

# A Study of the Revitalization of Indigenous People Annual Rituals in Taiwan

Hsiao-Ming Chang, Ming-Chao Yeh\*

School of Physical Education, Putian University, China

Received: 05 Apr 2023; Received in revised form: 03 May 2023; Accepted: 10 May 2023  
©2023 The Author(s). Published by TheShillonga. This is an open access article under the CC BY license  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

## Abstract

*Over the past 400 years, Taiwan's indigenous people annual rituals have been lost due to the assimilation of foreign regimes and the influence of modern urbanization. However, under the influence of modern social life style and political power, the annual rituals became performance and lost their original significance. But also because of its regeneration, the culture of Taiwan's indigenous people has been revitalized, and has the role of identity and continuity. However, because of the restoration of the annual rituals, the culture of the aborigines has been revitalized, and the role of recognition and continuity has been generated in Taiwan.*

**Keywords— annual rituals, tribe, culture, identify, indigenous.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

For the 16 indigenous ethnic groups in Taiwan, the traditional rite of passage is an important inheritance activity of the tribal people, which contains national culture, belief, norms and education significance. Therefore, the tribal ritual is an extremely important part of the traditional culture of Taiwan's ethnic minorities. Each ethnic group has its own unique life culture, which has become an important asset for Taiwan's multi-cultural and ethnic groups. However, under the influence of the foreign ethnic groups' military repression and cultural assimilation, as well as the role of the modern industrialized society, the indigenous cults fell into the fate of disintegration or suspension. In the context of today's increasingly accelerated globalization, the cultural departments of the Taiwan authorities and the departments responsible for indigenous affairs have adopted multiculturalism to promote the construction of community policies, encourage the establishment of community or ethnic cultural development associations in local communities, transform the cultural landscape of communities, and revitalize the basic cultural forms (for example, resume the holding of traditional ceremonies, inheritance of oral traditions, etc.). By inheriting and reviving the intangible cultural heritage handed down from generation to generation, we can arouse the cultural identity of all ethnic groups. This study is a qualitative study. First, we will understand the origin and function of Taiwan indigenous' annual rituals, and the reasons for their disintegration and revitalization. Then we will understand

the regeneration of annual rituals and ethnic identity. Finally, we will analyze the impact of cultural and tourism policies on indigenous' annual rituals.

## II. THE ORIGIN AND FUNCTION OF ANNUAL RITUALS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN TAIWAN

The annual rituals are a traditional celebration and ritual activity held by indigenous tribes every year according to the four seasons of nature. It is an important act of the year, showing how aborigines cooperate with the operation of the four seasons and reflecting the harmonious interaction between people and the natural environment. All kinds of annuals ritual reflect the cultural connotation of aboriginal beliefs, social organizations, traditional life and taboos. Therefore, with the traditional calendar or celestial body movement and natural farming conditions, various ethnic groups of Taiwan's aborigines held their own different annual rituals to preserve their ancestral beliefs and wisdom coexisting with nature [1]. For example, the annual ritual of the Amis people is of great political, economic, agricultural, fishing, educational, social and religious significance. They rely on nature economically, revere ghosts and gods spiritually, and pray for the protection and guidance of ghosts and gods for all difficulties and setbacks in daily life and activities. Therefore, a series of annual rituals related to economy, religion, entertainment and politics have emerged, each month has different forms of rituals according to the similarities and differences between natural

weather, farming, fishing and hunting, and there is a head and group presiding over the ceremony and a set of taboos that must be observed during the ceremony, and each activity has a certain purpose and multiple functions [2]. Because there are many kinds of annual rituals of indigenous people in Taiwan, and the ethnic groups are different from each other; The different cults of different ethnic groups have different meanings. The annual rituals of the indigenous people in Taiwan can be divided into five categories: the annual rituals of single livelihood activities, the complex annual rituals of settlements, the annual rituals of special objects, the life rituals, the witchcraft and the healing rituals [3].

The rituals for single livelihood activities refers to the rituals held mainly for a certain type of livelihood objects. It can be subdivided into farming sacrificial rites, hunting rituals and fishing and hunting rituals. The millet harvest rituals of the Tsou people belong to the farming rituals, the ear shooting rituals of the Bunun people belong to the hunting rituals, the sea rituals of the Amis people and the flying fish rituals of the Dawu people are typical of the fishing rituals. The settlement compound rituals refer to the sacrificial activities that the whole settlement mobilized to participate in. The content of the rituals includes multiple items and multiple functions, such as the Mangayau (great hunting rituals) of the Paiwan people and the harvest festival of the Amis people, which belong to this type of ritual. The Mayasvi (war rituals) of the Tsou people are the representative of the complex ritual held irregularly.



Fig.1. The Mayasvi of the Tsou people

(source:

<https://www.epochtimes.com/b5/12/2/19/n3517033.htm>)



Fig.2. The Pasta'ai of the Saisiyat people

(source:

<https://cyberisland.teldap.tw/g/qwhcsUDEwgAdefbBlmFSIZi>)

Special object rituals are a kind of sacrifice that mainly focuses on special objects. For example, the five-year ritual of the Paiwan people is held to welcome and send off the ancestors, while the Pasta'ai (dwarf ritual) of the Saisiyat people is held to comfort the spirits. In fact, in addition to specific purposes and objects, the annual rituals of the aborigines in Taiwan have religious color, cultural heritage role, and education, leisure, sports, and the functions of the rite of passage [3]. For example, the Mangayau is the most important annual ritual of the Paiwan people. The elders lead the young warriors to hunt in the mountains, inherit the hunting skills, and pass on the traditional culture and ballads of the Paiwan people to the next generation. The hunting results are brought back to the tribe and shared with all families. In the dance activities of the Sakizaya people's harvest festival, the clear determination of the leader and grade class system is not only the meaning of sacrificing ancestors and praying for a good harvest, but also the power of the traditional class to educate the aboriginal children to respect themselves, work hard, respect the old and the wise, love and be kind to the people, and abide by the rules and keep their own points [4]. Therefore, the annual rituals can be said to be a living teaching material of various aboriginal cultures. In addition to the functions of interpersonal, leisure, activities, education, politics and education, it can be found that in addition to its rich religious color, it can be determined that the annual rituals enrich the cultural connotation of all indigenous peoples and fully plays the role and function of the continuation of traditional culture.

### III. THE COLLAPSE OF INDIGENOUS ANNUAL RITUALS IN TAIWAN

Taiwan's indigenous society was originally a tribal and self-sufficient social entity. During its thousands of years of history before its contact with foreign nationalities, its politics, economy, culture, society, education, military, and belief all formed a complete system. Until about 400 years

ago, the aborigines of Taiwan had a lot of contact with ethnic groups outside the island, which impacted the original stable tribal system and seriously affected the preservation and creation of their culture. After contacting with foreign nationalities such as the Netherlands, Spain, the Ming and Zheng Dynasties, the Qing Dynasty, and Japan, the aborigines have been strongly transferred in terms of territory, organization and culture. Especially in the period of Japanese rule, the Japanese military government seized its authority and violence, and through the military and police, it has even had an unprecedented impact on the aboriginal community [5]. Therefore, the indigenous peoples of Taiwan have been suppressed by force and assimilated by foreign ethnic groups. They have been deprived of all places to live together with all things in the world, including invading their land use sovereignty and limiting their cultural autonomy. The indigenous peoples have lost the land resources they rely on to survive. The survival and development of traditional social organizations and cultural identity are facing a crisis of disintegration [6]. The study pointed out that when the Japanese colonized Taiwan, the powerful force of nationalization and monetization had a profound impact on the entire value system maintained by the tribal cult. "Remove sanctification" cuts off the sacred source of the tribe from the root. Therefore, the structural collapse of the tribal cult became increasingly serious with the deepening of the Japanese colonial government [7]. After 1945, the Taiwan authorities' policy of "assimilation of compatriots in the mountains" did not deviate from the basic line of the era of Japanese rule. Although the plan to improve mountain life was implemented, the goal was to improve the social customs of the indigenous people at that time, such as food, clothing, housing and transportation, so that they could accept Chinese and change their original surname, language, customs and culture.

Although the way of cultural assimilation or integration is conducive to the integration of ethnic groups and shapes the illusion of ethnic integration, it sacrifices the rights and interests of vulnerable aborigines and even makes their culture close to extinction. At the beginning of the 1980s, the lives of the indigenous peoples changed with the rapid social and economic changes in Taiwan. Because the mountains could not provide enough demand in terms of economy, and at the same time, many indigenous people flocked to the major cities of Taiwan under the attraction of various materials in the cities [8], thus forming the so-called "urban mountains compatriot". In addition, in Taiwan's indigenous tribes, it can be found that they all have Catholic and Christian churches, and most ethnic people believe in these two religions. Due to the influence of these foreign beliefs, the traditional beliefs of the tribal people were suppressed, and most of the annual rituals were suspended.

The study points out that the disappearance of tribal cults and the division within the tribe are indeed related to the Christian faith and its sectarian struggle; In addition to national and economic factors, it has the most far-reaching influence on the social and cultural changes of Taiwan's aborigines [9]. According to the above reasons, the reasons for the loss of indigenous annual rituals culture can be summarized as follows [6]: (1) The lack of written elements makes it more difficult to inherit and learn traditional ballads; (2) The conflict between religious belief and traditional culture; (3) Inheritance of culture and customs and oral culture fault; (4) The tribal population is gradually decreasing; (5) Culture is diluted, and it is difficult to preserve its cultural characteristics; (6) Popular entertainment has replaced the vitality of traditional dance teaching; (7) The consciousness of traditional culture is increasingly blurred.

#### **IV. THE REGENERATION OF INDIGENOUS TRADITIONAL RITUALS AND ETHNIC IDENTITY**

One of the important changes in Taiwan's society in the 1990s was the important moment when multiculturalism gradually became the mainstream value of the society. In addition to the influence of the social movement of the aborigines, the aboriginal culture of Taiwan's South Island system, which had been marginalized for a long time, gained an opportunity to revive. Under the development of such a large social situation, the little-known annual rituals of Miitungusu, which was handed down by the ancestors of the Hla'alua ethnic group of only 500 people, can have the opportunity to receive increasing attention from the outside world [10]. It also belongs to the Sakizayi ethnic group with a small population. There are many large and important rituals related to the whole tribe, such as harvest sacrifice, fishing sacrifice, annual sacrifice, prayer for the sun, prayer for rain, disease prevention sacrifice, bird hunting sacrifice and so on. During the annual winter and summer holidays, the tribe will hold cultural tours and recognition activities for children and young people of all ages. The leaders, teachers and professors of all ages and clans will give lectures in person to stimulate the respect, confidence and recognition of the clans' next generation to the clans' culture, and accelerate the cultural revival and reconstruction of culture [11]. Take Palamalan A-Lisin (the worship Fire God ritual) as an example. In the past, indigenous people engaged in any activities related to fire, such as daily cooking, holding ceremonies, and transmitting messages. The smoke generated by fire is the medium of communication with the ancestors. In addition, in the past, the Sakizaya people in the Qing Dynasty were destroyed by the fire attack of the Qing army. Holding Palamalan A-Lisin

not only means remembering the ancestors, but also represents the rebirth of the ethnic group. On the other hand, in the past, most of the ceremonies were held by each family itself. Now, the past private ceremonies have been turned into the activities of the whole nation. The holding of the ceremonies has linked the tribes together, which is conducive to the formation of cohesion.



*Fig.3. The Palamalan A-Lisin of Sakizaya people*

(source:

<https://cyberisland.ndap.org.tw/g/qwhcsUnewDAdefbBI mFSldx>)



*Fig.4. The Mikongu of Kananafu people*

(source:

<https://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20161008003326-260405?chdtv>)

Since the 1990s, the Kananafu people have revived the traditional rituals, and the Mikongu (celebrate the millet harvest) and Pasiakarai (worship the river God) are the two most representative traditional cults of the Kananafu people. Through the gathering of the elders to recall the details of the ceremony, the younger generation recorded it and worked together to prepare the ceremony. The reconstruction of the altar/club, the establishment of the ethnic group cultural development association, and the inheritance of oral traditions and handicrafts have experienced more than 20 years. These two traditional cults have gradually been held every year (except 2009 and 2010), and become the most distinctive ritual of Kananafu. They

have also become one of the most important traditional cultural heritage of Kananafu, the 16th ethnic group of Taiwan's aborigines. The study points out that since the 1992's, the awareness of aborigines has risen, and the traditional Bunun culture has been paid more and more attention due to the influence of government policies, capitalism and Christianity. Under the instructions of the government units, the Bunun tribes in various regions have rebuilt the new image and position of Malahtangia (A ceremony for training children to hunt.). The elders of the tribe and the Bunun people living in the metropolitan area believe that this phenomenon is very helpful for preserving the culture of the tribe and consolidating the ethnic consciousness of the people. In the past ten years, the nature of the Amis harvest festival has undergone a new development: the harvest festival has changed from being held only within the tribe to being held by the tribes in several tribes and towns, and its nature has also changed from the original ritual with religious functions to the festival activities expressing culture and identity.

#### V. THE IMPACT OF CULTURE AND TOURISM ON THE ANNUAL RITUALS IN TRIBE

A The Formosan Aboriginal Cultural Village (established in 1979) run by the local people in Yuchi Township, Nantou County, and the Taiwan Indigenous People's Park (established in 1987) run by the official government in Majia Township, Pingdong County are two typical ethnic minority tourism sites, which are the most typical exhibition venues for ethnic minority rituals, attracting tens of thousands of tourists every year. The former is a private amusement park, and the latter is an official institution. Traditional annual rituals have long been combined with commerce, and the performances have also been constantly innovative, not only flaunting tradition, but sometimes incorporating modern elements. However, in response to the changes in social needs and values, as well as the promotion of cultural and tourism policies by the Taiwan authorities, many tribes today will hold various festivals such as the harvest festival, ancestral spirit festival, and hunting festival to pray for agricultural production and harvest. Instead, combining local cultural characteristics, natural resources, and leisure industry, they have become a new mode of festival tourism in today's tribal areas, and therefore become one of the important forms of tourism. [12]. For example, the Bunun Tribal Leisure Farm in Yanping Township, Taitung, established a tribal theater.

In addition to performing the eight-part harmony of the Bunun tribe, it is a sacrificial ceremony to pray for a bumper harvest of millet, and it also irregularly performs indigenous traditional music and dance at home and abroad. Especially in the 1990s, the overall construction plan for Taiwan's

residential areas played a leading role in reviving and developing local culture. Of course, with the aid of policies and funds, the revival movement of tribal rituals has also begun among indigenous tribes. For example, the annual "Black Rice Festival" held by the Kungadavane tribe of the Lukai ethnic group in Kaohsiung has become an important tourism resource for the tribe, attracting many tourists [13]. In addition, the neighboring Teldreka and Opnoho tribes also sent representatives to participate. As the elements of tourism increase year after year, the plot design also takes into account catering to tourists' tastes. For example, in cultural exhibitions, although both tribes are performed by young men, the Warrior Dance of the Opnoho tribe is quite different from the Warrior Dance of the Kungadavane tribe: the former incorporates the dance elements of the Maori people of New Zealand, while the latter faithfully demonstrates the dance method and formation of the traditional Dona Warrior Dance [14]. However, there are not a few indigenous tribes that adhere to traditional culture. The Taromak tribe has inherited and continued the annual rituals to this day. Through holding annual ritual activities, it recreates the traditional cultural connotation and spirit of the tribe. Displaying the annual ritual is also a symbol of tribal people's cultural identity [15].

Due to economic factors, many indigenous people have migrated to cities in Taiwan, which has also led to a continuous increase in the number of indigenous people in cities. With the establishment of competent units for indigenous peoples by local governments, annual rituals are held in cities to provide the best stage for political performance. However, in order to avoid offending tribal taboos, it is usually necessary to avoid traditional tribal time for sacrificial ceremonies in metropolitan areas. For example, the number of people living in Taoyuan City has increased, and the municipal government has handled the "Taoyuan City Indigenous People Annual Rituals - Kazu ku Kani". The event venue is held at the Taoyuan City Indigenous People Culture Hall lawn, and the content includes wrestling and rally experience, a display of wreaths and moon peach rice, as well as the focus of the ceremony for each year of the Puyuma people. The aborigines in Tucheng District of New Taipei City include the Amis, Ataya, and Tsou people, with a total of more than 4000 people. In recent years, the district has also begun to handle the "Annals Rituals of the Indigenous People in Tucheng District", which includes the ceremony of reporting the ancestral spirit to the ancestral spirit house of the indigenous people, and ancestor worship. The district head and leader report the arrival of the bumper year festival to the ancestral spirit. In the evening, performances such as traditional singing dances and Tsou people war dances are arranged at the MRT station, in addition, the main purpose of holding a joint festival at the Tucheng Comprehensive Stadium is to

attract people to experience the culture of indigenous peoples.

Although the event is held in a different place than the original hometown, the aboriginal units that handle the event also hope to take root in the culture, gather the strength of the urban indigenous communities, and pass on the aboriginal culture through their own efforts. In addition, the traditional tribal life and rituals of the indigenous peoples have also undergone significant changes. Nowadays, most of the annual rituals have gradually become official performance and sightseeing activities. The reason is that currently, in Taiwan's various towns and townships, based on their characteristics in the real estate industry, combined with festival activities to promote the overall tourism industry, thereby attracting tourists to visit and experience, and bringing economic benefits to the local area. However, at the age of, the annual rituals often degenerate into a stage for Taiwan's politicians to perform. Some ceremonies are opened not by meeting tribal leaders, but by speeches from politicians or public opinion representatives who hold real power and financial assistance, as well as by dancing hand and foot with indigenous people, demonstrating the integration of ethnic groups.

However, the involvement of the public sector has also had a positive impact on the identification of annual rituals. For example, in the 1990s, the Truku people, following the wave of rising awareness of indigenous people in Taiwan society at that time, also actively promoted the revitalization of indigenous culture. Through literature and oral statements by senior citizens, it gradually constructed the contemporary ethnic group's annual ritual activity, "Mgay Bari Thanksgiving Festival.". This annual ritual is different from the traditional forms of the Truku people in the past. Therefore, in the first few years of the ceremony, it caused controversy among the ethnic groups. However, after years of active promotion and increased performance of the traditional ethnic culture by the township government, it gradually gained the recognition of the ethnic groups and became an occasion for contemporary Truku people groups to show their cultural appearance [16].

## VI. CONCLUSION

According to the analysis results, it can be found that the annual rituals is a Taiwanese aboriginal tribe, which worships the nature and ancestors, and embodies the cultural connotation of faith, social organization, traditional life and taboo. In addition to its religious color, it also has the roles and functions of interpersonal, leisure, activities, education, politics, education and the continuation of traditional culture. The annual rituals are not only a cultural heritage activity, but also an experience of living and life. From birth, naming, adulthood to marriage, there are

ceremonies to celebrate. From the cultivation, sowing, harvest and hunting of crops, there are also various unique rituals to thank the ancestors. The reason for the loss of a few traditional annual literatures is that there is no text, so it is difficult to inherit. After the assimilation of foreign regimes and the influence of modernization, the tribes were mostly located in remote villages, and it was not easy to survive. Most of the young aborigines moved to cities. Under the influence of foreign religious beliefs, young people love modern life and entertainment, and the consciousness of traditional culture is increasingly blurred. The social movement of Taiwan's aborigines in the 1990s gave the long-marginalized aboriginal culture of Taiwan's South Island system an opportunity to revive. Through the holding of the annual literature, it aroused the respect and confidence of the next generation of ethnic people for the tribal culture, as well as the identification of ethnic groups and cultures.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was supported by a grant from National Social Science Foundation of China (No.18BMZ130).

### REFERENCES

- [1] Lin, Y. T. Kanakanavu rituals and the reconstruction of ethnic community, *Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre & Folklore*, 193, 2016, 63-128.
- [2] Liao, Z. J. A research of the background, ritual process, and development status of Taiwanese aboriginal traditional sports – Take Bunun Ma-naq-Tainga as an example, Master Thesis, National Taipei University, 2019.
- [3] Hu, T. L. Cultural performance and Taiwan aborigines. Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Company, 2003, 279-283.
- [4] Lamuran, S., & Vayayana, T. Tao traditional ecological knowledge and its value for sustainability. *Journal of Geographical Research*, 65, 2016, 143-167.
- [5] Chang, H. M., Lin, C. H., & Chuang, Y.W. Study on sustainable development strategy of indigenous tribal tourism. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 257, 2021, 03045.
- [6] Lai, Q. Y. The beauty and sorrow of the Lukai aristocrats of the Wutai tribe-A study of the changes in the power status of the Lukai aristocrats, Unpublished Master Thesis, National Dong Hwa University, 2008.
- [7] Sun, D. C. A holy returning-the current state and revival of Taiwanese aboriginal ceremonial rites, *Performing Art Journal*, 11, 2005, 253-268.
- [8] Iskaf, Yohani. The awakening and rejuvenation of indigenous peoples. Taipei: Vanguard Publishing House, 2002.
- [9] Lin, C. Y. The study on cultural industry-For the north Amis' custom, *Journal of Dahan Institute of Technology*, 22, 2007, 135-153.
- [10] Lin, Y. T. Revitalization of Miatungusu and representation of ethnic identity: A case study of the Hla'alua in Tauyuan

- Hsing (1993-2003). *Taiwan Journal of Literature and History*, 2, 2010, 103-143.
- [11] Yang, J. H. The reconstruction of the intangible cultural heritage of the Sakizaya. *Taiwan Indigenous Studies Quarterly*, 3(4), 2010, 34-43.
- [12] Chen, M. C. A Study on the Cultural Identity of Kalalisiya in Taromak Tribe Residents. Unpublished Master Thesis, National Taitung University, 2018.
- [13] Huang, D. S. *Taiwan Festival*. Taipei: Hiking Culture, 2003.
- [14] Wang M. J. Community Associations and Cultural Revitalization - Taking the Dona Black Rice Festival as an Example. *Kaohsiung Literature*, 5(1), 2014, 39-62.
- [15] Wen, S. C. Cultural Exchange on South Island with Indigenous Tribes in Taiwan as the Main Body-Taking the Taromak Tribe in Taitung as an Example. Unpublished Master Thesis, National Taitung University, 2015.
- [16] Wang, J. H. Truku ritual and ritual narrative research. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, National Dong Hwa University, 2018.