

《Session 1》

Intangible Cultural Heritage in Taiwan: A Comparison with Taketomi Island

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Introduction

The human societies are constantly facing the influences from the outer world, whether natural or artificial. Different peoples under specific temporal and spatial environments realize the outer influences and weave them into culturally recognizable frameworks. Unraveling this framework then provides an approach through which more light can be shed on the understanding of peoples' identification of 'the Self/ the Other' and hence their cultures. In this paper, the author intends to examine how the concept of 'the Other' of Saisiat people in Taiwan formulates the structure and details of their most important ritual, *pasta' ai*.

The point from which the author starts the paper, however, is the ritual of *Tanadui* of the Taketomi Island, which is also a very significant occasion for the Taketomians to celebrate the blessings brought by 'the Other'. In the doctoral research which is concentrated on the ritual dance of the Taketomians, (CHAO 2001) the author has focused on the element of spatiality, which is central to the understanding of the Taketomians ritualistic practices of the priestesses or the villagers. At the conceptual level, the author delves into the belief systems of the visiting God, *nilai kanai*, (which is called *nilan* in Taketomi) and *Utaki* (*on* or *omiya* in Taketomi) to understand how various forms of 'the Other' in religious and political spheres have been connected historically. In practice, the complex identities of 'the Other' have been given clearer forms in the process of the ritual of *Tanadui*. Starting with the event of '*yungai*,' which means 'welcoming the *yu*,' (*yu* connotes the good year of harvest) the process of the ritual of *Tanadui* reveals the increasing awareness of 'the Other' of various forms, such as *nilan* and *miluku*.

The identification of 'the Other' in the ritual is largely through the moving in space: the welcoming of *nilan* by the priestesses and the political leaders in *yungai*,

the traveling around the three villages of the Island, worshipping in different *Utaki*, and finally, dancing on the stage. The static and natural space of the Island has become a dynamic sphere of interaction between the villagers and ‘the Other’.

***Pasta’ ai* of the Saisiat**

For the author, the Taketomian example provides a framework to compare with the situation in Taiwan. In the following part, the author shall focus on the ritual of *pasta’ ai* of the Saisiat, which is also centred on the identity of ‘the Other’, but with a very different cultural tone. The Saisiat live on the mountainous hills in north-western Taiwan, between Shin-chu and Miao-li counties. Compared with the other ethnic groups around their living area, such as the Atayal in the north and the Hakka Chinese in the south, the Saisiat have a much less population. They have developed an adaptive mode to cope with the ethnic ‘Others.’ The complex of the Saisiat towards the indispensable ‘Other’ can be revealed in their traditional ritual of *pasta’ ai*.

The ritual is closely connected with a legend explaining the complex relationship between the Saisiat and *ta’ ai*, which is the name of a group of short people. Unlike most of the other cases, *ta’ ai* has no ancestral relationship to the Saisiat. According to the Saisiat, no body knows where the *ta’ ai* come from. A cave in the mountain of Mabalay across the river of Balay, however, is believed to be the location where *ta’ ai* used to live. Until today, the location is considered a sacred spot and cannot be approached.

Without clear knowledge of where the *ta’ ai* came from, however, the Saisiat have imposed the role of the importer of culture on the *ta’ ai*: *ta’ ai* taught the Saisiat the way of planting the rice. They were also good at dancing and singing. They taught the Saisiat the way of singing and dancing, but only the member of the *titon* family got learned. Therefore, the Saisiat used to invite them to celebrate the harvest. Nevertheless, *ta’ ai* did not behave themselves by insulting women of the Saisiat. At the beginning, the Saisiat were angry but could only tolerate. One day, however, the saisiat could no longer endure and decided to kill *ta’ ai*. The Saisiat purposely invited the *ta’ ai* to the harvest ritual. On their way home, as usual, *ta’ ai* rest on the tree which had been cut broken beforehand. All of them, except for two, fell into the river and got drowned. Before the left male *ta’ ai* and the female *toway* went eastward along the river, they warned that there would be no harvest anymore because the boar, sparrow and snake would destroy all the Saisiat. To comfort the angriness and curse of *ta’ ai*, the Saisiat decide to hold the

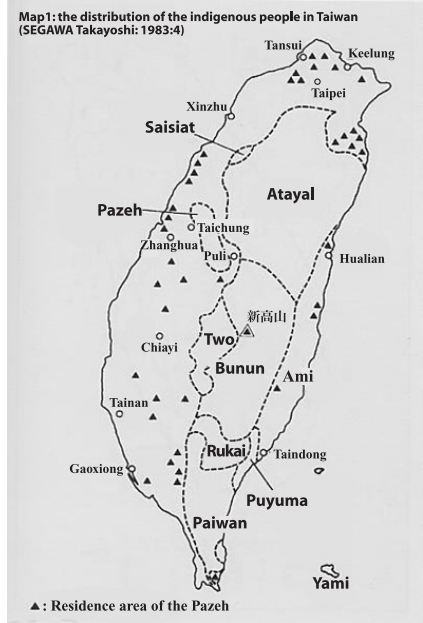
ritual annually to memorize *koko ta' ai* (*koko* is the honorable form of addressing a person) for harvest and avoidance of *ta' ai*'s punishment.

Today, the ritual of *pasta' ai* is held once every two years by two subgroups of the Siasiat, the north and the south. The family of *tition*, who have been thought as the keeper of the ritual knowledge, still play the most important role in the ritual. The ritual lasts six days. Several weeks before its beginning, the event of *gagawas* is held, in which groups of ritual representatives from the south and the north meet to decide the dates and the details of the ritual. It is a formal announce of the preparation of the ritual, including the practice of dancing and singing, which is treated as highly tabooed and strictly prohibited to practice except for the period of the ritual. It is also noteworthy that a specific grass of *esul* must be tied on the bodies and around the houses of the villagers to avoid attack by the evil spirit in *pasta' ai*.

A month after *gagawas*, the formal event of *pasta' ai* starts on the middle of the tenth lunar calendar month.* The south and north groups start the events a day differently. The process of the ritual, however, is almost the same. The detailed description of the ritual is out of the scope of the paper. The author shall focus on several aspects, including the sequence and the dialogical performance of the ritual to facilitate the comparison.

Welcoming *koko ta' ai*

The event is practiced by the *tition* and several other families under a rather



Reference: SEGAWA Takayoshi. 1983. *Taiwan Takasago Zoku no Fukushoku*, Clothes of the Takasago Peoples in Taiwan, Shibuya, Tokyo: Matsunami Museum of Arts.

*Originally, the ritual was said to held on day of full moon after harvest. Under the Japanese-colonizing period, the dates was moderated and followed until today.

sacred atmosphere. Only the close members of the families can participate. On the morning of the very day, the members of the *tition* family face east and start to sing the song of *rara' ol*, 'song of welcoming and inviting'. Cake of glutinous rice is then made by the female members. At noon, rice cake, along with other meat and liquor is prepared for the *koko ta' ai* to partake. They are believed to advent while the incense is burning through the gate of the house.

Entertaining *koko ta' ai*

Two nights of singing and dancing to entertain the *ta' ai*. The Saisiat believes that during these occasions, *ta' ai* are dancing with them. The order of songs, and hence the dances, are still followed under the instruction of the members of the *tition* family who lead the dancing line. In addition, since *ta' ai* is considered to be at presence, the villagers pay much attention not to irritate *ta' ai* and make clear the path for *ta' ai* to move.

Sending *ta' ai*

Starting from the last night until the morning of the last day, the Saisiat hold a series of events to send away *ta' ai*. Female members of the *tition* family prepare the rice cake for *ta' ai* and throw it toward the east. The males then deposit the plants used in the ritual to the east. A thin trunk of tree is cut for the males to destroy and its pieces threw away to the east, which is reminiscent of the broken tree that *ta' ai* has been climbed and fallen from. For the Saisiat, this last event, after *ta' ai* has been sent away, symbolizes the Saisiat's overcoming *ta' ai* in the end.

The sequence of the ritual is a narration of actions which manifests *ta' ai*'s existence and the Saisiat's interaction with them. Unlike the Taketomian case, it is clear that the Saisiat's relationship with *ta' ai* mixed with respect and fear, caution and worry. The subtle emotion of the Saisiat's feeling toward *ta' ai* is bestly expressed through the ritualistic songs. The ritualistic song suite in *pasta' ai* is composed of fifteen songs. The prohibition of the songs in usual period, its archaic language and complicated pattern of the verses all contribute to the difficulty of their preservation and inheritance. The song suites, however, enjoy a status of 'intangible cultural heritage' nowadays because its highly metaphoric content and complicated structure: each of the fifteen song is entitled with a species of plant, and the song has to be sung in a repeated pattern. In the ritual, different verses are sung on different occasions, and it takes four to five hours to complete the entire

song suite.

The song suite hence enlivens the image of the legendary *ta' ai*, who is among the core subjects of the ritual. The seventh song ‘*walowalon*,’ which is treated as the most sacred song by the Saisiat is an example of the complicated feeling mixed with *ta' ai*'s sadness and the Saisiat's regret:

(verse one)

See if you leave us ‘*ta' ai*’
To your place
Without a single noise

You have to pity us
You ‘*ta' ai*’

(verse two)

.....
We walked on the bridge of the tree
We fell down from the bridge, like being hung
Have you forgot the things of the past?

You have to care us
You ‘*ta' ai*’

These two verses highlights the voices of both the *ta' ai* and the Saisiat. The Saisiat act out the lively scene and mood of their mutual relationship through singing *walowalon* and other songs. The everlasting repetition of the dialogical verses, accompanied with the circular dancing of the participants, provoke the collective memory and experience of the Saisiat toward ‘the Other’: who had brought continuity as well as conflict to the community, but forcibly left at the end.

Conclusion: the Comparison

Compared the ritual of *Tanadui* in Taketomi and *pasta' ai* in Saisiat, there are several interesting points. First of all, at a general and phenomenal level, they all have strong characteristics rooted in the millet, the use of the grass *esul* to avoid the evil spirit and so on. The sequences of the ritual complex also share similarity,

which can be seen as a gradually highlighting of the interaction between the villagers and ‘the Other,’ from the levels of community, family and individual.

Most importantly, these two rituals are centred on ‘the Other’. For the Taketomians, their immigrant ancestors, *nilan*, and *miluku* can be seen as the historical, religious and cultural Other who not only influence but also formulate the Taketomian culture largely. All together they form a reflective object with which the Taketomians interact through the actions of praying, singing, traveling and dancing. Seen from the actions, the relationship between the Taketomians and all these forms of ‘the Other’ is harmonious. This may explain why there is not a remarkable event of ‘sending away the coming deity’ in *Tanadui*.

On the contrary, the feeling toward the Otherness of *ta’ ai*, for the Saisiat, is a complex mixed with dilemma: positive influence came along with negative outcome. *Ta’ ai* is a cultural importer, but also a plunderer to a certain degree. This dilemma is best expressed through the reflexive tone and the dialogical word sung in the ritual. The reversing of the subjects in the songs such as ‘*walowalon*’ constructs a very dynamic intersubjectivity between ‘the Self’ and ‘the Other’ for the Saisiat. This ritualistic relationship between the Saisiat and the *ta’ ai* coincide somehow with the Saisiat interactive experience with other ethnic groups around them such as Atayal and Hakka.

In brief, the author shall argue that the two examples show two types of cultural encounters which a small ethnic group could have confronted with and adapted to. One is more harmonious and the other more disharmonious. Interestingly, both these two rituals end in a similar kind of event of catharsis: *yukkui* of the Taketomians and *pate ‘so solaw* of the Saisiat. In the former case, the Taketomians priestesses and villagers tour around the families to give blessing for the next year. The procession often show great creativity in their improvising performances. In most cases, the Taketomians will perform a subversive version of the normal ritual performance, which often makes the sacred performance profane. In the latter example, the Saisiat gather by the river to send away *ta’ ai* again. By restaging the process of the ritual in a totally playful mood, they release themselves from the tension and caution during the ritual span and resume their interpretative power of experience of ‘the Other’.

The author shall argue that, after sending off ‘the Other,’ these two events both reinforce the self-awareness as human beings and hence their right of interpreting the collective memory related with ‘the Other’. This is the creative process of ‘between and betwixt’ before they reintegrate with the normal social life. The creative sphere reverses finally the dominated position of the villagers by ‘the

Other,' no matter a peaceful one or a conflicting one, and allow 'the Self,' which has been defined by the relationship with 'the Other', to be released from traditional convention and to find their subject exegeses in their contemporary situation.