



Session Summary: 12 February 2018

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This session was spent analyzing the apology President Tsai Ing-wen addressed to all indigenous peoples on 1st August 2016.

The discussion focused first on the normative scope of the speech by highlighting the values endorsed by the President. Indeed, the principle of “state of justice” was presented as a fundamental ethic to which the government adhered by presenting its apologies to indigenous people. The discussion then turned to the meaning given to the term “justice,” and to the way in which the government intends to “bring justice” to indigenous people for the wrongs committed against them throughout history. The second stage of the discussion looked at the role assigned to indigenous people in this narrative of the past. Because they are both viewed as and named victims in every moment of Taiwan’s history, they can benefit from the implementation of a process of transitional justice announced by Tsai Ing-wen. Nevertheless, it is a paradox that this singular role of victim prevents them from being viewed as, or represent themselves as, actors of history.

Also in this second part, the discussion looked at the narrative which is made of the past in the speech. Silences or gaps regarding the interactions between different indigenous groups and between indigenous people and other communities were emphasized. Indeed, nothing is said about conflicts and their resolutions, wars, economic and trade relations, marriages, etc.

This incomplete narrative of the past which primarily, if not exclusively, points out the wrongs committed, brought us in a third stage to a discussion of the apology itself. What is its intention? Its merit? Its significance? How was it received? A look back on President Lee Tenghui’s speech on 28th February 1995, in which he recognized the atrocities carried out by the nationalist power during the events of 228, allowed for a more in-depth discussion. Similarly, Jacques Chirac’s speech given 16th July 1995, in which he recognized the involvement of the French state in the Vel’d’Hiv roundup, helped put the Taiwanese experience into perspective. A show aired on the TVBS television channel to which Panay, an activist in the Ketagalan Boulevard Protest, was invited also helped us see the point of view of those among the indigenous community who have not accepted the apology presented by Tsai Ing-wen.