

Book Review

Josiane Cauquelin. 2004. *The Aborigines of Taiwan. The Puyuma: from headhunting to the modern world.* London and New York: Routledge Curzon. 277pp. Hardcover ISBN 0-415-31413-5

The book under review represents one of the first works (or perhaps the first?) that provides an in-depth study on a Formosan ethnic group, the Puyuma. The Puyuma live in the Taitung plain in the south-east of Taiwan. The term 'Puyuma' has been attributed to two related ethnic/linguistic subgroups, the Katipul and the Puyuma proper, also commonly referred to in the literature as Nanwang Puyuma. The book deals with the latter (henceforth referred to as 'Puyuma').

Documentation of this ethnic group comes from three major sources: (i) Cauquelin's fieldnotes over 20 years – the author spent a whole year with the Puyuma in 1983-1984 and has made many fieldtrips at intervals ever since – (ii) myths and folktales which are analyzed in detail in order to show how they reflect social order, (iii) Western and Eastern historical sources. The book is illustrated with numerous figures and beautiful drawings on cultural materials that further enlighten the discussion.

The main theme of the book is revealed through its subtitle: "The Puyuma: from headhunting to the modern world". It provides a detailed investigation of the traditional society and its major transformation at the turn of the 20th century from a hunting/shamanic society with uxorilocal residence patterns to an agricultural society with (female) shamans and patrilocality residence rules. The book is written with a lot of wit, as the author's remark on the Chinese (well-known but unspoken xenophobia) shows: "'Hanism' was a process of total absorption. Chinese society does not admit the Other, who is by definition a 'raw' barbarian. It can only recognize him if he is identical, so the barbarian must be 'cooked'". (Cauquelin, 2004:233).

In her introduction, Cauquelin provides the geographical and historical background of Taiwan, with a brief introduction on the first mention of the Austronesians in Taiwan in the 13th century (Cf. Ma 1322) and the two recent colonization periods by the Japanese (1895-1945) and the Chinese (1945~) as a setting for the Puyuma.

Chapter I is devoted to a short description of the Puyuma language, a brief discussion on the ethnonym,⁽¹⁾ an investigation of the relations of the Puyuma with neighboring

(1) For a discussion on the Puyuma ethnonym, see Zeitoun and Cauquelin (2006).

groups through the analysis of myths. It ends with the distribution of the Puyuma population rendered in a tabular form. The linguistic section offers a succinct report—based on Cauquelin (1991a-b)—on the Puyuma phonology, morphology (list of major affixes) and syntax (focus system, aspect and modes).

Chapter II provides a careful description of the village. Four migration movements are hypothesized based on oral tradition: (1) from Nirbua'an to DungDungan/Maidatar, (2) from DungDungan/Maidatar to Dekal, (3) from Dekal to Peinan (c. 1880), (4) from Peinan to Sakupen (Nanwang—present site). The author shows that the village is composed of moieties, each of these moieties including a boys' house, and three founding-households to which were attached a men's house, one hunting ground and an ancestral cult house. These moieties were transversally linked by the age system that overlapped them and created the unity of the village. She argues that residence patterns were bilocal, i.e., the line of descent sometimes went through men, sometimes through women.

Chapter III entitled 'God and Men' throws the reader (perhaps prematurely?) into the religious practices of the Puyuma and argues that "religion is the key element of Puyuma identity" (ibid:49). The chapter revolves around two major themes: traditional religious practices and the introduction of the Protestant and the Catholic churches in the life of the Puyuma. In the first part, the author describes the functions of the various spiritual beings referred generically as *birua*. She provides short indications on the two pantheons inhabited by supernatural beings, cf. the *ka'isatan*, peopled by the *birua* and visited by both male and female religious practitioners, and the *ka'aulasan*, where (female) shamans enter into contact with shaman ancestors. Follows a discussion on: (1) the conception of the soul, (2) divinations practices (including oniromancy and ornithomancy), (3) the functions of the religious practitioners (including bamboo diviners, male practitioners and female shamans), (4) the description of the ritual objects—the emphasis is put on areca nuts and fired clay beads around which rituals are built: *purang* 'areca nuts' are empowered with supernatural forces to destroy evil forces or to protect ritual practitioners against them; *inasi* 'clay beads' perform several functions, most notably to invite or send away the *birua* at the beginning or at the end of a ritual as offerings, and to help the shaman with her diagnosis—(5) the importance of the left side, and (6) the rituals performed by the male practitioners. The section on "parishes" reveals the complicated interrelationship between tradition and modernity and the competition between two churches with traditional religious practices.

Chapter IV is short and deals primarily with "Birth and Death". Cauquelin (2004:77) shows that "until the beginning of the twentieth century, the dead were buried in the house". Such a custom seems to have existed in the Paiwan and the Rukai societies as well (see Zeitoun and Lin, 2003).

Chapter V focuses on familial relationships. The author first provides a long list of kinship related terms. She then shows that against the rule that forbids marriage with a "close" relation, "there exists an 'unspoken rule' regarding the preferred choice of a wife, i.e., any second, third or fourth cousin on the mother's side, or a cross-cousin on the father's side"

(Cauquelin, 2004:100). She also focuses on the social change that led to uxori-local residence patterns and patrilo-cal residence patterns, following the Chinese traditions.

Chapter VI and VII constitute two major chapters in this work. In Chapter VI, the author deals with the former dual organization of the Puyuma (cf. the discussion on the village being composed of moieties) and the age system. She shows that the education of male children was formally divided into three periods: before the age of thirteen, they would be raised by their biological parents (and in particular the mother); after thirteen, their education (or more appropriately, their initiation at different age-sets) would take place in the boy's house, under the supervision of elder boys; from the age of eighteen to twenty one, they would finish their education in the men's house, under the supervision of a godfather, an Elder over 60. Headhunting (practiced until the late 19th century) would represent the consecration birth of the *bangsaran* 'virile-warrior', his entrance in the adult society, his permanent admission in the men's house, and his valorization as a man, entitled to get married. The discussion reveals the unspoken maintenance of a balance between men and women through procreation limits imposed on both sexes. In Chapter VII, the author deals at length with shamanic practices. She shows how the Puyuma society changed. It used to be a shamanic society that turned into a society with shamans at the turn of the 20th century, and is lately experiencing the rise of mediums that have integrated Chinese rites. She deals with the various manifestations felt by the women elected as shamans, their accessories—she stresses the importance of their bags, renewed every year—and their functions. The sole reproach that can be made is that dates (in particular in this chapter) are not always precise in time. The author suggests that "there are still, on average, 12 shamans in Nanwang." (ibid:153). This statement is corroborated by a table in appendix 7 that provides the chronology of the investitures of all the shamans until the mid 1990's. According to the author's latest recount, however, only two shamans were left in early 2006.

Chapter VIII—the last chapter—deals with material civilization, including a discussion on the division of daily tasks between men and women—in the past and until the end of the 19th century, men used to be hunters; women would practice horticulture (or gardening) and gathering—and handicrafts.

The last chapter plunges the reader in the modern world of the Puyuma today.

Each chapter reveals the profound intimacy that connects the author to the Puyuma in particular and to Taiwan in general, her deep-rooted love for the Puyuma people and their language and her mixed feelings towards the loss of the Puyuma traditional culture and customs and their superficial revival through the development and the exploitation of tourism.

This book represents the consecration of over twenty years of research that led to the publication of a series of ethnographic articles (written mostly) in French (see Cauquelin 1991b, 1992, 1994, 1995a-b, 2000a-b, 2004) and more recently in English (see Cauquelin 2006, 2008) as well as a dictionary (see Cauquelin 1991a). It is not just another (welcome) addition

to the Formosan field. It should be valued as an inspiring interdisciplinary work that provides a detailed ethnographic study that crucially takes its roots in the Puyuma language: lexical items are arranged through semantic fields; whenever a term is given in the text, its word formation is decomposed or its etymology is given in an endnote; a few rituals and songs are provided and translated, and nearly all the captions of the drawings are given in Puyuma. Each chapter introduces new linguistic forms and proceeds from there, investigating their semantic properties as a basis for the ethnographic analysis on the traditional society and customs of the Puyuma. For instance, the author does not just contend herself to describe the religious practices of the Puyuma. She provides a whole ritual text in Puyuma with its translation in English, cf. *pakalaDam* 'information [to the shaman ancestors]' (p. 169) and outlines the different stylistic and linguistic processes (systematic doublings of synonyms, dyads, extensive use of metaphors, assonances borrowings, archaisms) that underline each invocation. This is an analysis very difficult to carry on because the ritual language is reserved to only two categories of religious practitioners (cf. the male practitioners and the female shamans) and is said to be incomprehensible to the layman. When depicting the hunting activity (p. 203-207), the author provides a list of "good omens" as opposed to "bad omens".

This book is recommended not just to ethnologists but also to linguists working on the Formosan languages and interested in learning more about the hidden (and too often ignored) face of language, i.e., culture.

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Elizabeth Zeitoun

Academia Sinica

hsez@gate.sinica.edu.tw