

MASTER THESIS

REPRESENTATION OF TAIWAN'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH CONTEMPORARY TAIWANESE CINEMA FROM 2010 TO THE PRESENT.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation and justification

The main motivation for focusing on the study and analysis of the subject stems from the interest in the preservation of the intangible heritage of Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples, who were the first people to inhabit the island more than 6,000 years ago and anthropological studies place them as the origin of the Austronesian peoples.

Today, Indigenous peoples in Taiwan represent only about 2.5% of the total Taiwanese population and their cultural practices are at risk of disappearing. Therefore, with this study I am interested in deconstructing stereotypes through the documentation of cultural practices that help preserve their cultural identity, through contemporary indigenous cinema, by being the protagonists of their own stories, since, unlike in the West, indigenous peoples do not transmit knowledge and cultural practices in written form, but in oral form, which has been and still is a risk to cultural diversity.

Ethnic minorities represent only 3% of the world's population, and for this reason, in cultural management, it is necessary to work on cultural diversity as a key element to understand the world, to know what has happened in the past in order to transform the present from a decolonial perspective, which helps us to implement projects to revitalise cultural heritage and therefore its practices and customs so that they are not lost and become cultures of the past. In a world that is becoming increasingly globalised, where nationalism is resurgent in the West through the powerful tool of culture, I am interested in analysing how indigenous cinema can be a tool for cultural transformation and how it can help in the representation, visibility and preservation of the cultural identity of officially recognised indigenous communities and those that are not yet recognised. In a world that is advancing so fast digitally, where progress is associated with an increasingly visual culture, it is interesting to address how these cultures that have traditionally used oral knowledge to transmit their knowledge adapt to what we call modernity to revitalise their living heritage and preserve their cultures.

1.2. Subject of the study

The starting point of this study addresses a series of questions around indigenous cultural identity in Taiwan and its representation: What is the representation of Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples in contemporary Taiwanese cinema and how is the question of their cultural identity raised? Has their representation changed both domestically and internationally since 2010 when the first indigenous filmmakers began to appear as narrators of their own stories, previously told by their colonisers? How is this change of narrative in contemporary Taiwanese cinema perceived in relation to the cultural identity of Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples by Taiwan's different ethnic groups?

According to official data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Republic of China (Taiwan), three ethnic groups are currently identified in Taiwan: Han Chinese ethnicity, divided into Hoklo, which are the Chinese who migrated from mainland China's Fujian province, and Hakka, the Chinese who migrated from other provinces of mainland China to Taiwan and together they represent 95% of the total population; indigenous peoples, which represent 2.5% and there are currently a total of 16 groups officially recognised by the Taiwanese government; and the remaining 2.5% is made up of so-called new immigrants, mainly from Southeast Asia.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been talk of a new Taiwanese national identity that is putting Taiwan's indigenous communities at risk of exclusion, as each group has a very distinct cultural identity, with its own cultural practises and traditions, which cannot be lumped together as this would mean the loss of their cultural identity and thus their rich cultural diversity. Likewise, although the indigenous peoples are the original groups or first nations of Taiwan, today they are also minority groups living between the clash of urban growth and development and their cultural traditions, and are therefore at the crossroads of modernity.

With this project my intention is, on the one hand, to collect historical data on Taiwan's indigenous peoples and their cultural practices through the field of the film industry. This will be done by analysing several key moments in history to understand how they have been modified, eliminated and reached the point of almost disappearing, as well as to

review the stage of modernity with its safeguarding and revitalisation, with special emphasis on the influence of the arrival of the first indigenous filmmakers in the 2010s. On the other hand, the aim is also to find out how people of Taiwanese origin, over the age of 18, view indigenous cultures in order to understand how these changes are perceived through film, and in the case of people of indigenous origin, whether they are represented in the socio-cultural sphere. This may allow me in the future to explore the idea of creating new collaborative cultural initiatives and projects to contribute to their cultural revitalisation, taking as an example some of the existing international indigenous film festivals, where Taiwan's indigenous culture is promoted both in the region and in other geographical locations.

For the development of this research, we start from several hypotheses. In order to answer the first question, we must consider that research on the representation of indigenous peoples in a social, political and economic context and how to address the problems faced by indigenous communities in Taiwan has only begun to be carried out in the last few decades: the struggle for land rights, the migration of the young population from natural to urban environments, the loss of their cultural and linguistic heritage, and the consequences of some of these issues, more accentuated at some stages than others, such as unemployment and alcohol consumption and the stereotypes that have formed around it. In the cultural sphere, it is important to consider all these contexts in order to use a holistic approach that leads us to understand that their cultural identity is strongly linked to the territory and therefore to sustainability, and to their intangible heritage or living heritage of their "practices, expressions, knowledge or techniques transmitted by communities from generation to generation" (UNESCO, 2021) such as languages, weaving or tribal tattoos art.

Indigenous cultural revitalisation movements started from the 2000s onwards with the creation of new indigenous cultural policies, beginning to have a notable presence and visibility in the media. In relation to the film industry, Taiwan's indigenous peoples have been represented in films, series and documentaries from different approaches, traditionally from a higher position of power and not from the indigenous communities themselves until very recently. The first appearances of aborigines in cinema took place during the Japanese occupation (Aborigines and Taiwan Cinema, Daw- Ming Lee, p. 2)

where they were used as instruments of indoctrination and recruitment for the benefit of the Japanese nation. In turn, it was the Japanese who made the current classification of the indigenous tribes, which has been reworked in the light of recent research.

On the other hand, the Taiwanese government now officially recognises 16 indigenous groups, but these are divided into several indigenous communities with their own linguistic diversity, customs and traditions. The younger generations keep facing the challenge of combining tradition with modernity, especially with the development of cities and the migration of indigenous communities to the urban environment, as well as the increase of digitalisation and the presence of media in social and educational contexts. These changes are occurring at the same time as there is increasing debate about the formation of a new Taiwanese national identity that has surfaced during the recent democratic period (late 1980s to the present) that clashes with the cultural identity of indigenous groups. It is therefore key to analyse this aspect according to the different ethnicities living and coexisting together on the island today: Han Chinese (95%), new immigrants (2.5%) and indigenous peoples (2.5%). (Official Portal of the Republic of China, 2022).

From 2010, there has been a shift in contemporary Taiwanese cinema with non-indigenous directors working with indigenous directors in their productions (Wei Te Sheng with Umin Boya), and a sense of demystification and deconstruction of stereotypes of people belonging to indigenous groups, who had previously been portrayed through exoticisation, especially of women, is beginning to be seen. Laha Mebow, the first female indigenous director in Taiwan, uses a new and different approach in her films to show current issues experienced within indigenous communities, including changes in cultural practices, from the perspective of indigenous youth.

There are several organisations within the film industry that are dedicated to promoting and showcasing indigenous films, one of them being the Taiwan International Ethnographic Film Festival (TIEFF), an ethnographic film festival held every two years in Taipei, which is the oldest ethnographic film festival in Asia. Its main function is to promote innovative and educational documentaries from around the world, portraying stories and social practices in a culturally sustainable way. Therefore, the research could be applied to analyse what role this festival and other similar initiatives play in the cultural sphere as a mode of transmission, representation and preservation instrument of Taiwan's indigenous cultural identity.

We can therefore identify both general and specific objectives as drivers of this research.

General and specific objectives

The main objective of the research is to analyse the representation of Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan's film industry over three distinct historical periods from the late 19th century to the present day in order to understand their role from a socio-cultural point of view. The periods are as follows: Japanese colonisation (late 19th century to mid-20th century), the period of authoritarianism with the rise to power of the Kuomintang (KMT) government (1945-1987) and the change of government to democracy (1987 to the present).

The second general objective is to understand whether there has been a change in the representation of indigenous peoples after the emergence of the first indigenous filmmakers in the contemporary Taiwanese film landscape, helping to reinforce their cultural identities, preserve their tangible and intangible cultural heritage and give visibility to indigenous issues: language, land and sustainability rights, socio-economic inequality, marginalisation and stereotyping.

In terms of specific objectives, the intention is to expand knowledge about indigenous filmmakers who appear from the 2010s onwards, a period in which in addition to collaborating with other non-indigenous directors and screenwriters, they begin to tell their own stories and be the protagonists of their own narratives with productions that are counter to the Hollywood commercial model, and see how they compare with decolonial theories or Third Cinema, which emerged in Latin America in the 1960s.

The second specific objective is to address the gender perspective by analysing the films of Tayal director Laha Mebow, who won the Golden Horse Award for Best Director at the Taipei Golden Horse ceremony for her film *Gaga* in 2022. This award ceremony is equivalent to the Oscars gala in Hollywood, so I believe that looking into her films can add great value to the research in order to understand how indigenous women are represented in the creative and cultural industry.

2. Literature Review

Firstly, we take as a reference the indigenous movements, which are "the social movements that emerged in the 1980s in Latin America to claim cultural identity within a national political, economic and social space. This includes the struggle for land rights or educational rights" (Vargas-Herández J., p. 3).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the so-called indigenous movements emerged at an international level, helping to progressively weave a network of international cooperation between countries where indigenous peoples' rights are recognised and inhabited. However, since Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations, it cannot benefit from the same human rights instruments as other UN members (IWGIA, 2023).

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was thus established in 2000 with "a mandate to examine indigenous issues, in the context of the mandate of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights" (Permanent Forum website, 2023).

In relation to indigenous cinema, we can observe that despite the increasing digitalisation and rapid development of streaming platforms, indigenous issues continue to be an unknown genre in the film industry of Western societies. In fact, until just a decade ago, the prevailing perception of indigenous peoples was more related to cultures of the past, which no longer exist in the present and are only known as more primitive societies that can be contemplated in museums, disassociating them from what we understand as modern societies. This way of thinking and understanding the world, which still continues today, is very similar in all parts of the world, even in regions where indigenous peoples live today, such as Finland, Mexico, Brazil, Australia or Argentina. Despite recent efforts to give visibility and support to ethnic minorities, the problem of cultural unfamiliarity continues to exist, not only among the general population but also within the indigenous communities themselves, due to the clash with modernity and the cultural and educational policies carried out within the political systems of the different countries.

However, as far as the film industry is concerned, we can observe over the last decade how interest in indigenous cinema has increased among members of indigenous communities, and thanks to new technologies, cultural and educational projects led or co-directed by members of the indigenous communities themselves are being carried out. The projects that stand out for their relevance in the cultural and educational field include: the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, such as the revitalisation of some of the most spoken indigenous languages, the weaving art of indigenous women and their presence in contemporary art, as well as projects dedicated to addressing the present issue of climate change and the important role that indigenous communities play in the conservation of the environment, due to their strong link to the land and their management of natural resources, without altering the environment in which they live.

Despite the Western world's relationship with the regions of the Americas and Asia as a result of successive colonisations between the 15th and 20th centuries, there is a notable absence of post-colonial studies in the indigenous-themed film industry, so the intention is to address these issues in a country like Taiwan, nowadays considered more newsworthy in the global media due to political and territorial conflicts with China, but rarely because of its cultural richness and diversity, and never because of the existence of its indigenous communities.

At a national level, since the 2010s Taiwan has begun to give greater visibility to indigenous peoples in the field of art and culture, and initiatives and projects are being carried out where the public sector collaborates with indigenous communities in the creation of cultural projects, led for the first time by representatives of the indigenous communities themselves. In relation to the current climate emergency, indigenous peoples play a fundamental role in the sustainability of the planet thanks to their link to the land and their use of natural resources. They are also a key factor in the planning and development of strategies for sustainable cultural tourism.

Therefore, from a decolonial perspective, this study serves to understand the representation of Taiwan's indigenous peoples in contemporary Taiwanese cinema based on past historical events that were pivotal to their ways of life, their cultures and the socio-economic impact that has occurred in these periods of history, leading to the almost total disappearance of their communities, including their social organisation, language, heritage, traditions and cultural practices, and ultimately, their cultural identity and place in

the world. It also contributes to the demystification of stereotypes, as they become their own storytellers in the 21st century and their stories are no longer told by their colonisers.

Theoretical framework

2.1.1. The Third Cinema

The Third Cinema or New Latin American Cinema is a film movement that emerged in Latin America in the 1960s with the aim of moving away from a Hollywood or Europeanised perspective, radically breaking the passivity of the spectator (Javier de Taboada, 2011). According to the author, we can identify two key moments: "Towards the third cinema" (1969), a manifesto drawn up by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in Argentina; and "internationalisation" (early 1980s), where African and Indian directors stand out (Ousmane Sembene and Ritwik Ghatak) and the intervention of academics who review the revolutionary potential of the movement.

In this sense, we can analyse Taiwan's indigenous cinema by establishing a relationship with the Third Cinema movement in terms of political ideology and cinematography far removed from the big Hollywood and/or Western productions.

2.1.2. Indigenous cinema in Brazil

The number of indigenous film festivals held in the last ten years has increased in Latin America and Brazil, and Brazil is precisely one of the places where they are currently having the greatest impact. As we mentioned earlier about the population's lack of knowledge of the indigenous situation, until the 2010s Brazilian society was almost entirely unaware of the contemporary reality of indigenous populations. The work of indigenous filmmakers, present since the late 1990s at film festivals, on public television and in education, has progressively contributed to changing this reality (UNESCO, 2012). A similar phenomenon has occurred in Taiwan regarding media visibility with the creation of *Taiwan Indigenous Television* (TiTV), known for being Asia's first publicly subsidised television channel targeting aboriginal audiences, including cultural entertainment and news programmes. In addition, larger budget indigenous-themed film productions have recently been made, resulting in national awards, such as the historical drama *Seqalu*:

Formosa 1867 (2021) which was broadcast on Taiwan's Public Television Service (PTS) and Netflix Taiwan.

Similarly, Brazil has been developing educational programs for a number of years that involve indigenous young filmmakers and their communities, belonging to the Ashaninka and Guarani indigenous groups. One example is the "VÍdeo nas Aldeias" project, which uses pedagogical tools to teach indigenous filmmakers, helping them to produce and distribute their films (UNESCO, 2012).

2.1.3. First indigenous film festivals in Latin America: international benchmarks

The Wallmapu International Indigenous Film Festival was the first indigenous film festival, organised in Mexico in 1985 by the Latin American Coordinator of Cinema and Communication of Indigenous Peoples (CLACPI). The event is configured as a space that aims to foster intercultural dialogue and weave intercultural relations at a global level, bringing together film producers from the Americas and other regions of the world in the field of arts and cinema with indigenous themes (Caputto, 2022).

The festival continued its editions in Brazil (1987), Venezuela (1989), Peru (1992), and Bolivia (1996), following an interval of two years (Luciana de Paula, "festivales de cine indígena de Brasil") and its most recent edition has taken place in Barcelona this year 2023.

"In Latin America, the colonisation of the indigenous imaginary began to be debated among researchers, as well as in media activism, at the beginning of the current century" (Salazar and Córdoba, 2008). Therefore, we can establish a relation between indigenous cinema and the experiences of ethnographic cinema, which emerged in the second half of the 20th century.

2.1.4. Indigenous Film Festivals in Taiwan

A representative example is the *Taiwan International Ethnographic Film Festival* (TIEFF), Asia's oldest international ethnographic film festival, which is held in Taipei and takes selected films on the road to indigenous communities and schools throughout Taiwan. Its main objective is to promote innovative and educational documentaries from around the world, portraying stories and social practices in a culturally sustainable way. The

audiovisual material presented at the festival is directed by new and experienced filmmakers, both indigenous and non-indigenous, and features films from the Taipei Golden Horse Awards ceremony (equivalent to Hollywood's Oscars) and the Golden Bell Awards (similar to the Emmys in the music industry) where several indigenous productions have won awards in recent years, such as the historical drama series *Seqalu: Formosa 1867*, mentioned earlier in this section.

2.1.5. Current research projects in the field of sociology and anthropology: indigenous cultural identity and language revitalisation in Taiwan.

One of the most relevant projects in the field of linguistics is carried out at the National Dong Hwa University in Taitung, Taiwan, through fieldwork conducted by educators, activists and students working to safeguard the Pangcah language (indigenous community of the Amis in Eastern Taiwan) by connecting it to their cultural heritage and identity. This research project involves the youth and elders in community activities through a communicative learning approach, using ethnographic-qualitative technique with participatory observation. The project is led by Professor Kerim Friedman, an anthropologist who has participated in conferences on Taiwan studies during the pandemic and has served as a reference to understand the important role that languages play in the preservation of indigenous cultures, and ultimately all cultures, since without language we would lose much of our identity. Professor Friedman is also a member of the Taiwan Ethnographic Film Festival and his publications on indigeneity and Taiwanese indigenous film reflect the changing representation of indigenous communities (*The Shifting Chronotopes of Indigeneity in Taiwanese Documentary Film*, Friedman, K. 2021).

2.1.6. Research on Taiwan's indigenous cinema: languages as a key factor of cultural suppression

The academic work by film director and Professor Daw-Ming Lee *Aborigines and Taiwan Cinema* has served to contextualise the situation of Taiwan and its indigenous peoples in different periods of history, from the beginning and origin of the successive colonisations of various regions of the island, but never in its entirety, from the 1600s onwards by the Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese, and later by the Chinese and Japanese.

In 1906, the first documentaries on indigenous peoples were made during the Japanese occupation, and cultural indoctrination was carried out in order to force the indigenous peoples to integrate Japanese culture into their way of life. Through educational action plans such as teaching Japanese as the language of instruction, the aim was to gradually eliminate indigenous languages. As Professor Lee points out, there is film evidence that the Japanese used indigenous community leaders to send them to Japanese cities, to witness the modernisation of the new colonising empire, and on their return to convince the indigenous audience who did not have the opportunity to see it that their cultural transformation was justified. "The purpose of mainland sightseeing or Aborigine sightseeing was to persuade indigenous peoples to accept the power of Imperial Japan" (Aborigines and Taiwan Cinema, Daw-Ming Lee, p. 2).

In this sense we observe how the suppression of languages, which are part of the living cultural heritage, was one of the most effective instruments in Japanese colonisation to erase their cultural identity, as today there is a very high percentage of people who lived during the occupation and speak Japanese, and do not remember their indigenous language. These methods of eliminating cultural identity, creating a necessity for the colonising nation, were also carried out by other colonising empires such as the Soviet Union in Central Asia and its imposition of Russian and the Cyrillic alphabet.

Decoloniality: indigenous national sentiment?

In the indigenous communities of Latin America, a new concept of "indigenous nations" has emerged as indigenous communities demand political and territorial rights and are therefore associated with "ethnic nationalism". In this sense we can relate it to what is happening in Taiwan's indigenous communities, but in my opinion it would not be appropriate in either case, as it would be a Western concept that could not be applied in the same way. The concept of nationalism does not imply the celebration of cultural diversity, but rather, on the contrary, it seeks common characteristics that encompass a group of people within a society. The issue of indigenous rights goes far beyond the simple categorisation into Eurocentric concepts, which only detracts from the movement to claim their cultural rights, that is the right to safeguard their heritage, their languages, and their cultural expressions and practices.

Taiwanese film expert Chiu Kuei-fen analyses *Seediq Bale* (2011), one of the largest Taiwanese indigenous productions and its international reception in *Violence and indigenous visual history: Interventional historiography in Seediq Bale and Wushe, Chuanzhong Island*, by Taiwanese director Wei Te-sheng, who directed the film together with well-known indigenous actors such as Umin Boya. This production has been one of the most controversial in terms of its depiction as it revisits a tragic chapter in Taiwan's history during the Japanese colonial era of which everything that happened during the event is unknown today. Referred to as the Wushe Incident, in 1930 the aborigines of the Seediq community rebelled against the Japanese colonisers, resulting in a massacre on both sides. The film was screened at the Venice International Film Festival and was criticised by international critics as being too violent and perpetuating the stereotype that indigenous people are associated with the term "savage". On the contrary, it was well received nationally, including by indigenous audiences, as its director points out: in 2021 Wei Te-sheng was invited to a virtual meeting on cooperation and cultural ties between indigenous people in Canada and Taiwan, organised by the University of British Columbia (Indigenous Taiwan: Transpacific Connections, 2021). During the film Q&A, he tells how he worked with indigenous communities to make the production and how it was positively received by most of the indigenous people who saw it, who were also the first viewers. Taiwan's first indigenous female director Laha Mebow was also invited to the event to talk about her films and the cultural links between her own indigenous community and the indigenous community in New Caledonia, as well as the stereotypes associated with indigenous people. During the event, the Tayal director argues that "today they are still being colonised and it is not easy for them to survive".

3. Methodology

The research methodology used in this study has a qualitative approach, which includes analysis from two complementary perspectives: on the one hand, the post-colonial perspective, drawing on existing post-colonial theories in other regions of the world and taking indigenous cinema from other geographies as a reference, emphasising the idea of the concept of cultural identity; on the other hand, from a gender perspective, with the entry into the film industry of the first indigenous female director in Taiwan, who actively participates in national and international indigenous film festivals, thus approaching the

study of the growing collaboration and promotion of indigenous female directors through these festivals in the global sphere.

The research techniques used in this study are described below.

In the first phase, theoretical, written material and filmic sources have been used to investigate the proposed topic: cultural identity is a key term to be analysed in cultural studies and theoretical sources have been used, such as the work of Stuart Hall, a fundamental reference in cultural studies, and his book "Questions of cultural identity" (2003) in which he describes the relationship between culture and identity in the context of globalisation, approaching to the idea of the cinema as a place of encounter, from which this notion of identity arises. He also deals with the representation of the image in the visual media within the new culture of modernity with the expansion of globalisation (*Representation and the media by Stuart hall, Westminster University, 1997*) and has made the most significant contribution to the foundations of cultural studies and postcolonial theories within the social and political context in the United Kingdom.

Through bibliographic sources, I was able to compile and create a list of audiovisual material supported by written material to help investigate the representation of Taiwan's indigenous people and their cultural practices in three distinct periods: Japanese colonisation (late 19th to mid-20th century), the period of authoritarianism with the rise to power of the Chinese Kuomintang government (1945-1987) and the change from authoritarianism to democracy (1987 to present). The socio-political context of these three differentiated periods in history will serve to understand the role of indigenous peoples, as well as the roles that were assigned to them, until they were able to be the narrators of their own stories, especially from 2010 onwards. From the available audiovisual material, I have chosen the following representative film sources for further analysis: *The Man from Island West* (1989), *Seediq Bale: Warriors of the Rainbow* (2011), *Seqalu: Formosa 1867* (2021) and *Gaga* (2021).

As for the written material, a selection of academic sources in English has been made, including articles and case studies describing the socio-cultural situation in the different periods of history since Japanese colonisation. The book *Taiwan Cinema* has been a main source of material, which brings together various academic publications on indigenous cinema in Taiwan as well as its international reception. Studies on the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages in Taiwan have also been consulted, as they form an

inseparable part of its intangible heritage, such as the studies carried out by the American anthropologist Kerim Friedman, who has conducted fieldwork in Taiwan for several years and is currently developing techniques to preserve the Pancah language, one of the several indigenous languages that still survive, concluding that it is a key element in the shaping of cultural identity (Webinar *What's the value of an endangered language?*, 2021). In his blog (<https://kerim.oxus.net/>) there are several peer review publications on Taiwanese multiculturalism and indigenous identity that support the analysis.

This last aspect is directly related to the fact that minority languages have been declared intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO, which, together with land rights and cultural practices such as dance or music, keep alive these cultures, which today are at risk of disappearing. "While the practice and transmission of living heritage contribute to the vitality, strength and well-being of indigenous communities today, language is the main engine through which this heritage is kept alive" (International Mother Language Day, UNESCO, 2020).

A semi-structured interview was then applied to a sample population as close as possible to the context of study: adults over the age of 18 of Taiwanese origin, from Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese indigenous communities, currently residing in the study region or in other geographical areas of the world, in order to find out their views on several specific issues: the respondents' knowledge of Taiwanese indigenous film and culture, their views on Taiwan's cultural diversity today, their perception of the visibility of indigenous issues in the Taiwanese film industry, and on the representation of indigenous communities at the socio-educational and cultural level, which as will be seen in the analysis is strongly associated with a political component.

A total of eight interviews were conducted online, after creating a document with open-ended questions and a Google questionnaire in the same format, to make it easier for people in different regions and time zones to receive and respond. The interviewees are based in Spain, the UK, Finland and Taiwan and are mainly involved in education, culture and the film industry. Six of the eight respondents are of Taiwanese origin not belonging to indigenous communities, and the remaining two belong to two indigenous groups currently recognised by the Taiwanese government, Atayal and Paiwan.

Table 1 below contains the information collected on the respondents.

Table 1. Information on respondents

Name assigned (respondent)	Gender person identifies with	Age	Current place of residence	Ethnicity	Belonging to an indigenous group and which group it belongs to
Respondent 1	Woman	34	Spain	Han	Non-indigenous
Respondent 2	Man	31	Not specified	Taiwanese	Non-indigenous
Respondent 3	Woman	40	Not specified	Han	Non-indigenous
Respondent 4	Woman	31	United Kingdom	Taiwanese	Non-indigenous
Respondent 5	Woman	40	Spain	Not specified	Non-indigenous
Respondent 6	Woman	36	Finland	Tayal	Indigenous, Atayal
Respondent 7	Man	45	Spain	Han	Non-indigenous
Respondent 8	Man	30	Taiwan	Paiwan	Indigenous, Paiwan

4. Taiwanese indigenous cinema: revitalising cultural heritage and identity

Documentary research and film selection were key to researching the historical facts chronologically, in order to situate ourselves in the socio-political context that would help us delve deeper into the socio-cultural reality in which the indigenous peoples of Taiwan found themselves throughout the 20th century and part of the 21st century. In this way I was able to acquire the necessary information to work on the development of the second phase and to elaborate the questions I used for the semi-structured interview.

Below I explain the research development process of these two phases carried out in the analysis.

4.1. Historical and socio-cultural representation through film

As indicated in the initial approach, I have made a historical journey chronologically through three different periods, which helps to contextualise their representation from a socio-cultural point of view and to understand what their representation has been throughout the periods indicated through cinema, focusing more in detail on the current period, when they have become the narrators and protagonists of their own stories, starting in the 2000s but particularly from 2010 onwards.

For the research of written material, I have made a selection of articles and case studies on Taiwanese cinema linked to Taiwanese literature, and how indigenous peoples have been represented in Taiwanese cinema in the three periods mentioned above, to help me extract relevant socio-cultural information and identify key elements in the deconstruction of stereotypes. Three main concepts have been explored, namely *indigeneity*, decolonisation and cultural identity. These are interrelated and cannot be fully understood without each other.

4.1.1. Japanese colonial period (1895-1945).

During this period, the first documentaries featuring indigenous peoples, created by the Japanese themselves, are recorded and characterised by the modification and elimination of their cultural practices, with the intention of transforming Taiwan into a Japanese society. Until 1910, films were seen as an instrument of propaganda by the colonial government, and from then on they began to be used by the Taiwan General Government for educational purposes: before 1918, education for local residents was not an objective pursued by the colonial government of Taiwan, but was mainly used to maintain security and stability. After 1918, education began to become increasingly important, in order to pursue a policy of assimilation that cultivated citizens loyal to the regime. Following this model, as we can see in the diary written by the Japanese officer Hosoi Ryutaro in 1926 (published by Camphor Press in 2022), the perception of indigenous peoples were deeply acculturated and considered uncivilised and savage: "The Aborigines are in part a savage and warlike people known as headhunters". As a result of the Japanese categorisation of the ethnic groups living on the island during colonisation, problems associated with the rights recognition of various indigenous peoples continue to exist today, such as the

grouping together of people who do not share the same language or cultural characteristics of each group.

4.1.2. Chinese Kuomintang government (1947-1987): repressive elimination of indigenous culture.

This period was characterised by the repressive marginalisation and elimination of indigenous cultures in order to group the entire population into a single ethnic group, with the aim of creating a single national and cultural identity. This period was Taiwan's longest period of repression in its history, with Chiang Kai-shek's dictatorship and martial law regime spanning from 1949 to 1987, the longest in the world. Key aspects to highlight from this period are ethnic cleansing, the perpetuation of indigenous stereotypes, such as their tendency towards alcoholism, promiscuity and the association of their cultures with primitivism. This historical fact coincides with what happened to indigenous peoples in other geographical regions with the arrival of European colonisation in the Americas and Central Asia.

4.1.3. Transition to democracy (1987-present): creation of indigenous cultural policies and cultural revitalisation.

After a period of shadows, a period of light gradually came with Taiwan's transition to a democratic society model, where the first institutions and laws dedicated to defending the rights of Taiwan's indigenous peoples and safeguarding their cultural heritage were created. Some of the most important are the *Council of Aboriginal Affairs* (1996), later renamed the *Council of Indigenous Peoples* (2002), and the Indigenous Peoples Education Act of 2005.

Firstly, from Professor Lee Dawn-Ming's writings, I observe that Taiwan's indigenous peoples have been undergoing a slow process of change: starting with the forced disengagement from their traditions and elimination of cultural practices, as well as elements of their tangible and intangible heritage, especially with the Japanese and Chinese colonisations, towards a slow recovery in the period of democracy, with a process of decolonisation. The introduction of indigenous policies and laws within an international framework guaranteeing human rights has been key in the exercise of these rights, especially after the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples (2007) by the UN General Assembly. I consider that it is important to review the concept of decolonisation as a process of recovering the tangible and intangible elements of colonised peoples, which begins with linguistic restoration, for example, by recovering the original names of places. It is worth highlighting the protection of the linguistic diversity of indigenous peoples with the recent proclamation of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) (UN, 2022).

Secondly, Professor Chiu Kuei-fen at National Chung Hsing University in Taiwan, who has published an extensive bibliography on Taiwanese literature and Taiwanese documentary film throughout her career. Chiu has contributed to several academic journals, and has co-edited several books, including *Taiwan Cinema: International Reception and Social Change* (Routledge, 2017), one of my research references. This book discusses the concept of cultural identity with reference to several films by indigenous and non-indigenous directors, which is quite complex and controversial in Taiwanese society today. This is largely due to the emergence of a new Taiwanese cultural identity within the current political context, more associated with a national identity, which leaves Taiwan's first nations in limbo once again. As the Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop pointed out, "cultural identity depends on three factors: "the historical, the linguistic and the psychological" (UNESCO, 1986), among which can be highlighted in my research the importance of linguistics in the construction of cultural identity: a language that disappears can also make the cultural identity of a community disappear, as it is the means of communication and transmission of knowledge for the indigenous peoples of Taiwan, who did not transmit knowledge in written form until very recently: some universities of indigenous studies have already started to develop digital dictionaries to recover, preserve and promote languages of indigenous peoples around the world.

Thirdly, addressing the revitalisation of indigenous languages: From a cultural perspective in terms of the preservation of living heritage, it seemed essential to me to investigate recent studies on the revitalisation of indigenous languages in Taiwan. During the pandemic, I attended the online conference *What's the value of an endangered language?* (2021) given by Professor Kerim Friedman, organised by Leiden University and the *International Institute for Asian Studies* (IIAS) on the fieldwork currently being carried out in Taiwan to preserve the Pancah language of Taiwan (language spoken by the Amis indigenous group), concluding that languages are a key element in shaping cultural identity. This author works on the concept of indigeneity, "so recent and still so complex to

analyse from our Western society” (Friedman in *The Shifting Chronotopes of Indigeneity in Taiwanese Documentary Film*, p. 6). The concept of indigeneity has only recently been coined and is subject to debate, and presents great complexity as we must consider other cosmovisions, leaving aside Westernised preconceptions and thus consider the diversity of ways of knowing. This coincides with the opinion of one of the interviewees from the Paiwan indigenous group, who argues that "culture, language, and childhood memories with grandparents and friends from their hometown and their social interaction with people outside Tjuvecekan constitute their identity" and that "once the indigenous culture and language cease to exist, people will have nowhere to learn about them".

This is directly connected to the fact that the preservation and promotion of minority languages have been declared intangible heritage by UNESCO as previously mentioned. "Indigenous people have an important role in maintaining the world's cultural diversity and biodiversity" (UNESCO, 2022).

4.1.4. The case of Wei Te-sheng and his contribution to Taiwan's indigenous cinema

The book *Taiwan Cinema* (Routledge) brings together several publications written by academics on Taiwanese cinema, with an emphasis on the international reception of the most renowned directors inside and outside Taiwan, such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, Tsai Ming-Liang, Ang Lee and producer Peggy Chao, who were part of the New Wave of Taiwanese cinema that emerged in the 1980s with the Social Realism cinema genre. It was from 2000 onwards that the *Post-New Cinema* movement was born with directors such as Wei Te-Sheng and Sylvia Chang. This shift was a cultural exploration, adopting new cinematic techniques to appeal to a wider audience. However, despite the domestic success of director Wei Te-sheng within the Taiwanese film industry, we can observe that this has not been the case internationally, as he has not had as much impact as the aforementioned directors, mainly because he has been accused of making commercial films, more similar to the Hollywood model, far removed from the established auteur cinema of the other directors. Therefore, I was very interested to know why such an important Taiwanese director in the Taiwanese film scene did not receive the same attention and recognition internationally, considering the fact that he was the only one among them to make a film with an indigenous theme, collaborating with other indigenous

directors and actors, in addition to his nationally prominent productions dealing with Taiwan's ethnic diversity.

Since 2010 Wei has directed films that revisit colonial relations with Japan, such as *Cape n. 7* (2008), which was Taiwan's second highest grossing film at the box office, presenting a story that connects Japan's colonial past with Taiwan's socio-cultural issues from a different perspective than social realism, reclaiming the romantic comedy format to connect with a wider audience in a more contemporary approach. Although some theorists have disparaged Wei's work as "suppressing the reality of Taiwanese people's systematic subjugation to colonial violence by Japan and thus evading Taiwan's traumatic memory" (Wang Chialan Sharon, 93:2007), some recent research on Wei's work also suggests that "while the relationships between the film's protagonist members manifest the tensions between the indigenous Hakka and Hoklo (Han Chinese) and Japanese communities, they also contemplate the possibility of a tolerant coexistence of differences" (Zhan, Min-xu, 2010:176). He later presented his film *Kano* (2014), co-directed with indigenous director Umin Boya, which also addresses the issue of Japanese colonisation from a contemporary perspective; and the indigenous historical drama *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* (2011), based on a tragic true story occurred during the Japanese occupation. All of them have been the subject of international discussion, with strongly opposing views on their production, narrative and reception by the Taiwanese population and international film festivals. I was particularly interested in the case of *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale*, which was co-produced by the well-known Hong Kong director John Woo and starred indigenous actors such as Umin Boya, as mentioned in the literature review. This film received considerable international acclaim and generated a lot of controversy after it was shown at the Venice International Film Festival in 2011, having been negatively assessed by international critics as it was considered too violent and commercial.

With regards to audiovisual material, it is important to mention that I have encountered difficulties in obtaining rights to watch the films, as Taiwanese production companies generally do not export their films to Europe, and some of the most relevant indigenous-themed films can only be found at independent film festivals in countries where other indigenous communities exist, such as Australia or Canada. Moreover, despite the increasing demand for *streaming* platforms, it is still very difficult to find indigenous films from Taiwan, especially in the case of Spain.

The academic publications of film professor and director Lee Daw-Ming (*Aborigines and Taiwan Cinema*) have served as the basis for the list of films and/or documentaries relevant to the topic of study. This list includes the director, a short description, whether it was directed by a person of indigenous origin, the year of production, and relevant links to some of the trailers or audiovisual material available. This table can be found in the annexes (Annex 2).

Initially I drew up a list of 25-30 films and in a second selection I chose the most representative films for the project, based on cultural identity, gender and post-colonial theory, focusing on the period of transition to democracy, specifically from 2010 onwards.

4.1.5. Indigenous films directed by non-indigenous filmmakers

The selected filmography includes independent films and documentaries that deal with cultural diversity and indigenous themes, such as *The Man from Island West* by Taiwanese director Huang Ming-chuan (1988). It reflects the problems faced by young indigenous people from an Atayal community with the advent of industrialisation, moving from their places of origin to the big city of Taipei, and the difficulties involved in their return, with the search for a lost cultural entity as the main driving force. In 2022, it was presented at the *Taiwan Film Festival Edinburgh (TFFE)*, which was created in 2021, bringing indigenous issues closer to Western society in Scotland. Director Huang Ming-chuan makes films that are outside the *mainstream*, which is often the norm for indigenous-themed productions, although this is slowly changing, especially since 2010, with the release of other productions such as those that will be analysed further in this research.

4.1.6. *Seqalu: Formosa 1867*. Current indigenous-themed blockbusters

Coinciding with the 154th anniversary of the historical incident that occurred on the island, *Seqalu: Formosa 1867* is considered the first Taiwanese blockbuster based on real events thanks to the resources used both in terms of financing and film production, with the collaboration of the Taiwanese government. This 12-episode Taiwanese drama has been released in October 2021 on the online platforms Netflix Taiwan and TaiwanPlus, this last one being created the same year with the aim of promoting Taiwanese culture, and it is also available on Youtube. Therefore this production poses a new approach to indigenous cinema through digital platforms, bringing the cultural diversity of Taiwan closer to the public, specially since the pandemic started in 2020.

The idea for this film production started in 2014 by director Tsao Jui-Yuan together with the director of the Taiwan Broadcasting System to recreate this important historical event that happened 150 years ago and had such an impact on Taiwan. The series is inspired by the Taiwanese historical fiction novel *Lady Butterfly of Formosa* (2016), by the famous Taiwanese writer Chen Yao-chang, which was awarded the same year as one of the best novels at the Taiwan Literature Awards. As the director states in several interviews, although they had the idea to carry out this project a few years ago, Tsao says that they started filming the series around 2018. Although it is categorised as a fictional story, "only one of the characters is fictional", said Tsao Jui-Yuan in his interview for ICRT (Apple Podcast, 2021).

Despite being an important event in Taiwan's history, director Tsao recounts how they had great difficulty collecting information from Taiwan's official sources, as historical documentation was very limited, as at the time it was not very common to document or record historical events in writing, indicating that might have been probably due to the lack of literacy among the population and other social factors. Many of the stories of the historical event have been passed down by Taiwan's indigenous peoples following research by Taiwanese historians on the period. Furthermore, the greatest source of information about the events that took place turned out to be drawn from the personal notes of Charles Le Gendre (US Consul during this period) and the travel diaries of the English explorer William Pickering (played by Andrew Chau), who recorded his time in Taiwan. Tsao argues that no matter what source of information we are talking about, nothing explains as accurately what happened to the Rover wreck and the parties involved in its unfortunate fate as the notes of these two very important people who were involved in the historical events and experienced the story first hand.

4.1.7. Gender perspective. The case of indigenous director Laha Mebow

In the development of this research, there were only records of male indigenous filmmakers, so a gender perspective has been a key element in the analysis, focusing on the case of Tayal director Laha Mebow as a representative model of contemporary Taiwanese cinema, especially contemporary indigenous cinema (2010-present). In March 2015, she received the 23rd annual *Top 10 Outstanding Young Women* award for her contribution to indigenous issues.

Laha Mebow is the first indigenous female director in Taiwan, and received the Best Director award at the Taiwan *Golden Horse Film Awards* ceremony in 2022 with her film *Gaga*. In this production, she raises the current issues that indigenous peoples face today, such as the clash between tradition and modernity and how to deal with this fusion, from the perspective of an Atayal family (an indigenous group found in the mountainous regions of central and northern Taiwan), with the intention that the main family unit represents the entire audience. The film features many of the most important cultural manifestations of the Atayal cultural heritage, which follows the ancestral preaching, with the ceremony of the ancestral spirit as the most important ritual (Atayal culture in *Council of Indigenous Peoples*, n.d.).

The director has already directed 3 films, which we could call a "contemporary indigenous trilogy" in which she addresses current indigenous issues with realism and authenticity. As she indicated at the 17th edition of the *Asian Film Festival* in San Diego, she focuses on the search for her own cultural identity as an aboriginal through her films, having grown up in the city and returned to her community after 30 years.

One of the highlights of her career has been directing *Ça Fait Si Longtemps* (2017), a documentary that portrays the musical cultural encounters between indigenous communities in Taiwan and the Pacific region of New Caledonia, in which she explores Austronesian roots and ties with the indigenous Kanay community.

Laha Mebow's films have not been distributed in Spain (only her second film was distributed in France), so it has not been possible to obtain them mainly due to the time factor. This aspect is developed in more detail in the conclusions.

4.2. Results of the interviews

To address the research objectives, an interview with open-ended questions on Taiwan's indigenous cinema was developed to find out the views of indigenous and non-indigenous people of Taiwanese origin on cultural diversity and identity, focusing on the best-known or most impactful films, series and documentaries of the last decade.

The results obtained come from the opinions of 8 people consulted through a questionnaire with open-ended questions, both in English and Spanish, which can be seen in Annex 1. I had to adapt the initial idea of conducting the interviews online, as I obtained

a more positive response from the interviewees if they answered the questions in writing, with the option of making some clarifications after sending the written document or sending them the questionnaire, if necessary. Likewise, I do not include personal data that could identify the people who participated in the study, as not all of them agreed to do so at the beginning, so I will refer to the sample by indicating the data shown in table 1, attached in the methodology section.

The questionnaire has been posted on social media such as Twitter and on the indigenous peoples and Taiwan-related discussion forums of the Reddit online community in order to get more opinions from people of Taiwanese origin on the topic of the study. Although the views of these posts were very high, as we can see in the images below, only two people participated in the study and one other person shared information that can be relevant to the project.

Hi everyone! I'm working on my master's thesis in Cultural Studies about Indigenous people in Taiwan through cinema and I would like to ask for your help! To be able to answer the questions the requirement is that

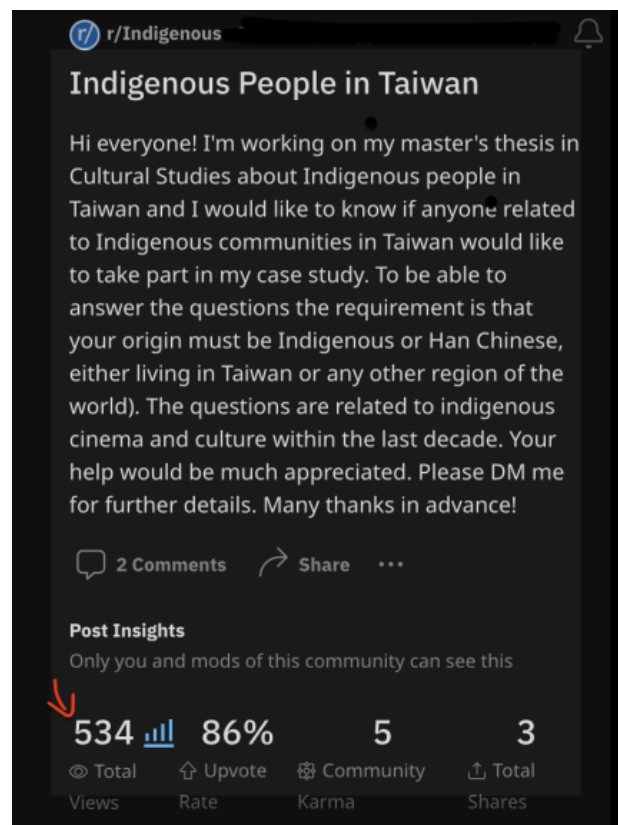
[Traducir Tweet](#)

13:12 · 25 may 23 · **174 Visualizaciones**

[Ver actividad del Tweet](#)

2 Retweets **3** Me gusta

Twitter screenshot. Source: own authorship



Screenshot of the Reddit online community. Source: own elaboration



Screenshot of the Reddit online community. Source: own elaboration

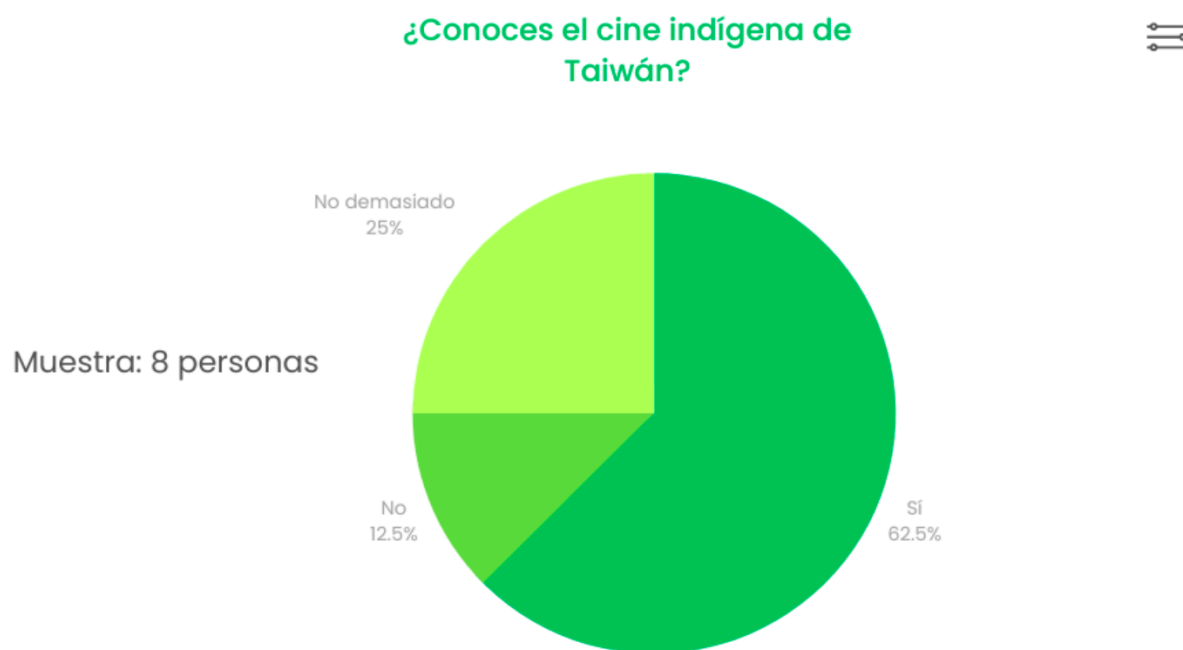
4.2.1. Perception of the representation of Taiwanese indigenous cinema by the interviewees

Despite the initial difficulty in obtaining a sample of people to participate in the project to support the bibliographic analysis, I believe that the final sample has proved to be very representative for the study, as all participants share similar views on the issues raised and provide important information from a cultural and educational perspective on indigenous issues.

The aim of asking these questions was to find out whether the respondents are aware of Taiwanese indigenous cinema, especially productions made since the 2010s, what their perception is of the visibility of Taiwanese indigenous cinema today, what their opinion is of the cultural diversity in Taiwan, and whether they have had the opportunity to see some of the productions chosen for the study to find out how they perceive their representation, and in the case of indigenous people, whether they feel represented and what cultural elements they highlight as positive and negative.

Beginning with the results of the survey analysis, these are the data extracted on the respondents' familiarity with Taiwanese indigenous cinema:

Figure 1: Familiarity with Taiwan's indigenous cinema



Fuente: Elaboración propia en base a las respuestas del cuestionario

Of the 8 respondents, 5 indicated that they were familiar with indigenous cinema, 2 not very familiar, and only 1 said they were not familiar. Interestingly for the study, of the group of people who are not very familiar with indigenous cinema, respondent 6 belongs to one of the 16 recognised indigenous groups in Taiwan (Tayal) but says that the main reason has to do with the fact that she does not watch films often in her daily life, and mentions that living outside Taiwan, access to indigenous cinema is limited. As I mentioned in the bibliographical analysis, this coincides with the difficulty I have encountered in accessing Taiwanese film material, especially films outside the *mainstream*, moreover when it comes to uncommon international themes such as indigenous cinema. With regard to this lack of access, respondent 1 points out that this is also the case with the *Seqalu* series, released only on Netflix Taiwan. However, going back to the answers of respondent 6, if we review the questions in the questionnaire, she does indicate that she knows the films or series that were asked about, and she claims to have seen the film *Warriors of the Rainbow*, so I have been able to extract very relevant data about her perception on a cultural level.

On the visibility of indigenous cinema, these are the results after consulting the respondents:

Figure 2: Visibility of Taiwan's indigenous cinema today



Fuente: Elaboración propia en base a las respuestas del cuestionario

Therefore, in terms of the perception of the visibility of Taiwan's indigenous cinema today, all interviewees agree that it is underrepresented, noting that although there has been an increase in representation today, and that although there has been an increase in films dealing with the suffering of aboriginal people in Taiwan since 2010 (as respondent 7 points out), it has not yet achieved the visibility it should have.

In relation to the question of what they know about Taiwan's cultural diversity, of the 8 respondents, all of them know about the *Han* ethnic group, which is the predominant ethnicity in the country, and only respondent 1 explained that she had studied Taiwan's indigenous cultures during her primary school education and therefore knows the main characteristics of each culture, noting that 9 indigenous peoples were previously recognised and 16 are currently recognised. As we can see in the historical overview of the three periods, the categorisations have not always been the same to refer to the different indigenous groups, and it is in the transition to democracy that indigenous cultural

policies begin to be developed to allow for the recognition of their rights and therefore their study in the cultural and educational field. I think it is important to note that only respondent 4 mentions the existence of a third population group and that is the group of immigrants from Southeast Asia, who in fact today represent about 2.5% of the total population in Taiwan as I mentioned in the section on the initial questions. Also, two of the respondents highlight the ethnic diversity of the country, but only respondent 8, from the Paiwan community, emphasises that, despite the cultural diversity, not everyone is represented equally in cinema.

Regarding the assessment of the situation of Taiwan's indigenous communities, all respondents agree that, although much progress has been made in relation to their political and cultural rights, there is still much to be done in this regard, with respondent 4 adding that "in terms of reaching real equality not only the government needs to take action, society should learn to respect the diversity, too". Respondent 8 also states that "continued efforts are necessary to promote indigenous transitional justice and foster a society that values and respects the rights, cultures, and contributions of indigenous communities in Taiwan".

Several of the respondents talked about the historical repression of indigenous communities, and I think it is very important to highlight that this statement comes from both indigenous and non-indigenous people. This means that there is a social awareness of the historical events and the economic, political and socio-cultural impact this has had on ethnic minorities, so necessary in the understanding of the preservation of heritage and cultural identities. We note how this approach is similar to the reflection on cultural identity and heritage presented by the Jamaican-British theorist and activist Stuart Hall (1932-2014), a leading figure in global cultural studies, and in his denunciation of entrenched elitist conceptions of British cultural heritage. As part of his speech at the national conference in Manchester (November 1999) he noted the following: "It is, therefore, an appropriate time to ask, then, for whom is Heritage for? In the British case the answer is clear. It is for those who 'belong' to a society that imagines itself, broadly speaking, to be culturally homogenous and unified". (Ashley, Susan L. T., 2023, p. 16). In relation to this idea, when respondents belonging to indigenous groups were asked for their views on the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to these groups, respondent 6 (Tayal) indicated that "the best part of belonging to an Indigenous group is to have a sense of collective goal to fight for, such as cultural continuity and language

revitalization" and that "the least is to be taken advantaged, stigmatized or exploited because of the identity"; respondent 8 (Paiwan) responded similarly in terms of stereotyping or stigmatisation, but highlighted the fact that it could be denoted as special as a positive thing.

Respondent 8, who belongs to the Paiwan indigenous group argues that "currently, indigenous peoples in Taiwan face numerous challenges, including land issues, outmigration of young populations to urban areas, and the loss of cultural and linguistic heritage resulting from historical colonialism and assimilation efforts". This view supports the literature review on current indigenous issues that are the result of successive colonisations and acculturation, especially from the late 18th century to the late 20th century, that is, until cultural policies that protect and promote the rights of Taiwan's indigenous peoples began to be developed. He also argues that "with Taiwan's ongoing process of democratisation, indigenous voices are increasingly being heard, and there is a growing awareness of the need for indigenous transitional justice. Notably, urban indigenous youth and local non-indigenous youth are actively raising concerns regarding indigenous rights and justice. They are advocating for the recognition and protection of indigenous land rights, the preservation and revitalisation of indigenous culture and languages, and the rectification of historical injustices faced by indigenous communities. This engagement from various segments of society reflects a positive shift in acknowledging the rights and aspirations of indigenous peoples in Taiwan. It demonstrates a growing commitment to address the historical and ongoing challenges faced by indigenous communities and work towards achieving a more equitable and inclusive society". Some of these efforts to revitalise the language and not lose their cultural identity are being carried out through educational projects such as the Pancah language project conducted at the National Dong Hwa University lead by Professor Friedman, which I explained in the literature review.

In relation to this matter, respondent 7 points out that "when the *Han* came to the island there were great massacres of the original population and general repression", and that "in the last few years of democracy in Taiwan indigenous people are protected, have visibility, and economic support and are generally loved and well regarded within Taiwanese society, and even carried with pride that they are there". Therefore, with regard to this social awareness of the historical facts of the past, it has been a milestone in Taiwanese history that the current president of Taiwan was the first political leader in the world to

issue a public apology in the media, as a form of reconciliation and cultural diplomacy to work on future cultural policies, showing her support for indigenous communities (*President Tsai apologizes to indigenous peoples on behalf of government*, 2016). Therefore, without the support of the government and both public and private institutions, the recognition of their cultural rights would not be possible.

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of the three film sources previously selected in the literature review, whether they had had the opportunity to see them, and what their opinion was of the representation of indigenous peoples in these films. Of the 8 respondents, all have heard of Laha Mebow's film *Gaga* and are aware of its recognition in the film industry, but only respondent 8 indicated having seen the film, providing interesting cultural insights, arguing that "although he does not belong to the Atayal indigenous community, the cultural representation is quite authentic, having shared the views with Atayal friends who watched the film". He also states that "the Atayal culture in the film is conveyed very naturally embedded in elders' life as to how to hunt, how to live harmoniously with nature, and family dynamics when it comes to political involvement", affirming "not to be sure if people's ancestors faith still fits in into the Atayal community due to the predominance of Christianity". With regard to the apparent clash of religions and thus also cultural clash in indigenous communities, Laha Mebow argues that "Christianity is also imported, but it is actually similar to Gaga disciplines, and is easier to understand and use to continue tribal disciplines, and easier to adapt to family lives" (*A virtual speaker series: Indigenous Taiwan*). (*A virtual speaker series: Indigenous Taiwan*, 2023).

In relation to the previous idea, respondent 6, from the Tayal group, points out the importance of "not just going back to 400 years ago, but to renew and reclaim the identity in the contemporary world", which in her opinion is what revitalisation means. In agreement with the same opinion, respondent 1 states that "these ethnic groups that centuries ago were very reticent about contact with society are opening up more and more, accepting the new reality that surrounds us".

Some of the people interviewed noted that they had to look up the titles of the films they were asked about, as they did not know the films by the English name or the indigenous language title, but by the Mandarin name (e.g. *Gaga*, in Mandarin has been called ha yong jia 哈勇家). Recently, some of the problems experienced by people belonging to indigenous communities who chose to keep their aboriginal name were reported in the

Taiwanese media (Taiwan news). This is consistent with the opinion of respondent 8, who indicated that what he liked least about belonging to an indigenous group had to do with the fact that there are still stereotypes about indigenous people, especially having a name that may be considered strange and not easy to pronounce. Like languages, names are part of people's cultural identity, and it is only very recently that the discrimination faced by indigenous peoples in this regard has begun to be discussed in the media, with indigenous peoples today facing difficulties when they are asked for their Taiwanese name. As Mutulavay, a member of the Ketagalan indigenous people states "A name is like a symbol of authenticity... For us who are still searching for the traces of our language, we can only yearn for a name" (Taipei Times, 16 July 2022).

Regarding *Warriors of the rainbow: Seediq Bale* by director Wei Te-sheng, 5 of the 8 respondents know and have seen the film, and I think it's worth highlighting the fact that respondent 4 points out that Taiwanese students learn about the historical event in history classes" and that "the film portrayed the indigenous people as heroes" which she believes is "a great turning point in Taiwanese cinema, as in the past the indigenous people were mostly depicted as victims, the suppressed. In Seediq Bale, however, they were the ones who fight back". This confirms director Wei's intention to portray them as heroes, and by inviting director Umin Boya in the making of the film to "direct his films and shape the colonial past in a way that represents Taiwan's collective memory as a process of reflection on the present" (Taiwan Cinema, p. 95). Moreover, the respondent is of the opinion that the second part of the movie was "too much of a fantasy", and it is precisely the director's intention to mix fantasy with reality, as indicated in the talk about his film organised by the University of British Columbia in Canada (2023). On the contrary, respondent 2 believes that "some liberties were taken to make some people more heroic, but the truth was the other way around", and respondent 3 describes it as a good film to present the aborigines as a different culture from Taiwan, and states "it is not important what is depicted in the film, as we will never know whether it is true or not what happened", the latter coinciding with what is officially known about the historical event. In addition, respondent 8, from the Paiwan group, said that he "did not so agree with the depiction, because it emphasizes on suicide too much".

Finally, in terms of the respondents' perceptions of the Taiwanese blockbuster *Seqalu: Formosa 1867*, all of them claim to be familiar with the series and the overall perception is

very positive, highlighting "the representation of different ethnic groups, as was the case in the real event" (respondent 8), who in turn highlights that he found it interesting that people spoke with many different accents in the Paiwan language.

In conclusion, we can see that the general perception of how indigenous cultures are represented in contemporary Taiwanese cinema today is in line with the information from the literature review. Although they are still not sufficiently visible, there has been a remarkable change in recent decades, and indigenous cinema has become a very important dissemination tool in terms of cultural and educational transmission, especially in showing the richness of Taiwan's cultural diversity.

5. Conclusions

In this project, I have been able to further investigate Taiwan's indigenous cinema for cultural purposes, analysing how indigenous cultures are represented throughout the different periods of colonisation and specifically in the context of modernity, what importance living heritage has for these cultures and how they are linked to cultural identity, as well as understanding what their scope is nationally and globally from a socio-cultural point of view. Therefore, I consider that both the main and secondary objectives have been fulfilled, as well as being able to contribute new information to the topic of study.

From a general perspective, having conducted the literature review as well as the opportunity to listen to the valuable opinions of the people who participated in this study regarding Taiwan's indigenous cinema, I would like to conclude with the following:

Both the research objectives and the research hypotheses have helped me to delve deeper into the different forms of representation of Taiwan's indigenous peoples as determined by the colonising nations, and the impact this has had on the preservation of their cultural heritage and practices. In this way I have been able to see the remarkable change in how society perceives these changes, especially since the last decade, following the creation of indigenous policies that protect and recognise their rights, as well as the growing but slow visibilisation in the media and film. This confirms the hypothesis that, since the 2010s, we observe how indigenous cinema is becoming increasingly important, albeit slowly, with the arrival of indigenous directors who tell their stories from their own perspectives and experiences.

This in turn is related to the rapid digitalisation of the last decade, as especially after the pandemic, the growing interest in home cinema consumption, i.e. increased viewing on *streaming* platforms, has paved the way for the exploration of new film genres, usually unknown to the general public, such as indigenous cinema. Although filmography with this subject matter is increasingly available, in the case of Taiwanese indigenous cinema, it is still very difficult to access films, series or documentaries on *streaming platforms* globally, and viewing is almost exclusively limited to academic settings, auteur film festivals or Asian film festivals.

Therefore, for the promotion of Taiwan's indigenous cinema, more distribution agreements should be made, and the *mainstream* culture or the global popular tendency to consume products should be more fragmented to make way for real cultural diversity in the film industry, especially in regions where there is very little knowledge about indigenous cultures for different reasons, as is the case in Spain. Despite having been the largest colonising nation for several centuries in the Americas with disastrous results for its indigenous populations on a socio-cultural level, there is little knowledge of the repercussions these events had on a cultural and educational level, especially for its indigenous populations and ethnic minorities. Respect for cultural diversity is directly related to the knowledge and values we assimilate through culture and education, which is why revisions of history through a decolonial cultural lens are fundamental to raising awareness. For example, in the United Kingdom and France, where the presence of these cultural and historical revisions in museums, galleries and educational projects is more notable, although stereotypes and cultural stigmas against their ethnic minorities or colonised populations have not ceased to exist.

Thus, for the promotion of indigenous cinema, film festivals have proven to be an excellent tool for cultural transmission and dissemination, and it would be very interesting to expand Taiwan's indigenous-themed film festivals, especially in geographic regions where knowledge of the subject is limited or non-existent. Therefore, this first approach would be part of a larger project to disseminate indigenous culture through film in western regions.

In relation to cultural identity, as indicated in the project approach, today more than ever there is a desire to search for a new Taiwanese identity within a political and social context strongly marked by the colonisations of the last century. This identity conflicts with the cultural identity of the indigenous peoples and the need to preserve their heritage, and thus jeopardises the efforts made to achieve full recognition of their rights. I would

therefore like to stress the importance of support in the development of indigenous cultural policies, which are aimed at the preservation and revitalisation of indigenous culture and languages, and the rectification of the historical injustices they face. In short, the protection of their rights so that these cultures do not disappear. Much progress has been made at the national and international level in this regard in the last decade, but this process would unfortunately not be possible without the support of the global society. Sustainability is one of the key factors for Taiwan's indigenous peoples as they would not be able to exist without this connection to the land.

Lastly, in reference to inclusive heritage, I would like to assert the need to preserve and promote living heritage through the realisation of cultural projects that foster cultural exchange, highlighting the benefit of collaboration between indigenous peoples' representatives and cultural agents at the international level. It has been proven that collaboration at the cultural and creative industries level strengthens ties between countries inhabited by indigenous peoples, such as in Canada, where indigenous director Laha Mebow has carried out film projects with other indigenous communities, or regions in Oceania, where cultural cooperation projects are carried out between Taiwan and other countries such as Australia, sharing a similar experience in their colonial past, which contribute to diplomacy through these cultural exchange projects.

As an overall assessment of the project, the research hypotheses and objectives have been met, although as I mentioned earlier it is a very broad field of research and I have had to be quite specific, but it would be a good starting point for the extension of future research.

With regard to possible obstacles during the development, I would like to point out that I have been able to access the bibliographical sources necessary to develop the topic and carry out the research process with little difficulty, as I had books and reference material at my disposal due to my previous interest in Taiwanese cinema, and in particular in Taiwanese indigenous cinema. However, it has not been easy to find the film material, as no films or documentaries on this topic have been distributed in Spain, and the time stipulated to carry out the research is very limited, which has not played in my favour in obtaining these resources. Even so, I am grateful for the collaboration of all the people who have helped me in this aspect, such as the Economic and Cultural Office of Taipei in Spain and the person from Laha Mebow's production team, as well as the people who are related to Taiwanese or indigenous Taiwanese cinema and have helped me in this search

for material, as well as in the development of the interviews. The fact that the films and documentaries in the project are not resources that can be found in *mainstream* or commercial cinema is a major handicap if you are not familiar with this topic, despite the huge growth of *streaming* services and online viewing platforms. Some of the selected films can be found in the viewing, rental or purchase catalogue of Netflix, Apple TV+ or Amazon Prime in other countries that have cultural and diplomatic relations with Taiwan, especially in the catalogue of the United States.

Furthermore, it has not been possible to conduct fieldwork research in Taiwan which I believe it would have provided a very interesting qualitative information for the study, especially if I had the opportunity to approach the indigenous communities. Therefore this also opens the possibility of continuing different lines of investigation through fieldwork.

In terms of bibliographical material, although I have noticed that in recent years several articles have been published in English on contemporary Taiwanese cinema and even some related to indigenous cinema, as well as on the incidence of colonialism and its cultural repercussions, many of the materials that could have provided interesting approaches to the research, especially from authors of Taiwanese origin or belonging to indigenous communities, are only in Mandarin Chinese.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that this is a field in which much research remains to be done, and this approach opens up the possibility for me to continue with future lines of research on the topic.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Questions used in the interview.

Name:

Age:

Gender you identify with:

Ethnicity:

1. Are you familiar with Taiwanese indigenous cinema and do you think it has enough visibility today?

2. Can you name any indigenous directors and any of their films or documentaries?

If you are not familiar with Taiwan's indigenous cinema or have not watched any films or documentaries, could you explain why?

5. What do you know about ethnic diversity in Taiwan?

6. How do you assess the situation of indigenous communities in Taiwan?

7. If you belong to an indigenous group in Taiwan, which group is it? In your opinion, what is relevant about belonging to this community? what does it mean to you to be indigenous in Taiwan? What's your opinion on cultural identity and how do you feel about it in Taiwan?

Do you identify with the way indigenous culture is portrayed in any of the current films?

Do you think there has been a change in Taiwanese cinema in recent years in how indigenous people are portrayed in today's Taiwan?

Culturally speaking, what do you like the most about belonging to an indigenous group? And the least?

8. Do you know the Atayal director Laha Mebow and have watched any of her films?

Have you heard of her latest film "Gaga" for which she won the Golden Horse for Best Director? If you have watched it, describe what you think about the portrayal of Atayal culture in the film.

9. Are you familiar with the historical drama "Seqalu: 1867" which was produced in 2021 and released on Netflix in 2022? Have you watched it? If so, were you aware of the historical event? What is your opinion on how different Indigenous groups are represented within the series?

10. Do you know the film "Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale" by director Wei Te-sheng? Have you watched it? If so, could you give your opinion on how the indigenous peoples depicted in the film are represented and whether you agree with this representation?

11. Please feel free to share anything you feel is relevant to you about Indigenous people in Taiwan.

Many thanks!

Link to the questionnaire in English: <https://forms.gle/EVifibqMv7ycAjUeA>

Annex 2: Table 2. Taiwanese Indigenous Cinema: Initial List of Filmography

Type	Name	Author	Year	Summary	Link - trailer
film	Sayon's Bell	Hiroshi Shimizu	1943	Japanese filmmaker, old version of Laha Mebow's "Finding Sayun" (2011)	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayon's_Bell https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhQpSu6KEps&ab_channel=%E3%83%96%E3%83%9C%E3%83%97%E3%83%A1
film	Green Mountain Bloodshed/Qing shan bi xie	HoChi-Ming	1957	Japan	
film	Old Mo's Second Spring/Lao mo de di er ge chuntian	Lee You-ning	1984	Japan	
film	Missing Persons/Shizong renkou	Lin Ching-chieh	1987		
film	The man from island west	Huang Ming-chuan	1989	TFFE	
film	Two Painters/Liang ge youqi jiang	Yu Kan-ping	1989		
film	Connection by Fate	Wan Jen	1999	Taiwan New Cinema - 1980s, the spirit of an executed aboriginal youth befriends a former activist-turned-taxi driver	
film	Postcard	Cheng Wen-Tang	1999	"aboriginal trilogy"	
film	Somewhere Over the Dreamland (Menghuan buluo)	Cheng Wen-Tang	2002	"aboriginal trilogy"	
film	Badu's Homework (Feng zhong dexiaomi tian)	Cheng Wen-Tang	2003	"aboriginal trilogy"	
film	The Sage Hunter (Shanzhu feishu sakenu)	Tony Cheung	2005	Hong Kong production, narrates the story of Taiwanese indigenous hero Sakinu (Paiwan tribe).	
film	The Song of Spirits (Xinling zhi ge)	Wu Hung-hsiang	2006	Bunun indigenous people (life and love)	
indigenous filmmaker	Voices of Orchid Island	Hu Tai-Li	1993	Yami People's views on Han Chinese tourism at Orchid Island	
film	Kavalan/ Shaonian gamelan	Kang Jinhe	1998	Kavalan traditional life	
film	Cape N.7	Wei Te-sheng	2008	International reception	
film	Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale	Wei Te-sheng	2011	International reception	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEsVAS0EV4&ab_channel=UBCAsianStudies
indigenous filmmaker	Finding Sayun	Laha Mebow	2011	Indigenous new movies	
film	Kano	Umin Boya Wei Te-sheng	2014	Indigenous new movies: A high school baseball team from Taiwan travels to compete in a national tournament in Japan (1931)	
Type	Name	Author	Year	Summary	Link - trailer
				in Japan (1931)	
indigenous filmmaker	WAWA NO CICAL (Taiyang de haizi)	Lekal Sumi Yu-Chieh Cheng	2015	indigenous new movies: Panchah	https://mubi.com/films/wawa-no-cical
indigenous filmmaker	Listen before you sing	Chih Lin Yang	2016	indigenous new movies: Bunun	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gse_XyLPkbU&ab_channel=WWalesOneWorldFilmFestival
indigenous filmmaker	Hang in there, kids! (Lokah Laqi)	Laha Mebow	2016	indigenous new movies, youth's perspective	https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=laha+mebow
indigenous filmmaker	Ten Years Taiwan	Lekal Sumi	2018	indigenous new movies	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHiWd3k5OcU&ab_channel=Geomovies
series	Seqalu: Formosa 1867	Jui-Yuan Tsao	2021	Historical drama, Golden Horse Awards Taipei	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYm6OAOkn7U&list=PLQrFzJcNrtM0pEDBwhy1jMvMPSrxPe&ab_channel=PTSPlus
indigenous filmmaker	Gaga	Laha Mebow	2021	Indigenous new movies: Ayatal.	
indigenous filmmaker	The Return of Gods and Ancestors	Hu Tai-Li	1985	Paiwan tribe	
indigenous filmmaker	Ga-Tau Chang	Lungnan Isak	2019	documentary: music industry	
indigenous filmmaker		Mayaw Biho Pilin Yapu Chang Shu-Lan		1990s - indigenous filmmakers Siku. S. [Skaya]. (2021). "The Making of Indigenous Knowledge in Contemporary Taiwan: A Case Study of Three Indigenous Documentary Filmmakers". <i>Springer</i> . https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-15-4178-0_3	Mayaw Biho: https://dafilms.com/director/11716-mayaw-biho

Link to the list of films in web version: <https://quilted-innovation-21e.notion.site/60c2819191614b8499b0988225e30967?v=3ac2a1a3ebc74303bab61b6e616e9a58>