Introduction

Under current official classification, Taiwanese indigenous peoples have been categorised into 13 distinct ethnic groups\(^{(1)}\), with the population slightly over 2 percent of the total population in Taiwan. (Department of Population, the Ministry of Interior, excerpt from http://www.ris.gov.tw/ch4/static/st0-1-9604.xls) In comparison with majority non-indigenous Taiwanese, a wide range of facts associated with socio-economic status reveal that Taiwanese indigenous people have a much higher risk of falling into poverty. Taken from The Survey Report on Indigenous People’s Employment Status, with reference to the monthly income of paid employees with a regular income, the income of an indigenous worker, on average, is 60 percent of that of a Taiwanese worker (Council of Indigenous Affairs, 2006:16). With regards to the labour market, the indigenous labour force is concentrated in less skilful, more risky, physical, low-paid occupations, or occupations without unions (e.g. agriculture, animal husbandry and hunting, forestry, fishing, crafts, and plant and machine operation). Around 64 percent of indigenous household heads work in these occupations while the percentage in Taiwan as a whole is 38 percent (ibid.:37).

What happened to the indigenous population? In contemporary economic analyses of productivity, considerable emphasis has been placed on understanding human capital in augmenting production possibilities (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985; Blaug, 1970). If education makes a person more efficient in terms of the production of commodities, then this is clearly an enhancement of human capital. If a person can become more productive in making commodities through better education, it is natural to expect that s/he is more likely to achieve more—and to have the freedom to achieve more—in her/his life. Amartya Sen, a leading scholar in the field of development, proposes “human capability” as an alternative model to human capital. He argues that the notion of human capability extends beyond commodity production to focus on the ability—the substantive freedom—of people to lead the lives they value and to enhance the real choices they have. Even with the same value of income, a person can benefit from education: in reading, communicating, debating, in making informed choices, in being taken more seriously by others, etc. All of these exceed the role of education as human capital in commodity production (Sen, 1999).
Human capital and human capability perspectives address, albeit through different routes, the importance of education in well-being. Bearing this in mind, one must ask why certain groups of people achieve less in terms of education than others. The most popular explanation is that disadvantaged groups do not possess equal opportunities of education. All positions in society should be open to a competitive system of entry, on the basis of personal talent, to education attainment. This form of equality requires universal criteria in the “selection” of people for certain positions in society while also placing a value on achievement motivation (McClelland, 1961, 1971). By employing this analogy of society as a competitive contest, equality of opportunity suggests that all persons, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or age have the right to compete.

Although the equality of opportunity approach is to be praised for its emphasis on the elimination of discrimination in education, critics have argued that, as a result of social, symbolic, economic and cultural capital, some people entering the competition have already enjoyed many advantages (Bourdieu, 1988). Would it be the case that access to education is constrained for children from lower-income families? Is the distribution of education unequal by social class/race? Thus, it is as important to know the impact of one’s education attainment on his/her standard of living and social/racial status as it is to understand the reverse relationship. Based in the context of Taiwan, this study analyses how and why the children of Taiwanese indigenous people, who are in relative poverty and under multiple deprivation of resources, “underachieve” in the educational system in Taiwan. It aims to provide an insight into how the factors of race and socio-economic status interact to prevent indigenous pupils from gaining educational achievement equal to that of their non-indigenous counterparts.

Research Method

Quantitative data are used to provide an overview of the relative deprivation of the indigenous people, although the reality of poverty and deprivation of education experienced by the indigenous people/pupils is largely hidden by limited, race-blinded statistics, and is thus virtually invisible. It is overcome by several means: employing in-depth interview techniques; incorporating grounded theory methods as a means of understanding the subjective experiences of the indigenous people; undertaking a pilot
study to formulate and test the interview questions; and adopting theoretical sampling techniques.

There were three types of informants selected for interview in this research. The first group (Group A) were those indigenous people who are poor and who live in mountain indigenous villages (MIVs). Only by talking to those who have a direct experience of poverty can we understand how the processes of poverty operate in their lives. The second group interviewed (Group B) were those with a special understanding and knowledge of indigenous affairs. The primary reason for including these professional indigenous people was that their observations of their people’s socio-economic inferiority might, in a systematic way, co-ordinate with, as well as differ from, those of the poor indigenous people. Heads of sub-villages were recruited as my interviewees for this group because they are in charge of governmental administration at the local level and are acknowledged as local leaders. Their conception of indigenous people’s poverty and deprivation of education provided a valuable comparison with Group A. Moreover, they provided a broader view of the indigenous people’s status in society and were able to comment on national and local policies. The third group (Group C) was composed of indigenous people who migrated from mountain villages to urban areas. The main reason for including this group is that through interviewing indigenous people who have more frequent contact with the Han, first-hand experiences of interracial interactions could be explored. Moreover, because these people have lived in both urban and mountain areas, they provided a useful comparison between these two areas.

The interviews for Group A and Group B in this research are largely based on a field study conducted in Fu-shing Hsiang in 2002. Fu-shing Hsiang is the biggest mountain indigenous village (MIV) in northern Taiwan, located in the south-east of Taoyuan County. The residential population was 11,320 at the end of 2000—56 percent of them are male, 69 percent are indigenous and more than 98 percent of the indigenous population are Atayal. With a territory of 350 km$^2$, Fu-shing Hsiang is the biggest sub-county administrative area in Taoyuan County. The administrative area of Fu-shing Hsiang is divided into ten sub-villages; seven of them are in the fore-mountain, closer to the urban areas, and the others in the rear-mountain. The seven sub-villages in the fore-mountain are San-min, Tse-jen, Hsia-yun, Yi-sheng, Lo-fu, Kuei-huei, and Chang-hsing; the three sub-villages in the rear-mountain are Kao-i, San-kuang, and
Hua-ling. By the end of 1999, the population density of Fu-shin Hsiang was 33/km$^2$, much lower than the 1,385/km$^2$ of Tao-yuan county.

**Background: Indigenous Children’s “Underachievement” in the Educational System**

“Underachievement” is a pattern in which one group persistently does not do as well scholastically as might be reasonably expected. Since the 1960s, research in Britain has foregrounded the lower academic performance of African-Caribbean boys compared with that of white and South Asian boys (Coard, 1971). There is similar evidence regarding Taiwanese indigenous children’s academic achievement in comparison with their Han counterparts.

Under the current educational system in Taiwan, all children must complete nine years of compulsory education, consisting of primary and junior high school education. The graduates of junior high schools can then choose to sit any (or all) of the entry examinations for general senior high school, vocational high school, or a five-year college. Children with a good academic performance are normally encouraged to attend general senior high school and children with less interest in academic work are encouraged to attend a vocational high school or college, which provide more applied and technical training than the general senior high school. At the high school level, the educational system is separated into two systems, one which is academically oriented and one which is vocationally and technically oriented. With few exceptions, it is difficult to change track after entering high school. Graduates from general senior high schools are normally expected to go on to higher education while the students from the vocational system are trained to enter the labour market.

Indigenous students account for 2.1 percent of the total student population in Taiwan, just slightly higher than the proportion of indigenous people to the total population (Table 1). However, the indigenous student population declines from 2.66 percent at primary education to a mere 0.24 percent at postgraduate level. This indicates that although indigenous students are capable of attending compulsory education, which is public-funded and almost free of charge, they experience certain barriers to continuing to advanced and/or higher education. Another issue that needs to be addressed is that within the same
age groups, indigenous students tend to enrol in vocationally oriented schools/colleges, such as vocational senior high schools and colleges, rather than in general high schools and universities.

Table 1. The Proportion of Taiwanese Indigenous Students in Various Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Taiwanese Students</th>
<th>Indigenous Students</th>
<th>Percentage of Indigenous Students to Total Taiwanese Students (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Students %</td>
<td>Number of Students %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Total</td>
<td>5,087,498 100.00</td>
<td>107,076 100.00</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School</td>
<td>177,024 3.48</td>
<td>425 0.40</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>938,648 18.45</td>
<td>8,830 8.25</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>272,722 5.37</td>
<td>4,345 4.06</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Senior High School</td>
<td>420,607 8.27</td>
<td>8,005 7.48</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Senior High School</td>
<td>467,932 9.20</td>
<td>11,324 10.58</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior High School</td>
<td>961,998 18.91</td>
<td>24,970 23.32</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>1,848,567 36.34</td>
<td>49,177 45.93</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>22,770,383</td>
<td>464,947 2.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Ministry of Education, 2005

What factors have prohibited indigenous students from attending academically oriented, advanced and/or higher education? If one considers education as a consumption good, what makes indigenous people underconsume it? Do indigenous parents, who, on average, have less education and are economically disadvantaged compared with non-indigenous parents, perhaps not possess the information with which to make “educated” decisions about their children’s education, or do they simply lack the economic power to enforce these choices? On the other hand, are indigenous parents and students so deprived of equal education resources
that they have very few options to choose from? This may cause an underconsumption of education as the benefits of education are frequently underestimated and the costs overvalued. The qualitative confirmation of this situation is found in the following sections.

**Policy Issues: Affirmative Action in Education**

Educational “affirmative” measures for the indigenous people of Taiwan date back to the late nineteenth century. The then Taiwan Governor Liu Ming-chuan (1885-1891) implemented a “Mountain Development and Fan [Savage People] Pacification Policy”, which included “establishing charitable schools” and “granting three dollars to each Fan pupil who attends school as the expense of clothing, food, and stationery” (Lee, 1975:4-16; cited in Liu, 1996:4). When the Japanese colonial government left Taiwan after their defeat in World War II, the Chinese Nationalist government (KMT) regained control of the island. This government’s educational affirmative measures for the indigenous people were covered by the administrative decree of “Affirmative Measures for Pupils from the Borderlands” (implemented in 1944; revised in 1948). Under this administrative decree, students from the borderlands (including indigenous students) were treated preferentially.

Since the 1950s, the KMT government in Taiwan has gradually realised the distinctiveness of the indigenous population and has progressively separated regulations for “imaginary” borderlanders from those for the indigenous people. In *The Guidelines for the Construction of Mountain Administration* (1953), the plainisation of the mountains (that is, assimilation of the indigenous cultures, societies, and economies which were mainly based in the mountains within the Han who are, in the main, located on the plains) was the government’s indigenous policy. Indigenous education was driven by the notion of complete assimilation of the mountain people. The combination of assimilationist with preferential treatments for indigenous students was reluctantly maintained by the government. Not surprisingly, in 1963, in *The Programme for the Improvement of Mountain Administration*, the government proclaimed that “the protective measures for the mountain compatriots shall be subject to real necessity, in order to avoid the side effects of these measures, which hinders their progression” and “the special administration for the mountain areas shall be lifted year by year” (Liu, 1996:5). Although the government was extremely hesitant about enforcing affirmative action for indigenous people, the government in practice did not withdraw those
preferential treatments. This is because these groups continuously lagged behind the general population in almost every economic and social index (Liou, 2005:7-19). In the past five decades, affirmative action in the education system has concentrated on three areas: lowering the entry examination standards; lowering the pass standards at school; and providing scholarships and grants.

Under current state policy, indigenous students who sit high (vocational) school, college, and/or university entry examinations, receive a reduction of 25 percent in the entry requirement, equal to an increase of one-third of the total score achieved by a candidate. In addition, several private vocational schools and colleges reserve a relatively large proportion of places for indigenous junior and senior high school graduates. The government also provides a disproportionate number of publicly funded opportunities for indigenous university graduates who wish to pursue postgraduate research abroad. In high school, indigenous students’ pass standard is reduced to 50 points, almost 20 percent lower than the ordinary pass standard of 60 points. Moreover, in university, an ordinary student will be expelled if s/he fails half of the credits, whereas the level for indigenous students is two-thirds. Finally, in terms of scholarships and grants, all indigenous students enrolled in both public and private senior high (as well as vocational) schools are eligible for a grant which is almost as much as the tuition fee (NT$42,000 from 1996 onwards). Indigenous students enrolled in public colleges and universities (and also graduate schools) have their tuition fees exempted, while those in private institutions are exempt from the same amount of the tuition fees as in public colleges or universities.

The Distribution of Educational Resources

The distribution of educational resources has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on indigenous people’s educational achievements. The educational resources a person possesses could be referred to as the educational expenditure s/he shares and the quality of educational facilities and teaching staff to which s/he is exposed. As far as primary education is concerned, according to the government, a school’s non-personnel expenditure (e.g. administrative, general, community education, water and electricity, and laboratory expenditure) is based on the size of the school, that is the total number of classes. The recruitment of teaching and support staff, or personnel expenses, is also directly related to the
number of classes in the school. “Table 2” shows that the average number of classes in primary schools in three typical indigenous mountain villages (He-ping Hsiang, Xin-yi Hsiang, and Ren-ai Hsiang) was 6.7, 6.0, and 6.7, which is much less than the Taiwanese average of 19.1. These figures show that schools in the mountains have much smaller budgets than their urban counterparts. However, because the average size of the class in the mountains (12.28, 17.26, and 10.99 students per class in those three villages respectively) is disproportionately smaller than the average class size in Taiwan Province (39.36), each pupil is, in fact, allocated a higher portion of governmental expenditure. Huang compared the education expenditure in indigenous schools (defined as those schools in which more than 30 percent of its pupils are indigenes) and non-indigenous schools in Hualien County. She found that expenditure per pupil in the indigenous schools is 2.1 times that of the expenditure in the non-indigenous schools (1998).

Table 2. Size of Primary Schools in Three MIVs and in Taiwan Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hsian</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Number of Classes</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Average Number of Classes Per School</th>
<th>Average Number of Students Per School</th>
<th>Average Number of Students Per Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He-ping</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>12.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xin-yi</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>1,778</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>104.6</td>
<td>17.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ren-ai</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>1,110</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>10.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan Province</td>
<td>2,277</td>
<td>43,414</td>
<td>1,708,910</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>750.5</td>
<td>39.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Huang (2000:182)

However, higher expenditure per pupil does not necessarily result in a better quality of facilities and teaching staff. This is particularly the case when comparing schools of varied sizes and in different locations. In the distribution of a school’s expenditure, 97 percent of total school expenditure is dedicated to personnel expense, leaving only 3 percent for non-personnel expenditure (Huang, 1998:1). Although smaller schools have a higher expenditure per pupil, a mere 3 percent of their total expenditure can hardly meet administrative and hardware maintenance needs. The financial difficulties faced by indigenous schools have been described in many studies (Yang, 1992; Lee, & Jian, 1992; Xie, & A-wu, 1994; Huang, 2000). They have found that schools in the mountains have adequate classrooms for general use, but that specialised classrooms, e.g. science, music, art, audio, and computing, are lacking both in terms of number and in variety. The teaching resources, such as tape and video recorders, microscopes, and computers, do not correspond with the students’
needs. The library collections in most of these schools are inadequate, failing to meet teacher or student demands. Owing to the lack of knowledge about library management and a shortage of staff, libraries in these schools do not function well. In addition, expenses for maintenance are less than sufficient, causing delays in the renovation of school buildings and the rapid deterioration of facilities.

Unlike a shortage of teaching facilities which could be alleviated relatively easily by pouring funds into indigenous schools through the government’s compensation policies, such as the Education Priority Areas schemes (EPA), it is much more complicated to equalise differences in the quality of teaching staff in schools on the plains and in the mountains. In Taiwan, primary and secondary school teachers are trained largely by the teacher training colleges and universities (Normal Universities, as they are called in Taiwan). These universities and colleges allocate public-funded graduates to schools on the basis of the demands of schools in each county. When allocated, graduates are ranked according to their achievements at college and each graduate ranks his/her choice of schools. Graduates with higher scores are more likely to be allocated to their top schools. These, in turn, are often located in areas of good living conditions with well-connected transport facilities. As a result, those with lower scores are likely to be assigned to schools of lower priority, most of which are in the remote mountains or in the rural areas. Therefore, teachers assigned to the schools in the mountains are lower achievers than those assigned to urban schools and have poor morale. It is not surprising that they are short of enthusiasm and lack devotion to work. The turnover of teachers is high in the mountains (Chang, 2000:226). They are often labelled negatively as “exiled teachers”, which further reduces teachers’ desire to teach in those remote schools.

Taking the proportion of qualified teachers as an index of the quality of teachers, in 1993 only 6 percent of the teachers of schools on the plains were unqualified (referred to as substitute teachers). However, for schools in the mountains it was 16 percent (Huang, 2000:177). In terms of the turnover of teachers, Lin documented that of those graduates allocated to the schools in the mountains, 56 percent of them reported that they will leave the schools once they have the chance (1992). According to The Desirability of Graduates from Teachers College to Teach in the Primary Schools in Mountains, only 32 percent of the respondents replied that they were willing to teach in the mountains (Wu, & Xu, 1992). It was also found that among those teaching in the primary schools in the mountains,
barely 27 percent of them volunteered to be placed there. A consequence of higher teacher turnover is that pupils have to adjust constantly to new ways of teaching, and a good number of the teachers leave soon after they become familiar with the pupils. Teachers and pupils waste much time in mutual adjustment. Teachers are prone to the identity of a “passing traveller”, which sometimes makes them muddle through their work (Tan, 1997:15-6).

The primary reasons which deter teachers from going to teach and to keep on teaching in the mountains are: inconvenience in transportation; inferior living conditions; insufficient cultural information; and inconvenience in their own children’s education (Cai, 1992; Lin, 1992; Xie, & A-wu, 1994; Wang, 1994). In addition, owing to the fact that school sizes in the mountains are considerably smaller than those on the plains but the administrative workload is much the same, a large proportion of teachers in the mountains are obliged to hold concurrent posts of teaching and administrative work. According to Cai, only 6.7 percent of teaching staff in the mountains are not assigned any administrative work, compared with 31.8 percent in Taiwan as a whole (1992). In the mountain schools, there is a greater lack of specialised teachers, e.g. physical education, music, and arts teachers (Yang, 1992; Lee, & Ou, 1992). For general teachers in the mountains to teach subjects in which they are not specialised is a challenge. With the administrative workload so high, it is hardly surprising that few teachers would like to work in these schools.

In indigenous people’s villages, the scarcity of educational resources does not occur only in the primary sector. With regard to pre-school education, there were 3,234 licensed nurseries and kindergartens in Taiwan in 2001; around 60 percent of them private (The Ministry of Education, 2002). In the remote mountains where indigenous people are widely dispersed, there are almost no private nurseries and kindergartens. As a result, almost all of those who can afford to send their children to pre-school education rely on the public sector. Tuition fees are much cheaper than the private schools, but the facilities and course content are relatively poorer. (Huang, 2000: 335)

In the secondary sector, the equality of educational resources is not much better. There were 708 junior high schools and 473 senior high schools and vocational schools in Taiwan in 2001 (The Ministry of Education, 2002) but there were only 22 junior high schools and 2 senior high schools in the 30 indigenous villages in the mountains, the size of which accounts to 44 percent of the whole of Taiwan. Junior and senior high school densities are as low as 1.5
and 0.1 per 1,000 km$^2$ in the area of the mountain villages, contrasting with 35.4 and 23.6 per 1,000 km$^2$ on the plains. In order to attend school, a large proportion of school-aged children either have to spend a lot of time travelling to school or are forced to leave their families to live closer to school. Both answers imply higher costs for the families affected, in terms of time and finance. This puts extra financial pressure on the residents in already poverty-ridden villages.

**Education for the Majority: Monocultural Education**

In the USA, the 1966 Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1969) was influential in raising awareness of social and cultural inadequacy as an explanation for the underachievement of the black child. The report gave impetus to the arguments about negative self-esteem and negative ethnic identity, which have since dominated educational research about the black child. In the UK, Coard suggested that racism was a factor causing some Caribbean children to underachieve in schools (1971). He commented that as it was the white middle class who constructed the IQ tests, it was not surprising that it was the white middle class pupils who passed the examinations with the highest scores. He argued that black working class children came from different backgrounds with different sets of life experiences, meaning that they would inevitably have difficulty understanding and answering those same questions, regardless of their intelligence, because the tests were culturally specific. Coard argued that the tests had little relevance to the abilities and realities of working-class children. Caribbean children were in a more difficult situation than white working-class children because they faced the multiple disadvantages of race, colour and class.

Gibson focused the issue on Caribbean children’s language and communication problems (1986:99-104). English as spoken in the Caribbean is a patois generally called “Creole.” Almost all English-speaking West Indians speak a mixture of Creole and Standard English. He argued that many Caribbean children may say that they have no trouble understanding the teacher without realising that they are making a false assertion.

An Englishman might be able to read and write fluently in French, but that does not mean that he will necessarily understand a Frenchman speaking to him. In other words, he does not have the mastery of French possessed by a
native speaker—even one who cannot read or write particularly well. Similarly, Westindians generally do not have a mastery of the English language. The inability to register or pick up on these ideas is one of the main stumbling blocks for Westindian children. (1986:102-3)

He argued that when pupils are unable to retain for future use anything told to them by the teacher, or seem unable to act upon it, the teacher’s expectations of them are likely to be fairly low. These low expectations in turn impact on the child, becoming a “self-fulfilling prophecy.”

In modern nation states, the authorities adopt a variety of educational approaches towards minority cultures, ranging from the complete suppression of minority languages and cultures to their formal inclusion within significant institutional and language domains. Churchill outlines six principal state policy responses to the educational and language needs of minority groups within the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries (1986). While he suggests that differences between the various stages are not always clear cut, he proposes the following ranking (in ascending order) of the degree to which such policies recognise and incorporate the needs of minority cultures and languages.

1. Stage One (Learning Deficit): The educational disadvantages faced by minority groups are associated with the use of the minority language. Accordingly, rapid transition to the majority language is advocated.

2. Stage Two (Social Linked Learning Deficit): Occasionally arrived at concurrently with Stage One, this stage associates a minority group’s educational disadvantage with family status. Additional/supplementary programmes are thus promoted, which emphasise adjustment to the majority society.

3. Stage Three (Learning Deficit from Social/Cultural Differences): Commonly associated with multicultural education, this stage assumes that minority educational disadvantages arise from the inability of the majority society—particularly the education system—to recognise, accepts and view positively minority culture. However, a multicultural approach does not usually include a commensurate recognition of the minority language.

4. Stage Four (Learning Deficit from Mother Tongue Deprivation): Although linked to the notion of deficit, the need for support of the minority language is accepted, at least as a transitional measure. Accordingly, transitional bilingual education programmes are
5. Stage Five (Private Use Language Maintenance): Recognises the right of national and ethnic minorities to maintain and develop their languages and cultures in private life to ensure that these are not supplanted. A group maintenance approach to bilingual education is the usual policy response followed.

6. Stage Six (Language Equality): The granting of full official status to a national-minority language. This includes separate language provision in a range of public institutions, including schools, and widespread recognition and use in a range of social, institutional and language domains.

Churchill argues that Stages One to Four posit that minority groups should seek the same social, cultural and linguistic outcomes as the majority groups. In other words, the instrumental objectives of education, as defined by the dominant ethnic group, should be the same for all ethnic groups within the nation state. The premise is the incorporation of minority groups into the hegemonic civic culture of the nation state with minimal accommodation of minority languages and cultures. He proceeds to argue that it is only at Stages Five and Six that the value of a monocultural and monolingual society is questioned. May describes the first four national educational approaches as “education for the majority” and the last two “education for the minority” (2001:170-80).

In examining the current educational policies in Taiwan, it is obvious that the underlining philosophy concerning state education still emphasises the importance of incorporating the indigenous people into Han culture, despite the fact that the rhetoric of “multicultural education” and “cultural pluralism” is frequently heard from the educational policy-makers and academics. It is easier to understand Han-ethnocentrism in the educational policy-making process by scrutinising school textbooks. Sun argues that three kinds of overt ethnic-biased positions permeate the current textbooks of Chinese Literature and Language Education, Social Sciences Education (including history and geography), and Life and Ethics Education in primary education in Taiwan: Han ethnocentrism, white favouritism, and urban perspectives (2000:186-92). The blatant Han ethnocentrism in the curriculum reflects the Han people’s dominant historical perspective, exemplified by the textbooks of Historical Education in primary and secondary education (Sun, ibid.; Fu, 1998). In textbooks of Social Studies Education in primary schools, the whole of Chinese history has been oversimplified as a soliloquy for the Han and the
experiences and cultures of other racial and ethnic groups are excluded or minimised. In the handful of places referring to the indigenous peoples, the description of them is confined to the Han’s historical perspective.

In 1996, the “Native Land Education” programme was incorporated into the then existing curriculum at both primary and secondary levels. The programme consisted of education in native languages, history, geography, nature, and arts. Schools located in the indigenous villages were allowed to adopt their own curricula, although they were collectively edited by the National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT). The objective of this programme was to help students understand their native culture in order to preserve ethnic cultures. It was also hoped that, through the implementation of this programme, students would learn to respect other cultures, open their minds and thus enhance the harmony of society (The Ministry of Education, 1993).

Although this programme is a laudable intention, racial stereotyping and prejudice in the compilation and the delivering of educational materials have been far from being eliminated. In terms of teaching frequency, Native Land Education (including native language education) has been taught for less than three hours per week, only 9 percent of the whole teaching time (Chang, 2000:246). Native Land Education is, in fact, little more than a trivial part of primary and secondary education. Hence when studying native languages/cultures, the majority Han language/culture remains the major frame of reference for interpreting linguistic/cultural differences. As a result, it does little to foster the status and the use of indigenous languages and the understanding of the indigenous cultures in the longer term. Indigenous languages, as Sueng has observed, are declining at an extraordinary speed (1994). He reports that in Wu-lai Hsiang most of the indigenous villagers under 50 years old were unable to give a public speech in fluent Atayal. Almost none of those under the age of 40 were capable of using Atayal to communicate freely with those of the same generation and their elders. Those who were under the age of 30 were rather unfamiliar with their mother tongue and did not even have native names. As for those under the age of 20, because most of their family members communicated in Mandarin Chinese, they only knew a few Atayal words (1994:97-107). It has been predicted that the indigenous languages will be extinguished within the next two or three generations (Huang, 1993:424).

In light of the severity of Sueng’s assertion and the restricted scope of this multicultural
initiative, the current school education (and Native Land Education) is simply the recognition of the right of the indigenous people to be different and to be respected for this, not necessarily to maintain their languages and cultures. This is because Native Land Education is unwilling to engage directly with questions of linguistic discrimination and the continued maintenance of Chinese hegemonies within both the education system and the wider nation state.

In the curriculum of the indigenous Native Land Education, the description and introduction of indigenous arts and customs accounts for more than half of the units, including rituals and customs, music and children’s folk rhymes, operas and dancing, handicraft and arts, buildings, dress, and religions. Native land history accounts for another 15 to 22 percent of the units, composed of the introduction of the origin of the indigenous peoples, the process of migration, their historical mythology and folklore, and the introduction of historical characters and deeds (Huang, 2000:121-22). It obviously overemphasises the indigenous people’s lifestyle at the expense of the actualities of their existence; in other words, it overstates the significance of cultural recognition and understates the perpetuation of racism and racialism, operating through discriminatory practices within schools and in the wider society. It may, in fact, serve to reinforce the current Han cultural and linguistic hegemonies with which native land education is concerned. This argument is supported by the fact that, during the 1990s, some key advocates of multicultural education in the West distanced themselves from this focus on a so-called “superficial culturalism” (May, 2001:175), moving towards a more critical or anti-racist discourse, which

*takes as its starting point a notion of culture as a terrain of conflict and struggle over representation—conflict for which resolution may not be immediate and struggle that may not cease until there is a change in the social conditions that provoke it. Rather than present culture as the site where different members……coexist peacefully, it has to develop strategies to explore and understand this conflict and to encourage creative resolutions and contingent alliances that move from interpreting cultures to intervening in political processes.* (Mohan, 1995:385)

Mohan’s critical approach highlights the ongoing effects of racism in the education system and the limitation of multicultural education which does not extend to broader structural
This critical account provides insights into the problems of the current education system in Taiwan. In order to prevent indigenous languages/cultures from being supplanted by the dominant language/culture, at least some measure of active protection is required. Indigenous people must be guaranteed a share in the power of educational decision-making, the power to define and protect knowledge and languages, and the benefits of participation in education. Bilingual education might be an effective policy response for this. Under bilingual education programmes, schools for indigenous pupils should teach and instruct largely or solely in the native languages, and knowledge taught and pedagogies employed in classrooms should be decided by indigenous people. This ensures that the indigenous languages/cultures are maintained and fostered, given that the majority language is usually dominant in most other social and institutional domains.

**Education and Poverty: The Analysis of Interview Data**

1. Deprivation of educational resources

Through carefully analysing the interview data, the lack of educational resources in the mountains is confirmed. Comparing urban schools with those in her mountain village, a village head stated:

> The facilities [in the mountains] are of course much worse! In addition, we have many more substitute teachers than schools in the plains. New teachers are always allocated to the mountains for their first two years, and once they have gained their experience in teaching, they leave. So, whenever I participate in a meeting with officials from the education department of this county, I ask them never to treat our pupils as guinea pigs again. This is also the case for the school presidents. Once they pass the exams to become a school president, the authority always assigns them to the mountain to practice. After two to three years of practice, the authority reallocates them to schools in the plains. (Respondent B05)

Others also confirm this view: “ours are much worse; our computing facilities are definitely no match for schools in the plains” (Respondent A07); “Because it is too remote here. Teachers from the plains are not willing to stay. It is too inconvenient here” (Respondent B03).
One previous Fu-shing villager stated:

They [teachers] prefer to teach in cities; they can teach in the supplementary schools and hence earn some extra money. It is a complete sacrifice to teach in the mountain schools. Why? If you give a supplementary course to an indigenous pupil, his/her parents are not able to pay you. They cannot even pay their children’s tuition fees. (Respondent C05)

Some interviewees, however, had a more positive view of the educational resources in the mountains. One head of village said that, “oh, they are not bad now……Some school presidents and teachers work quite hard. They can apply for a lot of funding from the education authority to improve their hardware and software” (Respondent B04). But when I asked where she sent her children to school, she admitted that her children went to urban schools:

In fact, most of the parents in this village still do not quite trust our schools. They still think our schools are no match for those in the plains. The parents, in spite of the progress being made in our schools, will not feel at ease with their children studying here. (Respondent B04)

The indigenous parents in the mountains almost have a consensus that if they have the ability, they will transfer their children to schools in the plains.

2. Lack of competition

Concerns over the quality of schools in the mountains are not just about qualified teachers and facilities. One head of village observed:

These [education problems] are caused by the lack of competition……. Sometimes there are as few as ten, or even only three or two students in each class. If there are very few students in one class, where does the motive to study come from? Right? There is no competition at all……For example, there is only one student in Grade Six of Guang-hua Primary School. Who does he compete with? How can s/he set his/her mind to study? Right? (Respondent B02)

Responding to this problem, a village head suggested that “the smaller primary schools should merge” (Respondent B02). In 2000, the average class size in a primary school in Taiwan was 31 (Council for Economic Planning and Development, 2000:270-1), which is two to three times the size of classes in mountains.
Although the argument of increasing class size so as to improve educational achievement may not be theoretically grounded (almost no research suggests that increasing class sizes leads to improvements), Hanushek’s work in the USA argues that there is no evidence of consistent improvements resulting from class size reductions. Smaller class sizes may also not be cost-effective (1986, 1989). Davies points out that class size is only one of a number of determinants of student performance. Others include teacher quality, school management/governance, peer effects, socio-economic status and home environment (2003:5). Hence, if educational expenditure is fixed, a key question for policy-makers is whether class size reductions are more or less cost-effective than other measures aimed at lifting educational performance. For example, Davies proposes that a reduction in class size can have an adverse effect on teacher quality because the increased demand for teachers could result in poorly or under-qualified teachers being employed (ibid.). The net effect of a drop in teacher quality is that students may be worse off than if they were in larger classes but with better quality teachers. This is, as Davies argues, particularly true in disadvantaged areas that find it difficult to attract good teachers (ibid.). This argument addresses the cost-effectiveness of further class size reductions, rather than supporting increases in class size. Educationist Huang’s suggestions to merge schools in the mountains in Taiwan in order to “correct” inefficiency in terms of management and finance, may merely reflect the government’s reluctance to tackle the structural disadvantages of the mountain schools (2000:182-4). In order to improve student performance, the government needs to provide more incentives for good teachers to stay and more financial support for those remote schools, rather than to merge schools and classes, which is, theoretically, not beneficial to students. Moreover, merging smaller schools in the mountains means that the pupils will have to travel for longer to reach their schools, which will worsen the currently already difficult transport arrangements experienced by many indigenous families with school-age children.

3. Transportation problems

Fu-shing Hsiang, in which most of the interviews were conducted, is a MIV about one-third the size of the whole Taoyuan county. Although there are 45 junior high schools located in the other two-thirds of the county, there is only one in that village, the Jie-shou Junior High School (JSJHS). The low population density and large size of the administrative territory of MIVs mean that students within its school districts can live quite far from school. JSJHS provides a typical example of the transportation problems in the MIVs. One father of a
junior high school child described the daily journey of his child:

My child has to walk down the hill to the bus stop. It takes about half an hour downhill but one hour uphill. From the bus stop, the bus journey is about another half an hour to his school. Therefore, it takes one hour to reach the school and an hour and a half to come home. (Respondent A10)

The situation is made even worse as schools do not provide buses and public transport in the mountains is unsatisfactory. He continued:

We are very dissatisfied with the bus services......The bus comes at about 6:00 in the morning, and my child has to leave home at 5:30......It is too early......The bus should come at about 7:00, which is just right for my child to attend the first class......The timetable of the bus does not fit the children in our tribe. Sometimes our children skip a whole day, simply because they miss the bus in the morning......The bus is wrong again when they come home. My child finishes a whole day of class at 16:50, but the bus leaves at 16:30. My child has to take another bus service at 17:00, but it stops very far from our tribe. My child has to walk more than an hour to reach home......You know, it is very dark and dangerous in the winter after 17:00. (Respondent A10)

The difficulty in schooling caused by the transportation problem, which is worsened by the lack of a school bus and inappropriate public transportation, is a common struggle faced by many indigenous families. This problem will intensify when the merger of smaller primary schools takes place.

4. Poor pre-school education

The lack of proper pre-school education weakens indigenous pupils’ academic competitiveness from an early stage. In Taiwan, most pre-school education is not free and even public nurseries are only partially funded through taxation. In Fu-shing Hsiang, almost every sub-village has its own nursery school run by the Fu-shing Hsiang Administration Office, and some of the primary schools provide a more expensive kindergarten education. With reference to the nursery schools, in which tuition fees are cheaper, one current and one former villager of this MIV stated:

Most of those nursery schools in mountains simply let children play, just taking care of them and preventing them from having accidents. There is very little teaching and learning undergoing. Simply let them play. Play this and play that.
Of course kids can learn something from playing. However, they are not as teaching-oriented as those kindergartens in cities. (Respondent C05)

The nursery schools are so so. They do not really teach. They just nurse and take care of children. They are bad in teaching. They are not like kindergartens, which teach everything, like the national phonetic alphabets and English letters……This makes a big difference. Now in primary school, the national phonetic alphabets are skipped and they teach Chinese characters directly. If you learn less in pre-school education, it makes a big difference. (Respondent A04)

Those children whose parents cannot afford to send them to kindergarten are deprived of a basic education at their pre-school age, which has a profound impact on their later schooling.

5. Impacts of poverty on education

Indigenous people’s lower economic capabilities also seriously restrain their ability to grasp the already limited opportunities. A mother talked about why her daughter would not leave Fu-shing Hsiang to pursue a senior high school education:

It is better not to ask this question. It is a shame. My daughter was to attend a senior high school in Da-xi…We were ready to send her there to study. But she spoke to me from her heart saying that she did not wish to go to high school. She said our family totally relies on father, and he does not earn very much. She said that if we agree, she will not go to senior high school. She said it is all right for a girl not to go to high school…We told her that we will support her fully, but she still insisted on not going to high school. From that point she started to do part-time work. We cannot force her to continue her education. (Respondent A08)

The abandonment of schooling owing to economic pressure is a common fact in indigenous communities. One Fu-shing villager observed the impact of economic difficulty on indigenous people’s education:

Economic ability makes a big difference to education. In our village, there are a lot of children who are keen to study. But the main problem is that their parents do not have a stable income. If their parents do not have a stable income, it is quite impossible for them to pursue a higher level of education......Sometimes I find children in our village are so pitiful. We have a lot of parents who cannot afford for their children to study. They cannot even
give their children the monthly school lunch fee of NT$400-500. (Respondent A05)

Another parent expressed her helplessness by saying:

We can do nothing without money. To be parents, we want our children to learn things that we couldn’t in the past. We have a mind to let them study as much as possible, but we cannot afford it......From the day my children were born, we wished that they would not repeat our failure. We wish that we could support them until they graduate from university. But we cannot simply imagine it without having the money. It is useless to just imagine. (Respondent A04)

The economic burdens faced by indigenous parents intensify once their children complete the nine years of compulsory education (six years of primary school and three years of junior high school). As mentioned above, there are only two senior high schools in the 30 MIVs. The majority of indigenous children in the mountains who graduate from junior high school must leave their villages to pursue a senior high school education in the plains. To support these children further intensifies indigenous parents’ economic stress. One head of village described supporting his daughter studying in the city:

She cannot commute from our home to the school on a daily basis, because the school is too far and there are very few bus services. The only way is to rent a room and live in the city. I have to pay her rent and living expenses. Although she has her tuition fee exempted, the rent and living expenses alone make me quite stressed. (Respondent B01)

This case and others confirm that there is an urgent need to establish senior high school education in the isolated mountains in order to clear away the obstacles barring indigenous pupils from accessing higher levels of education. However, the indigenous residents in the mountains claim that “we have not heard from the authority, although we suggested establishing a senior high school in Luo-fu (which is at the centre of Fu-shing Hsiang) countless times” (Respondent B03).

### 6. Racial prejudice revealed

The Han’s racial prejudice and discrimination against indigenous people has a significant impact on the indigenous people. Owing to the prevailing individual attribution of indigenous people's inferior socio-economic condition, the Han tend to feel discomfort with the various
governmental affirmative actions and the preferential treatments for the indigenous population. The following statement made by a Han deputy village head typifies this kind of accusation:

Their work discipline lags so much behind ours. The reason why we would discriminate against them is because they don't have enough self-respect. You need to respect yourself in order to gain others' respect. That's why we discriminate against them, because, to be honest, sometimes they are simply garbage. In the same governmental institution, the Han don't benefit, but indigenous people have had a lot of special treatment......As for the examinations for the civil service, indigenous people's special examinations are much easier to pass, creating more opportunities than for the Han......It is also the same for the indigenous students, whose thresholds of school entry examination are reduced and their tuition fees are subsidised. You see how good the government is! But I don't know why they still don't have self-respect......From an egalitarian point of view, I don't think they should be treated preferentially......As for the entry examination, in my viewpoint, I don’t think they deserve to have special treatment. The Han students also study very hard. We can pass, why couldn't they? Does this mean that they do not work at their studies? (Respondent B04)

This respondent justified her discrimination against the indigenous people without “being racist”, by employing such egalitarian principles as fairness and equal opportunity.

For the indigenous people in Taiwan, there is little chance of escaping racism because the whole climate in which the people live is permanently infected with a racist bias (Liou, 2006). Even in the educational system in the mountains, school teachers and the educational authorities (who are mostly Han), who ought to be more sensitive to racial issues, cannot avoid blaming the indigenous people and utilising some of the most widespread stereotypes. Two indigenous mothers complained:

They [the teachers and school principal] did discriminate against mountain people! They sneered at us......I remember in the past when we parents participated in our kids' school activities, they always said that if we spend all of our money on alcohol, how could we have spare money? But my husband and I did not drink any alcohol! Probably they occasionally saw us mountain people drinking, but definitely not every day. How could we have money to buy
alcohol? So, we don't like this principal very much! He somehow discriminated against us. (Respondent A03)

Some teachers seemed to look down upon us indigenous families. Sometimes we did have difficulty in raising our children, for example we could not always afford the tuition and lunch fees. They thought us indigenous parents did not look after our children well......They could not even imagine why we were not able to afford the tuition and lunch fees. Because they could not understand our life, they seemed to have a prejudice against us......In the parents' meetings, the teachers sometimes satirised us, saying that how come we had money to buy alcohol, but could not afford the lunch fees? We really did not like to hear that. It is not right to judge all of us simply by seeing some indigenous people drinking. (Respondent A04)

The Han teachers’ responses reveal that, through directly relating the stereotypes of the indigenous people—in this case the excessive drinking—with their economic condition, they could justify their prejudice.

Conclusion

In analysing and understanding the relative poverty of Taiwanese indigenous people, the emphasis has been considerably placed on their lack of human capital. If an indigenous person can have better education, it is natural to expect that, materially, they are more likely to achieve more in their life. It is widely believed that by guaranteeing equal opportunities of education—all positions in society are open to a competitive system of entry, on the basis of personal talent—the inequality in educational outcomes can be readily solved. However, this does not answer the question about why gaps still exist between the indigenous people and the majority Han in education attainment in Taiwan, despite the criteria of selecting students being non-discriminatory against indigenous people.

It is found in this study that the relationships between deprivations and underachievement in education are rather complicated. Taiwanese indigenous people have been trapped in a vicious circle of inappropriate education and poor economic conditions. On the one hand, their relatively deprived circumstances restrain them from utilising the existing educational resources. On the other hand, the unequal allocation of educational resources by
the state and indigenous people’s “underconsumption” of education impair the latter’s competitiveness in the labour market and their life-long earning capabilities.

It has been documented that the access to education is constrained for indigenous children by structural restrictions. The current allocation of educational resources deprives the indigenous people residing in the remote mountain areas of proper facilities and qualified teaching staff. This scarcity of educational resources in indigenous areas is prevalent in all levels of education. Indigenous people are forced to choose between enduring the inferior education resources in their areas and migrating to urban areas to pursue better education opportunities. The latter option adds extra financial pressure to an already disadvantaged indigenous population.

Although provided with a variety of preferential treatments, the enrolment rates of indigenous students in senior high school and higher education are less than those of non-indigenous Taiwanese students. This fact suggests that current affirmative actions to assist indigenes are not sufficient. Structural adjustments are thus required to make the notion of affirmative action worthy of the name. Educational affirmative action cannot be viewed as adequate if the resources allocated to indigenous students are worse or less than those enjoyed by Han students.

One important issue highlighted here is that the impact of indigenous pupils’ much impoverished family backgrounds on their education cannot be fully compensated by current preferential treatments. An increase in socio-economic resources for indigenous people would directly improve their economic conditions while, at the same time, indirectly enhance their ability to utilise educational resources. Assisting indigenous people to eliminate socio-economic gaps that exist between indigenous and the majority Han should be a policy of key importance. Redistributing resources to the poor through extending social security and public social services would help reduce poverty amongst the indigenous population.

Moreover, current preferential treatments for indigenous students are based on the argument that they are persistently disadvantaged in political, economic, social and economic arenas, and that through positive discriminative measures, they can be compensated. Although compensatory preferential treatments are not without value, using disadvantage as the principal criterion for affirmative action obscures the particular need for cultural integrity. Indigenous people should be treated preferentially not simply because they are a marginalised group—although this is true—but because of their legitimate historical right to protect and
maintain their cultural integrity. An emphasis on disadvantage implies a temporary treatment until such time as the disadvantage has been redressed. This also intensifies the stigmatisation of indigenous people as “inferior.”

Until relatively recently, indigenous cultures were not valued and their demise was brought about by programmes of assimilation. Even with these policies being abandoned or reversed, indigenous cultures remain threatened as a result of the lingering effects of those historical policies and because they typically hold a non-dominant position in larger societies. As the international community has come to consider indigenous cultures as equal in “value” to all others, the concept of “cultural integrity” has been developed to enable indigenous groups to counteract the previous undermining of their cultural survival and to guard against continued threats (Anaya, 1996:102). International Convention No. 169 and Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that governments must take affirmative steps to eliminate incidents of discrimination against indigenous individuals and indigenous group identity, and to guarantee respect for their integrity.

There is an urgent need to develop a critical multicultural education, which explicitly sets out to teach the history, accomplishments and culture of the indigenous people, and to emphasise the value of social and cultural diversity. Teaching the historical background and social circumstances of the indigenous people should counter the pernicious tendency to make dispositional—rather than situational and historical—attributions for their social disadvantages. Educating about the nature of prejudice and intergroup hostility, and how to alleviate this, should also be included in multicultural curricula. The current “Native Land Education” far from satisfies these requirements.

It is evident that affirmative action programmes can cause resistance and may reinforce prejudice against indigenous people. A major issue fuelling resistance appears to be the perception that such programmes violate basic principles of procedural justice and conflict with “equality of opportunity.” Policies must always be accompanied by programmes of institutional education, which clarify what the policies do to redress disadvantages fairly and to show practically the benefits of diversity for the institution. Current “affirmative action” programmes and education legislation in Taiwan do not meet these requirements. Although beneficial for the indigenous subjects, the preferential treatments in education focus on the reduction of the entry threshold or quota schemes. These oversimplified preferential schemes
are often seen by the Han as not being consistent with a true equality of opportunity. Without a supportive institutional education to explain the purposes of these schemes—to reverse the persistent disadvantages of the indigenous people and to bring about cultural diversity—the majority of the Han could falsely perceive the indigenous as privileged and thus as a burden to society.
Notes:

(1) These ethnic groups are Atayal, Saisiyat, Bunun, Tsou, Paiwan, Rukai, Puyuma, Amis, Yami (or Dawu), Thao, Kavalan, Truku, and Sakizaya.

(2) Indigenous people living in Taiwan Province (TP) account for 97 percent of the total indigenous population. 55 of the total 357 sub-county local governments (Hsiang, Zhen, Shih, or Qu) are categorised as indigenous Hsiang (villages). 30 of these are located in mountainous areas, the rest in the plains, as per the division of administrative areas. Around 73 percent of the indigenous population live in either a Mountain Indigenous Village (MIV) or a Plain Indigenous Village (PIV).

(3) For example, in 1998, annual expenditure approval of primary schools was set at:
   Administrative Expenditure = 20,000 + 600 x Size of School x 12
   General Expenditure = 60000 + 600 x Size of School
   Community Education = 12000 + 900 x Size of School
   Water, Electricity and Laboratory = 6000 x Size of School

(4) The Ministry of Education began to organise EPA schemes in 1994. Under such schemes, the government gave financial priority to those schools lacking educational resources. Ten indices were set to determine which schools were to be listed. In 1996, the Ministry of Education implemented 12 special subsidy schemes, aiming to advance the educational standard of those schools. Hereafter, the government adjusted the content of the schemes yearly, but the objective to promote educational opportunity for those disadvantaged areas has been maintained.

(5) This term refers to the process by which false beliefs are converted to practical realities (Merton, 1968). In the 1960s, Rosenthal and Jacobson randomly selected 20 percent of the children in a San Francisco elementary school and informed the relevant authorities, including teaching staff, that these children were intellectually promising: in their terms, “bloomers”. On a later verbal and reasoning test, the researchers found that the bloomers scored significantly higher than before, not, they concluded, because of their own capacities or effects, but because of the school’s heightened expectations of them and the extra attention they were accorded. Teachers accepted the researchers’ completely erroneous information and adjusted their behaviour toward the “bloomers” in such a way as to create conditions under which they would achieve good results (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). One might easily assert that with specific groups of pupils erroneously
defined as “slower learners”, that a reality will be created to fit the beliefs, or to fulfil the prophecy.

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