Cultural Revival and the Politics of Tradition in an Austronesian Paiwan Community

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the rise and fall of a local Paiwan cultural revival committee in Piuma and the politics of tradition involved in the process. I argue that the rise of the cultural revival committee was a result of a larger aboriginal awareness after the lift of martial law and a new identity politics emerged after the aboriginal rights movements in the 1980s, yet the fall of the committee was a result of internal factions competing for traditional leadership titles. This cultural revival trend promotes a search for an 'authentic cultural tradition' which favours a particular genre of narrative, that is, mythical origin stories, and ignores historical particulars.

In this article, I analyze the political use of mythical stories (mirimiringan) and historical events (tautsikel) in contemporary status competition between members of La Kazangilan and La Gaguligul houses, thus demonstrating how the people of Piuma, as historical agents, consciously use different genres of historical narratives to support their stands in different contexts.

The notion of cultural revival as embedded in an aboriginal movement often assumes that there is a collective past to be recovered which is at odds with the content of culture in this case. The purpose of the cultural revival committee was to 'revive' and restore traditional culture, but previous internal factions (La Kazangilan vs. La Gaguligul) were subsequently refocused into the committee through attempts to manipulate the 'revival' operations. The effort to revive a collective past is overshadowed by different interpretations of that past.