Lost in translation: Problematizing the localization of transnational activism

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Abstract
Existing studies on human rights change posit that activists use transnational networks to organize global and local movements against governments. However, this explanation assumes that international rights claims gain local support and underestimates how difficult it could be for activists to translate global movements into local movements. I address this issue by proposing three mechanisms through which activists face such difficulties and fail to pressure governments. First, misrepresentation occurs when international organizations accept and support activists who do not represent local voices and cannot get local support for their rights claims. Second, misperception happens when activists introduce global norms into local debates but local audiences, unfamiliar with these “foreign” concepts, misperceive them and thus do not support international rights claims. Third, mismatch occurs when pre-existing local movements mistakenly use international rights claims for their own goals, lead local discussions, and overshadow transnational activism. Due to these problems of misrepresentation, misperception, and mismatch, activists may fail to localize their transnational activism. This, in turn, makes it difficult to realize their claims at home. I demonstrate my argument by analyzing the indigenous peoples’ movements in Japan, tracing the success and failure of Ainu and Okinawan activists to domesticate the global indigenous peoples’ movement.

Keywords
Human rights, indigenous peoples, Japan, norms, social movements, transnational civil society

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Introduction

How do activists promote human rights norms? The conventional explanations of transnational activism networks (TANs) draw on the “spiral model” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse et al., 1999, 2013), arguing that local activists form global networks that apply normative pressures on governments. Using these networks, activists strengthen local movements and create domestic pressures, forcing governments to change their behavior.

However, this advocacy strategy has produced mixed results for indigenous peoples in Japan, namely, the Ainu and the Okinawans, who have long participated in the global indigenous peoples’ movement (IPM) to protect their rights. While both have gained United Nations (UN) recognition of their indigeneity, only the Ainu have mobilized a strong local movement and gained Japan’s official recognition. As for the Okinawans, as one activist said:

> Our suit seeking recognition of … Okinawans as indigenous peoples … has been recognized by the UN. But sadly, the Japanese government has used the excuse that “while we recognize that some people assert this, this is not the opinion of the majority of the Okinawan residents” in order to refute our claims. (Yokota, 2015: 62, emphasis added)

Another activist lamented, “Our claims that ‘we are indigenous’ don’t gain support because people misunderstand them.”1 According to one Okinawan journalist, “People have no idea what these international rights claims mean. Scholars like you need to translate them for us.”2 In short, the Okinawans have found that transnational movements do not easily translate into local movements. Their claims seem to have been “lost in translation.”

How do such translation problems affect the connection between transnational and local movements? Why do transnational activists like the Ainu succeed in inspiring local activism while others like the Okinawans fail? The spiral model does not directly address these questions because it assumes that international rights claims gain local support. While it does not necessarily predict linear progress of human rights change, it still underestimates how difficult it could be for transnational activists to translate global movements into local movements. Recently, scholars have started to address this issue, exploring why the introduction of global norms and movements into local politics succeeds or fails (see, for instance, Jetschke and Liese, 2013; Nuñez-Mietz and Iommi, 2017; Zwingel, 2012).

In this article, I join this emerging scholarship and examine what problems activists face in localizing transnational movements, that is, using global activism to strengthen local activism.3 I propose three new mechanisms through which such problems arise and disrupt the spiral dynamic. First, misrepresentation occurs when international organizations accept and support activists who appoint themselves, instead of being elected, to make rights claims on behalf of the local community. Such self-appointed activists may not represent local voices, and local constituents may not rally behind the rights claims even if these claims benefit them. Second, misperception happens when activists introduce global norms into local debates but local audiences misperceive them and thus do not support international rights claims. Third, mismatch occurs when pre-existing local
movements mistakenly use international rights claims for their own separate goals, lead local discussions, and overshadow transnational activism. Due to these three mechanisms, activists may fail to localize their transnational activism. Conversely, by overcoming these mechanisms, activists can succeed in localization.

This study has theoretical and empirical implications. Existing norm diffusion literature tends to assume a simple global-to-local flow of norms, overlooking the complex and nuanced ways in which global ideas are adapted and appropriated in local politics. Many studies of norm diffusion do not adequately describe the causal process by which norms are localized (Zwingel, 2012). This is an important oversight because the causal process by which transnational activism leads to domestic policy change works through local activism. Thus, as discussed later, successful localization is an important, if not necessary, condition for domestic policy change. Moreover, since TANs are key carriers of global ideas to local areas, careful theorization of localization mechanisms deepens our understandings of such global–local connections. In developing a theoretical account of this mechanism, however, I do not ask whether activists can translate transnational activism into domestic policy change. There are numerous reasons why transnational movements succeed or fail domestically (Checkel, 1997, 1999; Cortell and Davis, 2000; Risse, 1995), and examining them is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, I am specifically interested in whether transnational movements successfully motivate local activism.

I demonstrate my argument by analyzing the Ainu and Okinawan IPMs. Despite sharing similar colonial experiences and UN recognition of indigeneity, only the Ainu have successfully localized the global IPM. I explain this gap in terms of misrepresentation, misperception, and mismatch. Importantly, the three mechanisms explain the localization of the global movement by the activists, not the recognition of indigenous rights by the government. This distinction is important because geopolitical factors, as discussed later, affect whether the government recognizes Okinawan indigeneity. To prevent this from affecting my analysis, I specifically focus on whether the transnational indigenous activists can inspire local movements.

The article is organized as follows. I first review existing studies on TANs and human rights change. Second, I discuss the problems of misrepresentation, misperception, and mismatch. Third, I conduct the comparative case study of the Ainu and Okinawan IPMs. Lastly, I conclude with implications for TANs, norms diffusion, and future research.

**TANs and human rights change**

Over the last decades, the world has seen an exponential growth of global civil society. Scholars emphasize the role of TANs in pressuring national governments to adopt international laws and norms. How do activists play such a role?

The standard account draws on the “spiral model” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse et al., 1999, 2013). It stipulates that activists, faced with political gridlocks at home, form TANs. These networks frame global discourse in terms of their rights claims, gaining support from sympathetic states and international organizations. They use global normative pressures to force governments to adopt certain norms and change their policies. Building on such external pressures, or a “boomerang” effect, domestic groups mobilize
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and further push the governments. TANs help this by protecting local activists, sustaining links to transnational networks, and promoting domestic human rights discourse. As this “insider–outsider coalition” (Sikkink, 2005) develops and pressures the governments “from above and below” (Brysk, 1993), a five-phase spiral of state policy change (repression, denial, tactical concession, prescriptive status, and rule-consistent behavior) occurs. Despite their initial repressive reactions, denial of wrongdoing, and tactical concessions, governments are gradually caught up in their own rhetoric. As norms gain prescriptive status in domestic debates, governments become socialized, internalize the norms, and change their policies.

Numerous scholars have tested, and found general support for, the spiral model (Jetschke and Liese, 2013: 28). Although the original study applied the model only to autocracies, later studies have also shown its explanatory power for democracies (Risse and Ropp, 2013: 16–17). Despite this success, the model assumes that international rights claims gain local support and underestimates how difficult it could be for activists to spread global movements locally. As Jetschke and Liese (2013: 31) point out:

A central variable that might impede further progress in the phases [of the spiral] is the lack of domestic mobilization. Here, the model might have overestimated the domestic effects of transnational advocacy. Until recently, scholars assumed that domestic groups that supported human rights groups would gain domestic support once external actors support their case.

Indeed, the original study did “not assume evolutionary progress” and discussed the possibility of a “backlash” when governments respond by repressing activists (Risse et al., 1999: 18, 25–26). Yet, not only did it treat backlash as an outlier phenomenon (Risse et al., 1999: 242), but it also did not consider the possibility that progress stops due to weak local support. The subsequent study (Risse et al., 2013: 11–12) revisited the subject but only considered cases of backlash due to government opposition.

Recently, scholars have begun to address this issue, exploring why human rights change gets delayed, suspended, and even reversed due to weak local support and mobilization (Jetschke and Liese, 2013). First, despite activist opposition against security measures that involve human rights violations (e.g. surveillance, torture, etc.), publics support these measures due to high threat perceptions (Jetschke, 2011; Laursen, 2000; Liese, 2009; Shor, 2008). Second, publics may not support non-governmental organizations (NGOs) associated with controversial political issues or ideologies (Cizre, 2001: 73–74; Liese, 2006). Third, publics oppose transnational rights agendas if they see them as threats to their national identity and culture (Blok, 2008; Nuñez-Mietz and Iommi, 2017). Fourth, divides within civil society may create a local backlash (Stachursky, 2013), and this can turn into transnational conservative networks against progressive movements (Bob, 2012). Fifth, NGOs may not choose effective advocacy strategies to inspire local support (Arrington, 2016; Bell et al., 2014; Murdie and Bhasin, 2011; Reimann, 2009).

This study joins this burgeoning literature and proposes new mechanisms through which the localization of transnational movements succeeds or fails. Localization is crucial because transnational activism, as Tarrow (2005: 57) reminds us, “has not created a new cadre of international activists without domestic roots but instead draws on the efforts of … ‘rooted cosmopolitans,’” or international activists with grass-roots
campaigns. The coexistence of both international and domestic activism, as the spiral model (Risse and Ropp, 1999: 248–250; Risse and Sikkink, 1999: 33) and other scholars (Tarrow, 2005; Tsutsui and Shin, 2008) emphasize, is important for advocacy success, especially in the later stages of the spiral where governments make substantive policy changes. If, then, it is necessary to consider variations in local mobilization to explain variations in human rights changes. It is not sufficient to only discuss the international mobilization of TANs.

**Theorizing the localization of transnational activism**

What challenges do activists face when they bring transnational activism home? I argue that they face three underexplored problems: misrepresentation, misperception, and mismatch. I emphasize these problems since, as Figure 1 shows, they intervene in each stage of activism progress in the spiral model.4

**Misrepresentation**

As Figure 1 shows, activists form TANs and seek international help when they face gridlocks at home. A problem arises when these activists do not represent local voices, but still get accepted and supported by international organizations. Due to the lack of representativeness, they may not be able to gain local support and inspire local activism even if their international rights claims benefit the local community.5

Transnational activists are not necessarily “elected” by local populations to represent the local community at international forums. They are often a group of rights-conscious individuals, such as scholars, lawyers, and donors, who establish NGOs and make rights claims on behalf of the local community. Put differently, they are “self-appointed representatives” who claim to represent certain constituencies without being democratically elected (Montanaro, 2012; Saward, 2009). This issue of NGO representativeness has received scholarly attention, but not directly in the context of the spiral model (Anderson, 2011; Jordan and Van Tuijl, 2000).

Self-appointed activists could be problematic for two reasons. First, such activists do not have institutional authority and power to lead and unite the local community. Despite the strength of their normative rights arguments, they may not have the necessary political influence to convince the local public. Second, because of this, activists may decide to appeal to international bodies without obtaining domestic consensus first, hoping that international assistance raises local support. Such action, which follows the spiral model, could create a backlash because local constituents may question the democratic credentials of these activists and their claims given the lack of domestic consensus.

Moreover, this local backlash can worsen and create a “countermovement” when the claims involve politically controversial issues and threaten the values and interests of some population, and when political allies are available to aid oppositional mobilization (Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996). Consequently, although transnational activists participate in global civil society and rally world opinion against governments, they may fail to unite local society and mobilize public opinion against governments. Accordingly, activists may fail to bring global activism home and push for policy change.
Figure 1. The spiral model and localization problems.

Note: The top part shows the five stages of state policy change. The middle part shows the development of activism. These two parts constitute the spiral model. The bottom part shows my argument on localization problems and how each problem disrupts the spiral dynamic. Importantly, this diagram is a simplified version of the model. For full visual illustrations, see Risse and Sikkink (1999: 20) and Risse and Ropp (2013: 8).
Certainly, not all movements require democratic credentials. For instance, some international NGOs, such as the Amnesty International and Greenpeace, represent certain norms, such as human rights and environmental justice, but not certain populations. This form of transnational activism, known as “discursive representation” (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008; Keck, 2004), does not therefore require democratic credentials for its activists and is unlikely to face the problem of misrepresentation. Even so, such NGOs face the representation issue when localizing their movements. They may not need local support for international campaigns, but they certainly need it for grass-roots campaigns, which are equally important for policy change.

Relatedly, some studies suggest that effective representation may be unnecessary for policy change. For instance, international NGOs might successfully achieve change without close consultation with local populations (Jordan and Van Tuijl, 2000; Rubenstein, 2015). Activists with limited public support could succeed by targeting “gatekeepers,” or certain policymakers in power (Busby, 2010). Yet, this seems to be the exception rather than the rule since many studies, as discussed earlier, agree on the importance of local support and mobilization. I thus maintain that representation is an important factor in advocacy success.

In sum, transnational activists who are self-appointed representatives may not represent local opinions. Therefore, even if they gain support when they are abroad, they may not inspire activism when they come home. This is unlikely to happen if activists are local leaders with institutional authority and power to unite and represent the local community, or if activists involve those leaders and gain domestic consensus as they launch transnational activism.

Misperception

After participating in TANs, activists need to introduce global norms into local debates and mobilize local audiences. Here, the spiral model implicitly assumes that global ideas can easily travel to local areas. Put differently, local actors can accurately understand these ideas and reframe local struggles accordingly. This, however, is a bold assumption.

First, norms may not be easily accessible due to their foreignness, complexities, and legal technicalities. Many norms develop within global epistemic communities of officials, experts, and activists, and become codified into international laws — independently from local contexts. Therefore, the concepts of certain rights may literally be “foreign” to some societies, and local populations, unfamiliar with these concepts, may misinterpret what they mean. Conversely, norms with domestic roots are more accessible and less susceptible to misinterpretation. For instance, while it may be easy for the Americans to understand and embrace civil rights due to their history of civil rights movements, it may be difficult for others who have no such history. Additionally, some norms and international laws are complex and involve legal technicalities, which makes them inaccessible for non-experts. For instance, it is obvious who counts as women in gender debates, but it is less clear who counts as sexual minorities in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) debates. It is easy to understand what norms against torture mean, but it is less straightforward what environmental rights entail. Against this backdrop,
some scholars criticize existing studies on human rights norms for taking the “liberal” understanding of these norms as granted and assuming that these norms are universally understood (Zwingel, 2012: 120). Others (Bell, 2000; Goodale and Merry, 2007; Levitt and Merry, 2009; Merry, 2006) problematize the global–local disconnect, discussing cases of misunderstandings of global norms in local politics. Accordingly, activists may not be able to simply import global norms into local debates and reframe local issues in terms of their international rights claims.

Second, human rights frames may not “resonate” with local audiences and gain support due to the incongruity between global norms and local cultures (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow and Benford, 1988, 1992). Existing studies claim that activists address this by strategically adopting frames that appeal to locals. Yet, as Givan et al. (2010: 5) emphasize:

This does not mean that movement activists have free rein to adopt or alter frames to their choosing; collective action frames that are too detached from social realities and prevailing cultural meanings or identities are unlikely to resonate with targeted audiences.

In fact, some anthropologists argue that the term “norm diffusion” precludes a more expanded focus on “different avenues of cross-cultural encounters and transmissions of meaning,” and prefer to use the term “norm translation” (Zwingel, 2012: 124). Norm translation involves “vernacularization,” a process in which global norms are reframed and repackaged to fit local ideologies, political channels, and social issues (Merry, 2006). As Levitt and Merry (2009: 448) argue, framing “universal” human rights claims in “local” terms and adapting them to pre-existing ideas of justice “may mean abandoning explicit references to human rights language altogether and, indeed, can mean hijacking these concepts for quite different purposes.” Therefore, even if transnational activists bring global norms into local debates, their international rights claims may be misperceived by local populations and may not gain public understanding and support.

Indeed, some IR scholars emphasize the importance of “cultural match” when domestic actors “localize” global norms (Acharya, 2004; Checkel, 1999; Legro, 1997). Yet, unlike their anthropological counterparts, these scholars implicitly assume that locals understand outside ideas; otherwise, local norm entrepreneurs cannot rely on global norms to legitimize their claims, or local audiences would not reject these norms based on cultural differences. Also, these scholars only discuss such cultural dynamics in the contexts of bureaucratic politics and regional organizations, not social movements.

In sum, activists may fail to promote norms and mobilize at home when local audiences misperceive the meanings of these norms. This is likely to happen when norms are foreign, complex, and technical, and when they are incompatible with local cultures. This is unlikely when norms have domestic roots and are accessible, and when there is no cultural incongruity issue.

Mismatch

Even if activists manage to introduce global norms into local debates, they may face another problem: mismatch. While the spiral model only focuses on the behavior of
transnational activists, they are not the only actors who matter. Local actors, having their own pre-existing movements, may mistakenly use international rights claims for their own goals, lead local discussions, and overshadow transnational activism.

Although transnational activists, as posited by the spiral model, gain resources and networks necessary for local activism with the help of TANs, they still face the challenge of rallying local constituents behind their international rights frames. Yet, instead of being passive receivers of these frames, local actors can be selective and only adopt frames that fit their pre-existing movement claims. If so, these actors can use the frames to bolster their own claims, even if their local movement and the transnational movement pursue different goals. Put differently, they co-opt the global norms promoted by transnational activists and “graft” them onto pre-existing local claims (Price, 1998). The local movement then shifts the local debate from international rights claims to local claims, overshadowing the transnational movement.

Furthermore, the mismatch problem can worsen in two ways. First, local actors may misperceive global norms as supportive of their pre-existing activist claims. This makes it more likely that pre-existing local movements with different goals incorporate transnational activism and its claims. Second, transnational activists may face competition with local organizations in areas such as recruitment, funding, or public attention (Cooley and Ron, 2002; Hathaway and Meyer, 1993; Soule and King, 2008). In such a competitive environment, the local activists may strategically co-opt the international claims for their own gains and overshadow the transnational competitors in local politics.

Certainly, whether the use of international frames for unrelated local claims is problematic could depend on the perspective. While transnational activists may see this as inappropriate because their frames are being used for different purposes, local activists may view it as appropriate because these frames are helping their own causes. However, this can still be problematic not only because international laws and norms may not permit local claims, but also because transnational and local movements may seek incompatible goals so that pursuing local claims comes at the expense of international claims and thus undermines transnational activism. Conversely, problems will not arise when transnational and local actors seek compatible goals and are able to combine their claims and cooperate.

To recap, according to the spiral model, the causal process by which transnational activism leads to domestic policy change works through local activism. Yet, activists could face three problems when localizing transnational activism: misrepresentation, misperception, and mismatch. As Figure 1 shows, these problems stand as hurdles in the causal chain of the spiral model. Thus, they turn the activism dynamics into a “broken” spiral. Table 1 lists each problem and its scope conditions. Conversely, each problem is unlikely to emerge in the absence of its scope conditions. Without these problems, localization is likely to succeed, and so is the spiral process.

**IPMs in Japan**

In this section, I demonstrate how these problems affect activism by analyzing the Ainu and Okinawan IPMs. These indigenous groups have campaigned for the recognition of
Table 1. The mechanisms and scope conditions of localization problems.

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<tr>
<th>Mechanisms</th>
<th>Scope conditions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Misrepresentation</strong></td>
<td>Transnational activists do not represent local voices, and thus fail to inspire local activism.</td>
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<td>Misrepresentation is limited to:</td>
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<td>– activism with specific local constituents.</td>
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<td>Misrepresentation is more likely when:</td>
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<td>– activists are “self-appointed representatives”; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– activism involves controversial issues and threatens the values and interests of some population, and political allies are available for oppositional mobilization.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Misperception</strong></td>
<td>Local audiences misperceive norms and do not support international rights claims.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Misperception is more likely when:</td>
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<td>– norms are foreign, complex, or technical; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– there is incongruity between global norms and local cultures.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mismatch</strong></td>
<td>Pre-existing local movements mistakenly use international rights claims for their own goals, lead local discussions, and overshadow transnational activism.</td>
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<td>Mismatch is more likely when:</td>
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<td>– local actors misperceive global norms as supportive of their local claims; and</td>
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<td>– competition exists between transnational and local activist organizations.</td>
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their indigenous rights since the 1980s–1990s. They serve as an interesting comparative case study. Both share a similar historical background of colonization and assimilation. Both have participated in the global IPM to pressure the Japanese government and gained UN recognition of their indigeneity. However, only the Ainu have successfully inspired local activism to push for Japanese official indigenous recognition.

Importantly, the three mechanisms explain the localization of the global IPM, not the official recognition of indigeneity. This distinction is important because of geopolitical factors. Okinawan indigenous activists, as discussed later, demand the removal of US military bases from their native land, but the Japanese government is unlikely to recognize these claims for national security reasons. By contrast, the Ainu’s claims do not involve such geopolitical implications, and the government is more likely to recognize these claims. I circumvent this issue by focusing on local mobilization because geopolitics does not affect the ability of activists to mobilize local IPMs. Still, local mobilization, as discussed earlier, is an important, if not necessary, condition for domestic policy change.

Moreover, the within-country comparison controls for the state-level variables, such as domestic political structures, that existing studies find consequential for activist
mobilization. In fact, Japan’s democratic regime should facilitate mobilization (Risse, 1995). Additionally, the spiral model not only applies to both autocratic and democratic regimes, but also stipulates that democracies are more responsive to normative pressures than autocracies because they embrace “respect for human rights … [as] an institutionalized logic of appropriateness” and allow protests (Risse and Ropp, 2013: 16–17). This in itself does not guarantee Japan’s official recognition of minority rights, but it precludes government repression of the Ainu and Okinawan IPMs.

Lastly, these cases involve activists demanding not just indigenous rights, but also basic human rights, civil rights, self-determination rights, environmental rights, and cultural rights. This makes them a microcosm of human rights politics, offering us a unique insight into how all these rights are used in local contexts.

My findings are based on 23 interviews with activists, scholars, journalists, and politicians in Tokyo, Hokkaido, and Okinawa in 2016/2017. These individuals are the key actors who have long led or reported on the IPMs and other relevant movements. I also talked to many more relevant individuals more informally.7 To better understand the local politics and cultural contexts, I visited major protest sites and museums on Okinawa and Ainu histories and cultures. I also analyzed movement activities and documents, media coverage, and scholarly studies in Japanese.

**History of the global IPM**

Before discussing the Ainu and Okinawan IPMs, one must understand the history of the global IPM. After being appointed by the UN as the Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in 1971, Jose R. Martinez Cobo published the “Study on the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations” (commonly known as the “Cobo Report”) in 1981–1983.8 This was followed by the establishment of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) to prepare a Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 1982, and by the adoption of the International Labor Organization Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, No. 169 (ILO 169) in 1989. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), established in 2000 and launched in 2002, later became a vehicle for the IPM. In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) with a vote of 143 in favor (including Japan) to four against and 11 abstentions.

The term “indigenous peoples,” as defined in the Cobo Report and the ILO 169, refers to:

peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.9

The crucial point is that indigenous peoples not only: (1) were native to the land; and (2) experienced colonization by other countries; but also (3) self-identify as indigenous; and (4) make voluntary efforts to retain their traditions (Daes, 1996: 22). According to the
UN, more than 370 million indigenous peoples and 5000 indigenous groups live in the world today. Due to the complexities of determining indigeneity, these criteria are considered working definitions, and no UN body has officially defined the term (United Nations, 2009: 4–7).

Indigenous rights, stipulated by the ILO 169 and the UNDRIP, include rights to maintain ancestral languages, cultures, customs, lands, and resources, as well as internal self-determination rights to make collective political decisions as indigenous communities under the legal apparatus of the host states. Thus, IPMs differ from the ethno-nationalist decolonization movements for independence (Niezen, 2003: ch. 6). Indigenous rights, in fact, preclude independence based on external self-determination rights (Short and Lennox, 2016). As discussed later, this complexity and technicality surrounding the questions of who counts as “indigenous peoples” and what counts as self-determination rights contributes to the misperception and mismatch problems.

**History of the Ainu and Okinawan IPMs**

Both Ainu and Okinawans are indigenous peoples with similar colonization and assimilation experiences (Uemura, 2015). The Ainu are the original inhabitants of Hokkaido, Sakhalin, the Northern Islands, and northern Honshu. By the 13th century, they had developed their own distinct culture. They made living through fishing and hunting, and possessed language and beliefs that were distinguishable from those of mainland Japanese. The Okinawans, also known as the Ryukyuan, existed as an independent nation called the Ryukyu Kingdom since the 13th century. They are ethnically distinct from mainland Japanese and possess their own indigenous languages and cultural and religious traditions. Soon after the Meiji Restoration (1868), the central government forcefully annexed Hokkaido (1872) and Okinawa (1879), confiscating the native land and replacing the indigenous political institutions with prefectural governments headed by mainland officials. Moreover, it implemented assimilationist legislations forcing both indigenous groups to give up their indigenous languages and traditions and adopt the Japanese language and lifestyle. This has resulted in discrimination, social segregation, and economic hardships for both groups even to this day (McGrogan, 2010).

Both indigenous groups began their IPMs during the 1980s–1990s. Before this, the Hokkaido Ainu Kyokai (hereafter, the Kyokai), the largest Ainu organization in Hokkaido, had been promoting the New Ainu Law to replace existing assimilationist legislations since the 1960s, independently from the global IPM. For instance, Kyokai’s 1984 New Ainu Draft Law invoked the notion of indigeneity to claim Ainu rights without referring to any international laws and norms (Stevens, 2008: 136). The activism became connected to the IPM in 1987, when Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone’s statement that Japan is a “mono-ethnic nation” infuriated Ainu activists and led Kyokai President Giichi Nomura to become the first Ainu to attend the UNWGIP, with help from Hideaki Uemura, Director of the Shimin Gaiko Centre (SGC), a Tokyo-based human rights NGO (Uemura, 2003). Under Nomura’s leadership, the Kyokai transformed the legal movement into an IPM, regularly participating in international forums. This led to the 1997 landmark ruling by the Sapporo District Court over a dam-construction project on Ainu land, the first legal case in which a Japanese court had referred to the Ainu as an “indigenous people”
Minami (Levin, 1999). This ruling then led to the establishment of the Law for the Promotion of the Ainu Culture (LPAC) in the same year.

In 2007, the Japanese government voted in favor of the UNDRIP. The Kyokai capitalized on this opportunity to organize protests and the 2008 Indigenous Peoples’ Summit to coincide with the G8 summit scheduled in Hokkaido. These pressures led to a Diet resolution and a cabinet decision to recognize Ainu indigeneity and to set up the Council for Ainu Policy Promotion (Lewallen, 2008; Uemura et al., 2013: 95). In June 2015, the government reached the first cabinet decision on Ainu issues since the 1997 LPAC, pledging to reflect Ainu indigenous history in national textbook guidelines, implement welfare for the Ainu community, and promote Ainu culture in forms of museums and cultural festivals and exchanges. In sum, the Ainu have successfully domesticated the global IPM to push for official indigenous recognition.

In contrast, the Okinawans have not had the same success. After the Second World War, US forces occupied Okinawa. With US support for decolonization, the Okinawans mobilized independence movements. Yet, with the intensification of the Cold War, the US withdrew its support and expanded its military presence in Okinawa, causing cultural hybridization, with American cultures eroding Okinawan traditions (Allen, 2009: 194–195). This triggered a reversion movement to mainland Japan, with a demand for the removal of the US bases, leading to the 1972 reversion. The continuing US military presence and the related crimes and incidents after the reversion precipitated anti-base movements against the Japanese government that remain strong to this day.

This anti-base activism became connected to the IPM in 1996, when Okinawan activists first participated in the UNWGIP with help from the SGC. They later established the Association of the Indigenous Peoples of the Ryukyus (AIPR) in 1999 and continued transnational activism to preserve Okinawan culture and to remove the US bases from Okinawa. This pushed the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination’ (CERD) to call on the Japanese government to scrutinize and report on potential human rights offenses regarding the bases in 2001 (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2001). In 2008, the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) called on the Japanese government to recognize Okinawan indigeneity and promote their indigenous rights (Human Rights Committee, 2008: Article 32). In 2009, the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized six Ryukyu languages as “endangered” or “severely endangered” (Monseley, 2009), while the CERD, in its 2010 report to Japan, condemned the base issue as “contemporary forms of racism” (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2010: 6). In 2014, both HRC and CERD demanded again that the Japanese government recognize Okinawan indigenous rights (Nagai, 2015).

Despite these international pressures, the Japanese government has not recognized Okinawan indigeneity. This is not only because the government prioritizes US military presence over Okinawan indigenous rights for geopolitical reasons, but also because the IPM has gained little support from the Okinawans (McGrogan, 2010: 366). One activist laments:

Our suit seeking recognition of Ryukyuans/Okinawans as indigenous peoples and seeking an apology from the Japanese government for their policies of discrimination has been recognized
by the UN. But sadly, the Japanese government has used the excuse that “while we recognize that some people assert this, this is not the opinion of the majority of the Okinawan residents” in order to refute our claims. (Yokota, 2015: 62)

This weak local support is surprising since the IPM lends international support for removing the US bases, a popular demand shared by many Okinawans.

Why have only the Ainu localized the global IPM to push for official recognition? Government repression cannot explain this gap in local IPM mobilization because both indigenous groups were able to mobilize other movements against the state, as discussed earlier. Neither can the spiral model because it considers government repression, but not weak local support, as a reason for localization failure. I explain how misrepresentation, misperception, and mismatch have affected local support and mobilization for the indigenous groups.

**Misrepresentation**

According to the spiral model, activists form TANs when they face gridlocks at home. A problem emerges when activists are self-appointed representatives not representing local voices. In this case, while community leaders started the Ainu IPM, a small group of activists initiated the Okinawan IPM. Consequently, while the representative Ainu activists have successfully mobilized the local community, the less representative Okinawan activists have failed to unite the local society.

As discussed earlier, the Ainu first attended the UNWGIP in 1987. Kyokai’s former President Nomura spearheaded this global activism and continued it until the end of his tenure in 1995. The UN recognized Nomura’s efforts and invited him to address the opening ceremony of the International Year of Indigenous Peoples in the General Assembly in 1992. Vice-President Yupo Abe, who has built on this effort, observes: “It was very important that former President Nomura led the IPM in making the movement spread.” SGC Director Uemura, who played a key role in taking Ainu activists to the UN, recalled:

> When Mr. Nomura started going to the UN indigenous forums in 1987, the Japanese government had no idea about such forums. Given that even people in Tokyo did not know about this, it was very difficult whether the Ainu organization in Hokkaido would participate. [The Ainu people] would doubt the utility of such UN activism. In this sense, it was revolutionary that Mr. Nomura started participating. He used to say at the beginning that this UN activism will not continue unless the trustees of the Kyokai show support. Therefore, we had these trustees go to the UN on a routine basis. (Senju Minzoku no 10 nen Shimin Renraku Kai Kenkyu Purojekuto Chiimu, 2009: 159)

In short, it was crucial to get Ainu leaders involved and gain local consensus on the movement.

By contrast, a small group of activists started and continued the Okinawan UN activism *without* involving local leaders and achieving domestic consensus. The first Okinawan to attend the UNWGIP was Yasukatsu Matsushima, a student activist who, inspired by the Ainu IPM, collaborated with the SGC to bring Okinawa’s local issues to
the international stage (Uemura, 2003). Several activists later joined, established the AIPR in 1999, and continued the UN activism until today. In comparison to the Kyokai, an organization with 16,000 Ainu members (about two-thirds of the “official” Ainu population in Hokkaido), the AIPR is an NGO currently run by three activists with no institutional authority or power to lead 1.4 million Okinawans. AIPR Co-director Shisei Toma acknowledges: “There is no single [indigenous] organization that can unite and mobilize the entire Ryukyuan people.”11 It is thus no surprise that no prefecture-wide anti-base protests have adopted the indigenous rights claims, although both demand the same thing — the removal of the US bases.

Recently, the Okinawan IPM has gained some allies. Kazuko Inoue, director of a local party called the Okinawa Social Mass Party, participated in the 2014 UN indigenous peoples’ world conference to demand the protection of Okinawa’s self-determination rights. In September 2015, Governor Takeshi Onaga worked with both AIPR and SGC and gave a speech at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), arguing that the presence of the US bases is a violation of self-determination and environmental rights (Okinawa Times, 2015b). In 2014, the local major newspaper, Ryukyu Shimpo, published a one-year-long column on the Ryukyu Kingdom’s colonial history and Okinawa’s self-determination. In 2015, the newspaper published this column as Okinawa’s Self-Determination Rights (Ryukyu Shimpo Inc. and Arakaki, 2015). These publications received positive reactions from many readers in Okinawa.12 On the surface, the indigenous rights claims have become more representative of Okinawan voices.

However, the indigenous cause is yet to become a majority in Okinawa due to a local backlash and countermovement. Understandably, indigenous identity is a controversial issue because Japan’s assimilationist policies and the experience of reversion to mainland Japan have Japanized many Okinawans (Allen, 2009). A recent survey shows local divisions, with 41.6% identifying themselves as exclusively “Okinawan,” 29.7% as “Okinawan Japanese,” and 25.5% as “Japanese” (Lim, 2009). Moreover, the anti-base claims threaten the economic and security interests of some Okinawans, especially conservatives close to the pro-base Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Therefore, before Governor Onaga’s UN speech, the LDP in Okinawa issued a statement demanding the governor not to call the Okinawans “indigenous peoples” (Okinawa Times, 2015a). At the HRC, a conservative Okinawan activist made a counter-speech that Okinawa is “part of Japan” (Ganaha, 2015a). She later told reporters that the indigenous activists were misrepresenting Okinawan voices, and that the UN was accepting these activists without considering their democratic credentials (Ganaha, 2015b). Former Governor Hirokazu Nakaima also criticized Onaga: “[Onaga] went to the UN and told the story of his own creation that [the Okinawans] ‘are indigenous peoples.’... The Okinawan citizens never asked the Governor to do such a thing. When did we ever become indigenous?” (Nakaima, 2015). In December 2015, the Tomigushuku Municipal Assembly declared that “the Okinawans are Japanese, not indigenous peoples,” demanding the withdrawal of UN recommendations on Okinawan indigeneity (Tomigusuku Municipal Assembly, 2015). In March 2016, conservative politicians and activists established the Association of Okinawan Citizens to Realize the Withdrawal of the UN Indigenous Peoples Recommendation.
This opposition convinced Governor Onaga that promoting an IPM was “still premature,” leading him not to use the term “indigenous peoples” in his UN speech and any of his political campaigns and parliamentary debates. Similarly, Satoko Taira, a Naha Municipal Assemblywoman and a former AIPR member, admitted that it was “politically difficult” to promote an IPM in Okinawa. Most interviewees thus acknowledged that the IPM needs more local support.

In sum, the Okinawan indigenous activists’ lack of representativeness has made it difficult to inspire local activism, although indigenous rights would help the Okinawans preserve their culture and remove the US bases. The Ainu has not faced such a problem since it was their leaders who spearheaded the movement.

**Misperception**

In addition to misrepresentation, activists may face another problem: misperception. In the spiral model, activists, after engaging in TANs, must introduce global norms into local debates. However, local populations may misperceive global ideas and may not support international rights claims.

The concept of “indigenous peoples,” as defined and promoted by the global IPM and international laws, is foreign to Japanese society. This foreignness, combined with the complexity and legal technicality surrounding the definition of the term and the incongruity between indigenous norms and local cultures, creates misperception problems. Translated as **senju minzoku** in Japanese, the term is misperceived to be referring to populations living “primitive” lifestyles, such as the Native Americans and the Aboriginals. Therefore, while the indigenous frame has been embraced by the Ainu, whose traditional hunting lifestyles fit the popular image of “indigenous peoples,” it has been contested and even rejected by the Okinawans, whose cultural pride in their “civilized” ancestral status of the Ryukyu Kingdom does not fit that image. SGC Director Uemura explained:

> The very concept of indigenous peoples [as defined in international laws and norms] simply does not exist in Japanese society. Importantly, the level of civilization or the existence of kingdom-hood itself does not define indigeneity. The crucial point is the history of being subjected to colonial rule by a foreign state without consent.

For instance, AIPR’s former Director, Hideki Chinen, stated as follows in 2003, seven years since Okinawa’s first participation in the UNWGIP:

> The ordinary perception … [is that] Okinawa is too civilized to fit the definition of indigenous peoples, while those who live a self-sustained lifestyle in an isolated island can be called as indigenous peoples.… [However,] we [the Okinawans] are those [indigenous] peoples who have been forcefully exposed to an assimilation policy, as stipulated in the ILO Convention No.169.… We are hoping that the Ainu will first obtain recognition as indigenous peoples by the Japanese government and then be referred as such in Japanese literature. Only after that, the Okinawans can be acknowledged as indigenous peoples.… Therefore I think we, together with the Ainu, need to pressure the Japanese government from outside. (Chinen, 2003: emphasis added)
Today, the Japanese government has recognized Ainu indigeneity, and many scholars have produced research on the subject. Meanwhile, the Okinawan activists have continuously participated in UN forums to pressure the government. However, the misperception of the term “indigenous peoples,” and the negative image surrounding it, remain prevalent, hindering the efforts of the activists to promote the IPM locally.

For instance, AIPR Co-director Toma posited:

"Many Okinawans still think of indigenous peoples as “naked people with spears” and do not think that the Ryukyuan people, who existed as the Ryukyu Kingdom, fit that description.... Because of such a discriminatory connotation of the term indigenous peoples, many Okinawans resist using it thinking that doing so would worsen the discrimination they already face."\(^{16}\)

He also admitted that he himself had a negative image toward indigenous peoples when he first started the IPM. Another AIPR Co-director, Gosamaru Miyazato, said that despite the efforts to promote accurate understandings of indigeneity, “the public image of indigenous peoples as primitive populations still seems strong” (Uemura et al., 2013: 153–154). Moreover, Taïra, a former AIPR member, posited: “Until now, most Okinawan activists don’t use the term indigenous peoples, because it has rather pejorative image. For example, people would think of the Aboriginals in Australia, or the Native Americans, or the Ainu within Japan” (Chan, 2008: 278).

This negative image of indigenous peoples, and the resulting lack of public appreciation of indigenous rights, explain why even Governor Onaga, the leader of the “All-Okinawa” identity movement, refrained from using indigenous framing in his 2015 UN speech.\(^{17}\) Tsuyoshi Arakaki, Editor of the major Okinawan newspaper *Ryukyu Shimpo*, who has been covering the IPM, thus suggested changing the Japanese translation of indigenous peoples (*senju minzoku*) to avoid its negative connotations.\(^{18}\)

By contrast, this misperception problem is absent for the Ainu. First, having indigenous traditions based on hunting and a spiritual relationship with nature, instead of kingdomhood status like the Okinawans, the Ainu do not associate their indigeneity with civilized status or find the indigenous title problematic for cultural reasons. While some Ainu, especially those of mixed Ainu and Japanese heritages, may prefer a more modern image of themselves over the stereotype of being nature-worshippers, they still accept being called “indigenous peoples” (Lewallen, 2008; Siddle, 2009). Kyokai’s Vice-President Abe observed: “A problem similar to Okinawa does not exist among the Ainu. The term ‘indigenous peoples’ accurately captures our history of colonialization and assimilation.”\(^{19}\) “We did not find the concept of indigenous peoples strange at all. It fitted nicely what we thought of ourselves,” recalls the Ainu Peoples’ Party’s leader, Shiro Kayano.\(^{20}\) Second, as discussed earlier, the 1984 Ainu New Draft Law, which pre-dated the first 1987 Ainu participation in the UNWGIP, already evoked the notion of indigeneity in claiming Ainu rights. Indigenous framing thus had local roots and was less foreign to the Ainu, making it easy for them to adopt it in their local movements.

In sum, the misperception of indigenous norms has stymied the efforts of transnational activists to mobilize a local IPM in Okinawa. This has not happened for the Ainu, who face no cultural incongruity or foreignness issues with indigenous norms.
Mismatch

Even after spreading global norms in local debates, activists may face another problem in promoting transnational movements at home: mismatch. Local actors may mistakenly use international rights claims for their own pre-existing activist goals, lead local discussions, and overshadow transnational activism. Although the global IPM and indigenous rights only permit internal self-determination, local Okinawan activists have used indigenous framing to demand independence, drawing local attention to a claim that is not supported internationally and is difficult to achieve. In contrast, the Ainu have not had such a problem in the absence of pre-existing secessionist movements.

As discussed earlier, the history of Okinawa’s independence movements dates to the US occupation era (1945–1972). The movements initially spread after the Second World War with US support for decolonization, but faded as the Cold War pushed the US to withdraw its support and expand its military facilities in Okinawa. This precipitated a reversion movement, with a demand for the removal of the US military bases. No reduction of the bases achieved since the reversion, and the 1995 rape of a 12-year-old Okinawan girl by US personnel and other US-military-related incidents, triggered anti-base movements in Okinawa. This also spawned outright Ryukyuan independence movements, supported by about a quarter of the Okinawans (Lim, 2009).

In this context, several Okinawan activists started participating in the global IPM. Just like many other indigenous activists around the world, they were calling not for independence, but for the realization of cultural, education, self-determination, and land rights, with the goals of restoring Okinawan traditions and removing the bases. “We have never demanded independence,” emphasizes AIPR Co-director Toma, “because such a demand would bring various criticism and opposition and alienate people” given the political contestation surrounding secession in Okinawa.21

However, it appears that the ideas of indigenous peoples and self-determination rights have been misunderstood to mean secessionist claims and mistakenly adopted to support the independence movements. In 2013, the Association of Comprehensive Studies for Independence of the Lew Chewans (ACSILs) was established by a group of pro-independence scholars and former AIPR members, including Yasukatsu Matsushima, the first Okinawan to attend the UNWGIP. Inspired by the independence movements in Pacific islands, the ACSILs calls for secession through the use of the UN list of Non-Self-Governing Territories and the due decolonization process.22 While international norms and laws on indigenous rights only permit internal self-determination, the organization still employs the indigenous rights frame, referring to these international instruments and UN recommendations on Okinawan indigeneity to strengthen its case. Matsushima stated: “I disagree that indigenous peoples do not have the rights to independence. We, the Ryukyuan, should become independent.”23 With its increasing popularity, the ACSILs has overshadowed the AIPR, taking away public attention and resources from the IPM.24

Moreover, another group of pro-independence activists and scholars established the All-Okinawa Council (AOC) in 2013. This organization seeks to import the Scotland independence model, demanding secession based on the self-determination rights stipulated in Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It
also uses UN recommendations for its cause, shaping the local debates about self-determination in the direction of independence, and its activism is gaining momentum and taking public attention away from the IPM. Moreover, AOC rejects cooperation with the AIPR due to their incompatible goals.25

Behind these uses of indigenous rights claims for independence causes is the history of Okinawa’s independence movements. Both SGC Director Uemura and Ryukyu Shimpo Editor Arakaki, a close observer of the IPM, observed that independence claims can resonate with the Okinawans easily given the long history of secessionist movements.26 AIPR Co-director Toma expressed concerns that Okinawa’s indigeneity debates have become more about independence than the international indigenous rights claims.27

In sum, although the international indigenous rights norms and laws preclude secession, local activists have used indigenous framing and mobilized local populations for independence causes. While this secessionist movement enjoys some local support, it still presents problems for the transnational indigenous rights activists, who are overshadowed by that movement pursuing the incompatible goal of independence.

In contrast, the Ainu have not had a similar problem. In fact, they have renounced independence in their legal activism for the Ainu New Law at home and in their rights claims at the UN. For instance, Kyokai’s former President Nomura declared in his 1992 UN speech that independence is not an option: “We do not perceive this right to self-determination as being a threat to the national unity and territorial integrity of member states” (Nomura, 1992). This is understandable since independence is unrealistic for the Ainu. Hokkaido’s population (about 5.5 million) is mostly mainland Japanese, and independence would mean taking back all the lands currently held by the Japanese and becoming economically and politically self-sufficient. In contrast, secession is not unthinkable for the Okinawans, who not only have a history of independence movements, but also constitute the majority in Okinawa. Shinako Oyakawa, one of the ACSILs leaders, said that the Okinawan IPM was a way to promote discussions about independence as a realistic option for the Okinawans, who once gave up hopes for secession.28

In sum, the Okinawan indigenous activists have had difficulty promoting the IPM because the local independence activists have mistakenly adopted indigenous framing to promote their own agenda. This has not happened for the Ainu, who have no pre-existing independence movement.

The Ainu and Okinawan cases therefore present an example of how activists translate transnational movements into local movements. Although both groups have gained international support for their IPMs, only the Ainu have succeeded in inspiring local activism to push for policy change. The Okinawans have failed to do so due to the problems of misrepresentation, misperception, and mismatch. Thus, the spiral model worked in Hokkaido, not Okinawa.

**Generalizability**

Does my argument travel beyond the cases outlined earlier? While this article cannot fully address this question, there are reasons to think that it does.

First, scholars recognize NGO representativeness as a widespread issue (Anderson, 2011; Jordan and Van Tuijl, 2000). As Näsström (2015: 1) posits:
Both domestic and global politics harbor a number of non-governmental organizations, popular movements, advocacy groups and celebrities professing to act on behalf of the people. At the same time, these actors are not elected by the people they claim to represent. Globalization and the growth of TANs have contributed to the proliferation of such “self-appointed representatives” (Montanaro, 2012; Saward, 2009). One prominent example is the U2 singer Bono, who works on human rights issues in Africa. He said: “I represent a lot of people [in Africa] who have no voice at all…. They haven’t asked me to represent them. It’s cheeky but I hope they’re glad I do” (Saward, 2009: 1). While Bono has made important contributions to international humanitarian efforts, it remains an open question whether he really represents the voices of these people and can inspire local movements.

Second, many global norms and rights, not just indigenous ones, are broad and technical, and devoid of local cultural contexts. Their meanings are often subject to different interpretations (Zwingel, 2012: 120). One cannot assume that locals can always correctly understand and support them. For instance, studies find that people interpret the term “democracy” differently across borders. When asked to define democracy, 68% of US respondents cited freedom and liberties, compared to only 23% among Chinese respondents (Dalton et al., 2007: 149). As Morton (2005: 527–529) argues, many Chinese instead see democracy as “a means of ensuring more equitable development outcomes”; thus, “[i]t is … misleading to assume that the emergence of civil society in China will lead to the realization of a Western liberal form of democracy.” Indeed, existing studies stress the difficulties of introducing human rights and democracy to non-Western countries where people understand these outside ideas through their local cultural perspectives (Bell, 2000; Goodale and Merry, 2007).

Third, mismatch is possible so long as there are pre-existing movements with incompatible goals. In general, domestic and international NGOs vie for funding, recruitment, and public attention. This intensifies when they have similar constituencies, donors, or tactics, or seek conflicting goals (Cooley and Ron, 2002; Hathaway and Meyer, 1993; Soule and King, 2008). This situation continues as the number of NGOs keeps growing due to globalization and the increased use of NGOs as contractors by donor states and international organizations (Cooley and Ron, 2002). For instance, feminist campaigns by internationally oriented NGOs met challenges from other NGOs that appropriate women’s rights according to local religions or cultures, such as Shari’a in Nigeria (Abdullah, 2002: 169–171), Islam in Egypt and Iran (Stachursky, 2013), and the collectivist values in China (Liu et al., 2009). In India, some women’s rights campaigns have been derailed by Hindu nationalists who use the feminist agenda to criticize Muslims for their patriarchal laws (Merry, 2006: 103–113). All these examples of human rights, democracy, and women’s rights promotion suggest the generalizability of my argument beyond IPMs.

Conclusion

Why do activists sometimes fail to translate transnational activism into local movements to press for policy change? This “lost in translation” phenomenon, I argued, occurs through three mechanisms: misrepresentation, misperception, and mismatch. Localization
is crucial because activists often need both domestic and international campaigns to successfully pressure governments. It is also important for norm diffusion because TANs are key drivers of progressive normative change. Understanding how TANs succeed or fail to promote global ideas in local areas thus deepens our knowledge of how norms travel and how activists make that change.

Specifically, the misrepresentation mechanism shows the importance of grass-roots efforts to involve local leaders, gain local consensus, and give legitimacy to transnational activism. Such efforts help avoid local backlash and countermovement. This, of course, is easier said than done, especially when the issues at stake are politically controversial and involve vested interests. It is certainly not easy for the Okinawan indigenous activists to convince the entire population to embrace their indigeneity after so many years of Japan’s assimilation policies (Allen, 2009). Yet, such bottom-up efforts are arguably the way forward. As AIPR Co-director Toma says: “The UN and the SGC have done so much for us. But we, the Okinawans, have to stand up in the end.” Global assistance cannot replace local voice in overcoming the representation problem.

Moreover, the misperception and mismatch mechanisms emphasize the significance of educating local populations about international norms. Due to their foreign, complex, and technical nature, norms are often open to a wide range of interpretation, creating room for misperception and mismatch. This is further complicated when global norms clash with local cultures. One solution is public relations campaigns. In this regard, the recent local media coverage of the Okinawan IPM serves to promote correct understandings of indigenous rights. Yet, even Ryukyu Shimpo Editor Arakaki, who has led this coverage, admits the difficulty of digesting international laws: “People have no idea what these international rights claims mean. Scholars like you need to translate them for us.” To address this, in 2016, some Okinawan scholars established a study group on international human rights laws. However, even these scholars showed concerns about their lack of legal expertise. Perhaps this is where international NGOs can be helpful, collaborating with local actors to educate publics in a culturally sensitive manner. Resulting accurate public understandings raise local support, which, in turn, helps norm diffusion and addresses the representation issue.

Certainly, more research on localization is needed. With regards to the three mechanisms, future research may ask: is each mechanism necessary and/or sufficient for localization and spiral dynamics to fail? What other challenges do activists face in localization? How do they overcome these challenges? Answering these questions is important for improving the original five-stage spiral model because, as Simmons (2013: 57) writes, “[o]nly a weak logic connected the stages of the model; the fulfillment of one stage presented the possibility — hardly the inevitability — of movement to the ‘next’ stage.” In short, we still have much to learn about how activists move from organizing TANs, to exerting international pressures, to mobilizing local movements, to effecting domestic policy change. Such knowledge will help us better understand how norms travel and progressive changes occur across societies.

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**Notes**

1. Interview with Shisei Toma, the Association of the Indigenous Peoples of the Ryukyus (AIPR) Co-director, June 18, 2016, Okinawa, emphasis added.
2. Interview with Tsuyoshi Arakaki, the *Ryukyu Shimpo* Editor, July 7, 2016, Tokyo, emphases added.
3. I define localization as the successful mobilization of local constituents as part of transnational advocacy efforts. I focus on the efforts of domestic actors to use international support for local activism, not those of international actors to engage the local. This definition differs from Acharya’s (2004: 245) definition of localization: “the active construction (through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors, which results in the former developing significant congruence with local beliefs and practices.” His argument concerns how global norms fit into local cultures, while mine concerns how transnational activism turns into local activism.
4. I do not claim that this list exhausts all potential challenges. However, I still contend that it expands our understanding of localization processes.
5. By representativeness, I mean “critical mass” support or no organized opposition (Sarah and Krook, 2008). My intention is not to resolve the debate on democratic legitimacy, but to examine whether activists can gain enough local support to mobilize.
6. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.
7. I conducted all interviews in Japanese; all translations are mine. Typically, the interviews lasted from one to two hours. Usually, I started the interviews with pre-written questionnaires and then used a dialogic technique to uncover new information and insights.
8. The study was completed in 1986 (Cobo, 1986).
9. The cited definition is from the ILO 169.
10. Interview with Abe, June 28, 2016, Hokkaido.
11. Interview with Toma, June 18, 2016, Okinawa.
12. Interview with *Ryukyu Shimpo* Editor Arakaki, July 7, 2016, Okinawa.
13. Interview with AIPR Co-director Toma, June 18, 2016, Okinawa.
15. Interview with Uemura, June 10, 2016, Tokyo.
16. Interview with Toma, June 18, 2016, Okinawa, emphasis added.
17. Interview with AIPR Co-director Toma, June 18, 2016, Okinawa.
18. Interview with Arakaki, July 7, 2016, Tokyo.
19. Interview with Abe, June 28, 2016, Hokkaido.
20. Interview with Kayano, June 30, 2016, Hokkaido.
21. Interview with Toma, June 18, 2016, Okinawa.
22. Interview with Matsushima, June 24, 2016, Tokyo.
23. Interview with Matsushima, June 24, 2016, Tokyo.
24. Interview with AIPR Co-director Toma, June 18, 2016, Okinawa.
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