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"Erased in Translation": Decoding Settler Colonialism Embedded in Cultural Adaptations to Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

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Abstract: Māori wisdom revolutionized the child welfare system through the now manualized Family Group Conferencing method. The global trend of adopting and adapting this culturally grounded child welfare practice has been well documented. However, as this service model is adapted and imported to other countries, so is its legacy of settler colonialism. This qualitative case study applies Settler Colonialism Theory to unpack the settler colonialism embedded in the process of adopting an adapted Indigenist family engagement program in Taiwan. Research findings indicate that cultural adaptation reproduces settler colonialism. To implement family engagement within a paternalistic CPS system, program implementers struggled between authoritative decision making and building meaningful state–family partnerships. Although adhering to a model that ostensibly involves family decision making may ease settler anxiety among program implementers, settler colonialism remains the elephant in the room. It frequently undergirds the cultural adaptation process. Liberatory social work practice calls for unpacking settler anxiety, systems of power, and cultural imperialism embedded in program implementation.

Keywords: child welfare; cultural adaptation; cultural erasure; decision making; family group conferencing; out-of-home placement; program adaptation; program implementation; settler colonialism

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1. Introduction

Taiwan is a settler colonial polity with a vast majority of the population being descendants of settler populations and settler colonial systems (Tsai 2019). Taiwanese Indigenous inhabitants of Austronesian origin- comprising 16 officially recognized tribes, including the Amis, Atayal, Paiwan, Bunun, Rukai, Puyuma, Tsou, Saisiyat, Yami (Tao), Thao, Kavalan, Truku, Sakizaya, Seediq, Hla'alua, and Kanakanavu—were endured and continue to endure the legacy of settler colonial systems, beginning with the arrival of Dutch merchants in 1642, and followed by the Spanish, Ming Dynasty, Qing Dynasty, Japanese Empire, and finally the Republic of China (Andrade 2008). Currently, 2.4% of the Taiwanese population are Indigenous peoples, and 97% are ethnic Han Taiwanese, primarily descendants of Chinese colonizers who first arrived in the 17th century (Andrade 2008; Ministry of the Interior 2021).

The Government of Taiwan started to codify laws and regulations relating to child maltreatment in 1993. The settler polity has since institutionalized its child welfare system with a heavy influence of horizontal policy diffusion from America and with the heteronormative family values of the settler ethnic Han (Lin and Huang 2010). The American legalistic child protection system, like those in most Anglo-Saxon societies, ensures system

capacity with minimum system input (Gilbert 2012). Introducing child welfare policies also imported the epistemologies surrounding the definition and the attributions of child maltreatment, policy responses, and service delivery. In addition, the Taiwanese settler polity has since encountered a myriad of unintended consequences of child welfare initiatives. One of these is the growing number of out-of-home placements of children in largely restrictive environments (e.g., residential care), harming the well-being of both children and the families of origin from which they were separated. In a recent effort to reform service delivery related to placements in the late 2010s, a local government in Taiwan imported a child welfare practice model from the United States: Team-Based Decision Making (TDM). In so doing, it also imported TDM's unaddressed settler colonialism through the adaptation and implementation of the program in Taiwan.

Modern American child welfare systems cannot shy away from their complicity in the history of physical and cultural genocide of Indigenous children, families, and communities through their child removal and placement policies including militaristic or mission boarding schools in the United States (Evans-Campbell 2008; Thornton 1987) and Canada (Grant 1996), as well as adoption policies and practices in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia throughout the late 19th and into the late 20th century (Armitage and Armitage 1995). For example, in 1958 the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs created the "Indian Adoption Project" a decade-long program administered by the Child Welfare League of America to promote rapid trans-racial adoptions of American Indian and Alaska Native children into White adoptive homes with the explicit intent to alter Native children's identities and connectedness to their respective Tribal Nations (George 1997) and assimilate them into White families and lifeways (Jacobs 2014). Like their North American counterparts, the British Government implemented racialized child welfare policies specifically targeting Māori families as part of their colonization of New Zealand. As a result of this lasting legacy, Māori children in New Zealand have been over-represented in child protection services, out-of-home placement, and juvenile justice system populations at a rate disproportionate to their rate in the country (Tilbury 2009).

Separated from their communities, generations of former system-involved Indigenous young adults have suffered from dispossession (Pader 2014), cultural disruption (Halverson et al. 2002; Stamm et al. 2004), health disparities (Evans-Campbell 2008; Yuan et al. 2014), and continued marginalization (Dodgson and Struthers 2005). As part of the response to Māori resistance in demanding an end to genocidal assimilationist policies in the name of child welfare, the settler New Zealand government granted the Māori-led Family Group Conferencing (FGC) intervention a statutory status in the 1989 Children Young People and Their Families Act (Connolly 1994). FGC is a family engagement practice grounded in the cultural practice of Whānau (i.e., Māori term for extended family, including past and present generations). In Māori Indigenous community practice, when a family faces a crisis, such as when a child needs care and protection, the child's immediate family, extended kin, and support persons gather together to identify a culturally appropriate family/kin care arrangement.

Although Indigenous communities have been disproportionately affected by state systems, this study does not analyze the experiences of Indigenous families directly. Instead, it focuses on how settler colonial logics are reproduced in the adaptation of a child welfare model that originated from Māori Indigenous practice but was later stripped of its cultural distinctiveness and reframed through dominant settler structures. Specifically, we examine how a version of Family Group Conferencing (FGC)—developed by the New Zealand settler government in response to Māori leaders to resist settler harm—was adapted first within the U.S. child welfare system and then re-adapted in Taiwan's Han-majority bureaucratic framework.

1.1. Family Group Conferencing

The FGC has three stages: preparation and planning; meeting; and follow-up planning. In the preparation and planning phase, an assigned independent coordinator widens the circle (family finding) to involve parents, support persons, and significant others to convene the meeting. The FGC process is designed to address the power imbalance between the family group and the child protection system (CPS) through providing information and resources to the family, and creating space for the family group to assume leadership in crafting the culturally responsive and grounded plan. A family-led, solution-focused meeting includes information sharing by the service providers, private family time for the family group to develop the plan, and plan finalization by the family group and the CPS. During the information sharing phase, the CPS worker shares relevant information, including the safety issue to be addressed during the meeting. During private family time, the family group's task is to come up with a comprehensive care plan. This plan is then reviewed by all attendees, including the service providers, in order to reach a consensus on an achievable care and protection plan. Importantly, a participatory, collaborative partnership between family and the state is formed to work through the decision-making process, to carry out and provide follow-up for the service plan, and to support termination of the family's involvement with CPS.

The hallmark of the FGC approach is to incorporate the relational worldview of Māori epistemologies and practices. That is, the child is intimately interconnected through space and time to their whakapapa (i.e., ancestors) and to future generations while at the same time they are intimately connected to their iwi (i.e., a central tribe or a confederation of tribes) and whanau. The child exists within an interconnected web of ancestors, relatives, and family, and it is in this interconnectedness that sustainable, culturally grounded best practices emerge for the safety and wellbeing of the child as well as for the family, community, and iwi in which the child is embedded and to whom they are related.

The core elements underlying this culturally grounded model of family engagement are widening the family circle, power sharing, partnership, involvement, empowerment, balanced assessment of the child's best interests without cost to the child's safety (Crampton and Pennell 2008; Crea and Berzin 2009), and ensuring whanau involvement for sustainable welfare planning for the child. Children's continuing connection with their kinship cultural roots and cultural resilience are at the center of decision making. Research findings underscore the considerable potential of the family engagement model to advance a range of goals, including tackling racial disproportionality (Roberts 2007), increasing placement in kinship care (LaBrenz and Fong 2016; Pennell 2004), reducing re-reports (Pennell et al. 2010), reducing placement disruptions (Crea and Berzin 2009), shortening length of stay in out-of-home care (Pennell et al. 2010), increasing family satisfaction (Healy et al. 2012), supporting emotional healing in a restorative justice sense (Pennell et al. 2010), and advancing permanency outcomes (Berzin et al. 2008).

1.2. Global and Local Cultural Adaptation to FGC

Practitioners are more apt to perceive as useful and to adapt and implement those programs that fit well into their immediate context (Berkel et al. 2011) and align with their worldview. Various adaptations to family engagement practice have taken shape, and these adaptations vary with regard to the level of power leveraged by the family, the role of the meeting convener (either as facilitator or coordinator), the inclusion of family private time, and the right to final decision making (Merkel-Holguin and Wilmot 2005).

Adaptation of FGC into the Team Decision Making Model (TDM)

The team decision-making model (TDM) is an adapted model of FGC in the U.S. FGC was introduced to the U.S. child welfare field in the late 1990s at a time of rapidly increasing placements. The model was intended to reduce the number of youth placements, placement instability, and reentry into care; increase placement in less restrictive settings (i.e., kinship care, family foster care); and reduce length of stay in care (Bearman et al. 2014).

As the paternalistic approach to child protection could not fully accept this service model as originally intended (Gilbert 2012), in the U.S., the FGC model was transformed and adapted to remove all the core underpinnings of relational permanency planning and FGC processes. Specifically, the TDM adaptations include replacing the independent coordinator who prepares the family group to assume leadership for the meeting with a non-case-carrying facilitator of the meeting, altering the 'family finding' phase to include non-familial and non-kin groups, such as community service organizations, and adapting the follow-up agreement to be documented with statutory meeting minutes. Private family time, a key whanau-centered and empowering approach, is not required and may not be employed at all in this adapted model. In the TDM model, a facilitator convenes the structured meeting with the goal of reaching a safety-focused, placement-related decision.

Overall, the American adaptation relies heavily on formal community services and community partnerships while placing less emphasis on the natural and culturally sanctioned relational supports within family systems and their communities (Crea and Berzin 2009). On the spectrum of family authority to state authority, TDM is geared more toward system-led decision making, whereas FGC is situated at the family-led decision making end of the spectrum (Merkel-Holguin and Wilmot 2005). Moreover, FGC recognizes Indigenous sovereignty in the sense that the rights and authority regarding the safety and welfare of the children are centered within the iwi and whanau; thus, decision making and the development of sustainable welfare plans must, in the FGC model, center Indigenous worldviews and relational practices.

1.3. Settler Colonialism in Cultural Adaptation

The global trend of adopting family engagement practices in child welfare over the past three decades has been documented (Ashley and Nixon 2007). Several countries have given it statutory status. However, little attention has been paid to the settler colonialism embedded in the cultural adaptations of this Indigenist practice.

1.3.1. What Is Settler Colonialism?

Settler Colonialism is an ongoing settler project of replacing the Indigenous people and their nativity and, over time, developing settler identity and sovereignty on the land that settlers persistently define as "virgin" or "empty" (Elkins and Pedersen 2012). Settler Colonialism is a structure built upon the logic of elimination (Wolfe 2006), not a one-time event. That is, the settler colonial power both requires and is generated by the destruction of Indigenous peoples and polities beyond simply physical, cultural, and spiritual exploitation. The settler colonies often sought to weaken the power of metropolitan areas and of Indigenous populations. The settler colonial process includes 'othering' of Indigenous peoples, combined with a will to displace them (Veracini 2010). Settlers often appropriate and replace Indigenous cultural epistemology with re-created master narratives (Saito 2020), thereby displacing Indigenous people from the land and from the settler imagination. At the same time, settlers unsettle 'others', disavow using any founding violence to allow the "seamless process of settler territorialization", and exercise settler defensive maneuvers and hierarchical subjection to maintain the permanence of settler polity (Wolfe 2006).

1.3.2. Epistemicide: A Mechanism of Erasure for Settler Colonialism

Epistemicide is another invisible, yet detrimental, settler project. Epistemicide refers to the killing of knowledge systems (Hall and Tandon 2017). The settler colonial project of transracial adoptions for rapid assimilation of generations of Indigenous children as described earlier is a primary example of the attempt to eradicate cultural lifeways (e.g., language, cultural traditions; i.e., ethnocide) and thought ways (e.g., ways of knowing, relational worldviews; i.e., epistemicide) (Walters et al. 2011, 2020). Program adaptations that erase Indigenous knowledges and worldviews reproduce settler colonial constructs of family and reinforce settler notions of family processes as "natural" and as "best practices." Settler colonialism accomplishes its goal through these types of erasures. As settler colonial theorist Patrick Wolfe notes, "Settler colonialism destroys in order to replace" (Wolfe 2006, p. 388). On a societal level, settler society requires the practical elimination of natives in order to establish itself on their territory (Wolfe 2006). On the family adoption practice level, it requires the erasure of indigeneity from FGC protocols and practices, to be replaced with settler symbols, practices, and protocols—while still maintaining Indigenous-like attributes (such as the assumed value of family beyond immediate family structures). Historically, numerous settler appropriations of Indigenous symbols, attributes, and skills took place to both erase indigeneity while at the same time claim acknowledgment of nativity. In doing so, settlers mythologize their adapted program, protect themselves from settler ambivalence and anxiety, and maintain power over rather than partnership with Native communities (Glenn 2015).

1.4. Applying Settler Colonial Critique to the Current Study

Settler colonialism is not a singular or static concept but a dynamic, evolving structure that seeks to replace Indigenous presence and sovereignty with settler dominance. It is distinct from classic colonialism in that settlers come to stay, seeking to establish permanent political orders, often at the expense of Indigenous systems. This foundational logic of elimination does not only entail physical displacement but also cultural and epistemological erasure (Wolfe 2006; Veracini 2010).

As such, the settler colonialism paradigm has proven analytically useful in identifying structural violence, historical continuity, and the reproduction of inequality embedded in child welfare systems. However, it also comes with certain limitations. First, it may risk flattening the heterogeneity of settler polities and overlooking local nuances—such as Taiwan's unique colonial history and the absence of Indigenous subjects in this specific implementation context. Second, its focus on structure over agency may obscure resistance or partial adaptation strategies that occur even within settler-led programs. Third, applying the framework outside of traditional Anglo-settler contexts (e.g., U.S., Canada, Australia) necessitates more robust engagement with regional political and historical specificities.

Despite these limits, the paradigm allows for critical insight into how well-intentioned adaptations of Indigenist models can be reconfigured to serve state control under the guise of cultural responsiveness. In our case, it reveals how power, surveillance, and epistemicide are maintained through cultural adaptation processes, even in the absence of direct Indigenous participation. It offers a lens to understand the symbolic, procedural, and operational shifts in family engagement practices that maintain hegemonic structures.

2. Methods

This study explores the impact of settler colonialism on service users through the service delivery and program implementation of practitioners. The study site was purposively selected for two reasons. First, it is the only jurisdiction that adopts a family engagement model in Taiwan. Only a few Asian countries, such as Singapore, have adopted

this approach in tackling placement-related decisions. No Asian country codifies family engagement practices in child welfare laws and regulations. By and large, model adaptations in the Asian context are not well studied yet. Second, by the time this study was conducted, the adapted model had already been implemented and integrated into practice. The study site is undergoing post-policy evaluation. This adapted TDM model offers an opportunity to study the paradigm shift to family engagement and the continuing influence of settler colonialism.

Drawing on settler colonial theory, we analyze the structural mechanisms—such as epistemicide, cultural appropriation, and the logic of elimination—that operate even when Indigenous subjects are not directly present. This study contributes to growing scholarship on how settler colonialism functions transnationally, across contexts, and through institutional frameworks such as child welfare. Our analysis interrogates the ways settler colonial power is embedded in well-intentioned cultural adaptations, ultimately reinforcing settler norms under the guise of family engagement.

2.1. Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to recruit eligible research participants based on the criteria: CPS service providers (1) who had worked in the field for at least two years; (2) who had made at least three referrals to convene a TDM meeting over the past two years; and (3) whose meeting experiences involved complete stages. Administrative approval and participants' informed consents were obtained prior to the interviews. Participants were assured of voluntary participation and confidentiality. A total of sixteen CPS workers and supervisors participated in the study. The majority (94%) of the participants were female practitioners with a bachelor's degree in social work. The mean age of the CPS supervisors was 38 (range = 35–60). The CPS workers were younger, with a mean age of 33.3 (range = 24–45). A disparity in the amount of CPS experience can be found between the two groups. The mean number of years of CPS experience among CPS workers was 4.3 (range = 1–11) and among CPS supervisors was 10.8 (range = 2–25). CPS supervisors had more experience participating in TDM meetings over the prior two years, either as facilitator or case supervisor, compared to the CPS workers (mean number of meetings was 11.3 (range = 1–22) and 5.4 (range = 3–8), respectively).

Three semi-structured focus groups were conducted by the first author between March 2017 and May 2017—two groups with CPS workers and one group with CPS supervisors. Each focus group interview lasted about 2.5 to 3 h. Focus groups with CPS workers and their line supervisors were conducted separately to avoid the influence of the local culture of appealing to authority figures. A semi-structured interview guide was used to elicit the research participants' narratives. Topics included (a) the key components in TDM family engagement practice; (b) how this adapted model affects service delivery and service users; and (c) the facilitators and barriers to delivering this adapted TDM practice. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in traditional Chinese.

Although no Indigenous families were included in the study, we apply a settler colonial framework to analyze the reproduction of settler power through the cultural adaptation of a child welfare model. As Wolfe (2006) and Veracini (2010) emphasize, settler colonialism is a structure, not simply an event, and it persists even in the absence of direct Indigenous engagement. Our study does not aim to represent Indigenous Taiwanese experiences, which are beyond the scope of our data. Rather, we investigate how settler colonial structures—such as paternalism, cultural erasure, and epistemic violence—shape social service implementation within a settler polity and among settler-descendant participants. This theoretical positioning is critical for understanding how "Indigenist" models may

be co-opted and reconfigured within dominant systems in ways that obscure or erase Indigenous sovereignty and worldviews.

2.2. Data Analysis

This study examines the impact of settler colonialism on service users through cultural adaptations of Māori-based Family Group Conferencing within the child welfare system. To translate the ongoing, strategic elimination of settler colonialism, Wolfe (2006) suggested two levels of study methods. First, the documentation of settler colonial domination. The current study described the cultural and program adaptations to an already colonized model. Second, rather than analyzing Indigenous discourse and resistance, this study focuses on the experiences of settler descendants involved in the adapted program. Given the involvement of all settler descendants in the adapted program, it reports their lived experiences of system involvement from the perspective of child welfare service providers.

Guided by the theoretical elements of settler colonialism—such as assimilation, epistemicide, cultural erasure, cultural and land dispossession, the logic of elimination, settler cultural appropriation, and structural genocide (Wolfe 2006; Veracini 2010; Rowe and Tuck 2017)—as well as the assimilative tendencies of settler colonialism in child welfare, which reflect Eurocentric frameworks and bureaucratic constraints (Cram et al. 2018), this study employed an inductive, top-down coding approach for data analysis. Boyatzis (1998) outlines a systematic approach to deductive coding, consisting of three stages: first, establishing themes through a thorough reading and reflection on the theory framework; second, checking these themes for compatibility with the raw data using pilot coding; and third, ensuring the reliability of the coding process through inter-rater reliability testing (p. 36). The authors analyzed each sentence of the transcripts and clustered codes with settler colonialism implications into themes. As such, categories were sorted and themes were identified across transcripts. These themes were, in turn, examined and named in theoretical relationship to one another with regard to concepts of settler colonialism.

Reflexivity was fostered by the experience of international relocation. The first author was positioned as a member of the majority ethnic culture as a street-level bureaucrat within the child welfare system, and subsequently relocated to being positioned as a minority foreign student researcher. This enabled the first author to identify subtle differences in cultural exchanges as well as understanding the idiosyncratic experiences of a marginalized agent. To reduce the potential of researcher bias because of the first author's prolonged engagement with the study site, their methods included triangulation through the constant comparative method and through member checking. The research goal of trustworthiness was also pursued through member checking and by categorizing theoretical relationships in consultation with another practitioner with multiple years of FGC experience.

3. Findings

3.1. Beyond the Colonial Periphery: Cultural and Program Adaptation of TDM for Settler Commodification in Taiwan

Settler colonialism can be a violent phenomenon of geopolitics at a global level. Such global settler colonialism informs past and present processes of European colonization, global capitalism, and international governance (Cornellier and Griffiths 2016; Morgensen 2011). Commodified products of settler colonialism take advantage of globalized capitalism. TDM is one example. TDM gains its international influence through the reproducibility of the program. It was exported to Taiwan in the mid-2010s. While the Taiwanese child welfare system aligns with the U.S. system in many ways, several adaptations had to be made in accordance with the settler Han culture (i.e., paternalism, familism, collectivism), and adaptations were made to reinforce the Taiwanese child welfare system's legalistic

approach to child protection (e.g., substantiation of abuse, time frame of child placement, legal documentation).

The Taiwanese jurisdiction adopted, translated, and extended the TDM model to fit into the dominant Han culture in Taiwan as follows:

(1) Paternalism and familism. The research site did not hire a full-time non-case-carrying facilitator of the meetings as would be expected in the TDM model. Rather, the meetings were facilitated by the site's authority: the department chief or non-line CPS supervisor as opposed to the (extended) kin leader in the FGC model. Parents were encouraged to invite the extended family or community support persons to the meeting. However, it was not likely to happen in a timely manner because of the local cultural belief in family loyalty, which emphasizes lessons such as "don't wash your dirty linen in public" and "to feed without teaching is the father's fault", which teach the importance of saving face. Instead, the assigned worker typically chose the attendees through family finding. Indeed, workers' family finding interplays with the Han culture of familism. Familism refers to the local cultural value of prioritizing extended family's needs over individual needs. It is also an ideology that presumes the extended family's responsibility of taking care of their family members. The assigned worker makes effective use of familism, inviting extended family and deciding the presence of relatives in the meeting on behalf of the child welfare authority.

(2) Timing and meeting conventions. Taiwanese investigative CPS workers are obligated by law to substantiate the child abuse or neglect. This means that TDM cases begin with a particular urgency that adds a time pressure to the meeting process. For example, the logistics of the first crisis-driven meeting (emergent placement type) is contingent upon the availability of substantiation evidence and the safety of the assigned social workers. Clear evidence of child maltreatment and/or the safety concern of investigative/assigned worker will take priority in decisions about meeting logistics including regarding location. The meeting can be at a school, hospital (emergency room), or police station; at the office of a parliament member; or in a boardroom in the study site–these locations reinforce the CPS agency's power while simultaneously further diminishing the family group's ability to participate in a meaningful way.

(3) Discretion and formality. In Taiwan, parent education (4–50 h) and a case plan (3 months at the minimum) are forced upon the parents by law. Discussion of the safety plan and/or alternative care plan in the system-led meeting replaces the individual assigned worker's discretion. Parents are subject to penalty if they do not adhere to the plan. Due to the local practice of legal formalism, a notetaker is also introduced to ensure credibility. A notetaker is on site to complete the meeting minutes before the end of the meeting. The legalistic meeting minutes serve as the basis for the plan.

3.2. Qualitative Findings: Impact of Settler Colonialism on Service Users Involved in the Adapted Colonized Model of Family Engagement in Child Welfare

Exporting and adapting the colonized model creates chaotic cultural transfers and problematic practice. Through the adaptation process, cultural values underlying the Māori culture-grounded practice model were erased. Notably, disempowerment is the unintended consequence in regard to cultural transfer embedded in settler colonialism. In the case of implementing the family engagement model in child welfare in Taiwan, disempowerment is the client experience when attending the group meeting led by representatives of the state. Disempowerment is manifested throughout the service delivery through imposed family finding before the meeting and is brought on by internalized stigma. Disempowerment and how it limits self-agency also leaves families vulnerable during the meeting. The power

differential between the state and the family is further extended through the extended family being used as a surrogate authority to exert control following the meeting.

Theme 1: The implications of 'imposed' family finding on the dynamics and outcomes of settler family meetings

Family finding is a prerequisite in preparing for a FGC meeting. It also helps address the power imbalance between the state and the family. However, to impose family finding against parents' will in the Taiwanese adapted TDM model is to mobilize informal networks for the interest of the state. Workers may conduct family finding on behalf of the state authority in order to maximize the number of extended family members participating in the meeting for a number of reasons. First, in order to identify more options for kinship foster care, the worker will solicit and rationalize participation of extended family irrespective of the parents' consent. Even if parents object to relatives' involvement, meetings may still be held and adapted to meet the statutory needs. "*For the sake of the children's best interest, we will still move on to family finding. If they (relatives) don't want to meet, we may arrange separate meetings*." (SPV5)

Second, the worker's judgment plays a role in the timing of family finding. For instance,

> "*In some cases, we allow more time for parents to pull in extended family. This period of time is contingent on the developmental stage of the child. However, if parents aren't showing any motivation during this period while the child is young, then we will do the family finding. It is also dependent on our judgment of parents' willingness to make any change. We'll see if parents care about this (reunification).*" (SPV8)

Third, the worker's family finding has to align with concurrent planning. "*So, it's part of our concurrent planning. We are making our Plan B at the same time as we wait to hear from the parents*." (SPV8) Concurrent planning was proposed and required by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 in the U.S. It is an approach that attempts to eliminate the delays in obtaining permanent families for children and youth in foster care. Concurrent planning is not codified in Taiwanese child welfare laws and regulations, but some local jurisdictions require it for certain families receiving focused attention from child welfare practitioners. For example, family finding for the purpose of concurrent planning is applied to 'hard-to-change' and 'under-resourced' parents in particular. The most affected parents, as described by our research participants, are those suffering from extreme poverty, persistent severe mental illness, and chronic substance abuse or alcohol addictions. That is why workers use family finding as a strategy to meet the system requirements regarding the time frame: "*If we do not insist on finding family, reunification will be further delayed*." (SW5)

Theme 2: Reinforcing the role of internalized stigma in shaping parental experiences and engagement within the dominant settler cultural context

Reporting child abuse conflicts with the local cultural norm of family loyalty, making it a difficult and stigmatizing process. Parents may perceive the adapted TDM family engagement practice as a judgment on their parenting abilities, reinforcing feelings of inadequacy. The model can also intensify the stigma surrounding intergenerational patterns of dysfunctional parenting. For many families, participation in family engagement meetings feels like exposing a 'family secret', particularly for parents labeled with mental health challenges, substance use issues, or personality disorders. These parents often experience deep shame, highlighting the complexity of family engagement and the weight of internalized stigma. Internalized stigma occurs when individuals absorb and accept negative stereotypes about their own circumstances, such as mental illness (Drapalski et al. 2013). When family engagement feels forced, underprivileged parents may experience heightened shame and distress, leading to avoidant coping. One social worker described their service users' demeanor in the meeting:

> "*This couple leaned on each other silently. Even though we encouraged the mother to voice for herself, she still felt she was oppressed, was treated unequally- and said with self-assurance, 'I am a good mother, and we are a good family.'*" (SW8)

Theme 3: Disempowered self-agency: power disparity and parental vulnerabilities in settler family meetings

Disparity in numbers between representatives of the statutory authority and those from the extended family group will endanger implementation fidelity (Healy et al. 2012). Crampton and Pennell (2008) also noted that the unavailability of support persons will likely lead to a lesser contribution from the informal network. Parents with multiple adversities who are embedded within support networks that are also disadvantaged are more vulnerable to being dominated by authority figures in the meeting. Parental support through the presence of the extended family group, if present, is the embodiment of resource power in the meeting. As one supervisor asserted,

> "*Asking these parents from under-resourced backgrounds to come for a meeting is like oppression in a formal setting. I always feel this way. Because they don't have any support persons, it is like they are simply coming to terms with our orders. Once they sign the meeting minutes, they seemed resigned to doing so.*" (SP4)

When there are fewer family group participants than service representatives (e.g., CPS, other community service providers), parents recognize the power differential in the meeting. The power struggle between the parents and representatives of the statutory authority takes various forms. Some parents are reluctant to attend the meeting because of the disproportionate number of attendees convened by the authority. One worker described,

> "*Some parents regard this meeting as a manifestation of oppression. They might believe that the statutory authority has set up particular roles and results, shaming them (the parents) by making undesirable decisions in front of everybody. Then why should I (parents) give in? So, they (parents) don't want to come.*" (SW6)

Others try to negotiate with the help of community service workers involved in the case. "*Parents would project their thoughts onto community workers. They feel like the government would be more likely to believe these workers, since they are directly assigned by them.*" (SW4) Still other parents join the power game, see themselves as powerful agents, and speak up for themselves: "*Some parents only talk to the 'boss'. They equate themselves with higher management staff. They want to take it out on them. They don't care about front-line workers.*" (SW4)

Theme 4: Cultural manipulation and the emergence of surrogate authority in settler family engagement

Several elements of the family engagement model are at risk of being manipulated by the statutory authority as it exerts power over the client's family for its own interests. For example, relatives may become a surrogate authority to exert pressure on parents, as the statutory authority takes advantage of paternalism in the dominant Han culture. In Taiwan, the culturally specific belief that "to feed without teaching is a father's fault" endorses an authoritarian parenting style. It reflects the view of the parent in the role of teacher whose responsibilities are derived from Confucianism in Han culture (Chen and Luster 2002). Specifically, the parenting role is not only to give strict discipline and training to the child but also to impart values such as parental control, obedience, filial piety, and family duties and obligations (Chen and Luster 2002). Furthermore, the cultural belief also expects children's obedience to teachings from their father figures. As one worker's comments illustrated:

> "*Grandfather was scolding his son (the perpetrator). He tried to speak for him, but, at the same time, he was totally shocked upon seeing those evidence pictures of bruises. Parents would feel more pressure in such a situation than we could have given to them.*" (SW6)

It is assumed that invited family members who participate in the TDM meeting will take on the responsibilities of kinship caregiving and monitoring the implementation of the case plan. As such, this diverts empowerment to surveillance. As one worker described,

> "*That grandmother was even clearer about our agreement. So, when the mother was bargaining or breaking the agreement in private, the grandmother would remind her of the contract regarding placement.*" (SW5)

These strategies deprive families of constructive involvement with the child welfare agency.

The statutory authority's desire to pursue implementation of case planning within a structured time frame ignores paternalism and familism as it relates to both cultural and organizational hegemony. "*If parents are not going to buy in, they may buy into their parents. By engaging grandparents, we would likely shorten the life of the case.*" (SW6) In this way, workers may use the influence of familism instead of engaging with involuntary service users further, believing that: "*Some parents won't buy into our opinions, but they buy into their relatives'.*" (SW3) In addition, meeting minutes handed out to families were originally intended to serve as a mechanism for service accountability. However, in the cultural context of paternalism, they turn out to be an extension of the statutory power. As was noted,

> "*The effect of meeting minutes can be extended to their daily life. Extended family can refer to this to mandate perpetrators to carry out the case plan.*" (SPV3)

4. Discussion

This qualitative study aimed to describe and explore the experience of cultural adaptation and implementation of this Indigenist child welfare model in Taiwan. The study also sought to examine evidence of reproduced settler colonialist practices in the process of adapting this model to the local context. The study site sought to introduce a family engagement model in contrast to a traditionally paternalistic model to tackle the issue of out-of-home placement. To be feasible, family engagement practice in child welfare decision making has to fit with the local jurisdiction and culture. However, we found that importing an adapted family engagement model also introduced the legacy of settler colonialism as well as epistemic injustice.

Settler colonialism is an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of Indigenous peoples and cultures (Cox 2017). Adaptation can be a form of colonial extraction, colonial erasure, and reproduction of the logic of elimination. Taking TDM as an example, the concept of family engagement was appropriated from the FGC model, which was built upon Māori wisdom and designed to tackle racial disproportionality in foster care. However, since the extracted cultural underpinnings of natural communal support networks conflict with the settler nationalism of the American child protective service system (e.g., legalistic nature of child protection, paternalistic service delivery, capitalist model of outsourcing services), the very nature of family engagement is reframed to fit into the adapted model to perpetuate the system instead of support the system-involved families and communities. As such, assimilation of family values (e.g., patriarchy, nuclear family) embedded in an adapted family engagement model is introduced throughout the program implementation. For example, the system-driven meeting formalizes a narrow definition of 'nuclear' family by making arrangements with formal community resources rather than with extended family in addressing problems within the household. Moreover, Indigenous wisdom is appropriated and repackaged as commercialized nativism under the guise of family engagement. This process involves selectively adopting cultural elements while stripping them of their original Indigenous meanings and governance structures,

thereby reinforcing settler control. The justification for such adaptations often relies on defensive maneuvers (Veracini 2010) toward rationalizing and justifying the use of an adapted family engagement model (e.g., justifications such as the presence of extended family, the increased rate of kinship care, shortened lengths of stay in foster care, 'empowering' families and communities). However, these defensive maneuvers may exacerbate the cultural malpractice of commercialized nativism in child welfare services. Furthermore, as the settler colonialist-adapted FGC is exported to other sites and countries, this reinforces the image of America as the culmination of Western civilization and also perpetuates the reproduction of settler colonialism.

The reproducibility of an imported, adapted model may reinforce the logic of elimination embedded in settler colonialism, aligning with local dominant settler culture. Taiwanese adaptations to an already adapted model ensures the reproducibility for the majority ethnic population (ethnic Han) of Taiwan and does not yet address or reflect Indigenous Taiwanese concerns or family processes. The most notable threat to program fidelity of the Māori model is the Taiwanese adaptation of imposed family finding against the parents' will. To meet the ostensible goal of family engagement, the study site took advantage of familism to mobilize the involvement of a familial support network. The statutory authority exerts this manipulative strategy to delegate and extend its surveillance power over the lives of the family touched by the child welfare system. This is similar to the strategy observed by Brown and Bloom (2009), who studied an adapted family group conferencing model ('Ohana Conferencing) in Hawai'i. At the demonstration site, which represented large numbers of Native Hawaiians, they observed that through 'Ohana conferencing, the state expanded its capacity for surveillance and disciplining of child welfare-involved families by using extended families as "adjuncts" of the state and its neoliberal governance (Brown and Bloom 2009, p. 166). As they note, "this seemingly more benevolent approach by the state obscures its expanding capacity for surveillance" (Brown and Bloom 2009, p. 164).

Paternalism is also misused to engender parental submission in the meeting and to monitor the case plan implementation by mobilizing intergenerational power imbalances. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the effect that authoritarian orientations prevalent in Eastern societies may have on family participation. Specifically, individuals may recognize the demands of a subordinate within the meeting, yet may feel the need to obey authority in the hierarchical relationship. Chien (2016) points out that the subordinate may avoid challenging the authority, say if they violate their obligations by not sharing power in the family engagement meeting. In the Taiwanese Han culture, a common strategy is "to obey publicly but disobey privately." This reinforces the necessity of private family time as in the Māori model. Additionally, findings from this study draw our attention to the fact that service users will carve out a space as resistance in the face of an asymmetrical worker–client relationship. The power asymmetry may be more acute for socially excluded parents, who are also vulnerable in that they often have weakened extended network. Parents are sensitive to whether the workers' power over them is being used to either control them or support them. Parents experiencing power being exercised over them tend to resist or resign. In contrast, parents who experience power used with them, to support them, are more likely to work with the case plan (Dumbrill 2006).

As this study showed, the intent of introducing an Indigenist family engagement model in Taiwan was undermined by the influence of settler colonialism in the adaptation process. When implemented in Taiwan, the studied model drifted back toward the system-led decision making end of the family engagement spectrum. Specifically, the symbolic values of patriarchy and familism replaced the traditional FGC emphasis on family decision making, natural communal network supports, and cultural resilience. On the level of

implementation, replacement strategies were evident. First, the meeting facilitator acts on behalf of the settler state bureaucracy. Second, reliance on formal 'community resources' replaces the mobilizing of natural communal supports. Third, formal meeting minutes prepared on-site replaces state–family consensus, representing an unequal contract. Fourth, the contract is the extension of surveillance to the service users' extended family and private family lives.

Overall, the logic of elimination was intertwined with local cultural adaptations to erase egalitarian participation and decision-making autonomy. These settler colonial practices put service users at risk of subordination, internalized stigma, and limited self-agency. The current study suggests that appropriate cultural transfer and adaptation of an Indigenist program in child welfare should address the power and legalistic imbalance between system-involved families and the state and consider the participation of Indigenous peoples.

5. Limitations of the Study

A number of limitations are present in this study. First, the literature on the adaptation and implementation of the family engagement model in CPS practice in Asian countries is scarce. The study site is the first of its kind to apply this model. This has made it impossible to compare model implementation across Asian countries or even different sites in Taiwan. Thus, it is possible that research findings may be attributed to organizational factors such as organizational culture, partnership with stakeholders, facilitating style, and leadership. Second, the transferability of this qualitative study's findings is dependent on the trustworthiness of the data and our analyses. This study does not intend to claim that participants' experiences are representative of the entire country or of other jurisdictions. Instead, this interpretative work only seeks to understand the data and systems of belief within the current study site (Lin 1998). Third, the number of case referrals or meeting facilitations led by research participants ranges widely from 3 to 25. Their practice wisdom regarding the family engagement model may be limited by their experience, and possibly, by the type of maltreatment allegation brought to the meeting. Research participants may also have expressed their opinions in a biased way, based on their personal preferences regarding the paradigm shift from individual decision making to group decision making. Lastly, no Indigenous families were involved in the family meetings at the study site prior to data collection. This made it impossible to include their lived expertise into data analysis even if Indigenous communities have been disproportionately impacted by child welfare systems.

6. Conclusions

Settler colonialism can take the form of settler colonialist program adaptation and implementation. The current study illustrated the accounts and experiences of a settler adapted program in system-involved settler descendants. Settler colonialism disempowered service users regardless of their nativity. We suggest a closer examination on the lived experiences of system-specific settler colonialism in overrepresented, minoritized Indigenous peoples, so that these groups are not further disempowered. Furthermore, liberatory social work practice calls for unpacking settler anxiety, systems of power, and epistemic injustice embedded in settler program implementation.

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