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**Indigenous Peoples as Non-State Diplomatic Actors in the Public/Cultural Diplomacy of Taiwan: A Case Study of *Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art***

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**Abstract**

State-centred diplomacy is primed by foreign policy objectives. Yet when traditional diplomacy suffers from weaknesses—as in the case of Taiwan—their institutions are advised to revise approaches and to consider engaging non-state actors in their strategies. This article critically explores how Indigenous peoples can be considered non-state diplomatic actors in Taiwan’s public/cultural diplomacy. Considering various definitions of diplomacy and different understandings of the role of non-state actors, the article examines the legitimacy of Taiwanese Indigenous peoples to represent Taiwan internationally and their capacity to shape the perceptions of foreign publics about the country. Further, a contextualised analysis of *Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art*—an exhibition and series of events that took place in May 2018 at Goldsmiths, University of London—is used to demonstrate how the engagement between Taiwanese Indigenous peoples and foreign publics can happen in practice by examining the event through a public/cultural diplomacy lens.

**Keywords**

International cultural relations; cultural diplomacy; public diplomacy; soft power; Indigenous peoples; exhibition



FIGURE 1 *Opening of Dispossessions, 21 May 2018, Goldsmiths, University of London*

Credit: Jhy-Yen Lo.

## **Introduction**

The photo of the *Dispossessions* exhibition that illustrates this article frames a long shot of the individual experiences lived by the participants (Figure 1). It can be seen as a representation of diplomacy, since as Constantinou (1996) notes: ‘[t]he secret is that diplomacy does not exist. The challenge is to make diplomacy appear’ (p. 21). The photo and the article capture one of the many guises in which contemporary cultural diplomacy happens: in this case as an interactive event, congregating a range of (mostly non-state) actors with diverse (national) identities, peacefully engaging with each other and congregating around an interactive arts and culture prompt, while ultimately impacting the foreign policy objectives of a state.

Through a public and cultural diplomacy lens, this article offers a thick description (Geertz, 1973: 3–30) of *Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art*—an exhibition and series of other events (talks, music, dance, performances) that took place between 21 and 25 May 2018 at Goldsmiths, University of London, and examined alcohol both as part of rituals and as a health issue in Indigenous communities. The event and its context are analysed to explore how Indigenous peoples, and other non-state actors, can support Taiwan’s public/cultural diplomacy. They can augment Taiwan’s visibility and diversify its representation in the world, thus contributing to positive foreign perceptions of the country and to a favourable context for the development of its diplomatic status internationally.

This article starts by offering a theoretical framework to situate what constitutes (public and cultural) diplomacy and the role of state and non-state actors. Then the author makes a case for the importance of Taiwanese Indigenous peoples as non-state diplomatic actors. This includes a brief overview of Taiwan’s historical evolution and an exposé of the development of Indigenous activism domestically, while making reference to the international context. Further, Indigeneity in Taiwan is examined in relation to national identity and foreign policy. The critical analysis of *Dispossessions* demonstrates how it can be seen as a public/cultural diplomacy event where non-state and state actors pursue a range of interests in their interaction with a variety of publics. The conclusion summarises the findings of the paper and provides a final reflection on the content, seeking to establish how Taiwan’s public and cultural diplomacy and its efforts to make the country be seen internationally can gain from the participation of non-state actors, namely from the visibility of the culture and arts of Taiwan’s Indigenous communities, as well as from the Taiwanese government’s behaviour as a good (international) citizen towards those populations.

The author of this paper presents herself as a critical constructivist researcher (Kincheloe, 2005), thus understanding that knowledge of the world is socially constructed in a particular temporal and cultural context. The data used in this paper includes material from participant observation; interviews with the curator, artists, other participants, and members of the audience at the *Dispossessions* event; social media (mostly public Facebook announcements and posts related to the event); published literature and other secondary resources. Interview material is, in most cases, not attributed directly as agreed with the interviewees, but a full list of the interviews conducted is provided in the appendix. Data is analysed using reflexivity (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2018).

### **The Public and Cultural Diplomacy of Non-State Actors**

Diplomacy is traditionally understood in international relations as an institution and a practice of state actors and is often defined as an instrument to put into effect foreign policy, which is the substance, aims, and attitudes of a state's relations with others (Evans & Newham, 1998). The instrument of diplomacy takes an institutional shape, normally that of a ministry of foreign affairs, and implies a particular behaviour, by focusing on peaceful (as opposed to warring) engagement with the Other (in the sense of diplomacy as mediating estrangement; Der Derian, 1987). Its functions are often described as being dialogue and negotiation with other actors in the international society, which imply the tasks of communication, mediation, and representation, as well as the development of strategies and regulations for managing the orderly conduct of relations in the international system. This state-centred (bilateral and multilateral) diplomacy is still the mainstay for the achievement of foreign policy objectives.

However, diplomatic realities have complexified as international politics has been affected by globalisation processes, which have increasingly enabled individuals and groups to connect and communicate more easily, cheaply, and quickly across national boundaries, as well as raise awareness of complex problems that require transnational solutions. This has led to non-state actors, such as corporations, civil society organisations, other groups, and private individuals engaging with diplomacy, not just as objects of action by state actors, but as subjects of action themselves. Considering the complex multilayered, multi-stakeholder, networked reality of diplomacy in the twenty-first century (Hocking et al., 2012), literature on diplomatic studies offers a range of interpretations of what diplomacy is and who are the actors involved. Murray's (2008) taxonomy presents three schools of thought—the Traditional, Nascent, and Innovative School—which range from a view of diplomacy as an exclusive state function concerned with the study of the international realm of sovereign states mostly concerned with high politics (survival of the state); to a focus on non-state actors offering alternate forms of diplomacy (e.g., track two diplomacy) to solve real-world global problems; and to a middle ground offering a diplomatic studies approach that bridges the opposite poles of state/non-state division and conceives of their relationships as non-adversarial, symbiotic, and complementary in the pursuit of high and low political agendas (culture and the arts are included in the latter). This paper is positioned in a measured middle ground and non-traditional approach to what constitutes diplomacy, seeing it as something that transcends the state and can be practised by non-state actors (Murray, 2008). In this case the non-state actors analysed are Taiwanese Indigenous peoples, individual members of those communities, and other institutions and individuals involved in the *Dispossessions* event, as actants in Taiwan's public and cultural diplomacy. The activity of non-state actors is seen as part of diplomacy in so far as this activity of peacefully engaging in relationships in the

international environment relates to the foreign policy objectives of the state, of which the most basic is the existence of the state as an international actor.

As globalisation processes lead to the fragmentation of actorness in international relations, affecting the centrality of the traditional Westphalian state, and resulting in a necessary diversification and complexification of whom, how, and what is acted upon, diplomacy has moved from a relationship between nation-state counterparts to one that includes increasingly broader foreign constituencies. Technological advances (radio, international television broadcasting, the Internet) have allowed these publics to be easily reached but also have enabled these same audiences to raise awareness of their condition of listeners, empower their agency, and allow for the possibility of acting as respondents and/or activists. These publics are thus also able to (re)form transnational solidarities and escape the containment of ‘national’ black boxes (as is the case of the international solidarity of Indigenous peoples, in *Dispossessions* also conceived as activism). The growing importance of publics in foreign policy explains why (public) diplomacy as the conceptualisation of diplomatic engagement with people (Melissen, 2013: 436) has become of paramount importance. Public diplomacy, conceived as the conduct of foreign policy by engagement with foreign publics (Cull, 2013), is the sub-disciplinary field of studies covering these developments, and where this article is situated.

This diplomatic engagement with foreign publics often takes place via culture and the arts. For the purpose of this paper, cultural diplomacy is seen as a subset of (public) diplomacy—the focus of this issue of the *International Journal of Taiwan Studies (IJTS)*—since it is also a communicative act that uses the means of culture to inform, engage, and influence publics overseas to advance national and strategic interests (‘Call for Papers’, 2018). Thus, cultural

diplomacy is defined as the use of culture and the arts by governments (directly or indirectly via non-state actors) to achieve their foreign policy goals and a prime activity for achieving ‘soft power’ as a relational outcome (Figueira, 2018). Culture is used here in the sense of ‘culture as a way of life’: values and traditions, and ‘culture as a practice’; that is, sports, education, language, creative industries, heritage, and the arts to support the foreign policy goals of a nation-state/polity. It is worth stressing that the focus on government in terms of the use of the label cultural diplomacy does not imply that government officials/institutions have to be directly delivering the activity, but there has to be some involvement in the activity (e.g., through funding) and a (direct or indirect) support of foreign policy objectives.

Cultural diplomacy encompasses many different types of arts and cultural activities and it relates with (internal) cultural policy (Mitchell, 1986) and the exchanges between the cultural, educational, and artistic milieu of each country involved. In the literature and in practice, the reader may see these activities referred to as cultural exchange, cultural engagement, or cultural cooperation. Cultural diplomacy is undeniably associated with the interaction of discrete cultures be it for representation or promotion, communication, mutual knowledge and understanding, or negotiation. With the increased processes of globalisation and the consequent rise of transnational communication and activity, the role of the state as a cultural mediator, via cultural centres and libraries abroad and the figure of the cultural attaché, has greatly diminished. Albeit context-dependent and not readily acknowledged, often government needs culture more than culture needs government. As noted by Gienow-Hecht (2010), ‘unlike other areas of diplomacy, the state cannot do much without the support of nongovernmental actors such as artists, curators, teachers, lecturers, and students’ (p. 10–11), which complexifies responsibilities and agendas.



Literature has captured how cultural diplomacy is changing (e.g., Ditchley Foundation, 2012; Goff, 2013), against a background where there is a relatively small importance of publicly funded culture (and within that the part of cultural diplomacy) in relation to the spheres of commercial and homemade culture (Holden, 2015). Artists and other cultural professionals, and the organisations and networks they engage with to operate across borders, do work directly (not requiring the transnational facilitation or mediation of links by government officials), often only really needing governments to allow access (visas) and provide occasional financial support (within the remit of their public diplomacy, cultural and foreign policies briefs and strategies).

Considering these changes in diplomacy's operating environment, it is not surprising that conflicting definitions of both public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy abound. Ayhan (2019: 64) seeking to clarify public diplomacy, proposes a taxonomy of five broad groups of perspectives: state-centric perspectives that reject the diplomatic actorness of non-state actors; neo-statist perspectives that concede of the existence of alternative forms of diplomacy but reserve the term public diplomacy for states; non-traditional perspectives that define diplomacy on capacity and not on status, thus accepting that some non-state actor activities can be public diplomacy; society-centric perspectives that are similar to the non-traditional but define 'public' as people in the global 'public' sphere; and finally accommodative perspectives that set specific criteria for non-state actor activities to be considered public diplomacy. This taxonomy can also be applied to cultural diplomacy with similar results. The approach in this paper straddles the spectrum of non-traditional (as the collective identity of the Taiwanese Indigenous peoples is seen as having the capability to represent Taiwan in the international society); society-centric (*Dispossessions* is an event for the glocal public sphere, considering Castells's [2008] idea that all 'networked

communication and shared meaning' [p. 91] in the international arena is public diplomacy); and accommodative perspectives (*Dispossessions*' organisers intended it/labelled it also as cultural diplomacy, it was financed by Taiwan's diplomatic bodies, and the activity is understood as contributing to the accomplishment of Taiwan's foreign policy objectives).

Scholars, although divided on labelling as public diplomacy the activities of non-state actors, agree on the importance of non-state actors and that 'state-centric PD [public diplomacy] alone falls short of achieving effective PD outcomes, particularly in the long-term' (Ayhan, 2019: 67). Ayhan's (2019) thorough review of the literature on public diplomacy and non-state actors notes that it is widely accepted that public scepticism and distrust of state agencies 'may be remedied by making use of nonstate actors and individuals on the ground who are more credible in the eyes of the foreign publics engaged' (p. 67). This was already noted by Cull (2010), who understands cultural diplomacy as a component of public diplomacy, and sees its source of credibility being the proximity to cultural authorities, further reinforced by perceived distance from government. Gienow-Hecht (2010) also argues that increased distance between the agent and a political or economic agenda, as well as having an interactive structure, are success factors for a cultural diplomacy programme of activities.

The instrumentalisation<sup>1</sup> of the work of non-state actors by governments for the support of diplomacy can be considered effective as it allows avoiding the pejorative association of government communications and activities with propaganda (as highlighted by Rawnsley, 2014). Gienow-Hecht and Donfried's (2010) edited collection evidences this:

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<sup>1</sup> Instrumentalisation is not necessarily negative.

As individual case studies reveal, the closer the programs are linked to government and/or governmental agendas, the less legitimacy the programs have among their target audiences. In general, citizens of any country tend to dislike messages distributed by foreign governments, and very often people will associate government programs with propaganda. When cultural programs are run by civil societies, they seem independent and less compromised by policy concerns, even if their aims are in fact controversial. (p. 23)

As Gienow-Hecht (2010: 10–11) notes, there is a fine line between propaganda and information and between state institutions and non-governmental organisations. This has led, in terms of ‘traditional’ cultural diplomacy, to noting in governmental activity the importance of partnerships, or some sort of association, with non-state actors to achieve its aims—part of a broader trend towards ‘network’ diplomacy (Heine, 2013). However, if propaganda is defined as a mode of mass persuasion—publicly disseminated information that serves to influence others in belief and/or action (Auerbach & Castronovo, 2013: 6)—both governments and non-state actors can be considered to be doing propaganda. Thus, a discussion focusing on propaganda becomes unproductive and the alternative is to examine if the context in which actorness is developed is one of democracy, freedom of expression, and respect of human rights.

This partnership approach between state and non-state actors sits well with the overall perspective for the future of diplomacy as proposed by Hocking et al. (2012) through the framework of integrative diplomacy that stresses ‘the importance of collaboration between professional diplomats and the representatives of a variety of international actors’ (p. 5).

Further, this growing importance of non-state actors in international politics indicates that ‘the age of diplomacy as an institution is giving way to an age of diplomacy as a behaviour’ (Kelley, 2010: 286). The next section emphasises diplomacy as behaviour in analysing how Taiwanese Indigenous peoples can be non-state diplomatic actors participating in Taiwan’s public and cultural diplomacy.

### **Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples as Non-State Diplomatic Actors**

In order to understand how Taiwanese Indigenous peoples can be viewed as non-state diplomatic actors in Taiwan’s public and cultural diplomacy, this section explores some basic historical and demographic facts, examines Indigeneity in Taiwan, and relates it with contemporary issues of identity and foreign policy of the island. Kelley’s (2014) notion of non-state diplomatic actors is used to make the case that Taiwanese Indigenous peoples, although not having legal status to represent their state as diplomats, have the capabilities and legitimacy to do so. They can be very useful to Taiwan’s recognition in international society as they develop activities supportive of important areas of its foreign policy.

Until 1620, Taiwan was mostly inhabited by Indigenous peoples, then the Dutch (1624–1662) and the Spaniards (1626–1642) invaded and occupied Taiwan—these were later replaced by the Cheng (Koxinga) rule and the Manchu colonial period (1662–1895). The Japanese colonial period (1895–1945) followed and then from 1945, the island was established as the Republic of China (ROC). Currently, Taiwan’s inhabitants are mostly Han Chinese and the aboriginal population is constituted at around 530,000 individuals, corresponding to 2.3 percent of the total population in the island (‘President Tsai opens

Austronesian Forum’, 2018). Indigenous populations are organised in 16 recognised tribes<sup>2</sup>—with further tribes seeking recognition.<sup>3</sup>

The colonial occupations gave rise to the topic of Indigeneity in Taiwan, which can be roughly divided into a stage of assimilation and/or marginalisation until the democratisation of the ROC (Taiwan) in the mid-1980s, and the current stage of establishing minority rights and multinationalism. It is this last stage that is more relevant as a background for us—although the consequences of the prior stages are unescapable in the way they have framed the present situation. Indeed, one might argue that discussing if Taiwanese Indigenous peoples are or are not diplomatic actors does not make sense if we accept that the essence of diplomacy does not have to do with the state, and instead that ‘peaceful contacts between independent groups have always, since the start of human time, required the kind of representational activity which has come to be known as diplomacy’ (Berridge & James, 2001: vii). Thus, one might conclude that the Indigenous peoples, as the original inhabitants of Taiwan, are its legitimate diplomatic representatives, which would lead to the conclusion that this Indigenous diplomacy has been in existence at least since the first contact with Portuguese navigators in the sixteenth century, or before in terms of contact with more local Others.

The belated recognition of this Indigenous diplomacy can be observed in the work on Indigenous issues of the United Nations and its member states. Internationally, Indigenous identity and politics gained traction after the Second World War, and allowed for the

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<sup>2</sup> The Council of Indigenous Peoples lists: Amis, Atayal, Paiwan, Bunun, Tsou, Rukai, Pinuyumayan, Saisiyat, Yami, Thao, Kavalan, Truku, Sakizaya, Sediq, Hla’alua, and Kanakanavu.

<sup>3</sup> See Morris (2018) and Pan (2019).

development of international-level identity-based forums—in which the Indigenous Taiwanese peoples were able to participate—such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the International Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. This international movement culminated in 2007 with the ratification of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which is particularly concerned with their relationship with specific environments and their need for land, water, and natural resources to allow for the maintenance of unique lifestyles, cultures, and economies. The emergence of the Indigenous peoples' issues, and specifically their dispossession as an international issue (Samson & Gigoux, 2017), is significant to consider as a contextual background for this article, as how Taiwan deals with these matters domestically is observed by foreign publics and shapes their perceptions of the country.

In the case of Taiwan, the international regulation of Indigenous matters can only be adopted informally. As Taiwan has been excluded from the United Nations since 1970—due to the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s objections to its independent political status—and thus cannot ratify the UNDRIP, it has tried to incorporate (some of) its content in national legislation, which contributes to its reputation as a proponent of human rights (Simon, 2014). This instance does demonstrate, as Cho and Ahn (2017) note, that a distinction between diplomatic and global recognition in international relations is important for Taiwan, as the latter is more inclusive and '[i]t can be a key to global respect that serves as a basis of soft power' (p. 86). The visibility of Taiwan's (international and domestic) behaviour operates regardless of diplomatic recognition (which the PRC systematically undermines) and is increasingly potentiated by international and social media as diverse sources of influence of foreign perceptions of a country—something observed in the analysis of *Dispossessions*.

Since in the previous section, the labelling of non-state diplomatic activity was made dependent on peaceful engagement related to foreign policy objectives of the state, it is important to bring back the analysis of the Taiwanese Indigenous people to a conventional state-centric discussion. First, we explore how Indigenous minorities and their rights have been established in modern Taiwan. Unlike many Indigenous sociopolitical movements which developed during the Cold War, in Taiwan this only gained importance in the mid-1980s. In the 1980s, the democratisation of Taiwan politics and the opening of space for institutionalised opposition allowed the ‘mountain compatriots’ to be ‘aboriginal people’ (and later ‘original peoples’) and to make revindications regarding livelihood issues (namely regarding the dispossession of land)—this was also the context for the emergence of contemporary artists from Indigenous backgrounds (Harrell & Lin, 2006). As Indigenous activism grew, the government began to seriously develop protection for the rights of the Indigenous peoples. In 1995 Indigenous peoples were allowed to use their tribal names on official forms of identification. In 1997 the constitution was amended to require the state to safeguard the status and political participation of Indigenous peoples. Then in 2005 the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law was issued protecting the fundamental right of Indigenous peoples.

The above developments within the remit of the Taiwanese polity demonstrate that the Indigenous peoples have been able to work in, across, and beyond party politics to secure their rights. Currently, the Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-wen, is committed to improving social justice, and in her inaugural speech on 20 May 2016, she promised to ‘work to rebuild an indigenous historical perspective, progressively promote indigenous autonomous governance, restore indigenous languages and cultures, and improve the livelihood of

indigenous communities' (Presidential Office, n.d.). Later, in August of the same year, an official apology was issued acknowledging the Indigenous peoples as Taiwan's 'original owners' and recognising the need for a revision of the 400 years during which these peoples were brutally treated. Further, as recently as February 2018, the government's Council of Indigenous Peoples declared 1.8 million hectares—about half of Taiwan's total land area—to be traditional territory (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2018). This is promising and could be an indicator that Taiwan is on the right path to implement an exemplary domestic policy in regard to cultural rights (which will be recognised externally and position Taiwan, as aimed by the government, as 'a model citizen in global society' (ROC, 2018). However, the current political use of Indigenous communities seems to be rather superficial, serving the public relations of political candidates about Taiwanese society, as demonstrated in Davis's (2018) ongoing research, who notes that the references to Indigenous communities are often culturally reductive or fall into misrepresentation and do not actually focus on aboriginal issues.

Having explained how Indigenous people have been able to establish a legal framework for their rights as part of modern Taiwanese society—including recognition of their legitimacy as original owners of the land—we must take this state-centric discussion into the area of national identity building in Taiwan. This defines how it presents itself to the world, and mostly importantly, in terms of foreign policy, how it conceives of its relationship with the PRC.

The democratic turn in Taiwan in the mid-1980s and the consequential empowerment of different voices in civil society, besides enabling the Indigenous voice to be heard, also gave rise to an ongoing debate on the national identity of Taiwan. Here, Indigenous identity has



been used, at different times, to differentiate the ROC on Taiwan from the PRC. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the party politics in the use of Indigeneity in the development of Taiwanese nationalism (see Chang, 2015; Ku, 2005) since our focus is the present. However, we note, as an example, that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), as an opposition party in Taiwan at the time, proposed in 1992 the notion of a multicultural Taiwan. The notion was in effect Han Chinese centred, since the four ethnic groups accounted for were besides the Indigenous peoples: the Hakka, the Hoklo, and the Mainlanders, which have their origin in mainland China (Wei, 2017). This domination of the Han culture is still very much felt by the Indigenous peoples, as reported later in the analysis of *Dispossessions*. The current DPP government claims a separate identity for Taiwan (distinct from the PRC) and has reframed the national identity narrative away from Taiwan being the preserver of traditional Chinese culture: ‘Taiwan is known as a culturally diverse society’ (Presidential Office, 2016). This instrumentalisation of Indigeneity for national identity and foreign policy purposes, highlighting the differences between the ROC and the PRC, is important to flag in the eyes of international public opinion as one cannot forget that Taiwan operates in a ‘disabling environment’ (Rawnsley, 2014), where the forging of alliances in the international community needs to be creatively alternative.

The Taiwanese Indigenous peoples themselves also connect these issues of identity with foreign policy, although domestic politics are for them a bigger concern than cross-strait issues (Aspinwall, 2019). They make a similar use of identity in response to China’s opposition to the international recognition of Taiwan as an independent country, and to the concept of Taiwan as part of the ‘Chinese nation’ versus a multicultural and democratic state. This is well illustrated by their reaction to the PRC’s President Xi Jinping’s ‘Chinese Mainland’s Message to Compatriots in Taiwan’ speech in January 2019, where he set a

vision for the future of Taiwan that implied the unification of China and Taiwan, saying that ‘Chinese don’t fight Chinese’, while noting that force was an option (Goldkorn, 2019).

Replying to that speech, 31 Indigenous representatives signed an open letter saying, ‘Taiwan is the sacred land where generations of our ancestors lived and protected with their lives. It doesn’t belong to China’, and they added:

*We the indigenous peoples of Taiwan have witnessed the deeds and words of those who came to this island, including the Spanish, the Dutch, the Koxinga Kingdom, the Qing Empire, the Japanese, and the Republic of China.*

*We signed treaties with the Dutch and peace agreements with the Americans. We have fought against imperialism and every foreign intruder of our land. We have suffered military suppression from colonial and authoritarian regimes.*

*Once called ‘barbarians’, we are now recognized as the original owners of Taiwan.*

*We the indigenous peoples of Taiwan have pushed this nation forward towards respect for human rights, democracy, and freedom. After thousands of years, we are still here.*

*We have never given up our rightful claim to the sovereignty of Taiwan.* (Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan, 2019, emphasis added).

The extract evidences how Taiwanese Indigenous peoples see themselves as the representatives of the island in relation to the rest of the world (through verbs such as witnessed, signed, fought, suffered, even claiming the sovereignty of the island in the last sentence)—thus diplomatic actors—stating evidence of their engagement (the use of diplomatic instruments such as treaties and agreements) with different states throughout history. They also note the recognition of the legitimacy of their claims by others (the

Taiwanese state) as ‘original owners of Taiwan’. The Indigenous Peoples Basic Law is clear to establish their subjection to the state’s jurisdiction, and to officially regulate their legitimacy via approval of the central Indigenous authority (article 2). Sovereignty belongs to the Taiwanese state. But the theory of popular sovereignty in a democratising world, in which one can position public diplomacy, allows representatives of the ‘nation’ beyond the sovereign state (Henrikson, 2014). In this sense, one can advance that Taiwanese Indigenous people can diplomatically represent Taiwan through symbolic action, *expressiveness*, or *being* the point itself, as Henrikson (2014: 11) puts it. Further, the Indigenous peoples ascertain their contribution in terms of values to the Taiwanese nation (human rights, democracy, and freedom), which differentiates it from the PRC (as they go on to say, ‘We do not share the mono-culturalism, unification, and hegemony promoted by you, Mr. Xi’). If we think of the importance of values in the concept of soft power (Nye, 2004), the Taiwanese Indigenous people have a significant role in making Taiwan attractive to foreign publics.

The importance of Taiwanese Indigenous peoples in the international relations of Taiwan has been considerable. They were attending United Nations meetings when the ROC had already been expelled, and they continue to be important, as they enable the development of important international connections. Many scholars believe Taiwan is the source of all Austronesian peoples<sup>4</sup> (Jacobs, 2017), and governments have used the Austronesian narrative in their public diplomacy, a connection that is further reinforced by the ‘Taiwanese new immigrants’ originating from Southeast Asia. The present Taiwanese government seeks to develop a New Southbound Policy to expand trade and people-to-people contacts with

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<sup>4</sup> The matter of the origins of the Indigenous peoples in Taiwan is contentious and has being object of various uses in relation to China. Some theories claim that these people originate from mainland China and not Southeast Asia. See Ku (2005) for details.

Southeast Asia (Bondaz, 2017; Sautin, 2017). For example, Taiwan signed in 2013 a free-trade agreement with New Zealand—its first with a developed economy—despite the non-existence of diplomatic relations between the countries. According to Davis (2018) this was very much encouraged by aboriginal cultural exchange. This people-to-people exchange has been increasingly institutionalised at substate level: in November 2017, the Pingtung County-headquartered Indigenous Peoples Cultural Development Center and Darwin-based Artback NT signed a memorandum of understanding on a residency exchange programme for 2018–2019 for Indigenous artists from Taiwan and Australia, replacing previous ad hoc projects (Huang, 2017). Other examples include a cooperative act with the Philippines for the protection of aboriginal peoples; and Taiwan’s participation in the Pacific Arts Conference (Davis, 2018). As these examples demonstrate, the Taiwanese government is learning to make effective use of the arts and Indigeneity internationally. This mirrors the development of their internal cultural policy, where discussions on cultural diversity and cultural rights are taking place and incorporated in policy (see, for example, the 2018 White Paper for Culture). The external and internal spheres of cultural action work in tandem, as there is no cultural diplomacy without some form of cultural policy.

Considering Taiwan’s diplomatically crippling status—positioned against the agency of the PRC—and its shrinking number of diplomatic partners, all Taiwanese governments have recognised the important role of culture and the arts (for a broad review of these, see Wei, 2017), and these have been a defining theme of Taiwan’s external projection (Rawnsley, 2017). Nevertheless, Taiwan can make a better and broader use of the agency and activities of its non-state actors by empowering them to develop internal and external narratives that are key to defining a Taiwanese national identity. The potential of civil society, and specifically the Indigenous peoples, to promptly shape narratives that favour them is of great

significance, since government machineries are too slow to agree and approve reactions to news and communications (Rawnsley, 2017). As Kelley (2014) states:

[t]here is a natural place for NDAs [non-state diplomatic actors] when state-based diplomacy is weak or too slow to innovate, and so it is in the interests of actors and institutions grounded in the diplomacy of status to revise their assumptions about diplomacy, take inventories of the strengths and weaknesses of both systems, and seek out compatibilities. (p. 101)

The Taiwanese Indigenous people are important non-state diplomatic actors, being legitimate and capable of expressing themselves as representatives of Taiwan as a country upholding the values of democracy, freedom, and human rights. Examining *Dispossessions* in the next section allows us to see how this can happen on a localised level—the level at which individual perceptions are formed.

### ***Dispossessions* as a Cultural Diplomacy Event**

*Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art* is presented by its curator as ‘the first research-based exhibition of Taiwanese Indigenous contemporary art in the UK’ (Ismahasan, 2018b) and ‘a gathering of artistic and curatorial activism, showcasing the latest Austronesian performative knowledge from a Taiwanese Indigenous perspective’ (Ismahasan, 2018c). The terminology used indicates that the event, the objects it includes, and its subjects/participants are situated in a complex intertwining of geopolitical, anthropological, and artistic/curatorial spheres and meanings. So, what makes *Dispossessions* a cultural diplomacy event?

Cultural diplomacy can be a slippery concept (although clearly defined earlier for the purpose of this article) and thus thinking of the event as a composite assemblage is a productive way to conceptualise the bringing together of all the actors and their interactions. Each actor is built from a series of complex networked elements, which themselves also form a network of interactions and private/public meaning-giving practices. In this sense, this section draws on postphenomenology (Verbeek, 2005), combining a ‘constitutive view of language (the world-as-text) with an experiential sensitivity (perceptual-bodily referentiality)’ (Aagaard, 2017: 530). The analysis that follows does not capture everything; it invites the reader to follow a way of travelling through the networks—individuals, institutions, ideas, emotions—that is subject-dependent and theoretically informed, intending to offer a constructivist view of *Dispossessions* as a cultural diplomacy event.

The hosting of *Dispossessions* at Goldsmiths came about through a proposal by its curator, Biung Ismahasan, of the Bunun Nation, an alumnus of the MA Cultural Policy, Relations and Diplomacy, to the author of the paper. This initial interaction between individuals as representatives of their institutions (a higher education institution, and a collective identity) ‘negotiating’ the happening of a cultural event across national borders prefigured a non-traditional diplomatic engagement in which the institutional framework is key. Goldsmiths’ global reputation in contemporary art is attractive to those seeking to establish themselves in the field, and the college also has an institutional brief of supporting alumni, promoting access and diversity, being socially aware and engaged, while fostering reflection in a community beyond Goldsmiths and with impact locally and globally. Higher education institutions are traditional settings for the practice of cultural diplomacy, starting with the establishment of foreign culture and language departments (incidentally there is a Goldsmiths Confucius Institute for Dance and Performance) to the actual classroom interactions with the

increasing mobility of students across national borders, the decolonisation of the curricula, and general trends for the internationalisation of education. Goldsmiths can thus be seen as a non-state actor with potential to participate in diplomatic engagement. In *Dispossessions*, this is clear from the start as the institutional status of Goldsmiths facilitates the mobility of people across borders: letters of invitation to the curator and to the artists are necessary to ease fundraising and travel logistics. The college also functioned as the diplomatic space where the physical engagement with the *estranged* foreign publics took place: the exhibition and the other events took place in the space of the Lower Atrium of the Professor Stuart Hall Building.

If Goldsmiths is an institutional and spatial actor that symbolises one side of the identity/national equation that structures cultural diplomacy in *Dispossessions*, who are the other actors? For sure, among the main actors, and indeed initiators of the interaction, are the Indigenous curator and the Indigenous artists participating in the event. Their collective label, in the title of the event, ‘Taiwanese Indigenous’, can be seen to indicate a willingness to unite and flag the two identity spheres of national and ethnic/tribal/cultural identity. Further, a connection is made between Indigenous Taiwanese and Austronesia, an identity label provided by the curator to situate the Indigenous knowledge in an international perspective by making an association with a subregion beyond the state of Taiwan—which is, incidentally, in tune with Taiwan’s foreign policy positioning, as observed in the previous section. The Indigenous artists harbour a multiplicity of identities: a regional/Austronesian identity, a national Taiwanese identity, an ethnic/tribal Indigenous identity and their individual identities as art producers—and of course many other layers. Following from the previous section, the Taiwanese Indigenous people and their representatives (in our case, the

curator and artists) are the main non-state diplomatic actors in *Dispossessions* as a cultural diplomacy event.

A third major actant is the Taiwanese government. It sponsored the large majority of the *Dispossessions* budget—Goldsmiths offered the space for the event (considering Ismahasan was an alumni), made some competitive funds available through the Students' Union Friends and Alumni Fund, and acquired some support from the Office for Contemporary Art of Norway. A range of governmental institutions in Taiwan concurred with funds to enable the event to take place: Council of Indigenous Peoples, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Culture and Arts Foundation, and Indigenous Peoples Cultural Foundation (IPCF). Private support regarding organisational and financial administration was also gained from Taipei Indigenous Contemporary Art Gallery and Chen Mei Arts & Culture Social Enterprise. The motivations of each type of organisation are different: representation of national and ethnic/tribal identities, and in the case of the commercial partner, a mix of financial gain and social responsibility. The funding of the event by the Taiwanese government is a good indicator of its importance to the public/cultural diplomacy strategy of Taiwan. This is reinforced by the fact that the Facebook page of the Taipei Representative Office in the UK, Cultural Division (Cultural Taiwan UK, 2018), highlighted that the focus of *Dispossessions* was in understanding how an Indigenous exhibition can help foster cultural relations and diplomacy. In addition, the opening of the event was attended by the Deputy Representative of Taiwan in the UK—but overall the involvement of Taiwanese governmental authorities in the event was kept low-key by the organisers of the event, so as not to distract from their main aim, which was bringing the audience's attention to the plight of the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan. Indeed, although there was a moderated discussion during *Dispossessions* on Indigeneity in contemporary art and the cultural and diplomatic



implications of Indigenous exhibitions, in which the author of this article participated with other academics, artists, and curators, no Taiwanese official was invited to participate (see Ismahasan, 2018c).

There is evidence, both implicit in the funding and explicit in the inclusion/exclusion of official representatives in the event as well as through social media evidence, that from the point of view of the Taiwanese authorities, and also from the point of view of the organisers (embodied in the curatorial options), *Dispossessions* can be viewed as an event where cultural diplomacy is happening. It is further interesting to note the concurrence of efforts by different state and non-state actors in the funding and organisation of an event. This is increasingly a favoured modus operandi of cultural diplomacy, as evidence seems to indicate that this will be the most effective for an instrumental use of arts and culture in the shaping of foreign perceptions by governments (Ditchley Foundation, 2012). As argued earlier, if partnerships can be advantageous to build trust and make messages heard, they can also ease some of the burden on public funds.

A fourth important actor that makes *Dispossessions* a cultural diplomacy event are the *estranged* foreign publics and transnational communities that were engaged. The week-long exhibition and series of events took place in an open space, which did not allow for numbers of visitors to be counted. However, through observing the key events of *Dispossessions* (opening, mid-week talks and performances, closing), as well as through the audiovisual evidence available in the media, one can advance that a diverse audience was present, composed of people from London and elsewhere in the UK/Europe/World (including specialised publics purposely coming from continental Europe to attend the event attracted by its focus on contemporary Indigenous art—for example, a cultural officer from the European

Union and a multicultural Moroccan-born artist and activist—and members of the Taiwanese diaspora (Indigenous and non-Indigenous). *Dispossessions* was a diplomatic space for the mediation of estrangement (Der Derian, 1987) between different actors. And if we concede that diplomacy is essentially about representation (Sharp, 1999), in *Dispossessions* this was present both in the content of the exhibition/events and also through the experiences of the participants expressed in discourse, as will be discussed in the next section.

The digital footprint of the event enabled a multiplication of its audience reach to an unidentified number of publics. *Dispossessions* had a strong online presence that is still available and thus continues to potentially generate engagement with publics worldwide. Social media was used for promoting the exhibition and also to capture some of its content for future use. The transmission of this content has unintended impacts for the organisers of the event (and, for that matter, for the Taiwanese government) which can only be superficially grasped here. There is a web page for the event (Ismahasan, 2018c), a Facebook page (Ismahasan, 2018b), and videos are available on YouTube (Ismahasan, 2018d, 2018e). The exhibition was also systematically covered by the Taiwan Indigenous Television (TITV), which broadcasted four different pieces of almost three minutes each, during the week-long duration of the event (IPCF-TITV, 2018; Yamai & Opic, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Unfortunately, an English transcript of the TITV videos is not available (yet), which means that this narrative is only going to be consumed by a narrower (mostly domestic or at least Mandarin Chinese speaking) audience and not by an international audience. Thus in this immediate case, *Dispossessions*' online reach may not be as ample as it could be (although Facebook interactions via the event's and participants' personal pages was intense—both in terms of sentiments and in terms of volume of posts and numbers of likes), but the potential is there—the videos are online and some on YouTube (IPCF-TITV, 2018; Yamai & Opic,

2018b, 2018c), so anyone could undertake that task of transcription and translation for a wider audience in different languages. This would enable the multiplication of representational and communicational gains for both the Indigenous peoples and the Taiwanese government.

Now that we have identified the main human actors interacting in *Dispossessions*, we should reflect on the implicit and explicit content—ideas as actors—as well as how the messages being communicated were valuable for Taiwan’s foreign policy. Determining in what way foreign policy objectives can be supported by the occurring engagement is key to constructing *Dispossessions* as a cultural diplomacy event. Two fundamental foreign policy objectives were impacted: the country’s preservation and development, and the maintenance of a good reputation in international society. The government of the ROC sets as the ultimate goal of the country’s foreign policy ‘to ensure a favorable environment for the nation’s preservation and long-term development’ (ROC, 2018). This is underpinned by the fostering of good relations with other state actors, clearly expressed in article 141 of the constitution, which states that: ‘the foreign policy of the Republic of China shall . . . cultivate good-neighborliness with other nations, and respect treaties and the Charter of the United Nations, . . . promote international cooperation, advance international justice and ensure world peace’. Considering the situation of partial recognition of the ROC in international forums and the ongoing threat from the PRC, the simple restating of the existence of Taiwan in any dimension of international relations is valuable for the foreign policy of the country. Further, the government seeks to position Taiwan as ‘a model citizen in global society’ (ROC, 2018), this is an important aspect to keep in mind as we analyse the messages vehiculated through *Dispossessions* in relation to identity and in relation to the Indigenous domestic issues.

One of the most important messages in *Dispossessions* relates to identity. The event displays and represents Taiwanese/Taiwan not just in name, but also in essence, as diversity, through the way it has been structured. The event included the participation of eight individual artists and a musical troupe (Ismahasan, 2018a). Besides the artist-curator-academic researcher Biung Ismahasan (Namasia's Dakanuwa Community, Bunun Nation), the artists participating in *Dispossessions* were: performance and installation artist Don Don Hounwn (Truku Nation) with co-performer Temu Basaw; installation artist and environmental and textile sculptor Eleng Luluan (Rukai Nation); interdisciplinary painter Eval Malinjinnan (Takitudu group of the Bunun people from the Bukai community); interior and product designer Hsu-Hung (Sean) Huang (Han Nation); choreographer and dancer Yu-Hsien Hsueh (Han Nation); the group of eight singers of the Ayi-yanga First Taiwanese Ethnomusicology Ensemble (Paiwan Nation). In addition to the above Taiwanese participants, Marita Isobel Solberg, a performance artist from Northern Sápmi in Norway was a special guest. From the above list it is evident the diversity of peoples represented in the exhibition, which besides including different individuals of Taiwanese Indigenous peoples, included two members of the Han Nation and a guest from Norway. This curatorial decision points to a conception of Taiwan as diverse and open to the world. This ideal—also present in political discourse as identified in the previous section—mirrors a complex process still being negotiated in Taiwan, since discrimination continues to be reported as afflicting domestic relations.

Many of the interviewees noted a continued colonial condition existing in Taiwan. Indigenous interviewees reported feeling like outsiders in Taiwan, and the word 'discrimination' was often used to describe the situation of Indigenous peoples. One

interviewee noted, ‘The main issue is that the Taiwan Indigenous people are not equivalent to the Han people’. Interviewees reported that Indigenous people, if they could (i.e., if visually they could blend with the Han ethnicity) would not reveal their ethnicity. Some would only do it if they were overseas—one noted that in London, they had met more Indigenous people than they ever did in Taiwan. One could say that *Dispossessions* functioned as an idealised Taiwan: a site where relations between ethnicities were equal and where ethnicity was valued and not something to be hidden. Ethnic/cultural relations are a problematic situation that the Taiwanese governments need to tackle with a view to building a harmonious and fair society, otherwise public/cultural diplomacy narratives presenting the country as a model of democracy and human rights will be open to criticism.

Another important message in *Dispossessions* comes from its thematic focus, which is relevant at both domestic and international levels. *Dispossessions* focused on alcohol drinking and alcoholism, by which one can simultaneously examine the cultural distinctiveness of the Indigenous people through its ritualist use and understand how colonialism has dispossessed these people of their health. As noted, *Dispossessions: Performative Encounter(s) of Taiwanese Indigenous Contemporary Art*<sup>5</sup> was described by its curator as ‘a gathering of artistic and curatorial activism’ (Ismahasan, 2018c). This exhibition is a reflection of times of social disruption, instability, and change for the Indigenous communities and a site of discursive struggle regarding alcohol. The curator explains that

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<sup>5</sup> It is impossible in the limited word count of this article to examine questions related to Indigenous art, particularly if we think back to what is historically labelled as such. *Dispossessions* reinforces an emerging way of narrating the intersection of (Modern) Art and Indigeneity, blending the worlds of academia and activism. One could say that what partly distinguishes Indigenous contemporary art is its activism—albeit other characteristics can be called into play, such as themes or materials.

‘this exhibition aims to vindicate the allegedly genetic explanation of Taiwanese Indigenous drinking problem as a counter-narrative to defy the consistent slander and degradation by non-Indigenous authorities and peoples’ (Ismahasan, 2018c) and presents ‘alcohol abuse as a continuing colonial scourge’ (Ismahasan, 2018a: 7). The central subject matter of the exhibition—cereal crop millet and its fermentation into traditional millet wine—carries with it a claim to the redefinition of the understanding of alcohol in an (Taiwanese) Indigenous context.

If the Taiwanese government is able to make internal progress on these complex matters (be it tackling the alcohol/health issue, or the overall condition of the Indigenous peoples very much connected with the dispossession of the land (which continues today in Taiwan and elsewhere), this can be considered evidence of an exemplary behaviour of a state and beneficial to its international status (including how it is perceived). After all, states in a responsibilities-and-rights partnership with Indigenous peoples—which implies for individuals the right to be a citizen of a particular country (UNDRIP article 33.1)—have obligations towards those Indigenous populations in the domestic and international spheres. The fulfilment of these obligations contributes to a perception of the country as a good citizen of the international community; that is, recognising the interdependence of humanity and acting according to ‘human purposes beyond ourselves’ as per Hedley Bull’s concept (in Burke, 2013: 57). ‘Being a good state’ can be advantageous for public diplomacy and nation branding (as noted by Simon Anholt’s Good Country Index and Good Country movement), as well as benefiting humanity/the cosmos (Burke, 2013), from a beyond-the-nation-state perspective. *Dispossessions*, being an event sponsored by the Taiwanese government and by flagging a negative feature of Taiwan’s domestic affairs (alcoholism in Indigenous populations), can nevertheless be positive for the government. This is because it enabled the

expression of critical voices, thus reinforcing the reputation of the country as a model for democracy in the eyes of the foreign publics.

This criticism of government indicates that Indigenous people were clearly in control of the narrative being put forward in *Dispossessions*. The curator and the majority of the participants were Indigenous, thus accusations of cultural appropriation and misunderstandings, as it has been the case in other circumstances (see, for example, Wei, 2017 on the International Youth Ambassadors Exchange Programme) could be avoided. However, the critical voice of the Taiwanese Indigenous peoples is still developing in Taiwan's democratic context, recovering from centuries of destruction and oppression. Colonialists, by taking away Indigenous land, silencing the use of Indigenous languages and replacing them by others (in Taiwan, first Japanese, then Chinese), and thus breaking the contexts, mechanisms, and processes enabling cultural transmission between generations, and by making alcohol readily and cheaply available, actively worked for the demise and marginalisation of these populations. One could argue that, nowadays, these populations have agency and some powers of self-regulation—there is in Taiwan the Council of Indigenous Peoples, which is a governmental ministry-level body looking after their rights. However, disagreements over leadership on different matters between tribes are reportedly common and there is also the issue of the co-option of the small (educated and 'modernised') Indigenous leadership into the governmental apparatus, which one of the interviewees compared to bullies inside their Indigenous communities, colonising from within, instead of being brokers and mediators. The issue of voice and representation is complex, but, as demonstrated in *Dispossessions*, Taiwanese Indigenous peoples are developing independent and critical voice(s) fostered by the country's context of democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights.

In parallel with independence and criticality, the focus of communication via the participants' emotional experiences also allowed for a greater effectiveness in the transmission of the messages of the event. As noted by the *Dispossessions* curator, Ismahasan, in conversation with the author, his aim was to enable the communication of and reflection upon contemporary issues affecting Indigenous communities, and at the same time showcase the confidence of Indigenous artists. He saw the role of curators as being to connect people around the world. From the author's observations and experience as a member of the audience, one can say that the emotional exchange between the artists and the audience was intense—the impact of which, although not measurable, can be deemed to exist, and of potential benefit to both the Indigenous peoples and to Taiwan. *Dispossessions*, by focusing on people-to-people meaningful engagement, provided unique moments of connection between 'discrete' cultures embodied in individual experiences, manifesting themselves in/during the artistic performances. Examples include: the blending of cultural traditions brought by dancer and choreographer Yu-Hsien Hsueh that combined contemporary dance with flamenco and Indigenous Taiwanese music and dance; the performative encounter between the Norwegian performance artists Marita Isobel Solberg (Norway) and Don Don Hounwn (Taiwanese Indigenous Truku Nation); and the spontaneous participatory exercise of singing and dancing that brought together the public and members of the Ayi-yanga First Taiwanese Ethnomusicology Ensemble. These are personal choices—constituting limited evidence—that illustrate moments in a week-long event (see Ismahasan, 2018c, for the detailed programme) that by its own nature and design was a cultural exchange and a cultural diplomacy event.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**



*Dispossessions* can be seen at one end of the diplomatic engagement spectrum, as unstructured diplomacy characterised by loose couplings where ‘government input is low and processes are furthest removed from traditional modalities of diplomacy’; that is, where roles, responsibilities, and rules are fluid (Hocking et al., 2012: 19). Labelling *Dispossessions* as a diplomatic event derives from several reasons. First, the event reproduces, reinforces, and develops identities that are used to mediate relationships transnationally. Second, it communicates messages valuable for Taiwan’s foreign policy (sovereignty and good international citizenship). Third, it was financed by Taiwanese governmental institutions with foreign policy responsibilities and by Taiwanese institutions that, although having only a domestic remit, would like to raise their international affairs significance (Indigenous Peoples Cultural Foundation, Council of Indigenous Peoples). Fourth, *Dispossessions* was developed to communicate to foreign audiences a particular artistic and cultural representation of the geopolitical unit ‘Taiwan’ as an exhibition of ‘Taiwanese’ Indigenous contemporary art.

*Dispossessions* is thus an arts event that can be seen as a cultural diplomacy activity led by a non-state diplomatic actor, the Taiwanese Indigenous peoples. They have the legitimacy and the capability as original owners of the land and through the domestic and international recognition and networks to operate transnationally. The event they produced links Taiwanese-ness (as a national identity) with a construction and display of Indigenous identity in a (foreign) intercultural space: Goldsmiths has a culturally diverse body of students—some of which engaged in the organisation of the event—and many of the external visitors shared similarly culturally diverse backgrounds. In this cross-cultural/social relations platform, the curated exhibition fashioned a view of ‘Taiwanese Indigenousness’ for double consumption: for its members and for an ‘Other’ audience/public. As Graham and Penny (2014) stress: “‘Insiders’” and “‘outsiders’”, performers and audiences, publics and individual subjects

continually interact to shape emergent Indigenous identities in public arenas and intimate spaces' (p. 4). This performance thus produces new knowledge, contributing to a shaping of Indigeneity (and Taiwanese-ness) for the members of the group and a shaping of perceptions of that cultural identity for those outside (and potentially enacting other impacts in terms of self-perception and relationships with Others).

*Dispossessions* as a critical arts event exposing the dispossession of health of the Indigenous peoples through working with the theme of alcohol reinforces perceptions of Taiwan as a modern and independent political unit, cultural and politically distinct from the PRC, upholding democratic and pluralistic values, and hinting at a wider Austronesian affiliation (which opposes traditional and narrow narratives vis-à-vis mainland China). The issues dealt with by *Dispossessions* are of international relevance and this is why such a relatively small event can be so important for the public diplomacy of Taiwan.

Taiwan's authorities need to be ambitious and seek to innovate in their understanding of international engagement and public/cultural diplomacy practices. Just getting the attention of the international community should not be enough. In the case studied, the attention should be given to Taiwan because of exemplary ideas and values, policies and practices developed towards the betterment of its (Indigenous) populations. From the analysis of *Dispossessions*, the areas in which action can be taken are health (which is relevant to the circumstances prompting this *IJTS* issue), by supporting the recovery of Indigenous cultural health knowledge; and the area of arts and culture, by supporting the maintenance, development, and visibility of the artistic practice of Indigenous peoples.

Governments have much to gain from funding arts events as part of their diplomatic strategies since they enable the showcasing of values, practices, and ways of life to specialised publics. Building, multiplying, and sustaining transnational links needs to become a priority. Here a better articulation in the development of cultural diplomacy and internal cultural policy would be beneficial to improve how cultural exchange can be carried out and be more impactful. There are small improvements that can support existing institutions and processes to go beyond just sending artists for one-off visits. This could be done by investing in activities that have a multiplier and sustained effect, such as the sponsoring of training/visits abroad of curators and arts managers, as well as making funding available to create archives of practice-based knowledge. Furthermore, the way the Taiwanese government funds cultural exchange activities, where funds are only provided after the event, creates logistical nightmares that can be unsurmountable, if there is no ‘benefactor’ taking the risk to advance ‘the cash’ in the meantime. One should not forget the internal impact of funding activities such as *Dispossessions*: boosting the confidence and opening new markets for cultural professionals who often struggle to conciliate portfolio careers and that have to struggle, as Indigenous artists, with other cumulative discriminating factors in Taiwanese society, given their condition of dispossession.

Taiwan can overcome a deficit of engagement with traditional diplomatic spaces, by participating in and influencing trans/international policy domains, sites, and agendas to take advantage of the post-modernity of world politics shaped by interconnected and multilayered networks of different stakeholders. Cho and Ahn (2017) recommend that Taiwan should seek alternative approaches to reinforce its global recognition in international society, using networks outside of formal diplomacy to court and mobilise public opinion and decision-makers in their favour. In the area of public diplomacy, creating the space for and fostering

the engagement of non-state actors is an advisable course of action. *Dispossessions* is an example of a successful activity led by non-state actors that was supported by government. Cho and Ahn (2017) also suggest that, in the pursuit of being a model global citizen, Taiwan should be a norm-maker or norm-organiser by offering its shared values to protect humans and the environment and to search for equality and justice. Such an area of role-modelling could be the way it develops its responsibilities-and-rights partnerships with the Indigenous peoples. Building on its reputation of upholding the values of democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights, Taiwan should aim to go further. It should embrace the core beliefs of its Indigenous peoples and develop a new logic for the management of the relationship between humans and land/nature under its jurisdiction, prototyping behaviours conducive to tackling the contemporary global ecological crisis. It should go beyond the logic of the nation-state and contribute to real change in the international community. Taiwan can emerge from living in the diplomatic margins to become a role model to the world. The Taiwanese Indigenous peoples and their artists can show their government and their fellow citizens alternative ways to live in the world.

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### **Appendix: List of Interviewees**

- Biung Ismahasan (Bunun Nation), artist-curator
- Don Don Hounwn (Truku Nation), performance and installation artist
- Eleng Luluan (Rukai Nation), installation artist and environmental and textile sculptor
- Eval Malinjinnan (Bunun Nation), interdisciplinary painter
- Pea-Chen Tseng (Han Nation), Director of Taipei Indigenous Contemporary Art Gallery, Northern Taiwan
- Muni Pasasauv (Paiwan Nation), MA student in Social Anthropology at SOAS, University of London, event moderator and interpreter
- Guo Ting Lin (Amis Nation), PhD candidate in Media Studies, School of Media, Arts and Design, University of Westminster, London, curatorial assistant
- Vava Isiingkaunan (Bunun Nation), artist and cultural worker in Taiwan, curatorial assistant