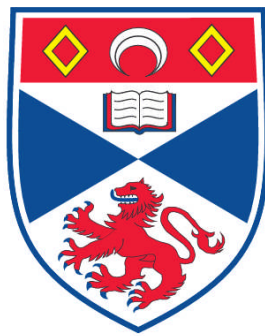


**LABOUR, LIFE, AND LANGUAGE: PERSONHOOD AND RELATIONS  
AMONG THE YAMI OF LANYU**

**Hsin-chieh Kao**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



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# **Labour, Life, and Language**

*Personhood and Relations among the Yami of Lanyu*

Hsin-chieh Kao

## Abstract

This thesis discusses the concepts of labour, life, and language among the Yami of Lanyu, Taiwan. In the local context, it is labour, life and language that comprise the concept of personhood among the Yami: *tao*, i.e. the ‘person’ in Yami language, is someone created labouring, and his labour in turn creates affluence, authority, and truth. I name this culturally particular image of a real or true person as *Homo laboris* or ‘Man the Worker’. This thesis aims to explore how labour, wealth, power, and knowledge are interrelated in Yami culture, and behind these relations, what material, social and epistemological conditions exist and render the relatedness possible. By analysing the contemporary economic predicament among the Yami, I attempt to highlight the effect of an episteme: when the Yami recognise and pursue wealth in the context of market economy they seem to be blind to the enormous invisible wealth in the market, because their category of wealth is constructed through numerous vis-à-vis relationships whose meaning resides in what a particular person is able to ‘see’.

The concept of wealth is being re-categorised among the Yami, due to both their continuous trial and error in business management and the invincible power of abstract money. Accordingly, the straightforward relations between wealth, power, knowledge and labour are dissolving. The image of a real person is also changing now. In short, what money and commodities introduce to the Yami is not merely their use- or exchange- value but a set of new relations and a new way to see and recognise the world.

### 1. Candidate's declarations:

I, Hsin-Chieh Kao, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 79,654 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2006 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in Social Anthropology in September 2008; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2006 and 2012.

Date 14 Jun 2012 signature of candidate

**2. Supervisor's declaration:**

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in Social Anthropology in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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## Note on Orthography

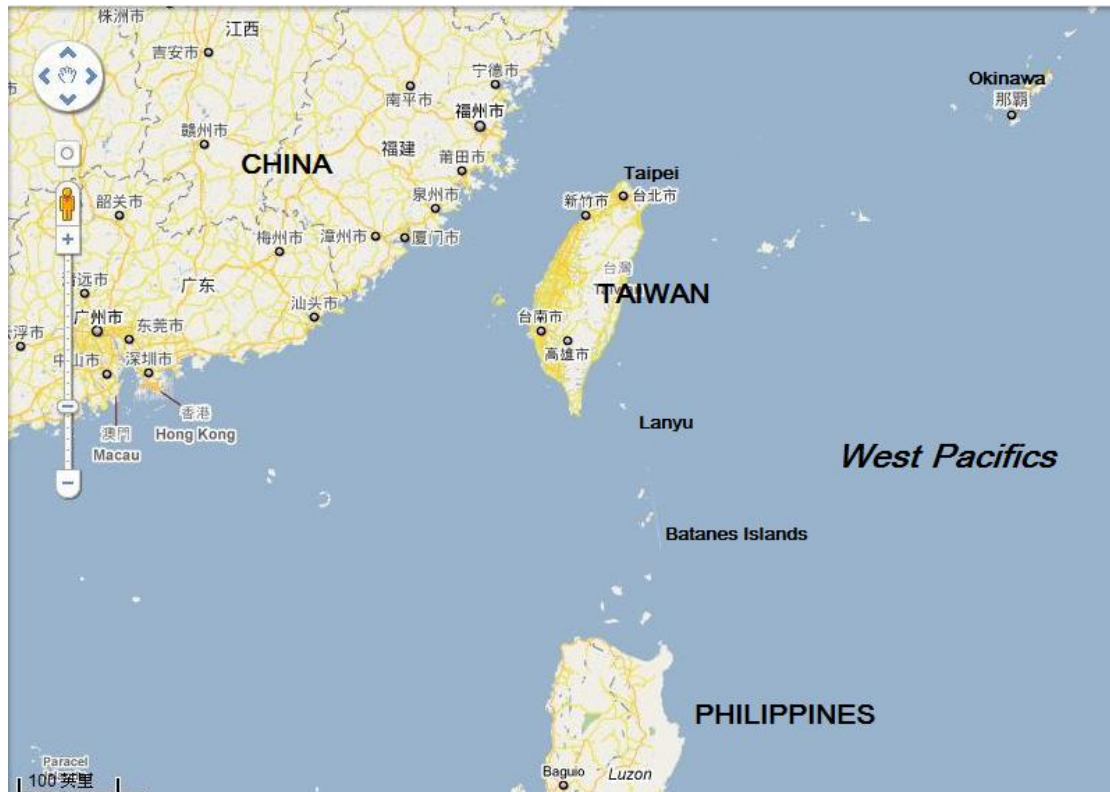
The Yami orthography currently in use among the natives developed for the use of Christian missions. In 1984, North American missionaries Si-Zigton, Si-Macinanao, and Si-Manidong began translating the Bible into Yami language, and the first Yami Bible was published in 1994 (Shao et al. 2007:9). The orthography in the Yami Bible thus becomes the way of spelling among native intellectuals, especially pastors and preachers.

### Vowels

Orthography	Equivalent to English
A	a <i>in</i> art
I	i <i>in</i> it
O	o <i>in</i> to
E	e <i>in</i> the

### Consonants

Orthography	Equivalent to English	Orthography	Equivalent to English
C	c <i>in</i> chip (voiceless)	B	b <i>in</i> book
K	k <i>in</i> skirt	D	d <i>in</i> do
L	l <i>in</i> look	G	g <i>in</i> good
M	m <i>in</i> me	J	j <i>in</i> jar
N	n <i>in</i> no	H	(glottal stop)
P	p <i>in</i> sport	R	(alveolar trill)
S	s <i>in</i> say	Z	(retroflex approximant)
T	t <i>in</i> tea	NG	ng <i>in</i> thing
V	v <i>in</i> vane		



Map 1 Taiwan



Map 2 Lanyu



Map 3 Villages in Lanyu

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Labour, Life, Language

This thesis discusses the concepts of labour, life, and language among the Yami of Lanyu, Taiwan. These themes are not arbitrarily or expediently chosen. They are general positively present aspects of humanity at the core of anthropologists' field experiences: we seek to recognise the locals by means of living, talking and working with them. We recognize their style of living, working and talking prior to anything else. Hence, labour and language become interrelated in the presence of living persons. In the relationship between the locals and anthropologists, labour, life and language represent both their ontological mode of existence and our epistemological basis for knowing it.

In the local context, it is also labour, life and language that comprise the concept of personhood among the Yami: *tao*, i.e. the 'person' in Yami language, *is someone created labouring*, and his labour in turn creates affluence, authority, and truth. In this thesis, I explore this culturally particular image of a real or true person, who through living, working, acting and knowing gains a kind of oneness, deploying the concept of *Homo laboris* or 'Man the Worker'. This thesis aims to show how labour, wealth, power, and knowledge are interrelated in Yami culture, and behind these relations, what material, social and epistemological conditions exist and render the relatedness possible. By analysing the contemporary economic predicament among the Yami, I attempt to highlight the effect of an episteme (Foucault 1970): when the Yami recognise and pursue wealth in the context of market economy they seem to be blind to the enormous invisible wealth in the market, because their category of wealth is constructed through numerous face-to-face relationships whose meaning resides in what a particular person is able to 'see'.

Wealth is being re-categorised among the Yami, due to both their continuous trial and error in business management and the invincible power of abstract money. Accordingly, the straightforward relations between wealth, power, knowledge and labour are dissolving. The image of a real person is also changing now. In short, what money and commodities introduce to the Yami is not merely their use- or exchange-value but a set of new relations and a new way to see and recognise the world.

## A glimpse of Lanyu

Whether disembarking at Kaiyuan Harbour or stepping out of the terminal of Lanyu Airport, visitors to Lanyu share the same first impression of this small tropical island: the burning sun hangs in the sky, the sapphire-like Pacific Ocean encircles the land, and a mingled odour of grass, salt and moisture pervades the air. Walking along the sole road around the coastline, blackish green jungles, shrubberies and trailing plants cover most of the landscape; scattered pieces of taro farmland decorate fields and hills. Pastured goats recklessly shuttle between bushes and rocks and occasionally produce car accidents. While getting closer to a village, groups of buildings in the view slowly replace the dull greenness. A few buildings are newly constructed modern concrete houses of miscellaneous designs, but more are roughly built, half-finished, or eroded ahead of time. Pigs and chickens roam in lanes and paths and rummage in tussocks. In front of houses, dried fish hung on bamboo racks swing in the wind, some villagers quietly sit in their own gazebos and occasionally give an uninterested glance at approaching tourists and their noisy motorcycles. After a short walk, the village once again vanishes from sight. Things on the island rarely remind one of the convenience and comfort of urban life, specifically, they do not serve its tourist visitors well in this respect. In contrast, it is the natural scenery and a sense of primitiveness that make Lanyu one of the most famous resorts in Taiwan. Every summer, the charm of Lanyu never fails to attract thousands of tourists<sup>1</sup> and, unsurprisingly, a very significant cash flow to the island.

Most tourists are innocent of the out-of-season aspect of the island. The five months when the northeasterly winter monsoon prevails, are filled with gloomy and rainy days. Gales and billows then often block planes and ships out of Lanyu, and locals are used to cancelling travel plans, grabbing essentials from the Co-op, and reading belated newspapers of the past week. Not only have tourists by then evacuated the island, quite a few villagers depart to Taiwan for work opportunities and in search of money. Otherwise, their time can only be consumed by staying at home, watching TV, chatting and complaining about the boredom of wintertime. 'Lanyu is a paradise in summer, a prison in winter,' so remarked a local young man, because winter deprived him of his pleasures: swimming, visiting Taiwan, and playing with female tourists. In the alternation of monsoon weather, Lanyu, the homeland of the Yami, also sways between a paradise and a prison.

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<sup>1</sup> In year 2010, Lanyu was visited by 63,633 person-times in total. The high season of Lanyu tourism is from April to October, and there were over 5,000 visitors per month. In the low season from November to March, the number of visitors drastically declined to around 2,000 per month. See *Visitors to the Principal Scenic Spots in Taiwan by Month, 2010* (Tourism Bureau, M.O.T.C., Republic of China <http://admin.taiwan.net.tw/statistics/year.aspx?no=134>)

To a considerable extent, geographical conditions of Lanyu have determined the fate of this small island and its dwellers. Lanyu is located on the margins of the West Pacific between Taiwan and Philippines (Map 1). In this tropical region, monsoons mark off summer, winter and the Yami's seasonal production activities, while the Kuroshio Current and schools of migratory fish mark out springtime and another significant aspect of Yami culture. Lanyu is close to the northern border of the Philippines, but it is closer to the eastern coast of Taiwan. For this reason, even though the Yami are said to have a close consanguineous and linguistic relationship to the aborigines of the Philippines, Lanyu has been included in the realm of Taiwan since the dawn of its written history. Today, the absolute majority of the Yami speak Mandarin, use Taiwanese commodities and New Taiwan Dollars, and receive education and subsidies from the Taiwanese government<sup>2</sup>. Although villagers are used to stressing on their autonomy and are sometimes reluctant to admit their subordinate status, by and large, Lanyu and Taiwan are now inseparably related.

In its history of colonisation, Lanyu has always been marginalised; its land area, natural resources, soil condition and strategic position always rapidly disappointed its colonists. For this reason, the Yami have suffered the lowest degree of political suppression, economic exploitation, and acculturation among Taiwanese indigenous peoples. To date, local traditional activities such as flying fish fishing, taro planting, and plank boat building, remain firmly situated at their original supreme positions as before. At the same time, however, marginalisation can produce something other than a paradise. Just a few decades ago Lanyu was still being used by the colonists as a political and economical dump, somewhere that provided placement for incompetent personnel, exiled felons, political prisoners, and most importantly, nuclear waste. A series of events degraded the relationship between the Yami and their colonists, though both parties had left quite a few unfavourable impressions of each other from the beginning. Even after indigenous agitation in Taiwan including violent protests in the 1990s, the nuclear waste storage compound remains on the island, like the colonists' last unpaid debt. The nuclear waste is playing the role of a political bargaining chip: at least in the mainstream discourse, both the government and the locals agree with its removal in the coming future<sup>3</sup>.

However, the pragmatic status of the storage compound is more ambiguous than that. The Taiwan Power Company (a.k.a. 'Tai-power'), a state-owned enterprise and the administrator of the compound, provides residents of Lanyu various subsidies and so-called 'Feedback Fund' – 220 million NT dollars per three years – for reducing the

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<sup>2</sup> Mandarin (Chinese) is the official language of Taiwan. New Taiwan Dollar is the legal tender of Taiwan; in 2010, 1 Pound Sterling is approximately equal to 50 NT dollars.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapters 2 and 5 for more details regarding the nuclear waste storage compound and its impact on Yami society..

locals' discontent before locating a new site for the nuclear waste. Tai-power's good neighbour policy is unexpectedly effective, and the easy money has successfully shaken some people's resolve of expelling the storage compound out of Lanyu; the storage compound has become a viper laying golden eggs, poisonous, but undoubtedly beneficial. Meanwhile, many local cultural habits have changed due to the free resources that they enjoy: electricity, transportation, education, and recreation subsidies. Hence, there are sufficient reasons to worry about Yami people's future life without the storage compound and Tai-power's money. Everyone in Lanyu knows that the tremendous transformation that may occur in the near future, but no one can ascertain what form it will take.

In sum, marginalisation is affecting Yami society on two different time scales: on the one hand, the cash flow of tourism circulates along with the periodic alteration of monsoons, and on the other, the 'cash flood' of colonialism acts as a sudden counterflow against the long-term monetary deprivation of Lanyu. At this moment in history, two kinds of money converge and become the main social dynamics in Yami society. With regard to money, indeed, the Yami show no less interest than Taiwanese: they diligently grab money in Lanyu, pursue money to Taiwan, and are always fighting for their fair shares against others, from their neighbours to the state. While money is flagrantly driving the Yami, their response to it is somehow peculiar; their methods of making and using money seems to be keeping them away from an affluent life both in a traditional sense and in a modern one. With the Yami's ambition, confusion and frustration concerning money, this thesis begins.

## **The Birds' Eye View and the Worms' Eye View**

### **Cultural structure and cultural premise**

Rather than natural barrenness or political exploitation, the Yami's current economic predicament is basically a cultural thing. They define wealth, its legitimate origin and proper usage in their own way, and their predicament may be analysable if we can read their economic mind. Nevertheless, it is far from feasible to demarcate a 'Yami economy', since their concept of wealth and their attitude toward work are an inseparable segment of their holistic understanding of personhood; money making is merely a means of becoming a real person. While this thesis is primarily motivated by economic phenomena in contemporary Lanyu, its field of vision outwardly extends to the locals' concept of knowledge, power and personhood. In Yami culture, wealth, power, and knowledge are mutually referential, and it is the three that make up a real person, namely *Homo laboris*.

Through an analysis of Yami cultural structure, this thesis investigates how

things and persons are related and unrelated within the frame of Yami economic understanding. In this thesis, ‘cultural structure’ refers to the total of numerous interrelated cultural premises, as Bateson’s definitions (1958) explicate:

[A cultural structure is] *the coherent “logical” scheme which may be constructed by the scientist, fitting together the various premises of the culture.*’ (p.25, italics in the original)

[A cultural premise is] *a generalised statement of a particular assumption or implication recognisable in a number of details of cultural behaviour.* (p.24, italics in the original)

Cultural premises describe particular relations induced from cultural phenomena, e.g. representation, proportion, equation, etc. The cultural premises mentioned in the following chapters express the ideal ways by which things are interrelated in Yami culture. For example, a Yami cultural premise ‘more pains, more gains’ refers to the proportional relation between labour and wealth: the harder people work, the richer they become. This statement is semantically different from ‘no pains, no gains’, a more familiar motto in capitalist societies, because the latter logically includes the possibility of ‘many pains, no gains’, i.e. people work hard but obtain nothing in the end. This categorical difference indicates the culturally particular relations between labour and wealth in different societies.

The consistency amongst various premises of a culture contributes to the integration of cultural structure; thus the cultural structure can ideally ‘fit together’ all the cultural premises. A potential problem in this conceptual scheme is the origin of the consistency, while Bateson himself unconfidently touched this issue, as he admitted:

I do mean, however, that the elements of structure are linked together by steps. But it is probable that cultures may vary in the species of steps which link their premises together, and that the word ‘logic’ must therefore be interpreted differently in every culture. (ibid:25)

Bateson was doomed to be confused by his own ideas when he analogised a cultural premise as a logical premise. In syllogism, it is steps of deductive reasoning that relate premises to a conclusion, i.e. one statement can be inferred from another, so the reasoning *per se* promises the innate consistency in a valid argument. Bateson also focused on the inference from one cultural premise to another – the relation between statements – but ignored a fundamental relation, that is, all cultural premises are inductive and, more precisely, induced by the researcher. In other words, the consistency of a cultural structure forms in the following relationship: the integrity



among observed phenomena, and the integration in the observer's mind. A cultural structure is the synthesis of the recognised order and the order of recognising.

The Yami cultural structure in this thesis is constructed by 'gluing' and 'merging' the cultural premises. Firstly, two cultural premises can be consistent if they describe causally related phenomena, and continuous observation helps to glue the two independently induced statements together. For example, 'more pains, more gains' is consistent with another Yami cultural premise 'the more generous, the more glorious', i.e. the more people share, the greater they become. This is because empirically, a diligent person is often observably a respectable person in the community. If people work harder, they can produce more, have more for sharing, and through the local mechanisms of redistribution, they can render others more indebted. Hence, wealth relates labour and power and produces a particular proportional relation between the two in Yami cultural structure.

Secondly, two cultural premises can be consistent if they describe the content of the same cultural category, which forms on the basis of the researcher's integration – he merges two or more cultural premises into one which, as he believes, describes a general relation in the culture. For example, the Yami cultural premise 'sloth is death' describes a moral and causal relation: laziness both signifies and causes death. Another cultural premise 'seniority is authority' describes the proportional relation between age and power, i.e. the more senior, the more potent. These two statements describe causally unrelated phenomena, but they can be consistent if they, presumably, refer to the same thing which is not literally mentioned, for example:

- (a) Death is the negation of life; sloth is the negation of labour.
- (b) Seniority is the extension of life; authority is the extension of labour.

Thus 'sloth is death' and 'seniority is authority' may imply a general relation in Yami cultural structure, i.e. that between life and labour, or more precisely, 'all men are created labouring'. Unlike a major premise in syllogism, this general cultural premise is by no means self-evident, and its validity is fully based on its consistency with all other induced cultural premises and observed cultural phenomena.

In sum, cultural structure is a means of representation. In this thesis, the analysis of cultural structure helps to point out the cruxes in local cultural conflicts, e.g. the changing relation between labour and wealth when people change their motto from 'more pains, more gains' to 'no pains, no gains'. Certainly, a cultural conflict never simply occurs between two cultural premises, between 'what we believe' and 'what they believe', but always within the relation described by the two statements.

## Episteme and configuration

As mentioned above, the motto ‘no pains, no gains’ obviates a possible consequence ‘many pains, no gains’, which is significantly untrue in Yami thinking. Hence, the conditions which may make people fail to obtain as much wealth as their labour produces become the object of further analysis for the anthropologist. A lot of factors might result in change in this domain. In terms of local relations of production, either more efficient means of production or more risky production activities may change the proportion between labour input and value. In terms of local social relationships, moreover, either another person or the collectivity of persons may possess one’s property as legally as the institution permits. These material and social conditions are also included in following discussions. In this thesis, I would like to put particular stress on the effect of epistemological conditions for a simple reason: labour and wealth, or this thing and that thing in a cultural structure, are never in a bipartite relationship. Their relationship is *at least* a tripartite one, i.e. the relationship between the person and these two things. Hence, how people recognise the things, e.g. how labour is defined, how wealth is evaluated, or how the two are categorised, determines how the things become related, or unrelated. The case of Yami ethnography exemplifies how epistemological conditions generate the affluence in ‘more pains, more gains’ and the loss in ‘many pains, no gains’.

On this issue, Foucault’s concept of episteme is illuminative. In his *The Order of Things* (1970)<sup>4</sup>, episteme denotes the epistemological unconscious which serves as the genetic condition of knowledge; it implicates

...on what basis knowledge and theory became possible; within what space of order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what historical a priori, and in the element of what positivity, ideas could appear, sciences be established, experience be reflected in philosophies, rationalities be formed, only, perhaps, to dissolve and vanish soon afterwards. (pp. xx-xxi)<sup>5</sup>

The analysis of episteme concerns the concept of configuration (ibid: xxi). In a specific configuration, relations are disposed along a set of predetermined directions, like cleavages of a crystal. Episteme defines how things are ‘rationally’ interrelated and become segments of knowledge, and accordingly, relations excluded by a specific configuration become ‘irrational’ ways to produce knowledge, while things absent

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<sup>4</sup> The title of this thesis – ‘*Labour, Life, Language*’, is also the title of Chapter 9 in *The Order of Things*.

<sup>5</sup> In other place, Foucault defined episteme as ‘the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within...a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false’. (Foucault 1980:197) That is, episteme is prior to any forms of value judgements; it predetermines if a statement is possible/eligible to be judged.

from relations included in a specific configuration cannot be the content of knowledge. Sun and moon, for example, are ignorable things in modern economics, because their symbolic relation with gold and silver is excluded from the knowledge.

A necessary defence of Foucault's theory of episteme, which is founded upon his comparisons among different theories of different disciplines in different ages in *The Order of Things*, is against a worry about the Frazerian situation of existing 'out of context' (cf. Strathern 1987). Did Foucault construct his theory by comparing unrelated things and piecing up their fragmentary similarities? Actually, it seems to me that the worry represents the effect of episteme, i.e. things should/should not be related in such ways. From a linear historical perspective, it is true that economics, biology and philology, i.e. the disciplines in Foucault's analyses, have unrelated research objects and development histories. From an organic social perspective, however, the disciplines are products of groups of people, especially intellectuals, who respectively lived under certain similar material and social conditions and shared similar concerns. That is, the disciplines reflect people's collective epistemological preferences and ignorance – what they care about, what they do not care about, and how they integrate the noteworthy parts in their daily life. This is what the analysis of episteme unveils through those related and unrelated things.

Economics, biology, and philology can be unrelated, because money, living things, and words are, in most cases, phenomenally unrelated. However, the three disciplines can be interrelated, because labour, life and language are intrinsically related to 'man', who is a 'living, speaking, labouring being' (Foucault 1970: 352). Between the unrelatedness and relatedness, the accent in the tripartite relationship between the person and two things is decisive: the unrelatedness is recognised if the accent falls on the relationship between things, while the relatedness is recognised if the accent falls on that between persons and things.

## **Persons and things**

In fact, anthropologists are not foreign to the shift of recognition along with the presence/absence of persons, which is often included in methodological discussions on a 'modernist fallacy': before the subject-observer's presence, persons and things under observation are objectified, 'construed as having value, that is, are objects of people's subjective regard or of their creation' (Strathern 1990:176). Anthropological interpretations, accordingly, are primarily made by means of representation – one object represents another, things represent persons, systems or meanings, etc. The subject's regard separates his objects and produces relatedness between them (ibid: 177; Rabinow 1986), while the subject *per se* is concealed behind his statements. In

this regard, it can be said that there is a similar accent on the relationship between things (including objectified persons) which conceals the tripartite relationship and eliminates the relatedness between persons and what they see; subjectivity is intentionally excluded from anthropological knowledge.

On this point, however, what matters is the existence of the tripartite relationship rather than a new concept replacing old ones (such as ‘representation’) but concealing the relationship as usual. Hence, when Henare et al. (2007) promote an approach of ‘native ontology’, arguing that ontological entities in different societies are as real as the locals claim<sup>6</sup>, they actually repeat the modernist fallacy in a different way. They seem to forget that the locals’ ontological statements *are* also knowledge, when they advocate ‘shifting focus from questions of knowledge and epistemology toward those of ontology’ (ibid: 8). An ontological statement (e.g. ‘ice is water’) is made by people, and it is interpretable as an epistemological statement which describes how people observe (e.g. ‘ice may become water’) or categorise (e.g. ‘ice and water are the same substance’) ontological entities. In other words, an ontological statement may conceal its subject, even if explicitly, two phenomenally different things never self-evidently become identical. Henare et al.’s native ontology compresses ‘the representation’ into ‘the equation’ between things, but the relationship between persons and what they see remains ignored.

A main argument in this thesis is the essential relationship between persons and their knowledge: it is people who prefer one thing and ignore another, evaluate things, create categories, and produce episteme. The P-T-T’ tripartite relationship (Figure 1.1) always exists in all types of knowledge, including studies of various systems of things. Nevertheless, the accent in the tripartite relationship may influence the allocation of relatedness and unrelatedness and change a configuration. In the modernist fallacy, the epistemological preference for the relationship between things (T-T’), either equation, representation, or irrelevance, is accompanied by the ignorance of the relationship between persons and things (P-T). Yami ethnography exemplifies the antithesis: the Yami care about the relationship between persons (P-P’), in which things are present (P-T-P’), and thus the relationship between things is often ignorable.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Cuban diviners’ magical powder is, rather than ‘means’, power itself (Holbraad 2007).

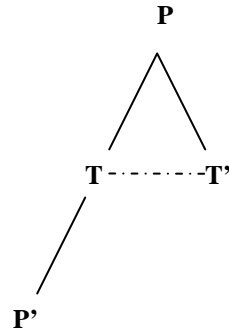


Figure 1.1 The tripartite relationship among persons and things

The accent on the P-P' or P-T-P' relationship can be interpreted as a focus on people and their labour in some primitive modes of production, in which the primary means of production is manpower rather than tools (e.g. Bloch 1975). In the case of Yami culture, however, this interpretation does not really get to the heart of the matter. In fact, while the Yami do attach much importance to the category *tao* (human beings), there is always an implicit proviso: they only care about those who are present before their eyes. Hence, those who are out of their sight, e.g. 'potential customers', 'market demand', etc., are often out of their mind, e.g. their calculation of wealth. If the relationship between persons is more often highlighted in Yami society, it is because persons are more visible – attract more gazes – than things.

When vision serves as a primary means of producing relatedness, invisible things are excluded from knowledge; if the P-T-T' tripartite relationship is constructed only by gazes (Fig 1.2), then the relationship between visible and invisible things (T-t) also dissolves. In this thesis, I name this vision-based configuration which consists of face-to-face relationships as the *Worms' Eye View*.

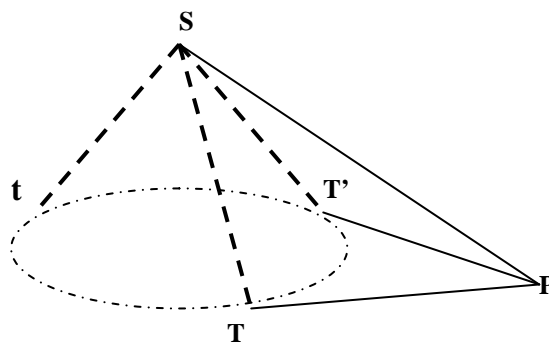


Fig 1.2 The multipartite relationship among persons, things, and the Society

In the process of knowledge construction, a notable feature of the Worms' Eye View is a concern with *faits accomplis*: people look at facts, view possibilities and general tendencies as impurities in knowledge, and eliminate uncertainty by means of

acting and seeing the result. For example, the Yami are not so zealous to innovate and would rather simply imitate or repeat what others have done, but at the same time, they are believers in ‘trial and error’ who learn from their mistakes, over and over again. Under the ostensible inconsistency between the ‘conservatism’ and ‘experimentalism’ is the same epistemological preference, that is, people believe what they see and create their beliefs by seeing.

In the context of contemporary economy, this preference is restated as follows: people pursue factual profits and prove profitability by producing facts. Unfortunately, this restatement is induced from apparently ‘irrational’ business activities among the Yami, in which sluggish sales, bad debts, pricing, advertising, market saturation, demand trends, etc. are all ignored to a considerable extent. This generates a twofold loss, i.e. ‘many pains, no gains’, while both invisible wealth and invisible means of wealth production are excluded from the Yami’s category of wealth. Here, the accent rather falls on the relationship between persons and what they see (P-T) rather than that between visible and invisible things (T-t).

In the modern market economy, however, profitability, or the possibility of maximising profit, exists in the relationship between things. On the basis of the concept of *equivalence*, things in a commodity system become conceptually interrelated (T-T’-t), whether they are visually interrelated or not. Profitability is produced by disturbing the equivalence, as the M-C-M’ circuit of capital (money accrues more money in commodity exchange) implies<sup>7</sup>. But more importantly, equivalence is never *ex nihilo* but determined by something outside the T-T’-t relationship, i.e. the social contract, or the relationship between persons and the Society-in-the-abstract (P-S). It is the Society-in-the-abstract that relates all visible and invisible things and thus expands the category of wealth and the scope of knowledge.

The introduction of the social contract creates a new configuration: a multipartite relationship (P-S-T-t) combining the P-T-T’ and the S-T-t tripartite relationships. This new configuration, as the counterpart of the Worms’ Eye View, is named as the *Birds’ Eye View* in this thesis. Through the Society-in-the-abstract in a commanding position, people transcend the limitation of face-to-face relationships and become related to not only things but also persons absent from sight. In order to see those invisible things, however, the accent in this configuration always falls on the relationship between things (T-t) instead of that between persons and things (P-T).

With the case of Yami ethnography, what I attempt to convey is such a notion: ‘poverty’ presumably originates not only from the phenomenon described as ‘limited resources, unlimited wants’ but also from this statement *per se*. Poverty can be a result

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<sup>7</sup> Chapter 6 will give more thorough discussions on the features of market economy.

of people's knowledge, while affluence can be realised through either re-categorising their concept of wealth or dissociating invisible wealth – what they have not yet gained – from the wealth in their hands.

## **The problem of inalienability**

This thesis largely consists of discussions concerning the Yami's concepts of life, labour, and wealth and how they become interrelated, while the same issue is not foreign to Western academia. In its academic history, this issue primarily concerns the concept of *inalienability* – i.e. that man, his labour and his wealth are inalienable. Inalienability often serves as the basis of morality while the concepts of ownership, exchange, and inheritance are academically reconstructed. Mosko (2000) argues that inalienability in Western academic discourse is based on a long-standing Western presupposition concerning persons, as he wrote:

'Persons' are viewed as 'unitary, bounded individuals rather than divisible or partible beings'. Groups of persons are similarly viewed as individual or bounded units of agency. There is a corresponding tendency to view 'possession' or 'ownership' as an inherent relation between an individual or group unit and the thing owned or possessed rather than as an aspect of interpersonal relations. (p.379)

According to Mosko's explication, the concept of inalienability seems to serve as an epistemological means of producing relatedness among 'unitary, bounded' persons and other things, particularly in the modernist fallacy. However, he ignores an evident fact, that is, inalienability is not applicable to *any two* phenomenally alienated things but always attached to an existing tripartite relationship, which includes explicit causality between two objects (i.e. A produces B) and implicit evaluation made by the subject (i.e. B carries value). In this regard, the concept of inalienability rather serves as a sociological means of reserving value, while reserving value is justified by means of retracing causality.

For this reason, ownership, exchange and inheritance are rather the same issue. When a person acquires certain kind of value, it always has a historical origin: one may acquire it as the end of their own actions (e.g. producing, collecting, etc.) or from another person (e.g. swapping, sharing, snatching, etc.). In a statement 'A produces B and transfers it to C', causality exists in both the relationship between A (the producer) and B (the product) and that between A (the giver) and C (the receiver). In this case, the key point is how to make these two parallel causal relations consistent, especially when they imply two contrary tendencies: keeping and giving.

## Ownership, exchange and inheritance

In John Locke's labour theory of property, things become people's property because they are mixed up with their labour. As a result, human labour can determine ownership:

'Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a "property" in his own "person". This nobody has any right to but himself. The "labour" of his body and the "work" of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property'.  
(2004[1690]:17)

Locke's inference began with the concept of self-ownership, i.e. a person owns his life, his body and his labour. Because it is human labour that transforms natural materials into products, a producer reasonably owns his products, which are regarded as the extension of himself. Self-ownership further derives the concept of pre-emption or original appropriation, i.e. a product belongs to the first producer who completes its transformation. Hence, through human labour, phenomenally alienated persons and things become conceptually inalienable producers and products. Sociologically, *de facto* exclusive causality (i.e. producers, rather than others, produce their products) becomes *de jure* exclusive dominance (i.e. producers, rather than others, dominate their products).

Strathern (1999) also points out that the modern concept of intellectual property rights is still based on the inalienability created by labour: no matter how many times intellectual property duplicates, its ownership and derivative profits always belongs to its author, the intellectual labourer. This claim obviously contradicts the fact that intellectual property is always out of its author's control after being duplicated and circulated. At the same time, Strathern also notices that inalienability is not only to establish static relations between alienated persons and things but to limit an tendency toward dispersion; '[o]wnership gathers things momentarily to a point by locating them in the owner, halting endless dissemination, effecting an identity' (p.177). In particular, it is noteworthy that inalienability often takes paternity as its metaphor: an author produces his work, as a father reproduces his child (p.137).

The metaphor of kinship highlights the problem in the latent labour theory of property. If parental rights limit the dispersion of kin members and reserve value (i.e. manpower), incest taboo obviously encourages the same trend – in Levi-Strauss's words (1969), for the sake of reproduction, kin groups cannot reserve, but must



instead exchange, their women with others. In short, ‘the extension of self’ fails to explain alienability, especially when it is a necessity. In societies where social division of labour is institutional, producers must give their products to others so as to take others’ products, which makes the alienation of things become a legal right protected by laws. However, inalienability produces contradiction between ownership and exchange: if a product is a part of its producer, then their alienation becomes the segmentation of a person (cf. Mosko 2000). Marx regarded alienation as an unnatural process under capitalist relations of production. As he pointed out:

All these consequences are implied in the statement that the worker is related to the *product of labour* as to an *alien* object. For on this premise it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself – his inner world – becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater this activity, the more the worker lacks objects. Whatever the product of his labour is, he is not. Therefore, the greater this product, the less is he himself. The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien. (Marx and Engels 1988 [1927]:72, italics in the original)

Marx described alienation as self-negation in a dialectic relation: man splits, and the split part becomes his enemy. What is immoral is not only the action of splitting but also the antagonism between the worker and his products. Following the same line of thinking, Mauss defended exchange in his *The Gift* (1970 [1922]): exchange is inevitable in social life, but the society is by no means founded upon immorality, since exchange might occur without alienation. In his theory, when a gift is sent, it is the spirit of the gift, e.g. the *hau* among the Maori, which demands its return to the original giver, so that people are motivated to return a counter-gift. This religious form of inalienability results in that ‘to give something is to give a part of oneself’ (p.10). Essentially, therefore, there is no alienation between givers and their gifts; in Weiner’s words (1985), people are ‘keeping while giving’. As Gregory (1982: 46) points out, a counter-gift never cancels a gift-debt and its giver remains indebted, because a gift and a counter-gift establish two different relationships between two persons, who are mutually indebted. To end a relationship established by a gift, the only way is to return the same one rather than a different one. Giving and returning

gifts continuously declares the inalienability among people – I own you as well as you own me – and thus constitutes a system of *total prestation* (Mauss 1970), in which people are bound to own one another.

Sahlins (1975) attempts to deal with what Mauss failed to fully explain, i.e. ‘the intervention of a third person’ (p.152), or why, when a person receives a gift and transfers it to a third person, the person has to transfer the third person’s counter-gift, rather than other gifts, to the original giver. Sahlins’s answer is: a counter-gift is not motivated by the spirit of the gift, who demands the return of itself, but by the vitality of the gift, which demands the return of its material yield (pp.167-168). Hence, the problem of the gift acquires a quasi-kinship form: A produces B and B produces C, so A produces C and C belongs to A. Sahlins’s theory – I call it ‘*transitive law*’ – explains what Strathern (1999) observes in intellectual property rights (and even in kinship) and its logic. It is causality rather than identity which connects up the chain of giving and returning. More importantly, the chain, and the ownership/dominance which it contains, also endlessly stretches along with the retracing of causality.

The transitive law can also be exemplified by Melanesian Kula exchange. The phenomenal equivalent exchange of *veigun-mwal* (shell necklaces and armshells) is essentially the conceptual identical exchange of *kitoum* (valuables). *Kitoum* represents ‘congealed labour’ (Damon 1980: 285), and when a *kitoum* (e.g. in the form of *mwal*) is put into Kula exchange by its producer, it opens a *keda* (route); after years, another *kitoum* (e.g. in the form of *veigun*) will return to that producer along the same *keda* (Campbell 1983). With the case of Kula, Damon (1980) attempts to prove that instead of reciprocity (Levi-Strauss 1969), it is ownership that activates exchange and further maintains the balance in a system of generalised exchange. Regrettably, even if Kula exchange is involved with third parties, it is formally similar to a linear arrangement of multiple relationships of restricted exchange. If Kula exchange is like a ring, then the system of generalised exchange described by Levi-Strauss is like a web, in which relationships between givers and receivers can be always asymmetrical, and from whom a counter-gift is returned is often unpredictable. For Levi-Strauss, the most enigmatic part might be the fact that the system *per se* is always circular, and a thing given must be returned, even without explicit causality for retracing. Levi-Strauss’s investigation illuminates a general social phenomenon which the causality-based concept of inalienability cannot explain.

By the same token, the transitive law also rationalises the diachronic transfer of things, i.e. inheritance. Through the analogy between production and reproduction, a person’s descendents (i.e. whom the person reproduces) and property (i.e. what the person produces) are homologous, and accordingly, people can legitimately possess those which are not produced by themselves. The persons and the things are owned by

and never alienated from their producers/reproducers despite their mortality. This is what Weiner asserts, inalienable things help people to connect to their history:

The primary value of inalienability, however, is expressed through the power these objects have to define who one is in an historical sense. The object acts as a vehicle for bringing past time into the present, so that the histories of ancestors, titles, or mythological events become an intimate part of a person's present identity. To lose this claim to the past is to lose part of who one is in the present. (1985:210)

Weiner interprets inalienability as 'replacement'. When a giver transfers their property to a receiver, it means that the receiver replaces the giver's social position, where the ownership of the property is attached. That is, inalienability exists between a social position and a thing. When Weiner describes exchange with the same concept, a counter-gift becomes a replacement for a gift, and the spirit of the gift, e.g. the *hau* of *taonga* (Maori valuables), demands its replacement instead of its return (ibid: 223). Weiner's interpretation is ingenious, but it conceals the relationship between persons under the relationship between things, like an anthropological version of 'commodity fetishism' (Marx 1977:165).

Despite the modernist fallacy within, Weiner's investigation inspires Godelier's brilliant exchange theory (1999). Godelier argues that exchange and inheritance are 'the twin foundations of society', and inheritance is prior to exchange (p.36), because inalienable things of historical significance determine exchange. Inalienability never exists among phenomenally exchangeable things, neither gifts *per se* nor their yield, but always among sacred/sacred non-exchangeable things, which serve as the measure of value at the immobilised centre of an exchange system. So he criticises Mauss and Levi-Strauss:

By excluding sacred objects from his field of analysis, Mauss may have unintentionally created the illusion that exchange was the be-all and end-all of social life, thereby preparing the way for Levi-Strauss, who further simplified matters in his well-known formula which reduces society to the three-fold exchange of women, wealth and words. (p.69)

Mauss, Levi-Strauss and Godelier have respective opinions of the dynamics of exchange: for Mauss, it is the category (i.e. the gift); for Levi-Strauss, it is the system (i.e. reciprocity); for Godelier, it is due to the centre of the system, which is absent in Levi-Strauss's structuralism. Hence, it seems possible to differentiate two forms of inalienability. One is causality-based and linearly produces a series of inferences: man, his labour, his property, his gifts, and his inheritance are all inalienable. However, this

causality-based form fails to explain Levi-Strauss's generalised exchange in which causality is largely untraceable. Another form of inalienability is symbolism-based, which illuminates an alternative way to rethink the problem of generalised exchange: exchangeable things, whether gifts or commodities, are alienable, but the balance in an exchange system is promised by non-exchangeable things and what they symbolise.

### **Gifts, commodities, and morality**

The causality-based inalienability produces a particular moral discourse: it constructs the history and consolidates the society, enhances the identity inside a group and the cooperation among groups. If inalienability is natural, then private property, collective identity, and social solidarity are all natural. The emphasis on inalienability often produces a dialectic relation between gifts and commodities, asserting the former's morality while highlighting the latter's lack of morality, if not its immorality. Gregory (1982) uses a series of dichotomies to enhance the impression of gifts vs. commodities, for example, gifts are inalienable objects transacted by insiders in clan-based society, while commodities are alienable objects transacted by strangers in class-based society. More importantly, 'gift-exchange *establishes* a relation between the transactors, while commodity-exchange *establishes* a relation between the objects transacted.' (p.42; my italics) In Gregory's eyes, therefore, it is gifts that represent, produce and consolidate social relationships, as if commodity exchange denies the fact that people need each other.

The gift/commodity dichotomy is certainly dubious. It is true that as Appadurai (1986:13) argues, there is no absolute distinction between commodities and 'other sorts of things', because 'all things can be conceptualised as "commodity potential"'. All exchangeable things may become commodities, so in reality, what separates gifts from commodities must be the social context of things. For example, Appadurai suggests that the gift/commodity opposition represents the antagonism between merchants and political elites: merchants bring foreign goods, while political elites guard local sumptuary-political structures; 'the notion that trade violates the spirit of the gift may in complex societies be only a vaguely related by-product of this more fundamental antagonism.' (p.33) In other words, 'gifts vs. commodities' might be merely a false proposition, in which the relationship between things again conceals the relationship between persons. It is arguable if the poison in commodities comes from either their threat to the foundation of society or that to class interests.

Similarly, if commodities can be non-poisonous, gifts can be poisonous. Laidlaw (2000) opposes Gregory who views gifts as the logical opposite of commodities and

necessarily reciprocal and socially binding. Laidlaw argues that free gifts may be harmful to their receivers and weaken social relationships. For example, Indian gifts *dan* might divert misfortune from their givers to receivers. Priests who receive *dan* ostensibly benefit from the gift but essentially suffer from the poison in the gift, so they have to accept *dan* while avoiding receiving too much. But the poison in the gift does not come from the contravention of reciprocity but from non-reciprocity; ‘receiving *dan* and incurring obligations is only an unambiguously bad thing for those who aim at non-reciprocity’ (p.630), i.e. priests as renouncers of the world. Gifts can be supports for some people but fetters for others.

Overall, the intrinsic morality of inalienability is questionable. When inalienability renders people inalienable from their property, history and society, it may also become an excuse for limiting philanthropy, innovation and freedom. A key factor is that causality, on which inalienability is based, is always socially reconstructed as dominance, and according to the transitive law, the dominance over things eventually becomes that over persons. The last point to be emphasised here is that the concept of inalienability is at least a tripartite relationship, in which the accent rather falls on the relationship between two so-called ‘inalienable’ objects. Other relationships, such as how people define and assess value, why people identify value with themselves, etc., are all concealed behind the convincing necessity of causality.

## **The process of fieldwork**

Most of the ideas in this thesis took shape during my fieldwork in Lanyu from July 2007 to September 2008<sup>8</sup>. In the period of investigation, I lived among the Yami successively in two local villages, staying in Yeyin for over ten months and in Yeyou for the remainder. I lived in Yeyin together with my friend Tarop for four months and helped him with whatever he did – managing his grocery, renovating his new store, and occasionally helping his parents with farming. At other times, I went to visit other friends in Yeyin and other villages, chat to see if they needed any help. Unwittingly, I took the correct trail to enter into local communities and be recognised as a friend, especially when the locals felt bored with rather unwelcome Taiwanese researchers who, in their words, come to steal their knowledge but seldom give feedback. Besides their historical xenophobia, they have more cultural reasons to disdain researchers, who are always asking pointless questions and spying on others’ privacy, who spend more time talking rather than working, and who finally leave after obtaining what they need. Because the Yami regard knowledge as private property which can be

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<sup>8</sup> The exact dates of my fieldwork are as follows: 7 Jul 2007 – 28 Jul; 12 Aug – 8 Dec; 3 Jan 2008 – 1 Feb; 13 Mar – 18 May; 5 Jun – 4 Jul; 31 Jul – 18 Sep; 288 days in total.

legitimately obtained only by way of either practicing (instead of asking) or trading with valuables (instead of verbal thanks), conducting interviews without a proper pay meant theft. The locals were more willing to share what they know with me because I worked with them, and my data were mostly obtained while helping the locals with pasturing, painting, serving customers, repairing computers, etc. To conduct a structured interview requires money – 1,000 NT dollars per day as both a price for the interviewee's knowledge and a compensation for his waste of time. Despite this being a more efficient way to obtain information, I seldom conducted a structured interview so as to protect my identity as a friend.

I stepped on the land of Lanyu for the very first time in May 2002. My local friend Blackie<sup>9</sup>, a cheerful man in his forties and a former colleague of mine in the Army, invited me to visit his parents and stay with them for some weeks. Blackie's parents Nimor and Yacin lived in Yeyin, and since then, Yeyin has become the origin of my local relationships. The old couple was in their seventies, living in a *vahay*<sup>10</sup> (Plate 1.1), speaking non-fluent but understandable Mandarin. Our conversations were a mixture of Mandarin, Japanese and body language. In those days, the old couple spent all their daytime taking care of their taro and sweet potato farmland, and in the evening, they cooked steamed sweet potatoes and fish soup and shared with me; in return I bought them Paolyta<sup>11</sup> from the only grocery in the village. I slept in their *tagakal* (gazebo), which is also the space for dining and social intercourse. The *tagakal* is open to everyone's gaze, so after some days, many villagers knew that the old couple was hosting a guest.

Salt was the only ingredient which the old couple added in their dishes, and their lifestyle was also as simple as their cuisine. They did not watch TV, maintained a low frequency of interaction with neighbours, while occasional chatting with relatives and friends might be their primary entertainment. Their life was like a triple-metre waltz of working, eating and sleeping; it was simple, regular but far from miserable. The old couple seemed to be very satisfied with how they lived and what they owned. Particularly, I was impressed by their limited use of and desire for money. In their lives, survival was more related to sweet potatoes and fish than to money, and life as such depended more on production than exchange.

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<sup>9</sup> All personal names in this thesis are either pseudonyms or nicknames used in daily conversations.

<sup>10</sup> Traditional Yami housing consists of three parts. The *vahay* is a semi-underground log cabin, where household members sleep and cook. The *makarang* is an ancillary building of the *vahay*, made of wood but on the ground; it functions as a workshop for woodcarving and a storeroom. The *tagakal* is a wooden gazebo, on the ground and usually without walls. In the tropical climate of Lanyu, people spend more time in *tagakal*, dining and chatting there, instead of staying in the hot and stuffy *vahay* for the sake of privacy. A modern concrete house in Lanyu usually includes these three parts as well.

<sup>11</sup> Paolyta is a popular brand of medicinal liquor among Yami people. Paolyta tastes sweeter and includes less alcohol (8%) than rice wine, so the locals usually take Paolyta as the substitute of alcoholic drinks. Paolyta is also welcomed by local women.

These first impressions are not a complete understanding of the locals, but they reveal the basic theme and tempo of local traditional lifestyle, which has been fading in recent years. When I visited Nimor and Yacin again in July 2007, their lifestyle was as simple as before, but their surroundings had been drastically changing. In Yeyin, the number of concrete houses, groceries and tourists had rapidly increased in the five years of my absence, and Blackie had become a famous guesthouse owner and guide on the island. Sometimes, Blackie would bring his guests to look around his parents' *vahay* and chat with the old couple as a 'cultural tour', of course not for free. The old couple was proud of their son's new business and took whatever Blackie brought to them: imported food, electric appliances, and money. On the other hand, however, they continued what they had been doing for a lifetime and never intended to move to Blackie's comfortable concrete house. While the locals are pleased at the recent development in Lanyu and their improved economic status, the old lifestyle continues among the elderly, as though a rupture is silently widening in this society.

Blackie was often too busy to be my informant, and summer was absolutely not a season for fieldwork in Lanyu, because few people were willing to waste their time in answering questions instead of making money. Fortunately, I met Tarop, who was in need of help at that moment. Tarop was much less xenophobic than others, and in fact, he preferred to ask his Taiwanese friends when he needed helpers. Hence, our friendship grew far beyond my expectation. Tarop was an ambitious young man, worked hard and talked little, and many people considered him a paragon among local youth. In those days when we worked together, Tarop was struggling between dreams in his mind and the reality before his eyes: he had made many efforts to make money and win others' respect, but somehow, things rarely happened as he had expected. His Taiwanese friends tried hard to persuade him to adjust his business strategies, but he was too confident of his work experiences and his achievements before everyone's eyes. Tarop's vexations are always a topic that I want to deal with, and many of his words and deeds are full of profound meanings when I think about them again. It is Tarop who gives me the key to understanding those common but somewhat peculiar phenomena in the Yami's contemporary business activities<sup>12</sup>.

Tarop is more than a key informant of mine. Because we frequently showed up in the same place and at the same time, soon I was known as 'Tarop's friend' among other villagers. Although some people mistook me as 'Tarop's employee', anyhow, 'Tarop's someone' is always a better identity than a researcher in the community, and my local relationships quickly extended when I moved to Tarop's grocery in October 2007. Despite being an advantageous condition for my participant observations, increasing relationships gradually became a source of social pressure. I noticed that I

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<sup>12</sup> Chapter 4 in this thesis is based on Tarop's story.

was being observed, discussed, and remarked by people around me. Lanyu is not a place where people are allowed to enjoy much privacy, and monitoring might have occurred since the first day when I stepped in the village. What made this monitoring stressful was rather my own awareness of it – I began to hear the rumours about me, and I might be the last one who knew about this. Accordingly, temporary retreats from the field became more and more necessary for me, and after staying in Lanyu for one or two months, I would need to leave the island for some days for the sake of my serenity. On the other hand, it is also the pressure that reveals the underside of speech to me. The Yami's paradoxical attitude toward speech – they hate rumours but cannot stop gossiping – complements my understanding of their 'correspondence principle' of truth<sup>13</sup>.

I moved out from Tarop's place in March 2008, when his new store was finished and I decided to live in a different way. I rented a *makarang* (workshop) in the old district of Yeyin (Plate 1.2) and began to learn to 'live like the elderly'. The *makarang* is smaller (4x2 square metres) than a *vahay*, large enough for sleeping, but impossible to stand inside due to its one metre high ceiling. On sunny days, it was unendurably hot and stuffy inside all day long, while the building itself was a huge nest of cockroaches. Except electricity, all my essentials were outside the building: light, water, and toilet. As a result, I was forced to leave my *makarang* and give up my privacy everyday, and it was all the same as living in a *vahay*. While local younger generations, who live in the new district of Yeyin, enjoy their free electricity, air conditioners, and indoor toilet everyday, it is questionable how resolute local youth are to reject the great allure of money and return to the self-sufficient lifestyle as their grandparents do.

It was not until my local friend Six, who was working in Taiwan and generously lent me his half-completed concrete house in Yeyou, that I moved out of the *makarang* in June 2008. In terms of economic development, Yeyou and two other villages on the west coast, Hongtong and Yuren, are the 'downtown' of Lanyu, where public facilities, offices of NGOs, and restaurants are concentrated. For people who live in the three villages, residents of Yeyin are rather traditional, conservative and stubborn, as a local woman remarked: 'Why do you researchers like to do research in Yeyin? People there are really hard to get along with, even for us!' In Yeyou, I met many more successful businessmen, who had money, knew marketing, and allocated their capital in a more shrewd way than cases in Yeyin. It was also the period when I had more chances for contacting local charities, including Lanan Cultural and Educational Foundation (a.k.a. Lanan)<sup>14</sup>, Lanan Association of Home Care Services<sup>15</sup>,

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 7 for complete discussions on the local concepts of language, truth, and morality.

<sup>14</sup> Lanan was founded in 1979 and is the largest charity in Lanyu. Besides relief, the mission of Lanan also includes improving Yami people's education level, and accordingly, Lanan set up a kindergarten



and World Vision Taiwan. The staffs of these NGOs shared with me quite a few illuminating experiences concerning their predicaments while promoting social welfare among the locals, e.g. eldercare, skills building, etc. There are always some cultural factors behind their respective problems, and their long-term observations in Lanyu also support and supplement my understanding of Yami society.

My fieldwork in Lanyu was far from a smooth one. Even though I luckily met so many nice people in the field, it remained an arduous process when I sought to understand the locals' temperaments, escape from various undeserved mishaps, and learn new things in the local way. Since only through working – as a process of learning and trading – could I understand the locals, I hardly said no to whomever asked me for help. When I was walking along an overhanging cliff for chasing goats, handling an electric saw with rotating blades delivered to me, or facing a dismantled computer while surrounded by curious and hopeful looks, I knew that I was the only person on the scene who could save myself, and I could but focus on my next step in a cautious manner. Indeed, in a volatile world where there are so many 'next steps' for people to worry about everyday, it is hard to ask people to think over their life one, ten or even twenty years later; but they always know the result when the time comes. Hence, by viewing their world's volatility as its intrinsic rhythm, the Yami rediscover its reliability from a particular angle of view, and this might be the most important lesson which I learned from them.

## Outline of this thesis

This thesis includes eight chapters. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 aim to give a sketch of Lanyu, Yami culture, and contemporary social changes. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 further place local ethnographic phenomena concerning power, wealth and knowledge in a macroscopic framework of the Yami's concept of personhood. Chapter 8 concludes the main viewpoints in this thesis.

The title of Chapter 2 '*Tao do Pongso*', which means 'people of the island' in Yami language, is the Yami's self-appellation. This chapter provides readers necessary background information, including the local geographic environment, demographical and historical facts, and social institutions. Natural conditions of Lanyu are decisively

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for free admission and an exhibition hall for collecting local antiques (see Chapter 6). Lanen is also the publisher of *Lanyu Biweekly*. The website of Lanen: <http://www.lanan.org.tw/>

<sup>15</sup> Lanyu Association of Home Care Services was founded in 1999, and it devotes to tending local disabled senile persons, especially those who live in solitude. Eldercare is an ethical issue in Lanyu, because in most cases, the elderly voluntarily live alone so as to prevent their offspring from the bad influence of their illness. When volunteers of the Association help old persons with body cleaning, not only the volunteers' family consider such a caring behaviour a bad omen but the old persons' family consider it a curse 'as if their sons and daughters are all dead'. (See Liu 2004) The website of the Association: <http://www.kokai.org.tw/>.

influential on the formation of Yami culture: its location shapes the locals' historical memories, and its monsoons, sea currents and resources contribute to the local domestic mode of production (Sahlins 1975) and household-centred social institutions. From interactions among these material/social conditions, a spirit of autonomy emerges in the local social life and reinforces an explicit tendency toward dispersion among households, among communities, and among insiders and outsiders.

Chapter 3 '*Home laboris*' elaborates the Yami's concept of personhood and the straightforward relation between life, labour, wealth and power in their culture. The Yami believe that people survive if and only if they work, and necessarily, 'more pains, more gains'. Accordingly, people's lifetime is equal to their labour time, and as time goes by, they continuously accumulate their fortune by working and their glory by sharing, and eventually reach their peak of life when they become elders. Such straightforwardness is rather artificial, and it is only in the Yami's reliable world, which is constructed under certain material, social and epistemological conditions, that the straightforwardness becomes valid and promised.

Chapter 4 'Fortune and Glory' begins with a common doubt among the locals: if 'more pains, more gains' is true, why does the infusion of more money not always produce more profits? With the case of my friend Tarop and his brother Nalo, I try to demonstrate how the Yami perceive money and business management, as a new type of wealth and a new means of wealth production in their society. To a considerable extent, the Yami's category of wealth is different from the one in the modern market economy, since the former excludes more profitable potential commodities but includes unprofitable unmarketable ones; profitability is lost in the non-intersecting areas. More importantly, the straightforward relation between wealth and power is being distorted, from 'the more generous, the more glorious' to 'the more generous, the more impecunious'. While money becomes their goal of production, unexpectedly, the Yami have to make an either-or bitter choice between their fortune and glory.

Chapter 5 'The Emergence of Finitude' discusses how the Yami define 'what people deserve' and protect that by means of relevant social mechanisms of ownership, distribution, and competition. Still, personal labour and social identity determine what and how many resources people can take from Nature and become their deserved wealth, while implicitly, all the social mechanisms are founded upon a cultural imagination of 'unlimited resources' in the Yami's reliable world. But money, a limited resource by definition, is eroding those social mechanisms and disturbing the state of peace in the society. Aggressive competition more frequently occurs both between individuals and between people and their communities, when money is embedded in 'more pains, more gains', rewrites the statement as 'limited resources, unlimited wants', and turns diligence into avarice.

Chapter 6 ‘Wheel of Fortune’ analyses the attributes of commodity exchange and the new relations which the modern market economy introduces into Yami society. What the locals ignore in their commodity exchange is that it is necessary, arbitrary, and systematic, while they fail to make their commodities commonly needed, noticed, and accepted by ‘other people’, including those who are not seen by the locals. While local businessmen often ignore the importance of selling, advertising and pricing, their commodity exchange looks like gift exchange, the traditional mode of exchange in Yami society, rather than the M-C-M’ circuit of capital. Fundamentally, people’s ignorance is more than one of modern commercial techniques. It is the ignorance of the relation between things, the profitability between commodities, and the equivalence between visible and invisible wealth.

Chapter 7 ‘Golden Silence, Silver Speech’ explicates the epistemological basis among the Yami: vision, and face-to-face relationships. On this basis, not only truth but also morality is defined; thus the paragon of virtue, i.e. *Homo laboris*, is incarnated. The image of a silently working person becomes the origin of all value judgements: through their physical labour, people learn true knowledge, produce usable things, and silently exhibit their good virtue to everyone. By contrast, language is often regarded as both an inferior medium for conveying truths and a somewhat menacing weapon – in the forms of lies, curses and rumours – in the local social life. Consequently, language-based knowledge, including school education and intellectual labour, is often excluded from the category of wealth and means of wealth production; ‘trial and error’ remains the authentic way of producing knowledge and making money among the Yami.





Plate 1.1 Yami traditional housing (middle: *vahay*; left: *makarang*; upper right: *tagakal*)



Plate 1.2 The old (black roofed) and new (white roofed) districts of Yeyin

## Chapter 2

### *Tao do pongso*

According to the context of dialogue, the self-appellation of Yami people is *tao* or *tao do pongso*. *Tao* in Yami language means mankind, people or person, and no difference is made among its biological, social and cultural referents. *Tao do pongso* means ‘people of the island’, and Yami people use this term while making a contrast with *dede*, i.e. outsiders. As for ‘Yami’, it is an exonym that the locals rarely use; it was presumably used by Ivatan people of Philippines (Rau and Dong 2006:79) and somehow recorded by a Japanese ethnologist Torii when making his first contact with the Yami in 1897<sup>16</sup>. Before the 1990s, ‘Yami’ was the undisputable official name, and it was broadly used in literature and archives. In this thesis, I continue using ‘Yami’ so as to retain a clear linkage to the history of Lanyu studies.

Since the 1990s, when indigenous movements in Taiwan reached their peak, some Yami youth have been promoting the use of ‘Tao’ instead of ‘Yami’ as their real tribal name; they considered ‘Yami’ merely a historical mistake of Torii’s<sup>17</sup>. Nowadays, quite a few Taiwanese researchers also use ‘Tao’ to show their respect to the locals’ self-determination, even though ironically, so far the locals themselves have not yet determined anything. In 1998, the Council of Indigenous Peoples<sup>18</sup> held an official open forum in Lanyu for name rectification, but no specific conclusion was made in the end – local advocates for ‘Yami’ were virtually as many as its opponents. The dispute over a real name continues, while most people are actually indifferent and would rather call themselves ‘Lanyuers’; such a region-focused appellation being rather closer to the usage in Yami language.

For those who have not made their voice heard among Yami people, obtaining a tribal name is an issue of little importance, since they clearly know who they are, no matter how many names outsiders have given to them. Seeking an authoritative name, therefore, is essentially a political event that reflects Yami people’s divergent attitudes

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<sup>16</sup> Torii Ryuzo (鳥居龍藏) is the first investigator of Yami society. In his work *Anthropological Photo Album: Kotosho* (1899), Torii presumed that the aborigines of Kotosho (i.e. Lanyu) called themselves *Yami-kami*.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Hsieh Yong-chuan (謝永泉), one of the youth leaders, alleged that Torii must have confused *yamen* (which means ‘we’) as a tribal name and further mistranscribed the word as *yami*. See Lanyu Biweekly 140 (1993, Aug 15), *The Origin of ‘the Yami’*.

<sup>18</sup> The Council of Indigenous Peoples (原住民族委員會) is the supreme competent authority for indigenous affairs in current Taiwanese government. See Lanyu Biweekly 246 (1998, Sep 13), ‘Yami’ vs. ‘Tao’.

toward their colonisers: while some of them refuse to accept the tag attached by their exploiters, others think ‘it doesn’t matter at all’. If the sense of humiliation originates from the locals’ historical memories in the colonial period, then presumably, the sense of indifference stems from the fundamental natural and historical conditions of Lanyu.

This chapter aims to sketch out the material and social conditions which shape Yami culture into what it is today, including the natural environment, historical events, and social institutions. While Yu (1989:8) summarises ‘self-care’ as a significant theme in Yami culture, what can be seen through those external conditions is more likely a spirit of *autonomy*. Lanyu isolates the Yami from the outside world and promises them a self-sufficient lifestyle without dependence; those unpleasant happenings in their modern history reinforce their aspiration to get rid of outsiders and return to their old tranquil days.

### ***Lanyu, pongso no tao***

In history, Lanyu had had many names. In early Chinese and Japanese records, the island was once called ‘Red-headed Island’<sup>19</sup>; it was also known as Botel Tobago in Western literature<sup>20</sup>. Since 1947, Taiwanese government has renamed it as Lanyu<sup>21</sup>, and unlike ‘Yami’, the locals have accepted this official name without much struggle. Nonetheless, in their own language, Yami people always use the same phrase to call their homeland, by which they literally build an inseparable relationship with it. Corresponding to their self-appellation *tao do pongso*, Yami people call Lanyu *pongso no tao*, ‘the island of people’. Such a mutual identification is both poetic and factual. Yami culture has been evolving as it adapts to the natural environment of Lanyu, and in a different context, the geographical location of Lanyu predetermines the Yami’s history and, probably, shapes their temperament as well.

Lanyu is a volcanic island of a surface area of 45 square kilometres, located on the margin of the West Pacific between E121°30’~E121°36’ and N22°00’~N22°05’. Taitung City on Taiwan is only 40 nautical miles northwest of Lanyu, approximately a voyage of 20 minutes by plane or 2.5 hours by ferry (Map 2). Taitung is the major gateway of cargo and passengers entering Lanyu, and in recent years, there are six flights everyday and two additional ferry departures every week in the high season. Despite the pride of ‘sea people’, most Yami people would rather take a plane than a

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<sup>19</sup> Red-headed Island (紅頭嶼) was a name used by both Chinese and Japanese, though their respective pronunciation varies; it reads ‘hong-tou-yu’ in Mandarin and ‘ko-to-sho’ in Japanese.

<sup>20</sup> Sir Edmund Leach (1937, 1938a, 1938b) also used the term ‘Botel Tobago’ in his ethnographic notes on the Yami’s material culture. Sir Edmund conducted short-term fieldwork among the Yami in 1933.

<sup>21</sup> Lanyu (蘭嶼) in Mandarin means ‘Orchid Island’. This name originates from a famous local product *phalaenopsis*, a species of orchid.



ferry, because it is much faster, cheaper (with government subsidy), and never causes seasickness. The Batanes Islands of Philippines is 54 nautical miles south of Lanyu, but currently no direct contact occurs between the two places (Map 1).

Low hills of about 450 meters spread over the island (Wei and Liu 1962:1). The land surface is mostly covered with tropical flora, from which the locals obtain building materials for their plank boats and traditional housing. Only small patches of arable land are distributed on the narrow strip between hills and the rocky coast, where local villages, farmland and the Circle Road are located (Map 3). Before the narrow and bumpy Circle Road was finished in 1973, local villages were linked only by footpaths among bushes, and inter-village trips would take half a day by foot. Nowadays, a round trip around Lanyu only takes an hour by motorcycle. Cheap and space-saving motorcycles are the most common vehicle in Lanyu, and each household owns at least one, usually more, since inter-village transportation has become an indispensable part in daily life. Cars and trucks are less popular due to size, price and, most importantly, only one car repair workshop available on the island. The locals drive cars and trucks for transporting cargo unloaded at Kaiyuan Harbour.

Prevalent monsoons in Southeast Asia challenge the normal everyday tropical climate of Lanyu. Statistically, Lanyu has a high average annual temperature of 22.6 degrees Celsius and a plentiful annual rainfall of 3,082 mm<sup>22</sup>, but seasons remain distinct. Summer (*teyeyka*) begins in June and ends in October, and it is featured by hot and sunny days with convectional showers in the afternoon. Fierce and saline southwesterly monsoons (*avalat*) every so often do severe damage to crops and cause vehicles to rust but rarely influence outbound transportation. Summer is also the period that typhoons (*angin*) strike the island with big waves and mudflows. When wind direction begins to shift to northeast in September, winter (*amyan*) is approaching. Northeasterly monsoons (*ilaod*) cause gales and rainfall lasting for weeks in the four months from November to February. From past to present, winter has always been a hard time for the locals. In the past, the locals might freeze or starve to death due to poor means of heat retention (Hsieh 2007:74-78), and at present, it is big waves and crosswinds which cut and annoy outbound transportation. When rice and other imported food on the island are totally consumed, the locals will reluctantly add more sweet potatoes in their diet. Trapped passengers fill the terminals of both Lanyu and Taitung Airports when flights are cancelled over and over again.

The Kuroshio Current is the genuine nurturer of Yami culture. In spring (*rayon*), a huge amount of migratory fish shoals move northward with the Kuroshio and pass by Lanyu from March to May, including various species of flying fish (*alibangbang*) and their predators such as dolphin fish (*arayo*) and tuna (*vaoyo*). For Yami people,

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<sup>22</sup> See the Statistic Data 1971-2000 (the Central Weather Bureau, Taiwan. <http://www.cwb.gov.tw/>)

the abundant fishery resources in the flying fish season are a gift from heaven, and mere flying fish is enough to satisfy a household's protein requirements for over six months<sup>23</sup>. In making the most of their fishery resources, Yami people have always been destined to be excellent fishermen, and fishing is traditionally the most important life skill of males. While meat, eggs and other imported food have diversified the local diet in recent years, the flying fish remains a significant cultural symbol of affluence, and flying fish fishing continues to be the highlight of the year.

Very few species of warm-blooded animals inhabit Lanyu or play a role in Yami culture. Yami households often breed pigs (*kuis*), chickens (*manok*), and goats (*kagirin*) and leave them roaming in specific areas. The status of livestock is closer to property than to food, and only on particular occasions do the locals slaughter their livestock and share meat with other households. Dogs (*ino*) and cats (*cito*) were introduced by the Japanese and Taiwanese in the colonial period and remain a very small number on the island; some households raise them as pets. Yami people are not good at hunting, and civets (*pahapeng*) in the mountains are the only available prey in Lanyu. Generally speaking, Yami people do not spend much time on these terrestrial animals in spite of their respective significance, and fishing remains the first priority.

Salinity in sea winds and soil largely limits the species of cultivable crops on the island. Yami people's primary staple crops are wet taros (*solli*) and sweet potatoes (*wakay*). Millet (*kadai*) was a vital crop in the past due to its ease of storage, but today it is planted only for ceremonial purposes<sup>24</sup>. The Taiwanese government had attempted to promote rice farming in Lanyu and established several state-owned plantations in the 1950s but eventually failed. Despite its massive consumption among local households, the supply of rice is fully dependant on import. The locals also plant a few species of tropical fruits, but the quality and quantity are insufficient for export. After endangered species on the island such as coconut crabs (*meypeyso*) and podocarpus (*pazopo*) were embargoed in 1980, currently Lanyu has no serviceable natural resources for export.

## The people

Since 2008 the registered local population in Lanyu has already exceeded 4,000, while the exact number in 1998 was mere 3,093, which means that one fourth of the

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<sup>23</sup> Traditionally, flying fish are no longer edible after *panoyotoyon* (a.k.a. the expiration festival) in mid autumn, and all dried flying fish must be consumed during the festival or discarded after that day. With the introduction of refrigerators, however, many Yami people have begun preserving dried flying fish as food or gifts for outsiders. (cf. Hsieh 2007: 59-63)

<sup>24</sup> On the day of *apiya vehan* (i.e. the harvest festival in the end of *rayon*), local villages often hold *mivaci* (millet husking) as a sideshow. *Mivaci* was certainly a solemn ceremony before millet was functionally replaced by rice. (cf. Hsieh 2007: 49-58)



population in Lanyu increased in the past decade<sup>25</sup>. The Yami account for 88.4% of the current population, and the remainder are Taiwanese immigrants of various identities: spouses of the locals, veterans, school teachers, and employees of Tai-power. Quite a few of the immigrants make up a floating population that leaves Lanyu after residing for two or three years because of employee transfers. Their affiliation with the locals is usually not strong. The sudden increase of population in the past decade is attributable to the triumph of Tai-power's good neighbour policy: only those who have their census registers in Lanyu Township are eligible to apply for Tai-power's subsidies. With this irresistible incentive, people who had been living in Taiwan for years began massively (and nominally) flowing back to Lanyu. In reality, the actual number of local residents is probably around 2,000 or less. Since most Yami youth in Taiwan go home only during the Lunar New Year vacation, at other times of the year, Yami people are not too worried about the potential problem of population pressure. Except for occasional natural disasters in Lanyu, presumably, the locals have not fully recognised possible natural restrictions on their sustenance, and they maintain their optimistic imagination of 'infinite', that is, Nature kindly bestows inexhaustible resources upon them as a reward for their diligence.

The Yami are an Austronesian people and speak a Philippines Batanic language (Rau and Dong 2006:79). Despite being officially one of Taiwanese indigenous peoples<sup>26</sup>, the Yami have a weaker cultural affiliation with others. Cultural features such as head hunting, bow and arrow making, and tattooing are nonexistent in Yami culture but common in others. Also, Yami people were totally ignorant of rice, cattle, tobacco and intoxicants before the colonial period (Mabuchi 1956:18; Yu 2004a:3). Currently, three languages corresponding to the generations are spoken in Lanyu. The elderly over 70 years old speak fluent Yami language and simple Japanese. Adults under 70 speak Yami language and Mandarin, but their Yami language capability proportionally decreases with age. Youngsters under 20 speak Mandarin for most of the time, and children learn Yami language mostly from school rather than their parents. It is common that grandparents and grandchildren in a family hardly communicate with one another (cf. Li and Ho 1988).

In terms of appearance, the Yami have black eyes, straight black hair, dark skin colour and a short stature. The height of an adult Yami man is often around 160-170 centimetres while that of a woman less than 160. Nevertheless, they commonly have a robust build, and very few of them have physical problems and obesity. Yami youth

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<sup>25</sup> See *The Scheme of Comprehensive Construction on Off-shore Islands, Taitung County, Phase III (2011-2014)*, p.3-3.

<sup>26</sup> To date, there are 14 officially recognised aboriginal tribes in Taiwan. Excepting the Yami, all other tribes mainly reside in the mountain area of middle, eastern and southern Taiwan. See the website of the Council of Indigenous Peoples for an introduction: <http://www.apc.gov.tw/portal/index.html>.

are vigorous with the superb stamina required for laborious jobs. Moreover, the elderly remain thin but sturdy because of their constant physical labour. Common diseases among Yami people include traumas, cellulites and arthritis<sup>27</sup>, and they die of old age or accidents in most cases<sup>28</sup>. Their facial features such as eyelids and nasal bridge are easily distinguishable from Han Chinese<sup>29</sup>, while skin colour is another hint to distinguish the two. Some of the locals claim that their dark skin colour is not inherent but suntanned, and it will become ‘as white as Taiwanese’ when they leave Lanyu and spend some weeks in Taiwan. While Taiwanese traditionally prefer whiter skin colour, Yami people usually consider light skin colour degeneration instead of beauty, because suntan is the mark of vitality and diligence. ‘As black as Lanyuer’ is surely a compliment to an outsider with sun-tanned skin, regardless of its cause.

These physical features are probably the last part of their appearance that has not been assimilated by Taiwanese. Today, Yami people of both sexes wear T-shirts, shorts and slippers in a casual style and seldom dress differently all year round. Their clothes are bought from Taiwan or donated by social welfare NGOs. The function of Yami traditional garment (*kekjit*) – male thong and female tunic, has been promoted from daily clothing to formal dress worn on ceremonial occasions, though a few young boys are too shy to wear a thong in public. *Kekjit*, as well as flying fish, is a primary cultural symbol of the Yami and makes an exotic impression among Taiwanese.

The number of Yami communities in Lanyu is not constant in history. Currently, there are six villages distributed along the coastline: Yeyou (椰油), Yuren (漁人) and Hongtou (紅頭) in the west, Dongqing (東清) and Yeyin (野銀) in the east, Langdao (朗島) in the north<sup>30</sup>. The distance between Hongtou and Yuren and that between Dongqing and Yeyin are much shorter like paired villages. In early records, there were *Imawawa* village beside Langdao and *Ivatas* village beside Yeyou, but both disappeared during the reign of the Japanese due to natural or man-made disasters (Yu and Dong 1998:22-24; Wei and Liu 1962: 17). These paired villages are not moieties, because cross-village marriages also occur between farther villages. The three villages in the west are sometimes called ‘the Front Range’, where the colonists established their earliest stronghold. At present, the Front Range is the region where main public facilities are situated: the post office and the health centre in Hongtou, the airport and Lanen Foundation in Yuren, Kaiyuan Harbour, the Township Office, the Co-op, and

<sup>27</sup> Statistics of Clinical Cases 1999-2003 (Lanyu Township Health Office [http://lay-tth.doh.gov.tw/pub/LIT\\_7.asp](http://lay-tth.doh.gov.tw/pub/LIT_7.asp))

<sup>28</sup> Statistics of Causes of Death in Lanyu 1993-1998, in *Preliminary and Interim Reports of Missionary Program among the Yami* (the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan [http://www.pct.org.tw/rnd/tao/Tao5\\_1.htm](http://www.pct.org.tw/rnd/tao/Tao5_1.htm))

<sup>29</sup> Han Chinese is the absolute majority of Taiwanese ethnic groups.

<sup>30</sup> Each of the villages has a name in Yami language: *Yayo* (Yeyou), *Iratay* (Yuren), *Imorod* (Hongtou), *Iranomilek* (Dongqing), *Ivarino* (Yeyin), *Iraraley* (Langdao). As well as the case of Lanyu, however, the locals (especially younger generations) have got used to those Chinese toponyms.

the gas station in Yeyou. All the aforementioned public facilities are the only ones on the island, and residents of ‘the Back Range’, i.e. Dongqing, Yeyin and Langdao, frequently visit the Front Range for specific items such as vegetables, medication and money. Because groceries always smartly shift their cargo freights to their customers, commodities sold in the Back Range are usually more expensive.

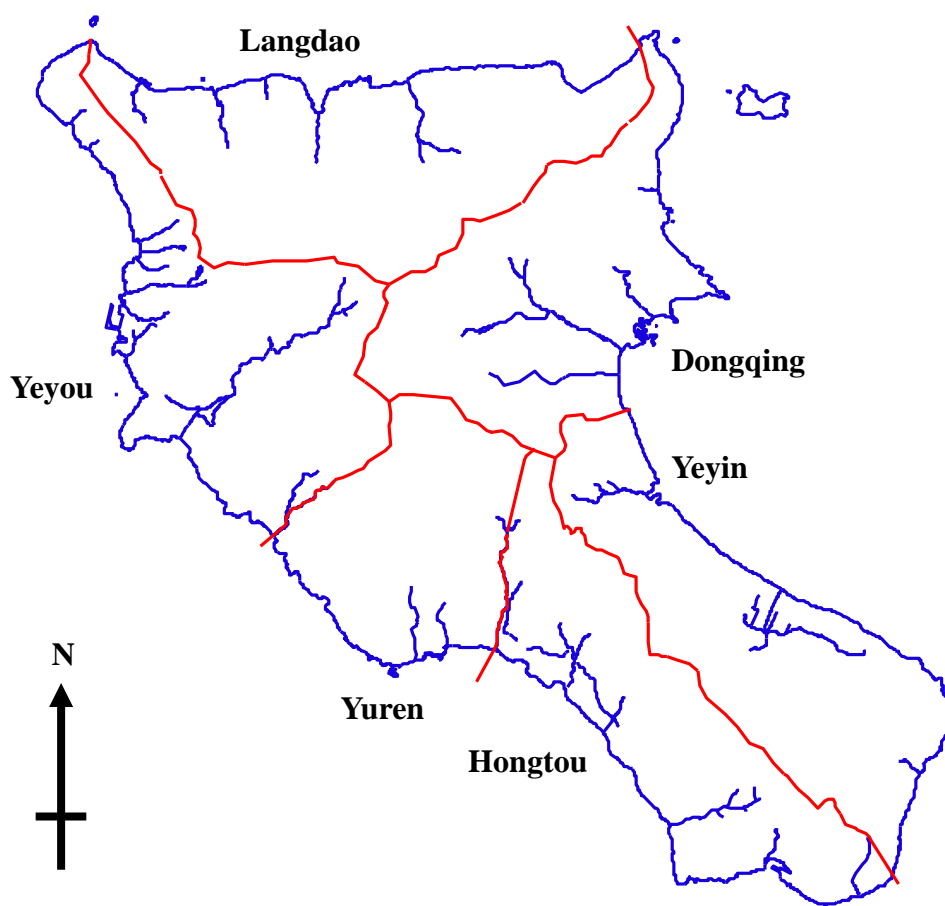


Figure 2.1 Local villages in Lanyu and their traditional territories

Traditionally, each Yami villages is an autonomous political unit, and members of a village organise their own public affairs and monopolise a conventional domain of forestry and fishery (Figure 2.1). While the Taiwanese government combined the closer local villages and re-demarcated four administrative divisions in 1946<sup>31</sup>, the administrative decree did not reduce the autonomy of each village. Since 1997, it has become the six Associations of Community Development (社區發展協會) which take over most local affairs and resources in practice, including the Feedback Fund. Besides, egalitarianism is a noticeable feature of Yami society (de Beauclair 1957:104;

<sup>31</sup> Yuren was incorporated into Hongtou, and Yeyin was incorporated into Dongqing. Despite no express provision, villagers in Hongtou-Yuren and Dongqing-Yeyin respectively have an unspoken consensus of the election of village heads, that is, the post should be taken up by turns.

Wei and Liu 1962:158), and due to the lack of leadership, decisions of public affairs are usually made on the basis of the consensus among elders and everyone's consent. To date, the locals still rarely recognise those elected township chiefs (鄉長), village heads (村長) and township representatives (鄉民代表) as leaders of communities, so that those officers never have the final say on local affairs (Yu and Dong 1998:171). Nevertheless, it is true that local officers not only enjoy a much higher salary than ordinary villagers<sup>32</sup> but control the use of government funding as well.

## A brief history of the Yami

In Yami people's historical memories, they are the sole aborigines in Lanyu; they had been the masters for generations until the advent of outsiders at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. From then on, either unwittingly or unwillingly, the locals began sharing their ownership of the island with the gatecrashers but have never really given it up. So far, colonisation has not yet increased much national consciousness among Yami people, and as usual, they consider themselves hosts/hostesses of Lanyu rather than lieges of Taiwan. They are right about this from a historical perspective, because they have always lived on the island, but outsiders never stay for long.

Yami people were not totally ignorant of outsiders before the colonial period. In fact, they have an intimate cultural and linguistic affinity with Ivatan people of the Batanes Islands. According to Yami oral tradition, their ancestors immigrated from Batanes and maintained barter of goods with Ivatan people until the 17<sup>th</sup> century (de Beauclair 1959a, 1959b, 1969; Yu and Dong 1998:94-96). Batanes is said to be the source of Yami heirlooms (*tametamek*), i.e. gold pieces (*ovay*), silver helmets (*volangat*) and agate necklaces (*zaka*), which Lanyu never yields. 'Ivatan' remains a meaningful toponym in Yami language as well. As participants of the 'Tour of Root-tracing' stated, Yami language is 60% similar to Ivatan language, and Yami elders could communicate with Ivatan people without difficulty<sup>33</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, it was colonists who began leaving written records about Lanyu and its dwellers. Despite a colonialist perspective, the chronology below marks out the critical events in the modern history of Lanyu, while each of them was a turning point of Yami people's collective destiny.

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<sup>32</sup> A village head's monthly salary is about 40,000 NT dollars, while a township representative's is slightly less and a township chief's is much more than that. By contrast, the average salary in Lanyu is about 10,000 NT dollars.

<sup>33</sup> 'Tour of Root-tracing' is a cultural exchange program organised by Lanen Foundation, which aims to re-associate Yami people with their cultural hearth Batanes. The first Tour of Root-tracing was held in 1998, and 21 Yami elders and local intellectuals were invited to visit Batanes. See Yu and Dong (1998: 96-98); Lanyu Biweekly 239 (1998, Apr 12), *Experiences of Lanyu-Batan Tour of Root-tracing*; 322(2003, Oct 19), *The Third Lanyu-Batan Tour of Root-tracing*.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Event</b>
1877	Chinese Empire surveyed Red-headed Island and claimed its sovereignty.
1897	China ceded Taiwan and subordinate islands to Japan after the First Sino-Japanese War (1895). Japanese surveyed Red-headed Island and restricted its public entry.
1903	The Sailboat Incident occurred. Japanese commenced with more active colonial rule on the island.
1945	Taiwan and subordinate islands were returned to Republic of China after the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).
1951-58	The Civilising Policy (山地平地化) was brought into practice among indigenous peoples, including six-year compulsory education and Mandarin speaking. Lanyu Headquarters, state-owned plantations and a prison were founded in this period.
1967	The entry restriction was revoked. Taiwanese capital began flowing into Lanyu.
1978	The 'Four-year Scheme of Indigenous Life Improvement' was executed. Traditional Yami housing was compulsorily demolished and replaced by concrete-made public housing.
1981	The first shipment of nuclear waste arrived at Lanyu.
1988	The first large-scale demonstration against the nuclear waste occurred. Taiwanese government unilaterally approved the 'Lanyu National Park Scheme'.
1993-95	The National Park Scheme was revoked due to the locals' objection. The Yami protested against the shoddy public housing in Lanyu. The 'Five-year Scheme of Indigenous Housing Construction and Reconstruction' was executed. Taiwanese government subsidised the cost of rebuilding the public housing.
2001	The land lease of the storage compound expired. Tai-power promised to offer the locals 'Feedback Fund' of 220 million NT dollars per three years.

The Chinese only nominally claimed Lanyu and had never ruled or made efforts to change anything there. In 1877, the Chinese surveyed the island for the purpose of naval defence but found no possibilities there for naval ports, strategic resources and immigration. The supervisor of the expedition Chou You-ji (周有基) recommended the central government to garrison on the island and educate the savages, but his recommendation was never adopted in the next 20 years (Lin 1958:13). Since then, however, the political status of Lanyu has been recognised as a subordinate island of Taiwan, and Lanyu was reasonably 'ceded' to Japan along with Taiwan after China was vanquished in the First Sino-Japanese War. The Japanese attitude toward Lanyu in the beginning was as passive as that of the Chinese. After their survey in 1897, the supervisor of Japanese expedition Sano made a similar report to Chou's. Sano also put stress on the Yami's gentle temperament and considered them able to live peacefully without a garrison; the only misgiving was 'impairing the dignity of the (Japanese)

Empire' if leaving the locals alone (ibid: 33). Indeed, colonising Lanyu seemed to be an investment of no profit. Consequently, the Japanese made an economic decision, i.e. their Segregation Policy: those who attempted to sail to Lanyu must obtain official permission; violators would be penalised with imprisonment or a forfeit (ibid: 33-34).

The Sailboat Incident impelled the Japanese to a more active colonial policy. In 1903, an American sailboat Benjamin Sewall encountered a typhoon on its way to China. Some crew on lifeboats drifted to Lanyu and were said to be assaulted and robbed by the locals. Because of an international affair, Japanese police organised a rescue team and a punitive team and sailed to Lanyu in 1904, saved two American crew on the island, arrested ten Yami 'headmen' and youth, burned local houses and seized their weapons (Yu and Dong 1998: 109-114; Shi et al. 2001:218-221). From then on, the Japanese began to exert political control and to develop infrastructure on the island by expropriating local labour power: a police station was founded in 1904, the Hospital for the Natives (蕃人療養所) in 1917, a trading post (供銷會) in 1918, the School for Native Children (蕃童教育所) in 1923. These facilities were situated in either Hongtong or Yeyou, and it was not until 1932 that another school was founded in Dongqing. Therefore, the level of development between the west and the east coasts began differentiating in this period. The four-year Japanese education was compulsory among local children, and therefore, today many Yami elders can speak simple Japanese and communicate with Japanese researchers. This is also the period when the locals began learning to use money. In the trading post, the Japanese sold a variety of goods: fishing gear, farm tools, food, cloth, hardware, etc. To trade these useful goods, the locals collected what the Japanese were interested in, such as herbs, lily seeds, eels, shrimps, octopuses, shells and eggs; they sold their products to the trading post for money and shopped there with money. If the locals earned Japanese silver coins, they would process the money to produce silver helmets (*volangat*) (Yu and Dong 1998:128).

By and large, the Japanese seemed not to excessively interfere in the local life, especially in cultural aspects. Meanwhile, the Segregation Policy also effectively prevented Lanyu from external influences. During the Japanese reign, thus, Yami cultural traditions were conserved in good condition, which benefited Japanese ethnologists to accomplish quite a few studies of Yami culture in this period, though it is disputable if Japanese colonists were intentionally protecting Yami culture for the use of academic research (Dai 2007:46-47). By contrast, Taiwanese colonists were more enthusiastic in 'civilising the savage', even if their ambition of construction brought about destruction more often than not. Before 1967, Taiwanese government continued the Segregation Policy out of a different motive. The Taiwanese failed to extract more economic benefits from Lanyu but, unlike their precursors, they soon

found another use for the island. Since 1956, the government had begun exiling marginalised people to the island, including felons, political prisoners, and veterans with criminal records. Segregation became a means of realising a Taiwan-centred regional outlook and transforming Lanyu from a protected area to a 'heterotopia of deviation' (Foucault 1986; Hsia and Chen 1988: 237-238). As local seniors still remember, managers of the state-owned plantations expropriated the locals' taro farmland, their farm cattle trampled local crops, and prisoners would at times bully the locals and steal their property (Yu and Dong 1998:163-166). The Yami's discontent at outsiders rose along with the increasing numbers of immigrants and their comprehensive intervention in local life. Nevertheless, not all of those exiled people were troublemakers; some of them chose to permanently settle down in Lanyu, run a small business, even marry local women and acquire the right to use indigenous reservations (Hsia et al. 1989: 15-6).

In the 1960s, the military gradually retreated from Lanyu, and the power of capital rapidly filled the vacuum. After the revocation of entry restrictions in 1967, Kaiyuan Harbour and Lanyu Airport opened to public use, and merchants from Taiwan began investing in tourism and introducing tourists to Lanyu. It was in the same period that the local population flowed out to the labour market of Taiwan (ibid:16). The initial stage of engagement was far from a pleasant experience for the locals: many tourists visited local villages in an offensive manner, intruded in villagers' homes and took photos as they pleased. To date, photo taking is still a highly sensitive action in Lanyu, and it may provoke the locals into instant rage if a visitor focuses a camera on them without their consent. On the other hand, as well as other aboriginal labourers, Yami people in Taiwan often suffered discrimination in employment and wages (Kuan 2007:162-177). Anyhow, it is in this period that the current economic model in Lanyu took shape: corresponding to their increasing dependence on Taiwanese commodities, the Yami exported their labour power to Taiwan, while Taiwanese became consumers of natural resources in Lanyu.

Despite improving material conditions, Yami people's worst nightmare had just begun in the 1970s. During the implementation period of the 'Four-year Scheme' (1966- 1978, three times in total), which was supposed to improve the quality of life, the government violently demolished traditional Yami underground homes in Yeyou, Hongtuo, Yuren, and Dongqing, and only those in Langdao and Yeyin survived from the calamity. On the original sites, moreover, the government jerry-built 566 concrete houses with saline sea sand, which was harmful to building structures. In 1974, Lanyu was secretly chosen as the final disposal site of low dose nuclear waste<sup>34</sup>. The storage

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<sup>34</sup> According to the official statement, the low dose nuclear waste stored in Lanyu comes from medical and laboratory waste, and contaminated clothes and consumables during the maintenance of nuclear power plants. Dangerous high dose nuclear waste are stored in the power plants (Nuclear

compound was founded in 1979 and then devolved to Tai-power. In the whole process, Yami people never participated in the policy-making nor were even informed. Many local people remember that the facility was officially claimed to be a canned food factory, but Tai-power always refutes this allegation (Yu and Dong 1998: 167-168; Kuan 2007:96-112). In 1988, some Yami youth organised the first anti-nuclear demonstration 'Expel the Evil Spirits from Lanyu', and later on in 1989, 1991 and 1995, Yami people convened another three times large-scale protests. Tai-power ceased shipping new containers of nuclear waste to Lanyu in 1996, and eventually, the government founded the 'Initiatives Committee of Lanyu Storage Compound Relocation' in 2002 to advance the removal of nuclear waste in Lanyu (cf. Nuclear Information Centre 2002).

It is noteworthy that after their first influential demonstration in 1988, the Yami seemed to recognise an effective conduit to voice their discontent repressed for years. Another form of wishful thinking from the Taiwanese government called the 'Lanyu National Park Scheme' was legitimised in 1988; this was meant to largely limit the locals' exploitation of local forestry and fishery resources, including their flying fish fishing. In 1992, a governmental delegation went to Lanyu in order to seek the locals' cooperation, but the locals refused to negotiate<sup>35</sup>. Eventually, the Scheme was revoked in 1993, and from then on, the government no longer tried to carry out any presumptuous local development in Lanyu and went back to an aloof and passive policy. When the latent construction problems of Lanyu public housing were unmasked in 1994, to pacify the locals' anger, the government decided not to get involved but 'responsibly' promised to subsidise the reconstruction (450,000 NT dollars each house). With the money, Yami people rebuilt their homes on their own and finished everything from design to construction. The current miscellaneous architectural styles in local villages are the consequence of Yami people's creativity brought into full play in this period.

The storage compound continues to be the main focus of debate in Lanyu. Up to now, there are still 90,000 old containers in the storage compound. Even if removing the nuclear waste from Lanyu has already been an established policy, its realisation has been continually delayed since another appropriate site is not available. When the land lease of the storage compound expired in 2001, Tai-power had no choice but to pacify the locals with, again, money. At the request of the locals, Tai-power issued 63,000 NT dollars per capita in 2003 and 51,000 NT dollars in 2010 as its feedback<sup>36</sup>, which is a large sum of money for ordinary villagers on the island. While most of the

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Information Centre 2002, 2008)

<sup>35</sup> See Lanyu Biweekly 112 (1992, Feb 23), *No Consensus; the National Park Forum Broke up in Discord*.

<sup>36</sup> See Lanyu Biweekly 310 (2002, Nov 24), *Share it! The 220 Million Feedback Fund!*.



locals remain dissatisfied with Tai-power, they are satisfied with the money, and the tangible benefit raised an alternative attitude toward nuclear waste among Yami people. The elderly still set their faces against nuclear waste, but a few local youth have begun taking its possible benefits into their practical consideration for the future.

Overall, after the turbulent 1990s, Taiwanese and Yami people gradually reached consensus on local issues: the locals have the final say. On the one hand, the government has regressed from an active ruler to a passive funder, and on the other, most Taiwanese tourists have learned to be moderate customers instead of bothersome intruders. In 2007, Lanyu seemed to finally recover some of its long-lost tranquillity: people lived leisurely and peacefully, strangers exchanged friendly smiles, and many visible things – roads without traffic lights, vehicles without licence plates, motorcycle riders without helmets, etc. – implied the absence of state power. Beneath the surface, however, many things have permanently changed on the island, such as the locals' lifestyle, values, and temperament. Ostensibly, Yami people have finally got rid of the state coercion, but another enormous driving force in their society – the money temptation, has just begun surfacing.

## **Yami social institutions: kinship, labour and property**

Ethnologists began entering Lanyu together with colonists. The history of Lanyu studies commenced with Torii's investigation in 1897, and in the following century, Japanese and Taiwanese researchers' continuing efforts made Lanyu an intensively surveyed area and produced a huge amount of literature covering biology, geography and anthropology (Yu 1992:73). Despite its long history, however, academic disputes seldom occurred in Lanyu studies. Japanese researchers were more enthusiastic in recording the nuts and bolts of Yami society<sup>37</sup>, and their academic contribution rests on the preservation of precious ethnographic data. It was not until Taiwanese anthropologists Wei and Liu published the first monograph on Yami social institutions *Social Structure of the Yami, Botel Tobago* (1962) that theoretical issues began to be dealt with. In recent years, Lanyu studies have been developing along two lines: one is to reveal the innate logic/meaning of specific cultural phenomena, e.g. inheritance (Chiang 1986), classification (Yu 1994; S. Chen 1994), exchange (Yu 1995), and symbolism of space (Kwan 1989; Y. Chen 1995), while another is to explore cultural change in the process of colonisation/modernisation, e.g. economic transformation (Yang 1998; Huang 2005), formation of power (Kuo 2000), new caring relationships (Liu 2004), modern plank boat building (Cheng 2004; Damalasan 2007; Pan 2008),

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<sup>37</sup> Torii and another Japanese ethnologist Kano Tadao (鹿野忠雄) are the major researchers of Yami culture in the Japanese colonial period. Both of them left detailed records of local material culture and relevant rituals but seldom gave a clear sketch of Yami social institutions. (Wei and Liu 1962:iii)

and knowledge transfer (Dai 2007).

Wei and Liu's monograph also raised the very first controversy in Lanyu studies. The debate primarily surrounded a typological feature, i.e. Yami descent principle is either patrilineal or bilateral. Before Wei and Liu, Japanese anthropologist Mabuchi (1956:13-15) had described Yami society as distinguished by its bilateralism that has a 'tendency' toward patrilineality. His opinion was soon challenged by Wei and Liu and the patrilineality that they discovered in their detailed ethnographic data on genealogies, irrigation systems and fishing teams (1962: iv). Their theory prevailed and was seldom questioned for a long time, even if researchers failed to discern the actual operation of what Wei and Liu called 'sub-patrilineage' (*asa so itetngehan*, see below) (Yu 1992:49-51). Wei and Liu's theory began being re-examined in the 1990s by a new generation of Taiwanese anthropologists, who reanalysed ethnographic data (Yu 1992; Hsu and Yu 2004) or traced back to the locals' descent ideology (Y. Chen 1994). In their conclusions, Mabuchi's opinion was rather closer to the truth.

Although the patrilineality/bilateralism debate has almost been settled, it is worth pondering what Mabuchi's 'tendency toward patrilineality' meant and where Wei and Liu's misconception came from. In fact, if suspending typological terminologies such as 'patrilineal', 'bilateral', etc., Yami descent principles are easy to comprehend: sons inherit male property from their father, daughters inherit female property from their mother, and the classification of male/female property is mostly predetermined by the gender division of labour within a household. That is, descent is based on neither rigid patrilineality nor arbitrary bilateralism but more pragmatic considerations. Therefore, the observed laterality to patrilineal kin among the Yami probably reflects the observer's over-emphasis on certain types of property such as land and houses. Moreover, inheritance of property can simply be an interpersonal affair rather than an intra-familial one. The ethnographic phenomenon 'only sons inherit land and houses' can be interpreted in alternative ways.

Godelier (1975:4) presumes that the internal structure of kinship groups can be determined by two prerequisite social conditions, i.e. kinship relations and relations of production. In this regard, the patrilineality/bilateralism debate in Yami ethnography seemed to originate from a twofold misconception. On the one hand, the local kinship was construed as relations between groups of people which are not locally defined. On the other hand, property was construed as things independent from persons and thus out of their original relations of production, e.g. who produces/utilises/maintains the property. As a result, Yami descent was misconceptualised as founded upon the assembly of certain self-evident, atomic descent groups instead of people's flexible application of descent principles – a set of cultural premises highly associated with local concepts of production and property, and the primal relations between persons

and things.

Therefore, before depicting more complicated ethnographic phenomena, it is necessary to give a brief sketch of basic social units and explain how persons within them are related to other persons and things. Because of their bilingualism, the Yami often use somewhat vague Chinese kinship terminology, e.g. *jiating* (household), *jiazu* (family), and *qinqi* (relatives), while referring to the local social units. Since these kinship terms are frequently used in daily life, it is important to clarify their respective referents in order to avoid misreading them.

### ***Asa ka vahay* ('one house'; a household)**

*Asa ka vahay* refers to a nuclear family consisting of a husband (*mehakay*), a wife (*mavakes*) and their offspring (*anak*). Members of *asa ka vahay* share the space of *vahay* and form the basic co-residential and commensal unit in Yami society. Since offspring usually move out of parents' *vahay* immediately after marriage<sup>38</sup>, a *vahay* in principle accommodates only one married couple, and subsistence in a household also relies on the cooperation of husband and wife.

In general, Yami society reveals typical characteristics of the so-called domestic mode of production, in which *asa ka vahay* serves as the basic unit of production. According to Sahlins (1975, Chapter 2) and Meillassoux (1981, Chapter 2), the domestic mode of production is featured by the following points:

1. Conditions of production: local natural resources, population size and knowledge-technique level allow to produce sufficient food for sustaining current population and maintaining the reproduction of population-labour power.
2. Relations of production: food production is primarily based on the primitive relation between people and tools and conducted by individual means instead of collective/social means. Land serves as an instrument of labour, while human strength serves as the major source of energy. The household is the primary social unit of organising labour power, and thus the gender division of labour becomes the dominant mode.
3. Tendencies of production: the synthesis of points 1 and 2 indicates that the cycle of production/reproduction proceeds largely below the threshold of local

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<sup>38</sup> It is hard to say if the Yami traditionally considered marriage per se something of substantial effects. Traditional Yami weddings were not celebrated in public; some were small-scale food sharing between two households, while others omitted all formalities and the groom directly took the bride home. After wedding, some brides continued living in their parents' house for days or even months because of habit (Dong 2004: 75-76). Newlyweds might temporarily live in the husband's *makarang* and begin building their own *vahay* when the wife was pregnant. (Chiang 1986:84)

carrying capacity of environment; both resources and labour power are underused. Production aims to satisfy livelihood needs and maintain a state of anti-surplus.

The gender division of labour in *asa ka vahay* makes every local household a self-sufficient economic unit in the society. Male jobs include fishing, goat pasturing, farmland preparation, water channel maintenance, logging, boat and house building, etc., which are traditionally done with simple hand-tools, exhausting but mostly occasional. Fishing and supplying *yakan* (side dishes) are husbands' routine work, and the ocean is an exclusive male workplace. Besides fatigue, male jobs are often performed in distant or risky areas away from villages, so it is said that men monopolise these jobs for the sake of women's safety. Less laborious and dangerous (though by no means easy) jobs are assigned to women, these include livestock feeding, cultivating and harvesting with digging sticks, which are mostly done inside or near villages within 10-20 minutes walking distance. Corresponding to husbands' role as *yakan* suppliers, wives' routine work is taking care of sweet potato and wet taro farmland and supplying *kanen* (staple). In terms of subsistence, therefore, a husband and a wife are perfectly complementary and satisfy at least the minimum needs in a household, as if *kanen* and *yakan* make a complete meal in local ideology (Yu 1994: 23).

Under the framework of gender division of labour, the utilisation of labour power in a household is limited. On the one hand, a wife is traditionally prohibited from getting involved in her husband's jobs, while sometimes a husband helps but cannot take all his wife's jobs, leaving her nothing to do. Except for a widow or a widower, doing the spouse's jobs is considered a humiliation or even a curse, as if the spouse is absent from the world (Yu 1994; Chang 1991:133). On the other hand, children grow up without responsibilities to their household. In the past, a father would take young sons to the mountain and seashore while a mother would take daughters to farmland, so that children could be familiar with their future workplaces and essential skills (Dong 2004:7-8). In any case, children's contribution to food production was not expected. Nowadays, while compulsory education deprives of their chances of staying with parents, local children are never asked to participate in production activities so as to learn living skills. Even if they are short-handed, e.g. harvesting tons of wet taros for a *mivazay*<sup>39</sup>, parents customarily seek help from relatives (*zipos*) rather than their own children. Youngsters begin engaging in angling, shell or crab collecting with friends for fun. It is not until their adulthood that Yami youth begin to work for the

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<sup>39</sup> The *mivazay* is a boat/house inauguration ceremony in the form of potlatch, which plays a critical role in the promotion of a man's social status. See Chapter 3 for more discussions.

sake of subsistence, and it is virtually the same time to look for a spouse and establish a new household. After getting married, sons and daughters still maintain an intimate relationship and share products with their family of origin, but they do not take full responsibility to support it. That is, parents never ‘retire’ and have to continue supporting their own household throughout their lives.

Flexibility also exists. Except for abovementioned male/female jobs, a few neither risky nor crucial jobs are doable for both sexes. Neutral jobs, e.g. fruit and betel nut planting on the hillside, shell and crab collecting on the tidal flat, etc., are secondary in local work schedule and often considered a kind of recreation. Handicrafts are neutral in principle, but according to the related skills and uses, woodcarving is a male job relevant to logging and boat building, while beading for decoration is a female job. Newly introduced jobs in recent years can be neutral as well. Except for tour guiding and snorkelling, business activities are not gendered even if commodities like ornaments are produced or used only by either sex. Intellectual labour such as public service and clerical work in local NGOs is done by both sexes. A notable change in recent years is women’s engagement in heavy physical labour. For example, my friend Lan, who was in her twenties, was asked to assist her brother with cement mixing – a tiring part in concrete house building – until the construction was finished. Despite this being traditionally a male job, her engagement in house building made good sense to the locals, since many local women had had related experience when they worked in Taiwan as building workers.

As mentioned earlier, inheritance in *asa ka vahay* is according to gender division. For example, among Yami heirlooms, gold pieces (*ovay*) and silver helmets (*volangat*) are male ornaments and passed down from father to sons, while agate necklaces (*zaka*) is female ornaments and passed down from mother to daughters. That is, possessions are handed over from one user to another. Here, ‘users’ refer not merely to those who utilise the property but also to those who produce and maintain it, so ostensibly, male members seem to inherit almost all ‘property’ of a household: its building site (*sako*), buildings, irrigated farmland, and water channels (*sawalan*), which are objects in male jobs. If a household has no male descendants, the host may adopt a *manlam* (foster son), a man of younger generation who will serve him, fish for him and then inherit his property. Daughters are not eligible to inherit male property, but sons-in-law can be *manlam* if it is an uxori-local marriage (Chiang 1984:93). Ultimately, diligence is the decisive factor in property distribution. A man is chosen as a *manlam* usually because of his diligence rather than closer consanguinity. In principle, every child in a household can get a share of inheritance from parents, but parents usually leave more to the child who is hardworking and willing to look after them. The partiality is evident especially when dealing with indivisible property such as the building site of

*vahay* (ibid: 90-93; Liu 2004:85).

### ***Asa so inawan* ('one breath'; a family) and *zipos* (relatives)**

*Asa so inawan* refers to the bilateral extension of a nuclear family to the third degree of kindred. This term is usually translated by the locals as 'family', and in their words, *asa so inawan* includes 'three generations'. The first generation includes ego (E), the spouse (H/W), their siblings (B, Z, HB, HZ, WB, WZ) along with spouses (BW, ZH, HBW, HZH, WBW, WZH), who are *kakteh* (siblings) in a *miketeh* relationship (siblingship). Siblings' spouses' siblings are not included in this category, so a person's sister-in-law's brother is a member of his/her brother's but not his/her *asa so inawan*. The second generation consists of *kakteh*'s offspring along with spouses, i.e. *kateysa* (first cousins) in a *miteysa* relationship (cousinship). A person's *kateysa* (FBS, FBD, FZS, FZD, MBS, MBD, MZS, MZD) are his/her particularly intimate relatives. Last, *kateysa*'s offspring along with spouses constitute the third generation *kaposing* (second cousins) in a *mikaposing* relationship. The stem *posing* means 'break off', so *kaposing* implies fading consanguinity and ambiguous kinship (Syaman-Rapongan 2003:66; Cheng 2004:65) (Figure 2.2).

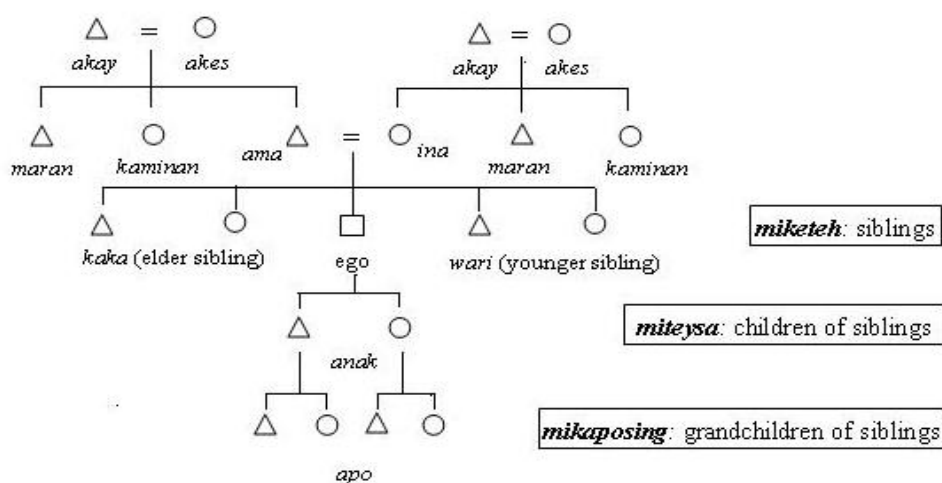


Figure 2.2 Yami family group

In an *asa so inawan*, nuclear families are the constitutive units, and this is the same as a typical feature of Eskimo kinship. Therefore, it is better to regard a husband and a wife as a whole of inseparability<sup>40</sup>. Genealogically, *asa ka vahay* produces a

<sup>40</sup> Before the application of national law, the inseparability of married couples only came into being after the first descendant was born, and before that, a marital relationship was unstable and could be cancelled at any moment if either party regretted, specifically for the reason of sterility. (Wei and Liu 1962:76-77; Dong 2004:8-9; Yu 2004a:45)

series of overlapping nuclear families along the vertical axis of lineal consanguinity, while *asa so inawan* connects up nuclear families on the horizontal axis of siblingship, i.e. the households of the father's siblings, the mother's siblings, and the spouse's siblings. However, a marital relationship will not include the husband's family of origin and the wife's in mutual *asa so inawan*, and derivatively, the father's siblings are not members of the mother's siblings' *asa so inawan*, and vice versa. The two parties are in an *iciaroa* relationship, i.e. in-laws.

If counting out lineal kin, spouse and siblings, other members of *asa so inawan* form a crucial kin group *zipos* or 'relatives'. In principle, *zipos* is an incest group, but it is also reported that endogamy sometimes occurs among *kaposing* in order to have separated relatives reunited, and *kaposing* will be flexibly viewed as non-relatives (Yu 1992:12). The importance of *zipos* primarily lies in its social function as a labour pool, i.e. the main source of manpower recruitment for specific labour-intensive jobs. Fishing teams (*kakavang*), which had played a critical role in the traditional big boat (*cinedkeran*)<sup>41</sup> fishing in flying fish season, also recruit crews from a ship owner's *zipos*. In Yu's explanation,

A fishing team usually expands from a set of paternity and siblingship. While females are not allowed to join, a fishing team commonly consists of brothers, sisters' husbands, and their sons and sons-in-law. A fishing team requires at least six crews, sometimes more than ten; certainly the requirement is hardly satisfied with mere siblings but always with all possible sources, including in-laws. (1992:69)

It seems that satisfying the need of manpower is the first thing to consider in crew recruitment, but members of *zipos* are preferable, since a fishing team dissolves rapidly if its crews are not from *zipos* (Cheng 2004:63). Wei and Liu (1962: 52) put stress on the patrilinearity in the formation of fishing teams and argued that a fishing team in principle consisted of members of a 'patrilineage', while matrilineal cousins and in-laws were expediently recruited. The observable patrilinearity among fishing teams may be true, but it is likely for a reason other than the existence of a 'patrilineage'.

Basically, Yami big plank boats are both the private property of *asa ka vahay* and a means of production of *asa so inawan*. On the one hand, the inheritance of big boats is not explicit, since their lifespan is usually less than four years due to the hot and humid climate in Lanyu (Hsu and Yu 2004:68)<sup>42</sup>. But relevant knowledge, including

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<sup>41</sup> Yami plank boats are distinguished into two types: smaller *tatala* handled by 1-3 crew, and bigger *cinedkeran* handled by 6, 8, or 10 persons (Wei and Liu 1962: 118; Jeng 1984:95-96; Cheng 2004:11).

<sup>42</sup> If well stored, the lifespan of a big boat can be prolonged to 5-7 years, at most 8-10 years. (Damalasan 2007:25)

building techniques and fishing skills, is necessarily passed down from father to son, which results in a natural patrilineality in actual crew recruitment. On the other hand, when a ship owner is deceased, his leadership will transfer to the second senior crew member in the fishing team rather than to his own sons (Cheng 2004:32), as if a big boat belongs to the fishing team as a corporation. Besides his age, experience and ability in fishing, a more pragmatic consideration in determining a new leader is his capability to maintain the social network in a fishing team. Because big boats are short-lived property, a new leader must be able and responsible to organise the next big boat building after the inherited one becomes unserviceable. Otherwise, the fishing team will naturally dissolve (Damalasan 2007:25). Accordingly, a son is unlikely to be mature enough to succeed to his father's leadership and maintain the father's social network in the fishing team. Wei and Liu might confuse two different things to inherit: diachronically, the knowledge carried in the lifespan of a big boat, and synchronically, the social network converging upon the function of a big boat.

Since the introduction of motorboats in the 1980s, the importance of big boats and fishing teams has vastly declined<sup>43</sup>, but *zipos* retains its implication of 'power'. In modern labour-intensive or time-limited jobs, e.g. cement grouting in concrete house building, *zipos* are always indispensable helpers. More *zipos* also implies more political strength. In the past, although large-scale group fights rarely occurred, *zipos* were said to be responsible for mutual blood vengeance (de Beauclair 1958:91; Wei and Liu 1962: 160-163). To date, *zipos* still psychologically secures individuals and practically deters physical violence. The locals commonly have an idea that people who have fewer *zipos* are more vulnerable and easily bullied by those who have more. Also, the power of *zipos* is embodied in modern local politics. In elections of village heads and township representatives, people's first choice among all candidates is always their own *zipos*, while the second is those who give them the most gifts and money (Yu and Dong 1998: 171). Generally speaking, to win an election requires only 100-200 votes<sup>44</sup>, so the number of *zipos* is rather a decisive factor in an election: the more relatives you have, the less money you have to spend.

Here a point should be noted: despite its being an institutional labour pool,

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<sup>43</sup> The first batch of motorboats on Lanyu was donated by the Taiwanese government for the sake of developing local fishery, but the policy is far from successful. Because there was (and still is) no cold storage plant in Lanyu and a huge expense of shipping from Lanyu to Taiwan, the excess of fish would be left to rot if not locally consumed (Yu and Dong 1998: 170). Due to an improved living standard, the number of motorboats in Lanyu is continuously increasing in recent years, but their frequency of use is still limited by fuel expense, which is rarely covered by the income from fish catches – fish in Lanyu is not usually saleable (see Chapter 6).

<sup>44</sup> In the most recent election (2010), eighteen candidates competed for four posts of village heads, and twenty candidates competed for seven posts of township representatives. Votes of elected candidates are around 200 in village head election and 130 in township representative election. See Lanyu Biweekly 432 (2010, Jun 13), *The 19<sup>th</sup> Election of Lanyu Township Representatives and Village Heads*.



drawing on the labour power of *asa so inawan/zipos* is always provisional and limited to specific occasions. The reason for drawing on the labour pool is always household failure (Sahlins 1975: 69), that is, a household encounters certain huge needs that cannot be satisfied merely with its own labour power. After the needs are satisfied, households immediately return to their original state of dispersion – a general tendency in the domestic mode of production. Therefore, the term *asa so inawan* more likely refers to a contract rather than a corporation.

### ***Asa so itetngehan* ('one root') and *keylian***

*Asa so itetngehan* is the further bilateral extension of *asa so inawan* to the fourth degree of kindred (cf. Syaman-Rapongan 2003:37, Cheng 2004:64). *Kaposing's* offspring along with spouses are called *kaporongan* (third cousin) in a *mikaporongan* relationship. Genealogical relations among *kaporongan* are mostly traceable, but they are often viewed as non-relatives or distant relatives. While marriage among *kaposing* is somewhat discouraged, marriage among *kaporongan* is strongly encouraged for the purpose of reuniting separate kin (Wei and Liu 1962:72-73). If no marital relationship is built, *kaporongan's* offspring will become *kadoan*, i.e. other people. Hence, *asa so itetngehan* is a transition zone in Yami kinship; if *kaposing* is nearly non-relative, *kaporongan* is nearly relatives.

Wei and Liu defined *asa so itetngehan* as 'sub-patrilineage' (ibid: 33-43), which is related to the co-ownership of timberland (*moamoa*) and water channels (*sawalan*) (ibid:134-138). Syaman-Rapongan, a local folklorist, also points out that 'patrilineal' kin in *asa so itetngehan* 'have the rights to inherit and share property, e.g. timbers for boat or house building, and water channels for taro farmland irrigation' (2003:37). Both statements declare a patrilineality in the inheritance of timber and water right, which plausibly originates from the same father-son succession as the case of fishing teams. A point of contention is: if *asa so itetngehan* is a functional corporation which is in charge of the aforementioned resources. Take the ownership of timberland as an example. Syaman-Rapongan (ibid:66) distinguishes three sources of timber in boat building: *moamoa no inapo* (great-grandfather's timber), *mimoamoa* (planting), and *mia vozaw do kahasan* (wandering in mountains). His explanation of *moamoa no inapo* is as below:

...The timberland left by the fourth generation senior kinsman, at least more than two pieces, is equally shared and inherited by his offspring within four generations; the kinship sphere is called *asa so itetngehan* (commonly owning a root) while including collateral kin. His fourth generation junior kinsmen are in a *mikaposing* relationship, which means tearing

relatives. Distribution and inheritance have been determined before the great-grandfather is deceased, so logging or reserving a tree is a personal responsibility. However, if a tree is too huge to be shared fairly or controversial among kinsmen, it is mostly inherited by the eldest son in the grandfather's generation, or the kinsmen reserve it and share its fruits every year.

It should be noted that *asa so itetngehan* is the sum of four generations, but for the locals, none of the generations excludes collateral kin, i.e. the husband's and the wife's siblings. Therefore, if we only consider relative genealogical positions, then correctly, a man inherits timbers from his *inapo* (great-grandfather), who is a member of his *asa so itetngehan*. Nevertheless, it does not mean that any of his *kaporongan*, who is also a member of his *asa so itetngehan*, contends for timbers with him, since his *inapo* and his *kaporongan*'s *inapo* are not the same person – their respective *inapo* are siblings. As Syaman-Rapongan describes, the generation who mutually contend in *moamoa no inapo* is *kaposing*, peripheral members of *asa so inawan*. With regard to inheritance of timber, therefore, it is more likely an affair among patrilineal kin in *asa so inawan*, even though the property is passed down by a person outside *asa so inawan*, i.e. the great-grandfather. Evidently, the two statements 'inheriting from a member of *asa so itetngehan*' and 'inheriting from *asa so itetngehan*' refer to different events.

Another point to be clarified is: if co-ownership of timberland exists among, if not *asa so itetngehan*, a group of patrilineal kinsmen. As well as boat building, tree planting is a male job, and its relevant knowledge is also passed down from father to son. Since his childhood, a man had been going mountain climbing with his father, acquainting himself with his familial timberland where his patrilineal kinsmen plant trees (i.e. *mimoamoa*), and learning to identify different people's *agaz*, i.e. personal signs of pre-emption, which a man carves on newly discovered trees of his when strolling around the communal timberland (i.e. *mia vozaw do kahasan*). The relevant knowledge prevents men from either committing or suffering theft of timber, which will provoke the owner into fighting and cursing (ibid: 66, 70). Plausibly, familial timberland forms in the process of *mimoamoa*, when a man, his sons, and his sons' sons continuously plant trees in the same area; his daughter's sons will plant trees in his sons-in-law's familial timberland, that is, his *iciaroa*'s familial timberland.

Tree planting is also a long-term investment: a sapling needs a span of over three generations to grow into a serviceable tree. When a man is alive, thus, he owns all the saplings planted by himself and the mature trees inherited from his father but planted by his grandfather or even great-grandfather. Because trees are equally distributed by the owner to his sons, the ownership of a tree is basically transferred from one man to another but rarely shared among persons except in those situations Syaman-Rapongan

mentions above. Therefore, even if brothers and patrilineal cousins plant trees in the same area, a tree is still owned by an individual rather than a patrilineage. In addition, the split of familial timberland seems to be progressing when saplings are planted. Despite their interest in the same familial timberland, brothers will respectively plant their own saplings on different locations on purpose in order to avoid possible controversy after generations (Cheng 2004: 35). Since trees are long-lived property, close kin such as siblings still need to prevent traces of ownership from confusion in the future, though *agaz* is generally not used inside familial timberland.

Communal timberland is the property of village (*ili*) and shared by all villagers (*keylian*). The six local villages claim respective pieces of communal timberland and draw boundaries in order to confine planting and logging activities and avoid intrusion of *kadoan lili*, i.e. people of other villages. A tree in communal timberland, as well as a fish in the sea, belongs to the first man who leaves his *agaz* on its skin. Later on, it is his duty to take care of the tree and re-carve *agaz* every once in a while to keep it identifiable. If the owner fails to look after the tree over years and lets the carved scar naturally mended, others can carve their own *agaz* on the tree and claim it (Cheng 2004:29). Trees in the communal timberland are inheritable private property once they are claimed and well guarded.

To sum up, Wei and Liu (1962) might make several critical mistakes. Firstly, *asa so itetngehan* is a bilateral concept in Yami kinship ideology, but Wei and Liu ignored matrilineal kin and highlighted patrilineal kin, because some significant property revealed explicit patrilineality. While conceiving a patrilineage, Wei and Liu also put excessive stress on its common ancestor but ignored the weak social bond among its contemporary members; Yu (1992:49-51) begins questioning Wei and Liu's theory because the function of *asa so itetngehan* as a whole is hardly perceivable in daily life. Most importantly, even if those who are eligible to inherit from a common patrilineal ancestor form a patrilineal kin group, inheritance mostly occurs between two persons rather than between a person and a corporation. In the case of timber, ownership is attached to the relationship between an individual and a share of divisible property – a person can own multiple trees, but a tree can only belong to a person. It is presumable that the Yami consciously prevent ownership from overlapping, i.e. multiple persons share or grab the same thing.

On a different scale, however, overlapping ownership is commonly recognised. As well as communal timberland, villagers share the rights to use communal harbour (*vanoa*), fishing zone, unirrigated farmland, pastureland, and cemetery (*kanitoan*). These resources are accessible to everyone and cannot be permanently possessed by specific individuals, but people can continuously own them as long as they are using them. Pre-emption, or 'first come, first served', is the general principle for allocating

public resources<sup>45</sup>. For example, patrilineal kinsmen usually pasture their inherited goats in a fixed region for the same reason as familial timberland, lest goats frequently suffer accidental death or injury. While the primary method to distinguish the ownership of goats is cutting their ears into specific shapes (Wei and Liu 1962:141-142), in order to avoid possible confusion, again, goat owners will intentionally pasture their goats in different locations (Yu 1992:61).

On an even larger scale, overlapping ownership once again becomes a taboo. *Kadoan lili* (people from other villages) are absolutely forbidden to exploit resources in the aforementioned locations of a village, which is traditionally considered a shame and curse on all of the villagers. As the locals explain, 'it is as if all people in our village were absent (dead).'

## Conclusion

This chapter has briefly sketched the world in which the Yami live and where their concept of personhood is shaped. In general, local material and social conditions have a profound influence on the formation of Yami culture, in which the spirit of autonomy is repeatedly declared in all social relationships: one household is independent from another, one village is independent from another, the Yami are independent from outsiders, etc. Evidently, the spirit of autonomy is founded upon a straightforward relationship between people and their product, that is, products are intuitively construed as the result of human labour, so people survive by means of their own labour rather than by means of tools or others' labour, by means of acquiring from Nature rather than fetishes or others' hands. Both fetishistic relations (i.e. things produce things) and collectivistic relations (i.e. the community sustains individuals) are simultaneously excluded from the local domestic mode of production.

Bloch (1975) argues that '[p]roperty relations are a type of social relations in all societies...in pre-industrial societies property relations are rightly represented for what they are' (p.204), and the misrepresentation of property relations as person-thing relations is due to specific relations of production, in which 'the social implications of the technology of production make reasonable the representation of production as the fruit of property and not of labour' (p.222). His opinion is applicable to grasping the Yami's concept of property, while in Yami society it is even possible to specify 'social relations' as interpersonal relationships. When their products are placed in a broader social context, the Yami protect their ownership – their straightforward relationships with their products – by means of personal signs of labour such as continuous

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 5 for more complete discussions on the Yami's social mechanisms of resource distribution.

utilisation, *agaz*, etc. Such signs of labour completely exclude co-ownership, i.e. one thing is always controlled by at most one person, which actually represents, again, the independence between persons. Nonetheless, in the Yami's theory of private property, human labour is not, as Locke presumed, permanently congealed in products but always dissolvable; products may return to their natural state if losing continuous infusion of labour power. Hence, from a synchronic perspective, Yami property is absolutely and exclusively private, but from a diachronic perspective, it is relatively and temporarily private; it is the structural reversal of permanent but co-usable private property.

In terms of inheritance, it is more explicit that property relations among the Yami are interpersonal relationships. In the case of Yami big boats, a kind of non-durable property, the real inheritance occurs in the process of producing the property, i.e. the knowledge transfer from father to son. In contrast with quickly decaying big boats, the knowledge of building big boats is the property which is regenerated. As for those who inherit the ownership of a big boat and the leadership of a fishing team, the inheritance is, as Weiner (1985) claims, the replacement of persons, whose social positions enable them to organise collective labour power. In the case of timber, a kind of delayed utilised property, the inheritance often nominally proceeds along kinship relationships between two or three generations and is disconnected from its practical use. In both cases, the person-thing relation (e.g. a ship owner and his big boat; a timber user and his tree) is relatively transient, and thus unreliable, in comparison with the interpersonal relationship (e.g. a man and his patrilineal kinsmen).

## Chapter 3

### *Homo laboris*

In a thoroughly cautious manner, the Yami live in a capricious world. For the sake of subsistence, they must leave their relatively safe villages and farmland and set foot in the mountains and on the sea, where the future is sometimes hard to predict. Local men are in danger of tripping on loose clods and falling into one of Lanyu's gorges; they can encounter unexpected undercurrents and run out of strength in the deep sea. Local women are sometimes swept away by freak waves while collecting shells and crabs on the tidal flat. Even the most experienced fishermen may dive too deeply to be able to surface and breathe in time. While accidental deaths are astounding and mournful events, the Yami are not so worried about the uncertainty of their days spent on the island. They prefer, while attending to possible dangers, simply to complete the steps instructed by their *makanio* (ancestral taboos),<sup>46</sup> rather than fret over the likelihood of suffering. However unpredictable their surroundings, people are prepared for accidental death.

Despite its capriciousness, the Yami wholeheartedly rely on their island. As they often say, '*nobody could starve to death in Lanyu*,' because '*the mountain is our storehouse, and the sea is our refrigerator*.' The simile is obviously a modern product of some unknown source, but it accounts for the Yami's basic attitude toward Nature. It is a nurturer rather than a ruler, and more importantly, it is a passive keeper rather than an active giver, who keeps treasures for people to go in quest of. The Yami engage in farming and fishing, but their thoughts have something in common with hunter-gatherers: they call fishing and collecting crabs and shells *maneysavat so yakan* (collect dishes) and harvesting taros and sweet potatoes *mangap so kanen* (take staple) (Yu 1994:27-32). The verbs *maneysavat* and *mangap* make their production activities sound straightforward, as if they simply take what Nature prepares. Which is also to say that they take what they feel they deserve.

When Sahlins (1975) mentions how hunter-gatherers lack 'foresight' in their production activities, he also notices their uncommon confidence in their environment. For example, among the Montagnais:

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<sup>46</sup> In a broad sense, *makanio* means words or deeds inconsistent with 'normality' in specific situations. See Syaman-Rapongan (2003:29, 38).

They are not worried by what the morrow may bring because as far as they are concerned it will bring more of the same: “another feast”. Whatever the value of other interpretations, such self-confidence must be brought to bear on the supposed prodigality of hunters. More, it must have some objective basis, for if hunters and gatherers really favored gluttony over economic good sense, they would never have lived to become the prophets of this new religion. (p.31)

Responding to Sahlins, Bird-David (1992) argues that hunter-gatherers may have a cosmological reason for the confidence of the yield of morrow: they live in a cosmic system of sharing, in which the anthropomorphic Nature is morally obliged to share food with human beings. Even if hunter-gatherers themselves are convinced by such a reason, their confidence cannot be based on self-deception regardless of the reality but, as Sahlins remarks, must have some empirical basis. The origin of this psychological confidence is rather a critical issue in Yami ethnography, because it is just in their ‘reliable world’ that the Yami’s promising cultural principle ‘more pains, more gains’ can be true. Elsewhere, a more familiar motto ‘no pains, no gains’ may be logically closer to the reality, i.e. gains necessarily result from pains, but pains do not necessarily result in gains.

*Vazay* (working) is always a central theme in Yami culture. People survive because they work, and it is optimistically believed that the harder they work, the more they gain. Moreover, what accumulates along with labour time is not only wealth but *everything else*: people also become more proficient in their livelihoods, more erudite about histories, more capable of sharing food, and thus more respected among people. Poor harvest, bad fishing luck or occasional misfortunes never negate this general trend in the long term. Eventually, people will reach the peak of life: they are aged and become *rarakeh* (elders), and what they own at that moment proves their greatness: large houses and thriving crops, comprehensive erudition, and numerous offspring. In short, people’s value proportionally increases along with their age. The image of a real *tao* – the *Homo laboris*, forms in this straightforward relation between life, labour, wealth, power and knowledge.

This chapter explores the straightforward relation between people and their labour and how this straightforwardness becomes necessary in Yami society. Certainly, the straightforwardness is artificial. On the one hand, the local relations of production and mechanisms of redistribution positively relate life with labour, labour with wealth, and wealth with power, rendering vitality, labour power and political power identical. On the other hand, the Yami’s ‘reliable world’ negatively excludes whatever may disturb the straightforwardness; more precisely, the world becomes reliable, because the people are inclined to ignore the uncertainties within it.

## Prologue: sloth and death

It was about eight o'clock in the morning, another day of a hangover in my island life. My local friend Six lay on the floor of his newly completed concrete house, and so did I. Last night had been an extremely crazy one: from rice wine to Vodka Lime, we had swallowed every kind of liquor available on the island as a celebration after a ball game, even if our team was not the winner. My brain sobered up a little bit earlier than my body; even when I had successfully commanded my eyelids to stay open, my limbs made no response. For quite a while, I maintained the same posture and stared into space with my eyes semi-ajar.

Suddenly, an angry, elderly voice came through our open door. 'Sleeping in the daytime, are you dead people?' I was startled. Turning my face to the door, I saw a hunchbacked old local woman standing outside with her stone cold gaze. We had never met before. In this embarrassing situation, we just silently stared at each other for a few seconds as a kind of introduction. As sudden as her appearance, she moved her gaze from me, muttered something unclear and then disappeared from my eyesight at a slow pace. I stayed lying while my tangled mind was trying to come up with a reason for this shameful encounter: firstly I should have got up, and secondly I should have locked the door. Either way would have prevented me from being called a dead person.

'Die' (*zakat*) in the old woman's wording is not a joking, sarcastic expression in a trivial event as above. For Yami elders, a healthy person who does not wake up at sunrise is unforgivable; only dying patients and dead persons are allowed to stay in bed during the daytime. When the elderly are seriously giving their warnings, they are not only saying 'you look like a dead person' but 'you may become a dead person' as well. 'Die' is also the word that the Yami use to warn of other improper pairings between who you are and what you do, i.e. *makanio*. Accordingly, if a young man eats Elders' Fish (see below), then his father is dead. If patients are nursed by volunteers, then their own children, if any, are dead (Liu 2004:30). If weeds sprawl around a home or a piece of farmland, then its hostess is dead. If men fish, log or pasture in the traditional territories of other villages, then all residents living there are dead (Chang 1991:66). In these statements, the semantic boundary between 'it causes' and 'it means' is blurred, and once a social transgression occurs, the *fait accompli* is only one step away from death, both causally and symbolically. Either the transgressor or somebody else will be immediately erased from his, her or their social position.

In two senses, sleeping in the daytime is improper: on the one hand, people are failing to complete their routine daytime work, and on the other, though death itself is signalled by the end of respiration (e.g. Hsieh 2004a:2), lying motionless is the first



sign of imminent expiry. Because only dying or dead persons are motionless, to keep moving or at least to stay awake becomes a responsibility of all living persons. In the old district of Yeyin, even decrepit persons with physical disabilities prefer to stay in their *tagakal*, where they can breathe fresh air and clearly see the sea, rather than stay inside their dim and stuffy *vahay*. In other villages, where the *tagakal* may have been demolished decades ago, the elderly would rather take a stool and sit outside their homes. It is not merely for their own comfort but for others' information as well: staying in people's visible range proves one's vitality. If the elderly cease appearing before people for a few days, their relatives and neighbours will notice the abnormality and visit their *vahay*. *Vahay* is the place where the most private things are done, e.g. sleeping, cooking, and having sex, but except for these activities, the locals prefer to stay outside *vahay*, watching and being watched.

All this lies behind the sentiment that if people can keep their eyes open and move without help, they should do some work. Mere headaches or fevers are not a sufficient reason for Yami elders to have a day off, even if their actual yields do not really matter because of their supportive kinship networks. Even so, the elderly by no means work only for fun or killing time. Working leaves visual signs of vitality for more people to witness. For example, a piece of carefully weeded taro farmland is a sufficient proof of its hostess' good health, even if she is not frequently met by others. If she did not leave her home, walk to her farmland and weed everyday, her taro farmland would have been overgrown with weeds. While busy with their restaurants or groceries in the tourist season, local women still find time to weed, because 'it doesn't look good' and 'elders may blame' if they have more weeds than taros on the farm. Despite physical decline, elderly women in their 70s or even 80s still walk to their farmland everyday, weed for hours, and carry kilos of taros and sweet potatoes back home on their own without the help of trolleys or vehicles. It is a common and somewhat affecting scene to see a skinny old woman stagger alone on the road, carrying a full bag of sweet potatoes in the afternoon. Similarly, elderly men are no longer able to do dangerous and laborious jobs, but they can work on the farm with their wives, take care of their trees in the mountain, or go fishing in easier and safer ways. There are even easier things to do. Hills around Yeyou were sporadically on fire, and the villagers could see the smoke and flame in the distance from time to time; they said that it is done by the same old man<sup>47</sup>. Visible changes of landscape are an indirect proof of vitality if someone can be associated with them.

At first glance, it is intriguing why Yami society is flooded with death, as if the locals never know minor penalties such as servitude or forfeits. In particular, the price

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<sup>47</sup> I heard this story from villagers of Yeyou; Wang and Cheng (2006: IV-23) also record the same story.

of sloth is not a loss of chance but a loss of life. Thinking it over, however, there is nothing surprising in the equation 'sloth is death', because diligence and survival are so closely interrelated in Yami society, and the locals just juxtapose the ultimate cause and effect without redundant descriptions. Unlike people in other societies who can make a living simply by means of exchange, buying cheap and selling dear, the Yami must produce food from Nature with their own hands. As Yu (1989:8) summarises his long-term observation on Yami culture,

It can be said that 'self-care' is one of the main cultural theme among the Yami. Everyone has his own duty, and doing his duty bases him on the society. After satisfying themselves, people who are capable to help their kindred and friends can acquire a higher social status in their community; on the contrary, those who are incapable to fulfil social expectation will come down to the bottom.

Different ages, sexes and residences leave persons with different responsibilities, but ultimately, all people have a responsibility in common, i.e. to feed themselves. The Yami have strong kinship ties to pull individuals through various difficulties from occasional bad fishing luck to long-term unemployment, and in most cases, they are kind persons and never sit by and watch anyone, including strangers, starving for any reason. What prompts people to be self-dependent are their dignity, others' gossip, or both. Only children and invalids are free from the psychological and social pressure of continuous non-productivity. Many teenagers begin following their elder siblings doing part-time jobs in Taiwan – mostly laborious jobs such as building workers or removers – and earning some pocket money during their long vacations. Those laborious jobs often become their preferred employment options after high school graduation.

Nowadays, the elderly are the remaining ones on the island who persist in the visual signs of vitality. Because of modern lifestyles, there are many incentives for young people to oversleep: watching TV, playing video games, getting drunk, etc. Local parents in their 40s or 50s seldom intervene in their adult or adolescent children's lives, and oversleeping is not considered something to be condemned, but better left unseen. The younger generations are obviously more tolerant of sloth. The elders' persistence may have something to do with their ambiguous status in the society: even though they are standing at their peak of life at this moment, sooner or later they are going to fall down once they lose their footing in the society.

## Seniority and authority

### Ages and generations

Because ageing is a continuous process, there is no specific threshold moment for people to become elders in Yami society. In a broader sense, people who reach the grade of *syapenkwa* (grandparenthood) can be called *rarakeh* (elders), but grandparents who are in their 50s or 60s may consider themselves not so eligible (Liu 2004:126). By contrast, people over 80 years old are absolutely senior enough to be called *rarakeh*, but their social influence is often limited if they have not been promoted to *syapenkwa* in their ages. By and large, it is believable that Yami elders' social authority is based on a comprehensive consideration of both their age and their generation in the family; a typical authoritative elder is supposed to live long enough and have a lot of offspring, including many grandchildren.

Actually, the locals did not know their precise ages before population censuses began being conducted in Lanyu. Even so, people always remember their relative seniority in the family – who are their *gaga* (elder siblings), *wari* (younger siblings), *maran* (uncles), *kaminan* (aunts), *akay* (grandfathers) or *akes* (grandmothers). These kinship terms are extensively applied to non-kin as honorifics that indicate relative seniority. People's family members can be their reference points for defining non-kin relationships, for example, parents' *kehakay* (male friends) and *kavakes* (female friends) should be called *maran* and *kaminan*, too. The relative seniority in a generation is also clear, since local children of different ages often play together and know one another well while getting along day by day. While seniority is almost equal to superiority in Yami society, even *gaga* are eligible to punish *wari* to a reasonable extent, while *wari* rarely dare to defy their *gaga*, who may be only three or four years older than themselves. The *gaga-wari* relationship remains valid in adulthood and serves as the minimum unit of seniority on many formal occasions in which a sequence is required, e.g. elders speak to the public in turn. Hence, Yami society is like a gigantic kinship network, in which seniority, in an interpersonal sense, determines half of people's social authority.

Another half of their social authority is determined by intergenerational seniority, i.e. their absolute grades in the genealogy – one is a grandparent, a parent, or merely a single person. Generally speaking, the authority of a higher grade in the genealogy is recognised by all people, including non-kin. Therefore, generations become absolute signs of seniority and draw definite social boundaries among people; the concept of *makanio* (ancestral taboos) functions accordingly. Generations mark out people's superior/inferior social status in a more institutionalised sense than ages do.

If ages are visually explicit, then generations are verbally explicit in Yami culture. Yami naming system is a typical case of teknonymy, i.e. referring to parents by their children's name. In principle, people's names indicate their generation. The specific application of teknonymy is: when a firstborn infant is named after birth, its patri- and matrilineal lineal kin will do away with their original names and acquire new ones according to their generation relative to the newborn. For example, if a boy is named Nayros, it is actually 'Si-Nayros' when his name is mentioned in dialogues, where the article *si* for personal names is always prefixed. The name Si-Nayros will be used until he has his first child, and before that, he belongs to the grade of *sikwa*, i.e. people who have no offspring. If Nayros is a firstborn, his parents should change their names accordingly. Nayros's father will change his name to Syaman-Nayros, the phonetic contraction and elision of *si ama no nayros*, 'the father of Nayros' (Wei and Liu 1962:108). Similarly, Nayros's mother will change her name to Sinan-Nayros (i.e. *si ina no nayros*; 'the mother of Nayros'). If Syaman- and Sinan-Nayros are also firstborns, Nayros's four grandparents will share one name Syapen-Nayros (i.e. *si apo no nayros*; 'the grandparent of Nayros'). Finally, if one Syapen-Nayros is a firstborn, his or her parents will be called Si-Kotan or Syapen-Kotan, a name commonly shared among all great-grandparents beyond boundaries of consanguinity.

Geertz and Geertz (1964) argued that teknonymy produces a 'downward looking' kinship structure and leads to a genealogical amnesia, since the system always focuses on offspring rather than ancestors. However, in the case of Yami names, teknonymy is a principle of promotion rather than oblivion, and to an observable extent, the accent in a Yami name falls on the generation rather than the newborn's personal sign. It is an insult if others continue using people's former names after their acquiring new names, even if the mistake is made unwittingly. Meanwhile, name changes are also a life goal among the elderly, especially when they have owned everything except their eldest child's first child. It is a noteworthy point that people's name retains 'Syaman-X' or 'Sinan-X' if their eldest children remain single or sterile, no matter how many grandchildren they have in fact. Their only chance to be promoted to 'Syapen-X' is their eldest children's death, and then their next eldest children will become new 'firstborns' (cf. Wei and Liu 1962:110; Dong 2004:79). Therefore, the grade of *syapenkwa* is not a symmetrical concept to the kinship terms *akay/akes*. In addition, degradation is also possible if a person dies before having any offspring. People who have previously changed names because of the deceased person must recover their former names instantly.

In public affairs, generations are a more decisive factor than ages. In principle, only people of *syapenkwa* or more senior have the right to speak. People of *sikwa* are only allowed to listen, and it is an extremely rude behaviour interrupting a senior

person. *Syapenkwa* also monopolise highly technical jobs, e.g. forging silver helmets, making keels and weaving tools, and building a big boat and organising a fishing team (Wei and Liu 1962:115; Syaman-Rapongan 2003:79). These activities are *makanio* among younger generations.

### **The ambiguity of old age**

In a sense, it is interesting that Yami elders' social authority is embodied in their tasks rather than privileges. Moreover, their eligibility to eat Elders' Fish makes their authority sound like a right to sacrifice. In the local classificatory knowledge, edible fish are primarily classified into two main categories, *oyod* (real fish) and *rahet* (bad fish). The two categories are a sociological distinction and another *makanio*: *oyod* refers to edible fish species which are better in taste and nutrition and suitable for everyone to eat, while *rahet* are worse in quality and suitable only for adult males to eat. Some species among *rahet*, e.g. butterfly fish (*tapez*) and groupers (*mahang*), are considered the worst fish suitable only for male elders to eat. The common name Elders' Fish derives from this custom<sup>48</sup>. In general, eating Elders' Fish is a *makanio* amongst younger generations, but there are two significant exceptions: firstly, a young man is allowed to eat Elders' Fish if his father has deceased (Hsieh 2003), and secondly, even a grandfather may avoid eating Elders' Fish if his father is still alive (Yu 1994:24). The exceptions make the implication of Elders' Fish more likely a sign of genealogical supremacy, that is, a man can eat Elders' Fish if and only if all his lineal senior kinsmen are deceased.

Nevertheless, 'the oldest people eat the worst fish' can be an uncomfortable phenomenon which contradicts morality in some East Asian societies. To give a reasonable interpretation, Hsu (1987:45-46) argues that although elders are physically weak, they are culturally considered the persons most resistant to the bad influence of Elders' Fish, due to their accumulated experience and wisdom. S. Chen (1994:55-58) considers the custom a cultural mechanism of self-sacrifice, since elders are the most suitable persons to undertake the risk of eating the worst fish – they do not need as much strength for laborious jobs as young people. While both Hsu's and S. Chen's interpretations make some sense, the phenomenon reflects the ambiguous status of Yami elders, who have the strongest mental power to resist and the weakest physical power to be wasted in Elders' Fish. However, this paradox is always resolved in the final stage of life. In practice, it is often the case that 'the oldest people insist on eating the worst fish', and an old man may stop eating Elders' Fish if he is no longer

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<sup>48</sup> In Yu's record (1994), the Elders' Fish in Yami language is *kakanen no raraker*; i.e. 'food of the elderly', but in fact, the Elders' Fish should be a sub-category – a kind of *rahet* - without a local name.

able to choose. This occurs among very old people, who have lost the capability for cooking and have to eat whatever their children prepare; it is said that children always prepare the best fish (i.e. *oyod*) for their decrepit parents.

Very old people are called Si-Kekey, an appellation which is also applicable to a newborn without a personal name (Wei and Liu 1962:111; Syaman-Rapongan 2003: 108; Cheng 2004:61); the similarity between the two kinds of people is explicit. As well as Syapen-Kotan, Si-Kekey is also a name commonly shared by a kind of people, mostly the generations above Syapen-Kotan, e.g. great-great grandparents, though real cases are rare in available records. To become a Si-Kekey only requires a vague 'very old age' rather than orderly genealogical promotions, and in reality, it is pitiful rather than respectful to become one. At this stage of life, a person has completely withdrawn from the society and no longer has influence on others. The social authority endowed by seniority is limited to those who can move, talk, and work.

### ***Vazay: more pains, more gains***

In a realistic sense, whatever people accumulate throughout their lives will, unfairly, be zero when they are no longer able to maintain their connexions to the society; on the other hand, their social authority is certain to be strengthened over time if the connexions remain. This phenomenon seems to reproduce the relationship between a man and a tree that he found in the communal timberland: if he stops his continuous infusion of labour to the tree, his *agaz* on it will gradually disappear, and he will lose the tree in the end<sup>49</sup>. Similarly, if people stop their continuous infusion of labour to their social authority, they will lose their authority, too. However, while the relation between labour and ownership is not as 'natural' as Locke claimed<sup>50</sup>, the straightforward relation between labour and authority can be culturally specific. From labour power to political power, the conversion is completed by means of a series of cultural premises in Yami cultural structure. The first one defines the necessary proportion between labour input and value, namely '*more pains, more gains*'.

Again, this optimistic principle cannot be based on the locals' self-deception but, to some extent, reflects what they experience in their production activities and how they rationalise those experiences. The following paragraphs describe the local daily life of a household in Yeyin village, in which working – farming and fishing – still takes up much time. Presumably, the reliability of those simple production activities is founded on neither huge yields/high efficiency nor the Yami's 'Zen road to affluence' (Sahlins 1975:2) – their limited human material wants, but something else.

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 1.

## More time, more food

Onis is Tarop's father, who is in his seventies, living together with his wife Yaso in their *vahay* in the old district of Yeyin. Compared to other householders, Onis has a very big family: he has ten daughters and two sons, which was a miracle in the years of very limited medical resources on the island. All Onis's daughters are married and working in Taiwan, and Tarop and his younger brother Nalo choose to stay in Lanyu and keep their aged parents company. Tarop's concrete house is located in the new district about five minutes walking distance from Onis's *vahay*. Even so, if he has no special requests, Onis seldom goes to see Tarop. Tarop often goes back to Onis's place for dinner if he works late, and the father and son may have a brief talk in passing. Tarop usually spends at most thirty minutes in his father's place and seldom stays longer. Most of the time, Onis and Tarop live their respective lives in the same village.

Every morning, Onis and Yaso usually go to Tarop's grocery around 7 o'clock, take some buns and drinks for lunch, and see if Tarop is available to give them a ride to their farmland. If Tarop is short-handed at that moment and has to stay in the store, the old couple will walk there in twenty minutes. Whenever Onis takes goods from Tarop's grocery, he always pays like other customers. Once I asked him why he insisted on paying at his own son's store, Onis fondly told me: 'It's hard to make money; my children are pitiful.'

Onis's money comes from a small governmental living allowance for senior citizens – 3,000 NT dollars per month. Onis can use the money for shopping for some canned food and Paolyta in Tarop's grocery; certainly he will not shop in others' groceries regardless of distance. Except for supporting his own son, Onis does not spend much money in his daily life: he has no rentals, bills and taxes to pay. Onis has his own house and land; he uses free groundwater; his electricity is free due to Tai-power's subsidy. Because he seldom travels far, he does not have a motorcycle and saves the money of daily refuelling. Onis's only large expense is the transportation fees when he goes to visit his daughters in Taiwan; the total cost for plane, train and bus tickets largely exceeds 3,000 NT dollars per person, but Tarop and other children will cover the expense.

Onis need not pay for food, either. Everyday, Onis and Yaso go to their farmland, weed with bare hands, harvest with digging sticks, and carry sweet potatoes and taros back home as their staple. Due to the tropical climate of Lanyu, root and tuber crops quickly sprout in 3-4 days after harvesting and cannot be stored at home for long, so the old couple usually take less than three days' servings of staple each time. If the staple is enough, Yaso may go to collect some crabs, shells or wild vegetables as

dishes, while Onis may carry out one-person fish netting (*manaoy*) on the tidal flat: when fish are washed ashore, he rushes forward to the waves and casts his net<sup>51</sup>.

*Manaoy* requires skills, but Onis can always bring a dozen of small-sized fish home, and it can be his lucky day if he successfully catches some small but nice *oyod* like delicious rudder fish (*ilek*), which is also a symbol of good luck.

In terms of sustenance, *manaoy* is sufficient for Onis's two-person household. If he would like bigger fish for honouring himself, he has to push his small boat (*tatala*) to and back from the sea by himself, angling and waiting in the offshore area for several hours. Since nothing is promised even after those boring and exhausting preparations, Onis runs this risk only during the flying fish season, in which there are more chances. Among other methods of catching a big fish, snorkelling and spear fishing (*mipaltog*) is suitable only for vigorous young men, while a motorboat is never something Onis can afford. Angling with a surf rod is a modern and popular fishing method in Lanyu, which can be safely carried out by the seashore and which enables the angler to catch offshore big fish. Tarop and Nalo have several surf rods at home, but Onis has never borrowed one and tried to use that.

Still, the old couple need not prepare dishes for more than one day, because fresh food is always better than preserved food, and wild vegetables and fish are always there. Hence, even if Onis and Yaso seem to spend most of their daytime – from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. – in food production, they work at a leisurely pace without much pressure. Normally, their dinner includes steamed sweet potatoes and taros, fish soup, boiled shells and crabs, fried wild vegetables, etc. Local young people including Tarop and Nalo have already been tired of eating sweet potatoes and taros, so Yaso always additionally prepare some rice for her sons. Leftovers will be eaten up the next morning as breakfast or left for feeding their pigs.

While Meillassoux (1981:40) describes the domestic agricultural economy as 'delayed production resulting from investment of human energy in the land, accumulation, storage, and organised and managed distribution of the produce', the agricultural production among the Yami is a rather different case. In the long term, root and tuber crops grow all year round, and thus their production is rarely delayed by periods of preparation. Both wet taros and sweet potatoes take a period over 5-6 months to mature, but technically, no household might harvest all its crops at once and start over from scratch. In the short term, it is obviously more advantageous to leave root and tuber crops on the farm rather than take them home, since they keep growing in the land but begin sprouting in the storage. These two biological features of root

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<sup>51</sup> Yami fishermen's major methods of inshore fishing include angling (*mamasil*), snorkelling and spearing (*mipaltog*), one-person netting (*manaoy*) and two-person netting (*manazatazan*). Two-person netting requires one person to guard the outlet of channels of reef flat with a fishing net, while another chases fish into the net with a stick. (See Chang 1991: 171-173; Yu 1994:27-28)



and tuber crops prevent the locals from investing more labour power in accumulation and storage – spending more time taking more food home is both a waste of strength and of resources.

When accumulation and storage become unnecessary, people have a different way to assess their yields. If ‘increasing yields’ means raising the quantity of serviceable products *in hand*, then such increase is totally useless for the Yami. Since the homogeneous production among local households excludes ‘production for exchange’ as a possible incentive to increase yields, what the Yami need to consider is stabilising yields, i.e. maintaining a continuous food supply in the long term. In this regard, ‘underproduction’ – taking less than what one can take – may be the most advantageous method. Hence, the Yami’s agricultural production looks like regularly gathering food from specific areas without taking their chances. In their routine work, local women can always harvest their crops as they want, even if their farmland is able to supply more than that. The first proof for the principle ‘more pains more gains’ may come from such a fact: if people spend more time on the farm, then they can bring more food home.

### **Greater pains, better gains**

Theoretically, the third biological feature of root and tuber crops, i.e. looser growing conditions, allows the locals to invest less labour power than do farmers in intensive rice farming. However, the Yami’s actual labour input is greater than that. Local women rarely use pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers on the farm but fight against weeds, rats and snails with their bare hands. Hence, their labour time on the farm is mostly spent in the endless struggle with those vibrant nutrient competitors in the tropical environment of Lanyu. When modern means of increasing production efficiency are excluded, it is as if local agricultural production is determined by only one variable: the more pests people wipe out, the better quality their crops, especially wet taros, will have.

It does not matter if people eat taros of a worse quality – a gnawed appearance or a small size – in daily meals. After all, gnawed taros remain edible, and it takes nearly two years for a taro to grow to a length of over 20 cm, while taros in meals are about half the size. What matters is people’s dignity. A good quality is particularly important in a *mivazay*, in which a newly completed building or boat has to be decorated with tons of nice taros as a kind of wealth exhibition (see below). Therefore, a *mivazay* can bring more shame than glory on its hostess if the exhibited taros are visually deficient in quantity/quality or bought from Taiwan. The Taiwanese taro species is bigger, rounder, and sweeter than the local one, but there is nothing honourable in displaying

good-looking but bought taros in a *mivazay*. If a household unfortunately suffers a bad harvest and must import taros to supplement the required amount, bought ones are always placed at the bottom of taro piles and covered by locally planted ones. Hence, the locals have the second proof for the principle ‘more pains, more gains’: if people work harder on the farm, then they can produce better products; the quality becomes an essential factor through the social mechanism of *mivazay*.

### **The continuous accumulation of facts**

Overall, the reliability of the local agricultural production can be founded upon both its stabilised yields and limited efficiency: the former positively confirms the principle ‘more pains, more gains’, while the latter negativity refutes the possibility of ‘fewer pains, more gains’. Now we shall further consider the local fishery. In contrast with farming, fishing relies more on skill and luck, and it is impossible to artificially demarcate an area on the sea, in which all fishermen can stabilise their yields in the same way. Nevertheless, Yami fishermen themselves regard the high uncertainty of their fish catches from a particular point of view. When Syaman- Rapongan discusses the Yami’s cultural belief in the homogeneity of human talent, so he concludes:

In Yami tradition, the work schedule in each month and each season of a year is definitely regulated, and everyone clearly knows what to do and what not to do in a specific period. In this context, everyone fairly has his time and chances to learn and practice life skills which he should be capable, but everyone’s outcomes are not always the same. Some people are more talented in boat building, and some people are not born to be a friend of fish. Even so, you can neither give up building boats because you consider yourself not a professional nor give up fishing because you are not a friend of fish. At least, people must have the courage to claim “others can build boats, I can do too”. Once you begin to practice, there must be someone coming to instruct and assist you; people must try to make friends with fish if they are not born to be one. It is impossible that a boat falls from the heaven for you to use or fish in the sea automatically fly to your home, because those things are fruitful results of personal efforts. (2003:87)

When the locals call a man ‘a friend of fish’ (*kanopan no among*) or a woman ‘a friend of staple’ (*kanopan no kakanen*), it means that the person can gain more than others without more efforts in those production activities (ibid:106). Even so, it is also believed that diligence is sufficient to supplement all innate inequalities. People’s dignity again plays the role as an incentive to increase yields, even if their actual yields remain limited by their available means of production; only the use of

motorboats may break the limit. Hence, the high uncertainty of fish catches, i.e. the probability of ‘many pains, no gains’ caused by either skill or luck, becomes ignorable *in the long term*.

This probably cannot be accounted as a sort of ‘foresight’. The Yami, especially people of the same generation, always love to mutually compare their achievements, but intriguingly, their competitions can stimulate a sense of inferiority but not a sense of loss. They neither question why they spend time as much as others but gain less than others nor ask why they invest as much as last time but gain less this time, which is as natural as it can be among fishermen. If a fisherman caught only one fish today, he may feel somewhat inferior to another fisherman (P-P’) who caught ten fish today, but he may not feel lost because there is nothing comparable between ‘what he has’ and ‘what others have’ (T-t’) – his neighbour’s ten fish are not ‘what he could have had’, as a goal of production of his. By the same token, the fact ‘he caught only one fish today’ is not comparable with his memory ‘he had caught ten fish yesterday’ (T-t); it is nonsense to claim that he should have also caught ten fish, as the maximum production capacity of his. However, what is comparable is his status before and after his actions: before fishing, he got no fish, but after fishing, he got one fish. Hence, his actions did bring some changes to his life (P-T). It is in this sense that the principle ‘more pains, more gains’ acquires the third and perhaps the most important proof: if people continue working, then what they have now is always more than what they had before.

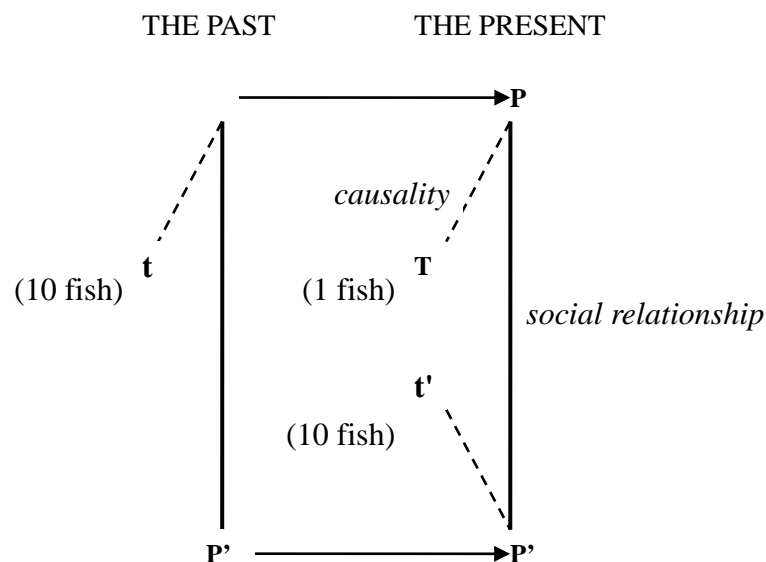


Figure 3.1 Relations among fishermen and their fish

In this case, the relation between persons (P-P’) and that between persons and things (P-T) conceal the relation between things (T-t-t’). Hence, the *fait accompli* ‘the

fisherman has one fish now' becomes unrelated to either 'the fisher man had ten fish in the past' or 'another fisherman has ten fish now', which could have served as reference points for comparisons and produced a sense of loss. While the relation between things, or that between a *fait accompli* and other possibilities, dissolves, the principle 'more pains, more gains' describes the continuous accumulation of facts, like irreversible histories.

### ***Mivazay: the more generous, the more glorious***

The very first time I talked with Onis was in Tarop's grocery, when I had become Tarop's friend for a short while. Before formally introducing myself, Onis had been informed about me, and he enthusiastically promised to assist with my research before I requested anything. 'I was a councillor and helped many people. It's no problem to ask me if you want to know anything about Lanyu,' so spoke Onis.

It is a rather uncommon case, in which an elder actively shares his knowledge at no price with people besides his own offspring. Aimless chatting with the elderly is welcome, but their words may become ambiguous and less detailed if some sensitive topics are touched, such as their knacks of 'how to do...' or 'how to make...'. Not only outsiders but local intellectuals may meet with rebuffs when they try to interview elders of other families, whose response is usually 'why don't you ask your own father/mother? Isn't he/she still there?' (Dai 2007:101-102) In principle, the Yami regard life skills as inheritable property from parents to children, and to teach others how to make a living is not only a loss of property but a curse to the learner's parents, as if they were deceased. An appropriate price, e.g. money, can shift teaching from the context of inheritance to that of exchange. By contrast, younger people in their 30s or 40s are more willing to be interviewed. While some of them consider interviews a chance to discuss local issues with friends, the others may take asking questions as a compliment. On one occasion, I asked Tarop a question with regard to his family history, and he enthusiastically explained to me as much as he knew. However, what impressed me most was not his answer but his overwhelming pride in answering my question; 'am I like an elder?' so asked Tarop with a self-contented smile.

Elders know everything. Whenever young people feel uncertain about anything in their traditional culture, they always speak with one voice: 'this must be answered by elders'. Elders are also the guardian of social order. When children wake up early, girls dress decently (with shoulders and thighs covered)<sup>52</sup>, and fishermen unwillingly

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<sup>52</sup> Many tourists mistake that Yami people tolerate being scantily clad – probably because of the exotic image of *kekjit* (male thong). Actually, girls in hot pants or even bikini always embarrass the locals. A local guesthouse owner complained to me about a male guest of his, who went to public places only in underpants. Even if underpants cover more than *kekjit*, the point here is rather the

leave their spear guns aside in the flying fish season<sup>53</sup>, their reason is always ‘elders may blame.’ Yami elders never inflict corporal punishment, but their verbal condemnation is powerful enough to deter people from violations of *makanio* in public. In general, the Yami obey a principle ‘*seniority is authority*’; the elderly are moral paragons in their society, and ageing is a natural process of gaining power.

It is not the principle that endows the elderly with authority; it is their deeds that validate this principle. In their egalitarian society, the Yami never recognise the power bestowed by titles such as village head, township representative or township chief. Moreover, neither wisdom nor wealth serves as a sufficient reason for standing in awe of the elderly, since more often than not, what people own easily provokes jealousy. While the principle ‘more pains, more gains’ promises personal interests, the only way to turn public hostility into social authority is sharing, making others indebted, and sealing their mouths with food. In short, the principle ‘seniority is authority’ can be true only if the gap between personal life-labour-wealth and social power can be bridged by means of sharing, and the more people give, the more power they gain, i.e. ‘*more generous, more glorious*’.

Meillassoux (1981:41-42) argues that social authority in domestic societies is determined by their mode of production: people diachronically help one another to last through their non-productive periods (e.g. immaturity of crops/infancy of persons) and thus establish a series of relationships of ‘advances and returns’; the elderly are authoritative because of their anteriority – everyone in the community is indebted to them. In Yami society, however, non-productive periods are not explicit in the local production activities, while social authority still forms by means of sharing, or more precisely, feeding. Therefore, Meillassoux seems to confuse the domestic mode of production as a decisive factor of sharing, which further determines the formation of social authority. But evidently, people can still gain power even if their sharing is totally unnecessary, as the Yami case shows.

In the light of a general logic of the gift economy – gifts create debts, and gift-debts create power relationships, the elderly are authoritative because they have already shared so much with people throughout their lives. Nevertheless, the implication of power among gifts in daily life (e.g. fish, taros or sweet potatoes) is often covered by their practical use – people are ‘helped’ rather than ‘indebted’ because of those gifts, and it is true that social authority rarely forms in the local surplus exchange<sup>54</sup>. Instead, power is acquired on a more institutionalised and

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traditionally defined propriety of dressing.

<sup>53</sup> Catching non-migratory fish in the flying fish season is a *makanio* because fishermen ought to concentrate on flying fish in the flying fish season. For a sketch of major events in the season, see Chapter 5.

<sup>54</sup> See discussions on local spheres of exchange in Chapter 6.

stressful occasion of wealth exhibition and redistribution, namely *mivazay*, a kind of potlatch.

As mentioned before, while sustaining a household to a minimum extent is in reality not so demanding, dignity is a rather decisive factor of the locals' labour input. The heaviest production pressure comes from the *mivazay*, in which a household is obliged to produce food of sufficient quality and quantity as a food-gift for nearly a hundred households. Because each household is a self-sufficient productive unit, the economic necessity of *mivazay* is quite limited. For example, the huge expenditure of a *mivazay* may be regarded as a sort of social deposit that promises a continuous pork supply, i.e. the distributed huge amount of pork is converted into a higher frequency of including pork in daily diet (Yu 1995:48). By contrast, the sociological implication of *mivazay* is explicit: sharing differentiates households by creating gaps of social status but unites them by means of debts. When people hold a *mivazay*, it is mostly because 'it's embarrassing to take so much from others' (ibid: 47). In quarrels, the simplest way to get the upper hand is to compare how many occasions *mivazay* one has already held; a man can question his opponent like this: 'I have built three houses and four boats; how about you?' (Chien 2004)

A *mivazay* is always bound up with the inauguration of either a building or a boat, and the larger the object is (e.g. a *vahay* or a big boat), the more possible a *mivazay* will be held. It is said that holding a *mivazay* is not compulsory but depends on the volition of a household, so it is possible that a household only prepares a small feast and invites a few close relatives when a gazebo or a small boat is completed. For all it is a male job, a husband always has to ask for his wife's consent before starting to expand a house or build a boat and hold a *mivazay*, because planting taros is a female job (Syaman-Rapongan 2003:117). If she agrees, the husband can begin to expand their farmland for planting more taros; villagers will know that the man is going to hold a *mivazay* in the near future when they see him expanding taro farmland. The time required to plant taros is two years on average, while it usually takes just several months to complete a plank boat or a *vahay* with local timber. The schedule of completing a concrete house is more uncertain, because few people in Lanyu have enough cash to pay in full for all building materials. It is a common situation that after grouting, a man leaves Lanyu to make money for buying paint, and after painting, he leaves again to make money for buying furniture. It is not until both the male and the female jobs are ready that their *mivazay* can be held.

Blackie's concrete house is an exception: he got a large sum of retirement pay when leaving the Army, so he could afford to buy sufficient building materials from Taiwan and to hire some of his relatives to help with the job. It took him only several months to complete his house in 2006. Blackie's problem was that he preferred to

invite a few close relatives and friends and hold a ‘Taiwanese feast’, in which invitees, according to the Taiwanese custom, would send him cash gifts. But Blackie’s father Nimor insisted on holding a *mivazay*, because it might be his last chance to return favours. Blackie was also warned that his mother Yacin’s taros were going to be eaten up by rats, so Blackie succumbed in the end and held his *mivazay* in January 2008. I briefly describe the procedure of his *mivazay* in the following paragraphs.

### **Harvesting taros (28 Jan 2008)**

Wet taros, as well as pork, are an indispensable part in the *mivazay*. Although the locals are usually more interested in how many pigs will be slaughtered and how much pork will be shared in a *mivazay*, the status of taros as a supporting role is never replaceable. As a result, Blackie must hold his *mivazay* in time before rats gnawed all his mother’s taros. On the promised date, about twenty aged and middle-aged men and women of Yeyin automatically gathered on Yacin’s taro farmland in the early morning; they are Nimor and Yacin’s relatives and friends. No young people came because it is not their job. Taro harvesting is a female job, so there were more female than male helpers. Nimor, Blackie and even their neighbour Onis also participated in the job. (Plate 3.1)

Some people dug taros with digging sticks, and others sat on the bank washing taros and removing the stems and leaves. Stems of bigger taros were not removed, and these better taros (*meyyopi*) would serve as more valuable gifts for guests from other villages; villagers of Yeyin would take normal taros (*ningan*). Worse taros – gnawed, undersized, or immature – were piled together and then shared with the helpers or used for feeding pigs. Men carried bags of worked taros from the farm to the Circle Road, and Blackie would drive his truck and carry the taros back home. In Blackie’s store house, *meyyopi*, *ningayn* and taros bought from Taiwan (since rats had gnawed quite a few taros on the farm) were separately piled. Nimor sat aside, counting the number of guests with stones and estimating necessary shares of taros (Plate 3.2).

### **Exhibiting taros and felicitating (30 Jan 2008)**

A *mivazay* lasts two days: the first day is ‘the welcoming day’ (*niyayi no nikat*), and the second is ‘the sharing day’ (*mikankanen*); the former includes exhibiting taros and felicitating (*isaray o ahakawen*), welcome chanting (*minikanikat*), and all-night chanting (*miyanowanohod*) (Dong 1995:2). Around 8 a.m. on the first day, some male elders in Nimor’s family, including Nimor and Blackie<sup>55</sup>, gathered in the living room

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<sup>55</sup> Blackie’s status in his own *mivazay* was somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, he is the owner of

of Blackie's house and began singing Yami traditional monotone folk songs (*raod*) in a solemn and depressing atmosphere: one man led, and others followed and repeated his lyrics. The lyrics of *raod* are mostly improvised on the spot and require rhetoric and inspiration for conceiving decent lyrics, so the chanting proceeded in a slow pace with quite a few intervals of silence.

Guests (male elders) arrived in succession in the morning. At 11 o'clock, young men in the village spontaneously came to help move taros from the storehouse and piling them in front of the house. Young men are not eligible to participate in chanting, but they are responsible for laborious tasks like moving taros and killing pigs. When the young men were working outside, the guests chatted in the dining room, and Blackie's female family members stayed in the living room watching TV. The young men finished their job at noon and then went home. After lunch, the women began to boil pork and peel yams outside the house for dinner preparation.

### **Welcome chanting and all-night chanting**

The *mivazay* formally began at three-thirty in the afternoon. The guests who had arrived earlier began to walk out of the house and waited outside. Nimor, Blackie and Blackie's wife stood in front of the house, wearing Yami heirlooms (Plate 3.3). When the ceremony began, the guests greeted the two hosts one by one, walked in the house and gathered in the dining room; the hosts followed up when all guests arrived. The female family members still stayed in the living room. Some young lookers-on could only stay outside the house. There were about thirty male elders coming for the welcome chanting. At this stage, the chanting proceeded in the form of call and response: the guests sang *raod* in turn to praise the host's achievement, while Nimor sang *raod* to humbly reply to the guests. The atmosphere was even more depressing than that in the morning. Excepting the singing person, people in the dining room made no sound, but they could freely smoke and chew betel nuts in silence (Plate 3.4).

It is said that a *mivazay* brings glory to a man, but the ceremony itself is far from a happy occasion; all the participants looked serious without smile on their faces. The locals believe that openly expressing delight or excitement in a *mivazay* is an impolite and even inauspicious behaviour, which may lead the host's family to misfortune. The

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his house and the host of his household, so he could not be absent from any of the procedures. On the other hand, however, he was not senior enough to host welcome and all-night chanting, and he actually knew very little about *raod*, in which lyrics are 'classical' and abstruse for young people to understand. Therefore, it was actually his father Nimor who dominated the ceremony, and the invited guests were mostly Nimor's relatives and friends. Nevertheless, it was a chance for Blackie to begin to learn about details of *mivazay*. If *mivazay* is household-centred, then in Blackie's case, the 'household' was rather Nimor's nuclear family (e.g. not including Blackie's sons) rather than Blackie's nuclear family. Blackie's two sons were too young to play a role in the ceremony.



Yami believe that excessive praise is no different from cursing, and thus irony is a notable feature of *raod*. To ‘praise’ the host, guests may sing nearly humiliating lyrics, such as ‘you raised very few pigs; you have never caught big fish; you are useless (*ipivanyaga*)’, to express the reverse meanings (ibid: 3-4)<sup>56</sup>.

The chanting continued until 5 p.m. when all the guests had already sung a song. After that, the women served boiled pork and taros as the participants’ dinner. About 6 p.m., the sated guests began singing again in the dining room. This time, the chanting would last all through the night, and the women would continuously serve the guests Paolyta, rice wine, betel nuts and taros. It is impolite to let the guests feel hungry.

### **Distributing taros and slaughtering pigs (31 Jan 2008)**

At 6 a.m. on the second day, local young men began dividing taros into small piles in the dark. Blackie invited 159 households in total, and he made 68 piles of *meyyopi* for guests from other villages and 108 piles of *ningan* for villagers of Yeyin. Taiwanese taros were equally distributed to each pile. After finishing piling, villagers of Yeyin took their shares back home, and soon they came back again for the climax of a *mivazay*, slaughtering pigs.

Blackie prepared twelve pigs, and only two were raised by Nimor. Interestingly, the locals do not devalue Taiwanese pigs as they devalue Taiwanese taros. The young men began slaughtering pigs at 7 o’clock, but the first piercing was left to elders – it is better done by more experienced persons, who can precisely pierce a pig’s heart so as to prevent it from frenzied struggle. After pigs expired, the young men began burning the bodies to remove bristles, severing the heads, and removing the skin. Different people cut and chopped different parts of pork and made piles of meatloaves, chopped lean meat and livers. Blackie made about 300 piles of pork, and the quantity of each pile was virtually enough for a meal in a household.

Around 9 o’clock, the women began boiling fat meat, organs and blood and making as many piles as the raw meat. After a short while, Nimor formally began to distribute the pork. In principle, every adult male in a guest’s household can take a share of pork, but Nimor would give a little more to his close relatives and friends (cf. Jeng et al. 1984:148; Huang 2005: 140-143). The process looked as if everyone took what he deserved from the host rather than accepted a favour. The whole ceremony ended when all piles of pork were shared, and finally, Blackie’s family could take a breath for a long while.

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<sup>56</sup> This feature is closely related to the negative implication of language in Yami culture; see Chapter 7 for more discussions.

## Discussion: gift exchange as *faits accomplis*

In terms of procedure, the *mivazay* for boat inauguration is not so different from that for house inauguration. However, because a big boat involves more than one household, and all members of the ship owner's fishing team are obliged to provide taros and pigs, a *mivazay* for boat inauguration is usually on a much larger scale and is a great event in the village (cf. Jeng 1984). Moreover, the lively boat heaving and trial voyage (Plate 3.5), which serves as an addition to food sharing in a *mivazay* for boat inauguration, has been recently used for promoting local tourism and attracting more tourists. Hence, a *mivazay* for boat inauguration can be a striking event on the island, too. By contrast, the *mivazay* for house inauguration is household-centred, and thus the real focus of a *mivazay*, i.e. debts and repayments, is more explicit in this case.

Both the preparation and the procedure of a *mivazay* are long-drawn-out and tiring, but a man has to hold at least three or four *mivazay* in order to enhance his social status (Yu 1995:47). Evidently, the wealth shared in a *mivazay*, particularly pork, can enhance the reciprocity existed among intimate households, but at the same time, the obligation to repay makes the reciprocal relationships coloured with endless competitions, as Godelier points out:

The act of giving seems to create simultaneously a twofold relationship between giver and receiver. A relationship of solidarity because the giver shares what he has, or what he is, with the receiver; and a relationship of superiority because the one who receives the gift and accepts it places himself in the debt of the one who has given it, thereby becoming indebted to the giver and to a certain extent becoming his *dependent*, at least for as long as he has not *given back* what he was given. (1999:12; italics in the original)

By means of either solidarity or superiority, gifts in *mivazay* relate self-sufficient households and presumably limit the tendency toward dispersion caused by the domestic mode of production (Sahlins 1975: 95). In a sociological sense, this game is certainly beneficial for maintaining social integrity and reproducing a system of the *total prestation* (Mauss 1970). This significant function is founded on another general logic of the gift economy, that is, a counter-gift never eliminates an old gift-debt but always creates a new gift-debt. This point has been explained by Gregory (1982:46): a gift and a counter-gift create two different relationships and render the two parties in gift exchange mutually indebted. In other words, gift exchange can be regarded as the continuous accumulation of facts, in which a gift purely means *itself* rather than the antithesis of another gift.

It is necessary to make a contrast here. When I argue that production among the Yami is the continuous accumulation of facts, my reason is that their comparisons of gains, or value judgements of ‘pains’, are always made between one *fait accompli* and another in the same causal relation (e.g. a fisherman had no fish before fishing, but he has one fish after fishing). That is, the principle ‘more pains, more gains’ can be necessarily true if people exclude possibilities of other parallel causal relations (e.g. he could have more fish if he did something). Gift exchange among the Yami can be same thing, in which people are only concerned about *faits accomplis* in the same social relationship (e.g. a man was not indebted before receiving a gift, but he is indebted after receiving a gift). People may care about whom they owe and who owes them, remember the number of facts of indebtedness, but never compare one gift-debt with another, because gifts and counter-gifts are, fundamentally, mutually irrelevant. Gifts in *mivazay* never invoke counter-gifts, but persons in *mivazay* always want to provoke other persons.

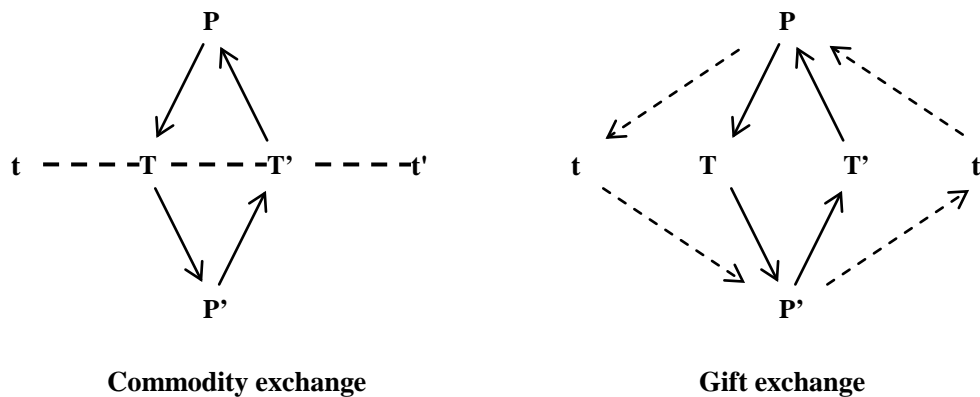


Figure 3.2 Relations in commodity exchange and gift exchange

*Mivazay* are irreversible histories and serve as a universal criterion of assessing a man’s lifetime achievements. Therefore, the frequency of his holding *mivazay* can be a stressful sign even for those who are not in his reciprocal/competitive relationships. In sum, it can be said that the upgrade/downgrade of social status caused by *mivazay* occurs on both a relative (interpersonal) scale and an absolute (historical) one.

But the intervention of money is changing the structure of the *mivazay*. Among local households that give the first place to money making rather than food producing, a *mivazay* is equal to a huge loss. For example, the pigs and taros bought from Taiwan totally cost Blackie 200,000 NT dollars, which could have been invested in more snorkel equipments, another second-hand van or whatever beneficial to his business. This is why Blackie was so reluctant to hold a *mivazay*. When Blackie finally made up his mind, the money was also doomed to be lost forever, even if sooner or later it

might be returned to him someday in the form of hunks of pork, useful but no longer saleable. While imported taros are considered second-class, in the eyes of local businessmen, holding a *mivazay* with money is like a thankless task and a loss of profitability.

Again, this sense of loss originates from comparisons among possibilities, but what makes the comparisons possible is money. As mentioned above, gifts in *mivazay* are mutually irrelevant, because gift-givers always pay more attention to their gift-receivers, making them indebted while enhancing their own social authority. What matters is the relationship between persons rather than that between things. However, money makes gifts interrelated, digitises their values, and shifts people's attention from the relationship between persons to that between things. In Blackie's case, his gifts were worth 200,000 NT dollars, and he did not forget this. He could not stop viewing his bought gifts – commodity-gifts – as commodities, especially when he could have put his money into the M-C-M' circuit of capital and made more money. But the counter-gifts that he might receive in the future must be unsaleable things. Hence, comparisons between a gift and its price, its commodity-equivalents, and its counter-gift, inevitably complicate those originally straightforward interpersonal relationships in *mivazay*. Gift exchange becomes a part of a huge exchange system of commodities.

### ***Dede*: both visible and invisible outsiders**

To sum up the discussions above, everyone in Yami society has a straightforward life course beginning with labour. People must act so as to prove their vitality; they must work so as to sustain their vitality; if they continue working and feeding others, they naturally obtain everything they deserve: wealth, power, and knowledge. No one is born rich, noble, or wise, and people's values are determined by their continuous accumulation of good/productive facts in the process of ageing. Of course, such straightforwardness *per se* is artificial. Positively, it is bolstered by people's social responsibilities, e.g. sustaining their households, holding *mivazay*, etc., which are functional on the basis of social solidarity. Negatively, it is shaped by people's ignorance of both shortcuts (e.g. more efficient means of production) and obstacles (e.g. the sense of loss) on their way toward affluence. Such culture-based straightforwardness is one foundation stone of the Yami's egalitarian society.

Another foundation stone is the cultural belief in the homogeneity of human talent. As the local expression 'a friend of fish/staple' implies, innate inequalities are believed to exist among people. But in terms of their learning capacity, all people are born equal, and this is the real footing where all begin to accumulate their efforts. Hence, by means of trial and error, everyone can do whatever others do, and because

of people's dignity, no one has an excuse for depending on others. The local homogeneous production and the spirit of autonomy converge on this cultural belief. While dependence is culturally identified with incapability, the social division of labour is largely limited among local households. Unsurprisingly, this cultural feature becomes the origin of vulnerability while contemporary Yami society is exposed to the threats of more solidified, organised political and economic systems (Sahlins 1972:84; Meillassoux 1981:87).

In a broader context, a real *tao* can be defined by an absolute racial boundary. Despite its biological referent 'human beings', the term *tao* is usually used to refer to those who have a traceable consanguineous relationship to the Yami. No matter how long they have lived in Lanyu, the immigrants and the locals' spouses from Taiwan are still labelled as *dede* (outsiders). But a half-blooded child, whose parent of either sex is Yami, is certainly a *tao*. Culturally, the Yami claim that their personal relations to the race as a whole are established in the naming ceremony (*sabujin-toktok*) or 'baptism' in their modern wording. The baptism is held two or three days after an infant was born. On the day, the father will dress formally and then depart for scooping some water from his family's water source. After naming the infant, the father will dip the water with his forefinger, gently touch the hair whorl on the infant's head and bless it (Dong 2004:76-78). From then on, the infant formally becomes a member of *tao* and acquires its *ngilin* (luck)<sup>57</sup>. While all human beings are destined to experience certain universal events in their lifetime, it is *ngilin* that makes *tao* different from *dede*. The locals often proudly claim that they are blessed, and their *ngilin* will protect their lives from undeserved misfortunes. For example, flights between Lanyu and Taiwan frequently encounter air turbulence and rainstorms, but the locals are seldom worried about their safety on the plane. As they say, although plane crashes have occurred in Lanyu several times, none of the victims was Yami; *dede* died in disasters because they did not have *ngilin*.

Besides being unblessed, *dede* are also socially excluded people in Lanyu. Generally speaking, local customs and taboos are not applicable to *dede*, and most of the time, *dede*'s behaviours can be ignored as long as they are not excessively annoying. A typical case of the *tao/dede* dichotomy is Li's field experience in the 1950s (1999:52). Li noticed that his local informant refused to walk along with him through other households' flying fish flakes (frames for drying flying fish) and would rather make a detour. The informant's reason was: 'It's a *makanio*, but you are not our people!' Today, anglers and scuba divers from Taiwan are never constrained by the

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<sup>57</sup> The concept *ngilin* is close to 'luck', which is fluid, personally different, and acquired from the identity of *tao*. A relevant concept is *lag* or *alag*, which is close to 'fate'. If *ngilin* predetermines contingencies in a person's life course, then *alag* predetermines necessities. See Syaman-Rapongan 2003:68; Hsieh 2004b:118; Hu 2004.

local demarcation of fishery zones, and they can freely engage in angling and spearing fish all around the island. The locals may only turn a blind eye if those tourists fish near their *vanoa*, but they themselves never dare to flagrantly fish at the *vanoa* of other villages. *Dede* are harmless in this case, because they never occupy any position in the society, and thus the concept of social transgression is not applicable to them. In a symbolic sense, *dede* seldom become a threat to *tao*.

The Yami are pragmatists. They may be glad if *dede* try to ‘do as the Romans do’ because their culture is admired and respected. But sometimes ‘do as the Romans do’ can be totally loathsome if it is unnecessary. A case recorded by S. Chen (1994:79) is a Japanese female researcher who insisted on eating *oyod* like local women. At that time, the local man who accommodated the researcher suggested that she could eat *rahet* and ignore the dietary taboo, but she never listened. The local man was annoyed because the researcher was grabbing food from other female members in his household – local women are prohibited from eating *rahet*, but *oyod* are difficult to catch and limited in number. In this case, therefore, *dede* became an aggressive food competitor. In other words, what liberates the *dede* from local social regulations is such a presupposition: *dede* do not compete with *tao* and deprive *tao* of things they deserve. Taiwanese anglers and scuba divers come to fish in Lanyu, but the locals never regard those outsiders as fish thieves, because no fisherman owns fish in the sea before he catches them – fishing is essentially a fair competition<sup>58</sup>. In addition, several anglers or scuba divers can hardly deprive the locals of their chances to catch fish.

On the same issue, the *tao/dede* dichotomy emerges once again when the locals take notice of a visible loss, which can be exemplified with the recent fishing conflicts between Yami and Taiwanese fishermen. The point of conflict is always flying fish. In pursuit of more catches in the fishing season, fishermen from southern Taiwan often sail to the offshore area of Lanyu and plunder local fishery resources using 10-ton motorboats and driving-in nets<sup>59</sup>. For Yami fishermen, who fish mostly with plank boats or 2-3 ton sampans, the plunder is rather unendurable: they could land 20-30 flying fish and 6-7 dolphin fish in several hours in the past, but nowadays, 5-6 flying fish a day are already a passable catch<sup>60</sup>. When Yami fishermen become aware of the difference between the past and the present and witness the tons of fish in Taiwanese fishermen’s nets, they realise where ‘their fish’ have gone. In June 2005, Taiwanese fishermen Capt. Jiang Jin-rong (江進榮) and his crew accused Yami fishermen of

<sup>58</sup> For more discussions on the local concept of ownership, see Chapter 5.

<sup>59</sup> Driving-in net (追逐網) fishing requires more than two boats, which spread fishing net over the sea, and fishermen swim to chase fish groups into the net. If successful, driving-in net fishing can catch thousands of flying fish in a day. Actually, Yami fishermen also occasionally apply this method but less frequently than Taiwanese fishermen, who are usually more organised.

<sup>60</sup> Chang, C.W. (張存薇), (2005, May 8), *Overfishing Breaks the Yami’s Hearts*, Liberty Times.

snatching their 1,200 kg catches of flying fish<sup>61</sup>. In April 2007, three Taiwanese boats fishing near Lanyu were driven away by the locals; the Taiwanese victims reported that ‘they (Yami fishermen) split our nets with knives and threatened us, warned that the sea area is all theirs and asked us to go back to Taiwan for fishing’<sup>62</sup>. Intermittent conflicts continued until March 2008, when the Taitung County government proposed to ban all motorboats from entering the three-nautical mile offshore area of Lanyu. Despite its effectiveness in settling the old dispute, this unreleased government notice raised a new one between the government and the people: Taiwanese officers insisted that the government notice must be equally executed without discrimination, and local motorboats should not fish in the forbidden area, either. The locals emphasised that the local fishery aims to self-sufficiency rather than trading, so their use of motorboats should not be limited by law. Finally, the government succumbed to the locals and privileged them; the amended government notice was released on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2008<sup>63</sup>.

The Yami’s ignorance and detestation are two sides of the same coin. Their attitudes toward outsiders are rather their responses to threats: if you are not a threat to them, they ignore you; if you are, they detest you. In either case, what comes after their ignorance or detestation may be not limited by the local social regulations. Nevertheless, outsiders in Lanyu are not always exposed to a pervasive xenophobic emotion of the locals. In their daily life, the Yami peacefully live together with the Taiwanese for most of the time, and the locals usually leave Taiwanese tourists with a very good impression of gentleness, friendliness and politeness – they can treat you well, even if they cannot trust you wholeheartedly.

A key factor here is how the Yami perceive threats, or what makes them feel lost. Even if the *tao/dede* dichotomy is always definite, the Yami rarely straightforwardly associate the category of *dede* with a negative moral stigma and conclude that all outsiders are villains. Rather, threats are always embodied as bad/aggressive facts. For example, my local friend Mai, who was educated in Taiwan and currently engages in social work in Lanyu, is astonished by the ‘selfishness’ among her fellows. On one occasion, she recounted her conversation with a local woman from Hongtuo:

Woman: There are many groceries in Hongtuo, but I would rather shop in the ones managed by Taiwanese than those managed by local people.

Mai : That’s too mean! Why don’t you help your own fellows to make some money?

Woman: I would help them if we were in Taiwan. But in Lanyu, if I let them earn my money,

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<sup>61</sup> Chen, M.D. (陳明道), (2005, June 11), *Nine Fishing Boats Were Expelled from Lanyu Waters*. People’s Daily, p.13.

<sup>62</sup> Ling, A.P. (凌安屏), (2007, April 29), *Lanyu and Hengchun Fishermen Mutually Provoked*, NOW News (<http://www.nownews.com/2007/04/29/124-2088788.htm>).

<sup>63</sup> Chang, C.W. (張存薇), (2008, April 24), *The Ban on Flying Fish Fishing Excludes Residents of Lanyu*, Liberty Times.

soon they will become richer than I!

It is understandable why the Yami maintain stronger social ties with each other when they are working or studying in Taiwan, where they are only to a degree backed by their families and need mutual reliance. But on the other hand, it is worth thinking why their solidarity quickly dissolves when they come back to Lanyu, where a few Taiwanese businessmen are competing with them for the limited economic resources on the island. In general, Taiwanese are more shrewd businessmen, who know more than the locals about business management, marketing, and what Taiwanese tourists may want. It is common that behind the most successful local businessmen, there are smart Taiwanese spouses organising everything. Nevertheless, the locals seldom take the Taiwanese as threatening competitors; rather, they are more concerned about social status among themselves – who surpasses them and whom they surpass – in their reliable world. Presumably, while the Yami confirm the reliability of their world by excluding obstacles from their lives, they can keep ignoring threats in their surroundings in the same way, until the threats are finally exposed to their eyes, like those unwelcome food competitors either in the dining room or on the sea.

## Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the formative conditions for *Homo laboris*. On the one hand, local relations of production establish a simple proportion between labour and product, and local mechanisms of redistribution, especially the *mivazay*, sophisticatedly relate the self-sufficient domestic mode of production with wider social life, both limiting the tendency toward dispersion among households while also shaping a psychological motive, i.e. dignity, as a production incentive. On the other hand, the particular emphasis on the *fait accompli* in local production and exchange activities reduces both products and gifts to continuous accumulation of facts. Hence, with its irreversible history, a human life course becomes a process of gaining without losing. The Yami's confidence in their environment has a twofold foundation: their belief in human talent and labour, and their ability to ignore what might otherwise make them feel a sense of loss.

A critical point here is whether and how things are interrelated. On the one hand, if only facts in a unidirectional causal relation can be considered relevant, then counterfactual possibilities and information become irrelevant (Figure 3.1). On the other hand, if persons only aim to relate persons in terms of their gift exchange, then gifts/things can be mutually nugatory (Figure 3.2). In both cases, the basis of relatedness is always the straightforward relation between persons and things – people and what they produce, what they give and what they receive.





Plate 3.1 Harvesting taros for a *mivazay*



Plate 3.2 Counting the number of guests with stones





Plate 3.3 Welcoming guest



Plate 3.4 The welcome chanting



Plate 3.5 Boat heaving in a *mivazay* for boat inauguration (Dongqing, June 2008)

## Chapter 4

### Fortune and Glory

Generally speaking, the Yami are people of high self-esteem. Excepting seniority, few things can make them permanently acknowledge others' superiority, or in their words, they will not allow others to be 'higher' than themselves for long. Temporary superiority is acquirable by sharing, e.g. when a fisherman fortunately catches a big fish and shares the meat, or a household holds a *mivazay* and shares pork. For the sake of dignity, however, gift receivers are also continuously producing chances to share and render their debtors indebted. By and large, it can be said that individuals of the same generation entertain a state of *dynamic equilibrium*, that is, everyone is equal but trying to break the equality at the same time.

'Dynamic equilibrium' is Bateson's terminology denoting a continuously changing status quo, in which both reinforcing and restraining influences toward, and processes of, differentiation, namely *schismogenesis*, coexist (1958:175). In terms of a domestic society, if the self-sufficiency based on local relations of production enhances the tendency toward dispersion among Yami households, then social mechanisms of redistribution like *mivazay* reunite people. In terms of an egalitarian society, if psychological factors like dignity stimulate the differentiation of social status among Yami households, then the limited productivity in the local domestic mode of production restrains a widening wealth gap. From either perspective, the local material and the social-psychological conditions are mutually inhibitive and result in an intermediate state between class society and anti-society. While material conditions remain constant, it is the social-psychological conditions that will both stimulate household production and limit accumulation of private property, endowing things with significance without depriving persons of self-worth. It may be debatable why the Yami require diligence and competition to decorate their reliable world, but presumably, a geographical factor comes into play: there is not enough space on the island for realising the tendency toward dispersion, so people must learn to live peacefully together with others.

It is foreseeable that the dynamic equilibrium will be disturbed as the material and/or social-psychological conditions begin to change. Nowadays, Yami society is in just such a situation: on the one hand, imported tools and techniques help people to break the original limit of productivity, while on the other, money and commodities



largely reduce the self-sufficiency of a household. Dignity still functions but exacerbates the circumstance: the harder people work, the more dependent they become; the more people share, the wider the wealth gap between themselves and others becomes. In other words, the society is accelerating toward a non-domestic-egalitarian society, in which households disperse in terms of class rather than space, while social relationships are vertically established between classes rather than horizontally established between persons.

The crux is what people gain and give in their working and sharing in the context of the market economy. The attributes of money have a decisive influence: firstly, the exchange value of money originates from an implicit social contract, and secondly, the M-C-M' circuit of capital is the most efficient way to produce money. Therefore, while money is culturally recognised as a kind of wealth, the following statement is also embedded in the cultural structure: *those who have more money can make more money than others, but they will become more dependent on others in the process*. Evidently, this statement is inconsistent with Yami culture. The first contradiction is: if more labour input always brings more products, why does the infusion of more money not always bring more profits?

Through the case of my local friend Tarop, this chapter depicts how the Yami generally respond to the market economy, one which is based on a totally different concept of production and wealth from theirs. In Tarop's efforts to make money, we can clearly observe the same emphasis on a *fait accompli*: his jobs are arranged in a lineal, step-by-step sequence; his profits never come from possibilities; his property is assessed by eyes instead of numbers. While Tarop firmly refuses modern commercial concepts such as strategic alliance, market segregation, opportunity cost, etc., his money making becomes a ridiculous process of 'many pains, no gains'.

By contrast, Tarop's younger brother Nalo is a smarter businessman. Nalo clearly knows how to allocate his limited resources economically, popularise himself among Taiwanese tourists, and make money according to the principle 'fewer pains, more gains'. What he is facing is a different problem from his elder brother's: his efforts – intellectual labour and capital accumulation – cannot render him more respectable among his fellows. In short, the two brothers' respective predicaments reflect a common dilemma among the Yami in this particular historical moment: somehow, fortune and glory are no longer two sides of the same coin but an either-or bitter choice that people must make.

## **Prologue: encounter**

I got to know Tarop at the very beginning of fieldwork, on a hot afternoon in July 2007. The whole story began in the middle of an aimless ride, when I decided to stop

by a famous open air bar ‘The Bean Sprout’ on the spur of the moment, seeking a cup of drink and someone to talk with. I had a pleasant talk with the bartender Ayu, a lively Taiwanese girl and an art student coming for her working holiday. Ayu mentioned that she was helping a ‘very earnest and hardworking local young man’ to decorate his store, and she invited me to take a look at her work. Some minutes later, I followed Ayu to an ordinary concrete building beside Kaiyuan Harbour (Plate 4.1): the ferry waiting room, which I had passed by several times but always ignored. Before then, what had impressed me was the crowd always gathering at the harbour: hundreds of tourists debarking from ferries, local guesthouse owners waiting to pick up their guests, and vendors peddling drinks and souvenirs. Despite its being a mere 20 metres to the harbour, the waiting room was desolated; it was obviously not a functional place where people must go, and its inconspicuous appearance hardly interested anyone to take a look inside.

When Ayu and I walked into the waiting room, Tarop was concentrating on the scattered motorcycle parts on the floor. He looked like he was somewhere in his thirties, wearing a greasy singlet and a shabby pair of shorts, sitting cross-legged on the floor, taking a short glance at both of us and then turning his eyes back to the parts. Tarop nodded to us without saying anything, and Ayu began to work silently. In the following ten minutes, Ayu kept drawing seaweed on a white wall with brushes and black paint, subtly and slowly; I stood beside Ayu, quietly watching; Tarop remained busy with his motorcycle parts. The long-drawn-out silence in the waiting room somewhat worried me, as if I was an unwelcome guest. When I finally made my mind up to withdraw, Tarop put his work aside and spoke to me.

‘You are Ayu’s friend, aren’t you?’ Tarop asked. Ayu turned to us and introduced me to Tarop: I am doing research on Yami culture.

‘That’s great. Thank you for coming to study our culture.’ Tarop smiled with sincerity, and I finally felt relaxed, though it was not the typical response which I had been used to get from the locals. Before I established some real friendships with the locals, their response to my self-introduction was mostly as indifferent as: ‘Hmmm, another researcher’.

Tarop told me he was also the boss of ‘The Tarop’s’, the largest grocery in Yeyin; his store was actually next to the house that I had just moved into a couple of days before. ‘Wonderful, you can come to see me in the evening,’ he invited me, and I promised I would.

I visited Tarop the following night. His grocery was a two-floored concrete house hiding in the narrow lanes of the new district of Yeyin, and few people would have noticed it if there was not an eye-catching signboard beside the Circle Road. On the right side of the main entrance, Tarop built a traditional *tagakal*, where youngsters

often gathered and played Chinese chess. There was a metal shed on the left side, where Tarop stored his tools and a billiard table; everyone could ask for a free game. Before stepping on the tiled floor inside the store, customers had to take off their shoes. In the grocery, two rows of shelves for goods were arranged along the walls, where cup noodles, snacks and other daily necessities were displayed in an orderly fashion. Various brands of drinks, beer, and the most popular Paolita were stored in a large refrigerator beside the backdoor. With more fluorescent tubes and a television, the atmosphere in the store was bright and amusing, different from other dark and narrow groceries in the village, where customers probably would not want to stay any longer after paying up. Many children were sitting on the floor and watching TV shows, while several youngsters were crowding around the cash desk and watching the part-time cashier, a high school boy, slaying monsters in a PC game.

‘Come up, come up,’ Tarop yelled upstairs, when I politely asked the young cashier if he would give up his game for a while. Tarop and his younger brother Nalo had their bedrooms on the first floor, and the remaining space there was their living room, where Tarop hoarded boxes of goods. Tarop was in his room, sitting on the floor, perplexed by his computer. He asked if I could fix its problem.

‘Recently it is running more and more slowly; it wasn’t like this when I bought it last year’, Tarop complained about his computer and its annoying slowness, a common problem caused by either not routinely executing disk defragmentation or installing too many useless applications; Tarop had made both mistakes. After taking some simple steps, I fixed the problem in five minutes and then fully instructed Tarop how to avoid it next time, though I wondered if he remembered what I said. Afterward, whenever Tarop had a problem with his computer, he always called me to deal with it; he enthusiastically introduced his friends (and their computers) to me and kept me busy all the time. Soon, computer maintenance became my speciality among the locals, and it was an unexpected but efficient way to make friends and prove my reliability in this society.

In the following days, my services naturally included various kinds of laborious jobs. A few days after our first meeting, Tarop began inviting me to join his routine work, including moving cargos from the harbour to his grocery, preparing for typhoons, and most importantly, renovating the ferry waiting room. Tarop seemed to enjoy my company, even though I was not skilled in any of his jobs. Tarop always encouraged me to try everything he was doing, from repairing an old chair with a hammer to making a new one with an electric saw; he seemed so assured as if there is no need to worry about an uninstructed man who might saw off his fingers during trial and error. Since nobody could shirk the job right before him in this society, I could but cautiously take whatever Tarop delivered to me every time. This is the how the locals

learn new things: there is no complete verbal instruction before people take action, and useful advice is always obtained from others when making mistakes.

I worked together with Tarop for six months in total, and in this period, I was deeply impressed by his ‘omnipotence’: he appeared proficient in carpentry, plumbing, motorcycle maintenance, and many other practical skills in Lanyu. He dealt with all kinds of problems in his daily life on his own, from toilet trouble to motorcycle breakdown. In his eyes, very few things had ever baffled him except repairing his second-hand truck which, as he said, ‘requires more special tools’. He acquired these skills partly when he tried various jobs in Taiwan after high school graduation. Tarop had been an apprentice mechanic at a motorcycle repair shop for one month, a factory worker for two years, and a building worker for three years; he seemed not to stay in the same job for long and preferred self-training after grasping the basic technical operations. Anyhow, he has learned enough skills and techniques to maintain his property in a serviceable status without depending on others, though there is nobody else for him to depend on, either.

Tarop lives a regular but flexible life. He usually wakes up at 6 a.m., opens the doors of the store, and then dozes off on a recliner beside the cash register. By eight o’clock, his cousin will come to work the morning shift, and then he can start his routine work. If it is Tuesday or Friday – the arrival days of cargo ships, Tarop will drive his truck to the harbour around ten, move 30-40 boxes of cargo on his own, and then drive back to Yeyin at noon. He will leave the boxes to his cousin if not too many, or he will stay longer and help her replenish the shelves and then ride a motorcycle to the waiting room again around 3 p.m. On other days of the week, Tarop stays in the waiting room all day long, arranging goods, making decorations or fixing motorcycles until late. When he finishes a day’s work, it is usually around 8 p.m. or even later if he is still in the mood for working. After having dinner in his father’s house, Tarop takes the remaining time as off-hours, while his favourite leisure activity is chatting with his Taiwanese friends via mobile phone or internet in his room. It is the high school boy who works the swing shift, and in addition to staying beside the cash register, his duties include replenishing the shelves and the refrigerator and locking the doors of the store before leaving at midnight. Tarop will come downstairs around 12 midnight, take most of the cash out of the cash register and leave a fixed amount of small money inside, conceal the cash in his room, and then go to bed. The next day the cycle repeats itself.

Tarop started his retail business in 2004, and before that, he had known nothing about it. Although all the skills that he had learned in Taiwan were practical in Lanyu, they could hardly become a way of making money there: no one needs a carpenter, a plumber or a building worker on the island. By contrast, retailing is a better choice –



there had been two or three other groceries in Yeyin, and most of them still survived. Therefore, Tarop blunderingly started his business with a nearly empty store, and as he describes, ‘people came but found nothing to buy, so they left.’ Despite things not going smoothly in the beginning, Tarop always had timely helpers in the following days, for example, his sisters lent him money, his local friends gave him a hand with heavy work, and his Taiwanese friends introduced cash registers and signboards to him. Finally, his store stood on a firm footing in Yeyin after years of effort.

Tarop always wants to be a respectable person, and his time unexpectedly came when his grocery got on the right track. In 2006, the Township Office held an open tender for the management right of the long-abandoned ferry waiting room, and by good luck, Tarop’s father Onis won the tender among dozens of local competitors by drawing of lots. Thus, surrounded by envious looks, Tarop started his second store in 2007 and suddenly became a celebrity on the island; he was known as ‘the young man who owns the dock’, which is an outstanding achievement at his age. Of course, Tarop does not really own the waiting room; he signed a six-year contract with the Township Office and has to pay a monthly rental of 6,000 NT dollars.

To start his new business, Tarop needed more manpower – his most urgent need was a helper who can stay in the grocery for him. For this reason, Tarop hired his elder cousin with a monthly salary of 8,000 NT dollars and the high school boy with 3,000 NT dollars. Saving extra personnel expense is always an important motive for him to look for a wife who, in his imagination, should be diligent and smart enough to manage the grocery by herself (and for free), so that he will not be distracted from his new business. Tarop is slightly out of the ‘best’ age range to get married, but he is still considered an ideal marriage partner among the locals: in their eyes, he works hard everyday and never talks much. It may be easier for Tarop to marry a local woman, but personally, he prefers Taiwanese women. ‘The Taiwanese are good at running a business and making money’, as he said.

Tarop’s business in the waiting room had a smooth beginning. When he had just taken over the place, it was the habitat of goats, and there was nothing but their faeces inside. Many of Tarop’s local friends helped him renovate the place, and they made it a clean and comfortable place with colourful wall paintings and hand-made wooden tables in a short time. In the following Lunar New Year vacation, Tarop made 200,000 NT dollars in seven days – smart Nalo reequipped the space to be a night club and sold profitable cocktails and beers to homecoming youths. Unfortunately, his business drastically declined when the crowd flew back to Taiwan after the vacation, and soon Tarop realised that a night club is not a stable source of income in Lanyu. Therefore, Tarop determined to transplant his ‘Yeyin experience’ to the waiting room and began to sell low-profit drink cartons, cup noodles and anti-seasickness tablets to ferry

passengers and cargo movers. Meanwhile, Tarop was also looking for other possibilities of making money, since regular ferry sailings are available only in the tourist season, and cargo ships come twice a week at most. With limited customers, retailing really is not an efficient way to break even.

Through Nalo's connections, Tarop finally found a business partner, a Taiwanese artist who is also a celebrity in the catering business. In her ambitious plan, the artist would like to re-equip the waiting room to be a seafood restaurant, and then bring her funds, equipments and management team from Taiwan. Tarop only needed to offer the space and give his full cooperation to her. In the following two months from April to May, the two brothers demolished the original decorations in the waiting room and assisted the artist to redesign the space. However, for unknown personal reasons that Tarop never clearly explained, their partnership broke off when the work was close to completion. Consequently, the artist took away all the completed decorations – her artistic works, and left Tarop an empty building. She compensated Tarop with some money for his loss in building materials, but Tarop obviously lost more than that: the high season was coming, but he must start from scratch once again, and this time he could not ask any of his local friends for help.

When I began to join Tarop, the waiting room looked like a newly gurgled house. It is a one-floor building of about 300 (10x30) square metres, which is partitioned into a lobby, a kiosk, a toilet and two rooms (Plate 4.2). Almost nothing was left in the lobby except wooden tables. The walls were intentionally painted white by Tarop's ex-partner in order to erase her paintings. The most valuable thing there was a refrigerator in the kiosk, which was filled with the same brands of cold drinks as those in Tarop's grocery. Tarop used the room on the right side as his storeroom for motorcycle parts, while the one on the left was reserved for his new plan: a craft shop, another new business which he had never tried before. His short-term plan was to start the business before the high season ended, and at that time, he had less than three months to meet the goal.

## **Many pains, no gains**

### **Steps vs. plans**

In the beginning, I naively tried to give my full cooperation to Tarop and avoid interfering in his business decisions. As time went by, however, it was more and more difficult for me, as a friend, to ignore his money loss. In fact, not only I but many of Tarop's Taiwanese friends have been trying to inculcate him with the 'correct' way of business management, or more precisely, how to maximise his profits. Even so, Tarop insisted on his personal interpretation of a successful management and a maximised

profit. In the end, in his friends' eyes, Tarop trapped himself in an incomprehensible dilemma: *he thirsts for money, but he does not want too much*. Sometimes, Tarop complains to me that all his friends misunderstand him, and he does know how to make money and make efforts to gain profits; his survival has proved his capability.

To start his new handicraft business, Tarop asked Ayu to draw whatever she likes in his craft shop. Actually, before and after Ayu, Tarop had been asking a few different people, mostly Taiwanese tourists, to do the same thing. Without overall planning, those enthusiastic travellers respectively painted a goat, a fish or a bike rider on a door, a wall or a corner in the waiting room. After several months, the space looks like a themeless gallery, where paintings of different brushwork are collected without any discrimination. Tarop himself seems to be quite comfortable and satisfied with the pluralism in his place; he tolerates the aesthetic disharmony and never tries to shape a unified style. At any rate, those enthusiastic travellers did resolve some of Tarop's problems: the waiting room was once again decorated at no cost.

Somehow, Tarop considers decorations, rather than goods, as the critical part in his business, not only for the craft shop but for the waiting room as a whole. One day in his grocery, Tarop and I talked about the progress of Ayu's painting.

'I really hope she can be faster. Sometimes she stays there for hours but only draws a blade of seaweed. Sometimes she leaves for play in the middle of work. It can't go on like this.' Tarop grumbled to me.

'But she is an artist! She always needs time and inspiration while working. By the way, she charges nothing. Maybe she just thought you can't put pressure on her because of that.' I honestly gave my opinion to Tarop.

'I know, but when can I start my craft shop?' Tarop shook his head powerlessly.

Nevertheless, in my eyes, Tarop himself did not show any more activity than Ayu in his own part. It was not until Ayu accomplished her wall paintings, a message board and a signboard for the craft shop at the end of July that Tarop began to search for his suppliers of handicrafts. Before that, his time in the waiting room was mostly spent on fixing his motorcycles, sometimes in assisting Ayu with her decorations, but rarely in making efforts to get some saleable goods in hand. Consequently, Tarop entrusted this task to me. He asked me to choose 'whatever I like' from a wholesaler of ornaments in Taiwan; he seemed to be more confident in my artistic taste than I myself did. But pitifully, because of two sequential typhoons, it was nearly the end of the high season when the ornaments were finally delivered to him at the end of August. His craft shop earned very little money from tourists in that year.

In the following low season, Tarop and I spent five months decorating the rest of the waiting room. We painted pillars and the ceiling, made flower beds, planted trees, and even made embossments with cement on the roof – he supposed that in so doing,

ferry passengers would notice the waiting room when the ferry is harbouring, though after completion, we found that they could see nothing due to the low angle of the roof. Some of our works proved to be not functional at all in the end. At the same time, Tarop remained unmindful of his suppliers and manpower for the coming high season, as if customers would automatically show up and spend money as long as his store is fully decorated. Again and again, I reminded Tarop that customers always come to his place for something: commodities, services, or whatever they are willing to pay for. Therefore, other than decorating the store, he could begin preparing the ‘something’ in advance, such as finding a reliable wholesaler or recruiting a skilled bartender. In contrast with my worries and uneasiness, Tarop always took an over-optimistic attitude, that is, his problems will naturally disappear in the end. As he said, in his experience, he could always find something saleable and meet someone helpful when the time came, and then he would be able to make money. ‘You are also one of my helpers,’ he told me.

#### **‘What is there’ vs. ‘what is not there’**

In the high season, Tarop invests relatively more time and energy in taking care of his motorcycles. It is not only because renting motorcycles to tourists is a critical source of income but because his motorcycles break down from time to time. After taking over the waiting room, Tarop borrowed about 200,000 NT dollars from the bank, bought ten second-hand motorcycles at a price of 15,000 NT dollars each, and then started his leasing business. Motorcycle leasing is certainly profitable: the current rental in Lanyu is 500 NT dollars per day, and sometimes Tarop will cut the price to 350 NT dollars if he likes the renter. Thus, if he successfully rents out a motorcycle for four days, he can immediately earn at least 1,400 NT dollars, which is a passable and instant cash income for him. As a result, Tarop did have his reason to invest more in his side job, while his craft shop had not yet earned a dollar for him. One day, I suggested that he should finish painting the last pillar in the waiting room, which we had been working on for days, but Tarop told me he would rather repair motorcycles: ‘Anyway, painting makes no money. It’s better to get the motorcycles repaired so that they can be rented out.’

Sometimes, however, it is as if Tarop is trapped in a hole which he himself digs. He spends lots of time fixing motorcycles, getting them repaired, then renting them out several times, and soon they will break down once again – the cycle is much shorter than might be expected. Obviously, the root of this problem lies in the lifespan of his second-hand motorcycles, which had been ridden for more than ten years in Taiwan before being sold to Tarop. Moreover, damp and saline sea winds in Lanyu

exacerbate the problem. Before starting the leasing business, Nalo urged Tarop to buy brand new motorcycles instead of second-hand ones, but Tarop did not listen to his younger brother because he could afford only four or five new motorcycles at most. I think, Tarop's insistence on buying second-hand motorcycles has nothing to do with his lack of experience in leasing business. Nine months later, it became my turn to stop him when Tarop told me that he wanted to take a loan again so as to expand his leasing business – to buy ten more second-hand motorcycles.

Among Tarop's motorcycles, there are always at least three in maintenance, and he keeps one for his own use, so serviceable ones for rent are fewer than six. Even so, Tarop seldom feels difficulties in his management, because his customers are usually fewer than his motorcycles. It sounds weird that the 'owner of the dock' takes no advantage in making money from ferry passengers, but in fact, a good location is not a necessary condition of running a successful leasing business on the island. Usually, when ferry passengers disembark, guesthouse owners will respectively take their guests home and prepare motorcycles for them, which means that Tarop's only chance is those who did not book accommodation in advance. I have suggested that he may cooperate with some other guesthouse owners so as to establish his customer base and ensure a stable income, but he never considers it necessary. At the same time, even Nalo, who runs a guesthouse as well, prefers to establish cooperative relationships with other motorcycle lessors, because Tarop's motorcycles may keep him busy in rescuing his guests all day long. Even a strategic alliance cannot save Tarop's leasing business before he realises that more motorcycles do not always make more money.

It is hard to say that Tarop's leasing business is a successful one, but he persists in it since it more or less produces income. In his waiting room, thus, Tarop runs three kinds of business at the same time: motorcycle leasing, a craft shop, and a kiosk; the three respectively represent different types of business model and vary in their prime costs, supply capacity and profits. None of the three businesses is incompatible with the other two, but running them at the same time necessarily disperses Tarop's limited capital and reduces the competitiveness of each of them. For example, if Tarop spent his time finding a vendor who offers the best wholesale prices rather than fixing motorcycles, his craft shop might have made some profits for him; if Tarop diverted his capital from starting a new craft shop to retiring his old motorcycles, at least his own brother might have been willing to support his leasing business. Furthermore, Tarop's 'all-in-one' management may implicitly give him more competitors, who are more professional suppliers in their respective businesses. Even so, it is Tarop's preference to run three or more unsuccessful businesses rather than a successful one.

The low-profit kiosk is a business which Tarop cannot easily give up. Retailing, in his words, is the 'root', and he must protect the root well. Unlike motorcycles and

handicrafts, the kiosk is the only possible way to earn money from local residents. When cargo ships arrive, cargo movers may occasionally take a break at Tarop's place and buy cup noodles, cigarettes or Paolyta at the kiosk. Overall, with the limited amount and quantity of each purchase, Tarop can hardly make any real profit from these people. The turnover of the kiosk is often around mere 100 NT dollars in a business day in the low season. In a sense, however, the kiosk is indeed a 'stable' source of income, regardless of its actual profitability. Probably, the kiosk can give Tarop a sense of security when neither his motorcycles nor his handicrafts produce income in the wintertime.

The Co-op, which is only one hundred metres away from the waiting room, is another business competitor of Tarop's kiosk. The Co-op provides more choices and cheaper prices of commodities, while few goods in Tarop's kiosk are special and attractive enough to general customers except anti-seasickness tablets. As a result, villagers of Yeyou have no reason for coming to shop in Tarop's kiosk, and Tarop himself has never expected this. Despite his stubbornness, Tarop still knows that in the long term, he has to find out something more profitable than retailing. One day in the low season, Tarop shared his plan with me about making more money in the coming high season:

'Firstly, I will make the waiting room a tea house or a bar, selling cocktails and snacks just like the Bean Sprout. In so doing, not only ferry passengers, but tourists all over the island will come and enjoy their time; they will love the scenery of the harbour and the beautiful sunset. Later on, I will extend the business hour to midnight, and then cargo movers will come to take a rest in the morning, ferry passengers will visit the craft shop while waiting for boarding in the afternoon, and tourists will come for a drink in the evening...my store will have different faces from day to night!'

A better interpretation of Tarop's dream, I think, is 'he wants to make money *in any case*' instead of 'he wants to make money *all day long*'. What Tarop cares about is the presence of money and if he is ready for it whenever it shows up. Hence, selling Paolyta to cargo movers, drink cartons to ferry passengers and cocktails to tourists, all these transactions of different profitability are of the same importance in Tarop's eyes. He seemed not to be aware of an observable fact that 'crowding out' happens all the time among his customers: tourists usually will not get close to places where local people gather and drink alcohol, and vice versa, because the crowds respectively want and produce different atmospheres in the same space. More than once, I urge Tarop to focus on one specific group of customers, for example, he can make the waiting room a bar as he was planning, serve profitable beers and cocktails, and stop selling cheap

and low-profit drink cartons in his store. But he always answers me like this: ‘What about others? What if customers want something inexpensive to drink?’

Thus, I wonder if the phrase ‘crowding out’ has ever existed in Tarop’s dictionary; for him, commodities of the same kind always ‘complement’ one another. One day, when I was replenishing his refrigerator, I noticed that Paolyta had been sold out in a few days, while Whisbih, a different brand of medicated liquor similar to Paolyta, maintained the same amount.

‘Very few people drink Whisbih in Lanyu, why not stop importing Whisbih and import more Paolyta instead?’ I suggested Tarop to adjust the ratio of his investment.

‘No, that’s not good, because still some people drink Whisbih. What if they come but cannot find what they want?’ Tarop looked confused with my suggestion, as if I had just asked him a ridiculous question.

The so-called ‘some people’ only showed up one time in the following three months, while numerous boxes of Paolyta had been sold in the same period. I suppose Tarop simply could not recognise the opportunity cost that he had lost from importing unsalable Whisbih; he could have used the capital to import more Paolyta and make more money. After several similar debates, however, I gradually realised the difference between his and my definitions of profitability. In my eyes, profitability exists in ‘what is not there’, and it is totally comprehensible to compare the profitability of the Whisbih in Tarop’s refrigerator with that of the Paolyta in my imagination. For Tarop, however, profitability only exists in ‘what is there’, so every one of his customers represents one chance of making money, and he will not miss out any; this is his way to maximise his profit. Accordingly, when I compare the gain and loss and finally make a bitter choice among various options, Tarop simply wants everything. ‘Market segmentation’ is a ridiculous concept to him.

### **The process vs. the consequence**

But Tarop is by no means an avaricious person, who is obsessed by money all the time. In contrast, he often leaves a somewhat negative impression of laziness among his Taiwanese friends, including me. In our eyes, his money making efforts are not as intensive as the locals describe him – a ‘workaholic’, and this is another aspect of his poor business management besides his problematic business decision making.

Tarop often brags about his diligence to me: he works from day to night, seven days a week, and this is why he can own two stores in his early thirties. Sometimes I agree with him. As mentioned earlier, Tarop has an overfilled daily schedule: from moving cargo, fixing motorcycles, to painting walls, there is always something waiting for him to do. At the same time, Tarop is always looking for new tasks to

make himself busy. For example, several days after finishing painting all the pillars in the waiting room, Tarop thought up a new plan: 'I want to plant some trees outside'. Beginning with this simple idea, in the following two months, we nailed formworks, moved bags of sand from the seashore, mixed cement and grouted, and finally made flower beds out of nothing. Later on, we moved a truck load of soil from the hillside, requested some saplings of podocarpus from the Township Office, and built bamboo fences in order to protect the saplings from goats. When we were on our way to finish the final stage of his project, Tarop grumbled again.

'When can I take a rest? I make myself too busy and too tired everyday. When can I go fishing without worries, like others?'

I was surprised and a little bit angry, because he could have given up his simple idea in the beginning, which is unlikely to be beneficial to any of his businesses. Besides, it seems to me that he actually can withdraw from his work whenever he wants. One day, we departed from Yeyin at nine o'clock in the morning, but on our way to the waiting room, we stopped by a small waterfall and played there for two hours, because he said that the waterfall only appears after continuous rainy days, so we should not miss it out. Another day, when we had just begun to plant a tree outside the waiting room, Tarop left the tree, the shovel and a truck load of soil to me, because his friend came for a chat and to have a drink. Still another day, when I persuaded some of my tourist friends to rent Tarop's motorcycles and called Tarop to come to take over the business, Tarop was enjoying his breakfast in Dongqing and asked me to wait, and then he let his customers and me wait for one more hour. Accordingly, of course he can go fishing anytime. A 'workday' for Tarop is never rigidly from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. or as overloaded as his schedule shows. Tarop never minds going to work four hours later or going home four hours earlier, and he always inserts various entertainments in the middle of work. I frequently needed to push him to begin or finish our work, since I hoped to compress the working hours and complete my daily work as soon as possible, and then there would be a real rest for me. But what is a real rest for him?

Chi, an intimate Taiwanese friend of Tarop's, has critically described Tarop as 'a time-wasting and non-organising boss', which depressed Tarop for a short while. Tarop felt misunderstood and thought that Chi's comment was unfair because she never really witnessed how hard he works. Indeed, Tarop's friends could only see him slacking off, such as falling asleep whenever and wherever he wants, or refusing to work if not in the mood. On the other hand, the locals see him in a complete different way, and Tarop also enjoys his good reputation among his fellows. When Tarop is mentioned in chatting, none of his acquaintances question his diligence – it is because Tarop was always at work or on his way to work whenever they saw him. Thus, Tarop



is still an outstanding young man of some remarkable achievements while his Taiwanese friends are worried about his financial position. When local people politely call him 'boss', Tarop always laughs happily with a little embarrassment.

Wealthy or nearly bankrupt, hardworking or lazy, these polarised evaluations on Tarop imply two distinct criteria for assessing wealth and determining a goal of production. Except his family and intimate friends, most people do not know or care about Tarop's real financial situation. All they know about Tarop is the visible fact that he owns two stores, and reasonably, an owner of two stores must be rich. Tarop himself also agrees with this inference. In fact, as far as I can recall, Tarop has never used 'poor' to describe himself, even when he asks someone for help. Moreover, Tarop is usually the one who pays the bill for others, as if it is the responsibility of a 'boss'. Between his tiny profits from retailing and his generosity, therefore, there is a mystery among his Taiwanese friends: is he really rich or simply face-saving?

Nevertheless, Tarop himself seems to be confident in his richness. He has never kept his business accounts, made an inventory or recorded the sales volumes, so he only has a vague idea of his property and sometimes he himself may be confused with how many things he has. Whenever Chi makes efforts to persuade Tarop to start keeping his accounts everyday, he always resists or succumbs for only one or two days. He also unhappily complied with my suggestion of taking an inventory for his craft shop. One possible reason for his reluctance is that Tarop is not good at numbers and has his own way to measure his wealth, as he answered me why he does not have a bank account to save his money:

'What is an account for? I fully know that I have returned the borrowed 300,000 NT dollars to my elder sister, I have the goods in my store that I didn't have before, I have the tools that I didn't have before, and now I have the waiting room. I always know I have more and more stuff, not less and less, and that's enough.'

Tarop recognises his property with his eyes rather than through numbers: his shovels, his truck, his billiard table, his waiting room, all these things are proofs of his richness. To some extent, therefore, Tarop is right about his wealth: as time goes by, more and more things gradually fill up his house, and he can see his richness without counting his cash. What worries me is that under a different criterion, not all of his stuff can be counted as accumulation of wealth. Lots of toys and T-shirts in his grocery, which have been stacked on the shelves for years, have transformed from assets into liabilities. Possessing these goods is more likely a loss rather than a gain if considering the carrying cost – they occupy the limited space in Tarop's store which could have been used for exhibiting more saleable commodities and making more

profits. However, it is like the abovementioned Whisbih case, Tarop will not count things out of his sight as a possible source of profits.

Tarop changes his mind quickly in many daily affairs. He may plan to paint the walls before departing to the waiting room and then decide to fix motorcycles when we arrive. But in contrast with this volatility, his beliefs are rarely shaken by others, even when he notices something wrong in his business. One day, after moving cargo back to his grocery store, Tarop shared with me what he had just figured out on his way home.

‘Selling drink cartons makes very little money! The purchase price of two dozens of drink cartons is 210 NT dollars. Plus the carriage of 30 NT dollars, the cost in total is 240 NT dollars. But even if I sell out the two dozens, I can only earn 288 NT dollars; the profit is not enough to even buy a lunch box!’

What a surprising discovery for a grocery manager, who has run the business for four years! Not to mention, Tarop forgot to include his personnel costs, fuel costs and electricity bill in his calculation. On the other hand, even Paolyta, the best selling product in his grocery, is not so profitable when its cost is 60 NT dollars per bottle and its selling price is only 75 NT dollars – he can only earn at most 180 NT dollars if he successfully sells out a dozen of Paolyta, which often takes one or two days for that to happen. But Tarop continued:

‘Anyway, I don’t dream of getting very rich. A passable life is enough for me.’

When Tarop told me this, a sincere smile emerged on his face; I could not keep arguing with him.

### **More generous, more impecunious**

Tarop’s brother Nalo is a completely different type of person. Nalo is seven years younger than Tarop, but he is taller, stronger and better-looking. While Tarop usually looks ragged and slovenly and drives an old truck, Nalo is always stylishly dressed and drives a nice jeep, which is an expensive gift from one of his Taiwanese friends. Half flatteringly and half jokingly, some Taiwanese girls call Nalo ‘the most charming guy in Lanyu’. Despite having different temperaments, the two brothers still have something in common: reticence. Tarop is friendly but ineloquent, while Nalo is eloquent but aloof. Nalo seldom smiles and rarely gets along with the youngsters gathering in Tarop’s grocery. Nalo spends much time in his room, where he owns a computer connected to the internet, an air conditioner, and a comfortable bed. Few

people are allowed to enter his small kingdom. One time I asked him why he always stays in his room alone, he just briefly answered me: 'I am always thinking'.

Despite his unsocial personality, Nalo runs a guesthouse and accommodates tourists quite well. Guesthouse owners in Yeyin usually have their own houses, and actually, anyone who owns a house can claim to be a guesthouse owner if he has one or two unused rooms ready for rent. Unlike Tarop, Nalo had not yet earned enough money to build his own house before coming back to Lanyu, so he temporarily lives with his brother. Nalo is using his father's *makarang* to be his guesthouse, which is renovated to become a tidy and well-decorated six-person suite. Due to limited space, Nalo is unable to accommodate more than one group of guests each time, but he knows how to make good use of his advantages under given conditions. While other guesthouse managers usually put more stress on their facilities and tour guiding services in internet marketing, Nalo highlights something different to his customers: 'This warm, delicate traditional house was our home; it is renovated and decorated by my dear family... You are welcome to have a chat with them and listen to their stories about the island.'<sup>64</sup>

Nalo's marketing strategy is a successful one. It creates value-added benefit for his ordinary guesthouse and differentiates an exclusive group of customers from others – somehow, few of his business competitors ever imagine living with local elders in a traditional house as something fun and attractive. Although Nalo is not the most experienced guide and does not have the most luxurious suites, he is one of the most successful guesthouse owners in Yeyin. He always has numerous bookings during the tourist season, which gives him certain advantages to charge a higher price (500 NT dollars per capita per night) than the general price in Lanyu (350 NT dollars per capita per night). Under the limitation of space, therefore, Nalo still has his own way to maximise his profit.

Nalo certainly knows more than the basic market principle 'the rarer, the dearer'. One day in the low season, I ran into two tourists who were looking for accommodation for the next four days, and I thought that Nalo might be interested in taking them since it was a rare chance of money making at that time.

'No, I don't want to accommodate them.' Nalo's response surprised me.

'Why? You are not accommodating any guests now, and making some money is better than not, isn't it?' I wondered what his reason could be.

'I thought you understood...the time of cleaning up a room for two guests is as much as that for six guests, so I would rather save my time. Actually, I may accommodate them if they stay for only one or two nights, since I know there won't be guests in the following two days...but what if I have six guests two days later

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<sup>64</sup> A citation from Nalo's introduction of his guesthouse on his blog.

while the two are still here?’

Normally, guesthouse owners in Yeyin never refuse any customers. Even if they know that their rooms have already been booked one or two days later, they always could find everyone a place to stay in the end. A common way to solve the problem is that one may accommodate a group of guests for one day and introduce them to his relatives for another, ‘so that the guests can enjoy different atmospheres in different guesthouses’, as they usually claim. Under similar circumstances, however, Nalo has to make a bitter choice between accepting and refusing his customers, because he has no other family members who run a guesthouse to share the chance. Other guesthouse owners would never care about their management cost; there is no difference between cleaning up a room for two guests and that for six guests, because a diligent housewife never complains about more or less linens to wash. Since Nalo runs a one-person business and has no helpers, his refusal of a chance is uncommon but understandable.

Indeed, Nalo has fewer resources than most of his business competitors on the island: he is young, single, and not very rich. Therefore, it makes sense if he wants to omit some profitless deeds. Nevertheless, the time and energy which he has saved are mostly spent staying in his room. His only outdoor activity is going fishing for fun when he has no customers to look after. After the abovementioned unpleasant event between the Taiwanese artist and his brother, Nalo no longer participates in any of Tarop’s jobs, either. Naturally, other people hardly have a chance to witness Nalo’s diligence, including me. Even so, some signs show that he seems to spend quite some time blogging; he frequently updates his status, uploads photos, and replies to messages in order to attract Taiwanese visitors and keep contact with old customers, who may introduce more guests to him. Therefore, it can be said that Nalo is endeavouring to expand his business in cyberspace. He has successfully made himself an internet celebrity among Taiwanese tourists. Although Tarop also has a blog for advertising his waiting room, he is too lazy to figure out how to type fast, upload photos and operate the user interface. Without necessary management, Tarop’s popularity on the internet is far less than his brother’s, and he sometimes expresses his admiration for Nalo’s fame among tourists. Tarop’s thirst for becoming an internet celebrity is notable especially when he googles his own name on the internet over and over again.

In Lanyu, however, Nalo is known as mere ‘Tarop’s younger brother’ by people of other villages, because Tarop is the one who has some achievements for people to remember his name: Tarop owns a grocery and the ferry waiting room, while Nalo does not even have his own house. Almost all Taiwanese friends of the two brothers know that Nalo is smarter and will overtake his brother soon or later, but currently, it

is impossible to ask the locals to show more respect to Nalo simply because of his potential. Nalo himself also understands this, and he knows that so far it is the limited space of his guesthouse that limits his business and covers up his smartness; this is a key factor for Nalo to dream of completing his own house as soon as possible. In his imagination, it will be a two-floored concrete house with a small garden near the seashore, decorated in a mixed style of traditional and modern elements, and most importantly, capable of accommodating a lot of guests. Once his house is completed as he expects, Nalo would be able to make several times the profit than now. But at this moment, his first hurdle is to raise a large sum of money to complete the house.

While Nalo is doing his best to make money under some unfavourable conditions in Lanyu, he is saving money for himself at the same time. There is no need to spend his money when he lives together with Tarop in Lanyu. He can freely use everything in the grocery without paying. Thus, Nalo's limited income is either saved or invested in himself, such as the upkeep of his jeep, his clothing costs, etc. These expenditures can be said to be functional in maintaining his public image in front of Taiwanese tourists, but unsurprisingly, not everyone takes them as investments. Onis always favours Nalo, but he still unkindly blamed his younger son as 'useless, because he is too stingy. Tarop is much better because he is generous to everyone'.

Nalo was born in the 1980s, the years of economic take-off in Taiwan. Therefore, Nalo did not experience the same shortage (of commodities) in his childhood as his elder siblings did. In addition, Nalo also left Lanyu much earlier than his siblings for high school education in Taiwan. Probably, Nalo's 'talent' for business is partly a result of his long-term learning by osmosis of money and commodities. Despite a different way of money making, Nalo is ultimately pursuing the same fortune and glory as his brother is, and he not only longs for an affluent life but wants to be a respectable person in his hometown. It's here Nalo's trouble began. If Nalo was born in Taiwan, things would have been much easier for him – he only needed to devote himself to money making, because Taiwanese respect those who own fabulous wealth. It is apparently a different case in Lanyu. Temporarily, Nalo has to continue enduring being nobody on the island for some years, at least until he finally completes his house. Not until Nalo owns his basic means of money making that will he have 'spare money' to share with other people and win some respect from them, and perhaps, Nalo may experience the same bitterness as Blackie did when he had no choice but to hold *mivazay*.

Sometimes, I wonder what may happen if the two brothers cooperated with each other, since they are complementary in many aspects. Tarop is industrious, and Nalo is smart; Tarop is generous, and Nalo is organised; Tarop is famous in Lanyu, and Nalo is popular among Taiwanese tourists. Ideally, Nalo can assist Tarop with marketing

and decision-making, so that Tarop's capital will not be wasted in profitless investments. Tarop's grocery and the waiting room can also become Nalo's stages, where Nalo can bring his talent into full play and accumulate his capital and fame sooner than now. At worst, the brothers can still be each other's manpower and save some personnel expenses. I have pointed out this idea to Nalo, and his answer was not surprising: 'We have tried, but we wouldn't have decided to separate if it ever worked. Tarop always wants to manage everything on his own and never listens to me; he is too optimistic to communicate with'. The problem is evident: it is impossible for Tarop to simply play the role as an executor and take orders from his brother, who is young and inexperienced in his eyes. Tarop has not recognised that 'correctness' in money making is no longer solely determined by age and experience – the breadth of vision and what beyond experiences are rather critical.

## Conclusion

Through the case of the two brothers, this chapter has described the conflict when the *Homo laboris* encounters the market economy. In contemporary Yami society, an evident trend is that more labour, especially physical labour, no longer promises more wealth. Human labour still produces wealth, but more labour input could be a waste if it is invested in things without market value, i.e. 'many pains, no gains'. At the same time, the wealth produced by labour is relatively little in contrast with the wealth produced by money in the M-C-M' circuit of capital, i.e. 'fewer pains, more gains'. This is the double loss that human labour suffers in the market economy: the market may underestimate the value of labour, and the capital may dwarf the status of labour.

Moreover, people have to make a choice between fortune and glory, since 'more generous, more impecunious' is juxtaposed with 'more generous, more glorious' in the cultural structure. When people share commodity-gifts instead of product-gifts with others, sharing remains advantageous to power but becomes disadvantageous to wealth, as the case of Blackie's *mivazay* shows. This is because commodity-gifts are converted from money, while money in the market economy serves as a means of production, which is more efficient than labour. In the domestic economy, sharing surplus as product-gifts never damages the source of productivity, i.e. manpower, because the situation 'sharing and then starving' is pre-excluded. But in the market economy, sharing commodity-gifts more or less damages the source of productivity, i.e. capital. While Gregory argues '[t]he gift transactor's motivation is precisely the opposite to the capitalist's: whereas the latter maximises net incomings, the former maximises net outgoings' (1982:51), his brief dichotomy simplifies the issue. Except among people without productivity (e.g. Jain priests; see Laidlaw 2000), gift economy

in most cases is not a livelihood, and gifting is normally done without instant subsistence crisis. In the long term, maximised outgoings in a gift economy not only instantly maximise social reputation but also promise maximised incomings because of the logic of the *total prestation*. However, in the commodity economy as a mode of production, any outgoing of money-commodity runs the risk of endangering capital and livelihood, that is, maximised outgoings are always accompany with maximised risks. What secures livelihood is never investments, but profits in hand.

Tarop's business activities reveal such a perspective: rather than things, persons are the bringer of wealth. Tarop himself never begrudges his labour input because, as he believes, it sooner or later brings corresponding wealth. In trading, he also clearly recognises that his income comes from his customers rather than his commodities: he gives his commodity to another person, and the person gives money to him. The relationship between persons is the authentic way of money making. However, the concept of profit in the market economy is based on the comparison of profitability amongst commodities, i.e. the relationship between things, so profit maximisation is done by comparing all possible commodities, including 'what is not there'. Hence, persons and their needs are concealed behind the concept of profitability. Of course, such a comparison is absent in Tarop's business thinking, because exchangeable things must be attached to social relationships; things *per se* cannot produce any relatedness.





Plate 4.1 The Kaiyuan Harbour, Lanyu



Plate 4.2 Inside the ferry waiting room



## Chapter 5

### The Emergence of Finitude

In the previous chapters, when I analyse the formation of the straightforwardness in Yami cultural structure and the dynamic equilibrium in the society, what has been taken into consideration includes local relations of production, the epistemological tendency, as well as social-psychological factors. These conditions shape the Yami's life courses in terms of flat and straight roads, motivating them to keep working and helping them to overcome (or ignore) various natural resistances to production. So far, what has not been dealt with is the moral condition, which limits the artificial attrition of productivity deliberately caused by other people. The condition I will explore here can be thought of as a *non-aggression principle*, that is, no one is permitted to impair others' productivity. On the one hand, a person makes efforts to produce but never obstructs others' efforts to produce, and on the other, a person gains what is deserved but never meddles in what others deserve, so one's pains will never become others' gains. In other words, competition in traditional Yami society is like a swimming contest, in which people move with similar movements in the same direction but always stay in their own lanes without overstepping: for the Yami everyone competes, but everyone has his own trophy to win. With regard to competition, therefore, it is as if Yami people's life courses describe parallel lines that only, theoretically, intersect at infinity.

While Locke explicated the non-aggression principle as 'a law of Nature...that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions' (2004[1690]:4), material affluence was a necessary condition, as he wrote:

The measure of property Nature well set, by the extent of men's labour and the conveniency of life. No man's labour could subdue or appropriate all, nor could his enjoyment consume more than a small part; so that it was impossible for any man, this way, to entrench upon the right of another or acquire to himself a property to the prejudice of his neighbour, who would still have room for *as good and as large* a possession (after the other had taken out his) as before it was appropriated. (ibid: 21, my italics)

There is no need for aggression if there are ample resources for use and fair

mechanisms for distribution, while amplexness and fairness *per se* may be an issue of *vision*. In economics, the concept Pareto efficiency refers to an optimal (but not necessarily equal) mode of distribution, in which any further improvement for some would have to be at the cost of a deterioration for others (Himmelweit et al 2001:11). That is, one's interests increase if and only if another's interests decrease. The premise of Pareto efficiency is a total distribution of limited resources, for example, all distributable pieces of land in an area have been allocated to the local population, so that one person can no longer obtain more land from Nature but only from another person. In other words, the non-aggression principle is hardly feasible in a community of Pareto efficiency, if people come to have unlimited wants for limited resources. In contrast, unlimited resources can be a favourable factor for the non-aggression principle. While the Yami generally place a premium on personal achievements, the state of peace in their community is more likely founded on an imagination of unlimited resources on their 'affluent' island instead of a matter of modesty and asceticism. On the basis of 'infinitude', original appropriation or pre-emption can be peacefully exerted in Yami society: people need not to fight for the same thing, because there is always another one waiting for them.

However, the idea of infinitude can be nothing but blindness to finitude. In recent years, there are signs that Yami people are approaching the limit of natural resources in Lanyu. A typical case is local lobster (*pai*) fishing. Local fishermen often complain that lobsters, which they can catch in the inshore area, are smaller and smaller in size, while some of them clearly know what it means: the reproduction and growth rate of lobsters seriously falls behind the consumption rate of human beings. A few people attribute this ecological disaster to some abominable guesthouse owners, who overfished lobsters so as to attract more Taiwanese tourists – their advertising slogan is 'free lobster dinner for our guests'. Despite being, on the surface, a fair competition with regard to personal capabilities for fishing, the diminishing lobster catch gradually results in an inequality among local fishermen, because one's good catch of lobsters now means another's bad fishing luck, and more lobsters can mean more customers, cash, capital, and competency of competition: a zero-sum-game, in other words. While the locals mostly criticise in private but seldom straightforwardly negotiate about the issue of resource distribution, in the wake of the emergence of finitude, a new mode of competition is forming in silence and degrading the Yami's non-aggressive social relationships. Their life courses begin to intersect where the limited resources appear right before their eyes.

This chapter discusses resource distribution and competition among the Yami in the contemporary context. As mentioned before, the Yami are competitive people who love to compare their social achievements. Nevertheless, their traditional principles of

distribution, e.g. ‘one person, one share’, ‘first come, first served’, etc., effectively prevent competitions from deteriorating into aggressions. To date, these principles remain valid in local traditional livelihoods such as fishing and goat pasturing. At the same time, however, there are more and more aggressive competitions occurring in recent years, in which one’s gains come from another’s losses and become morally controversial. Some of the competitions occur between one person and another when both grab the same limited resource, while others take place between a person and a corporation when both claim the ownership of the same thing. In local villages, thus, a hostile atmosphere is gradually becoming pervasive, and villagers condemn each other for their ‘jealousy’, ‘disunity’, ‘self-concern’, etc. more frequently than before. This ostensible moral degradation among the locals reflects the emergence of the finitude of local resources and a brand-new angle of view on morality.

## **Prologue: the water war**

A short drought struck Lanyu in the early summer of 2007. Beginning from May, hot and sunny weather lasted for more than two months, and sparse rainfall occurred in this period. Thanks to the abundant groundwater on the island, the drought did not destroy the local taro and sweet potato planting, though villagers of Yeyin were still troubled by the inconvenience of water shortage everyday. In those days, the concrete house where I was living regularly experienced water outage for hours, which was a torture on a tropical island. After 4 p.m. everyday, less and less water flowed out from spigots in the house, and finally no water was left for cooking dinner, taking a bath and flushing the toilet. The worst part was that the water outage seldom naturally recovered. As a result, my landlord Yop, who was in his sixties but remained robust, always went to the public reservoir of Yeyin once or twice a day for ‘checking water’. If the groundwater stored in the reservoir did not flow into his private water pipeline, then Yop would seek to re-channel the water in a simple but scientific way. He would disassemble his water pipeline – numerous connected plastic pipes stretching from the reservoir to his house – from the middle section, and then continuously suck the pipe closer to the reservoir until water flowed out again. This is a basic application of siphonage.

Few households in Yeyin use tap water, because it costs money. On the other hand, owning tap water pipelines at home never guarantees stable water supply, since the Taiwan Water Corporation<sup>65</sup> makes use of local groundwater as well as the locals do. Hence, tap water mostly serves as a spare, while villagers prefer free groundwater

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<sup>65</sup> The Taiwan Water Corporation is the state-owned water supplier in Taiwan. Currently there are three waterworks in Hongtou, Langdao and Dongching villages.

pouring out in the midst of hills and stored in their public reservoir; all people can use the water if they have enough plastic pipes to construct a pipeline. It is about 20 minutes' walk to the reservoir; pipes of different households exposed on the ground mark out the way. Each household maintains its pipeline, so during the drought, the villagers walked back and forth on the same trail to the reservoir more frequently than usual. Sometimes on his way to the reservoir, Yop might stop to have a brief chat with oncoming friends and complain about the water shortage; only at that moment, water shortage became a common concern of theirs. When they finished complaining, water shortage once again became a personal problem to deal with, while 'checking water' remained the most instant and effective solution for everyone.

Far away from the village, however, a 'water war' was silently proceeding inside the public reservoir. The reservoir is made of concrete, roughly larger in volume than a household water tank. Near its bottom, dozens of misaligned pipes are embedded in its walls; groundwater unceasingly gushes out of the main water outlet above them. The reservoir normally remains full of water, and the water pressure inside is usually high enough to send water into each of the pipelines. Nevertheless, every time I followed Yop to the reservoir in those days, what I witnessed inside was always a puddle-like volume of water, while the pipes were shallowly immersed in the mere 10 centimetre high water (Plate 5.1). When water shortage occurs, it firstly impacts on those who embedded their pipes on a higher position on the wall; even a difference of some centimetres can be decisive. Thus, before Yop started to suck his pipe, he would not forget to check if the other end of his pipeline was under the water level. If unfortunately not, a common way used by the villagers was to connect up more plastic pipes and move rocks to press the extended part down into the water, then they could continue to suck their pipes. However, some of the villagers seemed to prefer to a more efficient but obviously rule-breaking method so as to save their time. Once, I noticed that some people overextended their pipes up to the water outlet. In doing so, pouring water would go directly into their pipes before flowing down to the reservoir and being shared by others.

'Whose pipes are these?' I asked Yop, who was standing inside the reservoir and moving rocks to fix his pipe on the bottom.

'This one belongs to Yemis, that one some others I don't know,' Yop stared at those pipes with a grimace. 'Whoever did this must be a selfish guy.'

Yemis is also an acquaintance of mine. She is one of the precursors in the local guesthouse business. Her business has been declining in recent years due to more and more competitors in Yeyin, but she still accommodates quite a few guests in the high season, who need a lot of water for taking a bath and flushing the toilet. Forgivably, therefore, Yemis needs more water than general households, even if her ample water

supply must be guaranteed at the cost of her reputation among villagers. I raised another question to Yop: how did other guesthouse owners in the village satisfy the same demand?

‘They are even worse. They use water pumps and snatch most of the water in the reservoir just for serving their own guests. The water shortage wouldn’t have been so serious if they didn’t do that.’ Yop looked discontented but resigned, as though he had admitted his failure in the water war.

Those guesthouse owners usually switched on their water pumps and began to store water in their private water tanks in the afternoon, because tourists would need a shower after finishing their day tour in the evening. In other words, my deserved share of water was actually consumed by tourists and became the cash in those guesthouse owners’ pockets. Fundamentally, therefore, the water shortage in Yeyin was not merely a natural phenomenon but man-made disaster as well. The drought reduced available water resources in the first place, and the use of water pumps further contributed to the problem. Consequently, everyone noticed the visible deficiency in the empty public reservoir. Even so, it is unfair to put all the blame on those water pump users, since water pumps had been used on the island for a long while before the drought, that is, the capability for collecting water had been differentiated among the villagers a long time ago, but the fact was covered up by their abundant water resources under normal circumstances. When the drought struck, therefore, the scarcity of water invoked the evil inside the water pump.

The villagers’ general response to the water shortage was also notable. As I knew, they more or less knew about the manmade cause of their common problem, but such an important issue had never been put on the table throughout the drought. Including their elected village head, nobody came forward to lead the public to a negotiation about water collection and distribution because, as they said, ‘people have freedom to do that’. Inevitably, the water war broke out in people’s silence, and the capacity gap of water collecting gradually emerged among local households. The disadvantaged parties in the war took no effective actions to mitigate their plights but chose to endure and gossip in private. In the end, while Nature caused the problem, it was also Nature that solved it: two sequential typhoons struck Lanyu in August and brought abundant rainfall. Later on, everything returned to normality.

To date, water has not been fully commoditised in Lanyu, and instead of paying for it, the locals would rather obtain water through their own physical labour. From the standpoint of the Taiwan Water Corporation, the company hardly exchanges its water for the locals’ money. From the standpoint of local guesthouse owners, however, their water and tourists’ money are exchangeable through a causal relation: less water brings fewer customers, and fewer customers bring less money. Such a causal relation

usually remains latent until water becomes scarce. Although water was not formally given a price tag in this case, scarcity still made water a potential commodity and a part of operating costs among the guesthouse owners during the drought. The temporary commoditisation was put to an end when the scarcity was naturally relieved, and again, water supply was no longer a problem, people ceased gossiping and quickly shifted their attentions to cargo ships which had been seriously delayed by the two typhoons, because ‘without ships, everyone’s life pauses’, so spoke Tarop.

## **The scarcity of money**

Scarcity is the judgement decreed by our economy – so also the axiom of our Economics: the application of scarce means against alternative ends to derive the most satisfaction possible under the circumstances.....Yet scarcity is not an intrinsic property of technical means. It is a relation between means and ends. (Sahlins 1975: 4-5)

So Sahlins criticises modern capitalist economy. Indeed, an overambitious goal of production can make a means of production become inefficient. In terms of capital accumulation, for example, labour is a less efficient means than money, so people can clearly feel the scarcity of money, while money serves as both the goal and the best means of production. In other words, scarcity may originate from people’s unlimited wants. On the other hand, scarcity may be a problem of category, i.e. what kinds of things are viewed as limited resources. Inexhaustible resources, such as sunshine and air, never raise the issue of scarcity even if people do have unlimited wants of them, so economics pre-excludes those things that carry use-value but no exchange-value from its concerns. Certainly, the category of unlimited resources is culture-specific. People can see the infinitude if their consumption is next to nothing in contrast with the sum of their resources; it is a relation between means and sources.

Technically, money must be scarce if it is bound to carry exchange-value, as Adam Smith pointed out:

No complaint, however, is more common than that of a scarcity of money. Money, like wine, must always be scarce with those who have neither wherewithal to buy it, nor credit to borrow it. Those who have either, will seldom be in want either of the money, or of the wine which they have occasion for. This complaint, however, of the scarcity of money, is not always confined to improvident spendthrifts. It is sometimes general through a whole mercantile town, and the country in its neighbourhood. Over-trading is the common cause of it. (2000[1776]:13-14)

The scarcity of money means poverty and powerlessness for a person, but in a

macroscopic sense, it is essential for a stable economy, since inflation necessarily occurs if unlimited amount of money circulates. From a collective perspective, money is by definition a kind of limited resource, and using money is like redistributing the limited amount of money within a group of people, who recognise its value. Hence, if one gains money of certain amount, then there must be someone else who loses money of that amount. Counterfeit money ostensibly reduces nothing in people's purses, but it does devalue everyone's notes and coins in reality. Consciously or not, all users of a specific type of money are directly but implicitly tied to the sum of money and the group where it circulates. Individuals are inevitably interrelated if they use the same type of money.

### **The wealth brought by cash flow**

In essence, the water war in Yeyin was a money war, and guesthouse owners' thirst for water more or less reflected their anxiety about the scarcity of money. In Lanyu, everyone knows that money is scarce: when tourists arrive, money comes along; when tourists leave, money goes as well. In the six-month low season on the island, there is less money for people to earn, no matter how hard they work. Hence, when Taiwanese tourists have just begun swarming into Lanyu in early summer, local businessmen have already foreseen the scarcity of money in late autumn and begun preparing for it throughout their short and often fragmented (by typhoons) high season. A successful local businessman always has a full daily schedule in the summertime. For example, an industrious guesthouse owner like Blackie may spend his whole morning picking up different groups of guests arriving at different times, spend his whole afternoon taking them to snorkel or hike, and arrange nocturnal ecological tours<sup>66</sup> after dinner. His wife may have a load of bed linens to wash and a big mess in their guest rooms to clean everyday, and she may need to prepare sweet potatoes, wild vegetable and dried flying fish for cooking local flavour meal<sup>67</sup> if their guests request it. Backpackers usually stay in Lanyu for four days and three nights, that is, they will keep their hosts and hostesses busy in the same time. Popular guesthouse owners like Blackie may have no time for a break because groups of guests come and go ceaselessly in the high season.

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<sup>66</sup> Like snorkelling and hiking, the nocturnal ecological tour (夜間導覽) is an extra paid service of local guesthouses. The main event in the tour is observing Ryukyu Scops-owl (*Otus elegans*), a protected species perching in the forests of Lanyu, and marine animals on the tidal flat. Very few of the guides (i.e. guesthouse owners themselves) are academically trained, so that when tourists ask them questions such as 'What is that fish?', they can only give the simplest answer: 'That is nothing but a fish'. Some smarter guides like Blackie will self-train by reading animal illustrations.

<sup>67</sup> The so-called 'local flavour meal' (風味餐) is actually the daily diet of the locals, especially the elderly. Even though local younger generations have already been satiated with their invariable diet, 'local flavour meal' is a highly profitable commodity when being sold to tourists.

Blackie always introduces his guests to taste Vago's freshly made breakfast, so that his wife's workload can be slightly reduced while leaving the chance of money making to his best friend. By contrast, other guesthouse owners in Yeyin would rather buy some canned food and frozen steamed buns from the Co-op and sell 'homemade breakfast' to their own guests, because there is no reason to give up the income if they themselves are capable to grasp it. In fact, it is probably Vago who inspires others that a breakfast café can be another highly profitable business in Lanyu. Every morning in the high season, Vago's café, a 20 square meters large interior space in Dongqing, is always full of customers coming from all villages on the island. The café opens from 5 a.m. to noon, but Vago and his wife always wake up at 3 a.m. for preparations such as making homemade black tea and milk tea, defrosting hamburgers and bacon, etc. His daily challenge begins when the first group of tourists arrives around 8 a.m., and in the following three hours, hundreds of tourists along with hundreds of orders will make the couple look like two cooking machines. It is not until 12 noon that the couple can relax for a while, having lunch and taking a nap, sometimes going fishing and weeding in the afternoon. After dinner, the couple still have lots of things to do before bedtime, such as boiling tea, flavouring meat, etc. Their workdays are tightly interlocked with little flexibility.

Vago's breakfast café makes a lot of money, but like other businessmen on the island, he is continuously expanding his business for a simple reason: he has more than he needs, so he sells the surplus. For example, Vago's café consumes a lot of bottled gas imported from Taiwan, and other households use bottled gas as fuel, too, so he always imports more bottled gas and naturally becomes a local wholesaler of it. Vago has an unused room at home, so he begins running a guesthouse. Vago has a motorboat for fishing, so he also holds a boat tour if any tourists request it. In short, excepting his breakfast café, Vago discovers chances of money making from what he has already owned, which remains useful even if not used for money making. His businesses are like an extension of his daily life.

In a sense, only the breakfast café is Vago's real 'investment', though he had never expected it to become as successful as it is now. He knew the business when the couple were factory workers in Taiwan. When they decided to go home in 1991, they also brought back Taiwanese breakfasts as their livelihood in Lanyu: roast toast, omelette and sandwich, which are not hard dishes to imitate. His business began with a small stall and a small group of customers in Dongqing, including school children, housewives, etc. Ten years later, the business has become an enterprise, profitable enough for Vago to afford a motorboat. Undoubtedly, his success can be attributed to his unrelenting efforts, but at the same time, it is also the rise of Lanyu tourism in recent years that renders his efforts more rewarding. Vago himself knows this well, so



he has never complained about his exhaustion everyday in the high season. After all, he is going to have a long vacation when autumn comes, and villagers of Dongqing will become his main customers once again. Vago's business remains a passable status in the wintertime, and despite less income, he finally has some time for his traditional responsibilities, repairing his house, plank boat, etc. Vago is rich, but there are quite a few things in Lanyu which he must complete with his own hands rather than money.

### **The wealth brought by sea currents**

Local businessmen like Vago are neither mammonists nor workaholics; they simply want to make as much money as they can. Sometimes, when Vago raises the price of bottled gas again, Blackie may unwillingly pay and half jokingly call Vago 'a money grabbing guy'. Of course, 'grabbing' can be a totally moral action if it means 'hardworking'. For things limited to a short period in a year, people ought to grab them, and the more the better. In fact, the locals are not foreign to this type of grabbing. Flying fish, which visits Lanyu for a mere three months in a year, is a thing for grabbing, too.

Traditionally, the flying fish season in Lanyu includes two stages. Stage 1 includes the first two months in spring, *paneneb* and *pikaokaod* (approx. March and April)<sup>68</sup>, in which the local fishing method is strictly limited to nocturnal torch fishing carried out by 6-10 person big boats. Stage 2 includes the last two months in spring, *papatao* and *pipilapila* (approx. May and June), in which the locals begin using 1-2 person small boats for angling flying fish and dolphin fish (*arayo*) in the daytime and netting in the night time. Stage 1 focuses on the cooperation among members of the same fishing team (i.e. male members of *asa so inawan*), while Stage 2 is more household-centred. In the beginning of either stage, people of different villages hold *mivanoa* (fish summoning ceremony) at their respective *vanoa*.

The *mivanoa* for big boat fishing is held on the first day of *paneneb*. In the morning, formally dressed men gather at the *vanoa*. Before the ceremony, local elders give admonitory talks in turn to young men and reaffirm all *makanio* in the flying fish season, e.g. spear fishing, throwing stones into the sea, etc. After the talks, leaders of fishing teams get on their own boats, hanging silver helmets and praying to flying fish. Fishing teams kill piglets or chickens as offerings and collect the blood in a bowl. Everyone touches the blood with forefinger, goes to find a stone on the tidal flat, smears the stone with the blood and prays for luck for his household.

From the next day on, members of a fishing team have to sleep together in their

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<sup>68</sup> The Yami use a lunar calendar, which includes twelve months and an intercalary month for matching the migratory cycle of flying fish.

leader's *vahay*. They sail at midnight, attract flying fish by torches and catch fish with hand nets. Since very few groups of flying fish have arrived in Lanyu at that moment, their catch is often as poor as several flying fish, but the locals never care about the obvious disparity between the invested manpower and the catch. Fishermen dispose of their catch at dawn, share it equally in the leader's *vahay* and sleep in the morning. *Paneneb* is the month when individual actions are most rigidly restricted by *makanio*. From the next month *pikaokaod* on, members of fishing teams are allowed to go back home for sleeping, but cooking and sharing flying fish is done in the leader's *vahay*. At the same time, the members can freely choose to participate in fishing or not, while non-members are now allowed to join and get a share of flying fish if they are invited by the leader. The boundary between fishing teams-families is gradually dissolving during this month, while the amount of flying fish schools keeps increasing and reaches the peak in the following month *papatao*.

If the theme of *paneneb* is cooperation, then that of *papatao* must be competition. In the end of *pikaokaod*, the locals begin to make preparations for the coming small boat fishing, which is the climax in the flying fish season. Local households eat up their dried flying fish obtained from big boat fishing, and the hosts push their small boats to the *vanoa*. On the first day of *papatao*, the hosts erect fish flakes in front of their houses in the morning, and again, they gather at the *vanoa* and hold *mivanoa*, praying to their small boats and fishing tools for good fishing luck. Corresponding to the use of small boats, the second time of *mivanoa* is a private affair rather than a public one, and then the competition among fishermen formally starts. Fishermen go fishing more frequently than before for the sake of livelihood and fame. They angle for flying fish in the offshore area and begin hoarding a great deal of dried flying fish, which serve as stocks for the following four months and gifts for relatives and friends. Meanwhile, fishermen also use flying fish as bait for angling large migratory fish such as dolphin fish, the locals' favourite fish species. When a fisherman luckily catches a dolphin fish, he will hang the fish along with his heirlooms on the fish flake; everyone in the village will naturally notice his achievement (Plate 5.2). After consuming the flesh, the skull of a dolphin fish will be reserved and hung in front of his house until the end of *pipilapila*; the number of the skulls silently shows off a man's competency of fishing. With the departure of flying fish schools in *pipilapila*, the flying fish season comes to an end. No more ceremonies are held in this month.

An interesting trend in the flying fish season is the inverse proportion between the natural resource and the mutual reliance, i.e. *more fish, less collaboration*. At the peak of the fishing season, Yami fishermen do not use big boats as a more efficient means of production, like Taiwanese fishermen carrying out driving-in net fishing with the cooperation of several motorboats. Rather, the Yami turn cooperation into

competition, though the competition remains peaceful. Despite the lack of precise statistics, we can reasonably assume that the decentralisation of human labour prevents the fishery resources from overuse, as the current ecological impact caused by Taiwanese fishermen on the local flying fish fishing shows<sup>69</sup>. On the other hand, it is also a question that why the Yami want to use big boats in the trough of the fishing season: can that be a way to exclude non-members of local fishing teams from competing for the apparent limited resources? Basically, the exclusion does not result in a subsistence crisis among the excluded – local women continue working on the farm, while local men always have other things to do in the two months, though the prohibition of fishing can make skilful fishermen feel bored. Overall, the underuse of resources, a tendency of production in the domestic economy, is duplicated in the collaboration among households, but the reason is not ‘production for use’ (Sahlins 1975:82). Throughout the flying fish season, the locals continue hoarding dried flying fish as much as possible, but intriguingly, their wants are restrained by their use of tools rather than the tools *per se*; it is people’s choice that determines the efficiency of a means of production/resource consumption. Probably, Yami big boats unconsciously become a means of restraining productivity rather than reinforcing it, but definitely, the Yami are consciously concerned about their private interests more than their public interests.

## **The herd instinct**

Sea currents and the cash flow share some commonalities in Yami society: both bring fleeting but rewarding wealth to people, and it is a social responsibility to work hard in the tourist season as well as in the flying fish season. Nonetheless, the scarcity of money that the Yami perceive in the transient cash flow is not fully identical with how the market economy defines it. Despite its scarcity in our eyes, money can be a reliable unlimited resource if it is exhaustible in a year but cyclical year after year, as if flying fish always return to Lanyu because of their habit and capability for self-reproduction. On this point, it is currently hard to affirm how long the cash flow from Taiwan to Lanyu can last, while the exuberance of Lanyu tourism has just begun. In a different sense, however, the Yami explicitly do not regard money as a limited resource, which can be exemplified by the ‘herd instinct’ in their business activities.

Many local businessmen have a common complaint about each other: if one of them successfully earns money in some way, others will begin to imitate the way until it no longer works. The thriving guesthouse business is also a part of this phenomenon. In 2002 when I visited Lanyu for the first time, guesthouses in Yeyin were as few as

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<sup>69</sup> See Chapter 3.

two or three. In the following years, the number rapidly increased along with the takeoff of Lanyu tourism. At present, there are about eleven guesthouses in Yeyin, and the totality in Lanyu is forty-seven<sup>70</sup>.

It is economically reasonable that the supply increases along with the growth of demand, but it is a different case in Yeyin. While local guesthouse owners consider that they have more and more competitors in this profitable business, tourists consider that the local supply of accommodation still falls short of demand in the high season, so that they must book before June if they plan to visit Lanyu in July. Some guesthouse owners, including Yop, find it difficult to get customers even in the high season; they have prepared everything necessary in their guest rooms and made a reasonable price as cheap as others', but somehow, customers always flow to others' guesthouses instead. Hence, a correct description of the current local guesthouse business should be a 'fake balance' rather than an imbalance between the supply and the demand, that is, the increased supply fails to complement the grown demand.

This is rather a problem of information. Tourists do not know that they actually have more accommodation options, and obviously, local guesthouse owners must be responsible for this. For example, Yop's guest rooms are enough to accommodate dozens of guests, but he has never tried to advertise his guesthouse. Yop does not have a computer, a blog for internet promotion, or even a signboard to tell people that his guesthouse is here. Most of his guests are introduced to him via his social network. I was introduced to Yop by a mutual friend when I was trying to find a local residence in July 2007, while no other guesthouse owners wanted to rent their guest rooms on a long-term basis and for a favourable price. Yop accommodated me because he had no guests at that moment<sup>71</sup>. Besides Yop, there are more 'invisible guesthouses' hidden in the lanes of villages, and only social networks can render them visible. Therefore, accommodation is actually not a problem for backpackers if they can make friends with the locals.

Like Vago, Yop runs a guesthouse simply because he has many rooms at home, and he himself has a major livelihood to be busy with (see below). Hence, he is more likely passively waiting instead of actively seeking for chances for money making. In a sense, owners of the 'invisible guesthouses' contribute to an uneven but stable mode of resource distribution in this business: even though all people in the village become guesthouse owners because of the herd instinct, most customers will still flow to the same several persons like Blackie and Nalo, who clearly know how to advertise

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<sup>70</sup> According to the data collected by Lanen Foundation in 2009, there are 4 guesthouses in Dongqing, 8 in Hongtou, 8 in Langdao, 5 in Yeyou, and 11 in Yuren. Hotels and 'invisible guesthouses' (see below) are not included. See <http://www.lanan.org.tw/lanyu%20tour.htm>.

<sup>71</sup> In fact, those who rejected my request for a long-term lease invariably suggested to me that I could go back to find them in September, i.e. the end of the high season. Although Yop generously accommodated me in the high season, his wife also showed the same way of calculation (see below).

themselves and attract more guests. Despite their reluctance, those ‘amateurs’ who are less involved in this business can but share the remaining customers. Even so, because the amateurs half voluntarily give up grabbing more customers, so far the business maintains its stability and has not yet collapsed due to oversupply.

Popular guesthouse owners usually dislike one another. Yop’s second younger brother Notsop is one of the most famous guesthouse owners in Yeyin. Notsop is very proud of his ‘biggest and most luxurious’ guesthouse in the village, and in his eyes, his neighbour Yemis is nothing but a money grabber in a negative sense:

‘Yemis’s guesthouse always accommodates over twenty customers all at once and makes so many people crowded together in such a small house.....is there any quality in her service? We’re totally different. We accommodate only fifteen guests at most at a time, and each of our suites equips a toilet. Our guests can use the toilet anytime, queue-free. Very convenient, isn’t it?’

Yemis has no favourable impression of Notsop, either. Their grudge began with the completion of Notsop’s four-floor concrete house, which completely hides the seascape of Yemis’s guesthouse; Yemis loses a business advantage as if Notsop steals that from her. Since there is no law or custom to restrict Notsop from building such a high concrete house – an exhibition of his capability and wealth, Yemis reluctantly endures her intangible but visible loss. On the surface, the two households are busy with their own businesses and rarely quarrel in public, but it is not very difficult to discern their inimical relationships while they speak ill of each other in private from time to time.

Oversupply caused by the herd instinct destroyed some local businesses on a smaller scale, and the most recent case is the fried chicken fillet. Fried chicken fillet has been a popular Taiwanese snack since the 1990s, and before this business was introduced to Yeyin around 2003-2004, many of the villagers had tasted it when they lived in Taiwan. Before starting his grocery, Tarop had invested in this business, as he remembers,

‘For this business, I bought a very expensive special fryer from Taiwan, with that I could make chicken fillets as quickly as Taiwanese vendors. Others simply used their woks to fry, so their customers had to wait for at least ten minutes. I imported chicken from a famous Taiwanese company, absolutely hygienic and fresh. The company also instructed me how to correctly flavour and fry. Very shortly, I attracted a lot of customers, and others envied me. There was another chicken fillet stall across the road, and the boss’s son-in-law often picked on me. That guy was always telling others my chicken fillet was merely half cooked and

bloody. Once, he called me to send food worth 500 NT dollars to his place, where they were having a party. He asked me to stay with them and didn't let me leave. I was very angry because I knew he wouldn't pay me if I joined them and shared the food.

In the beginning, I did make a lot of money, but those who envied my business would no longer buy chicken fillets from me, and some others in the village began selling chicken fillets, too. I gave up the business in the end because it no longer made money.'

The fault-finder's chicken fillet stall in Tarop's story is the only survivor in the competition, but I would never notice it if Tarop did not mention it to me. That stall is actually the kitchen of a local grocery, hidden without a signboard, and open only when any customers come to ask – then, the boss will walk into her kitchen and fry chicken fillets with a wok for ten minutes. 'Winner takes all' cannot apply to this case, because after all, chicken fillet is merely a snack, and people do not frequently buy it, while there are actually more options in Hongtong and Yuren. To an observable extent, therefore, the frequency of local chicken fillet trading is not enough to support the business on a constant basis and make it a real livelihood. If Tarop's chicken fillet was really as tasty as he emphasises to me, he could have had a chance to make it a local specialty like Vago's freshly made breakfast, which might be more competitive than that lingering chicken fillet stall today. It seems that it is not 'the fittest' that survives in this competition. Tarop gave up this possibility ahead of time because of a common mentality among local businessmen, as a famous restaurant owner in Yeyou says:

Very few local businessmen are patient enough. The locals cannot stand deficits for long. If they start a new business which requires at least three months for regaining the capital funds, many people can only hold on for two months and then give up halfway. In so doing, they never see the break-even point in any of their businesses.

Giving up halfway is the reverse of the herd instinct: when people see profits somewhere, they go there; when people see no profits here, they go elsewhere. A key point in this case is that profits are always embodied in people and the money they have earned, i.e. *faits accomplis*. Tarop had proved that chicken fillet was not a good money-making idea, so he chose to give it up without much hesitation. Today, Tarop's special fryer still stays in his storeroom, and probably he will leave it there forever.

Several years ago, the herd instinct also terminated the business of ice shavings, steamed bread, meat stew, etc. in Yeyin for the same reason (Huang 2005:106-107)<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> Ice shavings (刨冰), steamed bread (饅頭) and meat stew (滷味) are low-priced Taiwanese snacks, which require merely a small stall, simple ingredients and equipments, and a little funding for

When one had proved a business profitable, soon one's business would be challenged by three or four local competitors, and after three to four months, all of them would withdraw from the competition at the same time; no one wanted to play the same game afterward. Today, it often surprises many tourists that no one in this village sells fresh food and desserts, so they can but visit other villages for a restaurant, a bar or a coffee shop. The tourists do not know that the villagers destroyed those businesses because of their diligence. The effect of the herd instinct results in an uncommon low degree of diversification in local business activities in Yeyin. In 2008, there were about 10 guesthouses, 3 groceries, and only one snack bar without a signboard in the village.

Those aborted businesses sprouted before the recent takeoff of Lanyu tourism, that is, the competitions were rather regional and occurred among villagers of Yeyin, who played both roles as producers and consumers at the same time. However, the situation was far from a state of self-sufficiency, because a consumer disappeared correspondingly when a new producer appeared. Consequently, oversupply inevitably occurred when no new consumers (e.g. tourists) appeared and created new demands. Before those redundant suppliers were eliminated by the market mechanism, local businessmen had already noticed their shrinking income and coincidentally decided to withdraw. In short, the villagers seemed not to take market saturation – the total of consumers is always limited – into consideration when they mutually imitated and invested in the same business one after another. At that time, they had not recognised that in a money war, 'doing the same as others' was no longer a production panacea as before.<sup>73</sup>

To some extent, the survival of the local guesthouse business depends on a much larger market, in which the producer-consumer proportion remains a direct ratio (i.e. more consumers, more producers) rather than an inverse one (i.e. more producers, fewer consumers). Therefore, the herd instinct may remain harmless to this business as long as the boundary of the market remains out of sight. Of course, not everyone is so optimistic about the future of this business. Junior, Notsop's second son and Tarop's high school classmate, is the actual manager of Notsop's guesthouse. In Tarop's words, Junior is a person who is 'too smart to make friends', while Tarop is a 'time-wasting and totally unorganised boss' in Junior's eyes. When Tarop worked in factories and building sites, Junior worked for trading companies in Taiwan; their work experiences mark out the major difference between their personalities.

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beginning a business – the competition is intrinsically open to almost everyone.

<sup>73</sup> The herd instinct is rather a common phenomenon all over the island. As a woman of Dongqing recalls, five or six years ago, she could receive orders from Taiwanese and make more than 60,000 NT dollars per month by selling Yami traditional bead ornaments. At that time, only several persons in the village knew how to make bead ornaments, and Taiwanese loved her designs very much. But now, all women in the village make bead ornaments, so that she can but switch to embroidery.

Among the locals, Junior is outstanding in many aspects. For example, from time to time, local businessmen are often mired in endless cut-throat competition in their guesthouse and motorcycle rental businesses, because price cuts – selling cheaper than others – are their most intuitive (and usually most effective) way to solicit more customers. By contrast, Junior's strategy is rather uncommon: he always insists on a higher price and a different way of pricing. When other guesthouses usually charge 300-500 NT dollars per day per capita, Junior charges 1,300 NT dollars per day for a double room and 2,500 NT dollars for a five-person dormitory; his service is priced by 'how much he gives' instead of 'how much his guests take'. In doing so, even if his dormitory is booked by fewer than five tourists, Junior will not lose a penny in this deal. The next question is if Junior can find himself enough customers when other guesthouses offer tourists more favourable prices and more flexible way of pricing. On this point, Junior himself is never worried, as he confidently told me on one occasion:

'Competitors? Welcome! It's even better if more people compete with me, then people will finally know whose guesthouse is the best. Price is not a problem for me, because that's just what I want – my guesthouse takes a high-priced, exquisite line. If you offer really good things, there will be people willing to pay more money for them, too. It's their business if others want to undercut, but what I want is to make distinction.'

Then, Junior showed me the shoes on his feet. As he said, the shoes are also part of his 'brand image' – a sense of formality, while other guesthouse owners only wear slippers as they always do when facing their customers. When Junior decides to run a high-class and high-priced guesthouse, he has prepared a stable source of guests, too. So far, Junior is the only one in Yeyin who cooperates with travel agencies in Taiwan and lets Taiwanese share his burden of soliciting guests. From the beginning, Junior does not intend to compete with other guesthouse owners and get involved in their cut-throat price war, because he has monopolised an independent piece of the market. Junior's strategic alliance with Taiwanese guarantees an exclusive income which no one else can grab, while he still has a chance to get a share from what others are grabbing.

## **People and what they deserve**

In the market economy, market saturation forms under the following conditions. In a commodity exchange system of any scale, the money circulated within must be limited, or it cannot represent exchange-value. This limited amount is not constant, and its variation is determined by the volume of trade, that is, the more transactions,



the more demands for means of exchange. Fundamentally, a successful transaction means a balance between supply and demand, i.e. one supplies what another demands. Accordingly, if the demand for a sort of commodity remains constant, the volume of trade stays stagnant even if people oversupply it – they invest more labour power but produce more unsalable things. Oversupply also reduces every supplier's income, because this limited volume of trade must be divided into more shares. Consequently, oversupply results in a situation 'many pains, no gains'. As we can see in the Yami's herd instinct, there is little concern about 'how much money is left for people to earn'; but there is much jealousy for 'how much money people have earned'.

By means of market segmentation, Junior artfully dodges the predicament of the herd instinct. He sells his services to different groups of customers so as to avoid conflicts of interest with others, like applying the old non-aggression principle to the new livelihood. His case proves that non-aggression is possible even in the market economy, which is established upon the concepts of exchange-value, scarcity and limited resources. This raises another question: if the non-aggression principle in Yami society is, as I argue, based on the imagination of unlimited resources, why is such imagination necessary? This question is closely related to local mechanisms for resource distribution, i.e. how the locals define what is deserved and what is not. I am going to analyse the relevant conditions in the following paragraphs with the case of Yop's daily life.

### **Real estate: indivisible rights**

Yop and his wife Nan live in a two-floored concrete house in the new district of Yeyin. As he proudly told me, his concrete house is the first one in the village, and he built it on his own; many villagers imitated his design when building theirs. Yop's house has two living rooms, four bedrooms and one tinsplate-made storeroom, and the interior space is large enough to accommodate a big family. Actually, his plan is to have his two sons live together with him<sup>74</sup>, though the sons' households have settled down in Taiwan for years and only come back home during the Lunar New Year vacation. At other times of the year, only the couple live in their big house. Sometimes Yop also accommodates a few tourists if anyone introduces customers to him, and hence I moved in his house.

In terms of morality, Yop is quite an exemplary man among the locals: he is

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<sup>74</sup> Yop's plan is rather uncommon in a society of neolocal residence, in which there is principally only one nuclear family living in a house, but it is true that today fewer and fewer married couples can have their own houses on the island. Besides the huge expenditure of building a concrete house, the growing local population causes the insufficiency of building sites, which is also a reason for some young Yami couples to stay in Taiwan (Lin 2004:3).

gentle, never talks much and always works hard. Different from his brother Notsop, who is a famous and rich guesthouse owner and others' strong business competitor in the village, Yop lives a low-keyed life as simple as the elderly in the old district, and people seldom speak ill of him. In contrast, his wife has a totally different temperament. While Yop is nice and generous, Nan always wants to haggle over every ounce. When I was staying in their house with a rental of 3,000 NT dollars per month, Nan asked me to move out from my room to the storeroom whenever they had guests, because they would pay 300 NT dollars per night per capita – what a calculation.

The house is, self-evidently, Yop's private property. If this requires justification, it is because Yop built the house for himself. The ownership of real estate, such as houses, building site and irrigated farmland, is traditionally based on the producer's labour input and thus historically traceable and socially recognisable. Accordingly, encroachments of real estate are rare among the Yami. An easily neglected point here is the proof of ownership when title deeds were traditionally absent in Yami society. This point can be more clearly explained with the process of land acquisition. If a man attempts to occupy a piece of unexploited land, his first step is to visually release this message to the public, e.g. to leave his tools or building materials there. If no one comes to stop him, he can continue to do something on the land, e.g. to plant some crops or build simple constructions there. Through others' acquiescence, his ownership is gradually validated along with his increasing labour input. In this case, labour input is equal to use, that is, owning is the result of using. In other words, ownership is established on the basis of the continuous accumulation of facts of using.

The indivisibility between ownership and the right to use seems natural while human labour is regarded as the origin of property, but it makes rental, or ceding the right to use while reserving the ownership, a common business activity without full understanding among the locals. My conflict with Nan occurred when both of us competed for the right to use a piece of space in Yop's house. She seemed not to recognise that the right to use the room had been transferred to me since she took the rent from me; she still reserved the right, so she could ask me to move out whenever she wanted. If so, what could my rent mean to them? It might be, I assume, a cash-gift for expressing my gratitude for their accommodating. Whenever I gave the rent to Yop, he always repeated saying 'thank you' and took the money with an embarrassing smile.

While the locals have learned that the space in a house is divisible – rooms of household members can be rented to non-members with little implication of death<sup>75</sup>, the more abstract divisibility between using and owning remains bizarre for them. In

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<sup>75</sup> In fact, Yop's young son was very unhappy when he knew that his bedroom had been rented to me, because it is as if he was absent from the world.

this sense, ‘different persons claim different rights over the same thing’ can be said a new type of competition among the Yami.

### **Food: labour input and kinship distance**

Yop engages in traditional men’s jobs, and his routines are always as flexible as he wants. It is common that he instantly cancels a plan if anything else comes to his mind at that moment, such as changes of weather, wind directions or tides. As a result, it is useless to make an appointment with him. Whenever we made an appointment for tomorrow’s jobs, Yop always left alone; even if I was on time, Yop might depart ahead of time because the weather was too fine for him to stay at home. Yop’s actions are not so predictable, but it is believable that there is a short cycle in his schedule, and he has to repeat fishing, goat pasturing and other jobs every two or three days.

Despite his good health, Yop’s age confines his production activities to less risky types. Yop usually cooperates with a friend for two-person fish netting (*manazatazan*) near the *vanoa* of Yeyin. When they finish fishing, they can immediately distribute the catch at the *vanoa* and bring their respective shares home. The traditional principle of distribution is simple and intuitive: *one person, one share*. How many persons are involved in the job, how many shares their products should be divided. The fairness is based on participation in the job rather than contribution to it, for example, the person scooping sea water from the hull, the least important job in a fishing team, can obtain a share as much as the helmsman, the most important one. Generally speaking, the locals prefer not to work with too many people, because it reduces the amount of each share; an unwanted helper is rather an unwelcome person.

Yop occasionally receives fish, especially flying fish in the season, as gifts from Notsop, who owns a motorboat and can easily catch abundant fish with fewer efforts. Yop need not make a contribution to the job, as he admits: ‘I am old, so my younger brother asked me to stay at home.’ On the other hand, the less demand for manpower in motorboat fishing (about only 2-3 persons) is also a reason for his retirement. Despite fewer chances for participating in fishing, Yop can always get a share of fish through sharing. Notsop is free to decide how much to share with Yop and other relatives, but principally, *the closer the person, the larger the share*.<sup>76</sup> For example, once Notsop caught one thousand flying fish overnight and generously shared at least one hundred with his elder brother.

It is clear that the Yami apply different principles of distribution to products and to gifts. Resources in production activities, which are a matter of survival, must be

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<sup>76</sup> The principle ‘the closer the person, the larger the share’ is also seen in pork sharing in *mivazay* and inheritance in a household.

equally allocated to all participants. By contrast, resources in redistribution activities, which are surplus products, are proportionally allocated according to kinship distance. While the principle of equality guarantees the basic subsistence of economic units, the principle of intimacy reinforces social ties in kin groups. Both types of distribution are morally compulsory,

### **Public property: temporal sequence and spatial segmentation**

In non-fishing days, Yop always keeps himself busy on the land. Yop inherited dozens of goats from his father, and he pastures them every two or three days. Yop's pastureland is near the storage compound at the south end of the island, and his goats freely forage in a broad but roughly bounded area between hills and the seashore. The so-called pasturing is actually going mountain climbing, finding the goats, and chasing them down to the foothill. As Yop explains, he has to keep those goats staying on the plain, so that he can easily catch them someday in the future. For this simple reason, Yop has to climb hills hundreds of metres high, go into the deep of jungle, and look for his goats and chase them with the help of his two dogs. The job always takes him three or more hours to finish. After returning from the pastureland, Yop usually exhausted, sits in front of his house and takes a long rest. 'Today I worked a lot,' sometimes Yop may say so, even if he did not bring anything back home on that day.

Goat rearing is not a rewarding livelihood. The locals slaughter goats and eat goat meat only in *mivazay*, and they commonly lack a commercial imagination about what they can get from their goats: they neither exploit goat milk and goat skin nor intend to sell their goats, which disappoints lots of tourists who mistake goat meat cuisine as a local speciality product in Lanyu. In other words, Yop spends lots of time pasturing goats, whose only usage is to be exhibited and shared in the *mivazay*. Anyhow, Yop never underestimates the value of his goats and his efforts because of their little utility and profitability. Livestock is a traditional symbol of wealth; its value is mostly symbolic because it is rarely consumable or exchangeable in daily life. Today, if a negligent driver kills a goat on the road, its owner will request for a compensation over 5,000 NT dollars and take its corpse home – the dead goat does not belong to the unlucky driver even if he has paid, because it is not a sale.

Yop does not monopolise the pastureland, which is shared by all villagers of Yeyin. Everyone is in principle eligible to pasture his goats there, but goat owners will not make trouble for Yop and themselves like that. In the first place, other goat owners will keep their goats away from locations where Yop or someone else has been pasturing his goats for a long while. When a new kid is born, a goat owner also instantly cuts his *agaz* (the personal sign of pre-emption) on the ears of the newborn

in order to render his goats distinguishable from others' (Yu 1992:61).

The principle of pre-emption, or '*first come, first served*', helps the locals avoid and solve problems with the use of public property in practice. The ownership of goat kids on the pastureland, trees in the communal timberland, fish in the sea, etc., always accompanies the identity as the first finder/user of them. Ideally, the most experienced and diligent person can seize the largest part of the public property, but the finitude of manpower naturally limits his privatisation. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Yami's private property is confined to the range in time and space in which people can exert their labour power, i.e. people cannot own what they cannot use. In the long term, therefore, the temporary privatisation may not make the public property continuously diminishing, if local population does not put new pressure on this balance.

It is notable that the temporal sequence of '*first come, first served*' itself forms in an already-segmented piece of space concerning social transgressions. Fishing, logging or pasturing in the traditional territories of other villages is a theft; even human labour cannot legitimatise the action. In fact, the segmentation of space is rather a general precondition of local resource distribution, as we can see in other types of social transgressions: intruding on others' familial timberland, farmland or house is both a crime and a curse, too. While a piece of space and a type of wealth precisely correspond to a social identity, it can be said that before their labour input, people's deserved rights have been preliminarily protected by their identities.

Besides averting the competition among persons of different identities for things in the same space, this wealth classification also prevents people from self-conflict due to their multiple identities. For example, Yop's identity as a member of Yeyin is irrelevant to his ownership of farmland in the village, so the identity never imposes on him with responsibilities concerning his farmland, such as farming for all villagers or donating the land when the village is in need. This identity is functional only when he works in the traditional territory of Yeyin or protects it from intrusions of people from other villages.

### **Discussion: identity vs. labour**

To sum up, two conditions determine 'what is deserved' in Yami society. On the one hand, one's social identity determines which shares of resources one can use, while on the other, one's labour input determines how many resources one can use; identity is prior to labour. That is, before the relationship between people and what they produce (P-T), social relationships (P-P') already exist between persons, separate persons, and further separate things (T-T'), i.e. the locals' wealth classification. On this point, it is the imagination of unlimited resources that renders the separation of

things possible. It promises that the amount of acquired resources always corresponds to that of labour input, no matter how much the total labour input can be – even if the labour input *per se* must be under a certain level of population pressure and production efficiency. Hence, it is as if things endlessly self-reproduce and split into unlimited ‘fair shares’. In terms of scarce resources, however, people can only choose to either guarantee their own ‘fair shares’ at the cost of what others deserve (as the concept Pareto efficiency implies) or accept ‘unfair shares’ which are disproportionate to their labour input. In either case, the scarce resources ‘reunite’ persons, who are separated by their social relationships, in an aggressive form (P-T-P’); the reunion rather produces a paradox in the local way how people should be interrelated.

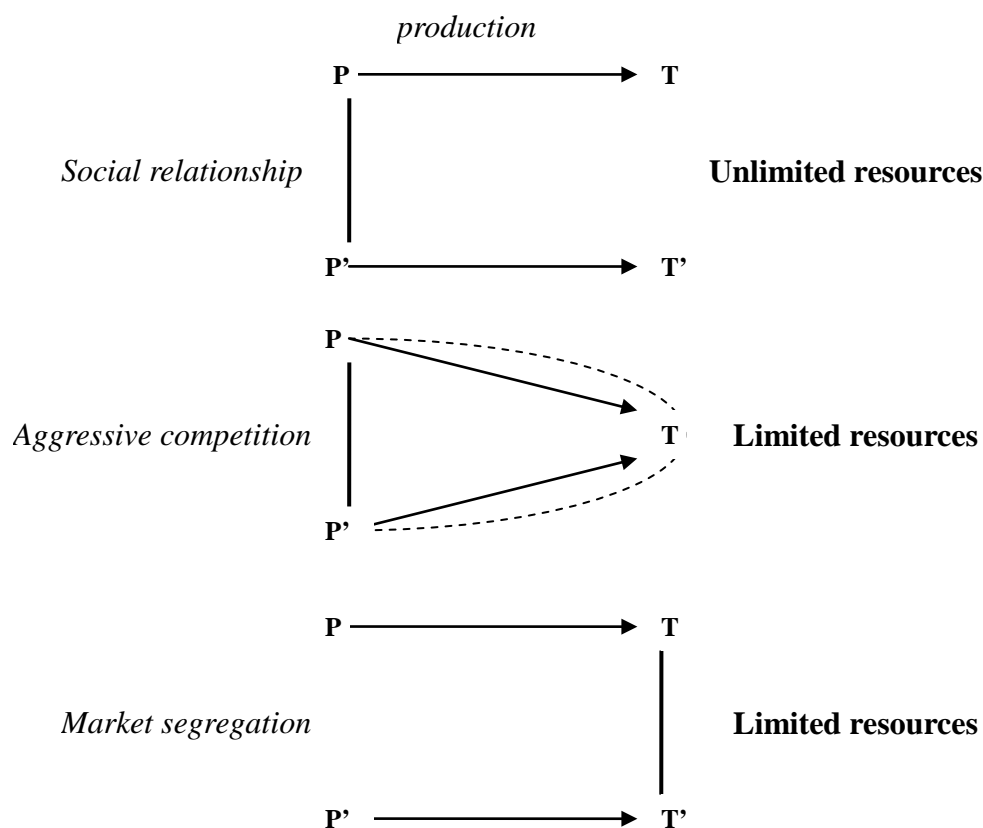


Figure 5.1 Different modes of resource distribution/competition

On the other hand, money is a kind of locally unclassified wealth, and money makers are not separated by their local social relationships; only labour can determine how much money one deserves. The tourism revenue is neither already-segmented by the locals nor renounced if they stop working – people can permanently privatise their money. Consequently, therefore, it comes about that people all over the island

scramble for this diminishing scarce resource, and the money war begins.

As a means of maintaining non-aggression, market segmentation segments resources, too, but its similarity with Yami wealth classification is rather ostensible. Yami wealth classification is the segmentation of suppliers and the relationship between persons (P-P'), but market segmentation is the segmentation of those who demand and the distinction/relation between what they want (T-T'). Hence, it is dubious if Yami wealth classification is ever capable to deal with the issue of resource distribution and maintain a state of peace in the modern market economy. The status quo in Lanyu suggests that even if money is labelled as either all the villagers' or all the islanders' public property, competition remains, but in a different way.

### **From self-discipline to self-concern**

Some of my Yami friends frequently express their discontent against their own fellows when the local business competitions or public works are mentioned in our talks. Their 'self-reflection' commonly condemns a mentality of self-concern among the locals, e.g. 'My fellows are so jealous and greedy; they can see nothing but their own private interests!' For example, I was impressed by a story told by Tarop about the stillborn community centre of Yeyin:

'Years ago, our villagers had planned to build a community centre for everyone's recreation, but the location was a problem. Later on, my kinsmen decided to donate a piece of unused land by the seashore, and all the fifteen votes in my family supported this proposal in the village assembly. However, Yop made a negative vote, because he was planting crops there. The plan was finally cancelled simply because of one man's objection.'

Blackie had a similar complaint about Yop. This time, my ex-landlord was accused of appropriating the abandoned drainage ditch beside Blackie's house:

'The drainage ditch is public property, but your landlord appropriated it for raising his own pigs! Look, he made those covers over the ditch, but he didn't even negotiate with us before making them. Now his pigpen makes my house stink!'

Whether other villagers care or not, Yop's self-interested behaviours might have infringed on their public interests, though his deeds may be not condemnable at all from a traditional point of view – his diligence qualifies his occupation. Even so, his diligence becomes his selfishness when the concept of collectivity interferes. What Tarop's family wanted to donate was a piece of unirrigated land which they had ever cultivated but left unused for a while, so they actually had no right to donate it. The

drainage ditch is beside but not a part of Blackie's residence, so he actually had no power to stop Yop from using it, unless he himself had occupied it before Yop. For Yop, what he had done was simply working as hard as before, but somehow, his efforts had to be re-examined from a viewpoint of 'us' by the villagers, who regarded his products as immoral loot taken from 'our' public property.

Yop's story implies the collision of two contradictory criteria of morality, but it does not mean a sort of group awareness emerging *ex nihilo*. As repeatedly mentioned, social identities are definite boundaries between Yami social groups, while social transgressions both signify and cause some people's absence from their social positions, i.e. death. While people's identities both positively endow them with some rights and negatively prevent them from other rights, it can be said that even the ostensibly most self-concerned actions of theirs can be the results of self-discipline under the regulation of their identities. In short, group awareness always exists, but its transformation from the guardian of private interests to their opponent is rather a contemporary issue. The issue is evident: whether permanently or not, public property cannot be privatised. Public property must be always in a serviceable status for everyone, and it is owned by the public, not merely an individual who can act and create facts of using. The concept of corporation is foreign to the Yami. Nevertheless, at least among some of them, a village gradually becomes something more solid and able to 'own' – of course not through using. In other words, while a person *de facto* claims the ownership of things through practices, a corporation may *de jure* claim the same right through institutions; thus conflicts of interest occur.

Although quite a few people criticised Yop's efforts, individuals are not always at a disadvantage in the resource competition between persons and corporations. In fact, while people choose to stand for either the corporation or the individual, what really matter are mostly their own private interests. In the following case, we can clearly see how the Yami are keen to carve up a sort of public property of theirs: the government funding, which is supposed to improve the local public welfare. The Yami believe that their public interest should be realised in the form of everyone's private interest.

### **The village's money**

Every year, the Lanyu Township Office obtains two types of government funding from the Taiwanese government. One is the local government budget issued to the Taitung County Government and partially redistributed to the Township Office<sup>77</sup>. This

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<sup>77</sup> In 2011, the revenue of Taitung County is 12,567,138,000 NT dollars, and the revenue of Lanyu Township is 127,981,000 NT dollars. The personnel budget of the Township Office is 47,581,000 NT dollars. See website of Taitung County Government: <http://www.taitung.gov.tw/Accounting/Func/FDL/FormDownloadDetail.aspx?SN=1435> ;



annual budget is primarily spent on personnel expense and small-scale public works. This part of funding belongs to the national finance and is less controversial. Another type is the so-called 'Feedback Fund' related to the nuclear waste storage compound of Tai-power, which is the locals' primary concern in recent years. The Feedback Fund includes the ground rent of the storage compound and the 'compensation'. Before 2001, the ground rent was mere 9 million NT dollars per year<sup>78</sup>, included in the central government general budget and not directly issued to the Township Office. The money could be drawn only if the Township Office submitted work programmes to Tai-power and obtained approval, and the undrawn part must be refunded to the national treasury<sup>79</sup>. The turning point appeared when the first land lease of the storage compound expired in 1999. Under the locals' protests against the nuclear waste and lease renewal, Tai-power promised to raise the ground rent to 20 million NT dollars per year and issue the money to the Township Office. Since then, this part of funding has been constantly under the Township Office's custody and, for the locals, become 'their money'. In 2009, the Township Office took 8 million NT dollars from the Feedback Fund for the use of large-scale community activities (e.g. sports) and social welfare (e.g. transport, marriage and birth subsidies), while the remaining 12 million NT dollars were equally allocated to the six local Associations of Community Development (ACDs) in the name of 'public welfare expenses'.

To draw their respective funding of 2 million NT dollars, the ACDs still need to submit work programmes to the Township Office, but the latter is usually not picky with purposes and budgets in their proposals as long as they look reasonable. The commonest usage of the public welfare expenses is holding community activities such as fishing and boating games, in which all food, drink and prizes are provided by the ACDs. Except for entertainments, however, it is not so easy for staff of the ACDs to come up with other fair ways to use the money. For example, the ACD of Dongqing often holds art classes for teaching the villagers traditional crafts such as woodcarving and rattan weaving, and the lecturers are usually chosen from elders in the village. Even though the trainees can learn skills from those classes without spending a penny, some of them still mind that the money is 'shared' only among some specific persons rather than all the villagers. As a result, the least controversial way to use the money is to make everyone get a fair share, regardless of the excuse.

Legally, the Feedback Fund is not allowed to be used for personal purposes, that is, the locals cannot share the money aboveboard. Therefore, the ACDs share out the funding in an indirect and tacit way. In 2008, the ACD of Dongqing drew up a budget

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<http://www.taitung.gov.tw/Accounting/Func/NEW/MixNewsDetail.aspx?SN=4736&ComeFrom=BN>.

<sup>78</sup> The calculation of the ground rent is the number of barrels (about 90,000) multiple the storage fee (100 NT dollars per barrel before year 2001; 200 NT dollars after 2001).

<sup>79</sup> See Lanyu Biweekly 302 (2002, Apr 21), *The Tai-power's feedback fund, wake up Lanyuers!*

of 1 million NT dollars for building farm fences – 800 NT dollars per capita per day, 1,250 person-times in total. When the work was progressing, each household could assign a representative to participate and take a share of money. In the same year, the ACD of Langdao also drew up a budget for building a stone wall to separate their farmland from the Circle Road. Participants (mostly the middle-aged and the elderly) moved and piled up rocks in a slow pace, and many of their working hours were spent chatting and taking a rest. Even so, everyone could get a daily wage of 1,000 NT dollars in the 40 day construction period. In this way, the government funding legally and morally became everyone's money by means of physical labour, even if it is dubious how beneficial those public works themselves can be.

If staff of the ACDs want to save the trouble, they can also draw up a budget for 'environmental protection' like Yeyou – everyone can earn 700 NT dollars every time they sweep the ground in their neighbourhood for one hour according to the timetable. Despite an easy way to fairly allocate the money, what the ACD of Yeyou fails to foresee is the gradual and implicit moral degradation among the villagers. One day, when my friend Lan was sweeping the ground in front of her home, a friend of hers made fun of her: 'Why are you sweeping the ground? Will anyone give you money for this?' 'Why I should get a pay for what I should do myself?' Lan replied to her friend with a little anger.

Not all the locals agree with such a 'moral' way to use their precious resources. Tarop advocates that the funding should be used for more constructive purposes, but so far the ACD of Yeyin has done nothing for the villagers' more sustainable benefits.

'For example, there is a natural cold spring in the south of Yeyin. If the ACD can spend some money on cleaning up the surroundings and set a ticket window, the cold spring may become a permanent financial resource for our village. But they never adopt my suggestion. Also, it will be good if the ACD makes the old district open to tourists for photographing and charges them money, but the elderly must be unhappy if it is the ACD who takes the money. The elderly may say: "it's me and my house being photographed, why I can't get the money?" Beneficial things like these will never be done if anyone says no.'

### **The island's money**

The locals make no attempt to veil their desire to carve up the second part of the Feedback Fund, which is euphemistically called 'compensation,' but is political bribery in essence. In addition to the increased ground rent in 1999, Tai-power also promised to pay an extra compensation of 220 million NT dollars for years 2000-2002. A great deal of money was issued to the Township Office in July 2001, and at the

same time, the Township Office invited representatives from the six local villages and established the Management Committee of the Feedback Fund. Local representatives on the Committee effortlessly reached their consensus: the locals wanted the money to be equally shared rather than used in public works. Considering the legality of sharing the money, however, representatives of Tai-power opposed this proposal, so that the fund remained in the bank until Tai-power finally succumbed in 2003. With the tacit consent of Tai-power, the Township Office brought up the 'Project of Improving the Quality of Life' (提高居民生活素質輔導實施計畫), in which every local resident could obtain 63,000 NT dollars under different names: scholarships, nutrition subsidies, employment grants, living allowances, etc. Everyone was satisfied with the final result. According to some witnesses, on the next day of issuing the 63,000 NT dollars to the locals' personal bank accounts, hundreds of empty wine bottles were discarded everywhere on the island.

The same scenario was replayed in year 2010. When the land lease of year 2003-2005 was renewed in 2006, Tai-power instantly issued the compensation to the Township Office without delay. Once again, representatives on the Committee debated for the use of the money, while the local consensus was the same as before. Unsurprisingly, the conclusion was to bring up the second Project of Improving the Quality of Life, and before the Lunar New Year of 2010, everyone excitedly received 51,000 NT dollars from the Township Office. Many people spent the money on new furniture, computers and other premium products which they could not previously afford.

Similarly, some people advocate that the compensation should be invested in developing Lanyu and solving some old problems on the island, e.g. the inconvenient winter outbound transportation, the bumpy Circle Road, etc. On this issue, however, defenders of the public interest are rather powerless and silent, since they understand that no one is eligible to command others to sacrifice, no village is eligible to demand other villages to compromise, while the majority is reluctant to see 'their money' being spent in an imperceptible way. At least among the locals, therefore, 'sharing the money' is always the least controversial option to use the funding, even though the Feedback Fund will not be there forever for them to share.

In the future, the Feedback Fund will be transferred to another Township which is chosen as the final disposal site of the nuclear waste, when the storage compound is permanently removed from Lanyu. Tai-power has been continuously working on this since 2003. When the time comes, the locals are bound to lose most of the welfare offered by Tai-power, e.g. free electricity, transport subsidies, the ACDs' funding, etc. Local younger generations have already foreseen the coming tremendous impact on their future life and have begun whispering under the table about the feasibility of

detaining the storage compound. In a private meeting among some local young men, Junior is quoted as saying:

The storage compound has been here (Lanyu) for many years, and the damage has been done, hasn't it? Even if the storage compound is finally removed from the island, nobody will dare to use its building site forever. Why don't we think more pragmatically? Just leave the storage compound there, but of course, Tai-power must propose satisfying conditions... If we handle this well, the storage compound can become our goose that lays golden eggs.

The storage compound can be beneficial as long as it keeps laying golden eggs, even if in essence it is a viper. Nevertheless, removing the nuclear waste from Lanyu remains the current politically correct option among the locals. Nobody knows what will certainly happen to the locals when 'their money' finally becomes others' money, but obviously, they have missed the chance twice to use the enormous funding for organising the future of Lanyu and maintaining their long-term benefits. While Yami people are commonly eager to have the affluent life which they have witnessed in Taiwan, few of them have clearly recognised that such affluence is by no means a collection of everyone's private interests.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter analysed the relationship between people and resources in Yami society as it is regulated by the locals' exploitation and recognition of resources and their classification and sequencing of people. A tendency toward competition lurks in the straightforward relation between personal labour and deserved wealth: while production for unlimited wants is culturally encouraged, competition for limited resources becomes inevitable among individuals. On this point, the state of peace in Yami society is maintained in two ways: the segmentation of resources, which socially separates people, and the imagining of unlimited resources, which denies this political economic problem. Unlimited resources are perceptually possible under several conditions: low population pressure, huge disparity between the sum of resources and the efficiency of means of consumption, and non-permanent ownership. In this mode of distribution, therefore, the relationship between people and Nature is like continuous taking and returning, that is, people take what they need from Nature and return what they no longer need to it.

While money becomes the deserved wealth, the state of peace also comes to an end, because money is scarce both by definition and in fact. The Yami's traditional wealth classification no longer works on this issue, and what is functional now is the segmentation of demands, commodities and consumers rather than that of producers.

This reflects two different viewpoints of the origin of wealth: in domestic economy, wealth comes from oneself, but in market economy, wealth comes from other people.

As I mentioned in the conclusion of Chapter 4, Tarop considers wealth coming from persons (customers) rather than things (commodities), and I shall make a more integral point here. What concerns the Yami is *every* customer, because it is in a face-to-face relationship with a customer that their supplies bring them money. However, the Yami are not concerned about *all* customers, i.e. the overall trend of demand – how many people are there ‘in total’ in need of what the Yami can supply? In brief, potential customers, as well as commodities of higher profitability, are easily ignored if they do not show up in the locals’ face-to-face relationships.





Plate 5.1 The ‘water war’ inside the public reservoir of Yeyin



Plate 5.2 Dolphin fish and heirlooms on Syapen-Kotan’s fish flakes

## Chapter 6

### Wheel of Fortune

As a kind of scarce resource, money can trigger aggressive competition among people and become a convergence point for their, otherwise parallel, lives. Money, like Eris's golden apple, seduces people to fight for it, and through its medium, any two strangers, two friends, or even two brothers may become rivals – inimical to one another – if they are grabbing the same money. In this sense, it is as if money embeds latent hostility into the social network where it circulates; the scarcity of money invokes the evil inside the society, when money serves as a primary means and goal of production.

However, money can be a different thing when it serves as a means of exchange. Through its medium, people can also become reciprocally interrelated, if money can help them obtain what they need from one another. This beneficial function is often neglected in anthropological analyses, like Godelier's:

This logic of gift exchange is entirely separate... from the logic of commercial exchange. When bartering for commodities or buying them with money, at the conclusion of the transaction, the partners own what they have bought or traded. Whereas before the exchange, each partner was dependent on others to satisfy his needs, afterwards each party is *once more independent and free of obligations to others*... This presupposes that the things or the services that are bartered, sold or bought are wholly alienable, detachable from the sellers. This is not the case in an "economy and a moral code based on gift-giving," since the thing given is not alienated and the giver retains rights what he has given, and subsequently benefits from a series of "advantages." (1999:43, my italics)

In fact, it is dubious if people can become 'more independent' after transactions; in the short term, probably they might be; in the long term, probably they cannot. If people can always obtain what they need from others, then they might forget how to produce it on their own, i.e. how to live a self-sufficient life. Moreover, the exchange-value of money is always recognised on the basis of a social contract, which defines certain pieces of paper and metal as bills and coins. In other words, money actually enhances the necessity of mutual reliance and mutual trust among its users. Ostensibly, money users are 'free of obligations' to one another after their transactions, but

virtually, they are obligated to serve the society – they promise to supply what the society demands so as to maintain the value of money in their hands.

The spirit of trust is often concealed behind money wars, as well as the spirit of competition often lurks at the core of gifting and sharing, as what Mauss concluded as ‘agonistic type of *total prestation*’ (1970:4-5) shows. Both gifts and commodities can relate people and reproduce social relationships in the form of debts, while debts must be repaid in any case. Hence, if people consider money/commodities more ‘indifferent, ruthless’ things but gifts more ‘beneficent, selfless’ things, this might be an illusion emerging from the modern market economy, in which people are highly sensitive to the equivalence between what they give and what they gain. The equivalence between giving and gaining defines a balance C-M-C’ commodity exchange, but only through disturbing the equivalence, an imbalance M-C-M’ circuit of capital generates profits.

To synthesise my arguments in the previous three chapters, commodity exchange features the following attributes, which make gift exchange its antithesis.

Commodity exchange is:

1. *necessary*: commodity exchange occurs for the purpose of production, while transactions are often subsistence-related for either or both transactors.
2. *arbitrary*: commodity exchange occurs between any two persons through the medium of money, i.e. the efficacy of social contract. Ostensibly, therefore, transactors are often more concerned about things rather than persons in transactions.
3. *systematic*: commodity exchange occurs in a conceptual system where all commodities are interrelated, which allows transactors to make comparisons among profitability of different commodities.

This chapter explicates these attributes of commodity exchange, and the case of Yami ethnography exemplifies the result when commodity transactions are deprived of these attributes. While local businessmen suffer from sluggish sales, capital loss, and ‘many pains, no gains’, under their predicament is such an epistemological condition: they are blind to the relations between their commodities and other invisible things, such as potential commodities, the measure of value, and the society. These relations, which the Yami ignore, constitute a particular system of things in the market economy, namely ‘Wheel of Fortune’. In this system, things/commodities are interrelated on the basis of their equivalence; equivalence is determined by a constant measure of value; the measure of value symbolises the origin of value. Intriguingly, the Yami have all the necessary components that constitute a Wheel of Fortune, excepting the ignored relations.



## Prologue: the order of commodities

For its educational mission, Lanen Foundation has collected quite a few Yami cultural artefacts in recent years. Rattan armour, pottery jars, wooden plates, and many Yami traditional tools are displayed in the two-floored exhibition hall, conveying a disappearing lifestyle to Taiwanese tourists. Lanen particularly partitions off an area on the ground floor for selling locally produced handmade bead ornaments and woodcarvings, helping local craftsmen and women to make some money. More than bringing extra income for local households, however, the sale of souvenirs aims to teach the locals how to run a business. Because Lanen has prepared the space and customers (i.e. visitors of the exhibition hall), local craftsmen and -women only need to think how to successfully sell their products; they have to decide prices, assess risks, and take the consequence of sluggish sales on their own. From each transaction, Lanen takes a nominal commission to inculcate the locals with the idea ‘there’s no such a thing as a free lunch’. Except for this, Lanen seldom intervenes in the sales and, of course, pushes the locals to sell their products.

On a hot summer afternoon in August 2008, I paid a visit to the exhibition hall, aimlessly moved about and glanced through the exhibitions, then stopped before the table of woodcarvings. My attention was firstly drawn by a small canoe decorated with Yami traditional design – geometric patterns, white, black and red colours, and a small oarsman (Plate 6.1-a). This canoe cost 1,800 NT dollars, nearly a building worker’s daily wage. It was quite a high price for mere a handicraft, though probably someone else might be fond of its rusticity and willing to pay for it.

It was actually another canoe which aroused my curiosity: the second one was only half the size of the first one, being attached to a decorated but oversized pedestal, and a mini oarsman sitting inside. This canoe cost 2,000 NT dollars (Plate 6.1-b). With some confusion, I asked Tarop’s elder cousin who managed the exhibition hall at that time: why does a canoe of a mediocre quality cost more than a much better one? She took me away from other visitors and whispered to me: ‘The elderly always make their prices as high as they want; they have no standard for deciding a price.’

I continued my enquiry for a short while. Finally I could confirm that those confusing prices were not totally arbitrary. A canoe with eye-catching yellow painting in the hull (Plate 6.1-c), which was similar to the first one except the oarsman, was sold for 1,500 NT dollars. Another one with two small oars (Plate 6.1-d) was sold for 1,500 NT dollars as well, even if it looked as unfinished as the hulls beside it; the undecorated hulls were sold for only 450 NT dollars each. To some extent, I could almost conclude a general rule for pricing the woodcarvings: the simpler, the cheaper.

This rule created a general order, but the particular irregular relationships among

those woodcarvings remained. For example, it made no sense that only two small oars could raise the price of a hull from 450 to 1,500 NT dollars (Plate 6.1-d), while an oarsman could only raise the price of a canoe from 1,500 to 1,800 NT dollars (Plate 6.1-a & -c). In the end, my price comparisons seemed to reveal more problems rather than standards. Comparing with the locally made bead bracelets, which had a stable price around 200-300 NT dollars each, the volatile prices of the woodcarvings were not so convincing for customers. Nevertheless, the reason why those wooden canoes had been staying on the same table for long became clearer: their prices were 'irrational'. Not only were those woodcarvings overpriced in my subjective value judgement, but also the proportion between their qualities and prices was irregular. The relationships among their qualities, values and buyers were too intricate to construct a consistent system. That is, the order of these commodities failed to tell me, as a potential buyer, if it could be a fair transaction, and whether I was smart or stupid if I bought any of them.

All the woodcarvings have their respective histories: they were made at different moments, in different places and by different craftsmen. Hence, it is difficult to trace back each of the motives behind each of the prices, and in essence, the complexity before my eyes could be the synchronic juxtaposition of prices decided by different persons for different reasons. However, a common psychological factor underneath the complexity is evident in this case. 'If nobody wants to buy those woodcarvings, the elderly may send their works to their relatives or friends as decorations or toys', as Tarop's cousin said. It does not matter if those woodcarvings cannot be sold for money, because they can always win respect for their makers.

## **The exchange of like-for-like**

A commodity is not merely the combination of a product and a price tag. Yami elders make prices for their works and put them in a space for commodity exchange, but in reality, they are not so concerned about whether their works are saleable or not. Hence, the final destiny of their products is often to become gifts – can such products be counted as commodities? In this case, it is not difficult to discern a subsistence factor underneath: the elderly take trading as a way of making money, but making money is not equal to making a living. As a result, their products are inclined to circulate along the route of gift exchange, i.e. people exchange their surplus products for fame. The local domestic mode of production may enhance this tendency toward gift exchange, or more precisely, 'eliminate[s] *equivalent* exchange in favour of identical *exchange*' (Meillassoux 1981:37, italics in the original). The homogeneous production among local households largely reduces the necessity of 'trading for a living', and when exchange occurs, it is mostly one between identical products, i.e.

the exchange of like-for-like in Gregory's terminology (1982:47-51).

We instantly face a problem of definition here: what does 'identical' mean? On this point, Bohannan and Bohannan's theory of spheres of exchange (1968:227-233) often serves as an expedient solution. Among exchange spheres,

'...each includes commodities that are not regarded as equivalent to those commodities in other spheres and are hence in ordinary situations not exchangeable. Each sphere is a different universe of objects. A different set of moral values and different behaviour are to be found in each sphere.' (ibid: 227-228)

Both Meillassoux and Gregory define the exchange of like-for-like as exchange within the same sphere/level/rank, i.e. between things of the same kind, while "likeness" is a social concept that varies from one gift economy to another' (Gregory 1982: 50). Categorically, however, this expedient definition encompasses commodity exchange, because commodities (including money) exchange only for commodities, too. This explicit problem reveals a delicate difference between the likeness defined by a category (e.g. an exchange sphere) and that defined by a relationship (e.g. two persons and their like-for-like exchange).

In the following paragraphs, I am going to explicate this point with the case of the three major exchange spheres among the Yami listed as below:

1. Surplus exchange: the exchange of surplus products in daily life.
2. Emergent exchange: the exchange of human labour on specific occasions.
3. Institutionalised exchange: the exchange of valuables in the *mivazay*.

## **Surplus exchange**

Gift exchange is a basic obligation among family members (i.e. *asa so inawan*). Due to the self-sufficiency of local households, the locals rarely produce surplus on purpose for the sake of gift exchange. Even so, people always have a chance to produce more than they need on their lucky days – more fish swimming into their nets, more crabs and wild vegetables appearing before their eyes, etc. They are obligated to give their close kinsmen whatever exceeds their daily needs, even if the gift-receivers are not in need. In brief, surplus exchange seldom concerns basic sustenance but one mostly serves as a means of converting labour into social relationships/boundaries. Here, the distinction between exchange and redistribution is rather blurred; in general, what people carry is the obligation of *giving*, regardless of the names.

Surplus exchange becomes necessary when the self-sufficiency of a household

may be temporarily disturbed due to unexpected factors. As a basic manner, for example, guests in Yami society should bring food, such as some dried fish and taros, as their gifts, when they visit people living in other villages. Correspondingly, hosts in Yami society should prepare food as their gifts, when their visitors want to go home. According to Yu (1995:41), the like-for-like exchange in this case is pragmatic. The locals rarely make an appointment in advance for their visits, and thus the guests had better prepare their own meals and not bother the hosts, who may have no extra food at home for uninvited guests. On the other hand, because the guests have spent time travelling to other villages instead of working, it becomes the hosts' responsibility to prevent the guests from starving. Although surplus products are consumed only by the guests, it is just the guests' actions that enhance the social relationships.

The social networks in surplus exchange are highly active in *apiya vehan*, the Harvest Festival in the beginning of June. On the day, local households mutually visit and send some dried flying fish, taros and sweet potatoes for celebrating the end of the flying fish season. While a household may need to exchange gifts with over 30 households in a day, the locals' strategy is 'giving right after receiving', so that each household only needs to prepare some extra food for the sake of gift exchange (ibid: 44-46). Overall, there is only a limited amount of surplus products circulating at speed among local households; in a sense, the households enhance their interrelationships with the least but probably the most efficient labour input.

### **Emergent exchange**

Household failure caused by time pressure is the primary reason for the Yami's exchange of labour. In contemporary Lanyu, the commonest occasions for collaboration are grouting a concrete house and harvesting taros for *mivazay*. For the locals, in fact, building a concrete house or harvesting acres of farmland is merely a test for patience. A man can spend one or two years building his concrete house on his own, while grouting is the only step of emergency due to the physical feature of concrete and safety in the future. Liquid concrete requires just a few hours to solidify, and if grouting is not completed on a single occasion, ruptures may appear on the concrete part and endanger the structure of the building. As a result, it is necessary to prepare enough concrete for the whole building and finish grouting in a day, and indispensably, the host needs to recruit helpers from his *asa so inawan*. For the same reason, because taros rapidly sprout in the tropical climate of Lanyu, the hostess had better harvest all taros two or three days right before their *mivazay*. In either case, about 20-30 helpers can complete the task in one day, while the sexual division of labour is often explicit: men help with grouting, and women help with harvesting.

The locals commonly regard their collaboration as labour exchange, that is, ‘if this time you help me, next time I will help you’, though the actual process looks more complicated. Customarily, a labour borrower is obliged to feed all labour lenders, provide alcoholic drinks and cigarettes in breaks and home-made meals or bought lunchboxes at mealtime. When the number of helpers increases, meal offering inevitably brings huge economic (especially monetary) pressure upon the borrower, so the obligation of meal offering is also a factor that limits their use of the labour pool. Despite possible high expenses, meal offering is not an equivalent of manpower, since labour lenders by no means work for food; what they are concerned about is the return of their labour power in the future, whenever they need help. The locals can freely choose to ask someone for help or not, but people dare not to forget their obligation to help in return, because it concerns their morality and reliability in the society. When Onis voluntarily participated in Nimor’s taro harvesting, he expressly stressed: ‘Because he helped me last time, I must come and help him this time. I would come even if he did not invite me’

Like the case of guest visiting, meal offering aims to prevent labour lenders from going hungry (Yu 1995:43). Because local households seldom produce and store surplus products, satisfying everyone’s minimum daily needs becomes the premise of mutual aid. Hence, meal offering and mutual aid are two parallel but interrelated obligations in emergent exchange.

### **Institutionalised exchange**

As introduced in Chapter 3, the *mivazay* is the institutionalised occasion for large-scale gift exchange and gift-debt production in Yami society. The ambit of a *mivazay*, as well as the gift exchange in *apiya vehan*, is the village, but the form of *mivazay* is closer to that of surplus exchange in daily life, i.e. one household shares its surplus products with others, while again, the distinction between exchange and redistribution is not so definite. Rather than the scale, institutionalised exchange and surplus exchange are distinguished by the different psychological effects of gift-debts. Surplus exchange aims to fulfil a basic social obligation, and its accent falls on the giver’s donation; by contrast, institutionalised exchange aims to promote personal social status, and its accent falls on the receivers’ reception. As a result, these two types of gift-debts are not a match for each other.

To sum up, the three spheres of exchange are independent from one another, and instead of things, it is occasions, or what people want at different moments, that demarcate these spheres. In different exchange spheres, people are concerned about

different things: in surplus exchange, they care about both the waste of surplus products and their obligation to kinsmen; in emergent exchange, they care about the possible household failure in the future; in institutionalised exchange, they care about the fame. The particularity of things is rather secondary, for example, taros appear in two exchange spheres at the same time, but their status varies according to the occasion on which people give them out. Hence, taro-gifts received in *apiya vehan* and those received in *mivazay* are not the same thing; they are not interchangeable, as if a demand of intimacy cannot be substituted by a demand of glory.

In this regard, both Meillassoux and Gregory confuse ‘categories of exchange’ with ‘relationships of exchange’. Fundamentally, things in different exchange spheres (e.g. T and T’’) are not interchangeable; they are not allowed to become interrelated, because they are categorically irrelevant. Therefore, a relationship of exchange, either like-for-like or unlike-for-unlike, always exists within an exchange sphere. Among things in the same sphere, their likeness/unlikeness (T-T’) is defined by persons: if it is expectable that one can regain (P-T’) what one gives out (P-T) through the same social relationship (P-P’), then the exchange is like-for-like. In the local labour exchange, labour power is both the object and the goal of exchange. In *mivazay*, while the goal is to gain fame, it is always expectable to regain pork and taros in the future.

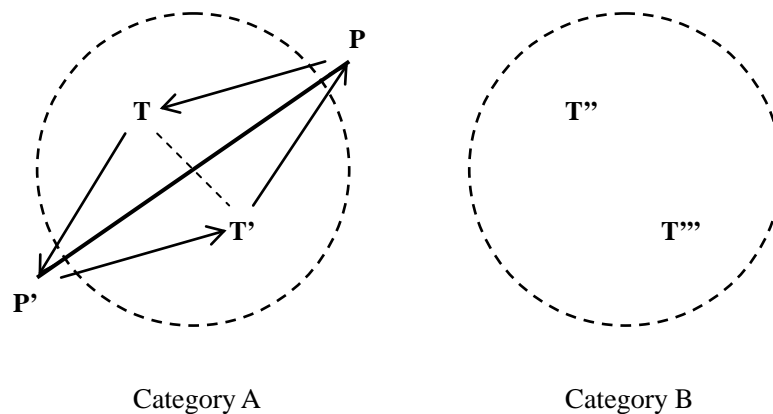


Figure 6.1 Categories and relationships of exchange

### Delayed exchange and bad debts

The exchange of like-for-like is normally accompanied by delayed repayment. If the object of exchange is surplus, then instant repayment is rather unnecessary; if it is non-surplus, then it is just the delay that renders the exchange socially meaningful, because people’s demands can be diachronically satisfied by their mutual aid. In this sense, instant repayment may become an anti-social behaviour when a favour is

improperly returned before the proper moment. In Lanyu, however, the ‘moral’ delayed exchange makes quite a few troubles for local businessmen.

Some Taiwanese tourists love to haggle when shopping for souvenirs or paying for accommodation, which is a common behaviour in Taiwan but one quite offensive in Lanyu. Local businessmen never enjoy wasting time in endless price negotiations with the tourists. Nevertheless, once both parties reach a compromise in price, no debts will be left between them. By contrast, although the locals rarely haggle with one another, they always love to shop on credit if possible, i.e. they tend to accept the price but delay the payment. Excepting the Co-op, almost all retailers on the island are vexed by the problem of bad debts between them and their customers, and if they sit by, the problem will soon become one between their wholesalers and themselves.

Those who are used to shopping on credit are of all ages except children, usually living in the same village as the retailer/creditor; their local social relationships can prevent their requests from being rejected. In a transaction, a debtor may owe a mere 10 NT dollars for a pack of instant noodles or 30 NT dollars for a bottle of beer, but tiny amounts of money may accumulate over time and eventually become a huge debt. Unsurprisingly, few debtors are active in cleaning up their debts, partly because their creditors themselves are not very active in collecting the debts, either. In most cases, the debts of each debtor may be recorded in account books with details of transactions, which can remind creditors rather than debtors. In order to put some social pressure on their debtors, some retailers also record the debts on an eye-catching corner in the shop, so that all customers can see their and others’ debts. Anyhow, local retailers seldom take real actions to take their money back. In Tarop’s account book, there was a huge debt of about 36,000 NT dollars in total owed by 40 different persons. Even if some of his debtors living in other villages never showed up again, Tarop would not visit their homes for the sake of debts. Tarop cares about his money, but he is also too shy to hurt his customers’ feelings and would rather wait for the money automatically coming back to him.

In market economies, bad debts always cause capital loss. For example, if the 36,000 NT dollar bad debts were invested in importing 50 dozens of Paolyta and each bottle could make a profit of 15 NT dollars, Tarop could have earned 9,000 NT dollars in this profitable investment, while the devaluation of his 36,000 NT dollars caused by inflation over time has not yet been considered in this case. In order to indemnify this loss, the concept of interest is invented: it makes the delayed C-M-C’ commodity exchange acquire a form similar to the M-C-M’ circuit of capital, that is, what people gain is more than what they give, regardless of the reality. But evidently, the Yami are foreign to the concept of interest, and as Tarop’s attitude toward his bad debts shows, what matters is if the collected debts are nominally as much as before – it is true that

nothing on the surface implies a loss, while the loss only exists in the comparison of profitability.

Fortunately, retailers are relatively more resistant to bad debts, since hoarding commodities – delaying the M-C-M' circuit of capital – is normal in this business. By contrast, restaurants are more vulnerable to bad debts, because their commodities are a kind of quickly decaying capital and need to be sold for money as soon as possible. In this sense, bad debts can be as disastrous as decayed ingredients to this rapid circuit of capital. Unlike Tarop, Vago more firmly rejects all his customers buying breakfast on credit: 'Those people always want to pay later, tomorrow, next time; how can they owe me money just for a breakfast?'

## **Out of sight, out of mind**

### **Commodities out of sight**

A main feature of gift exchange is that things normally circulate through existing social relationships, i.e. among 'non-alien' in Gregory's terminology (1982:43). In other words, only acquaintances are able to see things circulated in a gift economy. While this feature is copied to commodity exchange, the consequence is just like a common complaint among Taiwanese tourists: there are too many things that money cannot buy in Lanyu. As the case of 'invisible guesthouses' shows<sup>80</sup>, the locals are actually willing to sell many things, but their commodities can become visible only through local social networks. More often than not, therefore, trading exclusively occurs among the locals themselves, and outsiders must make friends with the locals before buying things from them.

A more explicit case is the local fish trading. Despite being outstanding fishermen, the Yami have no specific marketplace for fish trading in Lanyu; as they believe, a man should catch fish on his own. Nevertheless, the rise of Lanyu tourism creates new demands and new buyers for fish, such as local seafood restaurants (which need more fish) and successful businessmen (who are too busy to fish). Local fishermen only need to peddle their catches to those buyers, and in so doing, both parties can save time looking for buyers/sellers. In contrast, gathering everyone's products in an open space so everyone may browse can guarantee no profits. Recent cases, e.g. the evening markets in Dongqing and Langdao and Lanen's holiday market, are organised and managed by local ACDs or NGOs, who have made many efforts to both recruit more sellers and attract more buyers. Nevertheless, all these markets eventually fall into the same vicious circle: without buyers, sellers make little money

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<sup>80</sup> See Chapter 5.



and leave the market; without sellers, the market shrinks and attracts fewer buyers. The local homogeneous production and the herd instinct<sup>81</sup> are decisive in these cases. Through delayed exchange, identical products can always be socially valuable in the exchange among the locals themselves. Due to market saturation, however, identical products can be continuously devalued along with their increasing supply. The economic rule '*more production, more devaluation*' may be the primal paradox that a market economy creates in a domestic society.

In contrast with marketplaces, thus, the local social networks are economically more reliable, at least among the locals themselves. Through their acquaintances, the locals' general needs can be satisfied not only faster but also cheaper. This point can be exemplified with an experience of mine in the field.

One day, I promised to give my friend Six a ride from Yeyou to the airport. This 90 kilogram man happily jumped on my motorcycle, got to the airport in time, and took a flight to Taiwan; then my tragedy began. When I was on my way back to Yeyin, I noticed that my motorcycle was abnormally, violently shaking. I stopped by a motorcycle repair workshop in Yuren where I bought the motorcycle, and the boss, a Taiwanese, promised to perform a quick inspection.

'The motorcycle frame is totally fractured. Your motorcycle will break if you keep riding it.' The boss told me bad news: the frame was broken because of the saline sea winds in Lanyu and the overweight friend of mine.

'Could you weld the broken part?' I asked the boss.

'No, no one on the island has tools for welding. You will need a new frame. I can order one from Taiwan if you decide to fix your motorcycle here,' the boss answered.

'How much will it cost?'

'I think...a new frame costs about 8,000 NT dollars, including the freight and the wage. And you will need to wait for two weeks for the shipping.'

I hesitated, because several months ago, he had sold this second-hand motorcycle to me for 18,000 NT dollars. I wondered if it was worth spending more money on this short-lived machine. After a while, I decided to go back to Yeyin to find other possible ways. I carefully rode the motorcycle at a speed of 20 kilometres per hour and safely arrived two hours later. I pushed the motorcycle into the village, and a local friend Dalado saw me and asked me what happened.

'Do you know Gong, the guy living next to the Tarop's? He knows how to fix a motorcycle. You can ask him to help you assemble if you order a frame by yourself. I think this will cost you at most 5,000 NT dollars.'

Dalado told me better news, though it seemed that I still had to endure a life without a vehicle for at least two weeks. I continued to push the motorcycle toward

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<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 5.

my residence, and Notsop saw me. He said that his brother Yop stored two broken motorcycles at home, and perhaps I could get one and disassemble its frame for fixing mine. I instantly ran to see Yop, and he generously gave one of the motorcycles, for free! Soon I excitedly pushed two broken motorcycles toward Gong's home.

Gong was unemployed at that time, so he accepted my request with pleasure. He started working at five in the afternoon, very patiently assembled and reassembled the spare parts, and finally finished at ten; he even fixed my brakes in passing. We did not negotiate the wage before working, but to my surprise, Gong charged only 2,700 NT dollars; I gave him 3,000 NT dollars for showing my appreciation. After all, it is almost a miracle that a seriously broken motorcycle could be fixed with little money, in one day, and on a peripheral island where money could not buy everything.

Despite their reliability, local social networks are not flawless. In contrast with marketplaces, the social networks can only exhibit a limited amount of commodities to people, and more importantly, they often turn commodities into gifts. Such transformations occur when non-acquaintances become acquaintances, e.g. sellers and buyers become friends. For example, after staying in his guesthouse once, many of Nalo's guests become his friends from then on, and because of shyness, he hardly charges any money from those 'friends' again. When the 'friends' visit Lanyu next time, his solution is to accommodate them on the first floor of Tarop's grocery for free so as to reserve his guesthouse for new customers. Even so, this remains his loss – sometimes his guesthouse is waiting for the next customer, but the grocery is full of 'friends'.

## **Commodities out of mind**

A phenomenon related to the local exclusive commodity exchange is the local exclusive definition of exchangeability: the locals insist on selling only things that are saleable in their eyes. Even if some local products interest many tourists, they are generally considered unsaleable among the locals themselves. For example, goat meat is unsaleable because it is too precious to be exchangeable<sup>82</sup>; sweet potatoes are unsaleable because they are worthless – they are too ordinary to be exchangeable. For this reason, local businessmen neither consider importing Taiwanese goat meat and selling 'fake' local cuisine to tourists, nor do they consider making good use of local ingredients and selling baked sweet potatoes or other popular sweet potato snacks in Taiwan. Many Taiwanese tourists feel confused when they see goats and sweet potato farmland everywhere but find nobody selling those local products on the island.

On the other hand, the so-called 'saleable things' are not always saleable. Tarop's

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<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 5.

grocery is stacked with toys and T-shirts which have been stored since he imported them, because they interest nobody but Tarop himself. When I suggested that he could hold a clearance so as to earn some cash and make space for more saleable goods, he refused, because ‘someday those things will become useable’, instead of saleable. Making himself a user is Tarop’s solution for disposing of his unsaleable goods, even if this never prevents him from importing more unsaleable goods.

To conclude, commoditisation can be viewed as a process of double visualisation. While Appadurai (1986:13) rejects the commodity/non-commodity dichotomy and regards the exchangeability of things as their commodity potential, the potential does not exist in things *per se* but people’s gazes. A thing becomes a commodity when the buyer can see it (P’-T) and the seller can see its profitability (T-T’). The profitability becomes visible when the seller compares the thing with other things in the market (P-T-T’). The thing becomes visible when the seller exhibits it together with other things in the market, and in so doing, the thing becomes a possible – probably more cost-effective – option for the buyer (P’-T-T’). In short, commoditisation is a process of communication, in which a person places a thing in a commodity system, makes it a sign in a language of supply and demand, and clearly expresses what he can give to and what he would like to gain from others. In this system, value is the meaning of things, while the definition of value is given by a thing transcending all exchangeable things.

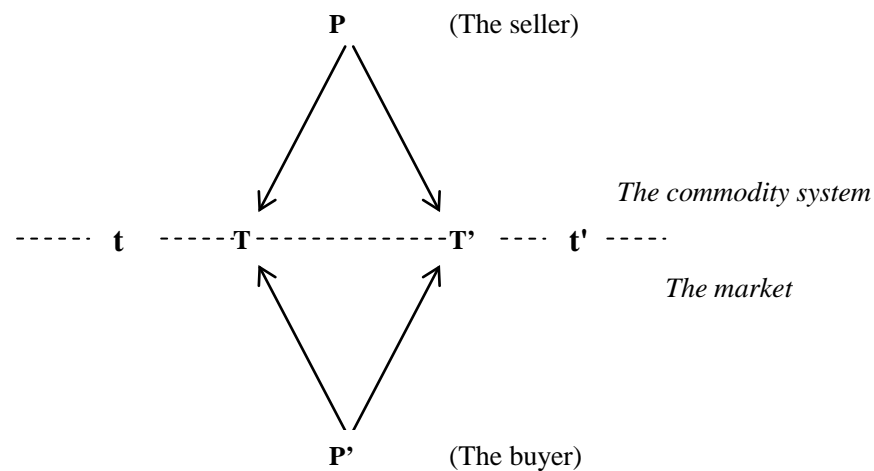


Figure 6.2 Commoditisation

## The Wheel of Fortune

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Levi-Strauss's concept of structure lacks a 'centre'. For Levi-Strauss, elements in a structure, like phonemes in a language, can produce meaning by mutually differentiating, and each of them is as significant as the others. There is no 'ultimate definer' in a meaning system. By contrast, a commodity system always needs a centre – a measure of value – to make it work. The exchange-value of commodities becomes comparable because of this universal measure of value, while commodities become interchangeable because of their *equivalence*.

Marx's analysis in *Capital* (Vol.1, Chapter 1) has elucidated the formation of equivalence in the market economy. The simplest equivalence can be expressed by a simple value-form  $xA=yB$ , i.e.  $x$  quantity of product A is worth  $y$  quantity of product B. Products A and B, e.g. a coat and a quarter of corn, may have totally incomparable physical properties and utilities, and thus their equivalence in the market can only be based on the comparison of exchange-value instead of use-value. Marx argued that exchange-value originates from human labour in the abstract, which can be represented by the measurable *socially necessary labour time*:

On the one hand, it must, as a definite useful kind of labour, satisfy a definite social need, and thus maintain its position as an element of the total labour, as a branch of the social division of labour, which originally sprang up spontaneously. On the other hand, it can satisfy the manifold needs of the individual producer himself only in so far as every particular kind of useful private labour can be exchanged with, i.e. counts as the equal of, every other kind of useful private labour. Equality in the full sense between different kinds of labour can be arrived at only if we abstract from their real inequality, if we reduce them to the characteristic they have in common, that of being the expenditure of human labour-power, of human labour in the abstract. (1977:166)

Time serves as the measure of human labour; more delicate, scarce, or enormous products are more valuable, because they consume more time to produce. Therefore, the equivalence among products of different natures can be established according to their consumed labour time, that is, to produce  $x$  quantity of product A consumes the same amount of labour time  $T$  as to produce  $y$  quantity of product B, or  $xA=yB=T$ . In practice, the intangible labour time is represented by a tangible general commodity, which serves as a means of exchange in transactions, and whose quantity serves as an expedient measure of value. If to produce  $z$  quantity of a general commodity G also consumes certain amount of labour time  $T$ , a general value-form  $xA=yB=zG=T$ , or  $(x/z)A=(y/z)B=G$ , derives (Figure 6.3). Because a unit of the general commodity is

equivalent to a certain quantity of any particular commodity, the general commodity can function as money and contribute to the C-M-C' commodity exchange.

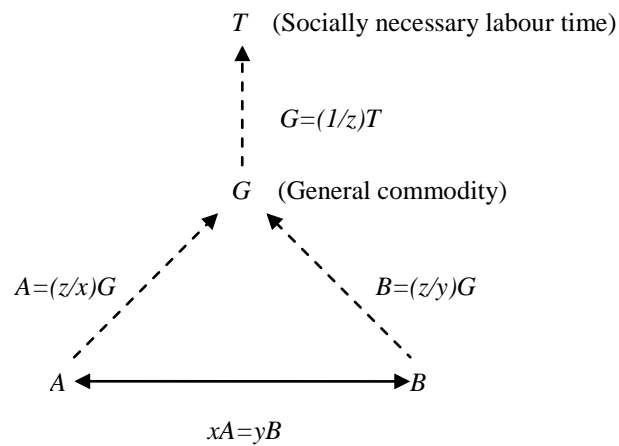


Figure 6.3 The value-forms

A commodity system is the infinite extension of value-forms. On the basis of equivalence, all particular commodities are interrelated and form a ring of exchange, i.e.  $xA=yB=\dots=vP=wQ=xA$ , or  $(x/z)A=(y/z)B=\dots=(v/z)P=(w/z)Q=(x/z)A=G$ . When this algebraic formula is converted into a geometric illustration, the ring of exchange becomes a circular locus in a two-dimensional coordinate system; any two particular commodities of certain quantities are equivalent to a unit of the general commodity, as if any two points of nominally distinctive coordinates on the circle are equidistant to the centre, where the measure of value locates (Figure 6.4). The circle and the centre – the ring of exchange and the measure of value, constitute the Wheel of Fortune.

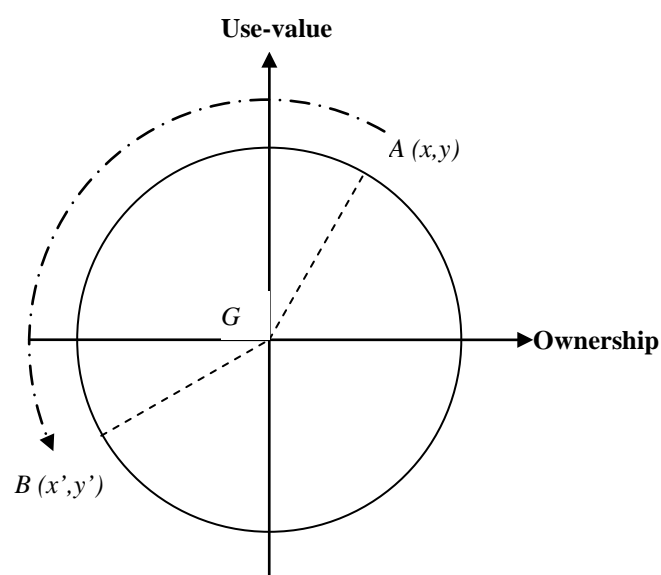


Figure 6.4 The Wheel of Fortune

After the C-M-C' commodity exchange, ideally, everyone possesses as much exchange-value as before, but people give out the ownership of their commodities in exchange for the use-value of others' commodities. That is, a commodity must be what one is able to give and what another is eager to receive; the intentions of persons merge into the exchangeability of things. In contrast, to maintain its constancy and constant relations with all particular commodities, a measure of value must be detached from all social relationships and becomes what people cannot transfer and desire. Accordingly, money, as both the representation of a measure of value and the means of exchange in the market economy, is endowed with a twofold nature. It is both absent and omnipresent in commodity exchange:

...this money (whatever it may be), must also fulfill two functions, occupy two places at the same time, one at the very heart of the exchange process where it functions as a medium of payment, the other prior to or beyond exchange, where it constitutes a stable reference point for measuring the value of whatever circulates in these exchanges. Money is thus both swept along by the movement of the commodities and immobilized as a point around which all this machinery begins to revolve and whose volume and speed it measures. (Godelier 1999:28-29)

In short, a commodity system is not merely a system of exchangeable things. As Godelier argues, things become interchangeable because all of them are related to non-exchangeable things, even if the relation, i.e. measurement, is often ignored in the tripartite relationship between exchangeable and non-exchangeable – visible and invisible in transactions – things. Non-exchangeable things are not necessarily a kind of wealth, but they symbolise the category of wealth, including its epistemological process, i.e. how people conceive the origin of value, compare products of different natures, and define fairness. Foucault's analysis (1970) has unveiled the variability of this process in history. Marx's labour theory of value is presumably not the final truth, but he did point out the fundamental relation in the market economy, i.e. equivalence. Both the concepts of impartiality and profitability in commodity exchange are derived from equivalence: if equivalence signifies impartiality, then non-equivalence signifies profitability.

## **The measure of all things**

### **The harder, the dearer**

In a sense, the concept of equivalence lacks significance in a society where the

exchange of like-for-like prevails. In an imprecise manner, for example, the Yami constantly exchange their identical products: dried fish for dried fish, manpower for manpower, etc.; the identity in quality seems to be self-evident, and the difference in quantity is often ignorable. Probably, it is such impreciseness – or morally called ‘generosity’ – that renders gifts less inimical and more favourable than commodities, while commodities may remind people of gains and losses, fairness and unfairness all the time.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that the Yami ignore the value of things. In some cases, the distinction between goodness and badness is definite, for example,

- (a) *Oyod* (real fish) are more valuable than *rahet* (bad fish).
- (b) Wet taros are more valuable than sweet potatoes.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, *oyod/rahet* is a pair of categories in Yami fish classification. It is said that *oyod* taste tender and delicious but swim extremely fast, while *rahet* are worse in the quality of meat and agility. Local beginners of spear fishing often emphasise how difficult it is to aim at alert *oyod* with spear guns – this somewhat absolves them from bringing more torpid *rahet* home, which make them laughingstocks among more experienced fishermen. Due to their limited availability, therefore, *oyod* are always reserved for women and children, who are prohibited from eating *rahet*; behind an unlucky fisherman, there is always a hungry wife.

In general, *oyod* have a higher evaluation among the Yami: they are tasty, healthy, and hard to catch. In recent years, the better quality of *oyod* also reflects on their price in the local fish trading: *oyod* cost 420 NT dollars per kilogram, while *rahet* cost mere 250 NT dollars per kilogram. Still and all, the *oyod/rahet* distinction is not the only standard that determines the value of a fish. A *rahet* can be more valuable than an *oyod* if it is big enough. For example, local fishermen are commonly obsessed by dolphin fish (*arayo*), a large-sized fish species that migrates along with schools of flying fish in the season. Catching a dolphin fish is an honourable achievement for a fisherman to show off<sup>83</sup>, and even though it is classified as *rahet* and not so delicious in reality, its significance surpasses flying fish, a kind of *oyod*. Broadly speaking, local fishermen love all species of big fish (*cinaknan*) except dangerous ones such as sharks (*zokang*). If a fisherman luckily catches a big fish, he will share the meat with his relatives and friends, and he cannot sell it. This event will be remembered as his personal heroic story. A big fish is more valuable than one or many middle- or small-sized fish, whether it is a *rahet* or not.

A possible interpretation for this double standard is the use-value of fish, that is,

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<sup>83</sup> See Chapter 5.

big fish can feed more people, delicious fish can make people more satisfied, while the comparison is based on a comprehensive consideration of the quantity and quality of fish. However, this half-complete interpretation highlights the relationship between a thing and its user but ignores that between its producer and its user – a fish not only carries utility but conveys information as well. In the context of Yami culture, some fish are more valuable than others, because they can glorify their catchers, who are not only lucky but hardworking. Behind a big fish hanging on a fish flake, there is always a laborious and dangerous process, in which a fisherman consumed the fish's stamina with his skill and strength while running the risk of being capsized or dragged into the deep sea by the fish. Among smaller fish species, local fishermen's testimony 'oyod are harder to catch' implies a similar difficulty. In short, it is plausible that the Yami evaluate things in the same way as they evaluate persons, i.e. '*the harder, the dearer*', a rewording of 'more pains, more gains'.

The principle 'the harder, the dearer' also explains the different evaluations between taros and sweet potatoes, while both crops have no difference on the dining table. Generally speaking, sweet potato planting is easier than taro planting. Wet taros grow in a slow pace and take over two years to grow into a proper size for exhibition in a *mivazay*, while the growth is always under the threat of weeds, rats and snails<sup>84</sup>. By contrast, sweet potatoes take a mere 5-6 months to fully mature after sowing at the end of autumn, and they are less vulnerable to weeds and pests. Overall, taro planting is more labour-intensive but less efficient than sweet potato planting if aiming to produce the same amount of food. Even so, no local household abandons taro planting because of its worse 'rate of return', and taros remain the real and displayable wealth in the *mivazay*. When the locals say 'sweet potatoes are not worth being exhibited', it is not simply because of the local wealth classification – taros are wealth but sweet potatoes are not – but the goal of the wealth exhibition. Indeed, showing easily available things wins no respects.

On the surface, the principle 'the harder, the dearer' is very similar to what the labour theory of value describes, that is, it is labour time that determines the value of things. A critical difference between the two is that Marx narrowed the definition of labour time as 'socially necessary', i.e. only the labour used for serving the society can become value. Among the Yami, in contrast, the proviso 'socially necessary' is rather ignorable, so all forms of labour can become value, and straightforwardly, the value of either persons or things increases along with the accumulation of labour time. While the Yami put no stress on social needs, it is not because all of them only care about their private needs. Through exchange and redistribution, they produce nothing useless for others and valueless for their society.

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<sup>84</sup> See Chapter 3.



## Vital exchange and the Yami Gold

Because the value of things can be recognised as the amount of labour time, equivalent exchange, e.g. swapping ten taros for one fish, is theoretically feasible among the Yami. However, commodity exchange is not merely a bipartite relationship between two exchangeable things but involves a third party, i.e. non-exchangeable things. In this sense, the ‘generosity’ in the local exchange of like-for-like and the lack of indigenous money are two sides of the same coin – the locals do not have, or need, a means for comparing what they give and what they gain. But intriguingly, the locals possess something similar to money or the general commodity represented by fine metal, such as gold. In the market economy, while some gold, like other particular commodities, circulates in the market in the form of valuables, some gold is stored by the state as the warranty of legal tender. The Yami store non-exchangeable ‘gold’ at home, too.

A Yami household owns several types of heirlooms (*tametamek*), including male gold ornaments (*ovay*), silver helmets (*volangat*), and female agate necklaces (*zaka*). The number and size of the heirlooms indicate how wealthy a household is. The heirlooms are also a part of the local wealth exhibition. The locals exhibit their heirlooms by wearing them in festivals or *mivazay* and by hanging them on fish flakes along with a big fish or an abundant fish catch (Plate 6.2). Among the heirlooms, *ovay* is particularly noteworthy. Some of the locals informally call it ‘gold’ or ‘Yami Gold’, though no one can confirm its purity. In appearance, a piece of Yami Gold is a thin gold foil with some hardness, like two connected discs. Its value is judged by size.

In principle, Yami Gold should be passed down from father to son and is rarely transferred to others in exchange for common things. On some infrequent occasions, Yami Gold is exchangeable for other two kinds of vital valuables, irrigated farmland and livestock. These vital valuables form an inactive sphere of exchange. In the past, poor local households might swap a small piece of Yami Gold or irrigated farmland for a pig or a goat, making a feast when famines occurred or the wintertime ended (Yu and Dong 1998:81; Hsieh 2007:74-75). Nowadays, since pork has become a buyable thing in the Co-op, such livestock trading has completely disappeared in Lanyu.

Symbolically, however, all the three kinds of valuables remain interchangeable with human life. Traditionally, the loss of human life can only be compensated with the vital valuables. If a person is injured or even killed in fighting, the culprit must compensate the victim’s household with a piece of irrigated farmland or Yami Gold. Otherwise, the victim’s family can take the culprit’s life according to the local rule ‘an eye for an eye’. By the same token, if a person is in danger and saved by someone, the

saviour is eligible to claim the same valuables as a reward. In both cases, one's life is regarded as being given (saved) or taken (injured) by another, so it has to be returned in the form of the vital valuables. Besides, the vital valuables can help people regain their vitality. A traditional treatment for traumas and bellyaches is to rub the affected part of the patient with Yami Gold, whose healing power is believed to be able to stop pains and bleeding. If a patient is seriously ill, his or her family may hold a ritual *alit no inawan*, which means 'the exchange of life', kill a pig and share the pork with the patient's household and other relatives (Liu 2004:75). Pragmatically, *alit no inawan* can provide extra nutrition for the patient, but it is notable that this ritual symbolises exchanging (*alit*) life for life; the pig is killed as the patient's scapegoat.

The origin of the healing power of the Yami Gold is mysterious. On the one hand, the locals consider that the power is not endowed by spiritual beings such as ancestors or deities, and on the other, they also emphasise that only inherited Yami Gold carries power – gold ornaments bought from Taiwan are nothing but ordinary commodities. Hence, it is believable that the healing power of Yami Gold originates from its history rather than its essence, while the history consists of a series of legitimate transfers from one person to another, including inheritance and exchange of human life-means of production-precious food. My interpretation is: the Yami Gold is transferred only in vital relationships, because it represents congealed vitality.

Furthermore, the Yami Gold represents congealed labour, since people's lifetime is equal to their labour time in the context of Yami culture. Analytically, under the Yami's value judgements are the following basic relations: people's labour generates value and produces valuable things; people's intelligence demarcates the category of wealth and relates valuable things; the 'gold' symbolises people, the creator of all valuable things and the definer of wealth. Therefore, the Yami Gold acquires an ambiguous status in the local category of wealth: it represents the origin of all kinds of wealth, but it is isolated from all other kinds of wealth (Figure 6.5). The Yami Gold is categorically irrelevant to exchangeable things in daily life. As a result, Yami Gold, unlike money, cannot measure the value of things (T-t) and establish equivalence among them (T-T').

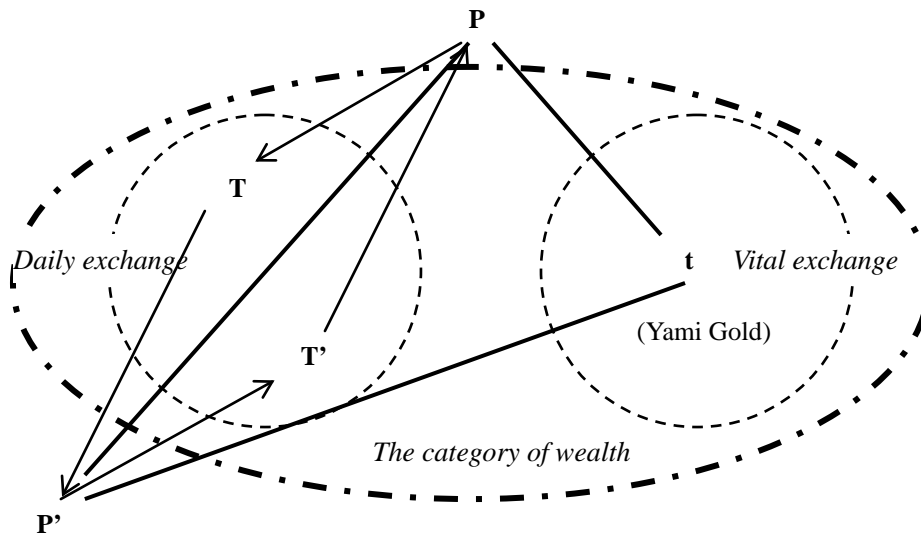


Figure 6.5 The Yami Gold and the category of wealth

### Personal equivalence

The Yami Gold leaves us an enigma to solve. The Yami have all necessary components of the Wheel of Fortune: exchangeable things, certain criteria for value judgements, and potential money. But they do not have a Wheel of Fortune in their society. A critical point is that local exchange spheres isolate the Yami Gold from most other things, render it non-exchangeable, and prevent it from functioning as a means of exchange. As discussed earlier, however, exchange spheres mean people's different needs on different occasions, while the needs can be satisfied if people relate things in certain ways. Accordingly, the Yami neither exchange their labour for meals nor exchange their Yami Gold for abundant taros in a *mivazay*, because those needs can always be satisfied in other locally more reasonable ways. For the same reason, the Yami have no need for a general commodity and the equivalence it establishes in their daily life.

Certainly, this does not mean that the Yami ignore fairness. As local principles of distribution show<sup>85</sup>, making all people obtain what they deserve is always a primary concern among the locals. Hence, the key to the enigma of the Yami Gold becomes how fairness is defined in this society.

It may be a prejudice that fairness, as in a market economy, can only be realised on the basis of a universal measure of value. Polanyi (1977:64) distinguished two types of equivalence, namely substitutive equivalencies and exchange equivalencies. The former is what we often see in commodity exchange, while the latter more frequently occurs in domestic societies:

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter 5.

Exchange equivalencies are of special importance for the independent peasant farmer: they help to tide him over in an emergency whether the neighbour is bound to lend him the necessities he needs or to exchange them against the equivalent. (ibid:68)

In the case of a crop failure or other emergency, a house holder could thus count on his neighbour to supply him with a minimum of the necessities, though no more. The transaction is incumbent on the latter: 1. in regard to all the basic staples, 2. to the amount necessary in the circumstances, but definitely no more, 3. against an equivalent amount of other staples, and 4. with the exclusion of credit. (ibid:69)

If one coat is equivalent to two quarters of corn in a marketplace, then one coat could become equivalent to one quarter of corn in an emergency, e.g. a starving tailor meets a freezing farmer. On the latter occasion, the tailor is more likely to be concerned about how personally necessary for himself the farmer's corn can be, rather than how socially necessary for others his coat can be. In other words, it is his demand for the corn, rather than his supply of the coat, that defines fairness for the tailor. Such 'personal equivalence' reveals the different accent in the domestic economy from that in the market economy: in domestic societies, people care if what they gain is as much as what they need rather than what they give, that is, *man is the measure of all things*.

Personal equivalence cannot be standardised. It exists in the relationship between persons rather than that between things and concerns people's preferences, especially when their preferences have nothing to do with their subsistence. In this regard, if prices in the market economy theoretically express the equivalence between money and commodities, it is hard to say that price tags attached to the Yami's products can express the same thing – buying from the locals is not always a 'fair' transaction.

The Yami are satisfied with the price of their labour power in the labour market of Taiwan. When they look for work opportunities in Taiwan, labour-intensive jobs such as building workers or movers are preferred options due to their high efficiency of money making. According to his proficiency, a male building worker can earn a daily wage from 1,500 to 2,000 NT dollars, while the minimum statutory wage in Taiwan was mere 95 NT dollars per hour in 2007. This fast money attracts the Yami to find a part-time job in Taiwan whenever they need money. When Tarop finds that his grocery is facing a financial crisis, his solution is always to go back to be a building worker again, supporting his grocery with more physical labour.

Despite its high price in Taiwan, the Yami's labour power is unsaleable at home. On customary occasions, labour remains the object of emergent exchange. In modern business management, local businessmen are commonly reluctant to hire labourers

with money. In most cases, they may hire one or two part-time workers for sharing their workload in rush hours, but they themselves are never absent from their businesses. Reducing money expenditure is also a reason why local businessmen would rather hire Taiwanese who come to Lanyu for working holidays. Local businessmen will offer free meals, accommodation, vehicles and return plane tickets, so that they can pay lower wages to their Taiwanese employees. For example, a famous restaurant in Yuren paid a mere 10 NT dollars per hour in 2007. Unsurprisingly, this money-saving method is not applicable to local employees, who always insist on receiving what they deserve.

Most saleable commodities in Lanyu, e.g. imported goods, tourist services, or locally processed meals, usually have prices copied from Taiwan. Local businessmen seldom flexibly adjust the prices according to the local level of purchasing power and scarcity, making their commodities more buyable and profitable. For example, a bowl of beef noodles costs 100 NT dollars in Lanyu, an unaffordable price among the locals, who would rather dine at home and save the money. Hence, many local restaurants open only during the tourist season. On the other hand, due to endless cut-throat competition, local guesthouse accommodation is largely underpriced (300-500 NT dollars per day per capita) in comparison with other regions of Taiwan; Taiwanese tourists can afford more than that. In brief, those copied prices might exclude some profitability – they are either too high to attract more buyers from the locals, or too low to extract more money from the tourists. Even so, the prices still work to some extent and help local businessmen earn enough money at least for their sustenance.

It is doubtful to what extent local businessmen care about their customers, whose needs in mind and money in the pocket can determine half a successful transaction. In the beginning of this chapter, the volatile prices among the woodcarvings in Lanen imply the same ignorance. The elderly do not care if their pricing is attractive enough among potential buyers or competitive enough among local sellers, because it is basically a private affair, a straightforward relationship between people and their products, between their labour time and their value judgements. At the same time, selling woodcarvings is rather an entertainment among the elderly, for whom money is merely something exchangeable for Paolyta, rice wine and cigarettes. They are careless about money because money is needless among them.

But undoubtedly, the locals are concerned about what they need. It is the concern that distracts them from endlessly calculating gains and losses, either theirs or others'. This particular concern also balances giving and gaining and endows both generosity and diligence with morality. As Tarop's dilemma shows<sup>86</sup>, the locals thirst for money, but at the same time, they do not want too much.

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<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 4.

## Conclusion

With the case of ‘gift-like commodities’ circulating in Yami society, this chapter has discussed the three attributes of commodity exchange, that it is necessary, arbitrary and systematic. These attributes are suppressed in the local mode of exchange, and accordingly, commodity exchange becomes dispensable, exclusive, and largely ego-centred among the Yami. While their attention is often drawn by what they need rather than what they give to others, equivalence in Yami culture is established upon the relation between persons and things, i.e. if their gains can satisfy their needs. The relation between things (i.e. what they gain is equivalent to what they give) and the relation between persons and the Society (i.e. what they gain from others is equivalent to what they give to others) can both be ignored and are excluded from the local category of wealth.

A commodity before our eyes actually exists in the following relations. It is an exchangeable thing that suppliers are able to give and demanders are eager to receive; it is an equivalent of all other exchangeable things, including those which we do not see; it is a representation of non-exchangeable things. Above all these relations, the Society-in-the-abstract, which transcends all particular persons and things, exists. It is the Society-in-the-abstract and its contractual relationship with all persons/social members that determine the signification of monetary signs, the exchange-value of things, and people’s obligation to serve other people. However, it is also because people begin to make comparisons between what they gain from and what they give to the Society-in-the-abstract that the concept of profitability forms. In other words, profitability is derived from the Society-in-the-abstract, but more often than not, the pursuit of profitability is ironically anti-social, while people would rather sacrifice impartiality for the sake of higher profitability. In this sense, the concept of profitability is like a self-destruct mechanism concealed inside the Society-in-the-abstract. The case of the Yami points out a way to escape from this moral struggle between fairness and unfairness: people need not make comparisons amongst things, if the things are epistemologically irrelevant.



Plate 6.1-a Yami woodcarvings



Plate 6.1-b Yami woodcarvings



Plate 6.1-c Yami woodcarvings



Plate 6.1-d Yami woodcarvings



Plate 6.2 The Yami Gold, and the first catch in the flying fish season



## Chapter 7

### Golden Silence, Silver Speech

If a commodity system is like a language of supply and demand, then through public exhibition of commodities and prices, people communicate their capabilities for giving and gaining. In this system, equivalence is people's consensus of value, the meaning of commodity. While meaning is fixed through the mutual differentiation amongst commodities and the regulation of a universal measure of value, the consensus is not only that between the two parties in a transaction but that among all members of a society. In this regard, exchange is also a means of communication among the Yami, but one more similar to an argot traded between a couple of persons. In a transaction, it is the persons who determine the value of the exchangeable thing before their eyes and further judge if the other party is a helpful – economically reliable – partner to trade with. The exchange of like-for-like evidently reduces misunderstanding in this process: what people give clearly signifies what they want.

If value can be the meaning of commodities, meaning can be the value of words. In Yami culture, the value of each statement, i.e. its truth or falsity, is determined by a so-called *correspondence principle*: a statement is true if and only if its referent exists. However, the existence is largely founded on the straightforward relationship between persons and referents, especially their gazes. A *fait accompli* present for the eyes to see must be real, so the statement describing it must be true. In a conversation, therefore, it is the persons, according to their experiences, who determine the validity of a statement and further judge if the other party is an honest – epistemologically reliable – partner to talk with. Such isomorphism between the local economy and the local knowledge is not based on contingency but reflects a consistent accent on the existence of persons in Yami culture. Both value and meaning are produced in the relationship between persons, rather than that between things or words.

This chapter aims to shade in the last element of the image of *Homo laboris*, i.e. language, truth and morality. By means of physical labour, the Yami produce not only products but also facts, while facts are the ultimate source of knowledge. In this sense, *Homo laboris* becomes the origin of morality in Yami society: a diligent person learns true knowledge when he works, owns deserved wealth from work, and wins power through displaying and sharing his wealth; speech is rather redundant and dispensable in this process. Beginning with their *Homo laboris* principle, the Yami develop a



particular hierarchy of morality. On the one hand, silence is better than speech, and truths are better than lies; on the other hand, working is better than not working, and speaking ill is better than doing evil. Unsurprisingly, the consequence of moral degradation is always death, the reserve of ‘all men are born labouring’.

In the context of the market economy, the Yami’s positivist criterion of validity and morality excludes more efficient means of production, such as intellectual labour, and obstructs people from seriously pondering non-positivist issues, such as abstraction, generalisation, and profitability. Hence, people’s wealth, when it does not correspond to their labour input, is considered undeserved and immoral. The extremity of vision eventually becomes that of knowledge and that of wealth among the Yami.

## Prologue: seeing is believing

In a warm evening in the early spring of 2008, I sat with Onis in his *takagal*, chatting about recent events in the village. It was that time of the year: the monsoon had just begun shifting its direction and rendered the weather unstable. The weather in the morning was usually sunny and warm, but if the wind direction shifted in the afternoon, dark clouds floated from the northeast and brought chilly rain. At some point, we started to talk about tomorrow’s weather. I reached my hand out and tried to feel the wind flow around me, and I said to Onis: it was the northeast wind blowing, so the weather would turn bad tonight.

‘No it won’t. It is still the southeast wind blowing now. The weather will remain good.’ Onis set me straight.

‘Why? Isn’t it a northeast wind blowing as I felt?’ I asked him with confusion.

‘You made a mistake. To know the real wind direction, you should watch the flow of clouds.’ Onis pointed to the skyline. I watched carefully and found that clouds in the distant sky were slowly flowing toward the northwest; Onis was right.

Winds may begin shifting directions near the village due to the local terrain, and accordingly, real wind directions cannot be judged simply by the sense of touch, and only the visible flow of clouds tells the truth. Such local knowledge is rather pragmatic in a natural environment where wind directions determine the weather and climate. Nevertheless, sometimes it makes me feel impatient when the Yami insist on confirming everything with their eyes. A few days later, on the day before *mivanoa* for small boats<sup>87</sup>, there was said to be a preparatory ceremony at the seashore in the evening, so I stayed with Onis in order to observe the procedure. For a long while, Onis just sat silently in his *takagal*, staring at his next-door neighbour Syapen-kotan’s

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<sup>87</sup> See Chapter 5.

*takagal*. About ten metres away from Onis, Syapen-kotan was sitting in a leisurely manner on the grass and folding his fishing net, seemed not to be going to do anything else. I asked Onis what to do next.

‘We are waiting for Syapen-kotan. After he moves to the *vanoa*, we will follow behind for the ceremony.’ Onis briefly answered.

That being the case, we continued waiting for half an hour, but Syapen-kotan did nothing else. While I hoped that Onis could open his mouth and ask Syapen-kotan if he was ready or how much more time he would need for staying with his fishing net, Onis seemed not to intend to say anything but kept watching and waiting. Finally, Syapen-kotan held his hand net, slowly stood up and began to walk out of his yard. Onis quietly followed Syapen-kotan and walked on the same trail toward the *vanoa*. On the way, hosts of other households showed up one after another, but no one made unnecessary noise. Five minutes later, we arrived at the *vanoa* and began another round of waiting.

Syapen-kotan stood by the seashore without further action, and some people whispered to one another. Onis did not speak, but he looked back to the village from time to time. I whispered to Onis: what were we waiting for this time? He quietly told me: there was one more person, and we had to wait for him.

After about a tedious twenty minutes, on the trail to the village, a man holding a hand net ran to us in a flurry. He did not apologise to any of us, and none of us said anything to him. Syapen-kotan gave a glance at him but did not say anything, walking to the seashore and making a pose of netting fish; others did the same.

‘Hey!’ People cried out at the same time. Following Syapen-kotan’s movement, men faced the sea and simulated netting fish, and then the ceremony was over. People began to walk back to the village by twos and threes, chatting and laughing. I was so confused: people waited for one hour just to do such a simple movement together? Even though I understood the cultural significance of this ceremony, I could not help thinking: if anyone was willing to say something to inquire and communicate, could all of us probably have saved some time from this endless waiting?

In this ceremony, messages were primarily conveyed through vision. Actually, when Syapen-kotan was folding his fishing net in his yard, there were dozens of eyes glued to his next step. Syapen-kotan need not call the roll, because he could check out who had not yet shown up with his eyes. Except for the latecomer who lived in the new district of Yeyin and did not pay attention to his surroundings, the ceremony was substantially completed without many words and mistakes. On the other hand, even if people continuously talk and listen in the process, can messages received through ears, such as ‘we will depart in thirty minutes’ or ‘two people have not yet arrived’, be more convincing than what we can see? On a positivist criterion, a *fait accompli* is

necessarily truer than a description. When a fact occurs before our eyes, it is also redundant to describe it with words; people only need to watch it with their own eyes.

For the Yami, seeing is believing. As mentioned in Chapter 3, either directly or indirectly, vision always conveys the most credible messages. Seeing people breathing and walking proves their vitality; seeing a piece of thriving taro farmland proves its hostess's good health; seeing a big fish on a fish flake proves its host's ability to fish. On the other hand, people also intentionally use visual symbols to convey such messages. In most cases, inferences from visual clues to general facts are valid in Yami society, because in principle, no one does what one is not expected to do. In terms of signification, the exclusive relations between certain identities and certain actions in this society render the validity of visual symbols not inferior to that of language. People can communicate with each other in silence as long as they grasp the routines in the local life.

## Speak of the devil

### Ill-founded words and *anito*

In contrast with such particular reliance on vision, however, it is worth pondering the implication when the use of spoken language is intentionally suspended in Yami society. On various occasions, for things which can be conveyed and negotiated conveniently through words, the locals would rather observe them, infer from spatio-temporal conditions, and reach an agreement in silence. But their guesses are mostly correct. On one occasion, for example, I asked Tarop about the source of pigs which serve as offerings in a ceremony, and he told me that it is a family thing and only requires a member as the representative to kill a pig.

'Will all family members hold a meeting to discuss who donates the pig? Or they will donate in turn?' I asked.

'No meeting. People will know when the time comes.' Tarop said.

'You said "when the time comes"; what if everyone thought others would donate the pig but no one does that in the end?'

'Why? People always know. As long as we see someone ties up a pig, that pig is the one ready to be butchered.'

'But what if people misunderstood each other, and that pig is actually prepared for other purposes?'

'That never happens!' Tarop looked more confused than I did; he seemed not to understand how it is possible for people to mistake such a self-evident fact.

According to the locals, if people openly discuss the process or gifts in a ceremony, *anito* (a ghost or evil spirit) will eavesdrop and hinder the ceremony or

steal the gifts. In big events such as *mivazay*, if prior communication and coordination is indispensable, participants in the meeting must not disclose related information to others. However, rather than such information *per se* being a secret, what the locals try to avoid is speaking. In fact, almost everyone knows who is going to hold a ceremony and what gifts have been prepared. When people observe a man reclaiming new pieces of taro farmland and a woman planting more taros, they know that this household will hold a *mivazay* two years later. When everyone is visually informed, no one will speak to the persons concerned to confirm the message again, because it is considered redundant and immoral behaviour which always brings the household bad luck. The persons concerned will hold their tongues until the last minute. When everything is ready, the new house or boat has been completed, and taros and pigs have been well prepared, the host will begin to invite guests a few days before the *mivazay*, by verbally conveying this message to everyone, even though the news is nothing new on the island.

Silence is a virtue not only in ceremonies but in daily routine activities as well. For example, when a man goes to the seashore with a fishing pole, a net or a spear gun, people immediately know that he is going fishing, but they will never greet him or ask him 'are you going fishing now?' Their greetings will be overheard by *anito*. If *anito* know the man's purpose, they will haunt him and make him gain nothing. Hence, talking to a fisherman brings him bad luck, and if he does unfortunately gain nothing on that day, he will attribute his bad luck to the person who talked to him. With regard to actions concerning fortune and glory, it is better for others to keep silent so as not to provoke others and make troubles for themselves.

Between spoken words and unrealised actions, evil *anito* exist. The term *anito* in Yami language also refers to corpses and the bereaved in a funeral (Liu 1959: 163). The Yami neither create categories of spirits nor worship ancestral or good spirits. A person dies and then becomes an *anito*, while *anito* are the producers of disasters and losses, always waiting for the opportune moment to take away people's lives. For the locals, the *anito* are a sufficient reason to explain accidents and deaths, and to relate the imagination and the fact, the locals further make a statement '*anito* are listening'. Why is it that merely describing things unrealised can lead to such serious results? Moreover, why do *anito* eavesdrop rather than peep?

In his record of a funeral in Yeyin, Liu (ibid: 163-164) explained the relation between *anito* and language in Yami culture as follows:

'The Yami consider language as a means not only of conveying ideas but also as carrying spiritual power, which renders words equal to their referents. During a funeral, when the bereaved continuously mourn for or talk to the deceased and bid farewell for several days,

such behaviours undoubtedly aim to comfort the deceased's soul with the power of language. Therefore, calling the deceased's name before the bereaved becomes one of the most serious taboos, for it calls the deceased's soul back. The soul of a newly dead person has not been used to its new environment and is missing its family, so calling the deceased's name must arouse its sentiment and cause disasters. Hence, informants claim that in this case, the bereaved can kill the name caller with a spear, or at least ask for large compensation.'

The principle 'speak of the devil and he doth appear' derives the name taboo in Yami society. Mentioning the deceased's name in public is strictly prohibited even after the funeral (ibid: 164). If inferring from this phenomenon alone, it seems that the Yami, as Liu claimed, do have a belief in the spiritual power within words, i.e. 'speech creates reality', the reverse of 'speech describes reality.' However, Liu's hypothesis does not explain the silence observed in local production and redistribution activities. If speech creates reality, why must blessings like 'I wish you a big catch/ a bumper crop' be avoided in case they evoke *anito*? One could certainly argue that various interpretations in a culture are not always consistent with one another, and for the locals, 'speech creates reality' may only apply to unfortunate things. Nevertheless, a more consistent interpretation can be made if we focus on the relations between persons, things, and words. For example, the logical sequence of 'calling the deceased's name evokes *anito*' in Liu's supposition can be reduced as below:

(a) Speech A (calling the deceased's name) referring to concept B (the deceased) corresponds to reality C (evoking *anito*).

On the other hand, the silence in local production and redistribution activities can be expressed with two propositions of the same meaning:

(b) Speech D (greeting a fisherman) referring to concept E (fishing) does not correspond to reality F (catching fish); or

(c) Speech D (greeting a fisherman) referring to concept E (fishing) corresponds to reality C (evoking *anito*).

In other words, in Liu's supposition, the reality 'evoking *anito*' may be a reverse of something unrealised when calling the deceased's name, while in funerals, the most significant but by no means realisable thing should be 'the deceased's revival'. Hence, between the spoken words and the certainly unrealised actions, *anito* is summoned. Of course, the Yami may play anything but such a logic game. What I would like to

highlight here is the relation between *anito* and ill-founded words. Neither calling the deceased's name in private nor mentioning it to people other than the bereaved is considered an evocation of *anito* (ibid: 164), while in contrast, *anito* always come along with talking about what a person cannot do or has not yet done in public. *Anito* do not peek, because it does not respond to *faits accomplis*.

### Counterfactual words and death

If suspending the anthropomorphic part, evoking *anito* is actually a metaphor for causing disasters, and this is what worries the locals most. In some cases, disasters will befall those who tell lies in public irrespective of *anito*. Intentionally or not, liars are not as innocent as unlucky fishermen, and they do not need *anito* to play a retributive role. The suffering of liars is both a divine retribution and the reaction of the destructive power within speech.

Traditionally, the Yami arbitrate in property-related disputes by means of vowing, a method similar to trial by ordeal and believed to lead to disastrous consequences. Even though ownership in Yami society is primarily determined by facts of utilisation<sup>88</sup>, such facts are not always continuous due to trading, the owner's ageing, or inheritance. As a result, legitimate owners are always required to be able to describe histories of their property. For example, a man inherited this piece of land from his father, that piece by becoming someone's *mamlam* (foster son), and swapped his Yami gold for another piece. Besides facts of utilisation as truths at present, hence, oral testimonies as truths in the past, which are based on either personal experiences or ancestral teachings, also serve as valid evidence. For this reason, local children without fathers are disadvantaged, because no one else would tell them the history of their familial property, and their deserved property is often claimed by relatives or even outsiders<sup>89</sup>. However, because there is no other form of valid evidence in Yami society, in a dispute over ownership, both interested parties argue merely according to what they respectively know. For example, A may claim that this piece of land was reclaimed by his grandfather and inherited by his father, but B may claim that B's father acquired the land from A's father through trading, and A is ignorant about this because he was in Taiwan at that time. When the two parties stick to their own views and fail to continue negotiating, their final solution is to vow.

The Yami do not have a strict form for vowing, but a vow requires something other than speech to be complete. Swearers must go out to find a vine of porcelain

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<sup>88</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>89</sup> Because of the gender division of labour in a household, females rarely make inquiry about male jobs and male property. Accordingly, sons cannot know details of father's property from their mother.

berry (*kamanrarahet*)<sup>90</sup>, cut it off, and then a vow is made. Such a simple action is believed to cause grave consequences, so the locals vow only with full confidence. After vowing, a dispute is not resolved right away, but the two parties will wait and see. It is said that after a while – several months, a year or even longer, misfortune will befall the wrongdoers or their families, who will suffer illness, injury or even death (Yu and Dong 1998:162; Huang 2005:130-131). Only facts can judge the validity of words.

When two statements contradict each other but only one fact exists, disasters will befall the liar, who tries to claim value produced by some person's labour and take over the wealth of the owner by making a false statement. This is also a kind of social transgression. It is noticeable that as mentioned in Chapter 3, a social transgression is regarded as the actor's curse for those who are infringed upon, because it is as if those victims are dead. However, when a social transgression is committed by means of speech, e.g. disputing over a piece of land with its legitimate owner, the curse will come true on the liars and their families. Thus, the structure of social transgressions is reversed:

- (a) If A does not infringe on B with actions, then no one will suffer. (Normality)
- (b) If A infringes on B with actions, then B will suffer. (Abnormality)
- (c) If A infringes on B with words, then A will suffer. (Abnormality)

A related case is verbal curses. Similar to the situation of vowing, the Yami do not have a strict form for cursing, and besides actions of social transgression, the locals can curse with inauspicious words, e.g. 'like a stone sinking into the sea', 'like an egg rolling down from the roof', or 'like fruit falling to the ground'. All these words imply violent death (Hsieh 2004:12-13). In addition, people can also use customarily inauspicious things to enhance their curses, e.g. the fruit of sea poison trees (*teva*)<sup>91</sup>, the sand in the cemetery, etc. These cemetery-related items also carry the implication of death and contaminate everything through contagion. They can cast a curse of death when put in a victim's house, land, boat, etc. Generally speaking, Yami people curse mainly for protecting their private property, such as timber, land or water, from theft. Curses are cast also because of hatred, e.g. quarrellers curse one another in a temper or avengers secretly curse those who bully them. Whatever the motive is, however, curses are always a double-edged sword, and the locals believe that curse casters will take the consequence if they themselves are in the wrong, just as liars do in the case of social transgressions. A local friend from Langdao shared his

<sup>90</sup> Scientific name: *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata* (Cheng and Lu 2000:136).

<sup>91</sup> Scientific name: *Barringtonia asiatica*. Sea poison trees usually grow near inauspicious cemeteries, so the locals call the species 'devil's tree' (Cheng and Lu 2000:159).

experience of being cursed but obtaining justice in the end:

‘While I was building my house, some people always gossiped behind my back. They said, this is not my land at all, but I am totally innocent. I knew these rumours as well as the people who spread the rumours. After I completed my house, those people even cursed me, but soon they had their retribution. In a few years, their families suffered illness, car accidents and so on. But as you can see, I am alright.’

Overall, the validity and morality of a statement is determined by its distance to facts. *Faits accomplis*, especially visible ones, have the purest and most self-evident trueness. Silence is moral because it never distorts facts, especially general facts concerning fortune and glory, i.e. ‘someone owns something’. Between silence and facts, there is no room for *anito* to hide. By contrast, ill-founded words (e.g. a wish ‘someone will own something’) and counterfactual words (e.g. a lie ‘someone does not own something’) are rather hazardous. However, disasters always befall those who fail to realise the invalid statements rather than those who make the invalid statements.

Interestingly, if ownership is suspended, counterfactual words are favourite ways of praising and joking among the locals. In this case, irony is not treated as lies but a form of humility, although ‘rendering others humble’ sounds somewhat peculiar. For example, on the occasion of welcome and all-night chanting for a *mivazay*, guests often sing literally humiliating lyrics to express the opposite meaning, but everyone knows that such lyrics actually mean praise and respect<sup>92</sup>. In daily life, the locals seldom frankly praise others, either. Even if they appreciate your abilities and recognise your achievements, what comes out from their mouths is often ‘that’s not bad’ or ‘it’s nothing’. Although the Yami are keen on face-saving, if one dares to say humiliating words in your presence, it is not because of an unyielding mentality. When the locals speak ironically, their facial expression often looks serious without a smile, so that their words may be easily misunderstood by outsiders. In fact, if they want to criticise you, they never do that in your presence, unless your relationship is already on the verge of breakdown.

Therefore, we can add a sociological factor into the correspondence principle. When speech does not lead to the dissociation of legitimate ownership, i.e. words do not relate a person to a thing which is not or has not yet been his or her product, speech is not endowed with innate immorality. It is certainly immoral to lie for undeserved interests, but it is probably moral to speak ironically to suppress others’ fame, especially when excessive praises not only make people conceited but also

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<sup>92</sup> See Chapter 3.



enviable. The Yami live in a society with pervading competitiveness, so it is unnecessary to increase the tension among them by eulogies.

## **Honesty is the best policy**

### **Honest brags**

Inferring from their emphasis on facts, honesty seems to be a praiseworthy virtue among the Yami. Generally speaking, it is believed that nothing supernaturally bad will happen to them as long as they tell the truth, i.e. their words correspond to certain facts. Nevertheless, their honest words often produce social disasters. As the case of irony shows, even if eulogies do not make a person complacent, they sound harsh among one's competitors. For example, I had a talk with a classmate of Tarop's in Yeyin. Since Tarop is a person we both know, I naturally brought up Tarop's grocery in our talk.

'Tarop's grocery is one of the best shops on the island, isn't it? It's bright and clean inside. Tarop sells a variety of commodities, and he is popular among young people. A young man like him should be considered successful, right?' so I praised Tarop.

'Tarop? He's most successful thing is cheating children. His business is good because youngsters are easily manipulated.' The man coldly responded to my praise with a tone of disdain.

The man's words were not irony, because he talked to me when Tarop was absent. He has his own business in Yeyin, and he politely gets along with Tarop for most of the time. Despite having no specific grudge against Tarop, he might feel challenged when I praised another person to his face. In Yami society, the competition for fame within a generation is intense, while everyone knows but rarely expresses it in public. After all, even if people are not friends, they are still neighbours. To some extent, the man's words make sense, because local youngsters are indeed Tarop's main customers. After school, Tarop's grocery immediately becomes the sole children's playground in the village, where high school students get along together with primary school ones. Hence, the man expressed this fact with harsh words, but he was honest.

The Yami are not sensitive to the distinction between universal and particular propositions, and as a result, their definition of honesty is rather loose. That is to say, people can be honest as long as they correctly describe some parts of a fact, even just the advantageous parts for themselves. Hence, while humility is principally a virtue among the Yami (so they 'humiliate' others), people are not so humble when talking about themselves. One time, Tarop's cousin Kay brought us a film. Tarop was not interested in the film and went downstairs to watch TV, so only Kay, another

Taiwanese friend and I watched the film on Tarop's computer. The film was a documentary of a dragon-boat contest, in which the rowing team of Dongqing also participated. I found that it was a high quality film with no vibration at all. It looked like it was taken with professional equipment, so I asked Kay who made the film.

'I made this film', Kay answered with composure. But I muttered in mind: how could that be even possible: I just saw you steering the dragon-boat in the film! Afterward, I heard from others that this film was actually made by a TV station, and a reporter gave copies of it to all members of the rowing team. Not to negate Kay's credibility in a hurry, his claim was partially true: he was one of the many participants in the film making, so he was eligible to claim the merit. Similarly, when I asked Blackie who built his house and he proudly answered 'I made it myself,' I had looked up to this personal achievement for a long while. Inevitably, I was quite disappointed when others told me that Blackie asked and paid his relatives to build his house, while he was only an unimportant helper because he knew nothing about house building. Even so, it is understandable that Blackie, who had lived in Taiwan for thirty years, was unable to build his own house like others but still feels sick of being looked down upon. Undoubtedly, such a face saver is unfair for those who have made real efforts. Tarop has complaint about a similar event:

'To build the public reservoir (of Yeyin), villagers decided to equally share the labour and building materials at that time, but guess what happened? It was I who donated the most materials. During the whole process, only young people were working, and those middle-aged men only sat aside drinking, chatting, and doing nothing. But when the reservoir was done, those people proudly told their families: 'I built the reservoir!' I couldn't believe they dared to say so!'

## **Honest gossip**

In a society where personal achievements are highly praised, imprecise honesty easily ferments and propagates harmful boasts which damage people's friendships; this makes silence even more valuable. Even so, both 'honesty is the best policy' and 'silence is golden' are what people had better, rather than have to, obey. In reality, the Yami enjoy talking, and reticent people like Tarop and Nalo are few in number, though the brothers also have lots of things to say to close friends. Indeed, in those years when people worked on the mountain or at sea all alone, and televisions and computers had not been popularised on the island, talking with people was the primary source of fun in daily life. Besides personal experiences and old stories, the content of chatting naturally includes daily events, especially the ones everyone is

familiar with and interested in, i.e. gossip. Certainly, gossiping in private is not unusual at all, but in Lanyu, gossip can cause enormous social pressure on persons concerned, which can be attributed to two factors: rumours always spread with a surprising speed on the island, and sooner or later, they will be heard by the persons concerned. When one's private affair is known by everyone, and one learns that 'everyone knows it', it may cause some unfortunate events on this small island, where people's glances cover all corners and nowhere is left for one to hide.

The rapid spread of rumours in Lanyu can be exemplified by a mistake of mine. A few days after Taiwan's presidential election in 2008, a Taiwanese friend of mine visited Lanyu, and I went to the airport to welcome her. We talked in the terminal, and she mentioned that when she was in Taitung airport, the building was heavily guarded as if some VIP was going to take a plane. I jokingly said: 'Can it be the new president coming to visit Lanyu?' I was not aware at that time that we were chatting a little bit louder. However, when I went back to Yeyin one hour later, a local friend excitedly came to tell me a good news: 'Did you know that? The new president is coming to Lanyu!' In such a short time, an interrogative sentence went over the mountain and turned into a declarative sentence. On that day, I guess, this fabricated rumour was spread over the island along the Circle Road.

The construction of the Circle Road and popularisation of motorcycles provide a convenient channel for spreading rumours, and sometimes, roads and vehicles *per se* can be the origin of rumours. The Circle Road is the lifeline of transportation on the island. Only the Hongtou-Yeyin section can be substituted by the steep Cross-island Road, and there is no other alternative route for transportation. Since the Circle Road directly links all villages except Langdao, whatever occurs on the Circle Road hardly escapes from the locals' eyes. Incomplete observations may produce a lot of rumours as well. For example, there was a period of time when Tarop and a Taiwanese girl Zheng, a new helper at Tarop's waiting room, rode the same motorcycle to work everyday. When the weather was fine, they departed from Yeyin to Hongtou via the shortcut Cross-island Road, and from Hongtou passing by Yuren to Yeyou via the Circle Road; when the weather was bad, they departed to Yeyou passing by Dongqing and Langdao via the safer Circle Road. Naturally, people of all villages had seen Tarop and Zheng's intimacies, and soon a rumour of their relationship spread over the island. Such a rumour has its cultural background: in the past when wedding ceremony was absent in Yami society, a couple's marital relationship was embodied in the fact of their living and working together. When people see a man and a woman being with each other all day long, it goes without saying that they are husband and wife. Nevertheless, their relationship is not stabilised until their first child is born and

named, and the couple began sharing the same name according to teknonymy<sup>93</sup>.

Seeing produces rumours; speaking produces more than rumours. For example, one day when Tarop went to Vago's café for dining, Vago asked him if recently Tarop met any nice girls. Tarop jokingly answered: 'I like girls as diligent as Xiang'. Xiang is a Taiwanese girl, who was helping Nalo manage his guesthouse at the time. Xiang often went to eat at Vago's café with Nalo, so she was close to Vago, too. A few days later, when I chatted with Blackie, he asked me: 'I heard Tarop likes Xiang, are they a couple now?' When I was wondering where this rumour came from, Blackie said that he heard this from Vago; the two even argued which one Tarop liked more, Zheng or Xiang? Tarop and Zheng were so close everyday, but he claimed that he liked Xiang, so the two men felt confused as well.

The two statements 'Tarop likes girls as nice as Xiang' and 'Tarop likes Xiang' are certainly different, but when rumours spread, semantic accuracy is by no means necessary, so an interrogative sentence can become a declarative one, a category can become an individual, etc. Fundamentally, rumour spreaders take no responsibility for verifying truths or conveying precise information. Their only responsibility is to pass along whatever interests them to more people. After moving to Yeyou for a short while, one day, when I sat beside a friend who was peddling handicrafts in front of the Co-op, a priest of Yeyin saw me while passing by, excitedly came to me and told me good news: 'Did you know that? The man who was lost in the mountain a few days ago came home safely this morning. It's so wonderful!'

I expressed my delight to the priest, and then he left to do his shopping. I had heard about this event from others a few days ago, but I was not concerned because the lost man was not an acquaintance of mine. Several minutes later, Blackie also came shopping and saw me, mentioning the same news to me and then entering the Co-op to shop. Because both of the messengers knew me and knew that I had lived in Yeyin, they wanted me to know the greatest news happening in Yeyin recently. They did not care how concerned I was about this event, how intimate my relationship with that man was, what action I might take after learning the news, and what else I might say to them. They no longer cared about this news after passing it along to me, while it existed for the purpose of letting me know instead of letting me act. Similarly, Blackie and Vago shared news about Tarop's romance with each other, absolutely not because they wanted to give Tarop a hand to end his single life; romance is a topic which most people are interested in but never intervene in. Like entertainment news in the newspaper, when people finish reading that this celebrity is falling in love or that couple finally divorced, they rarely do anything but gossip. After sharing the news or making some comments, everything remains in the realm of speech, and no facts will

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<sup>93</sup> See Chapter 2.

be changed. Theoretically, while factual actions are suspended in gossip and the causal relation between words and actions is cut off, the sin of gossipmongers can be exempted – they have mere harmless discussions on some interesting things, and harmless discussions will not result in harmful consequences.

Moreover, when people say those ill-founded words with their own mouths, they may not feel guilty because of a thought of ‘I might be lying’. At least, gossipmongers have some observations (‘I saw...’) or hearsay (‘I heard of...’) to weakly prove their words; even if they are finally proved to be wrong, the first condemnable person is the liar who made up the false news, while they themselves are nothing but harmless and innocent messengers. But the problem is: when others enjoy the pleasure of gossiping, the persons concerned may be seriously humiliated. Even though Tarop did not mind hearing rumours about him and his lovers, Xiang was very reluctant to become the heroine in Tarop’s romance, especially when she was said to be the heroine in Nalo’s and my romances at the same time. The key is that rumours will be heard by the persons concerned in the end, and thus, those persons may be unable to hold themselves as if nothing has happened. Among those people, consequently, ‘harmless’ words result in harmful facts.

Persons concerned in gossip may hear rumours about themselves from those who care about them. For example, because Vago cared about Xiang, she finally learned about Tarop’s ‘love’ for her. The persons concerned may hear from one another. Tarop finally knew that his joke had become a rumour when Xiang took him to task. In a broader context, people hear rumours about themselves from each other, as a local young man Kevin said:

‘Tarop often speaks ill of me, and I always know that. He speaks ill of me to Golo, but he speaks ill of Golo to me as well. I easily found Tarop speaks ill of me when chatting with Golo. Golo and I often share our information about how Tarop criticises both of us.’

I did not pass on Kevin’s words to Tarop, so I am not sure if Tarop ever warned his listeners ‘don’t tell others I told you this’ when he spoke ill of both Kevin and Golo. At least, when Tarop criticised others in my presence, he did not ask me to keep his words a secret; probably he trusted me, or probably he did not care whether I would disclose those messages or not. When Kevin told Golo ‘Tarop spoke ill of you’, he seemed not to think that he was responsible to protect Tarop’s trust, Golo’s mood, and their friendship; neither did Golo. In other words, in such a malicious discourse network, there are no secrets. No one purposely limits the circulation of his words, while their negative effects seem to be expected. From this perspective, it is hard to exempt gossipmongers from their moral responsibilities.

In Hongtou, rumours brought about a tragedy in the summer of 2007. At that time, a 32 year-old young man and a 47-year-old divorced woman fell in love. Because the woman had been a grandmother, their romance soon became a laughable topic in the villagers' gossip. Finally, the woman decided to break up with the young man, but the young man tried to save their relationship by proving his love – one night, he swam alone to an uninhabited small island near Lanyu with no equipment. In his adventure, the man was unfortunately exhausted by the rapid currents in that sea area. He unconsciously drifted for 26 hours but was miraculously saved by the Taiwan Navy. From then on, their May-December romance was made public by the Taiwanese media, who reported the news in a joking manner<sup>94</sup>. Although the villagers had known about this for a long time, the young man's reckless adventure made a laughable topic even funnier, and hence the villagers' gossip became more and more exaggerated and malicious. After one month, the woman was found hanging on a tree on the campus of Lanyu Elementary School; no one killed her, but rumours did.

## Words and swords

### Speaking ill: the dynamic equilibrium of rivalry

Because 'honest' words can be used to do filthy things, pristine silence is beyond doubt. Despite the premise of the correspondence principle, people only need a few facts to protect themselves from the retribution of lying, so it retains possible 'legitimate' interests in speech practices, e.g. boasting about themselves or spreading rumours to damage others' reputations. In many cases, the so-called honest words can only reach the baseline of morality, that is, they do not directly result in harmful facts. A paradoxical phenomenon in Yami society forms accordingly: people constantly put stress on the importance of 'seeing is believing', but they do not mind letting rumours spread and make trouble among themselves.

As mentioned earlier, gossipmongers evade their moral responsibility according to *faits accomplis*. When A speaks ill of C to B, and B passes on the message to C and makes him unhappy, it is as if A gives B a sword pointing to C when B is walking to C. If C is injured, A can claim that he did not injure C but gave B a sword, while B can claim that he did not injure C but A's sword did – both A and B are either innocent or guilty. However, I must point out that almost nobody can avoid becoming a victim of gossip while playing the role of a gossipmonger at the same time. Yami people always roughly know who is speaking ill of them, and speaking ill in return is the fastest way to revenge, e.g. C can speak ill of A to B, and then B can pass on this

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<sup>94</sup> For the collection of related news, see <http://www.cooloud.org.tw/node/4993>.

message to whomever he wants. Therefore, when everyone is speaking ill of others, it can reach a state of dynamic equilibrium in the end – as long as people do not confront others in public, they can maintain peace on the surface even if undercurrents are surging beneath.

From the perspective of social life, gossiping is far from serious demoralisation since everyone is doing it. In Yami society, speaking ill of someone is more of an attempt to keep his social status at the same level with others than real hatred. In daily life, therefore, two persons can speak ill of each other but maintain a peaceful interaction on social occasions. Social responsibilities between them will not be affected, either. For example, Onis and Nimor, Tarop's and Blackie's fathers, remain socially friendly even though there is between them a complex entanglement with obligation and competition.

On a summer evening, I carried a bottle of Paolyta to visit Nimor and chatted with him. Before my visit, the old man had had a few cups of rice wine, and unsurprisingly, my Paolyta made him even drunker. Nimor was too excited to control his mouth and began criticising others: 'You know Onis? His son, useless! Can't find himself a wife at his age, useless!'

Nimor's wife, in an aside asked him to stop his nonsense, but he was still repeating 'Useless, useless!' I made no remark but remembered his words. A few days later, Nimor invited me to have lunch with him, and I brought him a bottle of Paolyta as usual. When we were drinking and chatting in Nimor's *tagakal*, Onis appeared in front of us. Nimor happily invited him to have a cup of Paolyta with us. Then, in front of me, the two old men began toasting each other and mocking with bad words such as 'you old pervert', 'you old drunkard', etc.; they looked like they had a good relationship. In the evening, however, when Tarop and I finished working and went to Onis's house for dinner, Onis asked if I was familiar with Nimor and worriedly told me: 'Don't get too close to Nimor. He is filthy and often steals from others' farmland. All his sons are useless except Blackie. Just ask me if you want to know any cultural things.'

Hence, the two old men did not look like they had a really good relationship. Even so, certain obligations and responsibilities have nothing to do with feelings. Several months later, when Nimor invited friends and relatives to help with taro harvesting for Blackie's *mivazay*, Onis also joined in and worked hard. As Onis said, 'Because he helped me last time, I must come and help him this time. I will come even if he did not invite me;' and even if the two old men did not sincerely like each other.

The complexity of the two old men's relationship can be divided into three levels. On the level of emotion, they are rivals and always have lots of things to compete for:

wealth, morality, and their sons. Nevertheless, their competitive mentality is seldom directly reflected in the level of interaction, and they still talk to each other, share food, and make harmless jokes according to convention. Moreover, their rivalries rarely touch the level of institution. Responsibilities must be taken, and debts must be paid, because if anything goes wrong on this level, the consequence is by no means limited to a breakdown of relationship but threatens an overall loss of social credibility, while unreturned debts are always a good topic for gossiping.

When facts of competition and cooperation coexist in this society, for individuals or the community, gossiping is probably a relatively safer means of peacemaking: people obstruct one another without public offense, abreact personal emotions without social unrest. Hence, the ‘warre of everyone against everyone’ (Hobbes 2007 [1651])<sup>95</sup> can be peacefully contained by the discourse network. If this is still immoral, then verbal abuse in public should be more immoral, because the rivalry between two persons has lifted to the interactive level and become closer to a *fait accompli*. A calmer transition form exists between gossip and face-to-face verbal abuse. In the past, if a man found his belongings stolen and suspected someone in the village, he would stand on his roof, loudly speak to all people and openly express his anger. His accusation would be anonymous, but it could warn the suspect who was assumed to be hiding among the villagers. Then, the suspect might return his spoils or at least behave after receiving the warning. The anonymous public accusation is like firing a blank cartridge into the discourse network, and everyone hears the sound but no one will be injured. Today, this calmer form of verbal attack is done with modern equipment. In Yeyin, when minor crimes as above occur, victims will go to the village head’s office and speak to all villagers with broadcast facilities there. People never care if they may disturb others’ quietness, and it is common that an old man angrily tells everyone what he lost today through a broadcast at 6 o’clock in the morning.

### **Doing evil: first act, first err**

Verbal abuse in public is the baseline of morality. Beyond this line, all kinds of violence are immoral regardless of severity. From throwing a bottle into another’s home to fist fighting, the wrongdoer is always the first person who makes any of those violent actions a *fait accompli*, that is, *first act, first err*. In contrast, no matter how coarsely you curse a person, you can maintain a solid moral footing as long as you are not first one who physically attacks. Once violence occurs, the (temporary) victim can also take violent action as his justifiable defence. One afternoon, I had just returned to

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<sup>95</sup> In *Leviathan* (2007[1651]:74), Hobbes described the state of Nature as a war of all against all, in which everyone violently competes for limited resources due to the absence of social contract.



Yeyin from Taiwan, but Tarop could not wait to share with me his glorious deed he performed a few days before. He told me how he taught Laden, Blackie's younger brother, an unforgettable lesson:

'That night, I was upstairs in my room alone, and I heard someone yelling downstairs. I was so angry and rushed downstairs to see who was making the noise, and Laden was the only person in the poolroom. I began quarrelling with Laden, but he didn't want to walk away. Later on, some kids told me it was Kevin who yelled but fled after hearing my rushing downstairs. I wronged Laden, but I was still angry with him. When he was drinking with others in my gazebo, I kept disturbing him, calling him a coward, asking him to fight with me if he dared. Laden got mad in the end and suddenly hit me with a punch, but I evaded. Then, I finally got a reason to teach him a lesson. I pinned him down to the floor, choked his neck, and pushed his head to hit the wooden board. Laden was drunk and couldn't get rid of me. I let him go, but in a few minutes, he dared to come back again and shout in front my store. I rushed out to get him right away and threw him down to the ground over and over again. After losing the fight, Laden stayed at home and dare not go out for a whole week. I am powerful, right?'

'According to what you said, I think it's all your fault! Didn't you fight with him for such a stupid reason? You were bullying him!' After listening to his inglorious deed, I could not help condemning Tarop.

'Actually we were not fighting. I just pinned him down to the floor, choked his neck, and pushed his head to hit the wooden board. It can't be called fighting if he didn't bleed.' Tarop completely did not take this as a big deal.

Verbal attack is the prelude to physical violence. Certainly, if nobody is provoked to launch a real attack, quarrels often fade out in bystanders' mediation. The first punch opens a new and immoral stage of rivalry. Nevertheless, when Tarop claimed that he and Laden were not fighting, his physical attacks – pinning Laden down, choking his neck, pushing his head to hit the wooden board – were merely warnings, which aimed to make Laden lose face rather than lose life. Therefore, Tarop's attacks were not real violence but a transition form between face-to-face verbal abuse and real violence. Even though rivalry has clearly emerged on the level of interaction in violent events, as long as no one gets hurt, time will naturally repair people's peaceful relationships. After staying at home for a week, it did not take too long for Laden to visit Tarop's grocery for shopping, drinking and playing, as if nothing had happened between these two men.

Real violence is defined by the fact of injury, and once it unfortunately occurs, rivalry enters its final stage and begins to impact on the level of institution. Injuring a

person is also immoral, but morality must be re-considered according to the new *fait accompli*. When a violent event has just begun, the wrongdoer is the first person who chooses to fight regardless of motives. However, when the event becomes bloodshed, the wrongdoer also becomes the first person who injures others regardless of motives. The family members of a victim in bloodshed can ask for Yami gold or irrigated farmland as compensation from the culprit<sup>96</sup>. If their negotiation breaks down in the end, the ultimate compensation is ‘an eye for an eye, a life for a life’. The culprit might be killed, or the violent event might turn into a war between two families and their permanent enmity. By and large, however, the worst consequence is rare in history, partly because the locals always remember their fundamental ethics: whom should and should not be beaten, to what extent one can be beaten, etc., even when they are drunk or furious. Moreover, offending seniors is unforgivable, and injuring someone means an enormous indemnification to the victim.

The Big Sister’s Restaurant in Yeyou is the most likely place where people get into trouble in Lanyu. Big Sister, the boss, sells liquor, has a karaoke machine, and never rejects any guests at any time, so her restaurant often opens until early morning. Guests who go to her restaurant in early morning are mostly drunkards, who have drunk elsewhere and choose her restaurant as their final destination. Unsurprisingly, drunkards fight with one another from time to time. If the situation is not severe, Big Sister will cast everyone out of her restaurant and shut the door; if it is severe, she will hide herself in the kitchen, wait for the drunkards finishing their fighting, and then come out to pick up the pieces. When I lived in Yeyou, one night, to send off a Taiwanese friend of mine, I took her to Big Sister’s Restaurant and had a drink along with another local friend Lan. A group of noisy and drunk local youths sat next to our table. Although they occasionally clamoured and quarrelled, they were not making any trouble. Hence, we two groups kept peace for more than an hour.

Things can always go wrong along with an accumulating intake of alcohol. At last, a short and thin young man, who had just been bullied by his companions, gave me a glance, smiled at me, and suddenly picked up an iron chair and threw it at me. I evaded but not fast enough, so the chair hit my thigh and left a bruise. Everyone noticed the violence when the chair clattered on the floor.

At that moment, I did not take any further action, because only my friend and I were outsiders; my friend is female, so I became the most assailable person on the scene. I decided to wait and see, but not for long – Lan instantly rushed toward the attacker, heavily pushed him down to the floor. ‘How dare you hit my friend?’ She yelled with rage.

Angrily, Lan pulled up the young man from the floor and threw him down again,

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<sup>96</sup> See Chapter 6.

and repeated the same attack several times. It is hard to imagine that Lan, a 150 centimetre tall young woman, was able to throw that 170 cm tall young man as if he were a child. Rather, the young man did not or dared not resist at all. When others tried to take Lan away, she still wanted to stamp on the poor one on the floor. Some researchers (e.g. Yu 1994; S.Chen 1994) mention that the female is weak and vulnerable in Yami society, but after witnessing this scene, I begin to believe that if they want, Yami women can be as tough as men.

Later on, Lan told me that the young man went to apologise to her, telling her that he did not know that I was a friend of hers; I thought that the person to whom he should apologise should be me. The young man calls Lan *gaga* (i.e. senior sibling), so he dared not counterattack Lan even if he was drunk. Otherwise, there must be a severer result for him to take after sobering up. Certainly, Lan was also self-controlled and remembered not to pick any of the empty bottles on the scene to hit the young man's head; a blow would immediately turn a defender into an offender. In that chaotic scene, thus, social norms were functioning, though the most unlucky one is the person who is not under the protection of local rules.

## The extremity of vision

### Fake labour

In sum, we can conclude a hierarchy of morality in Yami culture: the degradation from morality to immorality is also the perception from silence to counterfactual words and violent actions (Figure 7.1).

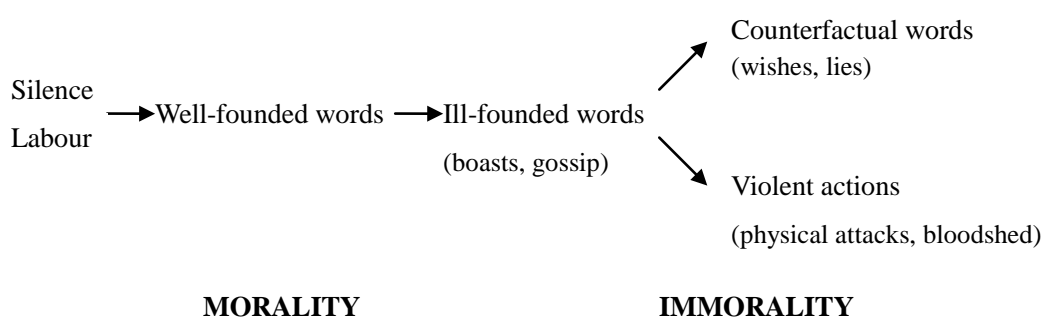


Figure 7.1 The hierarchy of morality in Yami culture

Silence, due to its perfect transparency, serves as the ultimate representation of truth. However, silence *per se* does not carry innate morality, and it is not until silence represents productive actions, i.e. labour, that it becomes the origin of morality. If it is aggressive actions (e.g. theft) or inaction (e.g. sloth) represented, silence cannot make them more moral but more exposed to moral judgements. On the other hand, the

innate morality of productive actions may be obscured if they are described with excessive praise and boasts. How real and valuable can a kind of labour be, if it cannot be represented by silence?

In contemporary Yami society, there are still quite a few people who insist that working in the mind is not working, as if modern art is not art in some people's eyes. For them, it makes no sense why some people just stay in an air-conditioned room, sit in front of a monitor and keep keyboarding, rarely sweat and make anything usable everyday, but are still able to earn more money and live a better life than those who are seen to be industrious. Therefore, intellectual labourers' wealth is often considered underserved. Jan, the director-general of the ACD of Dongqing, often complains about her working pressure. Her duties include organising and executing community activities in order to utilise their annual budget of 2 million NT dollars. Except for moments of convening the council meeting, the ACD is fully under her operation, and most of the time she stays in the ACD's office all day long. Jan alone takes complete care of everything in the ACD, and it is by means of her proposals that the villagers can take 'their shares' from the government funding<sup>97</sup>. Even so, some of the villagers remain dissatisfied with her work, as she said:

I was criticised by those who took the ACD's money to build our communal fences. They said, 'we work so hard and sweat in the sun but only earn 800 NT dollars everyday. Jan just stays in the office and keys in something,, and why does the ACD pay her twenty thousand NT dollars a month?' These people never know how much pressure I feel at work!

When passers-by look inside the ACD's office, they can only see Jan sitting in front of a computer with fingers moving on a keyboard. Even if they have a chance to read her work, they hardly know how much time and brainpower those documents and tables may consume. As mentioned in Chapter 5, local resource distribution is traditionally done by all participants of production activities, that is, producers are also distributors. Hence, it lacks a customary basis of legitimacy for assigning a 'professional' distributor to do this and offering one a reasonable share of products. No other people, regardless of their impartiality, can have a hand in the unbroken, straightforward relationship between producers and their products.

By the same token, middlemen between producers and consumers must publicly display their diligence, so that their wealth can be recognised as what they deserve. Vago is busy with cooking breakfast every morning, so he works hard; Tarop moves his cargos twice a week, repairs motorcycles all the time, and renovates the waiting room whenever he has new ideas, so he also works hard; Jan's husband, San the

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<sup>97</sup> See Chapter 5.

souvenir seller, drives his truck back and forth among scenic spots where tourists gather and tells them ‘I made these ornaments on my own’<sup>98</sup>, so he works hard, too. It does not matter how much relevance exists between their actions and their wealth. In contrast, the shrewdest businessmen, who can make money without breaking a sweat, are always controversial among the locals. Junior rarely takes tourists to go snorkelling himself but mostly entrusts them to some reliable local young men. Like other guesthouse owners, Junior charges 400 NT dollars per person for snorkelling, but he only gives his assistants 200 NT dollars and takes the other half himself; this income is rather ill-gotten wealth in other guesthouse owners’ eyes. Interestingly, few people consider Junior’s approach a kind of wage labour (i.e. Junior pays his assistants wage) or a kind of business cooperation (i.e. he provides customers and equipments and his assistants provide labour power); it is simply an astute way to exploit another person’s products.

### **Fake knowledge**

Junior’s business acumen may be highly appreciated in Taiwan. But in Lanyu, besides a negative sense of morality, his knowledge is far from something rare and precious. The Yami believe in the homogeneity of human talent, i.e. a person can learn everything if he wants<sup>99</sup>, so there is no fundamental difference among fishing, boat building, business management, science and literature. Accordingly, many people hold a naive view on their personnel training. When Tarop shared his ambitions with me, he mentioned:

If I can win the election and become a township representative several years later, I will strive for training a lot of talents for Lanyu. Now, we need to rely on Taiwanese because we don’t have enough talents. We can give money to students as scholarships, appoint this one to study medicine and that one to study law. After their graduation, we will have our own doctors and lawyers to serve for everyone. What a good idea!

‘Things are not so simple. It’s not that easy to study those disciplines, and not everyone is capable of studying them. In Taiwan, only the best university students are eligible to enter those departments. Do you think they can graduate if you randomly pick up some people and pay their tuition fees?’ I suggested that Tarop should reconsider this issue in a more practical way.

‘You don’t understand! How can you know the result, if you never give it a try?’

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<sup>98</sup> Actually, San’s souvenirs are mostly imported from Taiwan, and he reworks them a little. By the local definition of honesty, however, San is eligible to make this claim.

<sup>99</sup> See Chapter 3.

Tarop seemed to be unhappy with my advice and his shattered dream.

Tarop himself learned to use tools, build a house, and repair motorcycles in his work experiences, and it is understandable that he is so self-confident in his learning capacity. In reality, however, Tarop knows nothing about the general principles behind those processes of constructing or repairing, and he does not know how complicated and time-consuming it can be to grasp general principles or to create a theory. As a Taiwanese technician who has been living in Lanyu for years told me,

The locals know nothing about the mechanical principles when they repair motorcycles. If you know the principles, you only need to take a meter, do a test and check the value, and then you can know where the problem is. But the locals always remove this part, fit on a new one, and see if it works; if not, then they will remove that part and try again. Soon or later they can find the problem if they keep trying.

This is exactly Tarop's method. Excepting those immutable natural phenomena such as monsoons and sea currents, the Yami hesitate in believing so-called 'general principles'. Tarop hates accounting and stocktaking, because he has never seen anything useful from those numbers. Of course, he is not the only one who hates to deal with numbers. When I tried to persuade Tarop's cousin, who was managing the Lanen Exhibition Hall at that time, that Tarop's waiting room had higher profitability, she insisted that profitability could only be judged by facts.

'You can imagine: a ferry can carry 300 passengers each time, and it arrives in the morning and departs in the afternoon, so in the high season, Tarop's waiting room will be constantly visited by hundreds of tourists everyday. The Exhibition Hall is not a popular scenic spot, and it is a lucky day if a hundred visitors come here. Why not leave some of your souvenirs on consignment in his place so as to make them more saleable?' I tried to tell Tarop's cousin that a stream of people is a stream of money.

'You can't say that. We have a few visitors everyday, but sometimes there can be a lot. Sometimes we have only one or two visitors who buy a lot at once, but sometimes we have many visitors who buy nothing at all. It's totally unpredictable!' She denied my inference with her evidence from numerous empirical instances.

When I compared the profitability between the two locations, Tarop's cousin insisted that only goods sold in reality could be counted as profit. Nevertheless, if she could compare the number of daily visits and their daily turnover in the long term, she might have noticed the direct proportion between the two parameters, that is, a stream of people is a stream of money. However, she attributed the daily turnover to luck, and luck changes everyday. It is like a kind of 'fisherman mentality': when a fisherman's skill has reached a certain level, he catches more fish with better luck and less fish

with worse luck. Statistics are useless in this case.

While generalisation is commonly considered illusory, learning it is rather a waste of time. For the Yami, school education is quite a superfluous thing. In the mid 1960s, when the nine-year compulsory education policy had just been made in Taiwan, the Yami commonly refused to have their children enter junior high school, even though the government would cover all expenses. Their reason was: ‘our children have stayed in elementary schools for six years for the government, why does the government ask for another three years?’ In some villages, the locals even hid children in the mountains. Finally, Yami parents were forced to yield because the local government employed the army's power (Yu 2004b:1). With regard to this historical event, Yu's interpretation (ibid: 6) puts stress on the bad relationship between local students and Taiwanese teaching staff, who exploited local students' labour power for their own good (cf. Yu and Dong 1998: 160). In the light of contemporary facts, however, the reality is that the locals never think that they can learn anything ‘useful’ from sitting in the classroom and reading textbooks. Traditionally, the locals' childhood should be spent in fields, mountains and the sea, staying with parents and learning natural knowledge, life skills, and histories of property in the process of working together. True knowledge is learned from and examined by physical labour, and more pain not only brings more gains but more wits as well.

Today, most local youngsters only complete their free high school education and then cannot wait to enter the labour market of Taiwan. Instead of spending more time studying, their common dream is making more money on their own, enjoying some sensual pleasures in Taiwan, and then going home to build their own houses and, if possible, running a small business, and living a quiet and self-sufficient life among mountains, sea and money. Certainly, things are never as simple as they imagine; neither is the relation between things.

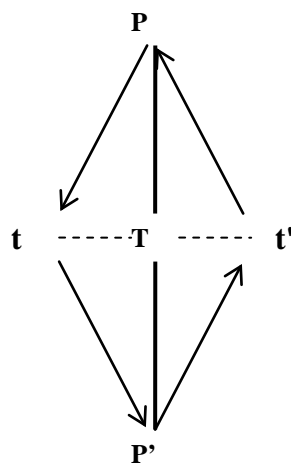
## Conclusion

This chapter explored language and its application as a taboo, a weapon, and a medium of information in Yami society. The value of words is primarily determined by their correspondence to *faits accomplis*. As a result, statements referring to fictions, probability, and generalisation always carry uncertainty in knowledge and danger in symbolism. But on the other hand, the Yami's tolerance for semantic impreciseness makes honesty their means of competition. While people glorify themselves by means of productive actions, they also humiliate one another by means of language instead of aggressive actions. Hence, language serves as a non-material condition of the dynamic equilibrium in Yami society. Ultimately, language is an opaque medium of information, so the knowledge constructed with linguistic signs must necessarily be

flawed, and only what has been accomplished in front of one's eyes can perfectly convey the truth.

The Yami's correspondence principle includes a set of parallel relationships: people and what they see (P-T), and people and what they speak/listen to (P-t/ P-t'). In a conversation, persons make statements according to the reality that they recognise (P-T-t), and others judge the statements according to the reality that they see, too (P'-T-t). Hence, the validity of an 'invisible' statement is based on the consistency between what different people see (P-T-P') rather than a precise description of the reality (T-t). This might be the reason why the Yami can tolerate their semantic impreciseness, because it is always people who need to be convinced. By contrast, the knowledge in texts is a different thing. While authors and what they see are often concealed behind their texts, what convinces their readers is the coherence among their statements. The tripartite relationship between persons and words remains in this form of knowledge, but the accent falls on the relationship between words (t-t'-t''-t'''). Presumably, the coherence between statements, as well as the equivalence between commodities, is given by the omnipresent Society-in-the-abstract. Because of the social contract, people begin to believe in invisible words, just as they believe in invisible things.

*Speaking and listening*



*Writing and reading*

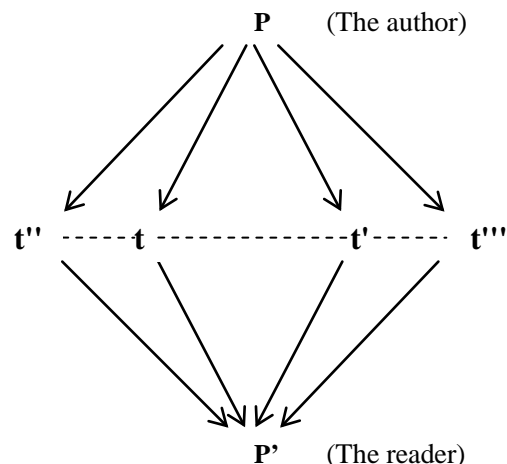


Figure 7.2 Knowledge conveyed in conversations and in texts



## Chapter 8

### Conclusion: Straightforwardness and Bifurcation

This thesis begins with perplexities that I experienced in my fieldwork, such as the Yami's 'peculiar' viewpoints about wealth, death, speech, etc. Instead of selecting some of the topics and probing into them, in this thesis, I search for an answer by way of including all my perplexities into an integral framework. In my opinion, those ethnographic phenomena look confusing, because they are respectively a fragment of an intact cultural portrait. They convey fragmentary messages, among which the coherence is not always easy to comprehend through the spatio-temporal continuum experienced by a fieldworker. Like playing a jigsaw-puzzle, an adequate frame can speed up the process of reassembling cultural fragments, and I have chosen the concept of personhood as the main framework of this thesis. If persons are the ontological existence of social life, the concept of personhood is a set of statements which describe their essence, regulate their transformation, and measure their value.

The Yami's wealth, power and knowledge that I have discussed in this thesis can be regarded as different transformations of the same essence, i.e. human labour. If labour power is said to be the flowing vitality of Yami society, then its crystallisation is people's tangible wealth in hand, its vaporisation is people's intangible fame in the social space, and its lustre is people's accumulating wisdom throughout their lifetime. Such ontological oneness among various cultural categories becomes comprehensible only from a phenomenological perspective, through the recognised essence behind the things, words and sentiments that anthropologists experience in their fieldworks.

As mentioned in my brief criticism on Henare et al. (2007) in Chapter 1, there is no definite boundary between ontology and epistemology. The concept of personhood, the deliberation about human existence, is itself a kind of knowledge. When a statement describes certain morphological transformation (e.g. labour becomes wealth) or asserts certain categorical relevance (e.g. wealth is proportionally related to labour), such knowledge *per se* must be conditioned by specific epistemological factors. Even though my ethnographic data chiefly come from local production, exchange and distribution activities, which are usually classified as topics of economic anthropology, material conditions (regardless of their explicit and tremendous influence) are not the primary focus in my discussions. Throughout this thesis, my major concern is always the epistemological configuration, i.e.: how, and in which forms, persons, things and

other conceptual elements become interrelated. It is on the basis of specific relations between persons, between things, and between persons and things, that the category of wealth forms, the dynamic equilibrium of social power is maintained, and truth and falsity are distinguished.

The ‘Birds’ Eye View’ and the ‘Worms’ Eye View’ define two different truths: the former recognises contractual realities, while the latter only accepts empirical realities. Therefore, the recognised wealth in the market economy, such as digitalised assets, expected return in the future, etc., is rather illusory from the Worms’ Eye View. On the other hand, some beliefs in Yami ideology, such as the preference for physical labour and the trueness of infinite resources, are not so different from ignorance from the Birds’ Eye View. Fundamentally, my perplexities in the field originate from the different criteria of truth in different cultures as knowledge systems. The current trend in Yami society is: the Birds’ Eye View, by means of the invincible power of money and commodities, is suppressing the Worms’ Eye View and pushing the locals to believe unrealised but promised things.

To conclude this thesis, this chapter briefly reviews my theoretical concerns and reflects the on-going shift of epistemological configuration in Yami society; such ebb and flow in knowledge is hard to be called ‘progress’. When universal equivalence replaces personal equivalence, and fairness is defined by social contracts rather than personal demands, unfairness also acquires its universal form, i.e. the labour which people give to the society is unequal to that they gain from the society. At the same time, when people try to avoid loss – to prevent ‘what one gives’ from being more than ‘what one gains’, to make ‘what one gives’ less than ‘what one gains’ becomes a general formula of profit making. In the market economy, consequently, the stability of an exchange system is maintained in the form of what Sahlins (1975) called ‘negative reciprocity’, i.e. everyone exploits everyone’s value as much as possible. If, via exchange, people humbly hope to obtain as much value as their own labour input, they are doomed to be the ones who are exploited in the market economy. From this perspective, ‘the warre of everyone against everyone’ (Hobbes 2007 [1651]) never disappears because of the appearance of social contracts; the war continues but has changed its form.

## **Routes of thinking**

On a burning hot summer afternoon in August 2007, Tarop suggested me that we two could draw a pattern (Figure 8.1) as a decoration on a white pillar in his ferry waiting room. Several months ago, some of Tarop’s local friends had helped him with the same task, but Tarop erased their decoration for his personal reasons but soon felt

regretful<sup>100</sup>. This time, in short, he and I were going to restore the old look of the pillar. We began with a pure white background, that is, we needed to paint black crosses and red triangles on the pillar. Tarop wanted to make a wooden template, which was supposed to cover the areas we should not paint, so that we could quickly complete the crosses with black spray paint.

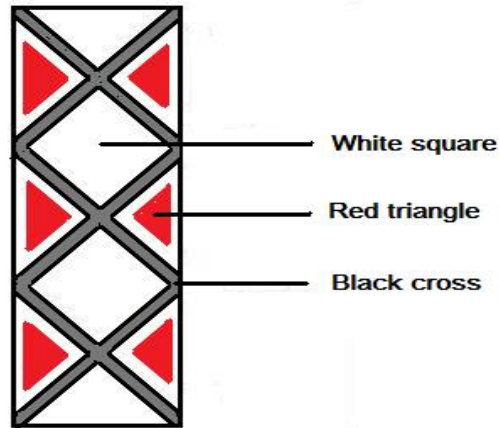


Figure 8.1 The geometric pattern painted on the pillar in Tarop's store (see also Plate 4.2)

According to a photo provided by Tarop, I sketched a draft of the pattern on a wooden board (Figure 8.2-a). Before beginning to make the template, however, Tarop and I had a dispute over the next step. If we were going to paint black crosses on a white background, as I told Tarop, we should saw off cross areas from the board and make the template look like hollow crosses (Figure 8.2-b). Confusingly, however, Tarop insisted on a reverse approach – he said that we should saw off triangle and square areas and make the template look like crosses (Figure 8.2-c). I asked Tarop to think over how it could ever be possible to paint black crosses with black paint and a cross-shaped template, but so he replied: ‘how can you know the result, if you never give it a try?’

<sup>100</sup> See Chapter 4 for more details of this event.

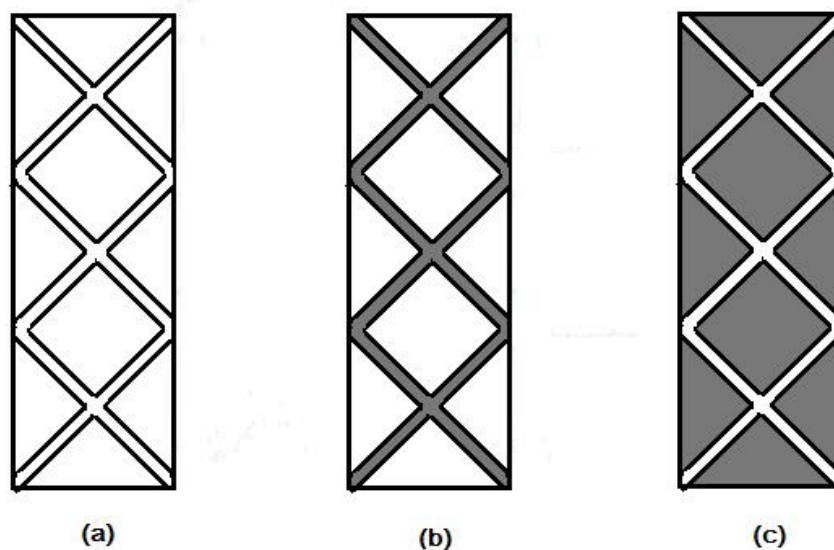


Figure 8.2 The templates (gray areas are areas to be sawed off)

Tarop was serious, and I would have loved to let him do an experiment if we had a spare wooden board; but unfortunately we did not have one. Finally, he unwillingly followed my instruction, and he looked unconvinced when I successfully demonstrated how to paint black crosses on a white pillar with ‘my’ template. Later on, I recognised what might result in Tarop’s insistence. Last time, Tarop and his friends had been dealing with a black pillar, not a white one, so they had used white paint and a cross-shaped template to complete the same pattern. This time, Tarop just wanted to repeat the same ‘effective’ approach as far as he remembered, even though the initial conditions were totally reversed.

For the first time, I was aware that between Tarop’s and my thoughts, there might be a critical difference in our routes of thinking. In terms of temporal sequences, to paint such a simple pattern in this case, I needed to draw a draft on a board according to the pattern (A), saw the board (B), make a template (C), paint with the template (D), and complete the pattern (E) (Figure 8.3). For me, with just one glance, I could immediately ‘see’ the correct shape of the template I need after seeing the pattern, and accordingly, I could correctly saw off unnecessary areas from the board and make a serviceable template without much effort. My route of thinking was the pattern (E) – the template (C1) – the board (A) – sawing (B1). Tarop’s route of thinking is rather a different case. On the one hand, he believed that he knew how to saw the board and what a serviceable template would look like, according to his experiences. On the other hand, he was keen to begin doing something in order to confirm if his experiences would work once again. Therefore, if the painting task was left to Tarop alone, he might have begun with sawing the board in the same way as he

remembered (B2), found that the way no longer worked as before (C2), and gone to find a new board (A) so as to continue his trial and error (B2); but sooner or later he would find the correct answer (C1).

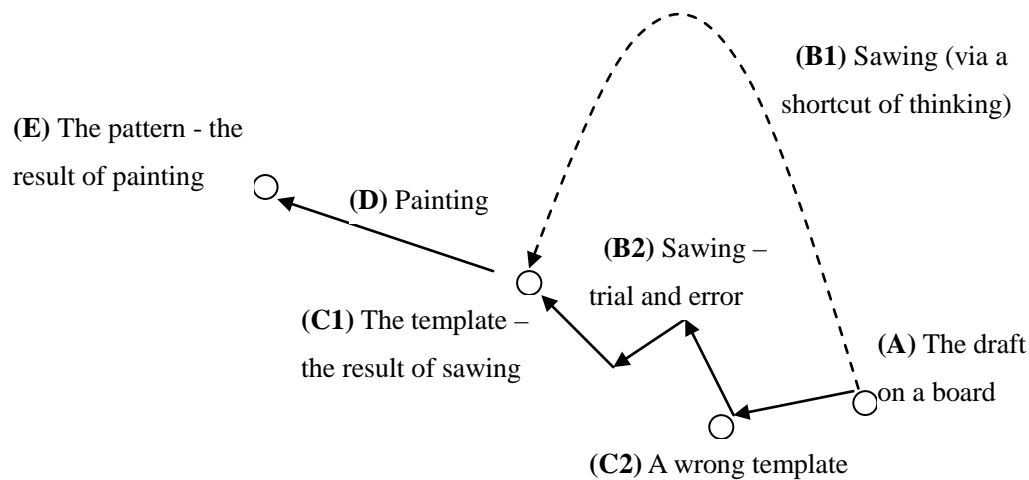


Figure 8.3 Steps of duplicating a pattern

In this case, what helped me to skip the trial and error is the 'reverse', like the relationship between a seal and its impression, between the pattern and the template. Through the reverse, therefore, I could imagine what I had never seen (the template) according to what I had already seen (the pattern). The reverse created a shortcut of thinking, which compressed the temporal sequence of trial and error between the template (C1) – painting (D) – the pattern (E). This shortcut connected the pattern (E) to the template (C1) and rendered the goal equal to the means, so I only needed to consider how to make a board become a template. It is as though I do not need to know the precise location of Glasgow (the goal) if there is a bus bound for Glasgow (the means); the only thing I need to consider is where to take the bus. If I was taking a shortcut, then Tarop could be said to be walking step-by-step toward the goal along a route of temporal sequences: (A) is the first step, (B) the second, (C) the third, etc.

This event inspired my deliberation about routes of thinking. If a person can think 'without shortcuts', can a society operate in the same way? As cases in Yami ethnography show, 'step-by-step' along temporal sequences is plausibly a deep-rooted feature of Yami society: there is no shortcut for working, learning, or a successful life. While no shortcut means 'no better choice', the Yami's life courses commonly reveal a kind of ideological straightforwardness without bifurcations. Obstacles and twists between the beginning and the end are the nature of this route rather than something making people detour. If people continue walking along the flow of time, eventually they will arrive at a promised future.

## Shortcuts and bifurcations

A social contract is a shortcut of thinking. When people accept a social contract, they accept all entities and relations regulated by this social contract at the same time. Hence, they can recognise things beyond their experiences through the contract. In the market economy, if people recognise the value of money, they also recognise that their money symbolises ‘all commodities’. Thus people’s use of money is conditioned by their desire for commodities as a whole, including those which are not before people’s eyes, which they have not demanded, and which they have not produced. They are willing to take future needs into their economic considerations, save their money in hand, or make money more than they can use. In the conclusion of Chapter 7, I also roughly mentioned that if people identify coherence with truth, they can regard texts as the representations of realities and recognise books as a source of true knowledge. When people make good use of shortcuts of thinking, the merit is evident: they can skip trial and error, particularly when some errors might bring about fatal results.

In this thesis, I tried to exemplify how to think without shortcuts with cases of Yami ethnography, but it is not my intention to draw a definite line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ according to the presence/absence of shortcuts. Basically, the Yami are not ignorant about shortcuts of thinking. The causality ‘doing A causes B’ embodied in the concept of *makanio* (ancestral taboos) directly prohibits the locals from trial and error. Nevertheless, even *makanio* may be corrected by means of incidental trial and error among the locals, and this seems to be a major motivator of cultural change in Yami society. For example, my local friend Lan told me a somewhat immoral case:

One day, my friend gave me a spider conch (*tazising*)<sup>101</sup> and asked me to have a taste. I had never eaten it before, but she said it is edible. That evening, I cooked it, and it tasted OK. But do you know what happened on the next day? My friend came to ask me how I felt after eating that conch – she lied to me, just wanted me to be her guinea pig! She dared not cook the conch for her family until someone else ate it and survived! Although I was very angry, I forgave her in the end because there was nothing wrong with me.

New facts may invalidate old taboos. When the Yami move along their old ways, they are also noticing if they are moving toward a better – certainly, changing – future. With many paragraphs in this thesis, I have described the traditional mentalities and behaviours among Yami businessmen when they encounter the market, money and commodities. To an observable extent, local businessmen are continuously amending their old methods and learning new methods through imitating and making mistakes.

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<sup>101</sup> Scientific name: *Lambis lambis*.

In the near future, it is highly possible that the Yami will become shrewd businessmen, who recognise the importance of social division of labour and market segregation, take action against the threat of sluggish sales and bad debts, and attempt to maximise their profits by all means.

Nevertheless, I shall not underestimate such an adaptation process to the market economy as a moderate fine adjustment of Yami society, as mild as re-categorising spider conches from non-food to food, increasing the content of local food without changing the local definition of food. Money and commodities do not merely increase the content of Yami wealth but fundamentally change the relationships underneath the category of Yami wealth – this brand-new type of wealth makes the accent shift from the relationship between persons and things (producers and products) to that between things (equivalence). The relationship between things is determined by a social contract, and it becomes recognisable only through the social contract as a shortcut of thinking.

Broadly speaking, the colonisers' cultures have introduced too many shortcuts into Yami society, so that there are more and more 'efficient' ways for working, learning and a successful life. When people are empowered to create tremendous wealth without corresponding labour, acquire abundant knowledge without much trial and error, and easily glorify themselves without lifelong effort, such shortcuts are re-shaping the ideological straightforwardness in Yami culture – not bending it, but bifurcating it.

## **Fewer pains, more gains**

In contrast with the Yami's unstinted labour input, it seems that capitalist societies are encouraging a mentality of 'fewer pains, more gains'. On the one hand, either by means of tools or other types of energy, reducing the consumption of physical labour in production activities rather symbolises high intelligence. On the other hand, 'reducing production activities' *per se* is often considered great wisdom – the richest in the world is not labourers who are responsible for production but capitalists who manipulate exchange; capitalists commonly enjoy a higher social status than labourers do. In terms of the direct relationship between producers and products, indeed, the use of intelligence looks like a process of 'fewer pains, more gains', since it lacks visible activities and tangible achievements. Of course, if we include intelligence into the category of labour, i.e. the so-called intellectual labour, and regard human labour as the sum of physical strength and intelligence, then it is possible to assert certain constant proportional relationship between labour and value. In so doing, reduced consumption of physical labour can be said to be complemented by the use of intelligence, while theoretically, fair transactions between physical

labour and intellectual labour become feasible under certain measure of value.

However, just like physical strength is not always consumed for the purpose of production, the use of intelligence is by no means equal to intellectual labour. A critical problem is: when the direct relationship between producers and products is absent, the definition of intellectual labour is highly unclear. This makes the formula of profit making 'what one gives is less than what one gains' morally ambiguous. The reduction of labour may be ostensible, if it is invisible intellectual labour which increases production efficiency. But the reduction of labour may be substantial, if intelligence is used to disguise unfair transactions. Nevertheless, capitalism does not take such a moral ambiguity into its consideration. The M-C-M' circuit of capital only concerns the cause and the effect, i.e.  $M < M'$ ; it does not care about what endows the means of profit making, i.e. commodities, with the exceeded value that physical labour does not create – is it intellectual labour, social popularity, or merely a lie?

Moreover, the moral ambiguity of intelligence shakes the basis of C-M-C' commodity exchange: the sum of the physical and intellectual labour in a product, no matter how its quantity and social necessity are estimated, does not constantly correspond to the value of the product. That is to say, commodity exchange is not necessarily equivalent. This potential paradox in the market economy does not exist between labour and value but, fundamentally, between physical strength and intelligence. In term of ratio, it is better if the use of intelligence can be more than the consumption of physical strength when producing a product. Here, the use of intelligence is not limited to the necessary conceiving and organising but includes the manipulation of exchange, i.e. making the product socially related to more, less or specific persons and things. This tendency undoubtedly increases the vagueness of the value of commodities and confuses people's judgements on fairness.

'Fewer pains, more gains' can imply both efficiency and speculation, while it essentially means better choices, no matter the 'better' is achieved at the cost of natural resources or other people's interests. Nevertheless, people still need to pay for their extra gains: the endless pursuit of a better life complicates and entangles their life courses. By contrast, 'more pains, more gains' may be primitive and naive in a sense, but it leads people to a down-to-earth way of living without much confusion.



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