

Transnational Indigenism in Southeast Asia

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The movement of indigenous peoples in Asia especially in South, East, and Southeast Asia, has become a prominent and powerful phenomenon over the past few decades. On a global level, indigeneity—the fact of originating or living in a particular place—has been used by marginalized peoples as justification for claiming and accessing basic rights. The origin of indigeneity may be found in colonized countries where European settlers permanently settled and gradually dominated indigenous or native peoples, particularly on the North American, Latin American, and Australian continents. Unlike many settler colonies in the West, native peoples in many former colonized countries and non-colonized countries are no longer dominated by recent settlers but are still being internally colonized by the present national governments (see Abeysekara 2011; Enloe 1977; Evans 1992; Prasit and Mukdawan 2021; Tan 2020; and Thongchai 2000). This has resulted in various native and ethnic groups identifying themselves as indigenous peoples and joining the international movement of indigeneity. In recent years, indigenism has become not only a common ideological consciousness but also a transnational movement in Southeast Asia, operating at different levels of networking. Considering this, my basic questions concern why indigenism is popular among various ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, what it stems from, and how it is being used to connect with indigenous peoples' movements in other parts of the world. It is my belief that self-identifying as indigenous peoples, among marginalized ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, enhances the opportunity for power negotiation with national government and relevant agencies, and for international cooperation with concerning human rights claims. To understand these issues, we need to trace the historical development of indigeneity in former settler colonies and the influence of its achievements on the indigenous movements in Southeast Asia. Particular attention needs to be paid to the limited scope for participation of

ethnic minority and marginalized groups in both the national and ASEAN arenas. Within the framework of the Southeast Asian region, the concept of transnationalism will be employed in my analytical framework.

The creation of modern nation-states in Southeast Asia emerged at the beginning of colonialism in the region, from the 1780s to the 1890s. Prior to this, the political and government systems in the region were known as tributary states, mandala systems, galactic polities, or candle states. There were also no clear geographical boundaries between states or kingdoms. Instead, there were overlapping power boundaries and multiple sovereignties of premodern states in Southeast Asia. The creation of the “geo-body,” to use Thongchai Winichakul’s term (1994, 129), of each modern state was based on modern cartography brought to the region by European experts. Borderline demarcation and agreement signing established clear boundaries with neighboring states. Thus, people living near a state’s borders, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, became subjects of the state. The central government was entirely controlled by either the colonial ruler or the leader who mainly represented the mainstream group in the state, while other minority and marginalized groups became ethnic groups in the modern state. In the case of former non-settler colonies in Southeast Asia, government leaders in the postcolonial period, after World War II, also came from major groups.

Throughout the region, nation-building mainly favors the identities of the mainstream group rather than equal participation and representation of diverse ethnic groups. Whether states adopt segregation or assimilation policies, ethnic peoples have been marginalized as a result, their basic rights treated differently. Even in countries that have adopted assimilative ideologies like Thailand, the successful assimilation of ethnic peoples into mainstream society has resulted in the loss of their ethnic identity. For instance, the longer ethnic students are enrolled in compulsory school, the less they are able and willing to speak their own ethnic or local languages. For states that have adopted multicultural policies like Singapore, unequal treatment may still be found but to a lesser degree. Indeed, development projects of states toward ethnic peoples often contain a hidden agenda of domestication and assimilation. Subsequently, struggles of ethnic groups for more equal rights occur on various occasions and in various forms. Some groups may use soft approaches to negotiate with state governments, while others may take up arms to fight against state forces. Previously, each group or community would normally react to state forces alone. But in the post-Cold War era and the age of globalization since the 1990s, interethnic and transnational cooperation has taken place among marginalized ethnic groups in Southeast Asian countries. Links have also been

made between international movements and the achievements of indigenous peoples in Western colonized countries. Such common indigeneity movements and ideologies have been termed “indigenism” (Niezen 2003).

Unlike ethnonationalism, indigenism, as stated by Ronald Niezen (*ibid.*, 9), “is not a particularized identity but a global one that acts almost the same way as ethnic particularism.” Ethnonationalism is an ideology that centers on a single ethnic group, with distinction from others, while indigenism “identifies a boundary of membership and experience that can be crossed only by birth or hard-won international recognition. It links local, primordial sentiments to universal category.” Essentially, he points out that “the indigenous peoples’ movement has arisen out of the shared experiences of marginalized groups facing the negative impacts of resource extraction and economic modernization and the social convergence and homogenization that these ambitions tend to bring about.” Indigenism exists on both practical and ideological levels. For the latter, according to Niezen, “With little public awareness, and with the obvious terminology (“indigenism”) little used up to this point, an international movement has led to the creation of an important new “ism” (*ibid.*). One of the distinguishing marks of this movement is the extent to which, unlike ethnonationalism, it is grounded in international networks. To reiterate, indigenism is a transnational ideology shared by groups of people of different backgrounds who intend to claim indigeneity worldwide, although they exist in distinct contexts.

The concept of transnationalism describes a situation in which nations and communications are connected, regardless of the geographical distances that separate people, typically by new communication technologies that facilitate flows and networks of people, goods, and services (Turner 2008, 433). According to Steven Vertovec (2009, 3), transnationalism refers to “sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders—business, non-government organizations, and individuals sharing the same interests.” The collective attributes of such connections, their processes of formation and maintenance, and their wider implications are referred to broadly as transnationalism.

Occasionally, transnationalism is associated with the notions of “network society” (Castells 2000) and international mobility (Urry 2000). One such process is “the emergence of cross-national political and institutional networks that deploy the discourses of decolonization, human rights, and other universalistic tropes to advance the interests of heretofore marginalized groups” (Smith 2003, 19). In the case of indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia, they have

adopted the transnational ideology of indigenism in their responses to modern nation-state domination.

Worldwide Emergence of Indigeneity

The movement of indigenous peoples emerged following the recognition of universal human rights and the foundation of international institutions. Initially, the rise of indigeneity derived from the relations between indigenous peoples and colonial powers in the colonized continents on which European settlers have permanently settled and later exerted dominant power over the native peoples. In the non-colonized context and postcolonial era, it can be argued that the indigeneity movement has arisen because of the internal colonialism of the modern nation-state that marginalizes minority groups. In the case of Southeast Asian, indigenous identification and movements have been influenced by such movements in Western colonized countries that have been recognized by international institutions and laws in the context of globalization.

Initiatives of indigenous movements that attracted international attention began in Canada following the end of World War I. Various groups of native peoples had inhabited Canada for more than 12,000 years before European settlers immigrated into the area in the early fifteenth century. These settlers, mainly British and French, gradually occupied the territories and lands of native peoples and dominated them economically, politically, culturally, and socially. Although grievances against colonial and state domination had been growing among native peoples in Canada for a long time, their petition reached international institutions only with the foundation of the League of Nations after World War I, based on “President Wilson’s promise of self-determination for nations and the rights of minorities to protection” (Niezen 2003, 31). This is also why native peoples in Canada identify themselves as “first nations,” “native,” or “indigenous” peoples. Among the Six Nations of the Grand River Land near Brandford, Ontario, Levi General Deskaheh, chief of the Younger Bear Clan of the Cayuga Nation, became the representative for lobbying at the League of Nations in Geneva in 1923–24. Unfortunately, he passed away in the United States several months after leaving Geneva. Although the dispute with Canada over indigenous rights had not been resolved, Deskaheh’s effort was heard by the international organization (Niezen 2003, 36). However, the League of Nations did not act on indigenous issues up until the late 1930s and the start of World War II.

A new wave of indigenous movements caught the attention of international organizations after the founding of the United Nations in 1945 and its agencies within the framework of human rights. Racism, discrimination, and fascism during World War II were major concerns for the United Nations, led by the United States. Besides the dismantling of European colonies in other parts of the world, the domination by colonial and postcolonial governments over native peoples was also determined to be a human rights violation based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948. Two additional instruments of human rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, were adopted by the United Nations in 1966. These instruments formed the basis for self-determination on the rights of indigenous peoples in those postcolonial countries where they were still dominated and assimilated by mainstream European settlers and new state governments. According to Niezen (2003, 42), among the civil rights movements in the United States in the 1960s were “pan-Indian” or “pan-indigenous” groups. In 1974 and 1975, the first international indigenous organizations—the International Indian Treaty Council and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP)—were founded in the US and Canada. The latter was the initiative of George Manuel of the National Indian Brotherhood of Canada in response to the Trudeau government’s promulgation of a White Paper proposing the elimination of Indian status and repeal of the Indian Act (first passed in 1876 and later amended) (Perry 1996, 150).

In addition to those in Canada and North America, indigenous peoples in Australia and Latin America played crucial roles in transnational indigeneity. The situation in Australia was quite similar to that in North America, where European settlers had settled permanently, occupied the land, and gradually dominated indigenous peoples in various ways. In the 1780s, the first British settlement was established in Sydney by Captain Arthur Phillip. Later, Australia became a British penal colony mostly inhabited by prisoners. Eventually, however, settlers included not only convicts but also people who sought new economic opportunities, especially during the gold rush. Before the settlement of Europeans, the native peoples or Aborigines had been living in different localities for tens of thousands of years. The invasion of European settlers not only led to widespread violence and land-grabbing but also the unintentional spread of new diseases among the Aborigines. Like the experience of Canada and the United States, European settlers in Australia also carried out cultural genocide against Aborigines in the form of acts aimed at assimilation. Boarding

schools and missionary work were the prominent mechanisms for weakening Aboriginal cultures.

Civil movements among Aborigines in response to colonization occurred in different forms. As reviewed by Francesca Merlan (2005), from pre-World War II to the 1960s, protests existed in the form of ritual action, such as messianic cults, rather than practical action targeted at the invaders. However, progressive indigenous activism had been operating since the turn of the twentieth century. The Native Union in Western Australia and the Australian Aborigines' League (AAL) were founded in 1926 and 1932, respectively (Clark 1965, 91; Haebich 1992, 269). In 1958, the Federal Council of the Advancement of Aborigines together with the Aboriginal Advancement Leagues of Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia were formed with the basic task of promoting equal citizenship for Aborigines. In this way, the federal government set up a clear mandate on Aboriginal affairs and the self-determination of Aborigines in the late 1960s to early 1970s. Yet, land rights issues were raised by Aborigines against mining and land-grabbing in the same period. In response, both local and national governments initiated the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in the 1960s to 1980s.

In Latin America, indigenous peoples were exploited in both colonial and postcolonial times despite every country gaining independence after World War II. However, indigenous peoples continue to face troubles concerning environmental degradation and the intrusion of the national government in terms of economic, political, and social domination. According to Guillermo de la Pena (2005), prominent indigenous peoples' movements in Latin America have existed since the 1970s. The term "indigenismo" or indigenous people was adopted to refer to people who lived outside the "civilized" nation, in the old communities and in the wild frontier, to replace words like "Indians" and "tribes" (Pena 2005, 721). The movement for self-identification and determination, according to Pena, was also influenced by the globalization of neoliberal indigenism, a movement through which indigenous people are "not claiming political independence or artificial isolation but are demanding an inclusive definition of the nation where the right to cultural diversity is an essential aspect of citizenship" (*ibid.*, 732–33).

The Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) (2014) stated that "two-thirds of the approximate 370 million self-identified indigenous peoples are in Asia, enriching the region's enormous cultural and linguistic diversity." AIPP also pointed out that governments refer to indigenous peoples collectively as ethnic minorities, hill tribes, tribal people, and highland people. Those terms have negative connotations of primitiveness or backwardness and inferiority

(ibid., 1). Both colonial and postcolonial governments played crucial roles in the creation of “otherness” and marginalization towards them (Thongchai 2000). Their land and other natural resources have been strictly controlled and occupied by state governments and outsiders. They have less access to basic services and are subject to assimilation to the national culture by long-term government development projects. Similar impacts to those experienced on the abovementioned continents cause marginalized peoples in Asia to define themselves as “indigenous peoples” and join the international movement of indigeneity.

Civil movements for indigeneity in Asia, mainly in East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, have been present for decades. Previous studies on indigeneity in Asia focused primarily on case-by-case issues, country by country (Baird 2016; Dunford 2019; Prasit 2019, Morton and Baird 2019; and Theriault 2019), compared with this study that looks at the Southeast Asia regional movement of indigenous peoples. I would argue that the transnational movement of indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia empowers the marginalized native peoples at national, regional, and global levels.

Transnational Indigenism in Southeast Asia

The existence of transnational indigenism in Southeast Asia only began in the early 1990s, in contrast to indigenism in Western countries that gained momentum after World War I and went on to attract international attention after World War II. Given this slow start, I set out to discover why ethnic groups in Southeast Asia identified themselves as indigenous peoples so late, especially considering they were no longer subject to colonial occupation in the region. I was also interested in exploring how indigenous peoples, networks, and institutions mobilized the indigenism movement on different levels.

Becoming Indigenous Peoples in Southeast Asia

“For 50 years, genuine people’s participation in the ASEAN has been severely limited. Despite the civic organizations’ efforts to initiate engagements for constructive dialogues alongside Asean’s claims of having more inclusive and meaningful spaces, Asean remains largely inaccessible to people.” This statement was made by Jelen Paclarin, chair of the steering committee of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People’s Forum (ACSC/APF), in Quezon City, the Philippines, on November 15, 2017 (Agoncillo 2017). Parallel to the annual ASEAN Summit rotationally hosted by member countries and attended

by leaders, officers of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum have also organized people's organizations and social movements. Ideally, meetings are planned annually by the ASEAN People's Forum in the country that hosts the ASEAN Summit. However, it is difficult and, in some cases, impossible to hold the ASEAN People's Forum in certain countries, such as Laos, Vietnam, Burma, and Cambodia. This explains why one of the forums was held in the Philippines in mid-November 2017. Civil society leaders who gathered at that conference represented marginalized populations, including farmers, low-skilled workers, women, indigenous peoples, and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. What they wanted was genuine inclusion in ASEAN meetings for leaders to hear people's concerns from the ground. Based on my observation, transnational indigenism in Southeast Asia is a response to ASEAN leaders' lack of attention to marginalized peoples. The movement also stems from international indigeneity in Western colonized countries in the context of globalization.

In responding to ASEAN, which primarily emphasizes regional cooperation of state leaders and the business sector, the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), an international organization that represents indigenous peoples in Asia, points out the lack of participation of indigenous peoples. ASEAN has three pillars: the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). According to AIPP, each of these pillars has its own blueprint regarding policies, technical arrangements, action plans, and review mechanisms. The blueprints also establish clear targets and timelines for implementation and have pre-agreed flexibilities to accommodate the interests of all ASEAN member countries. However, in the implementation of each pillar, indigenous peoples are not included, even though they are affected in various ways by regional cooperation.

The first pillar, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), covers political development, the shaping and sharing of norms, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, postconflict peacebuilding, and combating terrorism. ASEAN maintains the principles of noninterference, consensus decision-making, national and regional resilience, and respect for sovereignty. It also affirms the principle of nondiscrimination when it comes to gender, race, religion, language, and social and cultural background in participating in, and benefitting from, the process of ASEAN integration and community-building. Importantly, its aspirational goals cover tolerance, respect for diversity, equality, and mutual understanding. To deal with these issues, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) was established.

However, according to AIPP and related networks, “its present mandate is too weak in terms of human rights protection. It does not have the mandate yet to look into cases of human rights violations and enforce adherence to human rights standards among member states, especially the protection of the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples” (AIPP, IWGIA and Forum-Asia 2010, 17). For example, customary laws of indigenous peoples across ASEAN are not even acknowledged or recognized. Their self-identification as indigenous people has not even been officially recognized by most of the member countries of ASEAN. Furthermore, indigenous leaders who play vital roles in protecting their basic rights have been killed, or have disappeared, or have been suppressed by state authorities.

The second pillar, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), aims to transform ASEAN into a stable, prosperous, and highly competitive region with equitable economic development and reduced poverty and socioeconomic disparities. Four main aspects under this pillar include: (1) a single market and production base; (2) a highly competitive economic region; (3) a region of equitable economic development, and (4) a region fully integrated into the global economy. Despite this, the more cooperation the AEC has developed, the more indigenous peoples have become disadvantaged or even victimized since those who benefit comprise the business sectors. As pointed out by AIPP and other organizations, “the market driven economy being promoted by the AEC endangers indigenous communities as our lands and territories will be used and exploited in the name of development that is not benefiting us” (AIPP, IWGIA and Forum-Asia 2010, 17). Their diverse ways of life to achieve self-sufficiency, based on land and resources, were completely ignored. Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for indigenous communities on development projects was not fairly conducted.

The last pillar is the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). It seeks to forge a caring and sharing society that is inclusive and where the well-being, livelihood, and welfare of the people are enhanced. ASCC aims for the following: (1) human development; (2) social welfare and protection; (3) social justice and rights; (4) ensuring environmental sustainability; (5) building the ASEAN identity, and (6) narrowing the development gap. However, according to AIPP and other organizations, it “fails to acknowledge sustainable livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples. Further, the reference to regional food security ignores the production aspect, i.e. the threats of trade liberalization to small farmers and traditional livelihoods, and thus food security of Indigenous Peoples” (AIPP, IWGIA and Forum-Asia 2010, 18). It appears that only mainstream education

has been promoted, while state governments ignore promoting diversity in languages, such as the provision of mother tongue education.

AIPP and related institutions of indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia were thus set up to play crucial roles in promoting the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples in the region and to aim for the recognition of collective rights and identity by the ASEAN community. These grassroots networks and organizations have gradually imposed international indigenism concerning ethnic and marginalized peoples in the Southeast Asian region. A good example of the long-term influences of indigenism in Southeast Asia is the common term for referring to those existing names and meanings mainly coined and defined by outsiders. According to AIPP and other organizations:

Some governments in Southeast Asia use names to refer to us collectively—like “ethnic minorities,” “hill tribes,” “native people.” There are also the names given by outsiders, some of which are not appreciated by many of us, since they often imply notions of cultural inferiority, being “primitive” or “backward.” Examples are *chuncheat* (meaning “ethnicity,” or literally “national people” in Cambodia) or *sakai* (literally meaning “slave”) used in Thailand for some hunter-gatherer groups. We ourselves though prefer to use the names which our ancestors have given us.

We are using the term “Indigenous Peoples” with a meaning that is different from that given in many dictionaries, or how it is understood by many governments. Over the past decades, the concept of Indigenous Peoples has evolved beyond the original meaning found in dictionaries, and it is now well established in international law. That is why we are writing it with capital initial letters. It is a foreign term for most of us, and it is often difficult to translate into our own languages (AIPP, IWGIA, and Forum-Asia 2010, 2).

Indigenism in Southeast Asia has gradually been influenced by indigenous movements in Western countries which have endorsed various international legal instruments, starting with the ILO Convention 169, which refers to both Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Peoples. Others are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The most direct and recent mechanism is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by the General Assembly on September 13, 2007. Among the above

instruments, the ILO Convention 169 and UNDRIP apply most to indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia since they explicitly refer to collective rights (AIPP and Ikap 2009, 3).

According to AIPP, there are common issues shared by indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia regarding transnational movements in the region (Maranan and Tessier 2015, 44–55). The first concerns the legal recognition of state governments in the region. Among the ten member countries of ASEAN, only the Philippines, Malaysia, and Cambodia recognize indigenous peoples at the constitutional level. In other countries, they are invisible in the fundamental law of the land and others, to the extent that the term “indigenous peoples” even remains contentious (*ibid.*, 44).

Although some countries acknowledge the existence of indigenous peoples, the idea that they are distinct people who have been discriminated against and marginalized by state policies and the domination of mainstream groups has been ignored. Such denial, therefore, does not meet the international definition of being indigenous peoples and the principle of social justice regarding discrimination against them as affirmed by the UNDRIP. For those countries that do not recognize the existence of indigenous peoples, state governments claim that either there are no indigenous peoples or that every group is indigenous since both marginalized and mainstream groups have lived side-by-side for a long time. Taking Thailand as an example, the minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Mr. Warawut Silapa-Archa, insisted that there are no indigenous people but only ethnic groups in Thailand (Nicha 2021). Similarly, the director-general of the Department of Social Development and Human Security gave an opening speech on the celebration of World Indigenous Peoples’ Day in 2011 in which he stated that the Thai are also an indigenous ethnic group since Thai people have inhabited Thailand for a very long time. Whether or not they are recognized as such, indigenous peoples are still being discriminated against or assimilated by the national governments’ policies and domination of mainstream groups.

The second common issue is the violation of indigenous peoples’ right to land, territories, and resources. According to legal thought and general understanding, land and resources belong to the king or state but can be granted to individuals and legitimate organizations to own and utilize, such as in the case of Thailand (Sophon 1978, 45). Therefore, it is the right of the state to revoke private ownership of land and resources. Indigenous peoples mainly reside in areas that are rich in natural resources. Their perception is that land and natural resources belong to sacred spirits. Humans only occupy and utilize them temporarily. In terms of ownership, a small piece of land may belong to a

family but the vast area is owned by the community. It is a matter of collective rights. Violation of indigenous peoples' rights to land, territories, and resources occurs because of state governments' development projects and privatization. Hydropower construction, road construction, forest conservation declarations, land and resource concessions, and issuing of land titles to outside private owners are major examples of violations of indigenous peoples' rights to land, territories, and resources.

The third issue concerns violations of the rights of indigenous women and children. In dealing with both the state and their own communities, women and children are the most vulnerable groups. Their rights need to be protected and fulfilled. Indigenous women are traditionally dominated by men in various ways. They are the first group to face hardships in finding food if laws on natural resource conservation are imposed by state officers. Lack of formal education and language barriers are further obstacles to women's access to basic services, such as healthcare provided by state officials. Indigenous children normally have less opportunity for formal education because of their location in remote communities and their poverty. Those who have enrolled in school often face discrimination because of their distinct culture and stereotypical views of them. State-sponsored schools are mainly dominated by government curricula aimed at nation-building. The longer indigenous children stay in school, the more they lose their indigenous knowledge and identity.

The final common obstacle common among indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia is the lack of access to social services. Since they reside in remote communities, they are often denied state government development projects and basic services, including education and healthcare. Living in the forest area makes it difficult for state agencies to bring development projects and social services to them. In the case of Thailand, large numbers of indigenous people still lack Thai citizenship, which means they cannot get access to basic services provided by the state. For those who can access social services, the ways in which they are treated are unequal because they are perceived as lower status groups. Therefore, lack of access to social services and unequal treatment are common problems of discrimination faced by indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia.

In the face of such common problems, indigenous peoples in the region have no choice but to struggle for more equal treatment, especially from their respective government agencies. Forming their own networks and organizations is an essential strategy to empower themselves and contest state power, especially as governments in Southeast Asia have to follow international laws

pertaining to indigenous peoples (see more details in Feiring et al. 2014; Prasit 2019; and Maranan and Tessier 2015).

Famark Hlawning, the secretary-general of the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), has said that one initiative of the movement was “to lobby the international community to support, as possible as it is, to those Chins who are fighting for our human rights. From the standpoints of the international human rights law, we have found out that we belong to the ethnic indigenous group” (interview Chiang Mai, November 20, 2019). According to him, the definition of indigenous people includes those who are in the current place with their history and before the invasions, those who are now dominated by mainstream society, and those who have their unique identity based on their cultural civilization and vowed to maintain that identity handed down to the next generations. Importantly, to him the term “indigenous people” refers to people in a society that is subject to domination, either by a European colony or the current nation-state. As he explains: “People usually think that colonizers come from across the sea. But, in the case of current colonization in Myanmar, there is no need to cross the sea. Burmese colonization is without crossing the sea. We also see the colonization of the neighboring countries without crossing the sea. Nowadays, colonization is easily seen through the policy and institutionalization. Burmanization is a form of colonization.”

In the case of Thailand, the only country in Southeast Asia that has not been colonized by a European country, indigenism has been adopted and widely expanded for several decades. According to Sakda Saenmi, director of the IMPECT Association and secretary of the Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NIPT), the definition of indigenous people in the Thailand context is based on several components. The first is a cultural identity that has been inherited over a long history. According to him, “we are indigenous peoples because we want to preserve our identities such as culture, language, ritual, ceremony, customary law, and lifestyle. These are the issues that indigenous peoples would like to maintain and take forward from their history to the future.” The second component, as addressed in UNDRIP, is that “we are not the major dominant group but we are small groups. We are people who are being disadvantaged through government policies. Unlike other colonized countries, we are dominated by government policies which impact our identity and ways of life.” The last one is self-identification. According to Sakda Saenmi, “We should have a sense and rights to identify ourselves who we are.” He emphasizes that “we have a common aspect of being part of the movement of indigenous peoples in Thailand. Movements of the indigenous assembly of Thailand help to concrete action on the advocacy of indigenous’ self-determination.” To him,

people who have been involved with the indigenous movement may not have any questions about the concept of indigenous people, while those who have never participated in the movement may need to ask themselves who they are and what they would like to be—indigenous people or hill tribes (interview with Sakda Saenmi, Chiang Mai, November 21, 2019).

Overall, the birth of indigeneity in Southeast Asia at the national level has been caused by the marginalization of indigenous peoples and the violation of their rights as a result of development and nation-building. This contrasts with the indigeneity movement in Western colonized countries, which was a reaction to the European settlers who took power and dominated native peoples. At the regional level, the movement of indigenous peoples is a response to the lack of knowledge of the ASEAN community regarding their common problems. Moreover, at the international level, the emergence of indigenism in Southeast Asia was influenced by the progress and achievement of indigenous movements in Western colonized countries in the context of globalization. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, young leaders of ethnic groups in South and Southeast Asia established linkages with counterparts in Western colonized countries and learned about the international laws governing indigenous peoples. Among various indigenous networks and organizations in Southeast Asia, the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) has played an essential role in mobilizing transnational indigenism in the region.

The Transnational Indigenism Movement in Southeast Asia

Although various international organizations are involved in the transnational movement of indigenism in Southeast Asia, the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) has played the greatest role in propelling the movement. I have been indirectly involved with AIPP since the early 1990s, observing its development, but only recently have begun to carefully examine it closely. In this section, I want to show how indigenous peoples, networks, and institutions mobilize the movement on different levels in the region. Based on my longtime experience and recent fieldwork, I conclude that AIPP as a regional organization and other national and ethnic organizations are essential mechanisms that drive the indigenous movement in various activities and occasions. Throughout the past decades, peoples who have joined pertinent activities have gradually adopted indigenism. The movement has also been gradually introduced to the public and acknowledged by some state agencies in the region.

At the regional level, the foundation and roles of AIPP have led to the current transnational indigenism movement in Southeast Asia. AIPP was founded in Bangkok in 1992. During the 1970s and 1980s, prior to AIPP, Christian and international nongovernmental organizations bridged indigenous peoples in the South Asian and Southeast Asian regions. According to Morton and Baird (2019) and Dunford (2019), Luingham Luithui, an ethnic Naga leader from India, was one of the key founders of AIPP. After attending a few forums on ethnic minorities in the Philippines, Thailand, and elsewhere, Luithui understood the problems faced by ethnic minorities, who later defined themselves as “indigenous peoples” in South and Southeast Asia. The starting point of transnational indigenism was the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum in Chiang Mai, organized by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), an NGO, in August 1988. Luithui became the first chair of the forum. Initially, he and other AIPP founders intended to set up their head office in Bombay, India. However, he later decided to base AIPP in Bangkok since the relationship between state and ethnic minorities was better than in other countries (Morton and Baird 2019, 17). Scholars and leaders of NGOs in civil movements also supported the establishment of AIPP. Luithui began to contact young leaders of indigenous peoples who actively ran local and national NGOs in South and Southeast Asia. He then decided to move the secretariat of AIPP to Chiang Mai in 1993 because NGOs on ethnic issues were mainly based in northern Thailand (*ibid.*), as well as IWGIA, an international indigenous NGO from Denmark. There were thus several networks that fitted well in supporting the future movements of AIPP.

In Chiang Mai, both religious and non-religious NGOs on highland ethnic minorities or hill tribes had existed since the 1980s. Prasert Trakarnsupakorn, the former director of Inter-Mountain Peoples’ Education and Culture in Thailand (IMPECT), was one of those pioneers who had good connections with foreign activists and agencies. He had opportunities to present ethnic minority issues, especially the declaration of national parks on highland areas inhabited by ethnic groups, at the Asia Dialogue in Japan and the Philippines (interview, Chiang Mai, June 15th, 2018). According to Prasert, AIPP’s forum was organized in Penang in 1992. By that time, he was the director of the Inter-Mountain Peoples’ Education and Culture in Thailand (IMPECT) and joined the forum, also attended by Tuanjai Deetes, the founder of the Hill Area and Community Development Foundation which was based in Chiang Rai (interview with Tuanjai Deetes, Chiang Mai, November 21, 2019). Through that connection, Luithui found new alliances which worked with ethnic minority peoples in northern Thailand, which led to his decision to base the secretariat of AIPP in Chiang Mai.

It should be noted that the forums and civil movements for human rights and indigenous issues of the early 1990s were opportunities for ethnic leaders who were NGO workers in northern Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia, including other continents, to be united. In 1992, representatives of ethnic networks organized forums on both ethnic group and interethnic group levels in northern Thailand, brainstorming problems faced by their people, then brought the results and recommendations for joining the People's Plan for the 21st Century to Bangkok in December of that year. The following year, Prasert Trakarnsupakorn was the only representative from Thailand to attend and speak at the forum on the International Year of the World's Indigenous People in New York (interview, Chiang Mai, June 15th, 2018). In the meantime, Kittisak Rattanachangsri, director of the Indigenous Peoples' Foundation for Education and Environment (IPF), also joined the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal People in the Tropical Forests (IAITPTF), whose secretariat rotates among different continents and is currently based in Nairobi, Kenya (interview, June 18th, 2018). Subsequently, the first secretariat office of this alliance was set up in Chiang Mai in the mid-1990s. Later, before the office moved out of Asia, he and other colleagues, including myself, set up the Indigenous Peoples' Foundation for Education and Environment (IPF). In addition, Chiang Mai was also the base of the regional office of International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) since early the 1990s.

After AIPP had permanently established itself in Chiang Mai, young indigenous leaders from Malaysia, the Philippines, Nepal, India, and other countries were brought in to staff this regional organization. Jennie Lasimbang, an indigenous leader from the Sabah state of Malaysia, served as the secretary-general of AIPP for two terms, four years each term. According to Prasert and Kittisak, Jennie Lasimbang played a crucial role in setting up the structure of AIPP, networking with regional indigenous organizations and networks, and raising funds for the organization. Environmental issues were highlighted under her administration. The second secretary-general of AIPP was Joan Carling from the Philippines. She also served for two terms, focusing on international linkage and human rights issues. It was through her hard work that AIPP became known to international indigenous-related organizations, especially at the UN level. The present secretary-general of AIPP is Gam Shimray from Nepal. At present, AIPP has forty-seven members from fourteen countries in Asia with eighteen indigenous peoples' national alliances/networks (national formations), and thirty local and subnational organizations. Of this number, sixteen are ethnic-based organizations, six indigenous women-based, four

indigenous youth organizations, and one organization of indigenous persons with disabilities (<https://aippnet.org/about-us/>, 2021).

Those fourteen countries are organized into four subregions: South Asia (Bangladesh, India, northeast India, and Nepal), Mekong (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam), East Asia (Japan and Taiwan/China), and Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines). Although many new organizations and networks/alliances have applied to be members of AIPP, no policy for this has been presented to the General Assembly for approval as it would be difficult for AIPP to take care of a larger number of members. Over thirty years, AIPP has undoubtedly grown exponentially and played an essential role in driving transnational indigenism in Southeast Asia as well as South and East Asia. Its programs include communication, environment, human rights campaign and advocacy, indigenous women, organizational strengthening and movement building, and regional capacity building (<https://aippnet.org/about-us/>, 2021). To promote indigenism, AIPP disseminates information via various means, including websites, pamphlets, and books.

At the national level, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand are the only countries in Southeast Asia that have a local organization for uniting various indigenous organizations and networks. The AIPP, the regional movement of indigenism, played a crucial role in the emergence of those national organizations. In Malaysia, the Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia or Jaringan Orang Asal Se Malaysia (JOAS) is the umbrella network for twenty-one community-based nongovernmental organizations that have indigenous peoples' issues as the focus. As the focal point for indigenous rights and advocacy in Malaysia, JOAS provides the indigenous communities with representation not just nationally but regionally and internationally.

In Indonesia, the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN) is an independent community organization with a vision to create a just and prosperous life for all Indigenous Peoples in the country. This alliance represents 2,332 indigenous communities throughout Indonesia, amounting to about seventeen million members. The organization represents and advocates for Indigenous Peoples' issues at local, national, and international levels.

In the Philippines, there are many indigenous organizations because of its scattered islands. However, the two best-known ones at the national level are Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) and TEBTEBBA. CPA is based in the Cordillera Administrative Region in the northern Philippines. As stated on its website, "CPA was founded in June 1984 in Bontoc, Mountain Province, by 150 delegates from 27 organizations attending the Cordillera People's Congress. The founders of CPA were mainly indigenous leaders and activists

who spearheaded the widespread and successful opposition to the World Bank-funded Chico dams project and the commercial logging operations of the Cellophil Resources Corporation.” CPA works on a variety of issues pertaining to indigenous peoples’ rights, especially the defense of ancestor domain and for self-determination” (<https://www.cpaphils.org/about1.html>, 2021).

TEBTEBBA was established in 1996 to promote and disseminate indigenous peoples’ worldviews and their perspectives on key issues such as individual and collective human rights, sustainable development, climate change, biodiversity, traditional knowledge, customary laws and governance, conflict transformation, and gender. According to Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, AIPP is the network of indigenous peoples in Asia while TEBTEBBA, of which she was the founder (and a former United Nations special rapporteur for the rights of indigenous peoples), is a global indigenous network. “Although TEBTEBBA is not a member of AIPP, we help each other on advocacy regarding the right of indigenous peoples on the global level, to ensure indigenous representatives’ participation in global events, especially the UN” (interview, Chiang Mai, November 20, 2019).

In Thailand, where AIPP is based, the birth of the Network of Indigenous Peoples of Thailand (NIPT) and the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (AIPT) were influenced by AIPP. Although AIPP has been based in Chiang Mai since the early 1990s, few individuals and local indigenous organizations have worked closely with it. It was not until 2008 that NIPT was established. Previously, on August 21, 2007, I attended and observed a national workshop on “The Situation and Impacts of the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples on Thailand,” held at the Chiang Mai University campus. There were around thirty participants, mostly NGO workers and local community leaders with highland ethnic backgrounds. NGO leaders who had joined the indigenous movements, both in Thailand and on the international level, presented the historical background and the importance of indigenism to the audience. A few staff members of AIPP also introduced the role of AIPP in bridging indigenous movements in the region and at the international level. It was agreed at the end of the workshop that an annual event be held on International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples and to launch the Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NIPT). Since 2008, members of NIPT have gathered on August 9 each year to celebrate the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples. During the three-day event, there is a session in which a key person of AIPP makes a speech, addressing the importance of indigenism and the main theme set by indigenous organizations on the UN level.



Photo Indigenous Media Network/IMN

Fig. 1. Attendees from forty indigenous groups in Thailand during the 2018 annual International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples held at Rajaphat Chiang Rai University.



Photo Prasit Leepreecha

Fig. 2. A representative of AIPP reads a statement during the 2018 annual International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples held at Rajaphat Chiang Rai University.

The NIPT is mainly responsible for organizing the annual celebration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. In 2015, the network became an assembly (see Prasit 2019 and Morton and Baird 2019). Despite attempts to draft its act for presentation at the national congress, there has been no progress concerning the creation of a law. Recently, three versions of bills concerning indigenous peoples and ethnic groups have been drafted for presentation at the national congress of Thailand. According to Sakda Saenmi, a key person in the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples of Thailand (AIPT), “presently, there are 42 indigenous groups that have become members of the assembly. Each group may have different types of organization, such as a club,

network, association, and organization which registered with the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand” (interview, November 20, 2019). There are six strategies for the network and assembly: building capacity for indigenous peoples and organizations, enhancing the capacity of indigenous peoples at the household and community levels, promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, promoting peace and collaboration within and outside indigenous networks, disseminating information to the public and state government, and fundraising.

On the indigenous group level, as stated by AIPP, among the fortyseven members of AIPP, sixteen are ethnic-based organizations, some founded before the creation of AIPP, others recently set up. Joining the movement of indigenous networks or organizations on the national, regional, and global levels can empower indigenous organizations. One example of an indigenous organization in Myanmar is the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), founded in 1995 and legally registered in Canada and the United States. CHRO works to protect and promote human rights through monitoring, research, documentation, education, and advocacy on behalf of indigenous Chin people and other oppressed and marginalized communities in Myanmar (<https://www.chinhumanrights.org/alliance-membership/>, 2021). The works of CHRO cover local, national, regional, and international groups on a range of issues. At the Chin state level, CHRO works with a variety of local partners and has built strong relationships with academic institutions, the media, civil society, religious, and community-based organizations from across the nine townships in the state, as well as outside Chin state. In addition to being a member of the Myanmar Indigenous Peoples/Ethnic Nationalities Network, CHRO became a member of AIPP in 1996. According to Famark Hlawning, the secretary-general of CHRO, this indigenous organization became a member of AIPP in 1996. Becoming affiliated with national, regional, and international levels of indigenous movements could increase the power and acknowledge the roles of this indigenous organization. To Hlawning, “while the government is working on the drafts of policy, law, and practice, they are beginning to invite us to work together” (interview, Chiang Mai, November 20, 2019).

Other indigenous organizations in Southeast Asia that are members of AIPP include the Organization to Promote Kui Culture (Cambodia), the Hmong Association for Development in Thailand, and the Karen Network for Culture and Environment (Thailand). In theory, these organizations are the intermediate agencies linking indigenous peoples with national, regional, and international organizations regarding the rights of indigenous peoples. In reality, from what I have observed over the past decade, most indigenous members who attend

the annual celebration of World Indigenous Peoples' Day and other related activities are the same every year, while new youths appear only every few years. There appears to be no workshop or clear activity for campaigning about the meaning and essence of indigenous peoples on the ground. This may explain why the majority of members of ethnic groups who have been discriminated against and marginalized are seldom aware of the movement and the concept of indigenism (Baird, Prasit, and Urai 2016). Many challenges remain for indigenous organizations or networks at ethnic group, national, and regional levels in Southeast Asia to advocate for indigenism in communities.

In summary, indigenism in Southeast Asian countries has been influenced by Western indigenous movements in the context of globalization. Transnational indigenism in the region is a response to the state-led ASEAN community, which has left marginalized ethnic groups behind. In the past decades, transnational indigenism in Southeast Asia has developed and presently occurs in groups at the regional, national, and ethnic levels. Although the original context of indigenism in Western countries is different from that of Southeast Asian countries, nowadays they share a common ideology and movement. Transnational indigenism in Southeast Asia has gained much more trust on the international level. In addition to the annual United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held in New York, where representatives of different levels in Southeast Asia attend and present their problems, indigenous movements in the region also gain confidence from the forum. In November 2019, the International Expert Group Meeting, under the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, was held on the Chiang Mai University campus. The agenda was peace, justice, and strong institutions: the role of indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16. One of its main purposes was to propose recommendations and next steps to ensure the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights and institutions. In addition to leaders of indigenous organizations in Southeast Asia, representatives of independent and state agencies also attended. The event was a strategic mechanism for fostering transnational indigenism in Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

During the ASEAN summit in Jakarta in 2016, the ASEAN Secretariat, in cooperation with the Mission of the People's Republic of China to ASEAN and the United Nations Development Program, hosted a symposium on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development titled "Leave No One Behind" (<https://>

asean.org/asean-to-leave-no-one-behind/, 2021). At the regional level, the ASEAN Peoples' Forum, the parallel summit of civil society, attracts more and more attendees each year, comprising discriminated and excluded groups, among them ethnic or indigenous peoples. In some years, however, the host country of the ASEAN summit is not open to holding the peoples' forum, and civil activists are unable to get together. Alternatively, they have to organize the event outside the host country. At the ground level, ethnic peoples are still being marginalized. Lacking access to basic government services, ethnic groups also become victims since their rights to fruitful natural resources have been taken by the state government and outside capitalists. They face difficulties or even are displaced because of hydropower construction, land and natural concessions, national park establishment, tourism investment, etc. From time to time, local ethnic activists have been killed or have gone missing, as annually reported by IWGIA in *The Indigenous World* (Mamo 2020). Hence, identifying themselves as "indigenous people" and uniting with peoples who face the same obstacles and indigenous organizations or networks at different levels gives them hope in strengthening the power of powerless indigeneity.

Indigenism, as pointed out by Ronald Niezen (2003, 9), is a common ideology and movement of marginalized ethnic groups who face the negative impacts of resource extraction, economic modernization, and social convergence and homogenization. In addition, I would affirm that although indigenous peoples in Western colonized countries originally faced problems of domination by European settlers in the colonial era, in postcolonial times, whether in Western colonized countries or non-colonized countries, they face the same problems of state domination and capitalistic exploitation. By identifying themselves as indigenous peoples they are linked across ethnic boundaries and indigenous movements on various levels. Since it is grounded in international networks, indigenism becomes a transnational consciousness and social mobilization. At the regional level in Southeast Asia, it is my finding that indigeneity has only been adopted by native ethnic peoples in the past few decades. Scholars and activists on indigeneity in Southeast Asia clearly state that the indigeneity movement in this region stems from the influence of long-term movements in Western colonized countries. Turning points have been the Special Rapporteur on the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities by José R. Martínez-Cobo in 1981, the ILO Convention 169 in 1989, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 (Baird 2020, 2021; Erni 2008, Gray 1995; Kingsbury 1995; and Tauli-Corpuz 2008).

Transnational indigenism in Southeast Asia is a civil movement of excluded and marginalized ethnic peoples in ASEAN countries. Internally, transnational indigenism in Southeast Asia mobilizes disadvantaged peoples beyond a state's sovereignty. In reality, the freedom of movement of marginalized peoples differs among ASEAN members. As pointed out by Ian Baird, only the "governments of the Philippines and Cambodia now define particular ethnic groups of people as Indigenous, and are providing these groups with particular rights" (2019, 2). Some countries are quite receptive to indigenous peoples' movements, even though they still may not formally recognize those peoples' existence and basic rights. Meanwhile, some countries still strictly control the movement of ethnic or indigenous peoples. In such cases, any human rights movements of ethnic or indigenous peoples can be viewed as threats to national security and thus are suppressed by state governments. Internally, indigenous movements operate based on issues, especially environmental protection, educational promotion, cultural preservation, and general development. Externally, at the transnational Southeast Asian level, they share a common indigenism movement. Transnational indigenism in this region is also linked to the global level. Issues of marginalized and disadvantaged indigenous peoples in Southeast Asian countries are publicized via various mechanisms and opportunities. The problems faced by indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia are also human rights issues. The more indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia are disadvantaged and ignored by state governments and the ASEAN community, the more pressure will be imposed through the transnational indigenism movements by international indigenous and human rights-related institutions and laws.

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REGIONAL IDENTITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Contemporary Challenges, Historical Fractures

Edited by **Jayeel Cornelio** and **Volker Grabowsky**

Southeast Asia, as a regional configuration of nation-states called ASEAN, is a community of multiple identities. Over time, its citizens' loyalties were formed around national and transnational frameworks involving ethnic, religious, and ideological affinities. In the post-independence period, they were impacted by the processes of decolonization, nation-building, the Cold War, globalization, and the rise of China. As a result, Southeast Asia is emerging as a confluence of competing and overlapping identities.

Thus, in recent years, ASEAN has noticed the appearance of new collective imaginations about the region's future, committing its member states to directions beyond the politico-economic realm. Yet there is a risk that more exclusive visions among its people, whether national, religious, ethnic, or other allegiances, will hold sway.

This book unpacks these competing identities. Rich in ethnographic and historical material, its chapters examine identities shaped by generational markers, transnational linkages, and shared experiences of violence. Collectively, they point to the region's historical fractures and contemporary challenges.

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