

Environmental Anthropology and Indigenous Ecologies: A Self-Introduction

Brendan A. Galipeau | Assistant Professor, Institute of Anthropology, National Tsing Hua University

Greetings to the anthropology community in Taiwan. Having arrived here three years ago I welcome this opportunity to briefly introduce myself as part of integrating into the wider community. I was born and raised in the United States in Los Angeles, California. Growing up in a liberal arts Waldorf education system and regularly visiting the Sierra Nevada Mountains every summer for family trips, my interest in the natural environment and other cultures and countries was cultivated from an early age. I have been engaged in study, research, and teaching in Taiwan, China, and Southeast Asia in a variety of capacities for the past fourteen years since 2007 when I first visited northern Thailand and Southwest China for a cultural and environmental field studies program. I then returned in 2008 to work for an

NGO in village community-based tourism development in Tibetan areas in China upon completing my undergraduate degree in Environmental Science. Each of my subsequent degrees were then built upon these initial experiences. I received a master's degree in Applied Anthropology in 2012 based upon research on the social impacts of hydropower resettlement on local agriculture among Tibetan communities in Yunnan Province. Based upon findings made during this project about local agriculture, economies, history, and landscape, my subsequent doctoral research then focused on colonial histories and global capitalist agriculture related to viticulture and wine production in Northwest Yunnan, leading to a PhD degree in Anthropology in 2017 from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

I am an environmental anthropologist by training and having lived and studied in Hawai'i, I also became quite deeply versed in histories of colonialism and indigeneity, working closely with a Native Hawaiian anthropologist Ty Tengan and several others with research projects spread throughout the Pacific Islands and Austronesia. This makes living and working in Taiwan particularly exciting and enriching for me today. As an environmental anthropologist focused on indigenous peoples, climate change, development, agriculture, and food, my work is guided by two questions which I see as carrying both scholarly and applied practical significance:

What are the roles of culture broadly speaking (religion, ethnicity, identity, history, etc.) in shaping people's interactions with their surrounding natural environments and ecology?

How do individuals and communities balance the need for economic development with environmental protection and cultural preservation? Are these two things mutually exclusive?

My past research interests and publications focus on environment, economy, and history in Tibetan Southwest China. I have studied and written about hydropower development, agricultural practices, and non-timber forest products and am currently at work on a book manuscript under contract with the University of Washington Press tentatively titled *Crafting a Tibetan Terroir: Wine Production, Identity, and Landscape Change in Shangri-La, China*. This work explores economic and ecological representations of ethnicity and identity formation as they relate to agricultural change and commodification of wine and grape production among Tibetans in Northwest Yunnan Province in Southwest China. The book provides an inquiry into the ways that a strategic deployment of the French notion of *terroir* or "taste of place," can work to create and formulate new forms of ethno-regional identities and village landscapes among wine producers, built around their production of wine as a commodity from a certain marketed locale. I ask and examine how colonial histories and global capitalism can be re-established and reformulated through the production of "Tibetan" branded wine and beer in the crafting of a new global and unique

wine region and industry? In the book I assert that in post-socialist and post semi-colonial locales, long standing historical patterns of global capitalism and exchange of stimulants and intoxicants, remain in continuous motion with colonial and other older transnational connections between Europe and the Sino-Tibetan borderlands being reestablished and reformulated through the production of Tibetan wine and beer.

Following the completion of my PhD degree in 2017, I was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship in Transnational Asian Studies at Rice University for two years from 2017 to 2019, before being selected for and hired for my current position as Assistant Professor in the Institute of Anthropology at National Tsing Hua University. In addition to teaching courses on environment, food, contemporary social theory, China, and Asian Studies more broadly, given my expertise and familiarity with Southeast Asia as a border region with Yunnan and shared cultural affinities with Southwest China, my teaching at NTHU includes regular undergraduate and graduate coursework on Southeast Asia.



Last year I was awarded a research grant from the Ministry of Science and Technology for a new research project based in Taiwan entitled Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Salmon Worlds in East Asia: Foreign Aquaculture and Identity in China and Conservation of an Indigenous Fish in Taiwan. This new research takes an ethnographic and science and technologies studies approach to understand how different knowledge systems (indigenous and western scientific) play out in relationships between humans, animals, ecosystems, and climate change.

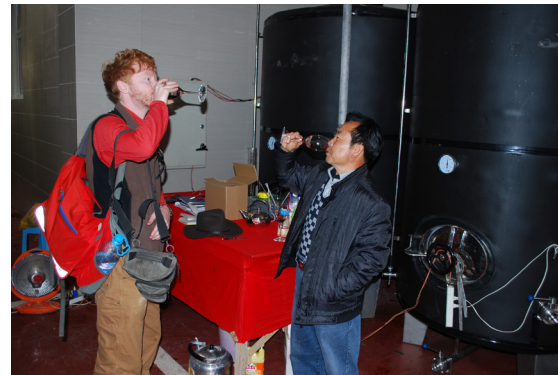


The project examines salmon conservation among indigenous Atayal peoples, national park managers, and conservation scientists in Taiwan, where the Formosan Landlocked Salmon (*Oncorhynchus masouformosanus*) once a major food source for the Atayal is now faced with possible extinction. The fish has become a national symbol of conservation in Taiwan, and serves as a bellwether for climate change. This is an issue with wide-ranging significance and particular impacts upon the indigenous peoples of the Asia-Pacific. The fish became landlocked not

because it cannot reach the ocean physically, but rather as temperatures warmed after the last ice age, preventing it from returning to the ocean as downstream sections of rivers became too warm for it to live. Today as global climate change proceeds, the fish has become further threatened with extinction due to habitats shrinking with warming rivers and increasing severity of typhoon events. The project focuses on and highlights historical and ethnographic analyses of indigenous Atayal perspectives regarding the fish, viewed as a disappearing ancestor in local practice and belief. In this work, I proceed by acknowledging the notion in recent scholarship that perhaps the only way forward in a period of rapid human induced global environmental change is through the notion of a more-than-human anthropology and methodology of listening to non-humans in the ecosystems surrounding us. There are longstanding relationships between Taiwan's indigenous peoples and non-human animals, and paying attention to these relationships reveals new and important gaps in conservation science. However, industrialization, colonialism, and urbanization are slowly eroding these relationships and alienating people from

the wild forests and rivers around them. Historically, Atayal people maintained close relationships with the Landlocked Salmon as a food source, acknowledging it as an ancestor that could share details with them about its riverine habitats. This research thus works to highlight what forms of agency have historically been ascribed to the fish and related aquatic river species and animals by indigenous peoples. In parts thanks to a Japanese colonial scientist, Ōshima Masamitsu who first “discovered” the Landlocked Salmon, we know that historically Atayal people maintained deep relationships with the fish through not only consumption but also songs, stories, and other folk customs. Ōshima’s work is recognized by Atayal themselves as leaving behind one of the last written or living memories of times when their people maintained active relations with the fish as a food source and ancestor before its population decline and move towards extinction.

In this research I am working on weaving together these histories with contemporary ethnography among the Atayal on contemporary perspectives about this aquatic ancestor, as this indigenous group has become more directly involved in habitat restoration, monitoring, and fish recovery, hoping to strengthen and bring back the relations they once maintained with the fish.



Theoretically I don't like to tie myself down to one rigid body of scholarship or area. My book manuscript is really a combination of political and spiritual ecology engaged with history and studies of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. For my new work in Taiwan, I am drawn towards multispecies approaches, indigenous studies, and what I should like to call grounded STS, couched in empirical data. I find some science and technology studies to be a bit too esoteric and lacking in real world specificity. Much of my previous and current work draws great inspiration from Anna Tsing's and more recently Michael Hathaway's new book on the matsutake mushrooms as another valuable commodity produced by Tibetans in Northwest Yunnan. I find these authors' melding of ideas of capitalism and the global political economy with multispecies ideals to be of particular intrigue and useful to think with.

I have so far found life and work in Taiwan to be incredibly rewarding and particularly appreciate the small and intimate but very global anthropological community here. As mentioned before, the building out and growing strengths in indigenous studies and connections with Oceania are of particular interest and excitement to me having lived and studied in Hawai'i. I carry a particular excitement to continue to build my work around this area of scholarship and with local indigenous communities around the island.

