



4/4/11

So, Yih-ren peeled off for a couple of days after the concert leaving me with David. April 5 is Qing Meng Festival, tomb sweeping day when everyone visits and tends the graves of the ancestors and he had duties. Two of the elders from Smangus, an Atayal Village a couple of hours away had come to the concert dressed in their traditional garb and had given a talk, one of them, Yurow, in their own language with the other, Masay, translating into Mandarin. They said this was both so that the old people would understand what was said and also so that the ancestors would understand.

David was interviewing Yih-ren for his masters thesis some years ago. Yih-ren had been a witness in the trial of some Atayal aboriginals from Smangus who had been charged with theft of the stump of a tree which had fallen near their village in a typhoon. An [article by David](#) explains that, according to their traditional law, the stump belonged to them (indeed, the whole tree did, including the trunk which the Forests Department had already removed by the time the “theft” occurred). They were given a heavy fine and suspended prison sentences which were reduced on appeal to the High Court. Two years and many protests later, the [government granted new rights to all the aboriginal communities](#) as a result of this case. David’s blog, <http://blog.taiwan-guide.org/> covers a wide range of aspects of Taiwan society.

The following is from a draft of Politicizing Nature: The Maqaw National Park Controversy in Taiwan by Yih-ren Lin from a forthcoming 2011 issue of Capitalism Nature Socialism, The Center for Political Ecology, [www.cnsjournal.org](http://www.cnsjournal.org)

“The wind-fallen beech incident occurred in Smangus, a Tayal community situated in the proposed Maqaw National Park area in 2005. After a community meeting, three members of the Smangus community collected some wood from a fallen beech tree that had previously been blown down in a typhoon. Later they were detained, charged with theft by the Forestry Bureau, and found guilty. The Smangus community authorities objected to these criminal charges and the sentence on the grounds that the three men had acted according to traditional practices of exploiting resources within their traditional territory, and they used the Indigenous Peoples’ Basic Law to appeal. In 2010 the plaintiffs were finally found not guilty by the High Court, ending a legal battle that took more than four years. This case made legal history and set an important legal precedent: it was the first



case in which the Taiwanese courts gave a verdict on the grounds of traditional indigenous practices and use rights (see Reid 2011, forthcoming).

Smangus is the most isolated village in Taiwan, that's one of the reasons why there's so many eco-tourists. Isolation is in short supply in the 2<sup>nd</sup> most densely populated country in the world. It was the last place to get connected by road, not till 1995. When Masay was a boy, it was 2 days walk carrying stuff in and out from the closest road.

Besides tourism, their other industry is growing peaches. They have an agreement that no-one can sell land to outsiders. They have a co-operative which includes 30 of the 32 families (pop. 176) and they share the proceeds, everyone gets the same wage, co-op pays school fees etc., sent someone to Israel to study kibbutz way back.

So we arrive about 8pm after 2 hours 56 k drive with Masay and Yurow and two young women, endless mountains, We get a room in Masay's house and then go to the church where Yurow and the chief are talking into mikes on the grassy flat outside to a couple of hundred eco-tourists (the capacity of the village is 300 tourists) and some kids perform a hunting dance and some girls dance and its all amusing and sweet and friendly. People win little prizes for answering questions and I win a bag of 3 local sweet potatoes for nothing at all.

In the restaurant full of tourists next morning I run into Kevan a Canadian guy, here for a year doing his PhD thesis on the local ethnobiology while his wife Jodi teaches English and cooks with the women. I invite him to join us on the 10k walk to the giant Cypress trees with us.

We set off at 8am with Lahuy, the chief's son, utterly gorgeous, mountain upon mountain with the giant relatives of the redwoods at the end of the trail. Lahuy tells us the story of how his dad in 1991 has a vision that these giant trees are going to bring the tourists once the road is constructed as indeed they did.



Lahuy & John



Lahuy & David



On the way back we stop and look at the field of millet that they've planted in the old swidden way. Government helicopters snoop around filming them whenever they light their illegal swidden fires. I learn that the dam which we had been protesting the day before would mean that they'd either have to abandon the village and their history

or the government would have to build a new road from the other side of the mountains separating them from the rest of their Atayal tribe.

Bought local millet and cherry wine and in the late afternoon Lahuy drove us to another Atayal village where we spend the night, Marqwang. There we're to meet a Presbyterian minister Sangas who does lots of community organizing and activism.

5/4/11

Last night Sangas was there with his kids and at 9pm (after we've all already had a big dinner) he decides to go and spear some fish to cook over the little charcoal fire we are all sitting around. At first I thought I had misunderstood David's translation but a few minutes later and sure enough there he is in a full-body wetsuit with goggles, headtorch and handspear, rides off on his motorbike, comes back in half an hour with a couple dozen small troutlike fish and we have a 2<sup>nd</sup> dinner.

Driving us to the station, he fills us in on the politics of the Atayal's situation and the proposed dam. He spoke of the crisis of Atayal identity stemming from things like the Japanese pushing rice farming onto them during 50 years of occupation replacing the millet on which their culture was based and disrupting their connection to the land. Now, lots of them think that they're Chinese and can easily be bought off and many had already sold out their land and culture. He spoke of a 1947 massacre of ordinary Taiwanese violently suppressed by the Kuomintang (KMT) government after protests at their corruption. 10,000 to 30,000 people died including prominent Atayal intellectuals. The people were terrorized and intimidated such that protests didn't follow widespread deforestation in ensuing decades. The root of the problem is lack of autonomy and to get this back they need to reconnect with culture and land. Their elected politicians don't stand up for these things but settle for getting money from the government for infrastructure and services (ie jobs). So he's afraid that the government will be able to buy people off on the dam issue. He says they have 3 things going for them:

- Presbyterian Church will stand fast
- Some communities like Smangus and Cinsbu have developed a degree of autonomy
- They have support from Providence University and other scholars.

Train to Taoyuan County. Dr Lin arrived on the same train as us and we were picked up by 2 nuns from Hongshi Buddhist College (famous as Taiwan's anti-nuke nuns), then lunch with the venerable Chao Hwei. She is famous for her engaged Buddhism and environmental and animal rights activism. Dr Lin mentioned that he interviewed her for his PhD in 1991 and the resulting article titled "Buddhism and Deep Ecology" is included as a chapter in one of her books, unfortunately never translated.



David                  John                  Chao Hwei   Yih-ren



I gave a 20 minute talk on Buddhism & Deep Ecology. Question time was strong. Chao Hwei's question was about species versus individuals and I replied that deep ecology is a platform where many can stand and so the answer I will give is not "the deep ecology answer" but only the answer from one person who stands on that broad



platform. For me, although compassion for individual suffering is of great importance, it is outweighed by compassion for species. The tree is more important than the leaf.

The session ended with her giving an unabashed plug for an upcoming anti-nuke protest.

I spoke about the anti dams movement in our two countries, sang the Franklin song and “Extinction”, fielded lots of interesting questions around Buddhism and ecology.



One question was about my own journey between Buddhism and ecology.

Chao Hwei: [8:55] So Engaged Buddhism involves participation in social movements, but it is a minority within the mainstream of Buddhism. So we are very curious that John Seed first engaged in the practice of Chan and then became concerned about the environment. So what Ven. Chuan Fa just said is “how did you arrive at this balance between your inner self and matters in the outside world to have harmony and peace”?

I answered that studying with Lama Zopa in Nepal and Goenkaji in Bodhi Gaia in '73, inviting Phra Khantipalo to Nimbin in '74, building the forest meditation centre and retreats with Luong Pi/Christopher Titmus from 75 on, meditating with Buddhadasa Bikkhu, Robert Aitken Roshi and so on, all preceded my 1979 conversion at Terania from which point the Earth became my spiritual teacher and refuge.

While living on Bodhi Farm we loved the bush around us but had no involvement or thoughts of protecting nature till Terania Creek in August 1979. Soon thereafter I stopped meditating, lost interest, too busy anyway and only after 25 years did I suddenly and mysteriously become interested and start practicing again and that interest has grown stronger to this day. I ended to a lot of laughter with “So, if your meditation practice is important to you, please be careful when you go into the forest.”

Chao Hwei gave the following response:

[35:10] Chao Hwei: I just want to clear up one point. I can understand why John Seed didn't meditate for 25 years, but then after he started meditating again was able to notice a big improvement. When we are practicing Vipassana, according to the practice of Buddhism, we want to experience not-self (annata), “bai tuo wo zhi ma”. “bai tuo wo zhi” is about cultivating love for one self. So John Seed, after he entered the environment movement, his mind was not just concerned with protecting himself or the immediate community around him. He had concern for life and the Earth. That kind of concern was able to make him take his own deep love for himself and direct it out to concern for life and the Earth. This is also a practice of not-self.

David is training back to-night but he and Yih-ren will come up for my keynote in Taipei on Sunday. A dozen nuns lined up and waved us goodbye till we were out of sight.



7/4/11

Rola Lin met us at the Hongshi railway station and David left me with her and he headed south while we headed north too Taipei. She is Deputy Secretary General of the Society of Wilderness an NGO with 14,000 members, 1000 volunteers and 40 staff. We met Alder who is in charge of SOW's "international affairs committee board" (many of the SOW people have nicknames of plants or animals) at the station in his black 4wd which took us out of the city and up another mountain to the K2 Nature Centre where the workshop will be held in a couple of days. A chance to hang out with my two translators Yijen and Rae and we went over all the processes planned for the workshop together. We drive down the bumpy switchback road and look over the site – perfect, rustic and funky. 40 people are booked in to the workshop.

Then we pick up one more SOW guy, Chun-lin and drive to a scenic restaurant overlooking the river. He's a psychiatrist, deputy chairman of SOW's board. He had had the book "Ecopsychology" translated into Mandarin and published by SOW so when Yih-ren contacted him about our tour, he already knew me from Joanna's chapter in that book. I stay with Rola and her American boyfriend Peter.

Next morning I'm picked up by Rudy, (translator Rae's husband and Deputy Chairman of SOW) and we are joined by Chun-lin and drive to the Hsao Yo Ken volcano in Yang Ming Shan national park steaming sulfurous (last erupted 800,000 years ago) with bubbling fumaroles (hot bubbling steaming springy things above the ground). I asked Rudy about Taiwan history, how come Mao didn't follow Chiang Kai-shek over to Taiwan and wipe him out? (he got out maneuvered) Did Mao fight the Japanese during WW2 (yes but only with a tiny part of his forces. Kept most for building up his strength for the main game).



Chun-lin



Then to a Taoist temple followed by lunch with Little White Rabbit, a university lecturer at his salvaged recycled shack organic garden Nature Centre and then the SOW office where Rudy gave a powerpoint presentation about their organization. Then to dinner at a classy spicy seafood joint – dish after delicious dish materialized, mmm I do like these folks.

That night I made a 90 minute (including discussion) deep ecology presentation at SOW offices which went down well, 50 or 60 people. showed the Indian Save the Elephant film, a bit stressful for Jennie (who'll also be translating for me at the big NGO conference in a few days) because I kept straying from the script she'd





translated, but she handled it well. People seemed to appreciate my presentation and they invited me to come back again and they'd show me the East Coast of Taiwan, the most beautiful part according to some.

The Council of All Beings workshop was great.



The shed where we circled



the milling



Truth Mandala



songs around the fire

[Cherrystar's photos of the event](#)

Day 2 sharing was intense with 40 people each more excited than the last and refusing to stick to the allotted one minute, lots of them saying that they felt so alive and rejuvenated and wanting to do more for the Earth, I guess that's what happens after a super-strong Mandala of Truth. I gave them 60 seconds to find a non-human ally, 15 minutes to make masks and then thru the magic gate for a 90 minutes Council of All Beings before lunch. About 30 of the people were from the Society of Wilderness, and some had been active since its inception 15 years ago, they knew and loved each other and that may explain why it was the liveliest council of all time. I told my translators not to bother explaining to me so that they could get into it themselves and I just sat back and watched.

It was over-the-top exuberant like a spellbinding play in some language you don't understand, I was enthralled. Two people would get up and dance and suddenly there were a dozen milling about in the centre holding hands, I



jumped up and joined them. Someone would say something and people would kill themselves laughing. It would get all soft and serious for a while. 10 minutes before lunch I asked the translator to begin and sure enough I came



Mask making



entering the magic gate

in on a conversation about how to reach the humans so I piped up about how I knew where the human masks were stashed by the magic gate and we peeled out of council as sweet as you could wish.



Yesterday random people would come up and give me presents, a bit perplexing, local custom maybe? Then Rola told me that they'd been told that, as there was no charge for the workshop, people could bring me a present and pretty soon it was a steady stream of rare teas, local alcohol, drawings, keychains, calendar, photos, and on and on so beautiful, I'm going to have to abandon some clothes to fit all the booty in my pack. In the networking session lots of people were keen to do more of this work and 3 people offered to do translations, maybe Thinking Like a Mountain will find a Mandarin language publisher. Now I remember why I used to be so addicted to this lifestyle.

Next day is my last one in Taipei, my flight to Sydney leaves at midnight. Morning I gave the keynote address to the annual environmentalists conference. Stuck a bit more to the script this time for translator's sake. Like at the SOW presentation I got them to do the evolutionary hand journey and after initial hesitation and embarrassment at holding and exploring a strangers hand, they got right into it and liked it a lot.

Then we went to see Teacher poet and photographer, with 30 come back from Borneo the night with us and Ching-yu (Whale) students. We brought fruits and juice .

Utterly gorgeous tall, strong than me, the founder of Society huge book of photos "Wild "To Mr John Seed – We are One and One Earth" and another book "Wild Nicaragua" inscribed "To Mr John Seed – You are an Angel of Earth".



Hsu (Hsu-jen Shiu), the activist of his books published who had before . Alder and Chin-lin came and Yih-ren and one of his steamed peanuts and sugar-cane

charismatic man a year younger of Wilderness, he gave me a Formosa" which he inscribed

What a delightful and productive couple of weeks.

Photos by David Reid & Chun-lin Chen

[MORE PICTURES](#)