

## CHAPTER 3—THE BUNUN PEOPLE

*“According to their myth, everything in the world has relationships with human beings. They personify and humanize them. Sun and moon are mother and son. Wind, snow, water, rainbow, and stone were transformed from human beings. Even birds, animals, insects, snakes, grass, and plants were transformed by human beings. And human beings were transformed from pottery and bottle gourd”*

Chi-Chien Chiu (1973: 73)

Understanding the Bunun culture is imperative to this study. This chapter serves two main functions: to provide a clear and general understanding of the Bunun culture and to prepare the reader for Chapters 4 and 5, which discuss the Laipunuk Bunun in some detail.

*[Author’s Note: Regarding the overlaying sections which address the Bunun culture in this thesis, the author has employed four divisions of investigation on the Bunun people and culture: (1) Chapter 2.2 focused on social organization of Taiwan’s indigenous cultures, serves to introduce and compare the Bunun with other indigenous cultures in Taiwan; (2) Chapter 3 concentrates on Bunun culture and ethnomusicology; (3) Chapter 4 presents the individual and collective knowledge of the Laipunuk Bunun people, culture, and Japanese Colonial Period; and (4) Chapter 5 is a collection and presentation of ethnographic data of two Bunun informants. Each section of study expands upon the other; and each serves its own function within this study. The author has limited the repetition of data, moving and expanding upon the aforesaid.]*

### 3.1. Bunun Culture

The Bunun people are divided into five ethno-linguistic groups: Takituduh, Takibakha, Takbanuaz, Takivatan, and Isbukun (Zeitoun 2006 interview). The Isbukun dialect is the largest group, widespread in (but not restricted to) Nantou, Haulien, Kaohsiung, and Taitung Counties, the latter of which encompasses the Laipunuk region. The five Bunun dialects are more than just linguistic groups; they are, “Characterized not only by distinctive dialectal and cultural features, but they [are] also [characterized] by a sort of tribal consciousness and tendency toward political cohesion” (Huang 1988)<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> Huang references Mabuchi (1951: 44).

The Bunun were known to be headhunters, fierce warriors, and a high-mountain people hostile to outsiders, including other aboriginal groups, the Chinese, and the Japanese.

### **Bunun Identity**

As mentioned, the word *Bunun* means *human being*. Although this may imply that a *non-Bunun* is *non-human*, the discernment is ethos-driven and not centered on ethnicity. Being Bunun is not solely based on an individual's genetic or family history; anyone can become Bunun. To the Bunun, being *true Bunun* means that one observes the cultural behaviors associated with Bunun taboos, rituals, and ceremonies<sup>62</sup> (Istanda, N. 2006 interview).

According to Bunun oral history, the Bunun people originally lived on the western plains of Taiwan and moved to the mountains (Istanda, N. 2004 interview). However, since the time of the earliest Japanese ethnographers in Taiwan, the Bunun were documented as the traditional inhabitants of the highest mountain areas. It was common for the Bunun to build their houses at elevations of one or two thousand meters above sea level. A Japanese survey done in 1929 by the Japanese scholar *Kano* indicated that approximately two-thirds (68.2 %) of all Bunun settlements were located above one thousand meters (Huang 1998: 32). Indeed many of the house foundations in Laipunuk are located over one thousand meters (Author 2006 field notes)<sup>63</sup>. Lee (2006 interview) offers the following insight to the potential movement of the Bunun over time:

“During the Dutch period the Bunun likely lived near *Sha Lu* in Taichung Prefecture, a coastal-plain area of western Taiwan. The Dutch, engaged in the trade of deer hides, encouraged the Bunun to venture and move upland to increase trade yields. Therefore we can presume that their movement upland was voluntary based of economic pursuits. Resettled in the mid to high elevation areas, they separated into two groups: one group in *Di Li Chun* which further moved upland to *Zhu Shui River* (both sides of the river bank); the other group to *Ren He Chun* which moved further upland *Si Ba Chong River* (upstream). It was from these areas they moved deeper and higher into the areas of the high mountains to where the Japanese documented their villages in the early Twentieth Century: *Hai Duan Xiang* in Taitung Prefecture, *Zou Xi Xiang* in Hualien Prefecture, and *San Ming Xiang* in Kaohsiung Prefecture. It was the Japanese, who in 1932 began a five year campaign to control the high mountains (termed *wu nian li fan ji hua*) which forced the Bunun back down to the plains.”

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<sup>62</sup> This issue will be further examined in Chapter 4.1.

<sup>63</sup> Altitudes were taken with a handheld GPS.

## **Kinship**

The multifaceted nature of the Bunun kinship structure is a cultural trademark. In comparison to other Taiwan aborigines, the Bunun are noted for their complex clan system (Huang 1995: 66). The Bunun have a *patri*-clan kinship structure, normally comprised of small family groups, in which several clans usually make up the organization of the community. Chi-Chien Chiu, who compiled *Kinship Structure of the Bunun*, notes four kinds of kin groups among the Bunun: moiety, clan, lineage, and family (Chiu 1973: 134). Close family ties give Bunun communities great cohesion. The Bunun kin universe contains considerable knowledge of social descents, affinities, and may include the dead (*ibid*: 170).

The Bunun are normally named after their relatives. In the male line, for example, the eldest son is named after his grandfather, second son after his great-grandfather, third son after his paternal uncle, fourth son after his maternal uncle (*ibid*: 97). This would account for the three interviewees named 'Biung' in this thesis, all belonging to the closely related Istanda family.

As Bunun populations grew in specific areas, their social system gradually changed from the traditional clan system to that resembling a large village or community. For example, Laipunuk villages were extraordinarily large (Huang 2006 interview). Patriarchal rule is absolute regarding familial division of labor; however, as the Bunun are an egalitarian society, every member has fair access to the settlement's resources.

## **Incorporation of Land and Material Culture**

Although the Bunun freely adopt and incorporate material culture, cultural traits, and *non-Bunun* peoples into their culture, they have managed to keep their culture and identity intact. They have particularly adopted jewelry and clothing styles from other peoples and early twentieth century Japanese photographs of the Bunun often show them wearing clothes, headwear, and adornments adopted or procured from neighboring cultures, including the Chinese<sup>64</sup>. This may also be due in part to marriage exchange, whereby a woman from one family is exchanged for a woman from another family. If the marriage is dissolved for any reason (including death), the other marriage that resulted from the exchange is also dissolved (Baudhuin 1960: 383). The Bunun employed marriage exchange as a means to gain passage, rights, and control over farming or hunting grounds, and this included exchange with other indigenous cultures (Huang 2006 interview; Istanda, N. 2006 interview). Remarriage

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<sup>64</sup> See *Photo 5 and Photo 6* in Chapter 4.1.

notwithstanding, the Bunun observe strict monogamy (Huang 1995: 68)<sup>65</sup>.

### **Residence**

The traditional residence of a Bunun family is large. Traditional houses were made by digging into a hillside and constructing an earth and stone terrace in front to provide a level or split-level foundation. Although stone is considered the customary material for building, the Bunun quickly adapted to new areas by making use of whatever raw materials were available, including wood, bark, reeds, etc. (Istanda, N. 2004 interview). The Bunun often abandon their houses and fields to move to new areas in search of better hunting grounds and fertile soil to grow millet (*Sateria italica*)<sup>66</sup>. As they practice *in-house* burial, when a family member dies in a way considered unnatural, they abandon the house and move.

The Bunun are the one most successful indigenous culture in Taiwan in terms of their dispersion and distribution. Huang (1988: 33) notes “Among the Taiwan aboriginal peoples, the Bunun form the third largest in population and occupy the second largest area.”<sup>67</sup> The Bunun are a *moving people* and elders believe that the survival of their culture depends on their movement (Istanda, T.B. 2004 interview).

### **Egalitarian Society**

When considering how to define the boundaries of the Bunun ethos, perhaps the best image is that of an egalitarian society, for an individual’s social position and respect depend on individual merit. Although being the son of a highly respected man may be of some consequence, individuals are, essentially, equal in status, until proving to be worthy of respect or leadership. However, only male members of the society can be head of the family (Baudhuin 1960: 360). As addressed in Chapter 2, anthropologists may generalize Taiwan’s indigenous cultures into two wide-ranging social strata: one is an *ascribed society*; the other is an *achieved society*. The Bunun are the latter, whereas the Paiwan and Rukai are the former. Ascribed societies inherit wealth and social position and have a class system. Land tenure is divided along aristocratic family lines and genealogies are well organized. This type of socio-political leadership has a highly formalized hierarchal social system that consists of nobles and commoners (Chiang 2000: 4). Such cultures tend to have somewhat sedentary households, as

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<sup>65</sup> See Li, P.J. *Austronesian Studies relating to Taiwan* (pp. 59-107) for Huang Ying-kuei’s paper *The “Great Men” Model among the Bunun of Taiwan*.

<sup>66</sup> Foxtail millet is the main staple along with wild fauna and vegetables.

<sup>67</sup> *Table 1*, Chapter 2, shows the Bunun are currently the fourth largest group in population.

land is associated with wealth and nobility.

As mentioned in Chapter 2.2, in stark contrast to the Rukai and Paiwan way of life, the Bunun have a social structure based on individual achievement. Huang (1995: 59) employs the *Great Man* model to describe traditional egalitarian or *achieved status* aspects of Bunun society. In the Bunun culture, social position is earned through such things as bravery, valor, and good hunting skills. The *achieved society* theory is especially useful for understanding Bunun culture; no matter what the individual's social position may be, it can be changed through personal achievement, through competitive relationship, or by invitation of outsiders into the clan. For example, a Bunun man wishing to advance his social position may work hard for the collective good of his clan or join a headhunting party and return home victorious (Istanda, N. 2006 interview). Furthermore, a Bunun man can break away from his clan and form a new clan in a new location, providing he can gain a following from others in his family or community (Huang 1988: 43). The egalitarian and competitive relationship among each member of the clan system has the potential to be achieved, individually manipulated, and centrifugal (*ibid.*). With regard to the Laipunuk Bunun, the issue of social structure is of key importance, as egalitarian society may have shifted to hierarchical society (Huang 2006 interview). Chapter 4 will address this issue.

## **Hunting**

Hunting was only done by men and it was a key occupation, figuring importantly in the Bunun tradition. Elders describe hunts primarily for deer, wild pigs, and other local fauna. Deer is the most useful game hunted by the Bunun and they use nearly all parts of the body, including the meat, skin, and antlers.

In order to further pacify the Bunun and to prohibit their use of firearms, the Japanese government restricted their hunting practices, resulting in cultural degradation at the very foundation of their social fabric. We should consider that the income from hunting was of the utmost importance. Hunting was a livelihood, sport, and a vital source of food and material culture. Hunting grounds were identified and maintained by a clan group, which formed a type of social or hunting organization, and intrusion to such an area without permission could be the source of conflict (Baudhuin 1960: 322).

As hunters, the Bunun are known for their prowess and sure-footedness in the mountains earning them the undisputed reputation as Taiwan's *sherpas* (Sinorama II 1994: 60). The Bunun of Tungpu, a village situated at the base of *Yu Shan*, Taiwan's highest mountain peak,

has been the source of Bunun *sherpas* since the early Japanese period.

Traditional styles of hunting include the use of guns, bows and arrows, dogs, fires, and ambushes (Istanda, T.B. 2006 interview)<sup>68</sup>. Bad hunting omens are numerous and may include a bad dream the night before the hunt, sneezing or farting, and the singing of certain birds (Baudhuin 1960: 484), and failure to adhere to these omens can result in disasters including death (Istanda, T.B. 2006 interview).

### **Headhunting**

The custom of hunting human heads was practiced by all *Formosan aborigines* to some extent (the Yami notwithstanding) well into the Japanese occupation of Taiwan. As the Bunun lived in the most remote mountain areas of Taiwan, they were among the last indigenes to discontinue the practice. It has been said that the Bunun were among the fiercest headhunters of all the ethnicities.

The Bunun not only hunted the heads non-Bunun ethnicities, they also hunted the heads of their inter-ethnic groups. Although various alliances between groups existed, the Isbukun head-hunted the other four inter-ethnic groups (Chiu 1973: 86). Conversely, the exchange of women (marriage exchange) promoted peace and alliance between the same inter-ethnic groups (*ibid.*)

The reasoning behind headhunting has long attracted anthropologists. It undoubtedly helped to maintain regional and ethnic boundaries. Among the Bunun we can say that rituals, ceremonies, music, social standing, and maintaining hunting grounds were deeply related to headhunting. The abovementioned hunting taboos also apply to headhunting, as do the following noted in Baudhuin (1960: 436): a man whose wife is pregnant should not participate; the occurrence of an earthquake; and encountering poisonous snakes. During headhunting all the village people should refrain from drink, travel, weaving, washing clothes, or talking cheerfully or loudly (*ibid.*: 437).

### **Religion**

The religion of the Bunun is characterized by animism, complex agricultural ritual, and rites of passage; and gods, spirits and souls are not distinguished clearly (Chiu 1973: 73). The Bunun cosmos is divided into three worlds: the sky world, the common world, and the underworld

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<sup>68</sup> There are a number of hunting related aspects embodied in T.B. Istanda's narratives in Chapter 5.1.

(*ibid.*). The Bunun belief in the spirit world is expressed in their pre-Christian belief in *hanitu* (Figure 2)<sup>69</sup>. *Hanitu* means the spirit of any living creature or natural object in this world, animate or inanimate, such as animals, plants, land or rocks, etc. (Huang 1995: 69). The concept of *hanitu* is characterized by polarity; spirits are either good or evil. Bunun often use the words *masial* (good) and *makuang* (bad) when describing *hanitu*. (Istanda, T.B. 2006 interviews; Istanda, L. 2004, 2006 interviews). Illness was generally perceived as *makuang hanitu*.

Figure 2 shows the division between the collective and the individual. The Bunun psyche (as an internal spirit force) may be divided in this way: while under the dominance of the *masial hanitu* a person is driven to act collectively for the benefit of the whole group or settlement; conversely, while under the internal force of the *makuang hanitu*, the person would act only for his/her individual benefit (Huang 1988: 103). The struggle between the collective and individual, *masial* and *makuang*, is perceived to manifest or explain sickness or health, in dreams, fortune and misfortune, etc. This relationship is a complex: consider that the individual who acts for the collective good therein advances his/her individual position within the collective.

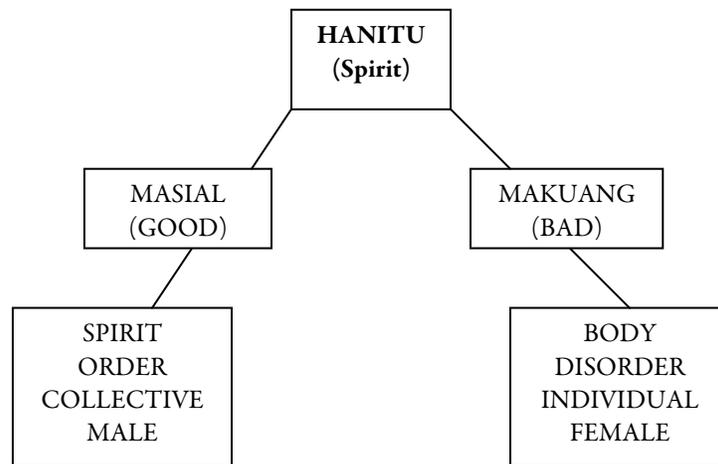


Figure 2: Duality of Hanitu Spirit  
Modeled and Modified from Huang (1988: 101)

With the adoption of Christian belief into Bunun culture, the concept of *hanitu* has come to mean devil. The Bunun word for sky, *dahinan*, once synonymous with sky or heaven (Huang 1988: 174) has come to mean God (Istanda, T.B. 2006 interview; Istanda, L. 2006 interview).

<sup>69</sup> Modeled and modified from Huang (1988: 101) diagram of the *Bunun person*.

When asked about *hanitu*, Christianized Bunun elders who grew up in the pre-Christian era would initially deny its existence. Later, while sharing personal life experiences, they would use the word frequently, especially when discussing topics such as luck, dreams, good and bad (*ibid.*).

Chiu (1973: 73) observes that the cosmological view of the Bunun is egocentric:

“Gods, spirits, and souls are called *hanitu* by them. Sometimes *hanitu* is the concrete organism. Sometimes it is without form or likeness. Sometimes they are bad and other times they are good. The feelings which Bunun people have toward them are different from time to time, place to place, and person to person. Sometimes they pray to them and beg *hanitu* to bless them. Sometimes they use magical methods to force *hanitu* to do something for them.”

### **Shamans, Priests, and Taboos**

In the Bunun cosmos, shamans and priests may have had different social positions. Traditional medicine included male or female shamans, who were equally responsible for treating illnesses and exorcising evil *hanitu* spirits from the body. Priests were almost exclusively male (Chu 1973: 73) and women were often shamans (*ibid.*: 74). However, anyone can become a shaman through dreams or by learning (Huang 1988: 130), although men normally assumed the position of public shaman (Huang 1995: 66).

The difference between priest and shaman are somewhat ambiguous. Whereas priests would attend to such things as agricultural and headhunting rituals (exclusively conducted by men), shamans may attend to healing, witchcraft and consoling clan members. Chiu (1973: 97) notes that shamans may assist in changing the name of a hunter who has had misfortune (name changing is common practice among the Bunun). Shamanic beliefs and duties may include *white magic*: healing of diseases, making women pregnant, promoting love, locating thieves or lost things, expelling ghosts, calling to souls. Conversely, shamans may practice *black magic*: making people sick or insane, induce miscarriage or death, and bringing about divorce (*ibid.*: 76). Istanda, N., (2004 interview), when referring to shamans, uses the word *lapasas* as verb and *amaminan* and noun.

The Bunun concept of magic is often related to taboo<sup>70</sup> (*samu*). Among the Bunun, the subject of taboo is taken quite seriously and aspects of taboo are far-reaching. Although this topic may warrant discussion in further detail, I will limit it to a brief and adequate introduction. Bunun

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<sup>70</sup> *Taboo* is one of the few Austronesian words adopted into English.

taboos are followed on various religious, political, economic, magical, and military occasions (Chiu 1973: 76). Violation of taboo is thought to bring misfortune, sickness, or even death (*ibid.*). Istanda, N. (2004 interview) overviews the discussion on taboo in this way: “We should consider the environment of the Bunun, living in high mountains and deep jungles... their lives were filled with danger: hunting, headhunting, mountaineering, typhoons, snakes, and all aspects of the spirit world including animate and inanimate should be always considered and respected.” In this context all things can have spirit (in a human sense) and life force – and the Bunun may venerate phenomena and noumena through experience, cognitive thought, and intuition. The connection between human and spirit (*hanitu*) is mediated through behavior and observance of the taboo. While on expeditions in the mountains with the Bunun, the author observed that taboos are synonymous with bad luck inasmuch as to break taboo is to invite disaster. For example, not acknowledging the spirits of an area might lead to falling to one’s death along the trail. In this way, taboos are as much internal and individual as they are external and communal. Taboos are often respected and observed through ceremony and ritual.

### **Ceremony and Ritual**

Bunun culture is endowed with ceremony and ritual<sup>71</sup>. Many actions related to the natural world have associated rituals. These include locating land to farm, opening and clearing the land, planting crops, maintaining crops, harvesting grain (especially millet), and transporting and storing the grain. Bunun rituals are deeply related to the cycles of foxtail millet cultivation employing *swidden* (slash and burn) agriculture. Millet rituals include the clearing of fallow land, sowing, weeding, expelling birds, harvesting, and storing (Chiu 1973: 168). These rites are complex, followed by luxurious festivals, and are associated with many taboos (*ibid.*). As an illustration, the best millet is blessed, stored, and treated as sacred. This *sacred* millet is incorporated into the Bunun social classificatory system, meaning that only kin members may eat that kin-group’s *sacred* millet (*ibid.*: 169). This sacred millet is also used in wedding ceremonies (by a priest) to represent that bride and groom’s family have received new affinity (*ibid.*).

The making of wine and its use are particularly related. Bunun ceremony and ritual may function as a system or mechanism of social cohesion and unity. Chiu (1973: 77) comments that taboos and ceremonies may conjoin cooperative spiritual and work systems, serving to incorporate individuals into the community.

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<sup>71</sup> Many of these rituals are narrated by T.B. Istanda and L. Istanda in Chapter 5 of this thesis and a list of ceremonies and rituals is offered in the Glossary.

Distribution of resources is deeply engrained into the Bunun cosmos and is an integral part of their ceremony and ritual. The sharing of foods, wine, and especially meat has cultural implications. For instance, if an individual never goes headhunting, he may not be welcome to eat meat or drink wine (Istanda, N. 2006 interview). Each member in the household should be allocated a piece of meat during a meal in which meat is being eaten. Even a baby not yet able to chew will be given a piece, if the adults are given a piece. This is because receiving a piece of meat means that one is being acknowledged as Bunun and therefore human (*ibid.*). Conversely, to not be allocated a piece of meat, whether on purpose or by accident is a sign of great misfortune. Furthermore, to dream that one is not given a piece of meat whilst others have received meat is a sign of great misfortune or *makuang hanitu* (*ibid.*). In this way, the ceremony and ritual is a symbol of the Bunun cosmos; connecting individual, collective, and spirit worlds.

Huang (1995: 70) notes that in earlier times, any person could perform a ceremony for him/herself or for others if his/her *hanitu* had enough power. Hence, religious practitioners were not a special social category, and potentially any person could serve in any ritual role. Traditional ceremonies can be classified into two categories: life-cycle rituals and calendrical rituals. Calendrical rituals are based primarily on the moon calendar and discussed in the next section. Life-rituals are briefly addressed below.

The Bunun concept of person is expressed and reproduced through their life-cycle rituals (Huang 1995: 101). Huang (1988: 104-16) explains that there are four significant life-cycle rituals<sup>72</sup>: *mapasila* or marriage ritual; *indohdohan* or ritual to celebrate the birth of a baby; *magalavan* or the ritual to celebrate the growth of a child; *mahabean* or the funeral ritual.

A noteworthy feature of the Bunun culture is the practice of in house burial. According to the Bunun mortuary ritual, when a family member dies from natural causes, he/she is then buried under the floor of the house. If the deceased was especially respected they were buried near the front door of the house so that their *hanitu* spirit would protect the surviving members of the domestic unit (Huang 1995: 71). In other circumstances, for example a death by unnatural causes, the dead may be buried in the house and then the house would be abandoned.

Importantly, although missionaries regarded many Bunun taboos as superstition and forbid their practice, Bunun society has retained a number of social rituals that have fused acceptably into the church<sup>73</sup>. Many life-cycle rituals continue to be practiced with an overlay of Christian

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<sup>72</sup> Spellings are those adopted by Huang.

<sup>73</sup> Christianization has been particularly successful among the Bunun, and most either belong to the Catholic Church or to the Presbyterian Church.

features (Huang 1995: 70).

The Bunun people's ability to adapt to new environments is a reoccurring theme in this thesis. And although Bunun ritual and ceremony as a coherent whole has changed and adapted, there is a progression of cultural elements. Horizons include physical environment, social environment, and religious environment; epochs include the Qing, Japanese, KMT, and the conjoining Christian period. Whereas the abovementioned shift to Christianity (with regard to the continuity of Bunun spiritual belief) has been extensively documented in Huang's 1988 dissertation *Conversion and Religious Change among the Bunun* during the KMT period, Chapter 3.1 of this thesis (Bunun musicology) will look briefly at the adaptation of the Bunun's ritualistic music practices, and Chapter 4 (The Laipunuk Bunun) will look deeply at social adaptations. Throughout all three horizons, Bunun ritual and ceremony have maintained a level of continuum worthy of further study.

### **The Moon Calendar**

In contrast to the above mentioned continuum of culture, Huang (1995: 71) notes that the traditional calendrical rituals have been abandoned with the demise of the Bunun's traditional agricultural system and have been replaced by seasonal rituals with Christian features.

Traditionally, early Bunun religious beliefs included periodic offerings to the moon. The moon was considered one of the most important spirits, and almost all activities in daily life had to be aligned with the lunar calendar (Istanda, N. 2004 interview). For example, in a specific lunar month it was forbidden for women to bathe. They followed a well-developed moon calendar, which served as an early form of writing and the Bunun are the only indigenous culture in Taiwan to have developed a primitive form of writing. *Figure 3* shows the written form of the Bunun moon calendar, which constitutes the oldest known writing system among Taiwan's indigenous peoples (the adoption of Western and Chinese writing systems notwithstanding). The recordation of lunar cycles kept track of their relationship to important events, such as the millet harvest or the slaughter of pigs (Istanda, N. 2004 interview). Istanda (*ibid*: 2006) notes that the figure incorporates a picture of a gun and therefore shows foreign influences.

Proscriptions related to the lunar calendar are part of a larger system of proscriptions and taboos that governed all aspects of Bunun life. A Bunun legend accounts for the creations of the moon: Once there were a father and a son who endured numerous hardships during a mythical time when there were two suns and life was very difficult due to damage to crops caused by the heat. Together, a man and his son set out to shoot down one of the suns. The second sun agreed

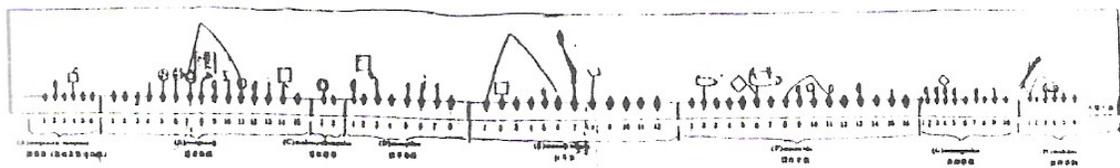


Figure 3: Bunun Moon Calendar  
 Source: Tian Zhe Yi (*Da Xi Wu La Wan*) (1992: 176)

to become the moon, but only if all Bunun obeyed three commandments: the first was that they had to constantly observe the waxing and waning of the moon and conduct all rituals and work according to its rhythm; the second stated that all Bunun had to conduct rituals throughout their lives to honor the spirits of Heaven and Earth; the third set forth a list of taboos and forbidden behaviors, forcing the Bunun to become orderly (Winkler 2003)<sup>74</sup>.

Important ceremonies conducted in accordance with lunar cycles include the *ear-shooting festival (malahodagian)* and the *baby ritual (intuhtubhan)*. The former takes place on the *new moon* during the daylight hours, coinciding with planting foxtail millet. Men hunt for the ears of the largest deer they can find; the larger the ears, the greater the success of hunting in the coming year. Men and boys practice their archery skills by shooting arrows at a pig's ear, usually fastened to a stick. The latter ceremony takes place on the *full moon* in June. During this ceremony, a necklace may be given to the babies born that year, in hopes that the babies will be luminous like the necklace.

### Tooth Extraction

The Bunun practiced tooth extraction of the front incisors as a sign of social identity, adulthood, and beauty. Chiu (1973: 80) observes that this is done at fifteen or sixteen years of age<sup>75</sup> to both boys and girls so that boys will be brave in battle and women become confident weavers. Only after tooth extraction can boys drink, smoke, hunt, fight; and girls learn to weave and embroider (*ibid*: 81). An interesting note on Bunun linguistics is that due to their practice of tooth extraction, their pronunciation of words would have been much different than today (Wei 2006 interview). Tooth extraction along with many cultural practices was outlawed during the Japanese era.

<sup>74</sup> Winkler, R.J., compiled a series of ten books on the legends of Taiwan's indigenous peoples. Author's summary is adopted from *Rendezvous with the moon: Stories from the Bunun Tribe*.

<sup>75</sup> T.B. Istanda (2006 interview) noted that in his case this was done at a much earlier age (see Chapter 5).

## Art

The Bunun are peculiar in Taiwan in that they traditionally produced very little art. They did make pottery for functional reasons, which feature impressed geometric designs. The most common patterns in their linen cloths are long stripes with chevrons ('v' shaped patterns). They prefer the matching colors of red-yellow-purple or red-yellow-white. The Bunun usually placed skulls of animals in important positions as trophies of the hunt; they revered them in a spiritual sense. The Bunun did not carve slate like the Paiwan, nor did they adorn or decorate their houses. This behavior attests to the pragmatic nature of the Bunun (Istanda, N. 2004 interview).

## Identification with Place

The Bunun custom is to bury the umbilical cord, the *busuh*, directly in front of the door of the house. The *busuh* site then becomes a sacred place for the individual or family. According to Istanda, N. (2004 interview) "The *busuh* is buried in front of the door, and is symbolic of connecting life with the land. Sometimes it is buried under a tree. Longer *busuh* may be placed around a baby's neck after birth to ward off evil spirits." This heart-felt tradition was broken when the Japanese removed the Bunun from Laipunuk in 1941. Laipunuk-born elders were torn from their *busuh* site and many still feel a sense of disconnection and longing to reconnect (*ibid.*). Laipunuk Bunun descendant Tahai Binkinuaz (Tsai San Shen) demonstrated this deep feeling in a recent documentary film, *Return to the Busuh Place*, in which elders that are still able to make the perilous journey through the high mountains and jungle are shown dropping to their knees and crying uncontrollably<sup>76</sup>. As this moving documentary asserts, the Bunun cultural identity is deeply tied to place. These traditions, once widespread throughout the Austronesian speaking realm, have nearly vanished (Blundell 2004 interview)<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> Many elders were airlifted by helicopter in this film. See Chapter 4.1 for more details.

<sup>77</sup> This is likely due to strong non-Austronesian cultural and religious influences such as Islam and Hinduism. It should be noted that in much of Polynesia, outside of the influences of Islam and Hinduism, that there is a still a sense to some degree of the practice. Contemporary Hawaii is a fine example where the umbilical cord, called *piko* (also meaning *navel* or *belly button*) is either buried or placed out to sea.

### 3.2. Ethnomusicology of the Bunun

Music is a signature aspect of the Bunun and their strong musical traditions have gained them an international reputation. Bunun music is somewhat solemn and serious nature. As the Bunun lived in isolated areas of the high mountains, often cut off from other groups and families, their music was practiced in smaller gatherings than those of other indigenous cultures in Taiwan (such as the Amis who lived on much larger communities and practiced many joyful songs and dances) (Blundell 2004 interview). The song *pasibutbut* or 'praying for a millet harvest' or 'harvest prayer song' is unparalleled for its chorus of eight chromatic alterations.

Although the Bunun are known for their skillfulness in acappella harmony, they also had the Jew's harp, flute, and a type of musical bow, which was made with bamboo and a single string of plant fiber (Chen 1988: 78). And although the stamping pestle as a musical instrument is currently only found among the Thao of Sun Moon Lake, several groups of the Bunun once had the stamping pestle (*ibid*: 82)

[*Author's Note: During 2005 author videotaped the 'Asang Dance Troop' at the Bunun Culture and Education Foundation in Taitung, Taiwan. Through translating and discussing the material gathered for the project with Nabu Istanda, the following information was generated. Four songs were chosen for this discussion.*]

#### **Macilumah**

*Macilumah* is the practice of calling ahead to the village when returning from the hunt, millet field, or time away. The voice should be that of a familiar member of the village, such as a hunter returning from the mountain with game or a family returning from the millet field, in order to signal reassurance that there is no reason for alarm. Also Bunun will sing when carrying a heavy weight. This song shows the individual is strong, that even with a heavy weight he/she can sing; furthermore the singing will make the weight lighter.

#### **Pasibutbut**

*Pasibutbut* the *Harvest Prayer Song*<sup>78</sup>; it expresses hope for the millet to grow and provide a bountiful harvest. It features an eight-tone harmony in a chromatic style unique in the entire world. Good harmony is important for a good harvest. The dance is conducted gathered in a circle and holding hands; the group's movement is counter-clockwise. According to Bunun oral

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<sup>78</sup> According to T.B. Istanda, *pasibutbut* was originally a headhunting ritual (2006 interview).

history, a long time ago, a hunter went to the mountains and heard the sound of honeybees. Returning to his family, he shared this sound with them, they sang together and this sound evolved into their own peculiar music, conducted in *good harmony for good luck* (Istanda, N. 2004 interview).

### **Pisilaiya**

*Pisilaiya* is a traditional headhunting song<sup>79</sup> that had evolved to become a ceremonial hunting song, which worships the animals' spirits and calls them to gather. It features shaking of *tagnas* reeds and is usually sung before the hunt. The words used today *ji ji* are Bunun for *meat*. The contemporary song's words include: "May the meat come to our basket... pig, deer, goat..."

### **Malastabang**

*Malastabang* is the Bunun announcement song or the *Report of Events*. This song is a ritual used to announce the events and achievements of headhunting<sup>80</sup>. It signals a proud time, a sort of forum for bragging rights. Before drinking from the gourd, three drops of millet wine are sprinkled as an offering to heaven, earth, and spirit, and then the man announces which village he has actually returned to in the past several years. The report is only done by the men. However, if the man's announcements or actions are favorable, his wife will enter the circle, positions herself directly behind her mate, and dance in his support.

*Malastabang* is also a traditional means of identification when clans came together. It is a way of telling others who you are, where you're from, and may serve as an indication of eligibility for marriage. As Bunun people carry the male's clan name, it is important to know the mother's lineage to avoid social taboos of same-clan marriage. Typical lyrics may include: "I came from my mother's clans' womb," she was born in "Taki-Luvun." The meaning is: "My mother's clan came from Taki-Luvun"<sup>81</sup>.

Istanda, N. (2006 interview) offers a hypothesis regarding the name *malastabang*: "To tell about the fights and headhunts against the Tsou." The word *malas* means to tell and *tabang* may refer to a Tsou village of that name. The Bunun name for the Tsou is *dapang* (*ibid.*). The Tsou have a long history of hostility and fierce rivalry with the Bunun, and the Bunun were infamous for displacing the Tsou and occupying their lands. Therein, Istanda's hypothesis is worth further investigation.

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<sup>79</sup> *Pisilaiya* was originally strictly for headhunting ceremonies (Istanda, T.B. 2006 interview).

<sup>80</sup> See T.B. Istanda, Chapter 5.1 (subheading on headhunting) for more details regarding *malastabang*.

<sup>81</sup> *Taki* means *place* and is a common prefix to many toponyms.

## Continua of Musical Traditions

During the Japanese period, when headhunting was forbidden, Bunun music evolved. Different songs evolved in different ways. However, in each case there is continuum. As an example, *pasibutbut* shifted from being centered on headhunting (as proposed by T.B. Istanda) to being centered on millet cultivation (as a harvest prayer song), and today it is done to bring good luck in life, mountaineering, etc., as well as a significant component to the cultural tourism industry. Despite the changes in significance, the song's harmony, style, and promotion of collective unity among the Bunun carry a coherent whole, sequence, and progression of cultural value. Similarly, *pisilaiya* shifted from headhunting to hunting, and currently fosters a channel or system of communication, information, or entertainment.

As abovementioned, *malastabang* served as an important stage for social gathering, offering a podium to report significant events a headhunting exploits and bravery, such as how, where, when, what, and/or how many heads were taken. A man may report heroic deeds in the distant past as well as the recent past. However, the song fell into utter decline during the Japanese Colonial Period. In the early KMT period the song remained in disuse. *Malastabang* reappeared during the late KMT period when regulations on hunting eased. Participants could gather and perform according to tradition; however the events reported focused on hunting and acts of bravery in the mountains. In the case of Laipunuk descendants, a Bunun man or boy who had returned to a Laipunuk village could proudly report the experiences and events of the expedition, as well as to report the village names where his family or ancestors were originally from. *Table 5* models the continua and adaptations of *malastabang*.

**CONTINUA AND ADAPTATION OF MALASTABANG**

Ritual	Continua	Era	Adaptation
Malastabang	ritual behaviors; podium for important cultural events and social unity; role of women supporting husband	Qing Dynasty	headhunting exploits; assertion of bravery; and confirmation of maternal line
		Japanese	headhunting to hunting – <i>period of decline</i>
		KMT	<i>period of decline</i>
		early Democratic Period	shift from hunting to mountaineering
		contemporary	shifting back to hunting

*Table 5: Continua and Adaptation of Malastabang*  
 Source: Author's 2005 Field Notes