

YAP DAY: CULTURAL POLITICS IN THE STATE OF YAP

Toru AOYAMA

Abstract

This paper focuses on Yap Day, a legal holiday of the State of Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia, and examines its background, history and current state. By discussing the activities related to the Yap Day celebration, particularly Yapese dances, in the context of the cultural politics in Yap State, the paper also attempts to identify issues underlying Yap Day, including the ethnic division between Yapese and Outer Islanders, the commercialization of the celebration, and the impact of tourism on Yap Day.

Keywords: cultural politics, dance, Micronesia, Yap Day

Background

The State of Yap is one of the four states comprising the Federated State of Micronesia (FSM), located in the Caroline Islands. The territory of the State stretches east and west over 1,300 km but its total land area amounts only to 119 square km. The Yap Islands, or Yap Proper as they are customarily called, are a major island group of 101 square km, whereas the 140-odd remaining small islands and atolls, lumped together as the Outer Islands, amount to mere 18 square km. Ulithi, Woleai, and Satawal are the major island groups in the Outer Islands. The State capital Colonia is located in Yap Proper and has an international airport and harbor facilities in its vicinity, thus making Yap Proper the administrative and commercial center of the State. Administratively, Yap Proper consists of ten municipalities, which generally correspond to the domains of influence of traditional chiefs called Pilung.

There are four indigenous language groups in Yap State: Yapese, Ulithian, Woleian, and Satawalese (GRIMES 1996). The distribution of the languages generally corresponds to the ethno-demography of the four major island groups. Although all Yap languages belong to the Malayo-Polynesian family, Yapese and the other three languages, which are close to the language of Chuuk to the east and mutually intelligible, are completely different. Therefore, communication between Yapese speakers and people from the Outer Islands can be achieved only through the use of the language of the former administrator, English. Yap State recognizes both indigenous languages and English as official languages. It is apparent from this linguistic diversity that Yap State consists of multiple ethnic groups. And this diversity, the gap between Yap Proper and the Outer Islands in particular, has a significant consequence in the State's cultural politics.

According to the 1994 census (Office of Planning and Budget 1996), the population of Yap State in 1994 was 11,178 persons, of whom 6,919 (61.9%) reside in Yap Proper and 4,259 (38.1%) in the Outer Islands. Of the total population, 5,379 (48.1%) are ethnic Yapese, whereas 4,705 (42.1%) are ethnic Outer Islanders. More importantly, in addition to almost all of the ethnic Yapese, 11.9% of the entire population of ethnic Outer Islanders (561 people) reside in Yap Proper. They usually come to stay in Yap Proper in order to obtain employment, higher

education, or medical treatment, which are not readily available in the Outer Islands. A trip between Yap Proper and the Outer Islands is far from convenient. Although a small passenger plane flies between Yap Proper and the major island groups of the Outer Islands, the most of the people prefer a cheaper field-trip ship which runs from Yap Proper to all the populated Outer Islands about ten times a year, each trip taking about two weeks.

Traditionally Outer Islanders have been subordinate to Yapese since the times prior to the contact with Europeans (LESSA 1950; SHERWOOD 1975: 147-155). In the relationship called *sawai*, the people living in the Outer Islands were obliged to engage in a regular tributary trade with Yap Proper. The *sawai* system was very hierarchical, with two villages in Yap Proper, Gachpar and Wyanan both in Gagil municipality, standing at the summit, Ulithi in the middle and the other Outer Islands below. The relationships were often expressed in pseudo-familial terms. The Outer Islander “sons” were expected to offer local produces, show filial respect and fulfil obligations to their Yapese “fathers.” The “fathers” were in return obliged to provide protection and care for the “sons” in the form of food and other goods and shelter during the stay of the “sons” in Yap Proper.

Although since the early twentieth century the *sawai* system has ceased to exist, the father-son relationship between Yapese and Outer Islanders survived and persists until today. Not only are Outer Islanders prohibited from obtaining land in Yap Proper, they are also forbidden to perform their dances there, and men may not wear a colored loincloth (only a white one is allowed).

Yap Day

Yap Day is a legal holiday of the Yap State, set down for March 1 “in recognition of the traditions of the peoples of the State.” in the Yap State Legal Holidays Act (*Yap State Code* section 802). The Yap State recognizes, in addition to two national holidays, four State holidays, but Yap Day is the only holiday that is pertinent to the traditions of Yap State. The Yap State Legal Holidays Act (amended most recently in 1996) defines the State holidays and their specific nature. Among the four State holidays, Yap Day stands first on the list and its provisions are most extensive, indicating the importance attached to this day in the State’s politics. It must be noted that although March 1 is designated as Yap Day, activities for the celebration of Yap Day may be held on a different day or days other than March 1.

More importantly, the Act prescribes the establishment of a committee on Yap Day to supervise and coordinate activities. This committee of five is composed of two members of the Council of Pilung, one representative of the Yap Women’s Association, and two members appointed by the Governor, although in actuality the committee meetings do include people other than the five members to execute the task.

According to the Act, the committee must:

- (1) promote and encourage activities which recognize and represent the traditions of the people of the State,
- (2) supervise activities conducted on and on behalf of Yap Day,
- (3) provide awards for superlative performance in activities and accomplishments recognizing and representing the traditions of the people of the State, and
- (4) provide awards for production in the areas of agriculture, marine resources and handicrafts.

Furthermore the committee is authorized by the act “to raise and receive funds from any source necessary to carry out its responsibilities”.

Thus, briefly, the objectives of the committee defined by the Act are threefold. They are to organize activities pertinent to the traditions for Yap Day, to promote better skills in the fields of agriculture, marine resources and handicrafts, and to raise funds to carry out the first two objectives. The responsibility as well as power given to the committee in local politics is immense.

The Origin and Development of Yap Day

The origin and development of Yap Day are not well-documented but their outline can be traced. According to a former member of the Yap Lands Congress (1959-68, later Yap District Legislature, predecessor of the present Yap State Legislature), the precursor of Yap Day (the name may have been different) as a holiday was first created by the Yap Islands Congress, on the initiative of the American administration, to preserve Yapese customs, tradition and culture, and the date March 1 was chosen because this coincides with the driest and most pleasant season of the year. This person clearly remembers the atmosphere of the first celebration of the day. Festivities were held for two days at the Community Center in Colonia. People came in their traditional costumes and some Americans joined in as well. The activities included foot races, swimming, and canoe racing. It was a rare instance when people from all the villages in Yap Proper gathered at one place irrespective of their traditional affiliation. Yap Day presented the first real opportunity for the people of Yap Proper to reassess their identity and start thinking about themselves not in terms of a village but of the larger entity which was to become the Yap State.

When Yap District Legislature was established in 1968, it officially codified Yap District Day (*Yap District Code* section 7201), so that it became legally the immediate precursor of Yap Day in the present Yap State Code. The section reads: "March 1 is established as Yap District Day upon which day there shall be special attention paid to the traditions of the Yap Districts." There was as yet no specification of the activities of the day or mention of the committee.

In March 1979 the Governor of Yap District approved an amendment made by the Yap District Legislature to Section 7201 which changed the name of the holiday to Yap Day, fully anticipating that Yap District would soon become Yap State when the Federated States of Micronesia constitution became effective on May 10 of the same year (*Yap District Law 6-5* section 1). It was on this account that Yap Day in 2000 was celebrated as the day's twenty second anniversary. The amendment also for the first time created a committee of six people on Yap Day and specified activities on the day. The committee then would supervise activities for Yap Day and also provide awards for superlative performance and production in the areas of agriculture, marine resources and handicrafts.

Compared with the present holiday act, there are two differences in the 1979 amendment. First, only the areas of agriculture, marine resources and handicrafts were chosen as the subject of award. The emphasis was clearly put not on cultural but on productive activities in a traditional field. Second, the amendment stipulated that the Yap State government should exclusively fund expenses related to Yap Day by appropriating general funds of the State Legislature to provide for the committee's activities.

In 1986 the Yap State Legislature finally repealed the Section 7201 and established the present Section 802 with a minor amendment, reducing the number of the committee to five (*Yap State Law 1-223*). An amendment made in 1989 was more significant in that the committee was for the first time authorized to raise and receive funds by itself in addition to the funds from the State Legislature (*Yap State Law 2-62*). This change in turn was changed in the following

amendment (*Yap State Law 3-7*), in which the fund from the Yap State government was abolished. Thus from then until now the committee has had to raise all the necessary funds by itself. The same amendment also stipulates that the committee should “promote and encourage activities which recognize and represent the traditions of the State” besides production in the areas of agriculture, marine resources and handicrafts. This amendment no doubt had the coming termination of the Compact in mind and attempted to prepare the committee for financially independent Yap Day activities. It also paved the way, unwittingly or not, to the possibility of combining Yap Day with tourism, by broadening the scope of the Day’s activities.¹⁾

Yap Day Celebrations in 1990 and 1999

In spite of these amendments the Yap Day celebration itself had been a relatively unpretentious event for many years. For the first years it was held at Colonia and remained a one day celebration with some sports activities and dances. Later its site was moved to Abay, a large open field of the former US Coast Guard Loran station site, which fell into disuse and was converted into the Micronesian Maritime and Fisheries Academy in 1990, to accommodate an increasingly larger audience.

According to the *Yap State Bulletin* dated 23 Feb 1990, the program of the Yap Day Fair in 1990, as it was called in the bulletin, included the “hundred dash” and bicycling, games of juggling and tug of war, skill contests such as coconut husking and basket weaving, award announcements and five dances. The whole program was held at Abay and completed in one day, March 2, starting at 9:30 am and ending at 7:00 pm. Although bicycling seems to be outside of the traditional context, the contents of the other games and skill contests were all closely related to tradition. Thus the basic structure of the program clearly reflected what Yap State Law stipulates. Moreover the importance attached to the dances is apparent from the time allocated to them, five hours in total in the nine and half hour program.

The article tells the reader that the Yap Day celebration is an occasion in which the people of Yap can give their traditions recognition, which they have failed to do in the past. It also suggests that Yapese cultural and traditional values are precious and must be preserved for future generations. Here the emphasis is laid on the function of Yap Day as a means of preservation of traditions. Precious traditions had been neglected, and Yap Day is an occasion to revive them. It must be noted, however, that Outer Islanders were represented neither in opening speeches nor in dances. This was also the case in 1999. The “Yapese” culture still does not fully include the cultures of Outer Islanders.

The Yap Day celebration in 1999 was the first time when the celebration became a three-day event with more dances and canoe sailing on the final day. Reportedly, the commencing date, Sunday February 28, was chosen so that school children could participate in the celebration activities. It is true that the Yap Day committee has been making an effort to infuse traditional culture in the younger generation through their participation in the Yap Day celebration. Tourism, however, is another factor to be considered, for at least in the last two years, the commencement of the Yap Day celebration coincided with one of the two days, Sunday and Wednesday, on which the direct flight from Guam arrives at Yap.

The celebration program consisted of six parts: opening ceremony, award presentation, children’s cultural games, traditional dances, canoe sailing and booth-based activities. All except for canoe sailing at the Colonia Harbor took place in Abay, where a makeshift pavilion for guests was erected facing the dance arena along with other pavilions for spectators and dancers, and two

lines of booths for exhibition and selling goods extended from both sides of the pavilion complex in a broad semicircular shape. The opening ceremony held in the pavilion started with the invocation by a Catholic priest and ended with the benediction by a Protestant minister, ensuring the Christian blessing necessary for an official activity in this predominantly Christian society. In between, speeches were made by members of the Council of Pilung, the Speaker of the State Legislature and the Governor. The speeches were made entirely in Yapese except for one brief, preliminary announcement in English which explained to the audience that no English would be used in the rest of the day because the celebration was meant not for tourists but for Yapese. The decision not to use English in favor of an indigenous language may be justifiable, even though certainly does not help tourists understand the details of the celebration. But the use of Yapese also excluded from the celebration the Outer Islanders who did come to see it.

Among all the items in the program, apparently the most keenly anticipated one by both local and overseas audiences was traditional dances. According to the official program (and there were in fact several last minute changes), the year 1999 celebration included the following dances:

- Opening dance: 1 team
- Boys' standing dance: 1 team
- Girls' sitting dance: 4 teams
- Boys' and girls' mixed standing dance: 1 team
- Boys' and girls' mixed bamboo stick dance: 1 team
- Women's sitting dance: 1 team
- Women's stick dance: 3 teams
- Men's sitting dance: 2 teams
- Men's standing dance: 1 team

Children's cultural games are in fact games designed to develop children's skills useful for traditional living. They include:

- Target shooting by school boys
- Basket weaving by school girls
- Tug of war by school boys
- Ball weaving by school girls
- Ball ducking by school boys
- Children's games
- Juggling by school girls

As mentioned above, booths were set up around the dance arena in Abay. Some of them attached to the pavilion were organized by the Yap Day committee as part of Yap Day activities, such as an agricultural exhibition and a handicraft display including a large selection of items sent from the Outer Islands, making this the sole representation of the Outer Islands in the Yap Day celebration. Other booths were, apart from those representing international organizations such as Peace Corps and Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, mostly commercial ones selling foods, soft drinks and toys. These commercial booths, though trifling in scale, are often criticized by Yapese as commercializing Yap Day. They are regarded as a nuisance and barely tolerated only as far as they do not obscure the real purpose of the celebration. Whether tourists may find them

convenient or even attractive is beside the point. The fact that many Yapese are still apprehensive about the booths business at the dance arena may be explained by the traditional function of Yapese dance, which will be discussed later.

On the final day of the celebration, canoe sailing was conducted at the Colonia harbor. Regrettably, canoe sailing does not have a significant position any more as it did in early Yap Day celebrations, which could boast the attendance of six or more canoes. In contrast, in 1999 there was only one canoe that took part in the sailing session, because, particularly in Yap Proper, skilled navigators and canoe builders have become aged and their knowledge has not been transferred well to the younger generation. In the Micronesia-wide movement for reviving traditions, Yapese long-distance canoe sailing is widely publicized. But this is mostly undertaken by Outer Islanders.²⁾

Yap Day 2000

Compared to the Yap Day celebration in 1999, the celebration in 2000 on the surface made little change in the format of the program, but there are a few differences worth noting. The first was the attendance of distinguished guests representing foreign governments and corporate bodies, probably because the beginning of the new millennium was regarded as special. According to the press announcement (“Yap Day Activity Ends” 2000), the opening ceremony was to be attended not only by the usual State government officials but also by the President of the national government, ambassadors from the United States and Australia, and a representative of the Japanese government, together with people from the business sector including the Presidents of Continental Micronesia and Mobil Oil Micronesia. The celebration also received coverage by the film team from a reputed travel guidebook publisher based in Australia. Although the scheduled attendance of the three diplomatic guests as well as the Governor of the State failed to happen, their intended presence made this Yap Day celebration something beyond an event of concern and attraction for the people of Yap State. It had become an international icon of Yapese culture.

The absence of the Governor also resulted in an unintended consequence. The Lieutenant Governor had to stand in for the Governor and made an opening speech (“Yap Day 2000 Celebrated” 2000). The irony is that, as an Outer Islander himself, he found himself in a position to speak not in Yapese, which was the only language used in the 1999 Yap Day celebration, but in English, and thus he initiated a celebration in which none of his fellow Outer Islanders were represented.

The year 2000 celebration also broke away from the past convention of choosing a venue that does not belong to a specific village, such as Colonia or Abay. It was held at the village of Tamor in the municipality of Tomil. The idea of rotating the site of the Yap Day celebration among the municipalities, thus making the celebration closer to the people, has been around for some time. But because of the difficulty in accommodating a large audience, it was realized only once in the past, also in Tomil, which has a relatively large open space at the municipality center. Apparently, however, the chiefs in Tomil were well prepared for this grand occasion. The construction of the community house and the new municipality office building were only completed in 1999, for the former community buildings were destroyed by a typhoon in 1996 and again, after reconstruction, by a fire (*Yap Networker* 15 Oct 1999). By hosting a prestigious celebration the chiefs of Tomil no doubt found an occasion to demonstrate their wealth of traditional culture. The spectators, however, were divided between those who thought the new venue enhanced the authentic atmosphere of the performance and those who thought the buildings hampered them in

watching the performances (*Yap Networker* 10 March 2000).

The celebration started on Wednesday, May 1 and continued for three days, reportedly attracting about 600 people a day. Again it seems that the first day was chosen because it is one of the two days on which the direct flight from Guam arrives at Yap. The format of the program was almost unchanged from the previous one, consisting of six parts. The highlight of the program was again dances. Apart from the taylor dance performed by Yap Women's Association, which was considered to be part of the opening ceremony, eight dances were performed from the first day to the morning of the third day (*Yap Networker* 17 March 2000). Two women's sitting dances from Tomil and one men's dance from Rumung tell the story of Angumang, the legendary sailor who first used stars for navigation. A women's sitting dance from Maap told the story of the first arrival of an airplane on Yap. Two women's dances from Fanif and a dance by the students of St. Mary School concerned Christian themes. A women's sitting dance from Rull was accompanied by chants in the language of an outer island, thus being unintelligible to a Yapese audience.

In the afternoon of the third day, canoe sailing was demonstrated at Colonia Harbor, providing tourists with an opportunity to experience a canoe ride. Unlike the previous year, when only one canoe operated by Yapese sailed, one more canoe operated by Outer Islanders joined in the demonstration on Yap Day 2000, resulting in some accomplished canoe sailing. This clearly shows how Outer Islanders can contribute to the Yap Day celebration and make it a celebration of the people of Yap State in its full sense.

Finally, in the evening of March 4, the Yap Visitor's Bureau hosted a farewell barbecue party, which was originally planned as a Yap Visitor's Bureau Social Event in the evening of the first day (*Yap Networker* 17 March 2000). Apparently, the date was changed impromptu to accommodate the need of those diplomatic guests who could not make it on the first day. The party, with a contribution from local tourist operators, included a barbecue, a mini-bar, and traditional dances from three municipalities. The dance from Rumung was gaslaw, and the dances from Dalipebinaw and Weloy were both stick dances by both men and women. Gaslaw, a type of men's standing dance with humorously sexual gestures, is a rare performance on Yap Day, and indeed was not shown in the main program at Tomil.

Yapese Dance

Dance is without doubt the most elaborate art form in Yap and the most appreciated in Yap Day celebration, both by local and overseas audiences. Dances performed during the celebration, and discussed in this paper, are mostly the kind of traditional dance called *churu'* by Yapese, which are more formal and ritualistic than others (TUN 1996). Yapese dance is a group dance accompanied not by musical instruments (except for the sound from sticks and hand claps) but a chant, which is, in general, a form of story-telling about historical events or the legendary past of the community. The gesture and bodily movement of the dancers visually represents the story.

According to the basic form, dances can be classified into three types: standing dance, sitting dance and bamboo stick dance (often simply called bamboo dance or stick dance). Any of these forms of dance can be performed either by a group of women or men, although recently a bamboo stick dance has been performed by a mix of both sexes as well. Typically a group of dancers is arranged in a row or two stretched in front of the audience. A dance starts with a deep shout by the leading singer, which is shortly responded to by the chorus of all the dancers, who start the first movement of the dance. A dance typically lasts a half hour to one hour.

As the chant is the integral part of the dance, it can be said that in most of the cases a dance represents a “history” of the community. However, not all the chants tell a history of the village which performs the dance. This is because for Yapese a dance is like any other property that can be bought and transferred from one village to another in exchange for stone money and other traditional valuables. Dances have been exchanged not only among the villages in Yap Proper but also between the Outer Islands and Yap Proper as a result of the sawai trade in the past. In these cases, the language of the chant is unintelligible to Yapese, and, because of the corruption of the words, also to the Outer Islanders (TUN 1996). Nevertheless the dances of Outer Islands origin are highly regarded just like those of Yap Proper origin.

The ritualistic character of a dance lies in its connection with an exchange ceremony called *guyuwol*, in which not cash but traditional valuables are involved (LINGENFELTER 1975). As this involves a host village and one or more invited villages, *guyuwol* can be rightly called an inter-village ceremony, in which the invited villages bring in dances and the host village provides stone money. Traditionally a *guyuwol* was held for such occasions as the installation of a new chief in a village, the opening ceremony of a new public building, or the funeral or commemoration of a dead chief. It gave an opportunity for making a show of generosity and wealth by the chief of the host village and for reestablishing inter- and intra-village relationships with the chiefs at the center. Furthermore, this close association of dance with an inter-village exchange ritual may explain why Yapese even now consider it necessary for a dance to be performed in the setting of at least a semblance of ritual exchange and are apprehensive of a slightest suggestion of commercializing it.

Although a grand scale *guyuwol* in the past, which could last for more than a month, became extinct, small scale *guyuwol* are common, even in vogue. Nowadays, public but not necessarily traditional events provide an occasion for *guyuwol*. Before independence, United Nations Day (October 24) was the most important of such events. After independence, Yap Day replaced it. High School graduations, completion of a public building, and reception parties for visiting dignitaries are also occasions for *guyuwol*.

Dance performance is a community-based activity in that the repertoire of dance is owned by the village and the villagers decide which dance is to be performed for what occasion. When they dance, as in a theatrical production involving a whole company, every person in the village must participate in the production to a certain extent. In fact, villagers, in particular women, are bound by tradition to join in dances and other village activities. If a woman does not participate in the dance practice, she may well suffer a penalty, which includes repairing the stone paths, cleaning the community house area, and paying local valuables (*Yap Networker* 6 August 1999).

Finally, it must be noted that a dance is not complete without dancers in traditional attire. Traditionally Yapese women wear grass skirts and men loin cloths. However, the attire for a dance is a special one and dancers make a considerable effort to decorate themselves elaborately with the help of their family and community members.

Yapese dancers in this extremely elaborate traditional attire are looked upon even by other Micronesians with awe and perhaps a little envy. A visitor from Palau was quoted by the *Yap Networker* (3 March 2000) as saying that “Yap is the most traditional island in the whole Micronesia” and that he wanted to see the traditional costumes and dances because he does not see much of those in Palau. Another Palauan appreciates the fact that Yapese maintain their cultural practices because his people are “on the verge of losing [their] traditional practices”. Thus, Yap Day serves as a showcase of Yapese preservation of the Micronesian tradition when tradition is

regarded as diminishing rapidly in other parts of Micronesia. For most spectators this is most keenly felt in noticing the fact that in traditional attire women do not cover their breasts.

Financing Yap Day

As discussed earlier, since 1996 the Yap Day committee has been obliged to finance its own activities to organize the Yap Day celebration. Apparently this is not an easy task. According to an informant, the committee spent about US\$ 15,000 for the year 2000 Yap Day celebration. To secure the amount of money needed, they eventually had to resort to financial support from the Yap State legislature, which has legally no obligation to give it, to the amount of US\$ 7,000. A further US\$8,000 was made by donation from large corporate sponsors, including FSM Development Bank, Mobil Oil Micronesia, Mid-Pacific, Moylans Insurance FSM, Black Micro, Merrill Lynch, Micronesian Petro Co., and Safe Way Market, and by a raffle and donations from smaller corporate sponsors and individuals.

A raffle is one of the committee's main two revenue sources besides donations. According to an advertisement placed by the Yap Day Committee in the local newspaper (*Yap Networker* 25 February 2000), one ticket costs US\$5, whereas the grand prize is a round trip for two between Yap and Guam with four day accommodation at a five-star hotel in Agana, Guam (probably worth over US\$3,000). The first prize is US\$1,000, the second prize US\$700, and the third prize US\$250. The prize money would cost the committee in total US\$1,950, assuming the grand prize was donated by a sponsor. Thus at least 390 tickets must be sold just to break even. It appears to be unrealistic to expect the raffle to significantly contribute to the committee's revenue.

On the other hand, there are two main expenses in the Yap Day activities. The first is the prize money for the award presentation in the fields of agriculture and handicraft (*Yap Networker* 22 October 1999). Nine categories were set for the agricultural awards in 2000: home gardens, container gardens, savanna restoration, timber trees, betel nut trees, pigs, mixed gardens, sweet potatoes, and bananas. The first to third prize winners received US\$20 to 200 according to the category and the total amount of the prize money was US\$1,750. For the handicrafts award, although the details of the prize money were unknown, three men from Yap Proper and another three men from the Outer Islands won the prizes, which makes this exceptional in Yap Day activities. Since the award presentation for the Yap Day 1999 celebration had been postponed and was incorporated in the Yap Day 2000 celebration ("Yap Day Activity Ends" 2000), the total amount of the prize money for the two years may have reached US\$5,000.

The other main source of expense is the payment for the dance teams. The committee is responsible for programming the Yap Day celebration including dance performances. However, although the dances to be performed are suggested by the committee, as a dance is performed on the basis of a village, the Council of Pilung exercises the authority regarding which dance is to be performed by which village. More importantly, the Council of Pilung also sets the fee for a dance and periodically increases it. According to an officer at the Historic Preservation Office, the fees in 1999 were US\$500 for a marching dance, US\$600 for a men's or women's sitting dance, and US\$650-700 for a men's standing dance. If we apply these figures to the Yap Day celebration in 2000 in which at least eight dances were performed, the total expenses paid for the dance fee may have amounted to about US\$5,000. Then it can be estimated that the committee must have spent as much as US\$10,000 for the dance performance and award presentation alone.

The payment for the dance performance is not only a problem of finance. It is also a cultural problem because a dance for money is a deviation from the traditional notion that a dance

performance is a community-based activity carried out in the context of an inter-village ritual exchange. The point was driven home in a letter published in the *Yap Networkers* (3 December 1999) concerning the FSM President's visit to Yap State in 1999. The writer contrasted the ways people in Yap Proper and in the Outer Islands organized themselves to welcome the President. That of Yap Proper was called "We will show hospitality at a price," in which the cost of dance performances, meal and gifts was charged on the Yap State government. That of the Outer Islanders was called "Giving with a thankful heart," in which the food, dances and gifts were all prepared at the people's own cost. The writer lamented the loss of traditional hospitality among the Yapese, who are known to others as a people who adhere to their own customs and tradition. There is no denying that an outright show of a formal dance for money is still not the norm even in Yap Proper. But the letter aptly demonstrated that accepting money for a dance in one way or another has been firmly established among Yapese.

It is clear that the Yap Day celebration is at a turning point in that it cannot be accomplished by community spirit alone. The Yap Day celebration in 2000 could not have been held successfully without the funds from the State legislature. But the support from the government cannot be expected in the future because the government's own revenue will be drastically reduced when the Compact is terminated. Thus, there is little doubt that we may see stronger connection between Yap Day and tourism and more corporate sponsors from tourism industry in future Yap Day activities.

Tourism

Until recently tourism was a long unexplored industry in the Yap State.³ In fact, Yap State had always been cautious about the influx of visitors. It was as recently as 1986 that Yap Proper was ready to receive in earnest a constant flow of tourists ("The Limtiaco Company" 2000). Since then, the number of tourists marked a record high of 4,404 (among 14,564 visitors) in 1995 (Department of Economic Affairs 2000). Although it is still minuscule compared with the number of tourists visiting other popular resort islands in Micronesia such as Guam (1,362,600 in 1996) (Economic Research Center 1997), this is a significant increase from the numbers of all visitors (at 1,475) in 1985 (Asian Development Bank 1997). Citizens of the United States (48.2% in 1995) and Japanese (27.4%) represent the two major groups in the tourist inflow to Yap State (Department of Economic Affairs 2000). Since 1995, however, the number has sharply declined to 3,396 in 1997 and 2,411 in 1998, among 7,353 and 6,127 visitors respectively (Department of Economic Affairs 2000). The decline was attributed to the reduced number of flights connecting Yap and Guam and a prolonged recession in Japan (*Yap Networker* 2 January 1999).

With a limited resource base and the impending termination of the Compact grant, it appears that the Yap State government cannot afford to let this budding industry dwindle. In 1998 the government established the Yap Visitor's Bureau to promote Yap as a tourist destination through brochures and a tourist promotion campaign. Formerly tourism promotion had not been handled independently but under the jurisdiction of the Division of Commerce and Industries. It is because of this increasing need to attract more tourists that Yap Day and Yapese dances have become officially recognized and systematically promoted as tourist features.

The Bureau has been actively engaged in tourism promotion through publishing brochures and organizing tourist campaigns, in which Yap Day and Yapese dance are well represented. A glossy travel guidebook "A Visitors Handbook to the Islands of Yap State" is an excellent example (Yap Visitor's Bureau 2000). One of the Bureau's latest efforts is the creation of the

handsomely designed Website, “Welcome to Yap.” (<http://www.visityap.com/>). In this site, Yap Day is featured in a dedicated Webpage, where the potential tourist is enticed to visit the “Mysterious Isle of Stone Money” to witness an “authentic expression of the rich culture of Yap” in Yap Day celebrations.

As Yap Day becomes increasingly intertwined with the agenda of cultural tourism, it seems inevitable that the Yap day celebration will come under pressure to change, mainly on two grounds. The first is practical one. If the Yap Day celebration is to see more tourists at the site, the Yap Day committee will be required to provide tourists with more services and facilities on site, including detailed information in English on program items. The presence of commercial booths also need to be recognized, preferably in a regulated manner, as a legitimate provider of needs of tourists.

The second ground is more important and fundamental, concerning the reconsideration of the orientation of Yap Day itself. Outer Islanders have been excluded from the celebration for years. However, if Yap Day ever should play a central role of cultural tourism in Yap State, the celebration need to be the true representation of the cultures (plural) of the peoples (plural) of Yap State in the eyes of others from outside and the anomaly of the exclusion of Outer Islanders needs to be redressed. Outer Islanders’ participation in dancing and canoeing, in which they excel, would be a welcome change in the program of the Yap Day celebration, even though there still remains a logistic problem of bringing teams of Outer Islanders to Yap Proper and accommodate them.

Conclusion

Yap Day was and is not merely an innocuous merrymaking. It was started by the American administration as a symbolic holiday with only residents of Yap Proper in mind in order to integrate people living in a village-based society into a larger social and political entity. Although it was successful in achieving the original objective, the limitation of Yap Day in not incorporating the residents of the Outer Islands was not resolved even after the independence of Yap State. In the meantime, the introduction of cash economy since the TTPI era has radically affected Yap society. The idea of dance as a community-based activity still persists but in reality dance is increasingly “sold for money.” Even more important is the fact that Yap Day cannot be successfully carried out any more without a large amount of cash coming from the corporate sector. Then since the late 1990s the ever increasing influx of foreign tourists is beginning to affect cultural politics in general and Yap Day in particular. The consequences of this whole process still need to be noted but it will not take long.

We have identified three focal points of tension around Yap Day, which can be summarized as follows. First, despite its status as a State legal holiday, the Outer Islanders are not allowed to perform dances due to their traditionally lower status. Second, it is difficult to maintain the pretence of the celebration being a result of voluntary communal work in the light of the huge expense involved in the celebration activities. Finally, the ever-increasing presence of foreign tourists puts pressure on the way the celebration is organized. The eyes of others from the outside would eventually make the cultural identity of Yap itself undergo the process of reconfiguration.

If Yap Day is to become a real “centripetal force” for the peoples of Yap State, it appears that change in inter-island relationships and attitudes toward the outside world is unavoidable. This must include the participation of dancers from the Outer Islands, thus making Yap Day truly

a celebration of the cultures of Yap State, and also the introduction of managed commercialization of Yap Day in exchange for better services for tourists.

Notes

- 1) The latest amendment to Section 802 was made in 1996 (*Yap State Law* 4-31). Apart from specifying the term of membership of the Yap Day committee, it made it possible for the committee to organize the Yap Day celebration on a day or days other than March 1 at one or more locations in the State.
- 2) For instance, the celebrated sail of the traditional Yapese canoe Mathawmwal from Yap Proper to Palau in 1994 was navigated by the expert navigator Mau Pailug and his crew from Satawal (*Yap State Bulletin* 13 May 1994).
- 3) For a recent survey on the tourism development in Yap Proper, see KUWAHARA (2001).

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