2008 Austronesian Workshop
清大南島論壇工作坊

Carving Cultural Heritage:
Turning Paiwan Sculpture into Art

Hong, Li-Ju

時　間：2008年5月10日
地　點：國立清華大學人文社會學院C310室
主辦單位：國立清華大學語言學研究所、國立清華大學人類學研究所
協辦單位：國立清華大學人文社會研究中心、國立清華大學人文社會學院、
教育部世界南島學術研究交流專案
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Workshop Protocol

1. Time limit for presentation and comment:
   a. The author has 25 minutes for paper presentation.
   b. The discussants have 10 minutes to comment on each paper.

2. Time limit for question and answer in general discussion
   a. The author has 8 minutes to response to discussants’ comments.
   b. Participants may speak after being acknowledged by the chairperson. People who ask question or gives comment are encouraged to provide information about their profession and institutional affiliation. Each question/comment is limited to 1.5 minutes.
   c. There is a roundtable session at the end of the workshop for general comments, questions and responses.

3. Please turn off cellular phone during the session.

Invited speakers

Authors (listed according to the sequence of presentation)

Lamont Lindstrom Department of Anthropology, University of Tulsa
Bill Ayres Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon
Ku, Kun-hui Institute of Anthropology, National Tsing Hua University
Hong, Li-Ju Institute of Anthropology, National Tsing Hua University
James Fox Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program, Australian National University
Paula Radetzky Institute of Linguistics, National Tsing Hua University
Li, Chao-Lin Institute of Linguistics, National Tsing Hua University
Wu, Chun-ming Institute of Linguistics, National Tsing Hua University
Tseng, Chia-Hsing Institute of Linguistics, National Tsing Hua University

Discussants

James Fox Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program, Australian National University
Lamont Lindstrom Department of Anthropology, University of Tulsa
James Wilkerson Institute of Anthropology, National Tsing Hua University
Yeh, Mei-li Institute of Taiwan languages and Language Education, National Hsinchu University of Education

Chairs

James Fox Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program, Australian National University
Elizabeth Zeitoun Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica
Carving Cultural Heritage:

Turning Paiwan Sculpture into Art*

Li-Ju Hong

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The Paiwan, now mostly living in the southern Taiwan, represent one of the thirteen Austronesian-speaking indigenous groups on the island of Taiwan. The Paiwan group is composed of about 80,000 people, which is the second largest group among the total population of 460,000 Taiwan Austronesian-speaking people, but only makes up two percents of the total population of 22 million on the Taiwan island. The Paiwan, however, is famous for their fine craftsmanship of sculpture, textiles and architectures. Paiwan sculptures often serve as special Taiwan cultural souvenirs to foreign tourists, especially in recent diplomatic occasions.

The Paiwan word vencikan has been widely used to include the Paiwan people’s production of sculpture, tattoos and embroidery on textiles. It has not, however, been specifically translated as the Chinese word yishu (藝術, works of art) or mei (美, aesthetic quality). Vencikan (also spelled vincikan), as a noun, comes from its verb vecik, which mostly means making a mark, writing or telling a story with patterns. For the past few decades, sculpture has been among the top list of all the Paiwan vencikan to be produced or labeled as ‘cultural heritage” or “art,” through the value mechanism of collection, exhibitions and art competitions. The issue of Paiwan vencikan-sculpture does not remain a local or ‘aboriginal” one but has often been re-contextualized in the broader framework of Taiwan’s

* My fieldwork in Puleti was supported by a joint grant from the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica and the Institute of Anthropology, National Tsing Hua University in 2006. I am very grateful for the comments received from Drs. Bin Chiang, Kunhui Ku, James Wilkerson and Tsui-ping Ho when I started this paper. Professor Irene Winter gave me very useful suggestions when I presented an early version of this paper in her class “Cross-Cultural Aesthetics” during my Fulbright Dissertation Research Fellowship residence at Harvard from 2005-2006. Also, I would like to thank Eveline Ingaman for her assistance in English editing. Another version of this paper will be presented at the International Conference on “Asian Heritages at the Crossroads” held by the University of Hong Kong, December 4-5, 2007.
national cultural heritage as a whole.

I will argue that the above phenomenon is never a one-way transformation forced upon the Paiwan by a small group of political rulers, antique collectors or museum curators. Rather it has been a movement participated in by the Paiwan people, themselves important social agents in the process. In the past, these two categories, the Paiwan sculpture as “vencikan” and the Paiwan sculpture as “art,” have been treated as two mutually-exclusive research topics, the former in anthropology as a material reflection of social structures and the later in art history as a vivid representation of aboriginal art studied with a strong emphasis on the ethnicity of the art motifs or as a representation for local cultural heritage.

My paper is based on the preliminary fieldwork that I have conducted during the past summers and library documents. In this research project, however, I intend to bridge the gap between these two approaches and focus on how the idea of “values” and “differences” is mediated by the production, circulation, and interpretation of these Paiwan sculptures both within Paiwan society and out in the “art world.”

The Fieldsite

Taiwan’s indigenous groups have never been totally isolated from other outside influences or communications. Settlers from southeastern mainland Chinese provinces moved to this island long before the 16th century, pirates from Japan, China, (also Portugal, Spain and later the Dutch) were prevalent on the Taiwan Strait. Trading and barter with the outside world was already regular even before large groups of Han Chinese immigrants moved into this area starting in the 17th Century. Taiwan was under the rule of Japan from 1895 to 1945 since the Chinese Ching government lost the opium war. In 1949 the Kuomingtang (KMT) government retreated to Taiwan. The KMT has followed many of the aboriginal policies established by the Japanese colonial government in the first few decades of its ruling. Among these policies, encouragements from government to improve on local products, such as textiles, baskets, sculptures, have always been crucial (Chen 1974; Fujii 2001; Liu 1975; Shi 1971; Wei 1960; Zheng 2002a, 2002b). For this purpose, during the Japanese rule, the only wood-carving training workshop for the indigenous groups was set up
in a Paiwan village Taranauma （萬安），Pingtong County.

In my fieldwork, I have noticed that a Paiwan village Puleti, or Jiaxing （佳興） village by the Chinese-Manderin pronunciation, located in the township of Taiwu, Pingtong County, has been recognized as an important place for producing the best quality sculpture since the late 19th-century Japanese colonial era. At least two of their sculptors were trained in the wood-carving workshops in Taranauma back then. Up until recently, there are still around 15 to 20 active sculptors working in this small village of some 90 households. Stories about the old sculptors and the oral narratives regarding the transformation of sculpture after the village’s relocation in the 1950’s are among the most vivid memories of the local society. The villagers even use the title “Puleti - Sculpture Village” in the 2005 Annual Cultural Festival to identify their village and as the starting point for the local cultural revival movement. Focusing on the field site at Puleti, my research will look into the historical process of how the category of Paiwan ‘sculpture’ was formed, how the concept of vecik and art has interacted in the contextualization and re-contextualization of social difference and values.

**Encounters and problems:**

My research project on Paiwan Sculpture started with several interesting encounters. In 2003 when I was visiting Puleti, I was approached by an elementary school-aged boy, asking me, “are you here to take pictures of our art?” I guessed my camera bag and a stranger’s face had revealed my identity and intention. It almost went without question that even a ten-year-old used the term yishu (art) so readily and knew confidently that their village possessed something called “art.”

Later, accompanied by my host family, I was led to a huge compound, where four men in their 40s or 50s were working on a huge pair of wooden sculptures. Camak, the leader, proudly pronounced that those two sculptures were commissioned by the village’s Committee of Development as a public art project and they would be placed at the entrance to the village as a mark of “Puleti – the Village of Sculpture.”

In the same afternoon, I met an old villager in his 80s and who was carving a wood block. I pointed to one of the huge free standing human figure sculpture at
the compound and asked him what he would call this. He simply answered “vecik, gaga-gaga, vencikan (to carve, human figure, sculpture).” Then he added that the vencikan of mamazangilan (the aristocracy) is much better because they have many more privileged patterns and thus can tell better stories. Afterwards I realized that I would not find a Paiwan equivalent for “art” or “sculpture” but “vencikan,” roughly translated as “marking” or “telling a story.”

This paper can only begin to address some of my concerns and questions on what I have gathered so far. There are, of course, shortcomings of lumping linguistic, conceptual and phenomenal aspects into one. I will still start my précis of problems from language, assuming that indigenous terminology is revealing the most obvious evidence. The focus lies in how the native and all related participants defined and contested vencikan (telling stories with patterns) and yishu (藝術, art).

Here is an example of how vencikan is used. A legend collected from the Tjakuvuku village describes a special stone fan owned by the protagonist Sakalats:

zwa zua sipaiyana vintski kan tua tsautsau katua marka didi.
a-zua zua si-paiz-an in=vetsik-an tua tsau-tsau ka-tua marka didi.
C-that that IF-fan-NOM PERF=mark-LF OBL RED-being and-OBL PL pig.
(That fan was carved with people and pigs.1)

(Early and Whitehorn 2003:128, in text 020:002)

Another case of how vencikan is used is even more inspiring. An early 20th-century Japanese document has recorded that when the Paiwan people first encountered the writings and paintings by the Han-Chinese immigrants, they referred to them as vencikan (Rinji Taiwan Kyukan Chosakai III 2002[1915]:283). Yet with the introduction of Chinese Manderin into the education system of the Paiwan, diaoke (Chinese word 雕刻 for sculpture) and yishu (Chinese word 藝術 for art) have appeared more often than the Paiwan vencikan, not just in art competitions or museums, but also in daily life.

The problems and also insights coming from these conversations are that, first of all,

1 The quoted texts, in four lines, are listed to show the original texts collected, lexical and grammatical information and its English translation. This format is very familiar to Austronesian linguists. I merely represent it here to show the correlation between vintskin and vetsik. The abbreviations and their meanings are C (construct marker), IF (instrument focus), NOM (nominalizer), PERF (perfective aspect), LF (locaitional focus), OBL (oblique argument), RED (re duplicated element) and PL (plural).
yišu ("art") and vencikan co-exist in the same time frame and in the same space. Apparently it is not merely a question of translation but also a question of categories. The rationale behind these categories; for example, aboriginal or cultural artifacts as opposed to folk art, or primitive art as opposed to modern art, crafts as opposed to art; reveals different concept of values, be it economic values, values of social relationship, or values of creativity.

Second, although an 80-year-old villager proves very authoritative in naming the sculptures as vencikan, and those in their 50s are very persuasive claiming their work as public art, it is equally interesting for a 10-year-old to be so positive in his knowledge about art. These terms are not merely defined by outsiders or researchers but also have begun to be used in the villagers’ (that is, the social agents’) daily life, incorporated into their own language.

**Values and Differences**

Anthropological studies have emphasized the social and cultural contexts of values or differences, especially in collective or public situations. This emphasis has a background in the concept of society or totalities versus individual. David Graeber has tried to sum up this idea in his study on values:

…The realization of value is always, necessarily, a process of comparison; for this reason it always, necessarily, implies an at least imagined audience. As I’ve suggested, for the actor, that’s all that ‘society’ usually is. (Graeber 2001:87)

However, the concept of what a society is may vary and there is not always the same audience for a certain set of values, as pointed out by Graeber himself (2001:chap.1) as well as other earlier researchers. In my research, I intend to examine the issues from three different sub-categories of values: the value of social relationship, the value of market economy, and the value of creativity, in an attempt to explore how Paiwan sculpture can be placed within these different value systems and how it is being treated as gifts, commodity and art. Within the limits of a conference paper, I will illustrate my argument with the family history of Gatu Camak.

Paiwan people are very much concerned with the origin narratives and the genealogy of
family names. Ownships of family heirloom objects, such as ancient pots, spirit statues or
glass beads do not only serve as material evidences but sometimes may override oral disputes.
Their status goes beyond a correlation with the status of individuals, families or houses
(umaq) and villages (qinaljan). Often they are brought out during rituals such as naming of
newborns, marriage negotiations and ceremonies, as well as in more daily life activities such
as allotting fishing and hunting boundaries, food distribution, and privileges of visual patterns
in tattoos, sculptures and textiles, etc. The principle of “precedence” applied in the origin
narratives or family names can be best exemplified by the Paiwan words “house” (umaq)
and “first-born” (vusam). Umaq denotes the corporeality of a house, the house that one is born
in, and one that may even become a grave. Up until the Japanese colonial period, many Paiwan
people still buried their deceased family members underneath the slate floor of their own
houses (Chiang Bin 1999). Vusam initially means “seed” but can be further understood as
“first-born.” The first-borns of a Paiwan family, especially aristocrats (mamazangilan), usually
inherit the house names (ngdan na umaq), the house itself and most of the important
belongings in the house. The inheritance also includes appropriate portions of fishing
and hunting rights, privileges of patterns, such as the motifs of sun, snakes and feathers. On the
other hand, the first-borns are often responsible for helping the younger siblings. For example,
they are responsible for assisting in building new houses when siblings have to move out (Wei
1960; Shi 1971, 1976; Chiang 1999).

Sculpture in family histories and publications

Gatu Camak is now 78 and has retired from his position as the village official-elect. His
father Celemesai was a famous hunter and sculptor. Camak pointed to a piece of goldsmith tool
used by his father. Then he told me if I want to find out what vecik is, I have to know how
malang (goldsmithing) has transformed the craftsmanship and quality of venikan.

A relative living in the Pingtong plain had a set of tools for malang and he gave
them to us for exchange of something precious. My father knew how to use them
very well so he could carve better than any other people in the village. Of course
his mamazangilan status assured him of pattern privileges, too. When the
Japanese came, they set up a workshop at Taranauma (萬安) to train people
making wooden furniture for elementary schools. The first lesson was to make wooden water buckets. Celemesai did a wonderful job because none of his buckets would leak but other people's did. He was getting better and better and other villagers were imitating his work. Since the tools were limited they had to borrow our tools but we only lent to our close relatives.

My father told me that the Japanese would come and order villagers to line up all the sculpture on the road. They would push down those inferior ones and take away the good ones. My father's sculpture was always among the ones being taken away. Even during the first half of 20th century when the Japanese were collecting our sculptures, body tattoos were banned on the basis of backwardness. Most people with tattoos were recorded in the "household record survey" and no new tattoos were allowed at all. We have specific names for these patterns and only people with a certain status or achievements could "vecik" on their bodies or on the sculpture. In the 1950s our village had a terrible outbreak of contagious disease and many people died. The government relocated our village but the new place was not fit for farming or hunting yet. My father sold almost all his sculpture to buy food for the family and the relatives. Now we do not have any more of his work left. We tried to find them but could not. Even if we do find them, the prices are simply too high to buy back.

Paiwan sculpture has always been very popular in the public and private markets. From very early on, it has been considered under the subcategory of art. For example, Miyakawa Jiro's *Taiwan no genshi geijutsu (The Primitive Art of Taiwan)* (1930) was a written catalogue of his own collections and included the Paiwan sculpture as one of the most important parts of Taiwan's "primitive art." Kobayashi Yasuyoshi took a slightly different direction on his *Takasagozoku Paiwanu mingei (The Folk Art of the Paiwan)* (1944). He compiled images from various sources and tried to sort them by media categories according to Japanese convention. In this book, I have come across several images of works by Gatu Camak's father in photos taken inside their old residence. The inclusion of Paiwan's *vencikan* into the modern art world continued well into the second half of the 20th century, in journal papers and a very important monograph by Chen Qilu (1961, 1972, 1975). Chen's contribution was significant in his comprehensive knowledge of the Japanese collections, taken over by National Taiwan University after 1945, and also in his
extensive fieldwork in the Paiwan region at Southern Taiwan in the 1950s-60s. He was not only an excellent anthropologist but an art-lover himself. He and the other co-author Tang hand-drew all the images in their 1961 catalogue of Paiwan sculptures. Chen also started using the so-called “Puleti style” in describing the unique style coming out of this famous village (Chen 1961:22).

Paiwan sculpture was nevertheless also noted for its mimetic portrayal of nudity and sometimes brutality, for example, an image of a head-hunter with an enemy’s head. Naturally it became the target of destruction when the villagers started converting to Christianity as early as in the 1950s. Later, the KMT government was to institute a policy of social development among the aborigines and thus identified these sculptures as objects of superstition and backwardness. Many of them were sent to museums, sold to outsiders for very low prices or destroyed on site.

We now rarely find any Paiwan sculpture that was dated before 1960s in the Puleti villagers’ own houses. But we often find museum catalogues or anthropological publications on their bookshelves, especially those of the sculptors themselves. Djakanau, a sculptor from Puleti and also a Christian missionary, produced many works with a combination of his father’s motifs and the designs from the other sources of the Pacific rims. His reference came from the famous anthropologist Chen Qilu’s publication Woodcarving of the Paiwan Group of Taiwan (1961), where Chen included images of sculpture from other Pacific rim area to make comparison with the Paiwan ones. Djakanau simply “digested” all of these images into his new creations. His sculptures are very much sought after by art dealers. One of them even set up a workshop in mainland China so Djakanau can produce work with cheaper raw wood materials.

Another Puleti sculptor, Rubilian Camak, recalled his first “art” exhibition at the Tainan Cultural Center in the 1980s and was puzzled by the idea of having to “sign” his work. “Everyone in our village can recognize each other’s work. Why bother signing on the sculpture? Besides when I got too busy, I would have my cousins coming to help out. Should they sign, too?” One of Rubilian Camak’s works has been sent to an exhibition in NYC in 2005 and was collected by an art museum. Asked if he felt sorry to leave his work
that far away, he answered, “that is fine. I can make another one that looks similar.” That is, there is no sense of “uniquenesss” of a work.

In the last few decades, Paiwan sculpture has re-defined and even challenged traditional social hierarchies, and moreover, has participated in a broader system of values by entering into the art world or museum collections. Issues of authorship, originality, authenticity and especially creativity, so much treasured in the art world, have become entangled in these new encounters.

Example one. Two pieces of sculptures were pulled out of an art competition in the 2001 Aborigines Wooden Sculpture Exhibition held in Pingtong County because the competitors were accused of dishonesty. One of the works was an older one passed down through the family, but it had been retouched by the eldest son Lege and handed in as the work of Lege. His reply to the above accusation was:

Why? I inherited the piece as a *kusam* (first-born) and it is my property. Also I retouched it with modern tools. I do not see anything wrong with it at all. I have heard that one of my fellow villagers turned in his father’s old piece under his own name last year and won the first place.

Example two. Chen Wensheng (陳文生), a Puyuma descendant of *mamazangilan*, was “discovered” by the famous *Xiongshi Art Magazine* (雄獅美術) in 1991 when the editor decided to produce a series of “New Primitive Art”. The editor has persuaded Chen to do his first exhibition in a Taipei art gallery, which happened to be owned by the same art magazine. From that time, he has also taken the suggestion from the magazine to change his name, from Han-Chinese Chen Wenshing to his Puyuma name “Hacu – the Chief Sculpture”. His exhibition was a big success and his work was acclaimed, associated with qualities of “purity”, “originality” and “primitive power” (Li 1991:114-115).

Different concepts of what “art” should be have certainly provided the bases for these differences of value. And to be precise, although the “process of actions” that has contextualized the definition or the value-difference tends to be one of hegemony, the participants do sometimes play the game from the other way around. Shelly Errington (1998) has proclaimed ‘the death of authentic primitive art’ in that it is often too ambiguous to be
authentic and primitive and these qualities only exist for the outsider’s imagination or for the sake of market values. In Paiwan’s case, I am more optimistic because these sculptures were created not solely for the purpose of the market or outsiders but have also been well circulated within their own people. Many Paiwan sculptors are very much aware of the rules of different games, the categories and the contexts of these *vencikan*.

**Discussions and possible approaches:**

Now, Paiwan sculptures are not only circulated or exhibited as art, but also are produced as “art,” regardless of how each individual social agent will define what art is. When the old villager insisted that a good *vencikan* has to contain privileged patterns, he was certainly more concerned with the social role of the sculptors and the appropriateness of motifs. Yet it is equally alarming when a best-selling art magazine is doing the same thing, emphasizing the aristocratic status of Hacu, the aboriginal legends and mythological motifs from the old days.

I believe that the cultural movement of “localism” from the 1970s to the 1990s in Taiwan, especially among the circles of the writers, artists and critiques, has played a role in the promotion of the primitive-yet-original art of Taiwanese indigenous peoples. Right around the same time, several “naïve” painters, including an illiterate old painter Hong Tung (洪通) and “grandma painter” Wuli Yuge (呂李玉哥), were sought after by various media for many years. Young students at the art academia were encouraged to look at their own land and culture instead of just copying from the popular Western avant-garde styles. This assumption might require some further research but my argument is that it is important to look at this promotion of aboriginal primitivism within broader social contexts, and not just in the context of colonial or post-colonial hegemony.

This paper has not addressed some other important issues I would very much like to pursue in future fieldwork. First, from the perspective of the value of “social relationship,” the Puleti ethnography should further clarify the correlations between sculpture, social memory and the concept of “house” (*umag*). There are two basic observations. Memories about the old sculptors, material evidences (especially sculpture) of the village’s relocation during 1950s,
and accounts of how the skills were handed down through “house” lines over the past few decades are critical for the village to define itself as “sculpture village”. Secondly, the narrations or “performances” regarding sculpture have also become important strategies for the re-structuring of this hierarchical society, which makes distinctions between aristocracy (mamazangilan) and commoners (Ku 2002). The conflicts are evident in the role of the head administrator of the village (selected through public elections every four year) and the role of the head mamazangilan.

In terms of the historical process, I have collected a copy of the complete household records during the Japanese colonial era and other household records during 1940s when the Chinese Nationalist party took over Taiwan. This information will be read carefully, along with the narratives of local lineages told by different families in the village.

Second, from the perspective of “market value,” the Puleti ethnography should examine how the Paiwan house sculpture, symbol of hierarchy, has gradually become commodified and is now measured by market value. Japanese colonial government purposely set up an artisan workshop near this area to teach more Paiwan sculptors make school desks and chairs, household water buckets and furniture, and even individual-standing human figure sculpture. Before the end of the nineteenth century, only high reliefs sculpture of human figures were found in this area. The setup of artisan workshops has had a very important influence on the smooth transition of Paiwan sculpture into art or cultural commodities later on.

Third, from the perspective of “creativity value,” the emphasis shall be placed not only on the providers but also on the social participants or audience. The sculptors at Puleti are not always inactive “recipients of tradition”; they have also actively participated in the transformation process. From the so-called “neo-antique” to the categories of art and cultural commodities, there are several sets of concepts at work: new vs. old, local vs. national or trans-national, primitive vs. civilized, creativity vs. tradition. It is my plan to study the meanings attached to these concepts.

Last, and most often neglected, the values and differences observed are not in a single line of order or in a constant and closed system. I intend to look into how the multi-value systems
work at the same time and how values and differences not only create segregations or
hierarchies but also complement each other and result in cohesions.

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