



Performing culture at indigenous culture parks in Taiwan: Using Q method to identify the performers' subjectivities



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HIGHLIGHTS

- There are three perspectives on performing indigenous culture at culture parks in tourism research.
- Q method demonstrates how reflexive analysis can join ontological perspectives.
- Fixed ontological categories are actually porous and situational.

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ABSTRACT

Performance of indigenous culture at culture parks for tourism is traditionally viewed from a modernist ontological perspective as exploitative and from a managerial perspective as the provision of a service. These views might fail to accommodate the performers' subjectivities. In this Q method study the views of the performers are identified based on a sample of 30 respondents and 42 Q sort items. Respondents were performers employed at the Indigenous Peoples Culture Park in Taiwan. The replicability of a previous Q study was tested using the same design in a different research setting. In both studies two clusters of subjectivity were found: the 'Performers' View' and the 'Instructors' View'. Neither view conforms to the modernist or managerial perspective identified in tourism research. Instead, the reflexivity of Q suggests that in the performance of indigenous culture, these fixed ontological categories are porous and situational.

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1. Introduction

At one time it was fashionable to exhibit people at world fairs and exhibitions. At the British Exhibition in 1910 the Japanese Pavilion featured Hokkaido Ainu and Taiwan Paiwan tribes on display. At the 1914 St. Louis World Fair in the United States the Filipino Igorot, the African Batwa Ota Benga, and the 'last Apache Chief' Geronimo were big attractions. Conspicuously absent were in each case were displays of typical Japanese, English or American village life. The human zoo was a demonstration of colonial power and its accompanying discipline of anthropology and was reserved for adequately 'primitive' indigenous peoples. This dark history was the legacy of the modern culture park or culture village that has become a standard tourism attraction at many destinations worldwide, although the typical culture park today will hopefully

feature various entertaining and potentially educational performances and exhibitions.

Contemporary tourism research on the indigenous culture park is still tainted by the collective guilt of past exploitation that has drifted over from anthropology. The legitimacy of the managerial view on development and commoditization of the culture park as a tourism product is challenged by the modernist paradigm on the incompatibility of 'original' and 'performed' indigenous culture. Meanwhile the performers' operant subjectivities on what the performance of culture accomplishes for them are overlooked. The fact that tourist demand for indigenous cultural performance at culture parks has coexisted with the survival and at times prosperous growth of the same lived indigenous cultures calls for further inquiry into whether managerial and modernist views have overlooked the indigenous performer's emic subjectivities.

The purpose of this study is to identify and interpret the performers' subjectivities toward performing culture at a major indigenous culture park in Taiwan. The contrast between the island's historical marginalization of indigenous people by successive regimes and current success of culture park tourism makes

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it an ideal research setting. The second purpose of this study is to demonstrate the reflexive qualities of Q method as a systematic approach to the study of subjectivity. The replicability of Q method is also demonstrated by contrasting this study with similar Q method research previously conducted at another major culture park in Taiwan. The research goals were to:

- To identify clusters of subjectivity based on the consensus and distinguishing statements found through statistical analysis of the Q sorts;
- To propose management and theoretical implications based on the interpretive analysis of operant subjectivities found through the Q method.

There are two major culture parks in Taiwan. The research setting for this study was the Taiwan Indigenous Peoples Culture Park (台灣原住民族文化園區) located in Pingtung County in southern Taiwan. The Indigenous Peoples Culture Park was established in 1987 and is operated by the Taiwan Provincial Aboriginal Affairs Commission. The park makes the claim that Indigenous people in Taiwan are Austronesian and their presence on Taiwan pre-dates the 17th century arrival of the now majority Han Chinese population. The park focuses on education, archiving of cultural artifacts and development of indigenous artists and performers as well as providing experiences for visitors.

The research setting for a previous Q method study (Hunter, 2013) which this study replicates was the Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village (九族文化村) located in Nantou county in the central mountain area of the island. This culture park is a private commercial enterprise that was established in 1986 by a non-indigenous businessman. The Village presents visitors with indigenous style structures, wood and stone carvings, handicrafts and dance performances mostly built and performed by Paiwan and Rukai craftsmen and artists. The Village has evolved into an amusement park with numerous rides and attractions in addition to the original indigenous 'village' and focuses on entertainment. Both culture parks employ indigenous people from any of the 14 tribal groups in Taiwan, many of whom have made it a lifetime career. In Table 1, facts regarding these two culture parks are shown.

2. Indigenous culture and tourism in Taiwan

2.1. Social construction of indigenous identity

The early social construction of an indigenous identity began in the 1600's with the establishment of fortified Dutch and other European trading posts and harbors followed by a brief occupation by Ming Dynasty loyalists. The relationship during this time was based on trade and segregation, and indigenous people were exposed to foreign technology and Christianity. From 1683, the Qing Dynasty enacted a reward and punishment system for first peoples based on taxation and compliance to law. Those who complied were designated as 'cooked savages' and those who did not were 'raw savages' (Hunter, 2013). The identification of indigenous people as primitive and tribal was mirrored by the concurrent large scale migration of Han Chinese fishing and farming clans to Taiwan from the southern coast of the mainland. Original residents were forced into Sino-centric dependency or farther into the central high mountains. Indigenous people were either assimilated or alienated by the growing majority Han population and by government policy.

Japanese occupation (1895–1945) refined and reinforced the indigenous identity through 'barbarian management policies' that included disidentification through infiltration or disbanding of

indigenous communities and the use of anthropologists to re-identify indigenous people by imposing new 'tribal' names and boundaries. This process was headed by the government appointed head anthropologist Ino Kanori (Kamijama Foundation, 1935). From 1938 an accelerated Japanese Imperialism (皇民化) under the Meiji government emerged based on British colonial practices. This system developed a Japanese police force – the first in Asia, based on the British model – separate and distinct from military and alienated from 'native' populations in Taiwan as well as in pro-Shogunal domains within the contemporary boundaries of Japan (Umemori, 2004). The purpose was to transform Meiji occupied territories into a greater Japanese nation-state and to transform their governed peoples into Japanese subjects (Liao & Wang, 2006).

Under military law the Chinese Nationalists (Kuomintang, 1945–1987) built on the established Japanese governing system but geared it towards the Sinicization of Taiwan's residents. The National Language Policy and New Idea Movement (Manthorpe, 2005) worked to ban the use of any language but Mandarin and to systematically dispose of all indigenous material culture. To justify its status as a distinct and different society than that of China, Taiwan redefined its 23 million Han Chinese as a collection of sub-groups within which the indigenous minority featured prominently with tribal identities expanded from the traditional 9 tribes to a current 14 with other groups emerging.

2.2. Re-purposing culture for tourism

Political and economic developments since the late 1980s have strongly affected the status of indigenous culture in Taiwan. Growing economic prosperity in the late 1980's encouraged public protests and moved Taiwan toward an electoral democracy with the end of martial law in 1987. The new government began to develop a new national identity based on independence (Rubenstein, 2007). Recognition of the 1993 UN Year of Indigenous Peoples and the establishment of the Bureau of Aboriginal Affairs in 1996 were steps taken to rehabilitate indigenous culture as a tool for establishing an autonomous Taiwanese national identity. Indigenous culture was re-purposed as part of a new brand for international tourism as evidenced in the national tourism slogan "Naruwan", a generic 'indigenous' greeting (Hunter, 2013) that was developed along with a national development plan in 2002 to increase the number of international pleasure visitors. Visitors have increased from 2,977,692 in 2002 to 7,311,470 in 2012 (MOTC, 2012). This rapid increase is largely due to the relaxing of travel restrictions for mainland tourists. As a result Chinese visitors have formed perceived images of Taiwan related to scenic mountain areas and indigenous culture (Lin, Chen, & Park, 2012).

While international tourism brings prosperity to the nation, tourism in Taiwan has worked in many cases to reinforce an asymmetrical power relationship between central government and indigenous communities. Originally purported to be a vehicle for bringing social recognition and economic opportunities to remote indigenous settlements (Rubenstein, 2007), indigenous tourism has partly worked to impose a "discourse of silence" (Ryan, Chang, & Huan, 2007, p. 189), lumping all tribal culture into a generic set of signifiers. Establishment of Taroko National Park was a controversial tourism development project that forced resettlement of indigenous residents. It was branded as an act of environmental terrorism (Chen, 2012). The proposed establishment of a national park on Orchid Island was hotly protested until plans were eventually scrapped. Development of the Atayal mountain community Wulai, near Taipei, was also controversial for its commodification of indigenous material culture by non-indigenous government development agencies (Chang, Wall, & Chang, 2008). These

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