

# Mihumisang-Tribal Voices of Formosa

By Amy Eisenberg, Ph.D. CWIS Associate Scholar

*I was Research Fellow and International Conservation Liaison for developing national parks in the Central Mountains of Formosa with the Bunun tribe, whose sacred homeland is Yushan National Park and well beyond the park's borders. After witnessing, reporting and publishing the desecration of a Bunun tribal cemetery by Taiwanese hotel developers in the Bunun hot springs village of Tungpu (Eisenberg 2015), I was invited to serve as Research Fellow and Professor at Yushan Tribal College with the First Peoples of Formosa (Figure 1). It was a great privilege and an honor to live and work with Formosan Native Peoples who are proactively engaged in practicing and invigorating their cultural heritage. They deeply enriched my life and our world with their creativity, wisdom, grace, kindness and generosity. The First Peoples of Formosa are linguistically Austronesian and today they are approximately 2.3 percent of the population of the island, Formosa, which is largely Chinese. I asked my students to consult with their elders and write from the heart.)*



Figure 1. Yushan Tribal College students

Ilha Formosa in Portuguese means “Beautiful Island.” Formosa represents the Austronesian Indigenous Peoples’ intact cultures and languages before Formosa was occupied in 1895 by the Japanese, and before the Chinese take over. It is believed that the large Austronesian language family and the Austronesian peoples originated on Formosa. The Austronesian cultures and ethnic

groups began on Formosa. They migrated to Madagascar, in the Indian Ocean, Rapan Nui, in the Pacific, Hawai'i, New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia, as well as other Pacific islands. This beautiful and large Austronesian language family of the seafaring Polynesian Austronesian peoples of Southeast Asia - Oceania, East Timor, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines is one of the most geographically far and widespread language families in the world. European peoples, in search of spices, colonized most of the Austronesian nations in the Asia-Pacific region.



Figure 2. Pongso no Tao

The Tao live on beautiful Pongso no Tao – Island of the People, off the southeastern coast of Formosa (Figure 2). The Chinese call them Yami and their island Lanyu, Orchid Island. There are fewer than 4,000 Tao tribal people today. Pongso

no Tao, which is about 45 square kilometers, is volcanic, mountainous, and tropical. The Taiwan Power Company installed a large Nuclear Waste Dump on the Tao's wet taro agricultural land and fishing grounds in 1982 (Figure 3). There are numerous earthquakes in the region, which can damage the 98,000 rusting metal receptacles in which the nuclear waste is stored. Tremendous earthquake activity exists in this archipelago, from the Ryukyu Islands to the Philippines. The saline and humid marine environment is rusting the metal drums of nuclear waste.

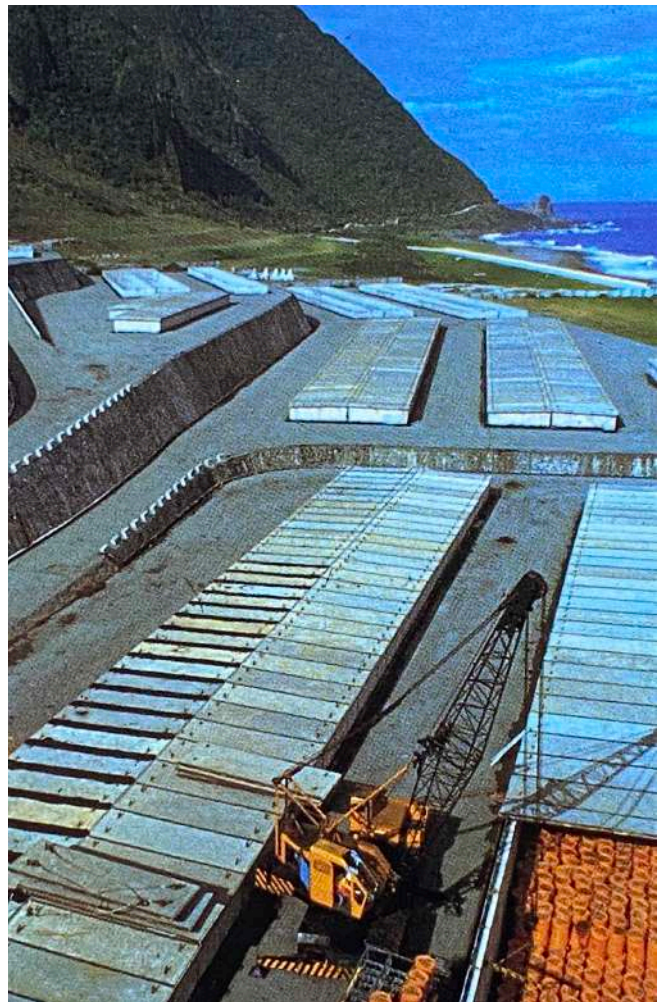


Figure 3. Nuclear Waste Dump



The Tao people are unanimously opposed to the nuclear waste storage on their island and have vehemently expressed their concerns. Many demonstrations have taken place with significant support from the Formosan tribes, scientists, and the academic community voicing opposition to the precariously stored nuclear waste (Figure 4). When the Taiwan government constructed the nuclear waste dump, Taiwan officials blatantly lied to the Tao people by telling them that a cannery was being created, which would employ the Tao people. Another falsehood told was that this was a temporary storage site for nuclear waste, and the Taiwan government would remove it shortly to a distant location. There was not a hospital on Pongso no Tao when the nuclear waste was deposited on the island.

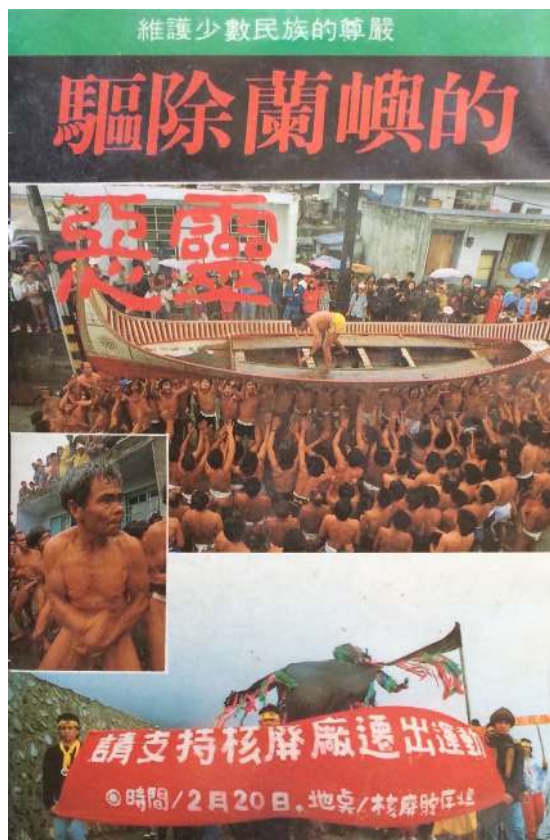


Figure 4. Pongso no Tao Anti-Nuclear Waste Demonstration

Following years of protests, concerns heightened about Taipower's storage of the rusting barrels of nuclear waste on Pongso no Tao, after the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in Japan. A radioactive leak was detected outside the facility. In 2012, hundreds of people protested outside the nuclear waste storage facility, calling on Taiwan Power Co. to remove the nuclear waste as soon as possible.

In March 2012, thousands of people staged an anti-nuclear demonstration in Taipei following Japan's massive earthquake and tsunami. Indigenous protesters demanded the removal of the rusting barrels of nuclear waste stored on Pongso no Tao. Authorities failed to deliver.

On November 29, 2019, Tao people and anti-nuclear activists protested in front of the Executive Yuan in Taipei, demanding that the government move its nuclear waste storage facility off Pongso no Tao.

In the Voice of the Tao:

"It is a tragedy that Tao children are being born into a radiation-filled environment."

*-Tao spiritual leader*

The Taiwan government's planned park on Pongso no Tao is a camouflage of a beautiful landscape covering a most noxious thing. Now we are being forced to fear our beloved natural environment. It's impossible to relocate nuclear waste. We are very angry about this. It's dangerous for our territories, for our ownership and for the environment around the island. We see it as an ethnic problem because the Taiwan

government didn't care about the Tao people, but when we began to protest, they began to think about our problem.

- *Syaman Rapongan, Tao tribe*

The government stated that it would remove the nuclear waste by 2016 but this did not occur. The Tao people have repeatedly expressed that the nuclear waste must be removed from Pongso no Tao. The nuclear waste dump has caused unceasing pain and trauma for the Tao people...

Although the storm at sea is dangerous, we can see the waves and feel the wind, to fight the storm. We cannot see or feel this nuclear radiation. How can we fight something we cannot see or feel? We know it can destroy our land, our life.

- *Tao tribesman*

Dear Amy, Thanks so much for your kindness. You help my people to be strong. We will continue to fight the nuclear waste. All the Tao people oppose the nuclear waste on Pongso no Tao. We hope that the Taiwan government nuclear officer does not put that waste in my village, and that they will take out that nuclear waste right away. When the Taiwan government put that nuclear waste on Pongso no Tao, they lied to my people, and now we know that it is very dangerous for the human body. But the Taiwan government still says don't worry about nuclear waste. We want the government to not deceive us. We ask them to take out the nuclear waste otherwise it will beget war for them.

- *Syaman Vongayan, Tao tribe Convener of the Mobilization of Pongso no Tao's Anti-Nuclear Movement.*

I feel for Taiwan Indigenous people. We are people too and equal in God's eyes. We need respect and freedom in society. I hope to help my tribe. I want to teach them to care for ourselves and our tribes. If the government is bad to us indigenes, I hope they take their opinion to protect indigenous people. Let indigenes not be slighted again.

- *Lawen, Pangcah tribe*

My dear teacher Amy, I am glad to share my feelings about my hopes, dreams and goals for my life and society, and our world. I will go back to the Indigenous village to serve God and my people. I wish to help them when they have troubles. So, while I am at school, I hope I can develop the sense of responsibility to my people and myself. For our society and our world, I hope we have truth, democracy and freedom in Taiwan's society. Then all of the tribes can have respect for each other, and all parties will have love. I hope the people on the earth will protect the earth because we are only one earth.

All of the indigenous people in Taiwan must help each other and unite together when we are in trouble. I want to teach science and confess to the government how to know and treasure indigenous people because indigenous peoples are especially intelligent. No body or group can threaten our freedom. Indigenous people do not hope other people will help us when we are in trouble.

- *Hisul, Bunun tribe*

I was born in the world as a Tayal girl and minority. My ideas glowed day by day. I found Taiwan's society was full of inequity. So, we must appreciate our indigenous sense and enhance human rights on Taiwan.

- *Mei-Liang, Tayal tribe*

Taiwan is a racist society. Indigenous cultures, land, woods and so on are almost approaching destruction...Let us awaken...and change our thinking, our lives, after teaching our daughters, our sons, our friends, our brothers and sisters. Every indigenous life in Taiwan must not lose our cultures, lands and woods, and we ask the people of Taiwan to give us our cultures, land, freedom, peace and justice for Taiwan indigenous peoples.

I am 21 years old. Until now, I understood little by little the meaning that people lived in the world. There was an important speech and idea on my mind before I entered Yushan, that we were inferior to other people; our tribe and culture were inferior. So, I aspired to be another "people"- I mean Taiwanese. They say they've got 5,000 years of good history and they offered us liberty, peace, equality and righteousness. We can own the fortune like them. So, I loved them more than I loved myself, my family, and my tribe.

This changed when I entered Yushan. I finally know that the dream I belonged to is terrible... We can see so many Native People living in an unrighteous society. There is a large percentage of our people involved in prostitution, unsung heroes on the ocean, developed heroes in the mines, and the poor man in the factory. Should we face the unrighteous treatment?

Now I know that my tribe is great and lovely (Figure 5). Native People are important figures in Taiwan's history. So now I will say that I like to be a Native person. On the earth, we are as other people. We are great and valuable, and we should have dignity, liberty, and real equal and righteous treatment.



Figure 5. Paiwan friend, Edan in his home

Maybe in the world, some other peoples are in the same situation as us, and under pressure they make the same statements. But we are united by a dream, a hope and a goal that we are real people. That is, give us that which we need, and for that we pray.

- *Legai, Paiwan Tribe*

I shall tell about Atayal society with my hopes. In ancient times, our ancestors were blessed because they were friendly (when no other country came to Taiwan). But the Chinese people and other countries came here. Our ancestors fell! Our backbone became weak! This is due to different cultures' or civilizations' imposing circumstances.



Now, the Atayal tribe is not able to adjust to a new life, so we cannot balance it and are not able to break through for betterment. So, we have many societal problems now. I hope to settle all kinds of problems one day... So, first I must study much wisdom and learn very well. The Atayal tribe must pray every time for Native people. All Native people must be of one heart. Dear tribes, we must stand up by ourselves.

– *Por-lo, Atayal tribe*

### A History about Tayal

Tayal is a kindhearted people. We live in beautiful Taiwan. When the Han Chinese people came here, Tayal's family was broken...

First, Han Chinese people brought politicians. Second, they made us become poor. The most important is that they killed our culture. They want all of the mountain peoples' cultures to become Chinese culture. Now I think we must build a new country. Let's break through it.

– *Por-lo, Atayal tribe*

Language is a feeling that's hard to forget. It has affected every people's lifeline. It has also spread in every epoch's life experiences. Paiwan language contacts the feeling between me, and my parents and sisters. It lifts up my grandmother's failing heart again. Paiwan is my first language. It makes me feel kind. I love it so much.

– *Vais, Paiwan tribe*

This is my dream - To learn more of my native culture and to help my people in the mountain settlements. We should not abandon wisdom. It will love, protect, and keep us safe.

– *Lo Shang, Atayal tribe*

Now I study at Yushan so I must know clearly my own identity, responsibility and the mission that I will bear. I hope we can see the real suffering of Native people and I will try my best to help them. I believe our life is concerned with everybody's life. So, we must pray for others who meet suffering every day. I feel that I'm not enough; everybody is not enough too. So, we must accept each other, help each other, share glory and bear hard for each other. At last, I wish, teacher, pardon our weaknesses. We love you forever.

– *Loyo, Sediq tribe*

I love my tribe and am most concerned with my tribesmen. The world is in a period of change and the humans' hearts are in a bad way... I love children very much. I respect childhood education and hope for compulsory education in my tribe.

– *Rahah, Atayal tribe*

High in the mountains, deep in thought are Indigenous Peoples. Where is justice flowing like a stream and righteousness like a riverine place? Taiwan indigenous people are in a tug-of-war. Our indigenous peoples' situation is very difficult. It is not fair to use the standards of one culture to measure another. We should cultivate an open-minded attitude, and rather than rejecting or disparaging people different from ourselves, we should work toward more fully understanding them.

– *Su-Lang, Sediq tribe*

I accepted the Chinese education system when I was a child but now, I feel it is to lose myself, my vision...The education system for me created

many problems. I can't believe myself. I can't believe our government because they limited our thought. I hope our government gives mountain tribes lots of freedom.

Today's government calls itself "democratic", but we don't have freedom really. Why do some people walk on the street demonstrating? Today's government calls, "To protect Taiwan tribal people." But we are "open" for them to exploit our human rights. So, Taiwan tribal people want to stand up! We do not want to let a government succeed with our extermination. We want to protect our cultures. Let it be continuous (Figure 6).

- *Vungad, Bunun tribe*



Figure 6. Bunun bingad pounding madu

I feel my tribe is absent of Native people's names. Parents call their children by their Chinese name. I hope Tayal people will stand up in this society.

- *Chi-was, Tayal tribe*

I hope to serve my tribe all of my life. This isn't easy, but it is full of many hardships that I must endure. When I see many evil incidents in Taiwan's society, let me find the cause that becomes a handicap to my tribe. I sense that our government does not appreciate native tribal cultures and despises native tribal life. I expect our government to have appreciation for native tribal life. The government is not doing what it can to preserve and enhance human rights on Taiwan. As far as I know, we are in a racial crisis. Taiwan's society is full of iniquity. Taiwan's minority peoples are impoverished. We must appreciate our indigenous sense and be respected by the majority.

- *Umas Tamapema, Bunun tribe*

In our days, the country is evil and brings our death. Some are not above telling lies and abusing power. In this age, we have death, but we have hope and life. In the evil world, it is like we are losing ourselves. One finds oneself in a dangerous situation. We are like losing servants. I am Sediq. We are peaceful people. We have a need for peace in the nation.

- *Taymo, Sediq tribe*

I am always dreaming that our country is a democracy with liberty and equality. By this, we can face the right treatment and not be despised as minority people. So, I always hope that Native

people will stand by our selves. Don't be bounded by the situation of society. Let us keep society's peace and the country's equality. Don't be controlled by others again. I am so glad that I am a Native person because I love my tribe.

- *SaVan, Paiwan tribe*

Our tribe will die by the Han Chinese people because they oppressed our people. They don't let us read about our culture and use our language in school, so we are losing our culture. We are the same as the bear that lost its roots. We are special, of God's chosen people. We must study hard any lesson, so we can help and teach our people.

- *Mwakay, Paiwan tribe*

I'm an indigenous Sediq person. I never liked myself and my tribe. I never thought my tribe was of wonderful, lovely, kind and great people. So, I was feeling ashamed of my tribe and my heart. I knew that I should take up my responsibility for indigenous peoples of all nations...We should not despise our own cultures, and to encourage everyone, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." (Figure 7). I think the cultures of Taiwan Native People are best worthwhile, and we are anxious to know the languages of every tribe. To reduce a language of any tribe is a loss because our languages are a favor of God. So, we can't slight maintaining ourselves, our own languages. Thank you very much, my teacher. You give me wisdom.

- *Shyounghay Tada, Sediq tribe*

Some people say: The indigenous peoples like drinking wine very much. Actually, they weren't originally drinkers at all. The drinking habit was



Figure 7. Sediq tribal elder

introduced from the lowlands. Do not let anyone look down on us because everyone has to be free and powerful. I want to make efforts to help the maltreated native people in Taiwan, with love for all who suffer hardships. I am very much concerned about the lives of native people in Taiwan, particularly if they are bullied or maltreated. The native people were the first to live in Taiwan and to receive suppression by the Kuomintang. We have not freedom and freedom of speech. It is not a good government. So, we have to raise one's self independently and self-confidently, and to act -We, the indigenous peoples of Taiwan.

- *E sour, Atayal tribe*

## Brothers, Begin

Brothers, awaken to the errors. Begin to deliver self and clansmen because after over thirty years, the Pangcah clansmen's language may disappear without a trace. Only .5 percent of three-year-old children to twenty years of age young women and men can speak Pangcah language and only 15



percent of twenty to thirty-five-year old Pangcah people can speak our language. This is our crisis. Now all Pangcah clansmen's families will be assimilated by the Chinese. Compatriots, awaken. We must unite together to exalt our own culture. Therefore, we want to begin from self and family. Parents and children, when we chat in the family, we must all use our own clansmen's language, and promptly teach children to speak Pangcah.

– *Kilang, Pangcah tribe*

I hope Taiwan's people will understand impartiality and human rights, but Taiwan hasn't these now. I dream that one day, Taiwan will be impartial for the Native peoples, but Taiwan's Native Tribes are not respected by the government. God gave us sense to manage our world and to put into operation God's just laws, but we haven't this equality. The government oppresses and deceives people. Original Natives live in Taiwan, but Natives are not much unlike the majority. In Taiwan's society, we are disappearing...God created humans and classified races of humans. These people must be respectful together. But Taiwan's Natives are wronged and are not venerated and esteemed...Taiwan is a beautiful place, but Taiwan changed by polluting the air, etc. and nuclear waste use. I hope Taiwan will have good ethics and will respect human rights and protect Native peoples. Afresh, anew. Get back to the beautiful island, Formosa!

– *Hagau Dunuh, Atayal tribe*

### **All Indigenous People are Superior Too**

My tribe is Paiwan. We are peaceful people. Every man likes to hunt animals. In the evil world, we find ourselves in a dangerous situation.

We are like bonded servants. Every people (tribe) is equal in God's eye. In Taiwan, although it is a large and complex government, it does not come true to protect the weak and small tribes. It forces us and robs us of our ancestral lands, woods, and much capital that we depend on for the life of our people. I feel that we must be brothers, though we are weak and too small. But we have the same beliefs: concern for our brothers and sisters, to protect our land, culture and capital. Still, we die. The land is my father's sweat and blood! The earth is my mother's heaven. Don't rob us of this.

– *Kual, Paiwan tribe*

I know that the Taiwan Indigenous Peoples' situation is not good at this time. So, I must endeavor to finish my learning responsibility and then go back to Native society to serve my tribe. I hope I can help my village and Native People when I enter my work. I do not belong to myself...I belong to my society...and I seek a social theory that is suitable to me from this special knowledge, take it and fulfill it in our society to bring benefit for Native Peoples. I hope Native Peoples and our society will become more harmonious, independent and more beautiful. The origin of this is built by many people who love their own tribe."

– *Kual, Paiwan tribe*

My tribe's name is Sediq. I like to live in the country. All of my family live in Jaming, a beautiful place. Dason is my neighboring village. Since the government used abnormal acts to impose and acquire this village for constructing an airdrome, the people's life is agony, embarrassment and resentment about this significant problem. Although the government looks down upon their power,

they acquired the village. Indigenous peoples or anyone cannot be indifferent. Let us seek assistance together for this problem. Can the village be free of trash for their life every day?

- *Mijue, Sediq tribe*

When I was a child, my grandfather spoke about the origin of the Tayal Tribe to me. He said, "Once upon a time there was a big btunux (stone in Tayal language) that rose up from the ground in Nantau. This is the origin of Tayal. Out of this stone was born one man and one woman, who are the ancestors of the Tayal Tribe."

- *Mizu, Tayal tribe*

My best hope and dream is to finish my studies...It is my greatest purpose that I go back to Native society and teach them how to help our society by ourselves and how to love our country. Tell them how to earn our place in this changing society. Minority people are mankind too. We must have our own places, rights and life.

### **I Love my Homeland**

Land is life. So, I love my homeland and more, and love every Native people. We have been living in Taiwan for over ten thousand years. I saw many people that were oppressed by different ethnoses. I want to struggle for our tribal people and homeland forever.

- *Mizu, Tayal tribe*

Long ago, in Taiwan, sightseeing places were all very clean and beautiful. But nowadays those sightseeing places that are special in the mountains, everywhere, any one of them, we'll see garbage influence and air pollution. Now, my village was originally a quiet, beautiful place.

Because of an era's "progress" we hear and look at all unpleasant noise and dust, rarely to hear birds singing songs. Noise! I hope we could better these bad points. Let my village turn back to God's so-called mountain flower garden. Because I love nature, it makes my mood pleasant (Figure 8).

- *Rth rth me, Rukai tribe*



Figure 8. Rukai weaver, southern Formosa

To live in the mountains, people are reenergized. A city life affects many young men. Genuine people may be deceived or taken in. Bring back the mountain. Keep mountain peoples' original usages. Let us enjoy life with prosperity and contentment. Enjoy God's grace for our country.

- *BeFuy, Atayal tribe*

### **Be Proud of Your Heritage**

I lived in Taipei for 19 years. When I was six years old, my family moved to Taipei from Ping-ton. For almost all of my life, I have lived in the city, so I didn't have much contact with our Paiwan culture. I can't speak Paiwan language well, so I am shy about that! But, every time someone asks me, "Are you Native People?" I always answer proudly, "Yes, I am!" Really, I am proud of my identity. We are a beautiful tribe. Our society is full of kindness, honesty and peace. Our ancestors hunted in the forest, planted on the land and had peaceful days. But it changed when Taiwan's government came here. They set some strange rules: No hunting, no planting on the land and even to enter our own place, we need a pass card. It is nonsense!

In fact, the assimilation policy of the government influenced all of Native society. It made us persecuted, caused loss of cultural heritage, economic collapse and it despised morals. So, we have a crisis that Native society will become extinct. When Amy talks about Native people, some didn't pay attention. We must restudy ourselves! This is our problem. We must wake up at once, and not be passive. I hope everyone considers our problem seriously.

At last, I will say thanks to Amy. I admire your courage and justice, and you stick to your principles. Moreover, you care so for our lives. Thank you very much. Really, we learned and got so much from you. You are our best friend. If you get a chance, we hope you come back to Taiwan and "fight back" with us. We love you!

*-Amos, Paiwan tribe*

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Inspired by Eisenberg, Amy. 2015. Desecration of a Bunun Tribal Cemetery in Tungpu, Taiwan. *Intercontinental Cry* - a publication of the Center for World Indigenous Studies. 7 April, 2015. <https://intercontinentalcry.org/desecration-of-a-bunun-tribal-cemetery-in-tungpu-taiwan/>



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



## Amy Eisenberg

Dr. Amy Eisenberg earned her Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Arid Lands Resource Sciences: Ethnoecology and Native American Studies from the University of Arizona. She has an MS and BS in Biology: Botany and Scientific and Fine Art. Amy is a scientific artist whose work is in the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation and has been exhibited internationally and nationally. She is a steward in the Tohono O'odham Haki:dag - sacred homeland of the Tohono O'odham Nation, and a botanist, ethnoecologist, organic sustainable agriculturist and agroforester and Associate Scholar with Center for World Indigenous Studies.

Amy teaches at the University of Arizona and was Licensed Researcher with the Hopi Tribe – Cultural Preservation Office on the International Repatriation of Hopi and Pueblo Human Remains and Sacred Funerary Offerings, which were taken from Mesa Verde and exported without permit or permission. They were in the National Museum of Finland since 1909 and came home in September 2020 for proper and rightful ceremonial reburial back in Mesa Verde where they were once laid to rest.

Amy was International Conservation Liaison and Research Fellow for Yu Shan National Park and Professor at Yushan Tribal College, Formosa.

Amy was Earth Island Institute Director of Conservation in the Yaeyama Islands of Japan.

Amy conducted participatory research with the Aymar Marka (Aymara Nation) in the Andes of Arica y Parinacota, Chile through USAID and the International Cooperative Biodiversity Group Project.

Amy was Agriculture and Community Development Cooperative Research and Extension Agent at Northern Marianas College and Organic Sustainable Agriculture and Agroforestry Researcher at the College of Micronesia.

As International Expert at the Research Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology and Visiting Professor in the Department of Biology and Environmental Sciences, Jishou University in Xiangxi Tujia – Miao Autonomous Region of China, Amy conducted collaborative UNESCO-LINKS UNPFII UNDESA research with the Kam people of China and ministries responsible for ethnic development.