IRT 2.2 (2024), 360–365
https://doi.org/10.1558/irt.29970
IRT (print) ISSN 2754-673X
IRT (online) ISSN 2754-6748

Book Review

Truly Human: Indigeneity and Indigenous Resurgence on Formosa. By Scott E. Simon. 2023. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 388pp. $108 (hardcover), $38.95 (paperback or e-book).

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The title of Scott Simon's 2023 monograph is an innovative translation of the term *sediq balay* from the Formosan Indigenous language Sediq.[1] *Sediq* is typically a noun meaning 'human(s)', though it has become a word for a language and an ethnic group. *Balay* would typically modify *sediq* adjectivally to yield 'true human(s)'. Simon's translation takes advantage of the fact that Sediq nouns can serve as predicates. Then they seem to verbalize, so that *sediq* can mean 'to be human'—hence, Simon's adverbial interpretation of *balay*, which modifies an adjective in the title. Simon's translation makes the term more relatable. What is a true human, anyway? You would have to ask someone Sediq. But we can all aspire to be truly human.

Anyone with such an aspiration has to uphold *Gaya*, Sediq morality, which is 'simultaneously a product of wayfaring, a moral compass in human lifeworlds, and an understanding of interpersonal and interspecific relations in the meshwork of life' (31). Indigenous elders tell Simon as much throughout the book. 'You, too, are *seediq*,' Simon recounts a shopowner in a Seediq village once telling him (xi). You, too, are human. 'The problem' of colonial extraction on Indigenous lands, a Mi'kmaq elder tells him, 'won't be solved until you, too, realize that you also are Indigenous' (287). Simon must have to uphold the Mi'kmaq analog to *Gaya* too, but in this book he focuses on Formosa.

Truly Human: Indigeneity and Indigenous Resurgence on Formosa is a summation of Simon's more than twenty years of research on the Sediq of Formosa, the main island of Taiwan. It revisits Simon's 2012 *Sadyaq*

1. The language is also known as Seediq and Seejiq, among other dialect-based spellings that Simon switches between depending on who he is talking to or about.

Balae! L'autochtonie formosane dans tous ses états, the title of which plays on the French word for 'state'. Here in *Truly Human* (see esp. 283–85), Simon contrasts indigeneity and the institutionalization of a modern identity and status category in settler states around the world with Indigenous resurgence in daily life, wherein Indigenous people make themselves at home.

Truly Human is, among other things, a reflection on methodology. Like a letter to young ethnographers, it teaches readers how to become more truly human through fieldwork. It exemplifies a practice of 'anticolonial friendship' (20). Simon's anecdotes show how much time he has spent hanging out with and working alongside Sediq people in the places they call home. When fieldwork is friendship, its fruit is 'heart knowledge' (32).

Truly Human is a deeply personal book. The reader really gets to know the author, including where he came from, so that one understands how he relates to his Sediq friends. Like them, his folks were converts, in his case from Judaism (122) to Anglicanism (161). Simon came to research Indigenous people through the Presbyterian Church (which sent missionaries like George Leslie Mackay, who Simon's maternal great-grandparents sponsored, to Taiwan) and Presbyterian Chang Jung University, which hosted a week-long Urban-Rural Mission (URM) training for social activists that Simon attended in 2001 (157).[2] At the URM training, he met a Truku Seejiq woman named Igung Shiban who invited him to write about her community, particularly about the way her people were being treated by Taroko National Park officials and Asia Cement executives (7).[3] He took to hunting because the Truku men who asked him to come along reminded him of his relatives (89).

Truly Human is also a work of 'head knowledge', and in that regard Simon has taken the ontological turn (285). He describes cultural ontologies as 'ways of seeing the world, not discrete categories into which anthropologists can place the cultures they study' (289). If cultures were really discrete, they would not be learnable, at least not in adulthood. But Simon has learned, for instance what a Truku hunter might make of the call or flight of a forest bird called the *sisil*, which might not be a single species from a biologist's perspective. He even 'entertains the possibility that the sisil really do communicate messages from the ancestors' (285). Since he has learned to listen, see, think, and act like an insider, a Sediq insider—like the lady who made a career singing Italian

2. The URM is program of the World Council of Churches, which includes the Presbyterian Church.

3. The romanization of the Japanese transliteration of Truku, Taroko, is still relevant because of its official use in the park name.

opera in Belgium (xvi–xvii)—should be able to adopt an outsider's perspective, too.

A related opposition that *Truly Human* deconstructs is between nature and culture. Now this is an opposition that desperately needs deconstruction, so that supposedly cultured urbanites realize how much damage their lifestyles are doing to 'nature'. Sediq people do make a distinction between *alang*, palisaded village, and *dgiyaq*, alpine forest, but not a hard one, as 'hunters forge pathways through the forest and constantly move between the two social realms' (93).

Throughout, Simon invites us to adopt a phenomenological perspective on Sediq social realms, by 'bracket[ing], at least temporarily, such cerebral concerns as representations, discourses, symbols, and culture in order to become more aware of the corporal dimensions of the body moving through space' (7). He asks us to imagine, for example, that *we* are the ones who emerged from the Root Tree in the Sediq origin tale.

> One of the men looked out into the world with wonder, not least because of the presence of so many birds, animals, and plants. The other, fearful of a world that was so full of disease, death, and danger, returned into the Pusu Qhuni and never emerged again. Only the woman did not hesitate about becoming truly human. (34)

What would you do? How will you live? Such questions beat at the heart of this book.

Truly Human begins with a pair of introductions, one to the argument and the book's approach and the other to the Formosan Indigenous peoples. Where sociologists might see misery (55), Simon finds a struggle for sovereignty. Each of the main body chapters is an invitation to reckon with terms in Sediq 'political philosophy' (23).

Samat, the topic of chapter 2, means 'forest animals'. Simon explains that the 'forest' in question is *dgiyaq*, a metonym meaning both mountain and forest. Men move through the *dgiyaq*, which they tend, to shoot or trap *samat*, which they share. Today, under colonialism and capitalism, hunters sometimes sell extra meat of supposedly endangered animals. The authorities restrict hunting to certain spaces, times, and modes. Indigenous hunters are particularly constrained inside national parks. They have to inform the authorities before they hunt. And they have to use homemade guns. The predicament of Indigenous hunters crystalizes in the case of Talum Suqluman (82–83), who, without informing the authorities, went hunting with a modified rifle and brought back a serow and a muntjac for his mother. He was fined and sentenced to prison, and he might have served a sentence had Simon not raised international awareness through an online petition (83). Taiwan's Constitutional Court agreed to hear the case. But instead of

a landmark ruling along the lines of the Mabo or Delgamuukw judgements in Australia and Canada respectively (118), the court suggested minor adjustments. Talum Suqluman ended up receiving a presidential pardon (119).

Mgaya, the practice of *gaya*, meaning 'headhunting' in addition to morality, is the topic of chapter 3. Once 'a violent way of dealing with the existential challenge posed by other humans from beyond the pale of the horizon,' headhunting is now purely symbolic, 'a strong declaration of sovereignty' (121). Using historical accounts, theories, and his imagination, Simon attempts to adopt the perspectives of the hunter and the hunted. He links headhunting to traditional Sediq politics, which is often described as 'acephalous,' or lacking a head or leadership, but should, Simon argues, be thought of as 'polycephalous' (140). '[H]eadhunting was the basis of political power within communities, but the multiplicity of both severed heads and living political heads made higher level political organization extremely difficult' (140). Higher-level political organization is possible under colonization, but the Sediq egalitarian ethos has not changed. When Sediq elites carry out mock rituals of *mgaya* to assert their leadership, ordinary people find them 'ridiculous' (151–53).

Chapter 4 introduces *utux*, or spirit—both ancestral spirits and spirit in a Christian context; almost all of Taiwan's Indigenous people are Christians. Adopting the same methodology as the previous chapter, he explores traditional beliefs in the idea, for instance, that pigs sacrificed to the ancestors would return as wild boar (168–73) or that a *sediq balay* would cross the rainbow bridge (literally the spirit bridge, *Hakaw Utux*) to the afterlife (165). In the past, Sediq people looked up at *Hakaw Utux*, and they look up now in church (180). Simon relates his experience of speaking in tongues at a service at the True Jesus Church (181), but he also attends Presbyterian and Catholic services. He notes that Christianity has not had an entirely negative impact. There was no Sixties Scoop separating children from their families in Taiwan (156), as there was for Indigenous peoples in Canada, and Christians in Taiwan continued to use ancestral languages in their services. Though some religious leaders have discouraged traditional belief, belief in *utux* remains very much alive today (174–76).

Chapter 5 treats *lnglungan*, which Simon glosses as 'heart'. There's no word for the organ in Sediq, except *toma baraq*, literally 'top of the lungs'. *Lnglungan* is literally 'place of thinking'. But the term is used in collocations that reminded missionary and dictionary compiler Ferdinand Pecoraro of French analogs of 'bad-hearted' and 'heartless' (201). This chapter is about ethics, particularly in politics. Contemporary politics is especially corrupt due to the involvement of money (197); candidates of all stripes make use of vote brokers (221). Curiously, Indigenous voters

tend to reject the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the party that has brought them 'a discourse of multicultural indigeneity' (198–99). Instead, they tend to 'vote for the conservative KMT [Kuomintang], which downplays ethnic difference at the same time as it promotes its version of Chinese citizenship' (199). Simon explains the puzzle with an appeal to 'ethno-sociology, which is inflected with ethical judgment' (203); many Indigenous people remember being cheated by bad-hearted Taiwanese businessmen, while they have fond memories of Mainlanders, old soldiers from China (204).[4]

Chapter 6 focuses on *tmninun*, or weaving. Traditionally, women wove ramie yarn. As Simon explains, this yarn is a metaphor for storytelling (235). He traces how history has been woven into narrative tapestries of social memory (273). There is more than one tapestry. Truku people on the east coast remember their resistance to the Japanese in the 1914 Battle of Taroko, while Sediq people in central Taiwan, including Truku, Tgdaya, and Toda, remember the 1930 Musha Uprising, which involved the complication of collaborationism. Particularly interesting is Simon's discussion of Toda Sediq Presbyterian pastor Kumu Tapas's feminist critique of Mona Rudo (265–68), the rich Tgdaya leader who led the rebellion against the Japanese. Women tended to marry into villages, therefore have divided loyalties, and be conflict-averse. This difference in historical experience and remembrance helps explain why the Truku and the Sediq were separately recognized by the government as distinct Indigenous peoples, in 2004 and 2008 respectively. Simon cites scholars like Elizabeth Povinelli, Glen Coulthard, and Pawan Tanah who evince a radical suspicion of the politics of recognition, but he respects Truku and Sediq friends who have sought it. Reviewing the story of the separate recognition of the Truku and the Sediq, I thought of a way of continuing the story of the Pusu Qhuni. Roots only explain so much, and the branches of the great tree of life keep growing according to their own priorities.

In the conclusion and epilogue, Simon spotlights Indigenous sovereignty. In the conclusion, he looks at *Gaya* as a path to the future that for society at-large might lead out of urban industrial or postindustrial modernity and for Indigenous people might lead out of colonization. 'Gaya', he writes, 'emphasizes the responsibility of each true person to protect the land, because the land and the person who takes care of it belong to each other' (286). *Gaya* might lead Indigenous people out of

4. 'Taiwanese' can sometimes refer to the Hoklo people, whose ancestors immigrated from Fujian starting in the seventeenth century. It is also used to refer to a language also known as Southern Hokkien. Mainlanders, by contrast, arrived en masse in 1949 and 1950 after the Nationalists lost the Chinese Civil War.

colonization collectively, as well, if plans for band councils with jurisdiction over *alang*, village communities, are ever implemented (226–28).

The epilogue is partly—but only partly—about the geopolitical elephant in the room. The Republic of China on Taiwan and the People's Republic of China stake conflicting territorial claims, but both subscribe to a Westphalian model of exclusive territorial sovereignty. A Gaya-based understanding of sovereignty emerges in 'entangled lines of engagement' (293) between people and places. It should appear in 'face-to-face communities (alang) that could create confederations flexibly and as needed through repeated rituals that the Truku call psbalay, the Sediq call dmahur, and the Atayal call sbalay' (295). This kind of approach to sovereignty, as a complement to Westphalia, might hint at a more 'workable equilibrium' for human societies in their environments (296). There could be no bigger picture, and Simon has carved a fine lens for us to see it through.