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**Poverty of Indigenous People in Taiwan – rethinking  
agency, embedded disposition, role of family and  
institution in the study of poverty**

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**PhD**

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**Poverty of Indigenous People in Taiwan – rethinking  
agency, embedded disposition, role of family and  
institution in the study of poverty**

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## Abstract

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**Title:** Poverty of Indigenous People in Taiwan – rethinking agency, embedded disposition, role of family and institution in the study of poverty

**Keywords:** indigenous people, chronic poverty, habitus, family, structure, agency, stratification, Taiwan

Recently, the issue of poverty amongst indigenous people has become a significant topic in literature on social policy and development studies. The literature mainly looks at this issue in terms of an unequal and one-sided relationship between the mainstream society and an indigenous minority group. This thesis seeks insights into the more diversified circumstances and experiences of poverty *amongst* indigenous people. The following questions are addressed: (1) Why and how is the poverty of indigenous people reproduced over time and space? (2) How can we understand patterns of differentiation between indigenous people? (3) What is the balance between structural opportunity and constraint in the lives of indigenous people? (4) To what extent do people exercise agency to cope with or overcome their poverty situations?

The thesis adopts an ethnographic approach, including participant observation and interviews in four villages of Taiwanese indigenous people. It explores the connections between poverty dynamics and diversified patterns of socio-economic action amongst indigenous people. Hogget and Greener's model of agency, which contains the essential theoretical views of Giddens (the ability of agents to act) and Bourdieu (the embedded corporeal disposition of human agents) are used to make sense of this exploration.

The thesis finds that the actions of indigenous people as human agents are differentiated. Actions are not only motivated by strategic plans and emotions but are also influenced by the agents' socio-economic positions, such as their occupations and education and those of their parents. The differentiated socio-economic activities of agents, in turn, have a strong effect on the stratification of their living standards.

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