Taiwan is a settler colonial society built on the continuous displacement of indigenous Austronesians by settlers. Since the end of KMT authoritarianism in 1987, the Taiwanese state has begun to embrace liberal multiculturalism and sought after reconciliation with native people (yuanzhumin), after centuries of successive colonializations by the Spanish, the Dutch, the Qing Dynasty, Japan, and the KMT and settlements by Chinese migrants. However, even after the government has reimagined yuanzhumin as important, recognized members of Taiwanese society, contestations over land, nature, resources, and infrastructure between the settler state and natives have not ceased to this day.

My dissertation is an ethnography of indigenous-state relations in the Taipei region of Taiwan. While Taipei is a city that was built by displacing the Ketagalan tribe, the massive post-WWII influx of yuanzhumin from other parts of Taiwan to Taipei has again turned this settler colonial city into a site of intense indigenous-settler state conflicts. Settlements built on public land by indigenous Pangcah/Amis people have been especially such sites of dispute, since claims made by residents of these communities span the realms of land, nature, and shelter. Based on long-term ethnographic research in two such indigenous communities in the Taipei region, I follow how Pangcah/Amis migrants have persistently occupied urban land so that they can engage in gardening and foraging; how they have claimed urban rivers, which they use for fishing and cultural rituals; and how they have built huts, houses, and large-scale settlements on riverbanks and hillsides. The state has criminalized such indigenous claims made to Taipei and violently relocated many urban native settlements to public housing complexes. Even at their relocated sites, however, urbanized yuanzhumin continue to contest the state’s attempts to police and displace them, asserting their autonomy and their right to live in public housing permanently.

I argue that these contestations in the Taipei region reveal ongoing debates about what kind of role the “state” should have in lives of yuanzhumin in the age of multiculturalism and reconciliation. Both state agents and native people try to imagine what indigenous subjects should be entitled to and what kind of relationship between them is just, reasonable, and legitimate against the backdrop of colonial settlement.