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From Policy to Performance: A Political Systems Analysis of the Indigenous Language Drama Competition in a Relocated Rukai Community

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Abstract	Case Studies

This paper analyzes the Indigenous Language Drama Competition through the lens of David Easton's political systems theory, situating the event within the broader dynamics of state-led cultural policy and local governance in an Indigenous Rukai community (K tribe) that relocated to a permanent housing settlement after Typhoon Morakot in 2009. Using qualitative methods — including participant observation, informal interviews, and document analysis — the study investigates how policy inputs, conversion processes, and outputs interact across three levels: the central government, local government, and community actors.

The Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) promotes the competition as a strategy to transmit endangered languages, requiring regional teams to participate. Local governments frame the initiative as both a cultural preservation measure and a performance indicator, seeking to enhance visibility and policy legitimacy. Within the community, tribal leaders and language teachers mobilize teams to align with policy directives, while residents join primarily out of cultural identity and emotional attachment. However, the process is shaped by three structural constraints: (1) generational gaps in language proficiency and fading cultural memory; (2) a governance model heavily dependent on government resources; and (3) concentration of power among a few local leaders, including the village chief, health station head, and community association officials.

The conversion process reveals multiple frictions. Information distortion undermines coordination between central goals and local execution. Dual authority structures — between tribal and external leadership — generate conflicting commands. Some participants join involuntarily, highlighting tensions between community autonomy and policy compliance. Furthermore, the competition's core values become blurred, with political correctness influencing scriptwriting. These factors culminated in a performance themed on Typhoon Morakot, adapted to fit institutional expectations, which secured a second-place award.

The outputs of the policy intervention are thus double-edged. On the positive side, the event increased the village's cultural visibility and fostered collective confidence, providing a rare occasion for public recognition and language use in a performative setting. On the negative side, the scripted representation neglected the community's own memories of the disaster, raising doubts about the authenticity and sincerity of institutionalized cultural activities.

By applying David Easton's Political System model, this study demonstrates that cultural policy implementation in Indigenous contexts cannot be understood solely as a unidirectional flow from central authority to grassroots compliance. Rather, it involves a cyclical exchange in which environmental conditions, actor agency, and feedback loops shape both process and outcomes. The findings suggest that while top-down initiatives like the Indigenous Language Drama Competition can yield measurable preservation outcomes and enhance symbolic capital, they risk undermining cultural subjectivity if they prioritize administrative performance over lived experience.

The paper argues for a recalibration of cultural policy toward a hybrid governance model that integrates institutional efficiency with respect for local autonomy, memory, and identity. Such an approach would better align state objectives with community aspirations, fostering not only language revitalization but also genuine cultural resilience in post-disaster, relocated Indigenous communities.

Keywords: post-disaster relocation, indigenous language education policy, political system theory, indigenous language revitalization.

I. Introduction

Since 1895, Taiwan has experienced two state-led "national language movements" grounded in linguistic assimilation, each promoting Japanese and Mandarin, respectively, at the expense of local languages. The "monolingual" policy ignored the linguistic rights of indigenous and other local communities, suppressed linguistic diversity, and placed these languages on the brink of extinction. Following the lifting of martial law in 1987, the government shifted from a Mandarin-only approach toward a multilingual policy recognizing the coexistence of Mandarin, English, and various ethnic languages, aiming to correct the errors of past "single national language" policies (Chang, 2020).

The greatest threat to the survival of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples is the loss of their native languages—a challenge well recognized by both Indigenous communities and elites. In response, the Ministry of Education began compiling Indigenous language teaching materials in 1995. The Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) was established in 1996, and the Indigenous Education Act was passed in 1998, laying the foundation for Indigenous language education policy. Subsequent efforts included the development of writing systems, dictionaries, and the collection of traditional songs in 1999, as well as the training and selection of Indigenous language teachers in 2001. These measures formally integrated Indigenous languages into local language curricula, promoted extracurricular learning, and launched proficiency certification exams. Since 2001, Indigenous language revitalization policy has gradually institutionalized through proficiency certification, immersion teaching, language nests, and various cultural activities aimed at preserving and promoting endangered Indigenous languages (Chang, 2020; Huang, 2014; Liu & Chang, 2022). Since 2009, Indigenous-language drama competitions have emerged as a key instrument in this effort, combining intergenerational stage performance with everyday life, historical memory, and language use. These competitions serve both as an extension of language education and as policy indicators for evaluating language transmission outcomes.

Migration studies indicate that Indigenous peoples exhibit a higher migration rate than the general population, along with more diverse patterns of movement, including continuous and return migration. Since the 1970s, many Indigenous residents have left their ancestral villages for urban areas; by 2022, 60% of Taiwan's Indigenous population lived outside their traditional homelands. This demographic shift has been deeply intertwined with language decline over the past five decades (Liu & Chang, 2022).

In 2009, Typhoon Morakot devastated southern Taiwan, forcing the relocation of the K tribe from its ancestral homeland in the Wutai mountain area to the Changzhi Lily permanent housing settlement. This relocation not only transformed the physical environment but also intensified challenges of linguistic discontinuity and cultural disconnection. Fourteen years later, the K tribe represented Wutai Township for the first time in the Pingtung County Indigenous-language drama competition—an event that was simultaneously a cultural performance and a site of institutionalized cultural policy implementation.

While the policy goal of Indigenous-language drama competitions is to foster language transmission through intergenerational performance, the practical execution involves multilayered interactions and negotiations among central and local governments, community leaders, and grassroots participants. This study seeks to answer: When institutionalized cultural policies are implemented in relocated Indigenous communities, what patterns of interaction emerge between policy objectives, local adaptations, and grassroots responses? How do these interactions influence policy outcomes and social feedback?

II. Literature Review
1. Indigenous-Language Drama Competitions and Indigenous Language Policy

1.1 Indigenous-Language Drama as a Tool for Cultural Revitalization and Language Learning

Indigenous-language drama, which integrates language, performance, and cultural narratives, has become an important strategy for promoting cultural revitalization. Li (2007), in her master's thesis, explored the implementation of creative drama activities by kindergarten teachers and found that incorporating Taiwanese folk songs into such activities deepened children's impressions of the language and enhanced their motivation for language learning. Furthermore, role-play in drama fostered children's sense of identification with Taiwanese Minnan society. This study demonstrates that drama activities can facilitate both language acquisition and cultural identity formation.

In the field of Indigenous language education, Lim and Li at National Chi Nan University designed Indigenous-language drama courses for the Kaxabu and Pazeh peoples, emphasizing the collection of history, memories, and stories from elders. These narratives were compiled into teaching materials, and students were encouraged to collaborate with elders to adapt community stories into dramas for public performance, thereby promoting both language learning and cultural exchange (Lai, 2023).

In addition, the 2012 Indigenous film-musical *Lameko*, staged at the National Theater by Chiu-Tou Music, combined traditional songs with electronic symphony, contemporary theater, and film, along with Indigenous Amis traditional dance, modern dance, and hip-hop. This cross-genre work showcased the innovation and diversity of Indigenous culture. Through the theme of youth idol worship, it reflected the blending of cultural heritage and modern values, sparking public attention and reflection on Indigenous culture (Kuo, 2012; Chao, 2012).

Similarly, the Indigenous Television program *Kai 試英雄之 kivavange*, launched in May 2023, incorporated various competition formats to test listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. By integrating language and culture into its challenges, it attracted participants across age groups and stimulated interest among non-Indigenous viewers, demonstrating the diversity and innovation of Indigenous-language promotion (Indigenous Peoples Cultural Foundation, 2023).

Indigenous-language drama has also been recognized as a critical practice of decolonial education. For example, the play *qalang ima'*, presented as a situational comedy, explored the tensions between Indigenous self-identity and external expectations in the context of tourism performances, offering an Indigenous-centered interpretation of cultural representation (Hsu, 2023).

However, existing studies have noted that when cultural activities are incorporated into institutionalized performance evaluation systems, two possible outcomes may occur: first, reward mechanisms and media exposure may enhance community participation and cultural visibility (Huang, 2014); second, the process may create a disconnection between grassroots actions and higher-level policy goals, potentially weakening community autonomy (Chang, 2011).

Thus, Indigenous-language drama competitions are both cultural performances and components of institutionalized cultural policy, requiring analysis from both policy and socio-interactional perspectives.

1.2 Indigenous-Language Drama and the Display of Resilience

Indigenous-language drama is not only a tool for language learning but also an important means of demonstrating Indigenous "resilience." Chen (2020) emphasized the importance of decolonial methodology, highlighting the deep connections between Indigenous cultures and their lands, and how these connections underpin adaptive strength in the face of external pressures. Through drama performances in their native languages, community members can reconnect with cultural memories, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance their sense of cultural identity.

In sum, Indigenous-language drama serves multiple purposes—as a medium for cultural

revitalization, identity reinforcement, and resilience building. However, ensuring its sustainable development requires ongoing attention to community participation and the safeguarding of cultural subjectivity.

2. David Easton's Political Systems Theory and Cultural Policy Analysis

David Easton conceptualizes the political system as a continuous cyclical process in which demands and supports from the external environment serve as inputs, which are then converted within the system into policies and decisions (outputs). These outputs, in turn, generate feedback that influences the next cycle of inputs. Political systems theory emphasizes the dynamic relationship between institutional operations and the external environment, making it particularly suitable for analyzing the full process of policy development—from design to on-the-ground implementation.

In the field of Indigenous studies, Easton's political systems theory helps reveal how central government policies are transformed into concrete actions through local governments and communities, and how feedback processes influence subsequent policy adjustments.

3. Policy Implementation and Grassroots Interaction: Top-Down and Bottom-Up Perspectives

In policy studies, top-down and bottom-up implementation models offer important perspectives for understanding the interaction between institutions and grassroots actors (Sabatier, 1986). The top-down model stresses the clarity of central policy design and the consistency of implementation, while the bottom-up model highlights the discretion and adaptation exercised by local actors during practice.

Michael Lipsky's (1980) theory of *street-level bureaucracy* further points out that frontline implementers—such as Indigenous-language teachers and community workers—when confronted with limited resources and institutional demands, tend to exercise discretion and reinterpret policies based on the realities they face. Such discretionary practices often have a profound impact on the ultimate outcomes of policies. In the context of Indigenous cultural policy, the negotiation processes among local governments, tribal leaders, and cultural workers constitute the critical conversion stage of institutional implementation.

In a government report, Yedda Palemeq (2015) noted that top-down Indigenous-language revitalization policies require consensus within an "iron triangle," with each corner bearing distinct responsibilities and functions:

(1) **Lead agency** – Responsible for designing and conceptualizing strategies, emphasizing the uniqueness and coherence of each initiative, and providing foundational education and tools.

(2) **Co-organizing agency** – Serving as the bridge between the lead agency and implementing teams, tasked with understanding strategies, guiding implementation, and thoroughly reviewing progress and reporting.

(3) **Implementing organizations** – The core of revitalization, requiring strong ambition, action capacity, and creativity to use resources effectively to restore Indigenous languages, as well as actively monitoring language conditions and reporting back to the lead agency to help formulate more appropriate revitalization strategies.

Palemeq also stressed that "while resources flow from the top down, thinking must flow from the bottom up" (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. **The Iron Triangle of Indigenous Language Revitalization Policy**
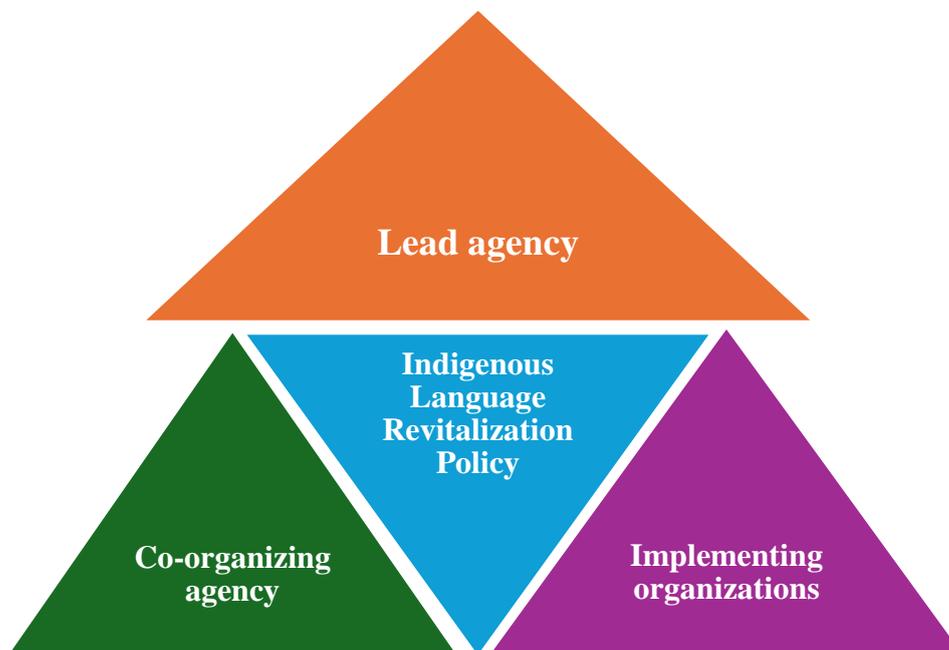
Adapted from *Evaluation Report on the Implementation Plan for the Rescue of Endangered Indigenous Languages* (p. 40), by Y. Palemeq, 2015, Center for Indigenous Peoples and Development Studies.

4. Agency and Cultural Practice within Institutional Frameworks

While institutional analysis primarily focuses on policies and power structures, it is essential to recognize the agency of grassroots communities operating within these institutional boundaries. *Agency* refers to the capacity of actors to engage in creative adaptation and reflexive practice under structural constraints (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In institutionalized cultural activities, community members may simultaneously assume the dual roles of "policy implementers" and "cultural subjects." They adhere to established norms while embedding personal memories and emotions into performances, thereby generating social effects that exceed institutional expectations.

Accordingly, Easton's systems theory can be integrated with the lens of agency to examine how policy inputs and community responses intersect in Indigenous language drama competitions. This combined perspective illuminates how cultural practices are continually reshaped within the cyclical processes of institutional operation.

III. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing participant observation as the primary methodological approach. In September 2024, I began my postdoctoral position at National Pingtung University to implement the Humanity Innovation and Social Practice Project funded by the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC). Immediately thereafter, I entered the project's field site—K tribe, located within the Changzhi Lily Permanent Housing Settlement—and engaged in the community's daily activities as both an observer and an active participant.

On October 12, 2024, I joined the K Village team that was formed to represent Wutai Township in the Pingtung County Indigenous Language Drama Competition. My role extended far beyond passive observation; I was directly involved in script discussions, stage rehearsals, performance delivery, and post-competition feedback sessions. This immersive

participation allowed me to experience, from within, the interplay between policy implementation, community leadership, and grassroots agency in a culturally significant event.

The empirical materials for this study were collected from three primary sources:

Fieldnotes and Visual Records — Detailed observational notes and audiovisual documentation gathered throughout my direct involvement in prop-making, rehearsals, live stage performance, and all related preparatory and follow-up activities.

Informal Interviews — Spontaneous and conversational interactions with Indigenous language teachers, village leaders, and competition participants, aimed at eliciting their perspectives on both the cultural meaning and policy implications of the event.

Archival and Official Documents — Formal competition guidelines, meeting minutes, and related administrative records, which provided insight into the institutional objectives, implementation frameworks, and evaluative mechanisms governing the competition.

By triangulating participant observation, informal interviewing, and document analysis, this study ensures a multidimensional understanding of how institutionalized cultural policies are enacted, negotiated, and reinterpreted at the community level. My dual role as both researcher and participant enabled access to tacit cultur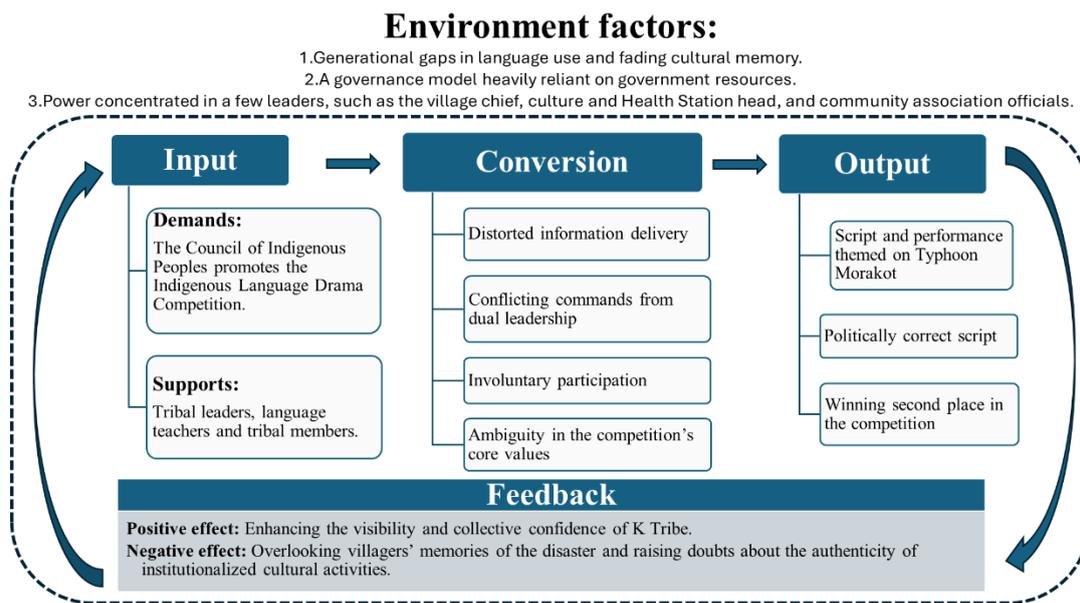al knowledge, subtle interpersonal dynamics, and unspoken community sentiments-elements that are often inaccessible through purely observational or interview-based methods.

IV. Institutional Analysis
System Operations of K tribe's Participation in the Indigenous Language Drama Competition

The analytical framework for this study is grounded in David Easton's (1965) political systems theory, applying its five core components—environment, inputs, conversion, outputs, and feedback—to organize and interpret the empirical data. This model conceptualizes the political system as an ongoing, cyclical process in which environmental factors shape the demands and supports entering the system (inputs), which are then processed through decision-making and policy implementation mechanisms (conversion), generating specific actions or decisions (outputs). These outputs subsequently influence new demands and supports through a feedback loop, thus informing the next policy cycle.

In the context of this study, David Easton's framework is used to systematically examine how the broader socio-political environment, community-level needs, and institutional resources interact during K tribe's engagement in the Indigenous Language Drama Competition. By tracing each stage—from environmental influences through to feedback—this analysis elucidates how national cultural policies are interpreted, adapted, and enacted within a relocated Indigenous community.(See Figure 2)

Figure 2. **Analyzing Indigenous Language Drama Competitions on Political Systems Theory**

Environment factors:
1. Generational gaps in language use and fading cultural memory.
2. A governance model heavily reliant on government resources.
3. Power concentrated in a few leaders, such as the village chief, culture and Health Station head, and community association officials.

Input

Demands:
The Council of Indigenous Peoples promotes the Indigenous Language Drama Competition.

Supports:
Tribal leaders, language teachers and tribal members.

Conversion

Distorted information delivery

Conflicting commands from dual leadership

Involuntary participation

Ambiguity in the competition's core values

Output

Script and performance themed on Typhoon Morakot

Politically correct script

Winning second place in the competition

Feedback

Positive effect: Enhancing the visibility and collective confidence of K Tribe.
Negative effect: Overlooking villagers' memories of the disaster and raising doubts about the authenticity of institutionalized cultural activities.

Political system model adapted from Easton (1965). *Note.* Adapted by the author from *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (p. 34), by D. Easton, 1965, Wiley. Copyright 1965 by David Easton.

1. Environment

In the aftermath of the catastrophic Typhoon Morakot in 2009, K tribe underwent a state-mandated relocation from its mountainous ancestral homeland to a permanent housing settlement in the land area of the Changzhi Lily Community. This forced migration profoundly reshaped the community's geographical landscape, economic livelihood base, and cultural fabric. The loss of ancestral territory meant not only the erosion of a familiar ecological environment but also a rupture in the place-based cultural practices that had sustained intergenerational transmission of knowledge and identity.

Fourteen years after relocation, the village continues to grapple with several enduring structural challenges that shape its capacity to engage with cultural policy initiatives:

Intergenerational language discontinuity and the erosion of cultural memory – The younger generation's proficiency in the Indigenous language has markedly declined, and collective memory of traditional narratives, rituals, and place-based knowledge has thinned.

A governance model highly dependent on external governmental resources – Development projects, cultural initiatives, and even routine community functions often rely on funding and directives from higher levels of government, limiting autonomous decision-making.

A concentration of authority in the hands of a small leadership core – Decision-making power is predominantly held by the village chief, the director of the Cultural and Health Station, and the heads of local associations, resulting in a centralized leadership structure that mediates most interactions with outside actors.

These environmental factors constitute the foundational conditions in Easton's systems model, defining the baseline from which external inputs—such as the Indigenous Language Drama Competition—are received and interpreted. They not only shape the initial receptivity of the community toward such policy-driven cultural programs but also influence the modalities of participation, the negotiation processes within the village, and the eventual form of cultural expression that emerges on stage. In this sense, the "environment" is not a static backdrop but an

active determinant in the interplay between institutional structures and community agency.

2. Input

Within David Easton's systems framework, "input" refers to the demands and supports that enter the political system from its external environment, shaping the policy agenda and subsequent conversion processes. In the case of the Indigenous Language Drama Competition, the inputs affecting K Village derive from both central-level policy directives and local-level expectations, forming a dual-layered set of pressures and incentives that frame community participation.

(a) Demands – At the national level, the Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) has, since 2009, organized the annual Indigenous Language Drama Competition with the explicit goal of promoting intergenerational language transmission and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. This competition has become a symbolic and practical platform for language revitalization and cultural performance. The CIP mandates that local governments mobilize teams from their jurisdictions to participate, thus embedding the event into broader language policy implementation frameworks. Even in regions with relatively limited Indigenous populations—such as Miaoli County, colloquially referred to by younger generations as the politically conservative "Miaoli Nation"—the 2012 edition of the competition successfully drew multiple ethnolinguistic groups, including Atayal and Saisiyat participants, ranging in age from six to seventy-nine years old, thereby demonstrating the potential for cross-generational engagement in cultural transmission (He, 2012).

The scale of the event has expanded over time. In the 14th edition of the competition in 2024, local-level preliminaries featured 84 teams with over 1,600 participants nationwide. The national finals brought together 29 teams from 13 counties and cities, representing nine Indigenous groups and 17 distinct languages, with a total of 433 registered performers (Indigenous Languages Research and Development Foundation, 2024; Council of Indigenous Peoples, 2024). These figures underscore the competition's effectiveness in mobilizing participation and fostering both linguistic proficiency and cultural identity. Nevertheless, scholars have pointed out that such competitions are not without challenges. Issues such as ongoing language attrition, uneven resource distribution, and the risk of cultural appropriation persist. As Huang (2014) cautions, the heavy reliance of current language revitalization efforts on government subsidies and administrative assistance can inadvertently cultivate a passive attitude toward language maintenance, thereby impeding organic, community-led transmission.

(b) Supports – In K tribe's case, the "supports" component of David Easton's model is manifested through the alignment of local leadership and community-based actors with central policy objectives. The village chief, leaders of the cultural and health station, and the Indigenous language teachers collectively assume responsibility for assembling and preparing the competition team, thereby operationalizing policy directives at the community level. Participation is also sustained by broader socio-cultural supports: namely, a shared sense of belonging to the village and an emotional commitment to preserving cultural heritage.

However, the composition and motivation of the K tribe team reveal the complex interplay between policy compliance and local agency. As the designated representative for Wutai Township, the K tribe team was largely comprised of Community Care Center members who were appointed by the local power structure. Many of these elder participants were "theatrical novices"—individuals without prior acting experience—who, despite occasional latent talent, generally approached rehearsals as the fulfillment of an administrative assignment rather than an intrinsically motivated endeavor. The more reserved and conservative disposition of the village's social culture further reinforced this compliance-oriented approach. For younger members, most of whom were born after the post-disaster relocation and thus had no direct memory of Typhoon Morakot, participation often stemmed from parental instruction rather than personal initiative.

Yet, during the competition itself, the village's strong sense of communal identity and pronounced competitive spirit emerged as decisive factors. On stage, participants—both elders and youth—channeled their collective memory, empathy, and pride into a performance that vividly reconstructed the lived experience of the disaster. The authenticity and emotional intensity of their portrayal resonated deeply with both judges and audiences, ultimately propelling the team to secure second place at the national level. This outcome illustrates how supports, even when initially shaped by compliance and hierarchical mobilization, can be transformed in the performance arena into acts of genuine cultural expression, thus feeding back into the system with heightened community morale and recognition.

3. Conversion

In David Easton's politiacl system, the conversion phase refers to the process by which inputs—demands and supports—are transformed into concrete policies, programs, and actions within the political or organizational system. In the case of K tribe's participation in the Indigenous Language Drama Competition, this conversion process was neither linear nor frictionless. Instead, it was marked by multiple points of misalignment, coordination difficulties, and power negotiations that shaped how central and local directives were translated into on-the-ground practices. Two recurring patterns were particularly salient: distortions in information transmission and conflicting chains of command.

(a) Distorted Information Transmission

The competition is structured as a two-tier process: preliminary rounds organized at the county or city level, followed by national-level finals overseen by the Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP). Preparation for such events typically involves a series of official meetings spanning several months, during which representatives from various teams and local institutions discuss logistics, scripts, rehearsal schedules, and technical requirements. However, these meetings operate under a representative system—only selected delegates from each team attend, rather than all participants.

While representative meetings are efficient for decision-making, they also introduce vulnerabilities in the accuracy and completeness of information dissemination. In K tribe, the individuals attending each meeting were not always the same, and verbal transmission of decisions often took precedence over written minutes in the interest of speed. This reliance on oral communication was reinforced by community norms that emphasize hierarchical compliance; most participants did not consult written records unless they had specific doubts. As a result, details were frequently altered or omitted in the process of being passed "from one to ten, and ten to a hundred," leading to confusion during team formation, preparation, and even during the performance itself.

One of the most critical instances occurred on the day of the competition itself. Every team was required to have stage performers as well as off-stage personnel responsible for props, sound, and lighting. During rehearsals and final run-throughs, the K tribe prop crew always operated with four members on stage. However, moments before entering the backstage area for the official performance, the team was informed—without prior notice—that the number of on-stage personnel was capped. In a last-minute adjustment, one prop crew member was reassigned to sound and lighting control in the audience area. While this change provided additional technical support off-stage, it forced the remaining three crew members to divide tasks that had always been executed by four people. Given the strict time limits for scene changes, this unexpected reduction created considerable stress and risked disrupting the smooth flow of the performance.

(b) Conflicting Chains of Command

The friction in the conversion process was further exacerbated by the presence of dual, and at times competing, lines of authority. Although the K tribe team was participating in a preliminary round at the county level, the village had been officially designated to represent Wutai Township, prompting both the county government and the township office to assign their own Indigenous language instructors.

The county-appointed instructor (Teacher

A) was primarily responsible for scriptwriting, while the township-appointed instructor (Teacher B) oversaw rehearsals. Teacher B, being older, more experienced, and more assertive in personality, often prevailed in situations where the two were present together and disagreed. However, when only one instructor attended a rehearsal, their guidance sometimes diverged significantly from the other's earlier instructions. This "two-horse carriage" scenario repeatedly left participants uncertain about which version to follow, prompting them to question their own memory or doubt whether they had misunderstood previous directions.

Such inconsistencies not only disrupted the cohesion of the rehearsal process but also contributed to a sense of instability in the team's preparation. From a systems theory perspective, these contradictions in leadership highlight how multiple institutional actors—each with their own priorities, styles, and perceived authority—can generate conflicting conversion pathways, resulting in inefficiencies, participant frustration, and potential dilution of the original policy's intent.

(c) Non-voluntary Participation

Another important dimension in the conversion process concerns the involuntary incorporation of certain participants into the competition team. As the officially designated representative of Wutai Township, K tribe was naturally expected to draw on its most proficient speakers of the Indigenous language for the performance. This expectation meant that elders who regularly attended daily classes at the Indigeous Cultural Health Station—many of whom were fluent, if not native, speakers—were considered the most suitable candidates for the stage.

However, the 2024 edition of the Competition Rules introduced a new stipulation for the "Community Division" (社會組), requiring each team to consist of 13 to 20 members, with at least half being under the age of 20. This age quota forced the team's organizers to restructure the original composition. Elders who attended rehearsals less frequently were removed from the cast list, and younger participants—often the children or grandchildren of the elders or care attendants—were recruited to meet the age requirement.

This recruitment process was not always voluntary. Some young people, particularly those born after the community's relocation to the permanent housing settlement in the wake of Typhoon Morakot, had no direct memory of the disaster or the historical experiences embedded in the play's storyline. Their participation was largely the result of parental or elder authority, rather than personal interest or cultural motivation. Similarly, a few older members who had been retained in the final roster were themselves hesitant performers, joining the team more out of obligation to community leaders than out of enthusiasm for the competition.

Such arrangements produced a tension between policy compliance and genuine engagement. On one hand, the team met the formal requirements set by the competition's governing body, thereby ensuring eligibility. On the other hand, the inclusion of individuals with limited intrinsic motivation generated what community members themselves described metaphorically as "forcing a cow to drink water" and "sharing the same bed but dreaming different dreams." These expressions capture the mismatch between the external appearance of unity and the internal divergence in purpose, commitment, and emotional investment.

From a systems theory perspective, this case illustrates how formal policy inputs—such as age quotas—can trigger adaptive but imperfect conversions at the local level. The resulting team composition may fulfill institutional criteria while simultaneously diluting the organic, community-driven cultural expression that the competition ostensibly aims to promote. This dynamic underscores the need to critically assess how structural requirements interact with local agency, particularly in contexts where cultural performance is positioned as both a form of heritage preservation and a tool of state policy implementation.

(d) Ambiguity in the Core Values of the Competition

A further challenge in the conversion process concerns the lack of clarity regarding the

core purpose of the Indigenous Language Drama Competition. Officially, the policy discourse frames the event as a mechanism for **language revitalization**, yet its assessment structure simultaneously emphasizes **theatrical performance**. As a result, while the term "Indigenous Language Drama Competition" appears straightforward, the underlying priorities are less certain: Is the competition primarily about sustaining intergenerational language transmission? Is it aimed at advancing theatrical artistry within Indigenous communities? Or does it simply operate as a competitive spectacle in its own right?

A close reading of the *Implementation Plan* issued by the Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) reveals this inherent ambiguity. Article 2, which outlines the **Purpose**, emphasizes four goals:

> *1.   To encourage creative expression through short plays and stage dramas drawn from family dialogues, preschool learning experiences, community life, and the historical and cultural heritage of each ethnic group, thereby deepening the experiential use of Indigenous languages and expanding their use in everyday family, preschool, and community contexts.*

> *2.   To promote the use of Indigenous languages within households, recognizing the formative role of the family in language acquisition and seeking to normalize everyday, fully Indigenous-language interactions in domestic life.*

> *3.   To establish a preschool category that fosters early language learning outside the family, ensuring that the next generation develops foundational linguistic and cultural competence.*

> *4.   To promote sustainability in language development and transmission by encouraging intergenerational participation, expanding language-friendly environments, and restoring traditional modes of learning.*

Article 5, which specifies the **Competition Format**, states that teams must develop scripts drawn from daily life, community history, or traditional culture and mythology, and that performances should avoid purely musical or dance-based formats, with Indigenous language dialogue as the primary mode of presentation.

However, the evaluation framework in Appendix 1 further complicates the matter. The **scoring system** assigns 70% of points to language proficiency and 30% to theatrical performance for group entries, while individual awards for Best Actor and Best Actress weigh language at 60% and acting at 40%. Moreover, the criteria for the Best Script Award give equal emphasis to cultural content (30%), creativity (35%), and structural/technical quality (35%).

This mixed weighting system reflects a dual agenda: language use is the central metric in theory, but theatrical artistry remains an essential determinant of competitive success. In practice, these dual emphases can create **conflicting incentives** for participating communities. Teams may face the dilemma of prioritizing fluent language delivery—potentially at the expense of dramatic sophistication—or, conversely, focusing on stagecraft to appeal to performance judges while risking diminished linguistic authenticity.

From a systems theory perspective, this ambiguity in core values represents a *policy signal misalignment* within the input–conversion–output cycle. The policy's stated goal of language transmission is partially diluted by the simultaneous valorization of dramatic form. Consequently, while the competition has been effective in motivating communities to engage with Indigenous languages, the performative demands may unintentionally shift the emphasis away from organic, everyday language use toward stylized, competition-driven expression. This tension calls for further critical examination of how evaluation frameworks shape the lived outcomes of cultural policy implementation.

4. Output

Within the institutional and procedural framework of the Indigenous Language Drama

Competition, the participation of the K tribe ultimately produced three discernible forms of output: the performance product itself, the competition results, and the official recognition of the event as a policy success.

(a) Script and Performance

Although the community initially sought to present a performance firmly rooted in the lived memories of the 2009 Typhoon Morakot disaster, the final version of the script was significantly reshaped under the authoritative guidance of two language instructors assigned by the county and township governments. This external rewriting process diluted the direct, affective recollections of community members and reframed the narrative to better align with what competition judges were perceived to value. Such changes illustrate a broader phenomenon in state–community cultural engagements, where community-authored narratives are modified to fit institutionalized evaluative frameworks. While this adaptation arguably increased the likelihood of competitive success, it also risked reducing the authenticity of local cultural expression, replacing experiential testimony with a more generalized, performance-oriented storyline.

(b) Competition Results

On the day of the competition, the thematic focus on natural disasters was conspicuous: approximately half of the scripts performed across the preschool, family, and community divisions addressed the impacts of typhoons, earthquakes, or floods. Despite the externally mediated script alterations, the K tribe's performance stood out for its sincerity and emotional intensity. Performers, many of whom had deep personal or intergenerational ties to the Morakot disaster, drew on these memories to deliver compelling portrayals. This genuine affective engagement resonated with audiences and evaluators alike, resulting in the team securing second place overall and earning the Best Script Award. The latter achievement, in particular, underscores the paradox of external script rewriting—while it may have compromised certain aspects of disaster authenticity, it also produced a performance that met official cultural and aesthetic standards.

(c) Institutional Recognition and "Success Story" Status

From an administrative standpoint, the K tribe's participation fulfilled multiple objectives embedded in the CIP's Implementation Plan and in the expectations of local government actors. For the language instructors, adherence to the plan's regulations, promotion of language learning, and successful guidance of the team were the primary goals. For tribe leaders, the community development association, and the cultural and health station administrators—who occupy key positions within the local power hierarchy—having the wellness center's elders serve as the core of the performance group not only satisfied the mandate from local authorities but also offered potential symbolic and material benefits. Securing an award amplified these benefits, yielding public recognition, prestige, and tangible rewards.

From the perspective of output analysis within David Easton's political system theory framework, the K tribe's second-place finish functioned as both a symbolic and bureaucratic achievement. The official narrative constructed around this outcome positioned the event as a model case of successful policy implementation, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the competition as an instrument for language revitalization. However, this "success" also reveals the extent to which community agency was mediated—and in some respects constrained—by the interplay of external policy requirements, evaluative criteria, and local power dynamics.

5. Feedback

The outcomes of the K tribe's participation in the Indigenous Language Drama Competition generated a mix of positive and negative feedback, both of which reveal important insights into the broader implications of institutionalized cultural programs.

(a) Positive Effects: Enhanced Visibility and Collective Self-Confidence

Historically, the K tribe has experienced multiple episodes of collective relocation, as well as individual outmigration prompted by educational, occupational, and marital factors.

By the time Typhoon Morakot struck in 2009, devastating their mountain homeland and forcing relocation to the permanent housing settlement in the lowlands, the K tribe's registered population had already been significantly reduced—only about half that of the neighboring settlement. As members of the Rukai people, whose cultural norms value reserve and discretion, the K tribe had often maintained a low public profile.

The competition's success altered this dynamic. Winning both second place overall and the Best Script Award elevated the community's visibility beyond local boundaries, drawing the attention of other indigenous and non-indigenous groups who were surprised by the cohesion, adaptability, and performative capacity of such a small settlement. More importantly, this external recognition reinforced internal solidarity, boosting collective self-esteem and affirming the community's ability to excel in activities that simultaneously demand linguistic competence, cultural knowledge, and performative skill.

(b) Negative Effects: Perceived Displacement of Memory and Questions of Authenticity

Despite these gains, the process also produced unintended and less welcome consequences. For many tribe members, particularly those with direct memories of the Morakot disaster, participation had been an emotionally charged opportunity to articulate and share deeply personal narratives that had long remained unspoken. Over the fourteen years since the disaster, the initial trauma had gradually subsided, creating a space in which some individuals felt ready to recount their experiences.

However, the competition's institutional framework—particularly the influence of external scriptwriting and evaluation standards—resulted in the production of what some described as a "politically correct" version of events. This revised narrative, though it garnered official accolades, was perceived by certain participants as displacing their authentic lived experiences in favor of a sanitized, externally approved storyline. Such perceptions not only diminished the sense of ownership over the cultural product but also undermined the potential for drama-as-therapy, a function that community-based performance can serve in processing collective trauma.

The tension between policy objectives and tribe authenticity thus emerges as a critical point of reflection. While the competition successfully showcased linguistic and performative skills, it also raised questions about the long-term implications of embedding cultural expression within rigid, externally defined frameworks. These concerns speak directly to debates in cultural policy and indigenous self-determination, highlighting the complex feedback loops—both affirming and alienating—that can arise when state-sponsored cultural initiatives intersect with community memory and identity.

V. Recommendations and Conclusion

Viewed through the analytical lens of David Easton's systems theory, the Indigenous Language Drama Competition can be conceptualized as a continuously recurring cycle of institutional interaction, linking central policy design, localized transformation, and community-level response. The central government's policy input—framed around the revitalization and transmission of indigenous languages—enters the system as a top-down directive. At the intermediate level, county- and township-level power holders act as critical mediators, translating these directives into concrete actions through resource allocation, participant selection, and the structuring of rehearsal and performance processes. This transformation phase culminates in a set of tangible outputs, such as competition results and wider social impacts, which then generate a feedback loop. The latter includes both the enhancement of community confidence and visibility, and, conversely, skepticism toward the authenticity of scripted narratives—both of which feed into the next round of policy-making and implementation.

From this case study, four key policy and practice recommendations emerge:

1.Clarify the Core Objectives of the Competition

There is a pressing need to resolve the tension between language preservation goals and theatrical performance criteria. When evaluation metrics and policy intent diverge, participants face uncertainty about the true priorities, which may dilute the intended cultural and linguistic impact.

2.Improve Policy Communication and Coordination Mechanisms

The prevalence of information distortion and the "dual authority" problem underscores the importance of establishing clear, consistent channels for communication between different levels of governance. Standardized reporting systems, coupled with more inclusive participant briefings, could mitigate discrepancies in interpretation and execution.

3.Respect Local Memory and Creative Autonomy

To maximize both cultural integrity and community engagement, competitions should be designed as platforms for cultural healing and memory transmission. This entails granting greater latitude for locally driven narratives, even when they challenge sanitized or politically convenient versions of history.

4.Institutionalize Sustainable Indigenous Language Environments

Rather than confining language-use opportunities to formal competitions, policymakers should integrate theatrical activities into everyday community life and educational contexts. This would foster continuous language immersion and create a more resilient foundation for linguistic and cultural vitality.

In conclusion, the K tribe's engagement in the Indigenous Language Drama Competition illustrates the dual nature of institutional-cultural interaction. On one hand, the community successfully delivered outputs aligned with central and local policy mandates, fulfilling the formal requirements of the system. On the other, the lived reality of the performance revealed moments of grassroots agency, emotional authenticity, and strategic adaptation to structural constraints.

This duality serves as a reminder that institutionalized cultural policies cannot be fully understood—or effectively implemented—without attention to the agency, needs, and aspirations of local actors. Only by simultaneously acknowledging the systemic logic of policy cycles and the situated realities of community participants can cultural policy achieve both operational efficiency and the preservation of cultural subjectivity. Such an approach moves beyond a narrow compliance framework, opening the possibility for more dialogic, participatory, and culturally responsive forms of policy design and practice.

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