commodity mode of production (Gates 1996) as entrepreneurs or workers. In either case, economic change means learning both new knowledge and a new subject position in a new situation. This paper, part of a larger study on women entrepreneurs in Taiwan, looks at the themes of learning and economic behavior in the narratives of two aboriginal women entrepreneurs in Tainan. How do aboriginal individuals learn new economic skills when they come in contact with development and globalization? How are learning and identity related in their work lives? Although exploratory, it is hoped that this study inspires new perspectives on aboriginal education and economic development.

Keywords: indigenous peoples, learning, economic development, entrepreneurship, identity

* This paper originated in research on women entrepreneurs undertaken as part of a post-doctoral project funded by the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica. As part of my research on women entrepreneurs from 1999-2001, I became a regular customer at several businesses owned by aboriginal women and documented the life histories of three of them (Simon 2003). In the summer of 2002 I also interviewed aboriginal entrepreneurs and activists in Tainan, Hualien, Taitung, and Ren'ai Township of Nantou County. The data and conclusions in this paper are thus interpreted from long periods of ethnographic observation as well as from the formal interviews chosen here as illustrative examples. The focus on Tainan, where I also conducted field research from 1996 to 1998, is particularly illustrative, since it shows how aboriginal people live as ethnic minorities in a region dominated by Holo-Taiwanese.

Introduction

Over 400,000 people of Taiwan's population of 22.4 million (about 2 percent of the total) belong to ten officially recognized groups of Austronesian origin. In recent years, there have been increasing numbers of ethnographic and historical studies of these ethnic groups in western languages (e.g., Bellwood et al. 1995; Blundell 2000; Brown 1996, 2004; Cauquelin 2003; Chen 1996; Hsu 1991; Ka 1995; Shepherd 1993; Zheng 1995). The political economic study of these groups has led to important findings on issues of representation (Ching 2000, 2001; Chiu 2000; Hsieh 1994, 1999; Ren 1998; Stainton 1995, 1999a), indigenous social movements (Allio 1998a, 1998b; Chiu 1989; Munsterhjelm 2002; Stainton 1999b, 2002), ethnic relations (Nettleship 1976), and religious change (Brown 2003; Huang 1996). On economic development, there has been a special issue of *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Arrigo 2002a, 2002b; Simon 2002) and work on urban aboriginal unemployment (Chu 2000, 2001). The relatively recent insertion of these groups into the greater Taiwanese economy offers important lessons about economic learning and the social positioning of ethnic minorities.

With economic development, aboriginal lands have come under the control of the Forestry Bureau, national parks, and Taiwanese corporations. Since these historical circumstances have deprived indigenous communities of their former hunting and subsistence activities, aboriginal individuals and families are forced to learn new forms of economic behavior. In the process, they become new members of a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991). On "Boss Island" (Shieh 1992) that generally means entering the petty commodity mode of production (Gates 1996) as either entrepreneurs or workers. In either case, economic change means learning both new knowledge and a new subject position in a new situation. These issues are closely intertwined: "Learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: They are aspects of the same phenomenon" (Lave and Wenger 1991:115). How do aboriginal individuals learn new economic skills as they come in contact with development and globalization? What does the learning experience mean to them? How do aboriginal individuals learn new forms of identity?

This paper is focused on the interplay between learning economic skills and constructing ethnic identity among urban aboriginal entrepreneurs. It is about the contemporary experience of the more recently assimilated "mountain aborigines" (*gaoshan zu* 高山族) from eastern and central Taiwan into urban areas, rather than that of western "plains aborigines" (*pingpu zu* 平埔族) who intermarried with Chinese settlers in earlier centuries (Brown 2004; Shep-

herd 1993). In the 1970s, aboriginal people started flowing into the cities in search of employment, primarily in construction and heavy industry. By the 1980s, considerable aboriginal communities had already become established in the Taipei suburbs of Hsintien, Hsichih, and Neihsu; as well as in the industrial/residential zones on the outskirts of Tainan, Kaohsiung, Hsinchu, and other cities. After martial law was lifted in 1987, these aboriginal communities were at the forefront of the social movement for indigenous rights. The 1990s saw the expansion of urban aboriginal communities, with the establishment of aboriginal restaurants, food stands, karaoke bars, and other commercial establishments throughout Taipei and other cities.

Yet, for the most part, urban aborigines have become a marginalized and excluded “sub-proletariat” (Chu 2001:179). According to all indices of social and economic development, aboriginal people remain worse off than the Han Taiwanese majority.¹ The aboriginal unemployment rate of 9.24 percent in March 2001, for example, was far greater than the general unemployment rate of 3.89 percent (Executive Yuan Council of Indigenous Peoples 2001:28). The median income of aboriginal people has consistently remained significantly less than that of Han people. In 2001 it was only NT\$24,000/month for working aboriginal people, compared to NT\$35,600/month for the working Taiwanese population at large (*ibid.*:17). Aboriginal workers tend to be concentrated in poorly paid manual labor positions. Sixteen percent of aboriginal people are engaged in construction and 21 percent in agriculture, as compared to 8.2 percent and 7.4 percent of the general population (*ibid.*:38). Thirty-seven percent do not have regular employment at all (*ibid.*:16). If urban migration means learning a place in a capitalist community of practice, aboriginal individuals have so far been admitted as merely junior members.

Faced with relatively grim economic prospects, many urban aboriginal people have gone into business for themselves. In some cases, they have been aided by municipal governments and/or aboriginal NGOs.² In the 1990s, for example, the Taipei City Government Department of Labor launched several programs to help divorcees, single mothers, and other disadvantaged urban women start their own businesses. In 2001, when legalized prostitution was ended in Taiwan, the Taipei Department of Labor similarly set up a “Rainbow Program” of start-up loans to help former prostitutes start businesses such as

¹ Throughout this paper, Han Taiwanese refers to non-indigenous Han ethnic groups in Taiwan, including Holo, Hakka and Mainlander Taiwanese. Holo-Taiwanese is used for Taiwanese speakers of the Holo language. As discussed below, it is recognized that the boundaries between these ethnic groups are fluid, historically constituted, and always in a process of construction.

² Non-government organizations.

breakfast shops, seafood restaurants, barber shops, betel nut stands and auto repair shops. In both programs aboriginal women were given priority in assistance.

In addition, at least two NGOs specifically assist aboriginal artisans and entrepreneurs with classes, aid in marketing, and even small start-up loans. Specifically, these are the ROC Taiwanese Aboriginal Handicraft Research and Development Association and the ROC Aboriginal Industry and Commerce Development Association. In 1999 the Executive Yuan Council of Indigenous Peoples, itself established as a result of aboriginal initiative after the end of martial law in 1987 (Allio 1998b), was able to publish a directory of Taipei aboriginal businesses in cooperation with the aboriginal magazine *Sea and Mountain Cultures* (*Shanghai Wenhua Zazhi* 山海文化雜誌 1999). By 1999 the rate of entrepreneurs among aboriginal people was 12 percent, compared to 16 percent of the general population (Executive Yuan Council of Indigenous Peoples 2001:40). Yet it has not always been easy for aboriginal entrepreneurs to learn the skills they need to survive in Taiwan's competitive capitalist markets.

The Meaning of Learning to Aboriginal Entrepreneurs

Like Susanne Brandtstädter (this issue), I look at how economic behavior in the marketplace is acquired through situated learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) were primarily interested in asymmetric learning situations in which newcomers become part of a community of practice. In this case, I examine unequal power relations between the Taiwanese majority and members of aboriginal groups. Since the dominant Han Taiwanese exercise hegemonic control over Taiwanese marketplaces and other learning environments, aboriginal entrepreneurs are still relatively peripheral in the Taiwanese economy. They suffer from discrimination, as Han Taiwanese control most resources, including access to markets. I am interested in understanding how they learn their place in that capitalist economy, claim economic resources, and construct identities in the process.

Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth was the first to explore how ethnic boundaries are learned and negotiated. In his discussion of how less industrialized groups enter industrialized societies, he made a typology of three basic strategies: (1) they may try to "pass" and become accommodated in the dominant group; (2) they may accept "minority" status by relegating culture to the private sphere and otherwise participating fully in society; or (3) they may instead emphasize their ethnic identity to develop new positions and patterns in society (Barth 1969:33). The latter strategy generates new social

movements, such as we now see in the international indigenous movement. When ethnic groups are mobilized in this way, they learn certain “idioms” (ibid.:35) of identity that have implications for the negotiation and maintenance of ethnic boundaries.

In this paper, I will argue that memories of learning new economic skills, as expressed through life narratives, are “idioms” that serve as markers of ethnic identity. Whereas non-aboriginal entrepreneurs also learn skills, they usually naturalize those skills and take them for granted once acquired. Aboriginal entrepreneurs, however, frame certain new skills in their life narratives as culturally specific to Han society. They assert aboriginal identity, not by rejecting the Han social world, but by interpreting it and incorporating it into their own acquired *habiti*. Highlighting the acquisition of new skills and contrasting those practices to memories of aboriginal childhood, they affirm identities of difference, even as they learn new skills and business practices.

As Giddens points out, identity is not an objective or even distinctive trait of the person. It is, rather “the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography” (1991:53). Identity as “aboriginal” is not a given, since individuals do not always fit neatly into the ethnic categories of ethnographies, museum exhibits, and other forms of official discourse. The two life narratives of aboriginal women entrepreneurs presented here show clearly how these dynamics work. The following two life history interviews were conducted in Tainan in 2002, as part of a wider project on women entrepreneurs in Taiwan (Simon 2003). Although quantitative studies are also needed to learn how “typical” these entrepreneurs may be, exploratory and qualitative case study provides important insight into the meaning of entrepreneurship to urban aboriginal women. Like many other contributions in this issue (Gates, Stafford, Yan), these life stories show how newcomers to the market learn economic skills and what that process of learning means to them. They render visible the intertwined processes by which aboriginal entrepreneurs learn new skills and new positions in the Taiwanese economy.

Urban Entrepreneur I: Selling Aboriginal Crafts in Tainan

From the outside, Dewas’s house is a typical rowhouse in suburban Tainan. Upon entering the courtyard, however, the dried flying fish hanging from the roof already suggest an aboriginal connection—they are available only in the Tao communities on Orchid Island. The first floor of the house is Dewas’s workshop. A large table dominates the room where Dewas and her Mainlander (*waisheng ren* 外省人) husband string together Paiwan-style beads or

sew together clothes designed with Paiwan and Rukai motifs. On the left side of the room are racks of clothing, once again in the style of southern tribes, bags, and jewelry. On the right side is a cluttered desk, a computer, and a bookshelf loaded with books on aboriginal culture and art.

Dewas, the 31-year-old cousin of a Tayal entrepreneur in Taipei (see Simon 2003), identifies herself as a member of the northern Tayal tribe. She was born in Hsiulin Township, known for its land-based conflicts between local aboriginal inhabitants and a major cement producer (Simon 2002). In spite of that personal identity as Tayal, however, her business specializes in the production of textiles and other crafts in the styles of southern aboriginal tribes. When I interviewed Dewas for this article, she pulled a dark blue vest, embroidered with glass beads in the form of the hundred-pacer viper,³ off the clothing rack and invited me to try it on. When I found it heavy and uncomfortable in the summer heat, she said, "The traditional vests are heavier, but I changed the design to make it more modern. Actually, the older ones were even heavier, but the men who wore them still had to dance in the hot sun while wearing such a heavy vest."

After her husband served us both iced tea, she began her life history:

I was born in Hsiulin Township, but grew up in both Hsiulin and Tainan. My mother married a Mainlander. He was a soldier, and had come over from China [with Chiang Kai-shek]. After he finished his military service, he went to Taiwan Normal University and then started teaching school. That's when he met my mother. . . . I started primary school in Hsiulin, but then finished my education in Tainan. We moved here because my father was assigned to teach school in Tainan. I was in the fourth grade then, so you can say that I grew up in the city.

Dewas, who graduated in fashion design in a local technical high school, was initiated into a career selling aboriginal crafts by her cousin Yuma in Taipei:

I didn't enter this occupation [aboriginal crafts] immediately after graduation. At first, I was designing and making clothing. But then, my cousin Yuma invited me to go to Taipei and help her out for a while. After a while, she said that I was in the South, and suggested that I try to find a market for her goods down here. I figured she was right. And I already had the designing and sewing techniques to adopt the styles, so I decided to give it a try. I started out at Yuma's place, and when my husband encouraged me to set up my own workshop, I just jumped in and did it.

³ This is the *baibushe* 百步蛇, totemic symbol of the Paiwan and Rukai tribes.

She found, however, that she had to adapt her style to circumstances in Tainan, since the ethnic demographics in that city created a different market than that of Taipei:

At first, I wanted to use very traditional styles. I figured that is the way the traditional styles were and we should not change them! When I was in Taipei with Yuma, we did everything in traditional style. But my environment here is very different than hers, since I am surrounded by many more Taiwanese people.⁴ She deals mostly with [aboriginal] people from the villages, and many more of them can accept the traditional styles. But the people here don't like it when I make traditional-style clothing. My husband asked, "How can you expect other people to accept the traditional style when you won't even wear it to work yourself?" That is why I started to make improvements on the old style.

I figure that people can accept my goods if they are not overly traditional, if they feel modern, and the price is not too high. I can produce bags and jewelry as well. Those are things that people can use every day. Beginning with those very simple things, they can begin to understand us. Once we attract them with such small things, they will get more interested and ask more questions. So that is my working ideal: I will let them see some simple things to pique their curiosity, and then they will begin to understand the more traditional things.

As Dewas continued her narrative, she continually made contrasts between the Holo-speaking "Taiwanese" and aboriginal people. Her job was often to represent aboriginal people to Tainan's (mostly Holo-Taiwanese) non-aboriginal population:

So, here we are in Tainan. Sometimes aboriginal associations will invite us to the Tainan Theatre to teach traditional crafts such as making beads or weaving. All of our students are Taiwanese; they are not aboriginal. In fact, nowadays aboriginal people don't necessarily know how to make such things. We always volunteered to participate in those community activities.

On the craft market, however, she initially encountered many problems:

At first, we had too many failures! Our products were both beautiful and useful, but most people could not accept them. It was so complicated. In fact, part of the problem is that I don't really look like an aboriginal. Since my face is so white, people would look at me and doubt that I am even aboriginal. Then they would ask how I would dare to sell such things.

⁴ Here she is referring to Holo-Taiwanese. Tainan has a stronger concentration of Holo-speakers, or "Native Taiwanese," than most Taiwanese cities. She refers to them as "*Taiwan ren* 臺灣人" in contrast to aborigines (*yuanzhumin* 原住民). This common discourse reveals the discomfort many aborigines have with adopting a "Taiwanese" identity for themselves. In discursive practices that frustrate recent nation-building attempts, many of them identity "Taiwan" exclusively with Holo-Taiwanese.

When she was perceived as aboriginal, however, she often experienced problems with overt racism:

When they saw us, sometimes they would curse us. That just grated on our ears! It is because our Tayal tribe [*women Taiya zu* 我們泰雅族] once had head-hunting customs. In fact, all of the tribes did, but the stereotype is that of Tayal head-hunters. I don't know if my husband remembers or not, but they used to say that the Tayal cut off peoples' heads. If you went to Hualien, you could be killed on the road and no one would know. They all curse us like that, but we are used to it.

When I expressed surprise that people would still call up such stereotypes in 2002—nearly one hundred years since the Japanese had forbidden head-hunting—she replied:

Rural people still do! They are rough, and many of them are uncultivated. It used to be that aboriginal people [*yuanzhumin*] were called montagnards [*shandi ren* 山地人], and before that they were called barbarians [*fan ren* 番人]. There were “raw barbarians” [*sheng fan* 生番] and “cooked barbarians” [*shou fan* 熟番].⁵ Speaking in Taiwanese [*Taiyu* 臺語], they curse us to our face as *hoan-a* 番仔 [barbarians]. When they call us *hoan-a*, I don't get angry. But when their tone of voice is unpleasant, then I can say that they still look down on us.

On occasions, those racial stereotypes are reflected in concrete cases of institutionalized racist discrimination:

When we work here, we are competing with the Han. It is not as if montagnards [*shandi ren*] have come out as a group. They [the Han] have greater group solidarity [*tuanjie lilian* 團結力量]. They aren't like us. You can see that we are the only company in Tainan. It's just me. So many Taiwanese set up vending stalls, and they don't like to do business with aborigines. I have to give them a deposit and register for a space. I've had problems with that. Sometimes they aren't very willing to give us a space. When we compete with the Han, the road is sometimes difficult to travel. This isn't a scenic area or a tourist attraction.

Nonetheless, she has great ambitions for her business:

We are considering whether or not we need a permanent storefront. It would be nice someday, if we were able, to have our own place. If we could find a relatively inexpensive place, we could start offering some aboriginal snacks. We could put our crafts in the front, and also set up tables for people to eat at. If it were big enough, we could have some classrooms to teach crafts, and interested people could come to learn. I would like to do it that way. I would like it if people were

⁵ In the Qing dynasty, a distinction was made between “cooked barbarians” who had assimilated to Han culture and “raw barbarians” who had not.

interested in our past way of life and our old craft techniques, but modern people are not so interested in such things.

Unlike Han Taiwanese entrepreneurs, who often learn how to do business by observing their parents, Dewas faced a long learning curve and obstacles caused by racism:

At first, Yuma helped me a lot, because she was an old hand at doing business. She had been doing it for almost 20 years. And at first I only worked in publicly-sponsored events, like those of municipal governments or the fishing cooperatives. We also traveled from Tainan to Taipei or Hualien. In cases where events were more private, that is to say when they were organized by Taiwanese [*Taiwan ren*], they were more hesitant to work with us. That is because many Han people have those stereotypes that we drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, whatever. Anyway, they do all those things, too! When they were willing to let us participate, they would demand more money from us [than from other people]. They would charge others NT\$1,500 to rent a market stall for a day, but then charge us NT\$2,000. At first, they charged us more. But once we went, they saw that we performed well. We weren't what they expected: we didn't just hang out there and we didn't make trouble. We just sold our products quite normally and dressed appropriately. In fact, we gave them a lot of special color, much more colorful than that of Taiwanese customs. Once they saw how successful we were, they wanted us to participate. The rents even became the same as theirs. Still, sometimes they wouldn't tell us about upcoming events. There was a little bit of racial discrimination there.

Her husband added:

You can say that the legal structure takes good care of aboriginal people. But when the relevant regulations are administered by local governments, sometimes they don't carry them out completely. So very few of the benefits actually reach aboriginal people. Sometimes, for example, they say that we can use our skills to teach aboriginal crafts to flatlanders [*pingdi ren* 平地人]. We can teach flatlanders about aboriginal culture. But when it comes to actually setting up craft events, they don't necessarily do a good job. Maybe it is because they themselves are not aboriginal, so they don't put their hearts into it. Or maybe they just don't understand our culture, so they subconsciously cast us aside.

Over time, Dewas has learned to adapt to the Tainan market:

I was able to alter my styles because I have spent a lot of time in a Han environment, and also because I have studied fashion design. The important thing is, our traditional designs are beautiful, but too complex. So I simplify them and incorporate them into the clothing. Sometimes I think the result is just OK, and sometimes I think it is much better. But I trust my own feelings.

Unlike Han entrepreneurs, however, she does not pass over her learning experience as merely the acquisition of new skills. Instead, she draws attention to the learning of new economic skills:

Up in the mountains, we don't have much cash circulation, or at least there is relatively less. For example, we will go out and hunt a wild boar. Then I will come down and trade it with you for something, maybe I will exchange some meat for some cloth.

When I asked if people still trade in that way in Hsiulin, she said:

Very rarely. That was a long time ago, when I was little! I seem to remember that it was like that. We lived in Tainan when I was in middle school. But when we went back to the mountains, it was like that. At least it was like that among the villagers. If someone came in from outside, we would use cash for exchange. But up in the mountains, the world is much smaller since there isn't much contact with information from outside. In fact, aborigines don't like watching television. We like to gather with other people, barbecue meat together, drink millet wine, and talk. All we know about is that one region. So we aren't as skilled at business as the Taiwanese. They spend every day of their lives calculating money, but we are more simple than that. Let's say, for example, that I have a *jin* 斤 of meat to trade for something. If you want that piece of meat, then you will find something to trade for it. If not, well, then we'll just forget about it. We won't even mind giving you a little bit more. We just have that very simple calculation. We aren't skilled businesspeople who just want to earn a lot of money. We don't think about how to go out into the world and make a big career.

Dewas thus emphasized that coming into Han society and working as an entrepreneur involved a long process of learning from others:

How did I learn to do that? At first, I learned a lot from Yuma. That was easy. Then I went out and experimented myself. At first I hardly dared; I was embarrassed to set up a vending stall and dress differently than other people. I was willing to dress like that up in the mountains, but in the outside world I was embarrassed to be different from others. I had to get over that complex. After a while I had seen enough. I knew what I had to invest in capital, how much time it would take to make something, and what I could get for it on the market. You have to be able to make that calculation. The way to learn how to do business is to go out and look in the stores a lot yourself. As I told my husband, we aren't natural business people. Our parents were teachers, and my mother was a housewife. Since we don't naturally understand prices, we have to go out and see what other people are charging. Then we figure out how much it would cost to produce our goods so that we can see how much will remain for us.

When the rent is high, we'll automatically raise our prices in order to have the profit we deserve. But if the rent is low, we won't pull the prices up so high. Some-

times when we set up in a marketplace, they even take a commission on our sales. They usually take about 3 percent. They might, for example, charge us NT\$2,000 a day, plus 3 percent of sales. Sometimes they use a ticket system. When people come to shop, they buy a strip of tickets. Let's say you want to buy something for NT\$100, you give me one ticket; or for NT\$200, then you give me two tickets. Then I take those tickets to the sponsoring organization, and then they give me cash minus their commission. Since that lowers our profits, I don't like to bargain on prices, but I will give some small gifts with the purchases.

In the spite of her own ability to trade in a Han Taiwanese world, however, Dewas feels as if aboriginal communities are still threatened by Han entrepreneurs:

Do you know what is the biggest threat to Taiwanese aboriginal products? Many things are now imported from abroad. A lot of those so-called "aboriginal crafts" are not even made by aborigines. They are made by Han people in mainland China.⁶ Or Han people will have things made in Southeast Asia, and then bring them back here to sell in aboriginal villages. Their prices are very low. Maybe for one item of hand-embroidered clothing, we need to pay wages of NT\$8,000 [in Taiwan]. But they can import it and sell it for NT\$5,000. There is a difference of NT\$3,000. What can you do when Taiwanese people do that? You will still buy the import, because the style is still aboriginal. You don't think too much about whether or not it is really made by people in the local villages here. That is the biggest danger, that many items sold as aboriginal crafts are actually foreign imports. That is what frightens me the most since it strikes at my own people. My own people can no longer survive. If we want to survive, we can't follow our own traditions. We have to order everything from abroad. Then, without even realizing it, we lose something. We lose our traditional craft skills. Soon nobody will even know how to do them; and we will have no more than the appearance of being aboriginal. That is why I would like to teach other people my crafts, even if I only have one or two students.

Urban Entrepreneur II: Selling Agricultural Products from Tainan

Thirty-eight-year old Dabas, a Tayal woman from Ren'ai Township in mountainous central Taiwan, lives in a neighborhood of nouveaux-riches in Eastern Tainan. Unlike Dewas, her home is not decorated with aboriginal crafts or dried fish. Instead, it is decorated with European-style furniture. Even the ceramic tiles and wine racks in the kitchen look as if they belong in France

⁶ She is referring here to the many Taiwanese entrepreneurs who now invest in the People's Republic of China or subcontract production to that country.

more than Taiwan. Dabas proudly showed me her multi-media sound system before serving me a cup of coffee and sitting down with me on the leather sofa. Since I had been introduced to her by a cousin I met while participating in a training camp for aboriginal social activists, we first chatted about mutual acquaintances from that milieu. She noted:

Ever since I began school, I have been working in mainstream society. If I didn't say that I was aboriginal, very few people would know. They all think I am overseas Chinese, since my accent isn't quite right, or they think I am from Malaysia. I think it has to do with my personality. I have been a Christian since childhood and am relatively extroverted.

When I told her that I was interested in learning from the perspectives of aboriginal entrepreneurs like herself, she drew a portrait of Taiwanese aboriginality in broad socio-economic strokes:

Many aborigines go to Normal University. When they graduate they have very stable jobs as teachers, like many of my classmates at Fu-jen University who have since gone back to Hualien or Taitung to teach. If you take a few education courses, you can teach in middle or primary school. So you can see that a few aboriginal people lead high quality lives and have rather stable urban lives. Of course, those are the ones with higher education. There are very few who go into business. That's the truth of it. On the one hand, they lack capital. If they do get the capital, they disappear in a few years. That is because aborigines are not good at planning their finances. They don't have accounting concepts.

Dabas has lived in the city for most of her life:

I went to Taipei in the second year of primary school. My brother was a pastor. That's how we were. The attitude of our parents was very important. They taught me that it is important to always depend on myself and not to depend on a man. Because of that, I have always been better than other people at "eating bitterness."⁷ Also, there are a lot of aborigines in the city. For those without a high level of education, it is hard to find a job. A lot of women work in places like beauty parlors.⁸ If they have enough money, they open a store. But without appropriate planning and management, the stores go out of business within a few years.

While in Taipei, Dabas met her husband:

I graduated from the English Department of Fu-jen University. Now it is mostly

⁷ The expression is "*chiku* 吃苦," a common Chinese idiom for "working hard, enduring suffering."

⁸ Often this is an oblique reference to prostitution, since 24-hour beauty parlors with smoked windows and bright lights are often fronts for brothels. The women of the Tayal tribe have a history of being sold into prostitution (see Huang 2002).

business English. As for my husband, he was previously teaching martial arts. He also was in business for himself. I learned a lot from his experience. He is a Mainlander. My husband's father was a soldier. He came to Taiwan with "Old Chiang."⁹ His mother is [Native] Taiwanese. They are only two brothers. His elder brother is a teacher. His sister-in-law is also a teacher, so the whole family is quite simple.

We met in Taipei. He was my teacher. After I graduated, I worked in a trading company. I was a secretary in a machine parts company. The boss sent me to night school to learn accounting. That is when I met my husband. After we got married, we moved to Tainan, since my husband is from Tainan.

Work in a business environment in Taipei also helped prepare her for eventual entrepreneurship:

I started this business five years ago. It was 10 years ago when I started the language school. I started in business at the age of 28. We ran a *buxiban* 補習班¹⁰ for high school students preparing their English exams for college entrance. Before that, I had always done sales. I had sold English textbooks and cosmetics. I had also worked in a trading company. Before that, I had worked in a *buxiban* for more than two years. I worked in the trading company for two years. That was in Taipei. I learned a lot when I was doing sales, and because thick-skinned. There is also my faith. I think that my faith has encouraged me a lot. So if I encounter a problem, I won't let it defeat me. I believe in the proverb, "When people reach their end, that is where God begins." That has encouraged me a lot.

As is generally the case for young entrepreneurs, Dabas faced many challenges in the beginning:

It was pretty difficult when we first arrived in Tainan. At first I just worked in a *buxiban*. I learned from them how to open a cram school and how to recruit students. They went out of business, and then we opened up our own school on the east end of town. At first it was very difficult. Since we didn't have much experience, we had to start from the beginning. We started up from just one student.

It was five years later before we were finally able to open up this trading company. In the intervening years, it was really difficult. Credit was a problem. Sometimes when we buy a product, we do it on a CIF (cost-insurance-freight) basis. Sometimes that means we have to borrow from the bank. But the banks would think we were a new company, so they wouldn't loan us very much money. As a matter of principle, in fact, we wanted to borrow as little as possible, just in case we were unable to pay it back.

⁹ Chiang Kai-shek.

¹⁰ These "cram schools," common throughout Taiwan, teach English, mathematics, and other subjects for the competitive entrance exams to high school and university. Many middle-class school children spend their days in regular schools and evenings in *buxiban*, at great expense to their parents.

It was the slow beginning and gradual investment, however, that made her business possible:

By the time I started doing international trade, I had already bought two houses. With that as collateral, it was relatively easy to get credit. I didn't want to borrow a lot of money, since I have learned from experience that people think aboriginal people are not good at business. Everybody's impression is that aborigines don't have a concept of money and don't know how to take care of their finances. That is perhaps a result of our historical background. In earlier days aboriginal people bartered. Let's say, for example, that I give you salt and then you give me rice. But in modern life, you have to sell things for money. I would say that it is my husband who gave me the opportunity, since he is a flatlander and not an aborigine. We set up our company in my name, because the English language education was already in his name.

Dabas's aboriginal background¹¹ gave her a comparative advantage in the marketplace:

Since aboriginal people are already good at Japanese, at first we did most of our business with the Japanese. In the beginning I communicated by e-mail and fax with one potential client. Once we got to know each other that way, I took some samples and flew to Japan. I sell plants: vegetables, cabbage, orchids, butterfly orchids, banyan trees, and bonsai trees. I also sell bonsai plants to Canada and Korea. In the beginning, my language skills were most important. We wanted to go abroad, since the entire Taiwanese SME¹² sector is changing. It's not like before when there were small factories all over Tainan. All of those small factories have been replaced with other kinds of business. That is why we decided to do trade. That is a way of helping our country earn foreign exchange, and we gain a personal profit as well. We chose a different product from other people. It took a lot of courage to go to Japan like that. I was "charging the enemy army with one bullet." I had no employees, except for the temporary workers I hired to ship the goods. Usually, it was just myself and my husband here.

When I asked about differences between aboriginal and Han entrepreneurs in this type of business, she said:

A lot of aborigines are Christians, but I think that my own personality and perspectives were very important. Many aborigines come out and go to work. Attitude is the most important thing. Every since I graduated, I have been working

¹¹ Her hometown, in fact, was the site of violent aboriginal resistance against the Japanese in the Wushe Incident of 1930. Subsequently, the Japanese invested heavily to assimilate their community. Spoken Japanese is still surprisingly common there.

¹² Small and medium enterprises.

and have even started my own business, and I don't think I have ever encountered any difficulty because I am aboriginal. In fact, it makes me proud. People think that aborigines are poor workers or drink a lot. I tell them that not all aborigines are like that. That is just an impression that is created by the media. Since we are so few in numbers, just one minor incident can get blown out of proportion.

I'm not proud just because I am aboriginal. It is also important to be proud of yourself. If you want others to respect you, you have to respect yourself. You have to take responsibility for your own actions. The attitude you bring to work is also very important. For example, I work with the Japanese and they demand very high quality. That means that we have to demand very high quality control from ourselves and from our subcontractors. We inspect everything before shipment. If there is a problem with a product, we compensate for it right away. Maybe my personal background is different from other people. I have met a lot of aborigines who say that it is not easy to move into the city. They will say they have to pay rent and you never know how long your job is going to last. But I say it is a question of attitude. When factories lay off workers, for example, they always fire the ones who show up late and take off early. I am different because I am more demanding with myself. Maybe it is because I have been accustomed to urban life from an early age, when my older brother took me to Taipei. That makes me better able to compete.

Noting that she and her husband are both outsiders and buy from agricultural producers who are nearly all Holo-Taiwanese, I asked how she set up the initial supply networks. With globalization and new technologies, she insisted, it is easier than ever for outsiders to enter the markets:

We didn't even think about networks when we went into business. Nowadays, it is all so convenient with the Internet. People might ask how we can get agricultural knowledge, when we have never grown vegetables or whatever. First, we got information from the Farmers' Association. We have the telephone numbers of all the Farmers' Associations in the province. First, we ask them what kind of products they have, and then we go and talk to them about the products.

We have also participated in the seminars run by the Ministry of Economic Affairs. We pay an annual fee and then, for example, if a foreign company wants to buy something, they can contact us through MOEA's¹³ homepage. They let us know, we select our clients, and then we communicate with them by e-mail. Most of the agricultural products are grown here around Tainan and Chiayi, in the Chia-nan Plains.

When we first started exporting cabbage to Korea two years ago, we sent out a few shipping containers. They thought that our service was very good and came to visit us. They were surprised to see that our office is so small, since we could

¹³ Ministry of Economic Affairs.

always respond so quickly to their demands for information. For example, we were selling onion cakes for a while. We could tell them all about the manufacturing process, what chemical additives were used, etc. Sometimes we would even call up Academia Sinica to ask. It didn't matter if our clients were Japanese or foreigners, we could always get the right information to them right away by telephone, fax, or e-mail.

But, we Chinese [*women Zhongguo ren* 我們中國人] say that one meeting is the beginning of a relationship, so it is also important to go see our clients in person. If you want to set up a long-term relationship, you have to have that personal contact. We also have to go to the factory or the farm to see the products ourselves. We have to know everything from how they are grown, to how they are shipped. We don't just ship goods. We have to understand the whole process, especially since the Japanese are so strict about quality control.

Dabas's success as an entrepreneur has drawn attention to her firm, and she has been recruited to help train other would-be aboriginal entrepreneurs. Most notably, she has participated in a program in nearby Sandimen Township in Pingdong County to encourage tourism and aboriginal business:

As you know, there are very few of us in Tainan who have done well. I have been invited to Sandimen Township to run a workshop on how to start and run a business, and how to manage finances. They said there are only eight of us who have succeeded here. There have been many who have not been able to pay their loans. They opened up really big stores, and used a lot of cash for things like decoration. You have to manage your finances well. You should not spend a lot of money before the first profits come in. You should do market research before opening any store. You should never just think that others are doing well, so you can do the same thing in the same area. That just increases the competition. Now of course, there are aborigines who do well in business. I have seen some on television, but they are quite rare. Sandimen Township is not bad, but I don't like to discriminate between aborigines, flatlanders, and Hakka. I think that God created us all equal. But when you run up against difficulties, there are differences in experience. You can't ask a recent graduate to take up a big task, since they cannot take the pressure yet.

Closing Observations

As these life stories illustrate, aboriginal entrepreneurs learn not only new economic skills. They also learn idioms of practice that position them in terms of aboriginality. The life narratives of both Dewas and Dabas thus illustrate well how identity is constructed through narratives, including narratives of learning, and constantly negotiated. Although both claim aboriginal identity

for themselves, only Dabas would be classified as aboriginal in many official statistics or sociological surveys. Dewas would be classified as a “Mainlander” because of her father’s status. Perhaps because her business is so closely related to aboriginal material culture—and in that she asserts a new pan-aboriginal identity—Dewas makes the stronger assertions of aboriginal identity. Both women, however, can make reasonable claims to aboriginality based on childhood memories as told in personal narratives, language skills, and continuing contacts with the aboriginal community.

In both cases, they construct an aboriginal identity partially through positive means. Dewas surrounds herself with aboriginal items such as dried flying fish and clothing that she purchases, receives as gifts, designs, and manufactures. To her, craft is a central marker of aboriginal identity. Dabas makes the argument that aboriginal linguistic skills in Japanese, a product of Japan’s colonial education practices in her home community, gives her an advantage over Han Taiwanese competitors. When they use the “we” marker in discourse, Dewas refers to her tribe as “we Tayal people,” a strong affirmation of in-group belonging. Ironically, when Dabas uses the same linguistic marker, she slips into national rather than ethnic identity by saying “we Chinese.” This shows the extent to which KMT nationalist education has succeeded in convincing Taiwan’s populace, even those of Austronesian heritage, that they are Chinese.¹⁴ The boundaries of identity are always negotiable.

Their aboriginal identities, however, are also constructed through neantisation, or negation of other identities perceived as opposing positions (Sartre 1943). Dewas laid out the contrast between herself and her Tainan students by saying, “All of our students are Taiwanese; they are not aboriginal.” Describing her husband, Dabas says, “He is a flatlander and not an aborigine.” For Dewas, these identities of negation have surely been reinforced by the overt racism she has experienced while selling aboriginal crafts. Yet the most striking form of negative identity arises in these narratives as they define aboriginality as not being rational capitalists in the same way as Han Taiwanese. Aborigines, in the words of Dewas, “don’t have much cash circulation;” they “aren’t as skilled at business as the Taiwanese . . . aren’t skilled businesspeople who just want to earn a lot of money . . . [and] don’t think about how to go out into the world and make a big career.” Dabas says “aborigines are not good at planning their finances. They don’t have accounting

¹⁴ To what is surely the consternation of Taiwanese nationalists, aboriginal people frequently oppose themselves to “Taiwanese;” yet still refer to themselves, as Dabas did in this narrative, as “Chinese.”

concepts.” This identity—the non-capitalist aborigine—is formed through the idiom of entrepreneurship as a learning experience. By drawing attention to the boundaries between communities of practice, these idioms of learning reinforce ethnic boundaries.

The perception that Han Taiwanese are naturally skilled entrepreneurs and aborigines are not is not at all uncommon in aboriginal communities. Aboriginal activists in Dewas’s home community of Hsiulin Township also point out that most of the entrepreneurs in the community, from hotel proprietors to the mobile peddlers buying old cloth or selling vegetables in the villages, are Han Taiwanese. Many contrast the profit mentality of the Han Taiwanese to the sharing and bartering practices of aboriginal culture. They say that aboriginal people traditionally went hunting for meat in the mountains; and shared it with family and friends upon return to their villages. They thus feel uncomfortable claiming money from friends and family members in return for their products or services. Some of the few aboriginal entrepreneurs in Hsiulin Township, in fact, complain that some of their aboriginal customers eat in their restaurants and leave without paying.

The idiom that aborigines are poor at business, however, has become accepted as a marker of identity, of position within the Taiwanese political economy. This is precisely what Gramsci meant by “hegemony”:

The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed by social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and subsequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. [Gramsci 1995:12, cited in Crehan 2002:138]

Like other forms of hegemony, this identity of non-rationality is internalized by those excluded from power. In these two cases, the entrepreneurs distance themselves somewhat from their communities of origin. Even as they re-create the economic inadequacies of aborigines, they highlight the individual characteristics and skills that set them apart from others. Unlike most learners, who naturalize the skills they come to possess, they draw attention to the learning process in their narratives. The resulting identity has the dual effect of marking off “traditional” aborigines from “modern” Han Taiwanese, and of marking themselves off from those communities. That has the effect of reinforcing the lower status of aboriginal people in society as a whole and earns many successful aboriginal people the reputation of “putting their eyes on the tops of their head,” or becoming proud and neglecting to look directly in the eyes of their peers.

Gramscian variants of Marxism, however, do not necessarily lead to post-modern resignation, as so often happens in anthropological accounts of hegemonic situations. In Gramsci's view, hegemony is never total and is always part of a larger class struggle in process. He argued, in fact, that subaltern groups can change society once they have the power to organize (Crehan 2002:132). Democratic reform and free markets have given Taiwanese aborigines power to organize and challenge the system that has so long dominated them. The aboriginal movement, including NGOs, church organizations, and the Executive Yuan Council of Indigenous Peoples, are at the forefront of that struggle and have done much to benefit Taiwan's aboriginal people. As Dabas discovered, even globalization can be empowering. She was able to use the Internet to find Japanese clients and use the Japanese skills learned as a child in an aboriginal village to her advantage over non-aboriginal competitors.

The process of globalization has made entrepreneurship attractive even to rural indigenous communities, as noted by aboriginal scholars and activists (Kao 2001; Tao 2001; Wen 2000). Aboriginal families survived under KMT rule largely by selling fruits, marine products, and meat to Chinese middlemen; or by sending their young to the cities in search of work. The prices they can garner from agricultural products, however, have dropped due to competition from Southeast Asia and are predicted to fall further now that Taiwan has gained entry into the WTO. Taiwanese industrialists, moreover, have moved industrial production wholesale to China, leading to higher aboriginal unemployment in Taiwan. Because of these changes, entrepreneurship appears more important than ever and is likely to have an even wider impact in the lives of rural as well as urban aboriginal people. More research, especially in applied anthropology, needs to be done to ensure that learning new economic skills is empowering and does not merely bring aboriginal people under new forms of exploitation.

Glossary of Mandarin and Taiwanese Words Used in the Text

(Romanization—Chinese characters—English gloss)

baibushe. 百步蛇 Hundred-pacer viper.

buxiban. 補習班 Cram school.

chiku. 吃苦 “To eat bitterness.”

fan ren. 番人 Savage, barbarian.

gaoshan zu. 高山族 Mountain aborigines.

hoan-a. 番仔 (Taiwanese) barbarian (pejorative).

pingdi ren. 平地人 Flatlander.

pingpu zu. 平埔族 Plains aborigines.

shandi ren. 山地人 Montagnard.

Shanghai Wenhua Zazhi. 山海文化雜誌 Name of magazine.

sheng fan. 生番 “Raw barbarian.”

shou fan. 熟番 “Cooked barbarian.”

Taiwan ren. 臺灣人 Taiwanese (person).

Taiyu. 臺語 Taiwanese (language).

tuanjie lilang. 團結力量 Power of solidarity.

waisheng ren. 外省人 Mainlander.

women Taiya zu. 我們泰雅族 “We Taiya people.”

women Zhongguo ren. 我們中國人 “We Chinese people.”

yuanzhumin. 原住民 Aborigine.

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學習與認同： 臺灣的原住民創業者

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歷史的情境讓原住民社群失去原有的狩獵與生計活動，並迫使個人和家庭學習新的經濟行為模式。在這個過程中，原住民成為 Lave 與 Wegner (1991) 所謂的「實踐社群」(community of practice) 的新成員。在臺灣，這通常是指進入小商品生產模式的商業活動中而成為創業者或勞工(Gates 1996)。在任何一種情況下，經濟變遷都意指學習新知識以及在新情境中新的主體位置。

相較於漢人，臺灣原住民除了有較高的失業率及較低的薪資所得之外，原住民就業者所從事的亦大多數屬於低薪之人力勞動的工作。面對現實而嚴苛的經濟遠景，許多都市原住民開始自行創業。至 1999 年，創業者約佔一般人口的百分之十六，而在原住民人口中，創業者則佔有百分之十二的比例。本文是筆者有關臺灣女性創業者研究計畫的一部分(Simon 2003)，主要是從兩位泰雅族女性創業者的故事來探討學習與經濟行為。原住民在接觸發展以及全球化時，他們是如何學習新的經濟技能？而在他們的工作生活中，學習與認同又具有什麼樣的關連？

Lave 和 Wenger (1991) 的研究主要是專注在新進者成為實踐社群之成員時，所面對的不相稱學習情境。由於位處優勢地位的漢人對臺灣的市場及其他學習環境的宰制性掌控，致使原住民創業者仍是居於相當邊緣的位置。在漢人控制了絕大部分資源的情況下，原住民遭受到不平等待遇，這其中包括了市場通路。

在臺南的兩位泰雅婦女 Dewas 和 Dabas，她們的生命史顯示出原住民創業者所學習的除了有新的經濟技能外，也同時學習如何以特殊的實踐慣性 (idioms of practice) 來凸顯其原住民的身分。為了有別於漢人資本家，在這些故事中最引人注目的認同形式，乃是原住民將自己的特性界定成非理性的。這種認同——非資本家的原住民——是透過企業經營是一種學習經驗的慣性所形成的。當不同實踐社群間的界限成為焦點時，學習的慣性更強化了族群的界限。

然而，原住民不善於經營生意的慣性已經成為一種標籤。這正是 Gramsci 所謂的「霸權」(hegemony)。如同霸權的其他形式一樣，那些被排拒在權力之外的人會將這種非理性認同內化 (internalized)。本文個案中的創業者，會與他們的原生社群保持某種程度上的距離。不同於大部分的學習者是將學習並擁有技能視為理所當然，這些創業者在敘事中反而著重在他們學習的過程。隨之而來的認同即產生了雙重區辨的作用——既區隔了「傳統的」原住民與「現代的」漢人，同時又將

他們自身與原住民的社群區隔開來。由此不但更坐實了原住民在整體社會的下層地位，同時也讓許多成功的原住民被冠上「眼睛長在頭頂上」、驕傲而看不起其他原住民同胞的名聲。

然在 Gramsci 的觀點中，霸權從來不是全面的，且通常只是更大的階級鬥爭的一部分。他主張底層群體一旦有力量可以動員組織，就能改變社會。在臺灣的民主改革與社會運動的興起中，已賦與原住民權力去動員組織並挑戰長久以來支配他們的體系。在這同時，全球化也讓企業經營對鄉村地區的原住民社群產生了吸引力。我們會繼續的探討，以瞭解原住民學習新的經濟技能是否能給予他們權力，而不只是讓原住民面對新的剝削形式而已。

關鍵詞：原住民，學習，經濟發展，企業經營，認同
