

# BUNUN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: TRADITION VS. THE PRESENT

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# A question

- What do you think of when you hear
  - Taiwanese Aboriginal people
  - 原住民
  - **Bunun people**
  - ?

# A question

- Many Taiwanese people would probably think of:
  - Drinking
  - Singing
  - Eight-voiced polyphony (八部合音)
  - Hunting
  - ...



















# A question

- ... but probably not about:























# Perception of cultures

- Perceptions of cultures (and probably especially of minority cultures):
  - ... are slanted
  - ... are to some extent fabricated
  - ... are often driven by the needs of the perceiver
  - ... often contain overly romantic notions
- This has been observed before:



- “On a visit to Beirut during the terrible civil war of 1975—1976 a French journalist wrote regretfully of the gutted downtown area that “it had once seemed to belong to ... the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval.” He was right about the place, of course, especially so far as a European was concerned. The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since **antiquity a place** of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories **and landscapes**, remarkable experiences. Now it was disappearing; in a sense it **had** happened, its time was over.”

(Said, 1977, *Orientalism*, p. 1)



# Orientalism

- A Western way of perceiving the Orient (the Middle East)
- In a canonical, managed fashion
- In order to make it manageable ideologically, scientifically, imaginatively, ...
- In order to justify its political control, its exploitation, and its submission



# Orientalism

- Very often this lead to:
  - A stereotyped, fantastical interpretation of Middle-Eastern culture, habits and people
  - Stress on the otherness of the Orient, its culture and its people
  - An implicit assumption of the superiority of Occidental (Western) culture



“The worthy Indian then gave some account of the victim, who, he said, was a celebrated beauty of the Parsee race, and the daughter of a wealthy Bombay merchant. She had received a thoroughly English education in that city, and, from her manners and intelligence, would be thought an European. Her name was Aouda. Left an orphan, she was married against her will to the old rajah of Bundelcund; ...”

(Jules Verne, 1873,  
*Around the World in Eighty Days*)



# Orientalism

- It also led to implicit restrictions on
  - What writers were supposed to write about the Orient
  - What researchers were supposed to investigate
    - Traditional culture
    - ‘Interesting’, unusual properties of the culture and people
    - ...
  - This influenced even those rejecting the Orientalist mindset



# An example

- In such a worldview, what should linguists and anthropologists study about minority cultures?
  - We can get a rough indication by looking at the TOC of Boas (Ed.), 1938, *General Anthropology*



IX. SOCIAL LIFE, by Gladys A. Reichard . . . . .	409-486
Family organization on different economic levels, 411 — The sib, 414 — Totemism, 426 — Marriage, 430 — Exogamy and endogamy, 431 — Forms of marriage, 431 — Extramarital relations, 435 — Restrictions and preferences, 437 — Betrothal, engagement, wedding, 440 — Divorce, 449 — Kinship terms, 450 — Prestige, 458 — Woman in primitive society, 465 — Education, 470 — Ethics and etiquette, 478 — Footnotes, 483 — General references, 486.	
X. GOVERNMENT, by Julius E. Lips . . . . .	487-534
Food-gatherers and hunters, 491 — Arctic hunters and related tribes, 498 — Harvesters and related tribes, 502 — Indians of the Plains, 512 — Simpler farming societies, 515 — Herdsmen and related societies, 519 — Polynesia, 523 — Conclusion, 525 — Footnotes, 527 — General references, 534.	

**XIV. RELIGION, by Ruth Benedict . . . . . 627-665**

The concept of the supernatural, 628 — Mana—supernatural power as an attribute of objects, 634 — Animism—supernatural power as will and intention, 635 — Techniques of religion, 637 — Behavior toward the personalized universe, 639 — Forms of religious behavior, 642 — Prayer, 642 — Divination, 643 — Sacrifice, 644 — Taboo, 644 — Fetishes and amulets, 645 — Tutelary spirits, 646 — Summary, 647 — Varieties of primitive religions, 647 — Siberia, 648 — The Pueblo Indians of the Southwest, 650 — The Plains Indians, 652 — The Dobuans of Melanesia, 654 — Recurring aspects of the religious complex, 656 — Ceremonialism, 656 — Vision and ecstasy, 658 — Cosmology and belief, 660 — Ethical sanctions, 663 — Footnotes, 664 — General references, 665.



# Perceptions of cultures

- The equivalent of Orientalism as a mechanism to control perceptions of minority cultures can be found in many (all?) colonial and post-colonial contexts
  - For example...
- Relics of it are often present in the methodologies used by researchers studying languages and cultures

# Aboriginal Taiwan

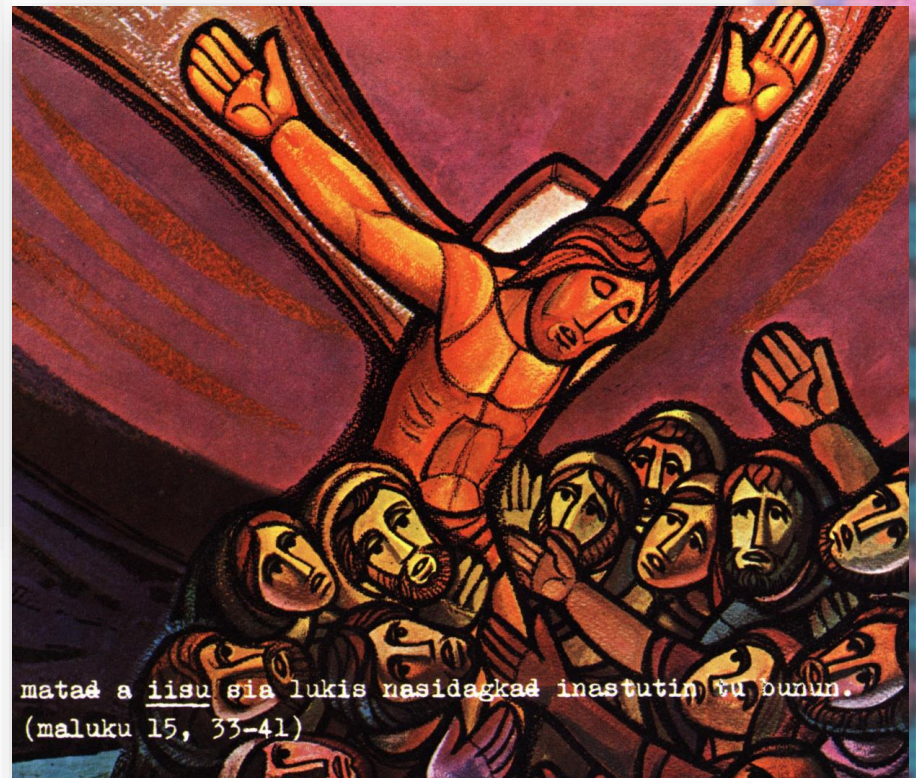
- Why should we do research Taiwanese Aboriginal culture?
  - ‘Because these cultures are dying out’?
  - Preservation?
  - Education?
  - Linguistic and anthropological interest?
  - ...
  - Because their culture matters



# Bunun culture

- Language
  - Dictionary
  - Grammar
  - Stories and texts
  - Teaching materials
  - ...
- Culture
  - Tangible heritage
    - Arts
    - Clothing
    - ...
  - Intangible heritage
    - Knowledge
    - Philosophy and ethics
    - Religion

# What is Bunun culture?



matae a iisu sia lukis nasidagkae inastutin ru bunun.  
(maluku 15, 33-41)

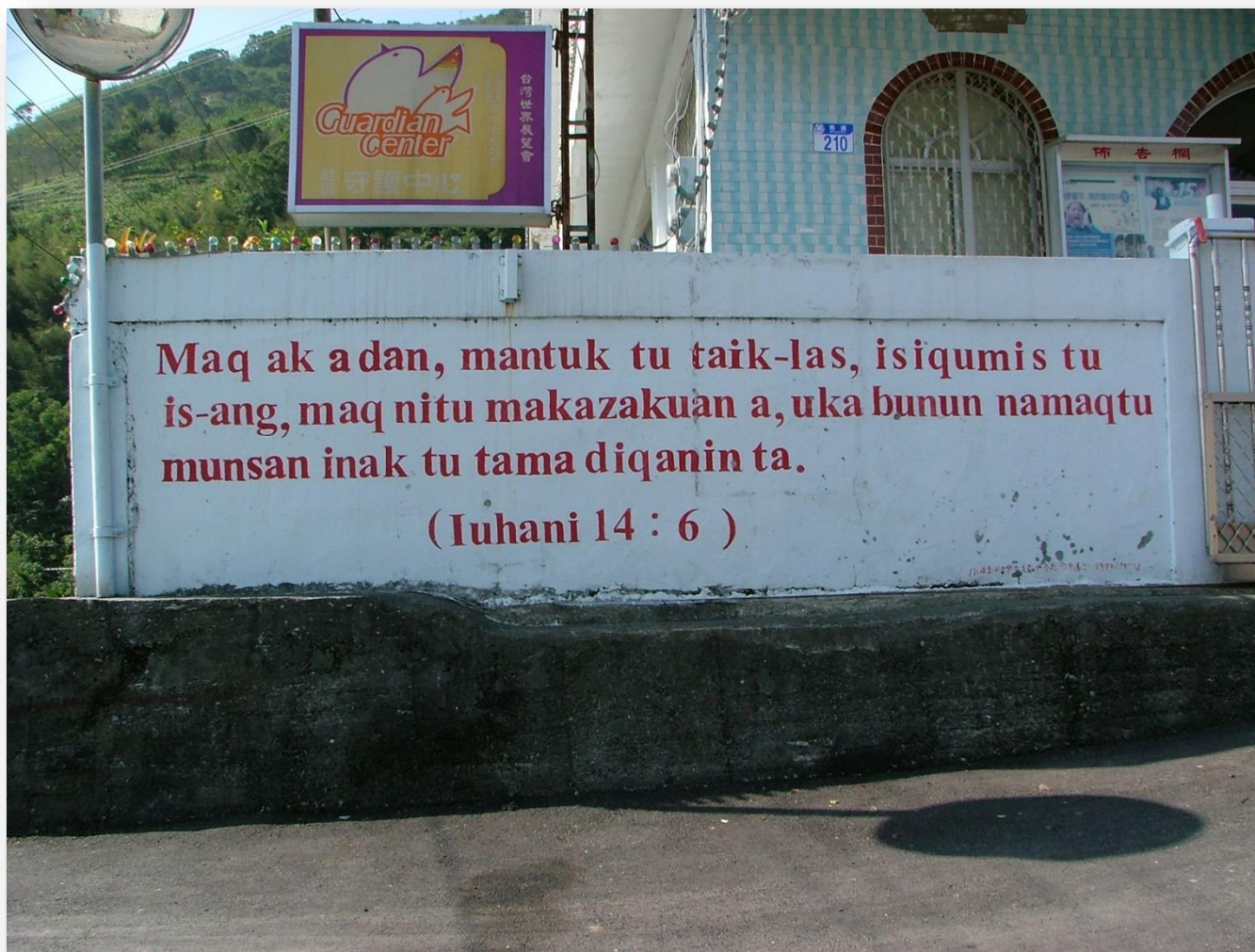


# Maybe it is both





# Maybe it is both





# Christianity

- A colonialist opinion
  - Christianity saves ignorant savages from an immoral life and eventually from hell
- A 20<sup>th</sup> century opinion
  - Christianity is an intrusive force with which colonizers destroyed traditional cultures

# Christianity

- A 21<sup>st</sup> century opinion
  - Christianity is a cultural force that can have positive as well as negative effects
  - It is part of a natural process in which cultures in contact transfer information
  - Often from a dominant to a non-dominant culture



# Christianity

- Christianity in Aboriginal Taiwan
  - Conversion started in at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century
  - Approx. 85% of all Aboriginal people in Taiwan are Christian (mainly Presbyterian or Catholic)
  - For many people, this is an **inherent part of their Aboriginal identity**

# Christianity

- Christianity in Bunun culture:
  - In most Bunun villages, a majority of people identifies as Christians
  - Many Bunun consider Christianity to be part of their indigenous identity
  - Christian Churches (esp. the Presbyterian Church) are highly indigenized



# Indigenization

- Local church officials need to learn local language
- Liturgy and other church activities in local language
  - But: shift to Mandarin
- Bible translation in local language

# My research

- How does Christianity influence the development of the Bunun language?
  - Missionaries interested in local languages
  - Involvement in education
  - Indigenization of the Churches
  - Bible translations
  - Church services and religious music
  - Introduction of the Christian conceptual universe



TAMA DIHANIN  
TU  
HALINGA



布農語聖經  
THE BUNUN BIBLE



**is-atumashig  
tama dihanin  
tu hudas**

(1980)



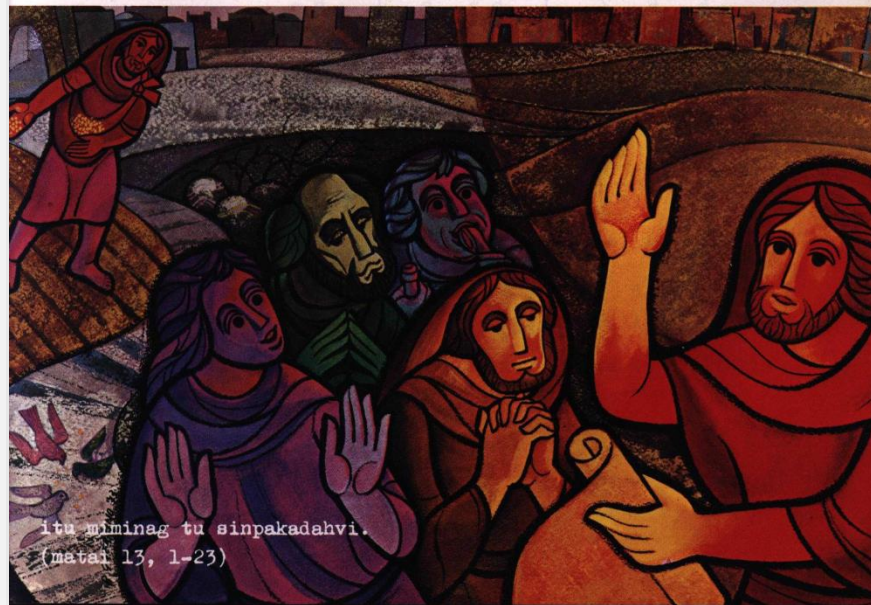
5 - 3 5 i i 6 5 1 3 2 1 3 - 3 3 2 2 1 1  
 as- im u-hai-ap-an ma- staan tu ma-ma-na-nu-as tu

3 3 2 i i i 6 5 3 2 1 - i i i i i i  
 ma-han-si-ap ta-ma, u- vaa, is'-aag, mai-si ha-bas-ha-bas

2 2 2 3 3 . i 6 5 3 1 3 5 -  
 sau ha-bas-ha-bas, mal-ma- mau-paa- tia.

1 1 1 3 2 1 1 i i i i 6 6 5  
 as-im u- hai-ap-an ma-staan tu ma-ma-na-nu-as

0 1 1 . 3 5 4 3 2 1 - - 0  
 pa-lis-ka-daan tu di-han-in.



itu miminag tu sinpakadahvi.  
 (mat 13, 1-23)

# Bunun church services

- Language clash: In non-Isbukun communities:
  - Bible and hymns: ‘Biblical’ Bunun
  - Sermon and other parts: native dialect
  - (Certain hymns and part of the sermon: Mandarin)



# Bunun church services

- Sinapalan village, 24 July 2011
- Takbanuaz dialect

Sermon  
(native dialect)



Reading NT  
(Isbukun-inspired Bible)



# Religious songs

- Modern hymns, translated in Bunun
- Musical arrangement:
  - Modern: Western chromatic scale
  - Traditional: Bunun eight-voiced polyphony



## Modern



花蓮縣奇美村

## Traditional



南頭縣新鄉村

# Conclusion

- Understanding culture = understanding:
  - Traditional culture
  - Contemporary culture
- Documenting a language =
  - Documenting its history
  - Documenting its present



# Conclusion

- Languages and cultures constantly change.
  - This is natural
  - We should try to understand it
  - We should not necessarily be worried about it

# Conclusion

- Languages and cultures die.
  - This is sometimes natural, but in today's world it happens too fast
  - We should try to understand it
  - We probably should try to help slowing down
  - In Taiwan, Christianity has probably been a major factor in the preservation of Aboriginal languages (not so sure about cultures)



# Bibliography

Boas, Franz. 1938. *General Anthropology*. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company.

De Busser, Rik. 2013. The influence of Christianity on the Bunun language: A preliminary overview. *Proceedings of the International Workshop on “Special Genres” in and around Indonesia*, 59–76. Tokyo: RILCAA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

Said, Edward. 1977. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.

# Uninang!

