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TAIWAN FELLOWSHIP

Indigenous Ecotourism and Mass Tourism :
A Quest for Sustainability and Jointly Managed Tourism Governance

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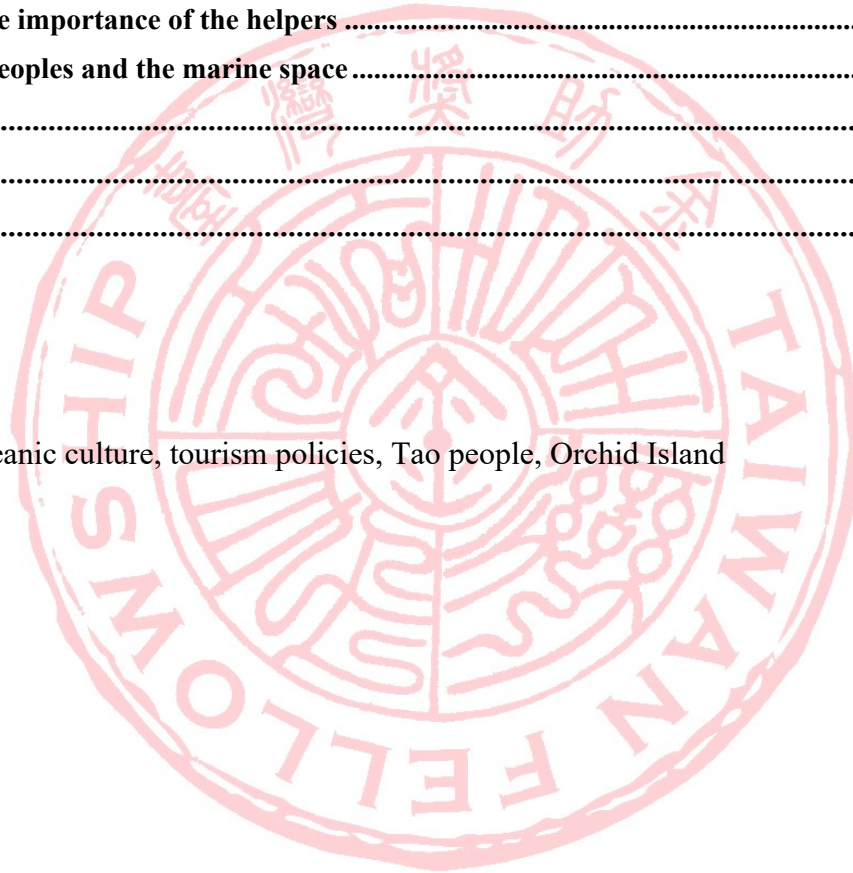
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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and mass tourism industry have been damaging both the environment and cultural practices in many indigenous communities. Even though it may be difficult to pinpoint the ones responsible for such tragedies, these situations make it clear that indigenous peoples should continue fighting for their rights to decide their own development strategies and policies based on their own cultural values, needs and priorities.

In this essay, I wanted to summarize the most pertinent ideas, information and experience I got from the year I spent in Taiwan. To do that, this essay will be divided into five parts. In the first one, I will briefly give some details about my fieldwork in Orchid Island between 2021 and 2022. In the second part, I will present the current situation in Orchid Island regarding the mass tourism industry affecting the community of Tao people. Then, as a reminder, I will explain the former objectives of this research and the methodologies I used as well as parts of the preliminary results I got from this research.

It is essential to keep in mind that this amazing journey was only possible with the financial support of the Taiwan Fellowship Program offered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in Taiwan.

1 Past and present fieldworks

Between 2017 and 2020, I spent more than two years in Taiwan with several indigenous communities. The objective was to familiarize myself with the different ways a community was dealing with the tourism industry. After careful observations, I chose to spend most of my time with the Tao people living in Orchid Island, for they are currently facing major issues with a mass tourism that becomes uncontrollable. To better understand how Tao people manage such tourism, I participated in different activities and ceremonies organised by the community members,

especially during the high peak season between June and August. These experiences in the field gave me many opportunities to observe how Tao people interact with customers, as well as the way the locals decide to put their own culture aside for the travellers. I started to grasp the complexity and necessity to develop tourism policies that protect Tao people from this overtourism, and to do that, it was first primordial to define what needed to be protected.

During my fieldwork in Orchid Island, I had many occasions to accompany the fishers during their trip to catch flying fish. These experiences make me realize how central these marine beings are for the entire community. Everything that is related to the marine world is extremely important in Tao people's culture, be it the making of boats or the offerings of taro and pork to the ancestors and divinities. Everything that is done and thought in the community is related to the underwater world. However, the mass tourism invading Orchid Island is making the interconnection between Tao people and the Ocean brittle. There is an urgent need for Tao people to think of tourism policies that respect their culture and environment while creating an environment where certain practices could be revitalised, such as the learning of their mother tongue, *ciriciring no tao*.

2 Mass tourism in Orchid Island

In Orchid Island, the territory of the indigenous peoples called Tao people, tourism has become the most economically profitable activity in the last decades. It is, therefore, not surprising that the number of hostels, restaurants, bars, and other stores has drastically increased in all the 6 villages. Every year, during the flying fish season that lasts for 4 months, which is also the beginning of the high peak season for tourism, thousands of travelers go and visit Orchid Island to enjoy her amazing landscape and unique cultural activities. In comparison to the other island located in the southeastern part of Taiwan, called Green Island, the presence of an indigenous community in

Orchid Island seems to be one of the main reasons why travellers choose this island for their vacation. The other reason is this island is enveloped in crystal-clear underwaters populated by gorgeous coral reefs and underwater beings. To keep the travellers from disturbing the fishers and their fishing spots, there are around 5 places that are reserved for customers to practice snorkeling and scuba diving. These “spots for tourists” are the safest place to practice snorkeling on the island. To keep them as clean and beautiful as possible, there is a non-written rule that forbids to practice spearfishing. Tao people often take the example of Green Island with the disappearance of fish and the destruction of corals to explain how important it is to keep these zones under protection to avoid such disasters. Another activity highly appreciated by the customers is the rowing of “traditional” boats that are shaped like the one used by the locals to catch flying fish. They are made of wood and can carry 2 or 3 people for 500 NTD each. The ride lasts 20 minutes or so and makes travellers experience Tao people’s oceanic culture. More recently, customers have been seduced by the possibility of boarding a large boat to see and catch flying fish. During the summer of 2022, while I was enjoying my night swimming practices, suddenly I saw a very strong ray of light that illuminated all my surroundings. When I took my head out of the water, I saw two large boats carrying around 20 tourists each. It was extremely disturbing to see Taiwanese night-boats equipped with high-density lamps chasing after schools of flying fish.

During the flying fish season, the locals have also been busy taking customers for a hike in the mountains. Most of the time, it is a 4-hours ascension that is interrupted by two or three stops to rest and to share some ecological knowledge with the amazed customers. It is always fascinating to observe how the young Tao people manage to make these activities entertaining for the customers. They are offering what the travellers are looking for: an escape in the forest with stories of ancient times and practices.

Other Tao people offer a night-fishing or crab catching experience, but the equipment necessary for these activities is quite consequent, so it is quite rare for Tao people to organize such activities. On the contrary, the set up to the night observation of howl is less challenging and extremely appreciated by the travellers. It does not require a lot of equipment and there is no limit on the number of people who can participate.

Mass tourism and current issues

Following the closing of Taiwan international borders in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Tao people have seen more than 220 000 tourists landing on their territory between February and August 2020, which is twice as many as in the last ten years. To meet the demand, the locals are building homestays and restaurants, piling up tons of cement on an island that is already bleeding. For some Tao people, the cement is like a curse to the island, something that should be removed. High tourism is also associated with the absence of a waste water disposal system that forces the owners to discharge uncleaned waters into the sea. More houses mean an additional need for water supply when east coast villages are already facing water shortage. The ecological footprint of this mass tourism has already impacted the environment with the exceptional bleaching of corals and the exponential accumulation of plastic waste on the island. Additionally, with all these activities offered by Tao people and/or Taiwanese to attract tourists and their money, it is quite common to see cultural prohibitions broken by the unaware visitors. The negative impacts of this uncontrolled tourism have become far too important to continue to ignore them.

3 Research objectives

When I submitted my research plan to the MOFA, I wanted my research to focus on the development of successful oceanic ecosystem-based management by gathering empirical data on

local-level knowledge and social dynamics between customers and locals. For that purpose, I proposed to analyze the different strategies the Tao people are trying to develop in response to the recent mass tourism situation, and to better understand how the local strategies could be integrated within a jointly managed ecotourism governance oriented towards sustainability.

To discuss these issues, three main questions needed to be addressed: i) What kind of local strategies have been developed by the community members in response to the current mass tourism? ii) What are the Tao people's conceptions of a 'sustainable' ecotourism? iii) How could their marine ecological knowledge be integrated within ecotourism governance?

To bring potential answers to the three previous questions, this research was divided into four objectives. The first one was to understand the connections the Taiwan indigenous people have with marine space. The Tao people and other indigenous communities in Taiwan, such as the Amis have ocean-based knowledge that considers the interconnectedness between all things – the land, the sea, the flora, the fauna, etc. As a “more-than-wet” space that exceeds the sense of touch, the Ocean “exists *within* our body” (Peters & Steinberg 2019: 299-300), participating in a sensorial entanglement between the body and the Ocean (Probyn 2011). Concepts such as the “more-than-wet ontology” (Peters & Steinberg 2019) and the “seascape epistemology” (Ingersoll 2016) will be useful to highlight coastal indigenous people's oceanic ontological conceptions that consider the interrelatedness between the land and the ocean. They are people of the ocean fully “attuned” (Ingold 2000) to any changes occurring in this underwater space. Between 2018 and 2020, I conducted several fieldwork trips to Orchid Island to understand the importance of the marine environment for the Tao people. The interviews and personal experience have been recorded and concealed in a journal.

Regarding the recent changes occurring on their land and marine environment, the second objective was to analyse the solutions that are implemented locally in response to the current tourism situation. The annual flying fish season, which extends between February and June, corresponds to the busiest period for the Tao people. Each one of the six villages must organize and participate in ceremonies dedicated to the ancestors and divinities. The flying fish season is also the period when the prohibitions are the most numerous. Anyone failing to participate in such activities or messing with the different cultural prohibitions might be cursed with misfortune. To avoid visitors breaking these rules, Tao people have been forced to take drastic decisions. That is why, in April 2021, some locals started drawing tape around their boats ashore to create what could be called a “cultural security perimeter” (figure 1). These strategies developed locally are part of the second objective which is to analyze the different strategies Tao people have been implementing to create a natural-resource-based ecotourism (Fennell 2000), which intend to protect the community members from tourism-induced disturbances (Ranaweera et al. 2015).



Figure 1: “cultural security perimeter” to prevent customers from touching the boats. Credit: Julien Laporte, 2022.

The third objective was to document Tao people's concepts and marine ecological knowledge (Grant & Miller 2004) that could be used to develop 'sustainable' ecotourism. Even though the aim of tourism is to contribute to indigenous peoples' self-determination and 'development' (Amoamo et al. 2018), however, it is quite common that uncontrolled tourism provokes major changes on natural ecosystems (Butler 2018), especially because it is not implemented on indigenous views on sustainability (Fernández-Llamazares & Virtanen 2020). In Orchid Island, there is a need for an ecotourism that is sustainably grounded in Tao People's knowledge. Taking the case of Maori people from Whanganui (New Zealand) as an example, it is interesting to note that they signed a settlement treaty with the government that recognizes the Maori people's connection with *Mana* (Mika & Scheyvens 2021), therefore participating in the protection of their knowledge and marine environment. For this situation to be possible with the Tao people, it is essential to first consider the *Tao* principles – such as *wawa*, the ocean - that could become the cornerstone of ecotourism “sustainability” which encompasses the relational ontologies between people, land, sea, sky, flora, fauna, etc.

The last objective was to analyze how these local strategies and marine ecological knowledge could participate in the development of a jointly managed ecotourism governance that could benefit all parties involved. Using concepts such as “resilience”, “adaptability”, and “transformability” (Walker et al. 2004), it is essential to consider an ocean ecotourism based on resilience and sustainability (Martin & Sunley 2015) that includes the environmental, economic, and social dimensions (Cheer & Lew 2017). Ecotourism governance should be seen as a collaborative project between the government agencies and the communities, a project that should consider the transfer of decision-making power to community members (Shie 2020) to create a community-based ecotourism (Palmer & Chuamuangphan 2018).

4 Methodology

To meet these objectives, I spent most of my time in two research centers: the department of ethnology at the Academia Sinica (AS) and the College of Indigenous Studies at the National Dong Hwa University (NDHU). The main reasons I chose these two centers is because they both possess tremendous knowledge and expertise on Taiwan Indigenous peoples. At the Academia Sinica, my supervisor, Liu Pi-chen's help and experience were central to reorganizing my ideas and meeting key participants for my research. At the National Dong Hwa University, my supervisor was Yang Cheng-Hsien. With his 40-years of experience collaborating with Tao people, he helped me better understand Tao people's current issues as well as the changes they have faced since then.

With the time I spent in these two centers of excellence, I could gather data from the libraries and learn from the experience and expertise of many scholars. I spent a fair amount of time in the different research center archives and libraries that contain valuable anthropological books written by indigenous authors on tourism and governance, as well as rare manuscripts that are only accessible to members. Also, while presenting my research and the preliminary results, I received a lot of advice, and ideas to deepen my understanding of the current issues affecting Tao people. The many conferences and lectures I have seen have helped me understand the importance of being very precise and meticulous when gathering data. During these activities, I met many specialists working with Tao people, being in political sciences, biology, or environmental studies. It was extremely satisfying to integrate the academic and research debates in social and political sciences on Indigenous Peoples current issues.

In the Academia Sinica, many conferences and activities were organised to discuss indigenous people's current issues such as the disappearance of their mother tongue or the exploitation of their ancestral land. Dr. Hu Tai-li, the 9th Director of the AS, has spent her career working with the Tao

people. She made several ethnographic films, and she presided over the Digital Archives of Amis and Yami Oral Legends. The AS library and Digital Archives constitute an extraordinary source of knowledge that could considerably enrich my understanding of Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples' culture and relationship with the marine environment.

My ethnographic work was done with the Tao people from Orchid Island. It has become a collaborative project in which my data and results will be shared with the *Cultural and Educational Foundation* and the *Lanen Musuem*. During my fieldwork, I recorded many hours of interviews and exchanges with Tao people. These data are essential to write my thesis, but they are also a treasure that should be given back to the community members.

5 Research in 2022

In 2022, I spent around 22 weeks in Orchid Island accompanying different hostel owners in their work. I had the chance to accompany many hostel owners and see how they interact with the tourists. I could see the entire process, from the hiring of innkeeper assistants and helpers who actively participate in the tourism industry in Orchid Island, to the organising of activities, such as scuba diving, night fishing or hiking in the mountains.

5.1 On the importance of the helpers

In Orchid Island, helpers or innkeeper assistants play a central role in the tourism business (figure 2). The job of innkeeper assistant is multitasked, they 1) welcome customers by helping them with their needs, such as bringing their luggage back to the hostel or renting a scooter. Once they check everything is okay with their room, most of the time the travellers will go and visit the island. Some of them will only stay a day or two while others could rent a room for a week. It is quite common for customers to be stuck on the island because of the bad weather. The assistant

innkeeper or helper should also 2) prepare the rooms which implies washing the sheets, cleaning the room, and answering the phone. In the place I helped, the helper needs to 3) prepare the meal for the owners and participate in other tasks, like helping buying food or butchering the flying fish.



Figure 2: One of the three ferries that travel between Taiwan and Orchid Island twice a day during the high season. Credit: Julien Laporte, 2022.

By definition helpers do not get paid for their job, but they are fed and accommodated. Most of the time, they work for about 6 hours a day, get a one-day rest, and can experience life in the community by participating in the activities organised for the tourists. Every year, more than a hundred helpers come from Taiwan to work as innkeepers.

Innkeeper helpers are at the core of the tourism industry in Orchid Island. They are the intermediaries, the people “in-between”, for the majority Taiwanese but also already accustomed to the locals’ way of living and thinking. An interesting fact is that it is very rare for hostel owners to employ Tao people, which is quite disturbing when we see so many young Tao during the summer vacations. I am convinced it would be a good opportunity for them to have some

responsibilities, develop their interpersonal and entrepreneurial skills. When I asked the explanation why the hostel owners don't employ Tao people, the first reason was that the young do not want to work. The second reason was that because "Taiwanese are neater people, which is essential when tidying up the rooms". Also, most of the owners I know won't take a man for the job because, as they say, "men smell" and it would impregnate the whole space. However, offering my help to clean and prepare the rooms was always welcome and it took me some time to understand the reason why the owners do not take men as helpers. Every year, the flying fish season is also the period for the Tao people to engage in romantic relationships with the Taiwanese helpers. As a matter of fact, it is quite common in Orchid Island to find couples that met that way.

5.2 Tao peoples and the marine space

As written above, in Orchid Island, there is an urgent need for an ecotourism that is sustainably grounded in Tao People's knowledge. To do that, it is essential to first consider the *Tao* principles that could become the cornerstone of Indigenous ecotourism "sustainability". Tao people and other Indigenous communities in Taiwan, such as the Amis, have ocean-based knowledge that considers the interconnectedness between all entities – the land, the sea, the flora, the fauna, etc. For Tao people to develop an indigenous tourism that is respectful of their culture, it is essential to develop tourism policies based on Tao people's conceptions and practices. As People of the Sea, *wawa*, the Ocean, and places such as *vanoa*, the port, are at the core of Tao people's identity. Everything happening under and above water is the Tao people's domain of expertise; it is their territory.

To take the discussion further with the concept of "territory", in my opinion, what makes this mass Tourism so threatening is the fact that travellers do not consider indigenous communities as a territory imbued with a special meaning and power, that is why so many prohibitions or taboos are

broken by visitors. To illustrate this point, I propose to look at the way Tao people manage the place called *vanoa* during the flying fish season.

Every year, during the flying fish season that starts in February-March and ends in June, all 6 villages are requested to participate in different activities. During that specific period, there are many rules that should be strictly respected. Some of them concern the entire community, others should be respected by the non-Indigenous peoples, the men, the women, the children, or the tourists. One of the most important ceremonies that Tao people organise is when all the community members call the Flying fish and give offerings to attract them in Orchid Island's waters. These ceremonies are organised in a specific place called "*vanoa*", which is a small port where the wooden boats used to catch the flying fish are moored. It is absolutely forbidden for anyone to go swimming, fishing, or catching seashells in the *vanoa* and its surroundings during the flying fish season, for anything that is human could disturb these fish. After reading Delaney (2008) and Barclay (2017), I feel like we could use the concepts of territorialization and deterritorialization, but first, it is essential to consider a territory as a moving entity, a time-space structure in a community where there are "innumerable complex territorial configurations and assemblages that shape human social life, relationships, and interactions" (Delaney 2008: 4-5). The territory's ability to move is more obvious when we consider the separation between the land and the sea, with low tides or high tides, with the recent rise in sea level, also with the presence of typhoons that constantly reshape these territories and move the limits (see Levain & Laval 2018).

During the flying fish season, the six villages decide to "privatize" part of the beach and the ocean for cultural reasons. It looks like the village's territory is extending for 4 months. In my understanding of Barclay's conception, "Deterritorialization" could happen when people are separated from their cultural practices and ancestral territory. An example would be the forced

relocation of indigenous populations under the Japanese colonization, for a better control of the population movements and their territory's resources (Barclay 2017). For the case of Tao people, that would be the forced removal of residents and confiscation of their lands under the KMT ruling episode when they established a military base for prisoners (Enn 2015: 108). Now "reterritorialization" is the reconnection with the place, which is the reconnection with the cultural, social, religious practices and conceptions. In my understanding, every year during the flying fish season, Tao people reterritorialize the *vanoa*, which is a part of the beach and the sea. It becomes the theater of numerous ceremonies and offerings with specific meaning and rules. The *vanoa* (re)become the heart of the community, the place that connects the Tao people, the "Celestial Grand-Fathers", with the ocean and her non-human beings. At the end of the season, anyone is free to swim, fish and catch seafood. The prohibitions are no longer in effect and the place's cultural meaning and value fade away: the *vanoa* is de-territorialized (see Barclay 2017).

Discussion

In Taiwan, the ethno-tourism in indigenous communities was promoted by the Japanese settlers in the 1920s (Barclay 2017: 36). One of the objectives was to let outsiders enter communities to tighten the control of the populations. This tourism was, of course, extremely discriminating, as Indigenous peoples were portrayed as "uncivilized" (see Barclay 2017). It is therefore not surprising that there are still oppression and discrimination in the way tourism is managed, just like in Orchid Island with Tao people. It might be necessary to understand precisely what the expectations of tourists are when they decide to visit this island, or other indigenous communities in general. With my very basic understanding of Tao people's current issues, I would suppose that Tao people feel like they have an obligation to stay "indigenous", because they need to: i) meet

the criteria required to keep their indigenous identity, and ii) to maintain a high level of tourism, they must become what tourists imagine them to be, “authentic” and not too “modern”. For some Tao people, the geographical distance between Taiwan and Orchid Island is the reason why the government agencies are practicing a “laissez-faire” approach that gives them room for autonomy, but it is only smoke and mirrors. The way the government encourages Tao people to participate in tourism activities, develop their own business and entrepreneurial skills, without considering the consequences of such an uncontrolled Monster is deeply damaging to the Tao People’s way of living and identity.

The on-going construction of many hostels, the presence of concrete structures on the taro fields, as well as the inability for many Tao people to participate in most of the ceremonies because of the tourism industry, make me worry about *Irala*’s future. When Tao people wish for bigger boats and planes, more and more tourists, I fear the original purpose of indigenous tourism is fading away, when it was supposed to be a “positive opportunity for enhancing the social, cultural and place identity of Indigenous peoples” (Carr et al. 2016: 1068).

Conclusion

As I tried to explain in this article, the mass tourism invading Tao people’s territory is concerning on many points. First, the locals are unable to manage such a large population of visitors that constantly break the prohibitions, especially during the flying fish season. For a community of fishers to see a wave of divers swimming in front of their fishing floats is an atrocious view. There is an urgent need to adopt tourism policies that respect and represent Tao people’s interests and values, a tourism that is based on resilience and sustainability. For that purpose, it is primordial to democratize the decisionmaking process by inviting all the people concerned with the tourism

industry in Orchid Island. Of course, the final decision should be up to the Tao people. Using concepts such as *wawa* and *vanoa* to define what could be sustainable and healthy tourism policies for Tao people could be an efficient starting point, but whatever their decisions, Tao people need to act.

For me, this fellowship is the reason why I am currently going for a dual-degree program with the NDHU and my university in Belgium. I made many friends that became dear to me and many scholars and experts that helped me better understand indigenous populations issues in Taiwan. I am highly indebted to all these friends that shared their experience and knowledge with me. I am also extremely grateful to the MOFA, especially Lorraine, and Elaine, with their amazing work and warm welcome to all of us. In the next few pages, I put pictures of some activities I participated in during my year in Taiwan. The year 2022 was very profitable and rich in experience and knowledge. Happy Year of the Rabbit to all of you!

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Calendar for the year 2022

January-February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Meeting with my supervisor at the Academia Sinica, Pr. Liu Pi-chen -Meeting with my supervisor at the NDHU, Pr. Yang Cheng-hsien -Meeting with Pr. Daya, Department of Ethnology, NCCU. <p>Objectif: develop partnership with the UCLouvain.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Fieldwork in Orchid Island - Participation to the NCL Lunar New Year On-line Reception organized by the MOFA
Mars-April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Participation in ceremonies and observation of tourism industry -Helping in tidng rooms for customers, and organizing activities, such as snorkeling and hiking -Collect data: interviews, taking of pictures, videos, and audio recordings -Exchanges with Pr. Yang & P. Liu
May-June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Back to Orchid Island -Writing of verbatim -Meeting with Pr. Cai, NTCU -Formation at NDHU on Indigenous Peoples knowledge -Submitted article on millet
July-August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Article on millet accepted for publication -Selected to attend the 4 days anthropologic camp, Academia Sinica, 16-19 August -Fieldwork in Orchid Island -Exchanges with Pr. Yang & P. Liu
Sept-Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Started discussions for dual-degree program between Belgium (UCLouvain) and Taiwan (NDHU) -Submitted abstract on the theme “Taiwan as Ocean” to ISAP (Institute for the Study of the Asia Pacific) -Application to the International Conference ISSR, International Society for the Sociology of Religion, Taipei, July 2023. -NDHU Formation: “Research on Contemporary Indigenous Issues” and “Theories of Ethnicity”, Pr.: 謝若蘭 & 陳毅峰 -Oral presentation to the Graduate students from UCLouvain (Belgium) -Paper accepted for the 37th Biennial ISSR Conference in Taipei, July 2023 -Participation to the MOFA Taiwan Fellowship Scholars III
Winter 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Writing of article for the ISAP (deadline March 2023) -Publication on missionaries influence on Tao people (deadline March 2023) -Writing of verbatim and translation of audio-video material -Start the thesis-writing process

Annexes: activities I participated in during the year 2022



Annual boat competition in Orchid Island – July 2022



Amis Community during the harvest festival in Hualien – July 27, 2022



Amis community in Fengbing during the harvest festival – July 9, 2022



Amis Community in Kiwit – August 21, 2022



Picture with Pr. Lukasz Zamecki, Pr. From the Department of political sciences and international studies from the University of Warsaw, Poland.



Participation in a 4-days anthropological camp, 16-19 August 2022, Academia Sinica, Taipei.



Participation in the International Conference organised by the Center for Chinese Studies at National Central Library and MOFA.



3-days-formation in Orchid Island to talk about: i) impacts of mass tourism on the environment; ii) new regulations and their impact on Tao people’s culture and practices; iii) the future of Orchid Island and its inhabitants.



Meeting in Orchid Island on the theme of plastic pollution and its consequences on the environment.



Group of tourists listening to young Tao people sharing their ecological knowledge.