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**OLD MEDIUM, NEW DESIGN:  
IN SEARCH OF ALTERNATIVE AESTHETICS OF TAIWANESE  
ABORIGINAL WOVEN TEXTILES IN THEATRICAL COSTUME  
DESIGNS**

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## *ABSTRACT*

The main purpose of this practice-led research is to explore the relevance of present day Taiwanese aboriginal weavers' work to contemporary society and how it might be integrated into today's production processes, and used on stage as well as in exhibition. My research focuses on my costume design work for two theatrical productions, *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet*, for which the costumes were made with traditional Taiwanese aboriginal woven textiles, and is based on the assumption that the process of costume design affords a space to explore other aesthetic possibilities for aboriginal woven textiles, and that the theatre provides a context in which the conventional conceptions of Taiwanese aboriginal textile design can be challenged, broken apart and renewed.

This research deals with both the theoretical and the practical considerations that apply to aboriginal weaving, and examines the intellectual traditions of the philosophy of art and aesthetics to be found in *its theory and application*. My thesis challenges the notion upheld by many of today's aboriginal weavers that their 'traditions' are fixed and unchangeable, and argues for the importance of individual creativity *if modern, contemporary needs and tastes in textiles are to be met by materials woven in the aboriginal way*.

My practice-led research is grounded on the techniques of aboriginal back-strap *loom and* weaving and basket weaving, which were learned from aboriginal weavers in a 20-month tribal fieldwork. This project approaches aboriginal woven textiles as artistic objects in the context of theatre productions and performances instead of as mere commercial entities. It also argues that theatrical costume design is *much* more than just the making of simple costumes that complement performances.

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## PERFORMANCES AND EXHIBITIONS

### Performances

#### *Africussion*

Produced by Ju's Percussion Group  
National Theatre, Taipei, May 22-23 May 2005  
Jihde Hall, Kaohsiung, 24 May 2005  
Chungsan Hall, Taichung, 26 May 2005

#### *Romeo and Juliet*

Co-produced by School of Theatre, National Taipei University of Arts &  
Taipei Culture Centre  
The Metropolitan Hall, Taipei, 9-11 June 2006

### Exhibitions

*On Stage/Off Stage; Weaving/Embroidering: Theatrical Costumes Design Exhibit*  
Culture Gallery, National Concert Hall,  
National Chiang Kai-shek Cultural Centre  
29 October to 11 December 2005

#### *Discover by Hands: New Fibre Art-Special Exhibition*

National Museum of Prehistory  
July 8 to October 29, 2006  
Lai-yi County Aboriginal Culture Centre, Nanhe Tribe, Pingtung  
11 November 2006 to 7 January 2007  
Amis Fishing and Hunting Culture Centre,  
Chengkung Town Marina, Taitung  
20 January to 4 March 2007

Bunun · Shakespeare · Saisiyat—Chen, Wan-Lee 2006 Exhibition

Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines

7 September to 5 October 2006

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Aims

This practice-led research explores the meaning of Taiwanese aboriginal weaving traditions, studies their associated techniques and ways that they might be used in theatre design—one possible form in which aboriginal weaving could be helped to survive. The central argument of this research is that creativity is essential to the survival of traditional aborigine weaving and I wished to investigate why the most contemporary aborigine weavers don't want to, or can't, weave creatively as did their ancestors.

### 1.2 Research Motivation

In 1993, I was invited to design costumes for an aboriginal Taiwanese production *Tales from the Mountains and the Seas*, which was based on a series of legends and folk stories told by the Taiwanese aborigines in their different tribes from early times and on through the centuries. In the research process I was fascinated by the different textures of, and variant details to be found among the old textiles which were woven mostly during the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945). I believe that the meaning of these textiles lies less in their ethnic identity and their functional use and more in the narrated life stories of the weavers contained therein. Each textile tells a different story, each as different from one another as each of us are different from one another. That observation motivated many of the various ways I approached my work with aboriginal hand-woven textiles.

Because of the limited production budget for *Tales from the Mountains and the Seas*, a lack of time and my having no direct connection with the various tribes to provide me with source information, the costumes had to

be made from mass produced materials. Although I devised and completed the costumes for the production by following typical theatrical costume designs **in order** to imitate traditional aboriginal costumes as best I could, **I felt that just like any other consumer of mass produced goods** I was merely consuming another culture – just like any other consumer of mass produced goods – a culture that was completely alien to me, rather than communicating and engaging in a meaningful dialogue with that culture’s design elements. Those feelings caused me to rethink my work and to ask myself what design meant to me. I mulled over the question **and subject** for many years; the more I designed, the more I felt a strange emptiness in my work. It was not until ten years later that I decided to walk out of the black box of the theatre **in order to explore** how I might use design practice to find what design really meant to **me and what** I wished to express through my designs, and **then explore** how I could move forward and create new designs developed from traditional roots.

Another motivation for me to work with aboriginal hand woven textiles was that I greatly enjoyed doing handicrafts. When I did my graduate study in costume design at the University of California, Irvine, in 1987~1990, my supervisor told us students that **after we had** graduated from our study it might take a while to make a living as a professional designers and that meanwhile we should work on other costume techniques in order to support ourselves. For a time I really enjoyed being a milliner and costume maker. I found working on materials with my hands would stimulate my sense of form and evoke a deep inner feeling within me--a feeling that not only **excited** my imagination but **at the same time** satisfied a theretofore **unrecognised** inner desire to understand the importance and meaning of handicraft, **which** also led me to sense the affection that others had expressed in weaving those textiles.

Although I could sense something of the feelings and personality of the abo-

rigine weavers in the old textiles, I found contemporary aborigine textiles to be dominated by a focus on ethnic identity, based on abstract, impracticable concepts that did not leave the weavers free to create their own **personal** designs or express **their feelings** in their **work**. Indeed, those few that did weave creatively in the traditional style were mostly a silent group and tended to be unwilling to interpret their works or explain the meaning **behind** their practice. **That** situation has hindered other aboriginal weavers in their understanding of weaving tradition and left them believing that in traditional practices group symbols were the only important elements. Individual agency is ultimately dictated by the ideologies to which convention subscribes, and so as convention continued to exclude **personal** creativity from modern aboriginal **hand-woven** textiles, modern textile aboriginal weavers restricted themselves to repeating those same **limited** patterns.

Since it is in the actual work itself that the dialectic between thought and action plays out, my practice-lead research, therefore, deals **with the** theoretical considerations **both** the work **and the** actual aboriginal weaving practice; and at the same time examines the intellectual traditions of the philosophy of art and the aesthetics of aboriginal hand-woven textiles. *The Alternative Aesthetics* (Stam, 2000, p.156) propounds the argument that **traditional aboriginal** textiles have an aesthetic praxis as artistic products despite **their** being intended for functional use: they retain embedded within them their own individual or peculiar creative and aesthetic character. The argument of the *Alternative Aesthetic Theory* provided me with a different approach to the examination of modern aboriginal weaving practices.

**It is in practice that** the dialectic between thought and action plays out. My practice-led research doctoral thesis **proposes an** alternative voice in the examination of traditional aboriginal textiles. The term 'alternative' (used in the term *Alternative Aesthetic Theory*) is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*



(OED) as “ Stating or offering the one or the other of two things of which either may be taken...” and “Of two things: Such that one or the other may be chosen, the choice of either involving the rejection of the other. (Sometimes of more than two.)” (Murray, et al., 1989a, p.368) The implication of another possibility- the state of being other or different, diversity--defies a simple definition because it contains concepts like *difference* and *otherness* within itself. *Difference* and *otherness* must be unpicked to allow one to begin to [understand alternative](#) and the cluster of meanings associated with *otherness* and *difference*. The OED also expands the definition to “Purporting to represent a preferable or equally acceptable alternative to that in general use or sanctioned by the establishment.” (Murray, et al., 1989a, p.368) The argument that is the Alternative Aesthetic Theory challenges the conventional notion of [weaving](#) traditions and champions the emerging importance placed upon the individuality to be found in the old aboriginal hand-woven textiles, and upon what the textiles convey to our modern sensibilities.

My designs for *Tales from the Mountains and the Seas* were set artistically in the context of the theatrical production. I came to believe that I and [a few](#) of today’s weavers were following similar processes: through the theatrical medium I was exploring the alternative possibilities inherent in aboriginal [hand-woven](#) fabrics and striving to surpass the limitations imposed by convention; [while](#) the [creative](#) weavers were exploring ways of contemporising their textiles through an understanding of their traditional practices and [the motifs to be found](#) in the textiles themselves.

The inspiration for theatrical design springing as it does from the basic motifs of everyday life became a crucial engine in the development of my design sensibility and led me to an understanding of the choices made by those who wove the original traditional textiles. Meanwhile, the occasion of the theatrical production brought into being a process that furthered both my and the

aboriginal weavers' awareness of design aesthetics.

Theatre is a reflection of society, of human beings--of life itself. To actually feel and absorb the cultural elements of a period now *passed*, and at the same time retain a sense of the historical and time differences is the same whether one is in the process of searching for essential motifs to be used in costume design for a theatrical production, or to be worked into present-day traditional aborigine weaving. In both processes one explores within a set time frame and focuses on a certain pattern of life or style within it *so that one may* come up with the right design or textile motif *that suits the circumstances*. The very essence of creating stage art is to employ motifs which may present and interpret momentary *emotions and sensibilities in a way that they may be* felt by contemporary audiences while the designs remain true to the period of the theatrical presentation-- just as today's traditional weavers strive to appeal to today's buyers while remaining basically true to their heritage.

My research practice was developed by means of an experimental procedure in theatrical design. In my costume designs for *Affricussion* and *Romeo and Juliet*, instead of merely replicating historical costumes from antique clothing and photographs of the originals, I attempted an anthropological approach that would comprehend traditional weaving practices but *while creating costumes* designed from the perspective of modern reality. The major factor in my practice-led research then is the production process, which was composed of three main strategies: an extensive 20 months of tribal fieldwork, the costume designs for two theatrical productions and a series of exhibitions *displaying my designs and costumes*. (See *Appendix 1: Practice Schedule*)

The fieldwork consisted of establishing deep interpersonal connections with four aboriginal weavers. My work represented not only a personal journey towards understanding the meaning of the aboriginal Taiwanese textile tra-

dition, but provided me also with opportunities to examine some of the cultural tensions faced by the weavers as their lives straddled [the gap between](#) traditional and modern cultures.

[My](#) two design projects took the form [of theatre](#) costumes for the percussion concert *Africussion* in 2005 and for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in 2006. Each of these projects caused me to reflect on and build upon the experience I was gaining from the exchange of knowledge and understanding [in the field](#) with the aboriginal weavers [themselves](#). Consequently, the theatre performances displayed the outcome of intercultural communication; the exhibitions showed the other side--the story behind the designs--and the same work, the costumes, encouraged interaction with different audiences. Together the theatrical and expositional displays were intended to address issues concerning the cultural roots on which [my](#) designs were based.

[In this chapter](#) I shall discuss the difficulties faced by Taiwanese aboriginal weavers today in contemporary society and the gaps created by historical forces in what might otherwise have been a natural evolution in aboriginal weaving. The [breaks in](#) tradition explain why many of aboriginal contemporary weavers don't like to, or can't, weave as creatively as [did their](#) ancestors. My research is based [on the](#) premise that costume design for the theatre affords an arena for further exploring alternative possibilities for a continued development and use [for](#) aboriginal woven textiles. Thus, the designs that I [have](#) produced for those two theatrical productions are much more than mere costumes whose sole purpose is to complement performances: they serve also as illustrations of the innovative abilities of [creative weavers of the Taiwanese aboriginal tradition](#).



Figure 1.1-3:  
*Africussion* costumes  
 for the performance at The National  
 Theatre, Taipei, 22 ~24 May 2005.



Figure 1.4:  
 Capulet costume for Romeo and Juliet,  
 Exhibition: "Bunun•Shakespeare•Costume — Chen, Wan-Lee 2006  
 Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines,  
 Taipei, 7 September - 8 October 2006

The two case studies in this research consist of the costumes made for *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet* with traditional Taiwanese aboriginal woven textiles (see Figure 1.1-4). My use of such textiles was grounded in and dependent upon my understanding of the techniques of aboriginal Taiwanese back-strap loom weaving and basket weaving.

Based upon a series of field investigations since 2004 and my personal experience of learning aboriginal weaving skills, this research, **with my analysis of** the aboriginal woven textiles presented in the theatrical productions, aims to construct a “new identity” for an “old weaving tradition”. I hope that my research might help to facilitate and provoke a further rethinking of contemporary aboriginal **Taiwanese** weaving practices; that Taiwanese weavers and **others** might be encouraged **to reconnect to the key** elements of the Taiwanese aboriginal weaving traditions, and to re-

conceptualize the way that design intended for consumer goods are realized in the weaving process. Changes that were made in the production process for the costumes for *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet* went on to have an effect upon the theatrical performances as well as the subsequent exhibitions.

### ***1.3 The Contemporary Contexts of Taiwanese Aboriginal Textiles***

In Taiwan today the so-called “traditional” aboriginal textiles are merely old patterns and motifs being reproduced over and over again on standardized commercial commodities; it is thought that this is the only way that tradition can be respected. I believe that idea has resulted from a misconception found among modern aboriginal weavers that to value tradition is to keep it unaltered -- that by keeping to the old patterns they are preserving tradition. I have rejected that idea and have tried to argue that the traditional ways should be allowed to evolve and to be redefined allowing the individual weaver the freedom to be creative. I find that the biggest challenge facing a weaver today is to gather up the wealth of aboriginal weaving art and adapt it to contemporary society.

Traditionally a weaver primarily used her weaving as a showcase to display her mastery of technical skills, while incidentally revealing her uniqueness and creativity in the way she constructed the overall pattern and combined tribal symbols within it; and revealing further creativity in her individual detailing of those symbols.

Another way in which a weaver could be creative was in her response to the frequent shortage of weaving material. Sometimes weavers would unravel used textiles and weave the threads into a new creation. Another source of weaving material was to be found in the textiles acquired through barter during intercultural encounters.

In the former instance the material being recycled might run short or completely out and the weavers would have to make adjustments that diverged from the intended pattern. In making alterations the weavers would have to be creative. In the latter instance the weavers might use materials, dyed with colours new to them and woven from other than their traditional fibres; they would unravel those materials also and if the supply of thread ran out they would likewise have to improvise adjustments to the pattern. Thus weavers had the opportunity to reveal their innovative abilities both in adjusting the patterning and in using colours and materials that were different from those they were accustomed to use (see Chapter 3.1).

These unique characters of creativity and improvisation in aboriginal woven tradition were disrupted due to the change of their living conditions. The Taiwanese aboriginal weaving tradition underwent a revolution as a result of the need to meet market demand. To earn their living, since the 1970s the weavers have been compelled to change from producing traditional living crafts to weaving standardised products, and so, in that process, some weavers, as a way of preserving traditional patterns and forms, tried to differentiate and distinguish their products from those of the mainstream. Many contemporary aboriginal weavers are encouraged to produce modernized textiles for fashion clothing, and products, such as handbags, and other souvenir-type items using traditional aboriginal forms by replicating old motifs and patterns. The simple reproduction of typical patterns on modern looms or by other modern means has meant that these woven textiles express little of the true voice of modern Taiwan. Most designed products are limited to just a few of the traditional forms, and very few manufactured objects allow for truly new weaving activity or encourage a weaver to use her imagination. I wondered, therefore, how, given those conditions, the art of traditional aboriginal weaving was going to survive in contemporary society other than in museums.

For most aboriginal weavers, tradition is an affirmation of their past, a way to remember the past glories of their ancestors, and their separate tribal identities. Since the 1990s, the weavers **have** dedicated **themselves** to safeguarding the consistency, steadiness and continuation of their traditions. Under the pressure of the contrasting movements of globalization and localization, questions regarding the individual weaver's creativity are now receiving greater attention. Many weavers sense that the harshest **challenge** they now face are not just to preserve their cultural heritage, but to keep up with the diversity of the world. It is hard with only a limited variety of aboriginal hand-woven textiles to spark the interest of the present-day world and satisfy its demands. Therefore, present-day weavers struggle with a **conundrum**: to duplicate tradition or build upon it. For them, the repositioning of their weaving culture and heritage in the diverse societies of today is a pressing matter that urgently needs to be **resolved**.

According to **the OED** "**tradition**" is that "which is thus handed down; a statement, belief, or practice transmitted (esp. orally) from generation to generation." (Murray, et al., 1989b, p.354) However, a lifestyle must evolve along with the changing times, **with** the development of new materials and the advancement of technology. Thus, in different eras, "traditional form or cultures" may have different aesthetics and styles. To have traditional cultures survive under the impact of modernization, **tradition must be allowed to develop, to evolve organically**, and to **change freely** into a form that is acceptable to the present and future. Rigidity will see a tradition marginalized and disrupted, and eventually cause it to disappear **altogether**.

From the viewpoint of anthropology and sociology, Taiwanese aboriginal woven textiles were traditionally associated with the ethnic identities of the weavers, and defined by their functional use: as gifts, as part of a coming-of-age ritual, or as an item for barter. However, the cultural meaning of **hand-**

woven textiles was compromised and their evolution disrupted a number of times by interruptions that have occurred during Taiwanese history.



Figure 1.5:  
Atayal weaver, back-strap loom,  
photographed by Torii Ryuzo in 1896-  
1898.

Taiwanese aboriginals have used horizontal back-strap looms to weave since the early Neolithic age (The Republic of China Yearbook, 2001). The looms might well be the earliest form of loom ever used by human beings, having been widely used: from Central Asia to Southeast Asia; in Egypt; from Sudan to the Tanganyika area in East Africa; and from Mexico to the Andes mountains. As can be seen in Figure 1.5 (Memory Taiwan, n.d.) the back-strap loom is a primitive style of weaving, operated by the movement of the weaver's whole body and requires the coordination of body and mind. It is a hard physical job for women, the only practitioners of the craft and one of the reasons most aboriginal modern weavers have given up this traditional form of weaving and now use modern looms. In fact, so few are still expert in the craft that their numbers do not even add up to twenty, and most are over 65 years of age according to Shu-quei Wang's field research (Wang 2004, p.6).

The tradition of using the back-strap loom for weaving was disrupted for the first time when Taiwan was colonized by Japan from 1895 to 1945. During that period the weaving tradition was severely suppressed as the woven textiles were for the Taiwanese aborigines important ethnic symbols of group identity—which the Japanese colonial rulers wished to wipe out—and, so, tra-



ditional weaving became one of their targets. The Japanese wanted to gain control over human and natural resources and to ensure aboriginal loyalty to the Emperor and colonial rule. Additionally, they thought that engaging in the complex procedure of back-strap loom weaving for making clothes was a waste of time, and **they** forced women to abandon this traditional weaving practice and to devote themselves fully to growing crops, making **up** daily supplies and working on war preparations for the Japanese (Wang, 2004, p.18).

The Japanese attempt to eradicate the tribal identities **evinced in** their weaving traditions was intended to weaken group beliefs. In his book, *Myth and Memories of the Nation*, Anthony **D.** Smith points out that each group builds up its own set of genetic beliefs and transforms them into living objects to identify the group and exclude outsiders, and “these cultural and historical elements also form the basis of competing claims to territory, patrimony and resources.” (Smith, 1999, p.9) During the fifty years of strict Japanese control the aboriginal weaving tradition broke down and a break developed in the teaching and handing down of weaving techniques, and **also in the** understanding of the cultural meanings behind the hand-woven textiles.

Distinct from those of Japanese rule were the disruptions in the weaving tradition arising from the pressures of modernization itself. After 1970, with the growth of modernisation and with limited work opportunities for the aboriginal agricultural population, many Taiwanese aborigines moved into industrial and commercial urban areas. The migration of agricultural workers to the cities changed their material life. Since no land for growing ramie (a nettle like plant of which the fibres are used in weaving) was to be found in urban areas, the tribal way of living **was** forced to change; and as the aborigine workers started to wear modern instead of traditional clothing, weaving activities were gradually abandoned by the aborigines. This was particularly

evident in the young who began to lose touch with their traditional dress, the weaving tradition, its patterns and their meanings, as well as with their legendary stories. **The result was that** as the young became increasingly detached from their **tribal** heritage, so did the demise of aboriginal weaving traditions accelerate.

Fortunately, since the 1990s, in contrast to the general trend towards **globalisation**, the **Taiwanese** aborigines have begun to **realise** the importance and uniqueness of their tribal traditions. That rising awareness has prompted a call for their restoration and preservation. Many aboriginal artists or crafters have started to proclaim their cultural identity in their works, among them Ami wood sculpture artist Rahic Talifo, Atayal weaver Yuma Taru, and Saisiat basket weaver Awai Da-in Sawan. The aesthetics of traditional tribal life, in particular those embedded in the traditional textiles, have been **revived**, and the patterns and symbols of old are used once again as a way of proclaiming tribal identity. With this trend, the conservation and restoration of aboriginal weaving tradition **seem** to have reached a new turning point: more and more aboriginal women have turned back to weaving or want to learn to weave.

In the 1990s, governmental policies, encouraging the sharing of experience by weavers among themselves, and leading to the establishment of a number of aboriginal arts centres and to the organization of various training course, were the main driving force in the renaissance of aboriginal weaving arts. For instance, in 1994 and 1995, the KMT **government** supported workshops on traditional aboriginal weaving **at aboriginal craft centres<sup>1</sup> in Pingtung and Taichung** with the express aim of teaching weaving skills to aboriginal **women** (Wang, 2004, p.5, 22). However, the difficulties of learning to weave on back-strap looms and the influence of governmental policies on **modernisation** led to a new generation of aboriginal weavers being taught

to weave traditional patterns on modern looms.<sup>2</sup> However, because of the structural differences between the traditional back-strap and the modern looms, many traditional motifs and patterns were consequently simplified or otherwise altered and the **authenticity** of delicate and special ancestral motifs disappeared (see Chapter 3.1) .

In the meantime, under the impact of **globalisation**, all kinds of aboriginal motifs, styles and colours used by indigenous people all around the world, were taken as samples of “traditional motifs” in the training courses organised by the aboriginal craft centres in Pintong and Taichung. Thus, the so-called aboriginal weaving tradition nowadays is really a new “**modernised**” tradition, a mixture of all kinds of tribal motifs, geometrical patterns and traditions from all over the world. The world-wide sourcing of motifs, etc., has disregarded the fact that the products of the traditional back-strap and the modern looms respectively actually represent different weaving cultures **as** each of the two loom types were created under different circumstances at different times in Taiwanese civilization. Because of current **government** policies, the aboriginal weaving culture has undergone fundamental changes: different cultures are being merged into one, **further** accelerating the disappearance of the true Taiwanese aboriginal weaving tradition.

The changes in lifestyle and production processes have transformed the weaving activities from the making of textiles for daily use into a new market-oriented aboriginal handicraft art. Many discussants believe that the switch from the traditional back-strap looms to modern looms has resulted in the loss of a tradition (**Wang, 2004, p.4, 22**). However, I think **changes** in weaving devices **are** inevitable in modern society. Rather than **blame** the switch of one weaving loom to another, we should look at the way weavers pass down the spirit and content of their weaving culture in order to identify

another cause behind the disruption of tradition.

#### 1.4 *Nostalgia, Memories and a New Tradition*

Modern Taiwanese aboriginal weaving arts have been influenced by the weavers' pursuit of their tribal identity and by high market values. Besides those two factors, the weavers' sense of nostalgia and hopes of resuming their past tribal life have also affected the development of aboriginal weaving arts. In 2008, a publication, *Reappearance of Atayal: Catalogue of the Reproductions of Pan-Atayal Traditional Costumes*, was released by the National Museum of Prehistory in Taitung, with a collection of photos of traditional Atayal textiles reproduced and woven [on modern looms for the National Museum of Prehistory by the members of](#) the Yeh-Ton weaving workshop, headed by aboriginal weaver Yuma Taru. The project was recognized as a great success [in contributing to the](#) restoring and promoting [of](#) traditional weaving culture, and played a significant role in [the](#) passing on [of](#) the Atayal tribe's valuable weaving tradition.

However, while I was reading the book, a series of vintage-look pictures immediately caught my eyes. Special photographic techniques that had been used to create a nostalgic atmosphere in the pictures; plus the vintage look of the models, dressed in reproduction Atayal textiles and costumes, presented [an image of Utopia, and invited](#) the readers to lose track of time and go back into the good old days of ancient tribal life. The visual effect satisfied the nostalgia of the aboriginal weavers as well as that of mainstream Taiwanese society; and the old textiles reproduced by modern weavers sparked memories, or imaginary memories, of the wonderful past. Therefore, [when](#) published, the book attracted the attention and accolades of many readers. But, although amazed by the visual effect, I started to [reflect](#) further and wondered why modern aboriginal weavers [wished](#), or [felt](#) obliged, to base their weaving

cultures or activities upon their memories of the past and merely attempt to reproduce it.



Figure 1.6:  
Image collected in *Reappearance of Atayal: Catalogue of the Reproductions of Pan-Atayal Traditional Costumes*.

As can be seen from figure 1.6, images collected in *Reappearance of Atayal: Catalogue of the Reproductions of Pan-Atayal Traditional Costumes* are very different from and a contrast to the old photos which genuinely show the true life of the aborigines and are to be found in many publications. The latter shows the reality of the aborigines' material life before modernisation, while the former uses photographic techniques to encourage a sense of "nostalgia" for an imaginary ancient tribal life.

The images in *Reappearance of Atayal* then are not a genuine historical reflection, but a creation of an imaginary Utopia to satisfy the nostalgic feelings—nostalgia—of the mainstream. Nostalgia is "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. It is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy". (Boym 2001, p.xiii) Nostalgia, then, is a psychological emotion in reaction to something that is disappearing or is lost; a longing for a past golden age that maybe never was. It can easily trigger "idealised" memories, spurring an "imaginary recognition" of tradition. However, the attendant "idealised beauty" may reversely inject passiveness into the mind, stopping the weavers from improving their work.

Nostalgia is enamoured of the distance between the referrer and the referent, not of the referent itself – it, the distance, becomes an end in itself. Therefore, as I dug further into the in-depth meaning of memories and nostalgia, I came to believe that nostalgia is a refusal to take part in and face the reality of present [day](#). I think nostalgic remembering is a regression for traditional weaving and [that it is another](#) of the reasons most modern weavers do not want to make changes to their traditional patterns and motifs.

In contemporary cultural discourse, nostalgia is an [anti-modernisation force](#). As [a](#) society encounters a drastic change, a yearning for recreating the past golden age may occur. “Drastic changes often create uncertainties and lead to the social stagnation. Under these circumstances, people tend to miss the good old days that represent stability, strength and steadfastness.” (Lee, 2006): people who have endured the great pressures of a fast-changing society start to seek stability by [recalling past](#) glories. By recalling the memories aroused by the old images, they reveal their longing for a return to the [imagined](#) simplicity and benevolence of the old society. In today’s era of [globalisation](#), a return has become the collective wish of those aborigines who overly beautify their memories of bygone days and hope to [carry on their](#) tradition by a return to the old. This “restoration” way of thinking has made the weavers overlook the meaning of “tradition” and insist on and even expand [upon](#) their misconception.

Moreover, the nostalgia complex has been intensified under the call for re-forging tribal identity. Tribal identity is formed by a heavy reliance upon a single and collective belief; the old memories shared by tribal men can help build recognition of their tribal identity. That identity shut within an imaginary boundary isolates itself from the intrusive influence of other elements. The nostalgia complex has labelled the textiles as constituting a sacred cultural heritage, and, hence, most of today’s aboriginal weavers are deterred

from changing and altering the traditional. That has in turn made the aboriginal textiles trivial and merely decorative, and further **marginalised** them. **The emotional** nostalgia leaves them disconnected from contemporary society. The weavers emphasize memories of the beautiful past as a contrast with the ugly present, drawing a clear line in-between the past and present which has pushed tradition and modernity **even** farther part.

In reality, the good old days are now too far away to ever return, but the weavers, yearning for the unattainable, refuse to adapt to the realities of contemporary world. This situation has **left the weavers stranded** – nostalgia neither permits them to recreate the past, nor links them to the present. The weavers are outsiders, neither in the past nor in the present, blocking the evolution of aboriginal weaving art. In addition, the nostalgia complex has grouped all the woven works from different tribes into one single category, by which they are referred to only as “traditional aboriginal textiles”. Individual weavers’ characteristics and styles are often unidentified and ignored, discouraging modern weavers from creating works that accord with their own individual aesthetics.

Analysing further the psychological state of nostalgia, **sociologist** Fred Davis suggests three ascending orders of nostalgia: simple, reflexive, and interpreted nostalgia. *Simple nostalgia* is that subjective, unexamined state that tells us things were better, healthier, happier, more **civilised**, and more exciting at some point in the past than they are now. However, we know clearly that there’s no return to the old days. *Reflexive nostalgia* goes a step deeper than **sentimentalising** the past. We first analyze past experiences to review the accuracy and appropriateness of the past memories, and then link the present to the past. Such truthful questioning enriches simple nostalgia, making it “a more complex human activity” from which **“we can better comprehend ourselves and our past.”** *Interpreted nostalgia* moves beyond

escapism and historical accuracy to interpret how nostalgia is significant to us in the present (Davis, 1979, p.21-24).

Svetlana Boym also defines nostalgia in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*. She points out the two functions of nostalgia – the “restorative” and “reflective” – which were two different aspects of memory within culture. Boym describes **restorative** nostalgia thus: “Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on nostos and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance” (Boym, 1994, p.283-91; Boym, 2001, p.xii-xix, 41-55).

If nostalgia in its regressive or restorative sense is a romance with the past, the other aspect, termed reflective here, is a romance one has with one’s imagination and the possibilities it offers. The **restorative** nostalgia appears to be a conspiracy that would **reconstruct** the past by making it appear clean and untainted by time, whilst the **reflective** nostalgia has aspects of memory that play into reinventing cultural depictions of familiar ideas and stereotypes created from traditions. Reflective nostalgia “is more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude” (Boym, 2001, p.49). It is more about the memories and the experience of memories than it is about a return to a place of origin or truth. Untold, rather than told, memories are missed the most.

Following the above discussion, **it becomes** obvious that “reflective nostalgia” is the way for the aboriginal weavers to enrich their tradition. Within the ground of reflective nostalgia, an individual’s personal experiences, his/her views, interpretations, and judgments on the surroundings are redefined. Moreover, according to Boym’s theory, in contrast to restorative nostalgia, reflective nostalgia emphasizes more the gap between identity and resemblance. The two characteristics of reflective nostalgia are first: “it is



focused on individual stories that savour details and signs.” Second, reflective nostalgia “cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space” (Boym, 2001, p.49). It is significant that the de-familiarization and sense of distance drives us to tell our story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future (Boym, 2001, p.50). On the other hand, if we abstractly work on a sentiment like restorative nostalgia, we can easily picture it as an expression and an implementation of **nationalism that omits** the creative playful force of the much more personal, immediate, **and** reflective experience that is so important a prerequisite if nostalgia is to be beneficent.

Given the nostalgic sentiment and the symbolic meaning of tribal identity, the standard view of today’s aboriginal weavers is that the essence of preserving and inheriting **weaving** traditions lies in the reproduction of traditional patterns. That view explains their sole focus on skills and dexterity and their neglect of weaving as an artistic activity that is embedded in everyday life, full of a spontaneous creativity that contains the **essential** and core values of their traditional weaving tradition. “Creativity is on the side not only of innovation against convention, but also of the exceptional individual against the collectivity, of the present moment against the weight of the past, and of mind or intelligence against inert matter” (Ingold & Hallam, 2007, p.3). Therefore, I think **therefore that** even in contemporary society, the aesthetics of aboriginal weaving art should be nurtured by the weaver’s pursuit of “spontaneous creativity”, as was the weaving of their ancestors, so that a new perspective may be added to traditional practices, and so that woven products stay coherent with contemporary society.

The crucial point toward reconstructing the wealth of aboriginal weaving traditions lies in recreating and rediscovering the creative integrity of the aboriginal **weaving** tradition and reintegrating it into contemporary society. Continuity of the tradition requires more than protection and preservation.

Creative integrity in producing aboriginal woven textiles can be achieved if the weavers become innovative in their **interaction with and** their integration **into** contemporary life. The process of creativity and improvisation, in which the weavers, designers, and any others involved should jointly take part, would generate a variation of forms and facilitate the evolution of **the traditional**. While such a phenomenon leads to an ever-incomplete creative progress, it also provides the power to drive the continuation of traditions.

**In the past, as stated above, aboriginal woven textiles** symbolized tribal identity. Without alteration in the arrangement and style of traditional patterns, many old textiles, especially those with high artistic values, have been exhibited; **they reveal that it is** the weavers' own personal design that makes them stand out from all the others. These textiles **have** thus demonstrated something of **the** weaver's skills and of her accumulated aesthetic experiences. Therefore, the "differences" and "variations" shown even in the slightest variant details on the textiles are vital to the tradition for their revelation of the individuality of the weaver. But nowadays, by creating **commercialised** and standardised textiles, the weavers try to unify, **to conform to** format, and **merely** duplicate the traditional patterns, hoping to **achieve** two ends: to highlight the tribal identity and to make profits by doing so. These weavers ignore the element of creativity that is the key to the development and evolution of weaving tradition and refuse to evolve and refine the tradition.

Moreover, **the** creative weaving activities **of the practitioners** provide a precious methodology **that can help** us to understand how to accumulate a depth of weaving experience and generate creative energies for creating new forms. This topic will be explored more fully in Chapter 2.1. My research revealed that the individual character of creativity is essential to the art of weaving and that artistic woven textiles would continue the weaving tradition and so upgrade the modern consumer-oriented woven products. Hence, with regard

to the prospective development in Taiwanese aboriginal weaving, this study, based on my own practice-led research and experience in theatre design and my work in conjunction with certain aboriginal weavers, is intended to show that innovative and creative attempts are being made by aboriginal weavers to keep their art and craft alive and moving forward.

As a designer, I believe that **the old** aboriginal woven textiles possess a meaning and value far surpassing their function as daily necessities or as symbols of tribal identity. Some traditional woven works **in museums** reveal a quality of “creativity” that has long been forgotten or not yet rediscovered by contemporary weavers. While considering the aboriginal modern textiles lack of a dynamic that would suggest a desire for improvement and the creation of new forms, I found that at first sight the traditional back-strap woven textile collections in museums looked similar **but, upon** closer inspection, I could see clearly that all of the textiles were different and that every piece of work was exquisitely unique. These pieces **convey** the aesthetic experience of the weavers, showing me that some weavers were playing the role of both weaver and designer simultaneously and creating new patterns. I noticed that the outstanding works woven by traditional master weavers were often designed and manufactured to a **very** high quality. The traditional woven textiles not only demonstrated an excellence of craftsmanship but also performed a narrative function **erving** as a medium for the weavers **to express** their state of mind and feelings.

Through this practice-led research I **hoped** to better understand the meaning of Taiwanese aboriginal weaving traditions, their associated techniques and determine how they might be incorporated **into** theatre costume design. In earlier times, the practice of weaving allowed the weaver the freedom to create and to express **her** feelings and individuality and demonstrate skill **that was often** of a **very** high standard. I should like to argue that, likewise, today

the aboriginal weaving arts should be no longer unified but unconfined and liberalized so that the modern weavers feel free to create following the aesthetics they have developed from their own experience or learned from the modern world; and for the sake of renewing the traditional I would plea that their works may be permitted in any form and accepted in any form. “By its ubiquitous nature textiles had touched the lives of millions of individuals, shaping their experience, their hearts and their minds” (Gale & Kaur, 2002, p.7).

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## Endnote

- 1 There are three educational centres – Taiwan Indigenous Culture Park in Pintong, Aboriginal Taiwanese Learning Centre and National Taiwan Craft Research Institute in Taichung. These centres teach weaving and other professional skills to the Taiwanese aboriginal people.
- 2 For a modern weaver, to operate a traditional back-strap loom is hard to learn because it requires the full coordination of body and mind. Therefore, almost all of the aboriginal weavers in Taiwan use western-style modern looms to weave. The importation of western-style modern looms indeed positively and greatly contributed to the development of aboriginal weaving arts in Taiwan. However, this also detached the weavers from learning old weaving skills. Currently, there is a fierce debate about how this affects the development of aboriginal weaving arts.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Literature Review

Since the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945), most of the research studies on aboriginal Taiwanese hand-woven textiles have been conducted from the perspectives of anthropology, ethnology, folklore and sociology. These researches mainly involved the photographic documentation of the aborigines' apparel and textiles, such as those by Torii Ryuzo in 1998, Kanori Ino in 1999, Kokichi Segawa in 2000, and Shizhong Xie in 2002. Among the few researchers who focused on textile details were Miyagawa Jiro in 1930 and Okamura Kichiemon in 1968. Printed bibliographies of collections in institutions include those released by Kichiemon Okamura in 1968, Tenry University in 1993, the National Museum of History in 2000, Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines in 1999 and the National Museum of Prehistory, Taitung in 2002. Essays and books written by Ye-rong Gao in 1997, Sha-li Li in 1998, Max Chiwai Liu in 1980 and Li-cheng Ye in 2001 also record the style and form of the costumes of different Taiwanese tribes.

Other documentation describing details of the aboriginal weaving materials, tools and techniques was published by Man-li Ling in 1960, Chi-lu Chen in 1968, Pin-hsiung Liu and Zhi-ping Lai in 1988, Temi Nawi in 2000, Ten-song Li, Jen-kao Li and Li-her Weng in 2003, Yuma Taru in 1999. There is a report investigating the condition, etc., of contemporary traditional woven textiles and the weavers themselves written by Shu-quei Wang in 2004. Shao-ying Jiang published *Aesthetics of Tribal Crafts* in 2000 and 2002. There are also essays and books to be found that document the aboriginal traditional arts as collective memories and as the means by which Taiwanese aborigines may seek out their tribal identity; those written by Ta-ch'uan Sun in 1996, Shao-ying Jiang in 1999, Sung-shan Wang in 1999 and Doyu Yulan in 2004 are ex-

amples. Moreover, certain books trace the development of aboriginal weaving arts and of the textile industry – those released by Fu-yu Chien in 1998, Chao-hua Ho, 1999, Jian-cheng Lin, 2002, and Mei-Fen Lu 2007; as did reports in Taiwan Panorama magazine (formerly Sinorama magazine) in 1991, 1995, 1997 and the traditional Atayal textiles reproduction project of *the Reproductions of Pan-Atayal Traditional Costumes* by the National Museum of Prehistory and Yuma Taru in 2008.

Carried out from the viewpoints of anthropology, ethnology, folklore and sociology, the past research on aboriginal weaving culture was mainly focused on the function and **connotations of woven** works in religious rituals and other social events, rather than on the exploration of the aesthetics of the aboriginal weaving culture from the perspective of art. The above researchers, who regarded the weavers as only one element of the tradition, also concentrated their studies on the tribe as a whole, without singling out the aesthetics and weaving experiences of the individual weavers **that were revealed** in their work, or indicating how they affected **a weaver's work**.

In those studies, **the** aboriginal weavers have been **“objectified”**, and seldom was there conducted an in-depth investigation of **the individual weavers**. As a result, the general public had only a vague impression of the aboriginal weavers who, often **treated** as anonymous members of the group, became passive receptors to be dominated by market demand, and used merely as a medium for passing on collective knowledge and experiences. Lacking any discussion of **the** individual weavers, the studies on aboriginal weaving art have been built upon an “imagined subject”–with no substantial **details or particulars** of their aesthetics supplied. I ask, therefore, “What are the crucial influences on a present-day aboriginal weaver’s textile development? How can we regain the authenticity of **the** aboriginal **weaving** tradition?” Those are the questions this research will endeavour to answer.

## 2.2 Methodology

The aforementioned (see 2.1) essays and books did contribute to the overall accumulation of academic knowledge of aboriginal weaving culture and to the drafting of governmental policies; however, given their literary nature, these academic papers couldn't arouse the interest of the weavers enough for many of them to read the research results; nor could the weavers that were supposed to be leaders in the weaving art benefit directly from these researches. Therefore, recognizing the distance between the results of academic researches and those still actually involved in traditional weaving, I adopted in my research practice a methodology that included the weavers themselves: the weavers joined me in designing the costumes (for *Africcusion* and *Romeo and Juliet*) which provide the examples used in this practice-led study. After the run of performances, the costumes were displayed in exhibitions. Through direct participation in the designing process, even if the weavers aren't able to read my research paper, they were still able to appreciate their own contribution to the works and learn first-hand from the results by watching the performances and viewing the exhibitions. This kind of interactive research methodology allowed the weavers to observe one another and compare work, and further let them reflect upon ways to improve their weaving skills. This style of research is expected to add substantial meaning to the development of aboriginal weaving arts and directly benefit the weavers themselves.

In my research, the theatre stage serves to stimulate close interactions between the aboriginal weaving culture and modern theatre arts, as traditional aboriginal woven works are incorporated into the costume design. My research practice, as stated above, is composed of three working processes: a 20-month field investigation among various tribes, the subsequent costume design and production process for the two productions

(*Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet*), and the following three exhibitions of the costume designs. Rather than being a theory-led research or just being a note-taking of the working process of creating the theatrical costume design, my research methodology is grounded in the continuously interactive encounters between my design practice and my fieldwork. Each of those two elements was part of a broader reciprocal relationship and an on-going process.

"Reflection" was the all important element in the functioning of this method and it helped me in deciding upon the fundamental aesthetics of my designs. The words "interactive encounter" refer to the circular relationship between the weavers, designers, and the production team of each production and exhibition. For instance, during the production process I, as designer, played the role of subject to reflect upon, or cite from, a weaver's experiences; the weavers also played a part in producing the design; and the weavers could also be given positive feedback. Under the concept of "reflection" and the circular relationship between the subject and object, i.e., between me and the weavers, I merged the information collected during the fieldwork with my prior and continuing learning and experiences to formulate the aesthetics of my design, whilst the weavers learnt from my experience by observing the way I created my works, as in turn I learn from them as they worked and created their textiles. All of us together re-examined the meaning behind the aboriginal weaving culture and tried to find ways to reconcile traditional woven textiles with contemporary aesthetics.

Donald Alan Schön, a scholar of the theory and practice of reflective professional learning, believes that "reflection" is a flexible, adaptable, feasible, and innovative method that can provide solutions to problems. The theory of "reflection in and on his practice" is an applicable technique for a designer and other professional workers to apply to their working process. In particular, by means of "practice reflection," designers can integrate tacit knowledge,



information and other elements **into** their work. Schön has said that the practitioner, being stimulated through visual and other sensible ways, can go on to reflect on a feeling about a situation that has led him to adopt a particular course of action. Design becomes a process in which reflection and actions are mutually **interactive**:

*"When a practitioner reflects in and on his practice, the possible objects of his reflection are as varied as the kinds of phenomena before him and the symptoms of knowing-in-practice which he brings to them. He may reflect on the tacit norms and appreciations that underlie a judgement, or on the strategies and theories implicit in a pattern of behaviour. He may reflect on a feeling for a situation which has led him to adopt a particular course of action, on the way in which he has framed the problem he is trying to solve, or on the role he has constructed for himself within a larger institutional context" (Schön, 1983, p.62).*

"Design" is a complicated activity that requires the convergence of wisdom and intelligence. It is also a series of mind-processing events required to solve the problems frequently appearing **during the working** process. "Design" is the outcome of the subjective views of the designer as he **or** she struggles to solve challenges and integrate intangible, tangible, different, conflicting and illogical elements all together. The theory of "reflection" has given me a signpost that **heads** me towards a way of coordinating all of the problems I encounter. For instance, during the period of **my fieldwork and my learning weaving**, I experienced different kinds of challenges and hardships of the kind that **any** weaver might encounter, and learned that weaving is not merely a technique, but a channel for reflecting on inner emotions and life-long experiences. This concept has made me go beyond the state of "awareness" and combine my experiences with my previous knowledge as I create a new design. Under **this** process of reflection, the visual stimulation transforms itself into a **concept** for an innovation. For example, the process of communicating with the traditional weavers in their tribes and the experience of learning to weave not only enabled me to understand the integrity of

weaving traditions, but also provided me with important design elements which I used to shape the “imperfection aesthetics” of design works later on. I shall elaborate on that point in Chapter 3.2.

Later on, the costumes of the two theatrical productions, as well as other relevant aboriginal woven works, were put on display in the three exhibitions. Theatrical productions are not individual creations but the result of the collective wisdom and efforts of all those taking part in their production. After working on the costumes with the team members for some while, I was able to work into my costumes the wisdom, knowledge, and new techniques that I learnt from one or other of the various team members. In exhibition my costumes had a narrative function that told the viewers about the value and spirit of our teamwork. The narrative function of the exhibitions coincided with that of the aboriginal woven works, which also tell of the personal characteristics and of the fine contributions of their respective weavers. Details of the exhibitions will be given in Chapter 5.

### *2.3 Fieldworks, Designs and Exhibitions Planning*

My practice-led research is divided into five stages that cover the fieldwork, theatre costume design, and exhibitions. For details, please see Appendix 1: ‘The working schedule for design production and fieldwork.’ A brief introduction to the research work at different stages (including planning the studied targets, selecting samples, collecting information, handling and analyzing collected data) is as follows.

#### *2.3.1 First Stage of Fieldwork*

##### **a) Research targets**

The first stage of fieldwork was mainly to learn traditional weaving and other

weaving skills which included basket-weaving, and to collect the weavers' stories. Traditionally, weaving, as a living craft, was part of the general activities of tribal life. In addition to secondary sources, such as texts, images and woven objects, *it seemed to me that* the best approach to understanding the aboriginal *weaving* traditions *would be* to work with the old, traditional weavers and learn back-strap loom weaving from them at first hand. This stage of the fieldwork—learning to weave and understanding the creative experience of weaving—was critical to my design process *in so far* as it gave me a working knowledge of the skills required to create the designs, and knowledge of the more subtle, implicit elements of the tradition of weaving. Therefore, I adopted an anthropological approach: to observe, *learn from*, and discuss *details* with the weavers. After the two stages of fieldwork, I had established *long term* cooperative relations and friendship with four aboriginal weavers and *learnt* their stories. The experience of working with them further supports my argument in this research.

## **b) Sample selection**

The primary aim of this research is to explore and prove that innovation and creativity are integral parts of the aboriginal weaving tradition. To that end, studied samples should include works that vividly reveal the personal characteristics of *the* innovative aboriginal weavers from whom I could learn and collect relevant information. However, it was not an easy task to locate and select the studied samples. *Given that there are fewer than 20 expert back-strap weavers still practicing, and since they are unwilling to teach students their skills, traditional back-strap weaving seems likely to soon disappear from Taiwan as the weavers, mostly already over 65, die off. (Wang, 2004, p.6)*

There were various limitations that caused uncertainty and risks in my field research, but I managed to overcome them. The two main obstacles I

expected to encounter in the fieldwork were these: first, were the problems caused by the time-consuming nature of the fieldwork that were generated by the time spent in travelling, and the time spent in learning itself. To overcome the problem of travelling long distances, I decided to visit those target weavers who were in the same area at each stage of the fieldwork, instead of approaching individuals separately; and, as it takes years of practice to master hand weaving skills, my learning from had necessarily to be limited to gaining an understanding of how to set up primary operating looms and how to plain weave without really rather than actually mastering the skills themselves.

Second to the aforementioned time limitations, was that it would have been impossible for me, an outsider, to approach the traditional weavers directly. So I had to find a mediator who would facilitate the search for, and make contact with suitable creative traditional weavers. I approached several governmental and private institutions in charge of aboriginal affairs, including the National Museum of History and the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines, as well as some experts directly. The experts recommended that I contact the Atayal weaver, Yuma Taru from the Siang-bi tribe, which belongs to the North Potential Atayal tribal group<sup>1</sup> located in the Miaoli county region. As a mediator, she would be able to link me up with other traditional weavers. As one of the most influential weavers among the middle-aged generation of the aboriginal tribes, Yuma Taru, was the first target weaver in my field research. With her professional background, abundant tribal connections, her open attitude and her recognition of the aims and ideals of my research, she was a great help to me. She not only helped and took part in the costume designing for the two productions, but also gave me her life story as a reference for the discussion in this paper of the correlation between tribal identity and the weaving culture. More details will be given in Chapter 4.

The two target traditional weavers introduced to me by Yuma were Lawyi Kayi from the Da-an tribe of the Atayal, and Awai Da-in Sawan from the Pon-Lai tribe of Saisiat. Kayi **was** a 70-year-old (**in 2005**), creative traditional back-strap loom weaver. While spending time with her, I **learnt** much more than weaving skills. Her life story revealed to me the creative nature of the aboriginal weaving traditions, which is the crucial experience and knowledge I have derived from **my** fieldwork. Sawan, the third target weaver, is a nationally renowned 60-year-old aboriginal bamboo/rattan weaver. The experience of learning basket weaving with Sawan inspired me to make a break with my design habits and mind-set (see Chapter 3.3); her life experience also provided testimony in my research's discussions on "cultural differences" and on how "creativity" plays a part in traditional weaving (see Chapter 5.1). She also took part in the production of *Romeo and Juliet*, by designing and producing millineries (see Chapter 4.4).

### **c) Information collection**

The decisions regarding the interviews and the processes behind them were a considered methodological choice. Communications with the traditional weavers were based on personal conversations rather than formal interviews. That was necessary for two important reasons. First, most elderly weavers do not have any experience of discussing their own creative processes with others. They lack the professional vocabulary of design and creativity, and cannot recount their experiences systematically or logically. Formal interviews **then** might have caused stress and uncomfortable feelings, which would **have hindered** communication and prevented them from giving **me** information I sought.

**Secondly**, **for** traditional aboriginal weavers, weaving belongs to the private sphere. Most of them are not **willing**, **therefore**, to share their personal

experiences with strangers, and in part also have fears of giving away the secrets of their techniques to outsiders. Quite frequently, most of the weavers, especially the skilful senior weavers, neither show their skills in public nor discuss weaving details at all. Once a stranger gets close to the weaving machine, they will likely immediately stop what they were doing. However, with my own knowledge of weaving skills, I was able to establish a level of familiarity and trust with the various weavers. After I had built a rapport with them, the weavers began to share their stories more naturally, to explain their works through personal conversations, and give me a better understanding of the actual meaning of their weaving culture. At the same time, I interviewed a wide range of their family members and friends in order to gain different perspectives on the weavers' life stories. In the case of the weavers who only spoke the native tongue, I had to allow more time for communication while sometimes relying on members of their families to interpret.

Most of aboriginal weavers were willing to share their weaving experience and life stories with me after I had established a level of familiarity with them; however, there were a few that were extremely resistant to meeting and communicating with outsiders and so with me. I had, therefore, to find some expedient – a seducement or bribe -- that would allow me to overcome their resistance to communicating with me as an outsider and to establish a relationship with them so that I might collect the information that I needed. For example, Lawyi Kay's sister-in-law, Fong-Mei Jeng (see Chapter 3.1) from the Da-an tribe of the Atayal, was very unfriendly and refused to meet me, going as far as shutting her door on me when I first approached her for an interview. However, I heard that she was fond of wine. So I brought two bottles and went to see her again; in that way the difficulty was resolved: the ice between us was broken.

#### d) Information about recording and analysis

The work of visual documentation played an important role in recording evidence and facilitating my research and provided it with an added dimension. I relied mainly on visual tools, such as photographing, videotaping and tape-recording to capture the research process and its details (See Appendix 4: *Images of Kakmono* and Appendix 5: Video of *The Poetics of Lines*). Visual images enabled me to preserve the entire research process and provided me with important materials and evidence for analyses and designs in the later stages of preparing costumes. Eventually, my audio-visual recordings were edited into a documentary film and the photos transformed into an installation artwork—the film and photos being displayed in the exhibitions to demonstrate the process of realizing the designed works.

#### 2.3.2 Design Project I

Costume design is the second working process of this research. The design process is not intended merely to analyse the collected information (weaving techniques and weavers' stories), but also to present the concrete result of the studies. The period of costume designing and production also served as the means of giving me an opportunity to engage with the weavers and further understand their ideals and the challenges they faced. The first costume designs were produced as part of my research in May 2004 for the percussion concert *Africussion*, performed by the Ju Percussion Group at the National Theatre in Taipei and in two other major cities, Taichung and Kaohsiung. The selection of *Africussion* as the first case to be studied in this research was made because of the perfect coincidence between the theme of the percussion concert – “innovate the tradition” -- and the primary aim of this research. So I, the designer, decided to give an innovative look to the traditional woven works by turning them into costumes for the musicians on stage.

The textiles for *Africussion* costumes were produced in Yuma's Yeh-Ton

**Workshop** and woven on modern looms. I collaborated with Yuma and her weavers on the designs for various reasons: Yuma is currently considered to be one of the most important aboriginal weaving experts in Taiwan. Being an experienced weaver in both back-strap loom weaving and modern loom weaving,<sup>2</sup> she can offer assistance to researchers in their exploration of both tradition and innovation. At the same time, her Yeh-Ton **Workshop** is known for researching and reproducing high-quality traditional Atayal textiles on modern looms.<sup>3</sup> It can offer technical support and be a strong backup for **innovative** design works.

**Furthermore**, Yuma's education and social **experience** allow her to be more objective in her observations on the challenges faced by aboriginal weavers in modern society, and prompt her to seek solutions. She understood what my research meant to aboriginal weaving and **realised** that my experimental project was not a commercial venture; as a result, she showed great patience in working with me. These qualities of Yeh-Ton were **crucial in** the production of the costume textiles for *Africussion* and later for *Romeo and Juliet*. Her long-term involvement in this field has earned high regard for her **workshop** from both the **Taiwanese** tribes and mainstream society. I decided, therefore, to establish a long-term collaborative relationship with Yuma and believed that *Africussion* was an ideal production with which to start.

For designers, to design **is** subject to limitations that **are** an inherent aspect of **it**. **Most of designers** can make the best of those limitations **to increase** momentum of innovation. I **regarded** most of the practice limitations – the technical and material problems, the time-consuming nature of productions, budget limitations and so forth – **as to be expected in this practice-led design research**. As a matter of fact, I find that the challenges **imposed by** limitations often play an important role in inspiring creative ideas. My design project for *Africussion* started from scratch, and that made it **more different from and**



even more complicated than my previous production experiences. I started by collecting and processing the fibres and string materials, weaving the materials into clothes, then tailoring the clothes and sewing them together to create the finished costumes. This time-consuming process required much detailed and accurate arrangements of working schedules, if I were to achieve a satisfactory result on time. However, I insisted on following an experimental production process, by which I was aiming to simulate the self-sufficient and self-reliant aboriginal weaving process of traditional societies..

### 2.3.3 Design project II and Second Stage of Fieldwork

The second costume design practice was the Shakespearean drama, *Romeo and Juliet*. It was mounted by the School of the Theatre Arts of the Taipei National University of the Arts, in collaboration with the Metropolitan Hall and sponsored by the Ministry of Education, as their annual production for 2005. The reason I selected this production to be my second design project is that the conflicts and confrontations between the different *Romeo and Juliet* families remind me of the situations and difficulties that aboriginal modern weavers were undergoing. I was inspired to connect the various totems and patterns of different tribes, that respectively symbolize their tribal identities, and use them to represent the complexities of group identity in the play.

I had already decided to do *Romeo and Juliet* scheduled for performance 14 months later, when I received the invitation from *Africussion*. Thus, there was plenty of time for me to collect the costume materials and arrange the manpower for this production. The second stage of fieldwork was undertaken to enrich the design and production experiences and improve the techniques that had been acquired so far, to make concrete the design aesthetics I had developed and to support the design concept for the *Romeo and Juliet* production. I looked also into the application of aboriginal weaving

techniques and into using multiple textile materials made from various other sources, such as bark-cloth making, felt-making, off-loom weaving, and [made connections with more modern aboriginal](#) weavers.

In the first period of fieldwork and during the first production, I was associating mainly with outstanding professional aboriginal weavers. However, I was aware that [other, amateur](#) modern weavers coming from various educational backgrounds and living conditions, might view weaving traditions from different perspectives. Therefore, in the second period of my fieldwork, I felt the need to broaden my understanding of those amateur aboriginal weavers coming [with](#) their different [training backgrounds, as the](#) differences would have undoubtedly influenced them each in her own way, and would [have helped produce the](#) diverse range of contemporary Taiwanese aboriginal weaving styles.

Starting in October 2005, I took part in the '[Explore the Natural Fibres](#)' workshop, organized by the National Museum of Prehistory in Taitung. The four-month workshop provided me with knowledge of the techniques and skills of traditional bark-cloth making and rattan weaving, and gave me the opportunity to [make some](#) connections with the aboriginal weavers of that region, among them the Bunun weaver, Vika Dansikian, a semi-professional weaver from the Kanding Tribe, whom I invited to weave the Capulet families' costumes for *Romeo and Juliet*. The reason I included her in [my](#) research practice is that I wanted to build up a different collaborative experience other than that with the Yeh-Ton [Workshop](#), and to compare their potential for, and attitudes towards, creating new traditional textiles. (See Chapter 4.4)

In addition to increasing my working experience with weavers from different tribes and backgrounds, I also wished to extend my inclusion of aboriginal woven textiles by using various and different materials to reflect the dramatic

changes that inter-cultural encounters have wrought in aboriginal weaving culture throughout Taiwanese history. (See Chapter 3.1) Therefore, in the summer of 2005 I arranged a trip to join a felting workshop in Keswick, U.K., to collect wool fibres and learn felt making techniques. Although felt making isn't a tradition in Taiwan, it is a traditional skill in Scotland and many other areas in the world, and I believed that a combination of **the two traditional yet distinctly different** textiles--woollen felt and Taiwanese cloth--would not only **enable me to** create new forms out of **the** two different traditions but **would also exemplify** a cross-cultural dialogue between tradition and modernity.

#### 2.3.4 Exhibition Planning

In addition to **appearing** as clothing for the actors on stage during the theatrical performances, the costumes were displayed in exhibitions organised to **show** the design results in a different context and to collect feedback from the public through talks and conversations **between the** weavers, curators and audience. **Although the animation given to a costume when it is worn in the stage performance is lacking when the costume is draped on a lifeless mannequin in an exhibition, the details of design and texture of the materials can be seen clearly and duly appreciated. Such detailing may be lost on stage despite contributing, even if only subliminally, to the overall effect.**

The exhibitions aimed to display the costumes as artworks to be looked at from close quarters so **that the viewer could examine the** details of the woven textures **from up close**. The exhibitions were composed of five display units, **made up of** theatrical costumes **assembled from** *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet*, some video **clips** recorded during the production process, and the woven materials **woven** by different aboriginal tribes.

After the stage performance of *Africussion* in 2005, I was invited by National Theatre in Taipei to take part in a group exhibition curated by the National Theatre. The invitation to exhibit the costumes from *Africussion* proved that my attempt to incorporate aboriginal woven textiles into theatre art was a success. A second exhibition was held in 2006, when the costumes of *Romeo and Juliet* formed a part of the group exhibition “Explore the Natural Fibres—Fibre Art Exhibition” curated by the National Prehistory Museum. After the play’s performances were concluded, some of the best of the main characters’ costumes, millineries, and masks were chosen to be show-cased in that exhibition as a demonstration of the creative application of aboriginal woven textiles. To allow aboriginal weavers living in remote areas to have an opportunity to appreciate the works, following the appearance in the museum’s gallery; the exhibition went on tour to Taitung and Pingtung counties, the homes of two aboriginal tribes; that provided an excellent opportunity for the costumes to be seen by the aborigines and local weavers in the suburban areas. I hope the exhibitions will inspire aborigines to expand their ideas of traditional weaving. That hope coincides with the aim of my research: to have local weavers directly benefit from the projects.

The costumes were also displayed in a solo exhibition in the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines, which is the most renowned and specialised aboriginal museum in Taiwan, being dedicated to the preservation and promotion of aboriginal culture. The invitation to show my work there again came after a 2005 performance of *Africussion*, but this time, as I was already preparing designs for *Romeo and Juliet*, it was decided that my costumes for the play should be included in the exhibition which was held in October 2006. Up to that time the museum had invited only aboriginal people to take part in any way in the various kinds of exhibitions that were mounted. I felt that it was a special honour and a significant recognition of my achievements up to that point. Thus, I was given the opportunity to

display my design works as art forms which examined the true meanings of the aboriginal weaving culture from the perspective of modern art. More discussion relating to this will be presented in Chapter 5.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This practice-led research advocates an artistic approach to traditional aboriginal weaving practices, rather than an endorsement of, or adherence to, mere cultural copying. It is clear to me that the key response to the challenge faced by a waning tradition is to be found in recovering the agency or dynamics of creative improvisation which has long existed in the weaving tradition itself. Therefore, my practice-led research is intended to encourage modern weavers to indulge their creative instincts and to develop new forms of aboriginal traditional textiles. The two theatre costume design projects, *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet*, show that efforts to encourage creativity and innovation can be successful, and that examination and reflection could conjure up new pathways for the development of the traditional craft.

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## Endnote

1. There are 13 tribes included in the North Potential Atayal tribal group which is located in the Da-an river area at the junction of the Taichung County and the Miaoli County.
2. Yuma Taru was well trained in back-strap loom weaving skills by her grandmother and other older expert weavers in the tribes. She also received training in modern loom skills and acquired a modern education, graduating with a master degree from the Department of Textiles and Clothing, Fu Jen Catholic University.
3. The Yeh-Ton Workshop is a highly specialized weaving institution and the only Atayal weaving institution in Taiwan that undertakes research in and works the development of new skills, gives education courses and makes commercial products. It is also the only weaving workshop that can replicate traditional collections for museums on modern looms.

### CHAPTER 3: THE COSTUME DESIGN OF AFRICUSSION

By analyzing the characteristics of the costume design for the percussive musical performance, *Africussion*, I aim in this chapter to reveal the creativity inherent in Taiwan's traditional aboriginal weaving culture. It hopes to show how aboriginal weavers worked with me and employed their weaving techniques, honed over decades, along with a new technique of "creative improvisation" derived from my design experience to create costumes which would harmonise with the vibrant beats of the performance.

The costume design was based on the concept of an "aesthetics of imperfection" (see Chapter 3.2), which was inspired by my close interaction with aboriginal weavers on various field studies. This aesthetic philosophy was the culmination of my own years of aesthetic experiences, alongside the experience gained previously when creating designs. My exchanges with the weavers not only deepened my understanding of the aboriginal weaving tradition, but also gave me the motivation to apply my "aesthetics of imperfection" to the costume design series. The *Africussion* costume designs exemplify the way in which aboriginal weavers, such as Lawyi Kayi, a skilful Atayal weaver, create their best works by accumulating skills and finding inspiration from their daily lives. I designed the costumes keeping in mind the creative ideas the musical work was intended to portray; the traditional aboriginal woven textiles that comprised those ideas were, in turn, given a new breath of life through their stage presentation.

I patterned the costumes of *Africussion* with the square-cutforms of traditional aboriginal clothes but employed a traditional technique of weaving and lacing to link together waste woven textiles with other clothing materials. Inspired by these imperfect recycled textiles I took advantage of the "imperfections" to make each costume one of a kind. So, the costumes

were patterned with the square-cut forms each of **its** own kind, yet at the same time complementary to the other pieces. This approach **was intended to echo** the varied weaving skills of the aboriginal weavers and the one common characteristic of their work--the telling of their life stories. The costume design of *Africussion* is not simply a work I created for a performance: it also tells a story shared **with** other weavers. The costumes **link** the past with the present and tradition with modernity.

### ***3.1 Creativity Myth***

The traditional woven textiles of the aboriginal Taiwanese (as with other ethnic groups) **have** evolved and transformed over the passage of time. New techniques and materials brought about through the advancement of **civilisation, modernisation** and contact with other cultures **have** resulted in traditional textiles taking **on** new forms. This phenomenon reflects the idea that changes in lifestyles gradually and naturally lead to a change in the aesthetics of the living arts, and that creativity is closely intertwined with the evolution of tradition (Li, 2000, p.10).

Before **the** 20<sup>th</sup> century, weaving was part of a woman's daily life, a job in the private sphere, necessary for the production of clothes, blankets and baby-carriers. However, in the public realm, woven textiles were associated with formal costumes for occasions such as weddings, funerals and other ceremonies. Woven textiles were not only symbols of tribal identity but also the prized outcomes of a ritual which constituted, in part, the self-identity of aboriginal females. The highest honours were bestowed on those female weavers who could **demonstrate uniqueness in** their works (Wang, 2004, p.17).



Figure 3.1: Back-strap loom woven textile by Fong-Mei Jeng. Photographed in October, 2008.

As seen in Figure: 3.1, traditional aboriginal textile patterns were exclusively geometric in design using diamond, rectangular and hexagonal shapes. However, every tribe had its own unique textile symbols, colours and pattern designs. These patterns showed a close correlation between humans and nature at large, for **example**, the tribesmen's admiration of hundred-pace vipers (a local venomous snake with beautiful rhomboid dots on its skin) inspired the diamond patterns on woven textiles. However, the meaning behind the symbols differs slightly, according to the tribe, as they have different interpretations and legends regarding the hundred-pace vipers. For **instance**, the people of the Atayal tribe believe that vipers are the spirits of their ancestors and that the diamond **shapes** are the 'eyes' of their ancestors. The Paiwan tribes also think of vipers as their ancestors, and no one is allowed to hurt them. For the Bunun, vipers are "ka-viaz", good friends; and so, Bunun hunters, despite being renowned for their excellent hunting skills would never hunt and eat snakes<sup>1</sup>.

Given the importance attributed to weaving skills, all women **had to** learn to weave if they **wanted** to make a living. In ancient tribal life, all women were able to skilfully weave the tribe's traditional patterns. For the Atayals, weaving not only determined a woman's value but also her social reputation, **and, crucially, could assure** her a place in the afterlife. Weaving was an occupation that encompassed a woman's daily life from the moment of birth



to the moment of death and was an activity at the heart of tribal heritage. The Atayals believed that life was synonymous with a weaving loom that wove everyday until the day it wove no more. This is evident in the Atayal language 'huquil' for death means 'finished weaving'. This tribe believed that on death proficient weavers would be entitled to pass over the 'Hongu Rutux' (Rainbow Bridge) and return to live in the world of their ancestors; an aim which was pursued by Atayal women all their life (Wang, 2004, p.17).

However, while the ability to reproduce traditional tribal symbols skilfully might receive instant approbation, such reproduction could not showcase the whole range and depth of a weaver's abilities. The highest honours were bestowed on those who could demonstrate uniqueness and creativity in their work. It is evident, therefore, that the real value of aboriginal woven textiles was not that they satisfied daily needs or symbolized the tribal spirit, but that they were a means for aboriginal women to construct an identity for themselves. After passing through a period of intense and often harsh training, weavers were expected to use their creativity in their work in order to come up with new forms that expressed their innermost feelings and reflections on their life.

It is clear then that in the past, change was nothing new to the aboriginal weaving tradition. Since the 15th Century, the various occupations of Taiwan by successive colonists-- the Chinese, Dutch, Spanish, and Japanese have brought dramatic changes to the aboriginal weaving culture. Aborigines exchanged animal hides and other natural resources for Chinese cotton fabrics, and for wool textiles and clothes with the Europeans. It is not surprising, therefore, that the styles of aboriginal costumes and the raw materials used in the textiles branched off in multiple directions. For instance, owing to the frequent use of cotton in their fabrics, in some tribes, such as the Puyuma, the Paiwan and the Rukai, the weavers' techniques gradually became worse.

However, the effects of the exchanges were not all negative: the aborigines' embroidery skills largely improved, as the tribal patterns were "embroidered", rather than "woven" out onto the fabrics. The dialogue between the colonists and tribes led also to changes in garment design, with the original square-cut forms being replaced by Han style designs. The result was that only a few tribes, such as the Atayal, Saisiyat, Tsou, Amis, Yami and Bunun kept some of their original square-cut designs in garments.

In addition to new designs, the colonists also brought other new materials, which had a great impact on the woven patterns as well. Although Taiwan doesn't produce wool, in traditional woven work wool twills became important weaving materials and that is believed to be a consequence of trading with other cultures. During this period of intercultural contact, colourful wool blankets and twills imported from Europe were particularly attractive to the aboriginal tribes. This was because in the past, Taiwanese aboriginal weavers had not been competent in dyeing, and the textiles produced in the early period were usually in the original colour of ramie, a light beige. Some rare exceptions were brown or other dark colours, which were achieved by colouring the yarn with mud or cassava root pulp (Wang, 2004, p.30). The colours were simple and crude in essence. So, at a time when resources were scarce, beautiful textiles incorporating colourful supplementary woollen wefts woven into the textile were a valuable material in aboriginal society.

Supplementary wefts added a decorative element to the textile surface and often appeared as groups of long strands or floats creating blocks of colours, patterns and motifs. The rarity of these colour yarns meant that the collection and production of the textiles was a time consuming process. The weavers would collect colourful woollen products, take apart traded textiles and recycle the wool yarns and then reweave the yarns as a supplementary

weft into their textiles. These wool fibres were softer, more airy and more flexible than ramie, linen or cotton yarns, and gave a dimensional texture to the textile. When the aborigines obtained new materials by way of international contacts—yarns of different textures and colours—they were given the instigation to make variations in their traditional motifs, and create **beautiful and colourful** new forms and patterns. The textiles with their good supplementary weft of wool fibres became **especially** popular with the aborigines (Chen, 1988, p.1824).

The evolution of “**civilization**” and inter-cultural contact not only created a momentum which inspired creativity, but also disrupted the passing on of weaving traditions. For instance, during the period of Japanese **colonisation**, in a bid to boost the weavers’ productivity, the weavers were ordered to abandon the use of back-strap looms **as** the nationalist government adopted policies to encourage aborigines to weave on modern looms (see Chapter 1.3). As the aborigines became more used to modern ways of living, traditional woven clothes and textiles were no longer used in daily life and instead functioned **only** as tribal symbols that highlighted the tribal identity in festivals **or dance** performances. Thus it was that historical factors and policies made to promote **modernisation** resulted in a disruption **in** the passing on of the weaving tradition.

In contemporary society, traditional woven textiles have been **commercialised** and transformed into products that can be traded as part of the wider economy. As a result, many weavers in order to make a living **have been** forced to compromise. Instead of abiding by the aesthetics of their living arts, **they have produced woven works of little artistic value** to comply with the **demands of the current economic system. But that is not to deny that some of the work created for mass commercial reproduction whether by machine or manual copying is not without merit. Some is very impressive. However, the**

fact of mass production means that very few weavers are actually involved in originating artistically creative work.



Figure 3.2-4: Commercial textile products in the Yeh-Ton Workshop. Photographed in April, 2005.

See Figure 3.2-4. The mass production of traditional patterns of aboriginal woven textiles has resulted in most weavers no longer heeding their creative interests, or incorporating new ideas into the weaving of their traditional textiles. They have forgotten how important creativity and innovation were to their weaving tradition and how those artistic elements helped to preserve their traditional craft and ensure it was passed on to new generations. As a consequence, modern woven works lack the vitality and vigorousness that is often found in antique work and explains why outstanding and creative modern aboriginal weaving work is so rare.

I began to wonder why contemporary weavers refused to develop their skills and weave creatively as had the traditional weavers of the past. Most weavers I asked that question blamed historical factors for the loss of their traditional weaving skills, and said that they could not recreate certain fine traditional patterns on a modern loom. Some said that those same factors and the lack of professional training make it “impossible” and “difficult” to create delicate traditional woven textiles. Despite the reasons given, I believe what modern weavers really lack is the ambition and encouragement required to inspire them to explore their creativity.

In answer to the question, Ho Chao-Hua, a researcher in Taiwanese textiles

from the Graduate Institute of Textiles and Clothing at Fu Jen Catholic University offers several reasons stating that designs were often reproduced from [those](#) existing traditional patterns which could be duplicated easily by machine at a low cost. In her essay regarding the design and marketing of textiles and costumes, she also points out that

The research found that the produce of aboriginal weavers is categorised mainly as a primary industry which can neither fit into the manufacturing process nor keep up with the production efficiency of other industries in the modern world.... The (Aborigine) products contain traditional characters and colours or have special and fashionable totems that are usually those most acceptable to consumers. However, the impact of cultural transition makes it difficult for weavers to balance the pursuit of high market value and the preservation of tradition. When traditional elements are used to create new products, they are either too market oriented or too traditional and find it hard to be accepted in the mainstream aesthetics.... Aborigines who engage in creating revival textiles and costumes are often doing so to improve their livelihood.... As regards design, most of the interviewees admitted that they closely follow market response in producing their works. Some said that they incorporate traditional designs in a small part of their contemporary designs. A smaller group of interviewees said that they wove their textiles with the part use of traditional patterns or by duplicating traditional motifs using modern materials on modern looms. Only a few weavers said that they tried to reproduce traditional patterns using traditional material, traditional looms and traditional decorative methods.... Duplication can produce only a replica.... (Ho 2000, pp.252-8)

[Indeed](#), there are modern weavers who are equipped with great skills and have the potential to create graceful works and give a new face to the traditional, but they lack both the opportunity to cultivate a sense of artistic aesthetics, and the motivation to break away and challenge tradition. I believe that the key to changing that is to encourage modern weavers to deepen the richness of their thoughts through two main [ways](#) 1) [by their](#) developing mature and proficient weaving skills and cultivating their

aesthetic sense; 2) by their being encouraged to develop a sufficient level of ambition and passion to seek a break away. Elizabeth Goring, a former curator at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, has postulated a fourth requisite: "Craft is not defined by genre. Makers today may express themselves through a wide range of media. Whatever the medium, craft practice demands a unique combination of hand, mind and eye - the technical mastery of material, aesthetic sensibility and design skills. The best involves a fourth element too: passion." (Goring, n.d.)

Tradition naturally takes new forms as civilization evolves and a change of era and cultural expectations may lead to a shift in the sense of aesthetics. Peter Osborne in *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* describes the relationship between tradition and modernity thus:

*...as a periodising concept, modernity marks out the time of the dialectics of modernity and tradition as competing, yet intertwined forms of historical consciousness, rather than that of a single temporal form, however abstract (Osborne, 1995, p.127).*

The effort to create more delicate works should not be restricted and disrupted by these shifts in aesthetics. As long as the weavers continue to polish their professional skills and retain the desire and ambition to pursue perfection, the spirit of tradition will be passed on--as it is in the nature of human civilisation. For most of the modern weavers who blame their inability to create delicate works on various factors beyond their control, the issue lies not in what "can't be done", but in what "won't be done". Despite the general lack of vital interest in creating delicate woven works, a few aboriginal weavers can fortunately still be found, who are following in the spirit of olden day traditional weavers and demonstrate a vigorous ambition to create new forms out of the old.

My back-strap loom-weaving teacher Lawyi Kayi, a master weaver in the Atayal tribe, is one of the few who strives hard to give the traditional craft a new life. Kayi's weaving experience demonstrated to me how past weavers broke through deadlocks to further their skills, and how a creative weaver was trained in traditional tribal society. Most importantly, she provided an exception to the many aboriginal Taiwanese modern weavers who **have** lost their connection to the creative side of weaving in repeatedly making **commercialised** woven products. Kayi is an experienced weaver linking the old traditions **to** the modern world with her creativity, and living proof of how the old weavers deployed their creativity to boost tribal vitality and secure the continuity of the tribal traditions and spirit. For example, the textile of Figure 3.5 is a commonly used traditional pattern for **the** Atayal people. Whilst most of Atayal weavers followed tradition and kept reproducing the same pattern for generations, Kayi extended the tradition and created new forms, (**see Figure 3.6**), **out of** her personal experience and imagination. The **newly** created **patterns** not only **evolved from the traditional** but also demonstrated a crucial meaning **that is** hidden in aborigines' traditional weaving culture.



Figure 3.5: Traditional Atayal woven pattern by Fong-Mei Jeng. Figure 3.6: Lawyi Kayi's creative pattern.

Within **Kayi's** own generation of weavers her textiles are highly commended for reflecting her unique personal style, (Figure 3.6), and she is renowned for her brilliantly creative in-woven supplementary wefts that go beyond

the typical traditional patterns, (Figure 3.5). She creates her own motifs and symbols within the tribal aesthetic; she weaves patterns to express her life; the result is woven textiles full of humanity. I was curious why Kayi's textiles looked so different from those of other weavers in her tribe who focused on the reproduction of traditional motifs; Kayi's surprising explanation was, "because I don't know how to weave their kind of patterns" (Personal communication)<sup>2</sup>.

In the process of learning back-strap loom weaving with Lawyi Kayi, I observed the connection between weaving and her life. From my observation of Kayi's creative experiences, two principles emerge which can be seen to facilitate the birth of creativity. The first is that improvisation in weaving techniques and active experimentation with weaving patterns create new forms. The second principle is that the weaver's inner values and reflections on real life also assist in the creative process. And thus, happy family relationships and a visual reflection of ritual activities are transformed into weaving patterns. By turning her inner values into visual forms, Kayi created patterns that had never been seen before. For most people creativity is a mysterious, complicated and illogical experience. It is hard to approach and to set up a methodology around being "creative". Kayi's creative experience, however, provided an important way into understanding how it is we create.



Figure 3.7: The front and back view of supplementary-weft woven works of Fong-Mei Jeng.



For the Atayals, the most significant, but difficult weaving technique is **the incorporation of supplementary weft: the inserting of coloured wefts or picking up warps in the weaving process to create dimensional patterns in the textile designs** (see Figure 3.7). Only a few skilful weavers can **apply** this **time consuming** and highly complex technique well. The skill requires long, intensive training (tutoring and step-by-step demonstrations), without which the weaver would **have to learn** the complicated arrangement **all by herself**. Once the patterns are created **by means of** this technique, they will be unique, and hard to copy by observation alone. **As a result, supplementary weft** woven works are exclusive to the creator. In traditional tribes, in order to learn the supplementary-weft skills, a young weaver has to formally seek tuition from a master weaver in a solemn ceremony. **And** to own such a work, **the buyer pays huge sums** to the **weaver** for creating the uniquely patterned textiles. **Such** precious supplementary-weft works are worn only on important occasions to show off the weaver's weaving skills and **attest to** the rank in the tribe of those that wear them.

Kayi was born in 1933. By the time she started to learn to weave, **the** weaving tradition had already been disrupted by Japanese **colonisation**. Therefore, she **did not have** the opportunity to learn much weaving from her mother. However, she married into the Jeng family, one of the two most skilled weaving families among the neighbouring tribes. Even under the pressure of Japanese **colonisation**, they had been too proud to give up their family's reputation as weavers, so female members of the Jeng family continued **on in** their weaving tradition.<sup>3</sup> Kayi's mother-in-law trained and passed down most of the family's weaving secrets to her only daughter, Fong-Mei Jeng. Although she wanted to train her daughter to accede to the title of the best weaver in their tribe, she wouldn't teach her daughter the unique symbols she had created herself. These were her own secret codes that would ensure she returned to live in the world of her ancestors when she died and so

retain her dignity. According to a tradition that had been passed down for generations, her daughter had to create her own symbols in her own way; should she fail she would never be granted the accolade of best weaver. That was the tradition and her grandmother had handed it on when training her mother to be an expert weaver.

Kayi's mother-in-law, however, did not want to pass down her weaving skills to the new daughter-in-law. Only with the insistence of Kayi's father-in-law did her mother-in-law, unwillingly, teach her some basic (but not intensive) weaving skills. Kayi was now in an even more critical situation when it came to learning how to weave, since lack of weaving experience placed her in a difficult position within the family she had married into. In order to improve that position she had to train herself to weave skilfully and produce excellent textiles. Kayi secretly studied the textiles of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law to learn how to do supplementary weft. Back-strap loom weaving was a highly skilled craftwork, and it took a long time to learn how to weave on the loom. It was hard to figure out the construction without tuition, and learning through observation leads to a different outcome from direct learning from a tutor. However, although Kayi thought she could work out the weaving constructions and imitate the family patterns through observation, she could never successfully reproduce her mother-in-law's symbols; nevertheless, the constraints did not discourage her or prevent her from becoming a skilful weaver. Conversely, it was the experimental practice that gave her the ability to create and develop new patterns. The difficulties Kayi faced in becoming an expert weaver endowed her with a perspective which went beyond the family traditions. The newly created forms of Kayi's textiles were the result not only of technical developments but also of original, innovative thought.

Bearing Kayi's experience in mind, I came to understand that weaving traditions were not only significant in intensifying group identity and in

providing a functional use but also important in reinforcing the viability of the group's survival through the creativity of the weaving. I think the aboriginal weaving tradition, which encouraged weavers to develop their creative integrity and so reinforce the group's competitive strength, is a subtle but unmistakable power that **has** had a profound influence **on an** aborigine tribe's retaining a level of flexibility **that enabled it to survive** historical change.

From what has been discussed so **far**, the various and important meanings of creativity in the aboriginal Taiwanese weaving traditions shown through Kayi's stories are plain to see, **we** might conclude that her creativity was developed by the process of unravelling and resolving problems. **The** deeper purpose of the weaving tradition was to encourage the weavers to challenge and stimulate their intelligence.

The aboriginal Taiwanese were traditional tribes who, for thousands of years, spent their lives constantly struggling against nature and other tribes. The tribe **had to** be trained to keep their group strong and flexible for dealing with environmental changes and for improving their living conditions. In their youth, tribal men had to go through headhunting rituals to strengthen their courage and resolve, and **develop** their **fighting** ability before they become an adult and were considered warriors. The traditional **way** in which the young men and weavers were trained is reminiscent of the natural **selection** theory of Charles Darwin, "the survival of the fittest" (**Darwin, 1869**). Improvisational creativity helped the weaver to keep her competitiveness and survive in the face of changes and challenges. Only by adapting her creative ideas to the solving of problems arising during the process of weaving and by continuing to better her skills could the weaver produce unique and outstanding woven works. Throughout history, there were many creative weavers accumulating experience and wisdom in order

to improve their lives and woven works. I believe then that therein lay the true intent and meaning behind the weaving tradition.

The need to improve their lives through the accumulation of experience and wisdom explains why Kayi's mother-in-law required her daughter to daughter develop her own symbols for herself. That need was the real meaning behind the tribal weaving traditions and the legend of returning to live in the world of ancestors as the reward for their creative efforts. Creativity is personal to the individual and depends upon the skills they have developed from their life experience. Challenges and feelings are the keys to stimulating new energy for creativity. We can tell from the later work of Lawyi Kayi that she made another breakthrough because of her sensibility. In the 1980s while in her fifties, despite having up to then based her creations on traditional patterns (see Figure 3.8-10), Kayi started to go further: to create the human shape patterns that express her inner feelings and loves.



Figure 3.8-10: Lawyi Kvi's creative human shape patterns.

Aborigines no longer need or use woven textiles for practical purposes since modern lifestyles no longer call for them. But, on the positive side, skilful weavers can now work creatively and freely, and weave whatever they want. For several years, Kayi worked hard on her weaving skills and became a highly respected weaver in the tribe. That gave her the confidence and courage to weave now in the way she feels is best rather than just follow the traditional practices (patterns). For Kayi, weaving is no longer a way of achieving a certain social status; instead, it is a way of expressing herself and her inner feelings. Kayi's inability to bear children had long been the major setback in her life and one of the reasons for her difficult position in her husband's family. Thence, the birth of the twin granddaughters of her adopted son had a special meaning for Kayi. When I asked her how she had developed new patterns based on the human form, which had not previously existed traditionally, she said, "I am very satisfied with my life and very much enjoy my relationship with my families and friends. When I see everyone singing and dancing happily together, I feel that life is so wonderful. I have a strong feeling that I want to express my happiness through my textiles" (personal communication). Her internal feelings have triggered her inventive ideas, and she has transformed her love and affections for her family and friends into her woven textiles and, as a result, she has made a breakthrough in the weaving tradition and developed her human shape patterns, (Figure 3.8-10), unprecedented in the tribe. These new and creative patterns show Kayi's determination and commitment to passing over the Rainbow Bridge and to returning to the world of her ancestors.

Aboriginal women in Taiwan and indeed around the world share the same features and traditions: expressing their innermost feelings and developing their self-expression through their woven textiles. The traditional embroidery of the Bukhara of Uzbekistan, known as Suzani, is famous for its local, vivid style patterns and bright colours. Non-merchandized, traditional Suzani has

no repeated patterns. The detailed design and pattern of **the** embroidery are varied in order to represent the individual Suzani maker. They show that traditional Suzani makers changed **their** patterns in order to show their individual craftsmanship and creativity.



Figure 3.11: A modern piece of Suzani, which was duplicated from traditional patterns.

Locals know that every piece of Suzani tells a life story. **A duplicated traditional Suzani (Figure 3.11),** shows which shows geometric circles or round-shape patterns **which** have long been important symbols in traditional Suzani. In 2009 when I **visited** Bukhara, I **learnt** from the local embroiderers of an old tradition about these round shape patterns: in the past, when women in Bukhara were pregnant, they **started** to embroider a special Suzani (personal communication). Every month, the pregnant woman would embroider a circle to express her feelings and the changes that her baby **had wrought in her,** and her expectations of and **her** blessings upon her baby. During the nine-month pregnancy, nine different circles would be embroidered in the centre of a square Suzani. After the baby **was** born, one circle **would** be embroidered every year, surrounding the nine circles **sewn** before the baby was born and expressing the child's growth. The circles **continued** until the child married. Mothers would complete the last circle on the Suzani and give the Suzani, full of motherly love and best wishes, to her child as a wedding gift. For all

mothers, their child is always a unique and most special baby. I think one of the reasons Suzani mothers **made** such a gift is **that it was** a representation of their love. In the past, maternal love filled the women in Bukhara with imagination, and stimulated their creativity. They created numerous circle designs in order to describe and bless their children. **In that way**, every piece of the traditional Suzani is unique and **priceless**.

**Both** the legend of Suzani in Bukhara and Kayi's weaving history reveal that improvisation is closely related to the traditional weaving culture. Both also show that human beings instinctively pursue aestheticism and creativity. The **motive force** for Lawyi Kayi's breakthrough in traditional weaving and for her creative woven work is her determination to face challenges and improvise. The key to her achievements **is her making use of** the aesthetic experience accumulated throughout her daily life. Kayi turned the process of solving a problem into **a training in the field** of aestheticism **and** creativity, and so she acquired a new energy for innovation. Furthermore, the sentimental creativity shown in both Bukhara's Suzani and Kayi's work represents not only the weavers' love for their family, but also the life experiences of the aboriginal women, **which** helped them to build their self-esteem and sense of identity.

Different cultures and histories have **similar outlooks in** spirit. Under the influence of the different ages, environments, racial cultures and way of **life**, those similar outlooks have developed according to their own style and aestheticism, and **the individual weavers have likewise** formed from their life **experiences**, their own various aesthetic styles and meanings. Passing down the weaving heritage is to continue in the traditional spirit but does not have to translate into a restriction in form. When an aesthetic form carries **within the** vitality and the flexibility of improvisation, **it** evolves through time and in relation to social changes, **and** adapts to the latest social environment **with its** demands, then traditions can survive **and evolve**.

### 3.2 The Aesthetics of Imperfection

Observing Kayi's weaving and learning from it and her life experiences was incredibly significant to my understanding of aesthetics. I realized that an academic education could not teach me how to design aesthetically. While I had a basic knowledge, I had not hitherto been aware of the delicate but strong emotions abounding in my field. Becoming aware of them made me start to reflect and ask questions such as "What does my design job have to do with my life? As a costume designer in the stage performance industry, I have to deal with different directors and performance themes. How am I going to develop a unique design aesthetic of my own during the process?" Learning of Kayi's experience, I realised that an aesthetic is not only developed from iterative professional experiences, but that more importantly, when one combines these with one's own experience of real life, a deep design aesthetics will develop as a result. Kayi's story inspired me to consider some of my innermost thoughts and feelings and to develop the idea of an "aesthetics of imperfection". When I started to learn weaving, I went through a series of difficulties. As an orally passed down tradition, unlike modern loom weaving, back-strap weaving provides no weaving charts that note and organise the designing of patterns and the procedures of warping and weaving. That creates a challenge for beginner weavers wanting to learn to operate the back-strap loom well.



Figure 3.12: Learning back-strap loom weaving with Lawyi Kayi, Da-an tribe, January 2005.



Figure 3.13: Back-strap loom warping, Lawyi Kayi, Da-an tribe, January 2005.



As show in **Figure** 3.12 and 3.13, the initial challenge I encountered when I **was learning** how to use back-strap loom was warping. Warping, or the process of designing and arranging patterns, is fundamental to the design, quality, and patterns of the woven textile. Warping is highly delicate and complicated, and requires a high level of concentration and a quiet working environment. Any small error might lead to a negative result because warping errors are impossible to fix afterwards and the weaver has to start again from the beginning. Therefore, weavers **will** often weave in a quiet, private place to **be able to** concentrate on their work.

Weaving as a consequence has many closely related rituals and rigid governing **taboos**, many of which come from mythology or traditions. I believe that most of these traditions exist to help weavers find an appropriate working environment. In Taiwan, weaving taboos were very similar in tribes around the island. For instance, one of the taboos forbade men from being close to the weaving area and another prohibited children and animals from jumping over looms while a woman was working. The purpose of the taboo is to prevent family members from interrupting women's weaving work. Another example of such taboos was that women should not weave when the men went out hunting. The reason was that the weavers might be worried about her husband or her son who was hunting in the wild and her worries might affect the quality of her woven work.

An experienced weaver needs to weave in quietness, let alone a weaving beginner like me. Warping is like meditation. It was not easy to memorise the weaving procedure in the beginning nor **to** concentrate for a long period of time and complete the whole process without any mistakes. During the process of learning **from Kayi to set the warp**, I often made mistakes which if Kayi noticed in time, she would take and fix. Nevertheless, most of time, she did not notice my errors until I started to weave **the weft** on the loom. When I

felt frustrated, Kayi would encourage me with her own story and experience, or tell me that this **was** just practice, and that it was okay to have deformed patterns. She told me that sometimes these **mistakes** produce a surprise, and by making **them**, I could possibly find patterns that I had never thought of before. That was how she learnt from her mistakes and created patterns that she had never imagined or seen. From such experience, I learnt to think positively and **gained** the wisdom **acquired from** facing setbacks. I also learnt how to turn difficulties and mistakes into “improvisation training” and to transform imperfection into a strength. **From** Kayi’s wisdom, I understood that the imperfection of life makes people appreciate the beauty **of it** and in a short period of time I was able to **deal positively** with the flaws occurring in my life. Moreover, I **learnt** that those people whose jobs are related to aesthetics need to **be** better **able** to transform life experience into a form of aesthetics.

Through the experience **of learning back-strap weaving**, I started to think about **an** aesthetics of imperfection. I realized that “imperfection” is actually the most real sign left during the progress of creation, and is thus the most wonderful mark **of** humanity. It is true that life and human nature are imperfect. But because of imperfection, “creative improvisation” can come into being and can inspire **individuals** to develop their own creativity and break **with perfect**, regulated, and traditional stereotypes. Imperfection therefore integrates reality with the creative **outcome**, and through this **release, an** individual’s creativity emphasizes the unity of humanity **and** nature. The idea of an aesthetics of imperfection correlates to creative improvisation. Both stress organic and natural evolution and **propose** that creativity is derived from a continuous process, in which **one experiences and explores** various possible forms over and over again. In comparison with the creativity of improvisation, an aesthetic of imperfection is more concerned with the relationship between a life aesthetic and craft art.

The concept of an aesthetic of imperfection is not an individual's experience and thinking about aesthetics, but rather a life philosophy rooted in oriental culture, and an aesthetic way of thinking about craft art. In Japan, "*wabi-sabi*" is the quintessential Japanese aesthetic, "[the] beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete... [the] beauty of things modest and humble...[the] beauty of things unconventional." (Koren, 1994, p.94) The word *wabishii* describes "a state of imperfection that is in contrast with a state of perfection", "simplicity and plainness", or even "coarse quality".

The meaning of *wabi* extends to the kind of perfect beauty that comes from exactly the right kind of imperfection, such as the asymmetry of a ceramic bowl which reflects its handmade craftsmanship, as opposed to another bowl which, while perfect, is *merely a soulless, machine-made object*. Like the patina on a very old bronze statue, *sabi* on the other hand, is the kind of beauty that only comes with age. In Haiku, a Japanese form of poetry, *sabi* refers to the beauty of old stuff, particularly when its beauty does not have anything to do with its look but with that which penetrates, that which is on the inside, such as a stone covered with moss. Therefore, *sabi* is *a quality* by which we can appreciate the beauty of the old. It is not the age that *sabi* emphasizes but the marks *or traces* that nature and time leave *on an object*.

With *wabi-sabi* philosophy, it can be seen that imperfect beauty *has* a deeper *value* than perfection does, and such imperfect beauty is spiritual. *Wabi-sabi* features natural beauty, flowing with time. It is not *man-made*, and is created accidentally. *Wabi-sabi* art pieces often represent the harmony between its artist/creator and nature. Certain national domestic treasures from Japan are spoken of as demonstrating the beauty of *wabi-sabi*. For instance, the bamboo flower vase, made by Sen no Rikyu and preserved in Daitoku-ji, a Buddhist temple, is precious because of the little cracks on it. The tea bowl Seppo (Snowy Peak), made by Honami Koetsu, is particularly admired because

it has been repaired. The fact that the old Iga pottery water jar known as Yabure-bukuro (Burst Bag) sagged and split during the firing has made it all the more interesting. (Hume, 1995, p.247)



Figure 3.14-15: A Tokyo Culture Creation Project *Luxury in Fashion Reconsidered*: Special Exhibit Kazuyo Sejima Spatial Design for Comme des Garçons, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, October 31, 2009 - January 17, 2010. Photos by Amelia Groom in 2009.

*Wabi-sabi* philosophy is found not only in Japanese traditional crafts, but has also influenced contemporary work on Japanese fashion designers. Rei Kawakubo (Comme des Garçons) who specialises in “anti-fashion”, creating austere and sometimes deconstructed garments, see Figure 3.14-15, has also found energy and power in the principles of *wabi-sabi*, in the beauty of imperfection, impermanence, and incompleteness and uses this philosophy in her clothes designs. She believes that design is going, in her own words, “on a mission to challenge conformity” (Kawakubo, 2001) .

The real purpose of an aesthetics of imperfection is to both demonstrate the beauty of the imperfect and to find harmony between nature and humanity. It is a kind of reverse thinking which allows us to find the ideal beauty. Nowadays, our life overflows with machine-made, perfect products which are in actual fact adverse to humanity and reality. Consequently, our inner spirit has been emptied, and our ability to better our creativity has been degraded. The design idea of the aesthetics of imperfection is to provide people with an opportunity to reflect on modern life, and to promote creative improvisation. It is hoped that current forms will evolve and demonstrate the

true ideals. The existence of the aesthetics of imperfection shows that every author, artist, or creator instinctively *is in pursuit of some kind of beauty when working creatively*. Thus, the aesthetics of imperfection is not just my aesthetics, but also the aesthetics of Lawyi Kayi and other aboriginal weavers.

### 3.3 *Costumes in Africussion*

In April 2005, I was both designing costumes for *the* Ju Percussion Group's performance *Africussion* and continuing my weaving education with Lawyi Kayi. During this period *of fieldwork*, the concept of an aesthetics of imperfection began to crystallise in my mind and I decided to apply *my* ideas to my *Africussion* costume *designs*. *The* major concept behind the *designs* was to improvise with traditional elements and be creative *making use of* traditional forms with an application of a modern *aesthetic*. Such a design concept parallels the ideas contained within the music and performance as *Africussion* *aimed* to integrate modern and traditional *musical* elements.

Through the minds of four Taiwanese composers, Yiu-kwong Chung, Chienhui Hung, Kuen-yeon Hwang and Huan-wei Lu, and the hands of thirteen percussionists, innovation and *changes in* music and *visual arts* *were* sought after *by contrasting different* cultures. Their music incorporates several old Taiwanese as well as African instruments such as gongs, drums, cymbals, amadindas and kalimbas. With experimental techniques and mind-sets, the musicians set out to *create* a musical style full of traditional intensity and modernity while demonstrating *a* multiplicity of sounds (*Africussion* performance program, n.d.).

The design idea of the aesthetics of imperfection matches the purpose of *Africussion* because this philosophy represents the common feelings among many artists of the day. The music of *Africussion*, for example, employed

traditional musical instruments and sounds to compose original and contemporary songs. In addition, the composer used modern musical instruments to play traditional melodies. As for the costumes in *Africussion*, traditional aboriginal woven textiles and hand-weaving skills were used in association with the aesthetics of imperfection which transformed the traditional elements in aboriginal weaving craftsmanship into something much more modern and artistic. By utilising old traditions and reinterpreting them in a refreshing manner within a contemporary context, the musical compositions and costume designs of *Africussion* developed new meanings and new skills.



Figure 3.16-18: Details in the *Africussion* costumes which reflect the aesthetics of imperfection.

The idea behind the *Africussion* costume design was to demonstrate a traditional Chinese philosophy and aesthetic and to transform them into a visual design. This notion is akin to an old Taiwanese saying that, “a man of great wisdom often seems to be humble, a strong man acts as if he is soft, and an eloquent man acts as if he were blunt”. A negative attribute or behaviour in each case is brought into contrast with its positive counterpart to imply that appearances belie an opposite tendency. In *Africussion* costume designs, see Figure 3.16-18, the costumes were constructed using handcraft skills such as free hand weaving and twisting, and with the use of rope worked into the material. These “unpretentious” details are the pieces of work which are not overly polished. The rough and imperfect texture symbolizes “infinity” and

“freedom”, a forward power and change. The texture thus reflects the beauty of humanity and nature. The overall idea behind the *Africussion* design is anti-mass production and anti-duplication and advocates for nature and hand-made beauty.

The imperfection aesthetics occurred to me as a weaving beginner, when I lacked experience and left many flawed marks on my work. Flawed woven textiles are usually considered to have no value at all and are thrown away but I found them to be priceless. This was because having created these flaws, I was able to understand Lawyi Kayi and every other skilful weaver much better; the flaws were material evidence of weaving efforts and mistakes; in other words, evidence of learning and of an experimental process. This process also replicates on a small scale the historical evolution of the woven tradition; the series of efforts and experiments of numerous weavers and their outcome.

Those flaws I made also inspired me, and, in the same way that Lawyi Kayi had developed her creativity by building on her past mistakes, I had accidentally found a way of expressing my inner feelings through these flaws: each flaw represented both a difficulty and a new possibility or potential breakthrough.

That is the reason why the aesthetics of imperfection (see Figure 3.16-18) reflected in the incomplete, simple, asymmetric, rough, partial, and free form features of my designs represent all kinds of possibilities. Through imperfection, there is always room for progress, and for more creativity and space for new ideas. Therefore, applying the aesthetics of imperfection to the traditional style of aboriginal woven textiles means that the weavers are able to break away from a reliance on symbols, and can be released from the constraining factors of tribal ideology and business demands. Lines, composition, colours,

and textures can be woven freely without any limitation. Weavers can deconstruct patterns and symbols and use them freely, and allow aboriginal woven textiles to reveal their beauty and speak as artwork. This shows how modern design and art can come together in traditional style of aboriginal woven textiles.



Figure 3.19: The recycled textile swatches of *Africussion*.

There are 13 costume sets in *Africussion* (See Appendix II: The Photos of *Africussion* Costumes). The materials for these came from 14 recycled swatches (see Figure 3.19). 57,000 yards of cotton and fibre threads were woven into three rolls of 10 metre long custom-made woven textiles. In addition, around 30 sheets of leather and more than 3,000 tacks were used to fix the textiles and leather, so that these costumes could be completed (see Figure 3.16-18, 3.31, 3.33, 3.37), and different weaving skills were used to create the woven costumes. By filling the interlace in either a loose or close manner, I intended to create weaving of imperfect, simple, asymmetric, rough, and incomplete beauty in free-style aesthetic forms. Created with the design



idea of imperfection, the costumes **have** an unstable and oscillating visual effect. Such visual effects reflected the character of the percussion rhythm. The **movement of the woven material** and the oscillating structure **of the costumes** made **them move as if dancing to** the percussion music **as** the musicians **played their** instruments.

The costume style in *Africussion* was based on the traditional costumes of aborigines in Taiwan. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century before the first Han Chinese migrations to Taiwan, their costume style was not influenced by other cultures; every tribe had **its** own simple and original style of dress as discussed in **the** previous chapter. The patterns on Taiwanese aborigines' cloth were the simplest; **it was joined in the** most primitive form of sewing together: merely two textile rectangles, without further figurative alteration (except length) **to fit the body. That is,** the male and female **vests** had stitches only on the back and sides seams. Simply speaking, it was like layering an entire piece of textile on a body.



(Right) Figure 3.20: Atayal man in traditional cloth. (Ooshima, 1935, p.43)

(Left) Figure 3.21: Atayal women in traditional clothes. (Nakama, 1931, p.203)

Aborigines' dress style was therefore very simple and basic: most of the materials were neither cut out nor trimmed--weaving was time-consuming and substantial effort was made to avoid textile waste. Other pieces, such as chest covers, one-piece skirts, female and male leg coverings and shawls, had strings attached so they could be tied onto a person for them to wear (**see**

Figure 3.20-21) The essence of Taiwanese aboriginal costume culture was neither the style nor design of the clothing, but the woven textiles themselves: it was the patterns, weaving skills, and textile materials that was focused on.



Figure 3.22: Musicians dressed in costumes which including top garments, chest covers, and leg coverings for both male and female percussionists.

When designing the costumes for *Africussion*, I took into consideration the early aboriginal dress styles and made modern adjustments to meet the interests of contemporary society. Similar to the styles of aboriginal costumes, the *Africussion* costumes combined top garments, and leg coverings for both male and female percussionists (see Figure 3.22). Although the styles for male and female players were similar, the colour arrangement and cuttings gave the male and female percussionist different silhouettes.



Figure 3.23-24: Details in the *Africussion* costumes which demonstrate the free hand weaving constructions.

The design of *Africussion* has two features. First, as can be seen in Figures 3.23-24, neither needles nor sewing machines were used as weaving and lacing replaced the sewing method (a more typical way of cloth-making). I chose to weave and hand-make the costumes of this collection so as to give them a rough, primitive touch and thereby emphasise how mass-produced modern textiles are too standardised to give the vibrancy of hand-made primitive work. This choice simulated an experience a traditional weaver might have had in producing clothes and created challenges in constructing the costumes. To meet these needs, I had to improvise and come up with innovative designs, which helped to further stimulate my creativity and imagination.

Unlike most of the early aboriginal weavers whose main interest was to innovate or replicate complicated patterns or symbols, I was more interested in the act of weaving itself and chose to complete and structure my costumes by weaving rather than sewing. This inspiration came from my lessons with Lawyi Kayi, my textile-weaving instructor and Awai Da-in Sawan, my basket weaving teacher. I was deeply impressed with the effects of line arrangements and the free hand formation of improvisation (see Figures 3.25-28).



Figure 3.25: Fieldwork, rattan weaving, Pong-Lai tribe of Saisiat, January 2005



Figure 2.26-28: Fieldwork, back-strap loom weaving, Da-An tribe of Atayal, January 2005.

Through the act of weaving, simple threads can develop all kinds of layouts and layers, presenting countless vibrancies and dynamics. Lines are not only the foundation of textiles but they stretch beyond images. Lines alone can be an extension of beauty, as Chiang Hsun notes, “it is the continuous communication of lines that provokes metaphysical spiritual communication” (Chiang, 2003, p.63).

The originality of weaving and my experience of it had inspired me to reconsider my previous costume experience with patterning structures and gave me new insights in weaving costumes with lines. I stopped seeing fabrics as surfaces on a flat base and instead started using lines as the basic design element in the costume. Lines can be linear, superficial or even three dimensional. My fieldwork experience facilitated my development and allowed me to integrate my emotions and feelings into the act of weaving costumes. The creative act of weaving is an act of improvisation because weavers can change the formation of threads as they please. The *Africussion* costume series has, therefore, an original rhythm and an interesting and detailed dynamic. I started weaving the costumes freely in an impromptu manner and followed my inspiration of the moment. I observed the sense of space created when I weaved in and out to create various density and layers. Space is presented as fluid in the costumes.

The second feature of the *Africussion* series is that I recycled the unwanted textiles that weavers thought imperfect and turned the pieces into tops for performers. Covering the abdomen for male performers and the chest for female performers, the tops became the most eye-catching decorations on stage. As mentioned earlier, there was insufficient time and money to make the entire suite of costumes from custom-made textiles, so Yuma Taru suggested I use their ready-made textiles which were already in stock instead of weaving new textiles for these tops.

After I had checked through the stock in the Yeh-Ton Workshop, I found myself uninterested in the standard textiles for sale. The quality of those textiles was so “superior” that they had lost the character of hand-made textiles. Rather, I was fascinated by some textile remnants that looked as if they had been forgotten about and which Yuma said were unwanted. These textiles included samples, experiments, or flawed works by the inexperienced weavers. The unwanted textiles had inconsistent densities, irregular formations or deformed patterns, but they were kept because each looked unique. When I asked for the imperfect textiles Yuma was reluctant to give them to me but I wanted them for their uniqueness: it was unlikely that these flaws could ever be copied. Despite her reluctance, Yuma in the end was generous enough to offer me the selections so the tops could be created for the performers.



Figure 3.29: Hakka Blue textiles, Yeh-Ton Workshop, 2005.

Figure 3.30: Dirty Yellow textiles, Yeh-Ton Workshop, 2005.

I chose these imperfect textiles because they reminded me of the days I had spent weaving with Lawyi Kayi and I could relate to the textiles, as they looked familiar to me. Compared with mass-produced fabrics that look flawless, I considered the flawed textiles to be far more interesting and meaningful because they told a unique story which records something of the different lives, personalities and individual touch of their weavers. Their imperfection gave the textiles life and inspired creativity. At the primary level of my “aesthetics of imperfection”, I saw that these textiles had great potential to be completed and developed. I was able to reinterpret those flawed textiles

and **transform** them into decorative tops for **the** performers. I gave each textile selected a name which I felt reflected its original story (such as Hakka Blue and Dirty Yellow, Hundred Pace Snake in the Museum and **the** Black Line Lost **Its** Way) and **incorporated** the “flawed” **remnants** into beautiful designs which I hoped would embody the philosophy behind my “aesthetics of **imperfection**”.

For example, Figures 3.29 Hakka Blue textiles and **Figure** 3.30 Dirty Yellow textiles are textile remnants that were originally ordered by and **customised** for residents in a nearby Hakka village. These textiles are samples **for** **costumes** that the villagers use **in** their traditional ceremonies. The Hakka Blue and Dirty Yellow textiles afforded aboriginal **weavers** an opportunity to encounter other cultures **by way of** their weaving techniques. When they were producing these textiles for the Hakka village, **the weavers were** **challenged** to try an unconventional colour arrangement.

Blue and yellow are not commonly used colours in traditional Atayal textiles. However, the Atayals had some experience of weaving blue colour textiles as they had traded **for** blue yarns and fabrics **with** the Han Chinese before the Japanese colonization period (1895-1945). Weavers in the Yeh-Ton **Workshop** **did** not have **problems, therefore**, producing a perfect textile of “Hakka Blue” but they had a hard time with yellow, as it was rarely seen traditionally and today's Atayal weavers have no experience of dealing with the yellow colour. This is evident in Figure 3.30, which reveals their experimentation with different colours such as grey, blue, brown yarns interwoven with the yellow yarn to **discover** the right tone. In this experimentation process, **it was found** **that** the yellow colour became “**dirty**” when mixed with certain colours. Weavers in the Yeh- Ton workshop called these different tones of yellow, “The Dirty Yellow”. “The Dirty Yellow” textile sample reflects and records the weavers working process. Such “impromptu experiments” are an experience-broadening and **capability**-building opportunity for aboriginal weavers.



Figure 3.31: *Africussion* costume made using Hakka Blue and Dirty Yellow textiles.

While the weavers thought of the yellow as “dirty”, I felt that the tones differed **markedly**. I came up subsequently with the idea of using the differentiation as a deliberate structural dimension in the woven works, just as painters use different light and dark hues to highlight the contrast of brightness and shadow. In Figure 3.31, the yellow, separated by the colour of “Hakka Blue”, no longer look dirty. Instead, the changes of tones and colours gave the woven work a more delicate look, as if each of the yellow varieties had been specifically created and perfectly coordinated for the costume itself. According to the concept of aesthetics of imperfection and after refreshment, useless could be useful and ugliness, beauty.



Figure 3.32: “The Hundred-pace Snake” textile, Yeh-Ton Workshop, 2005

I named the woven textile in Figure 3.32 “The Hundred-Pace Snake in Museum”. At first sight, the woven textile resembles a colourful snake with its delicate diamond patterns and the kaleidoscopic look of the work reminded me of the spirits of the Atayal ancestors in so far as it reveals an

admiration for the Hundred-Pace snake tradition and evokes the legend of our ancestors. This work was originally woven for a restoration project produced in collaboration with the National Prehistory Museum. In [that](#) project, the Yeh-Ton weavers duplicated some antique back-strap loom textiles on a modern loom for the National Prehistory Museum. Though [when](#) duplicating old textiles, different looms require different skills and produce different structures. By using a modern machine to recreate traditional patterns, the weavers faced a series of challenges in the transfer of technologies. As some traditional patterns cannot be recreated on modern looms, Yeh-Ton weavers had to develop new pattern structures to represent the old patterns. By successfully [overcoming](#) the challenges, the weavers [had](#) injected innovations [into](#) the traditional work.

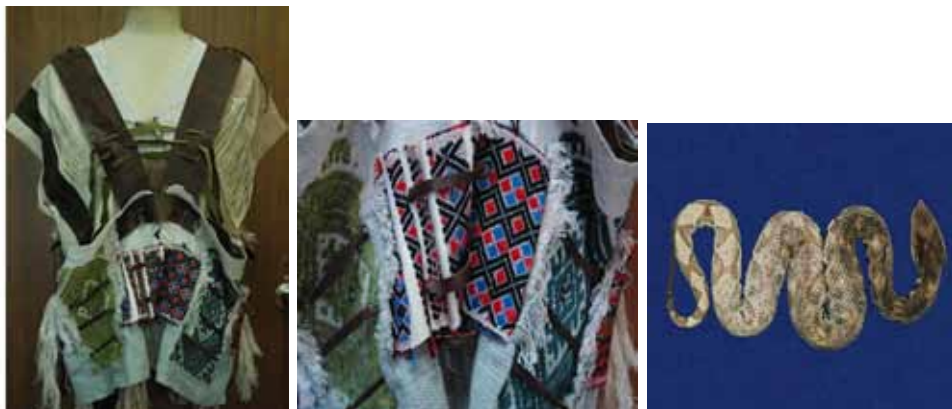
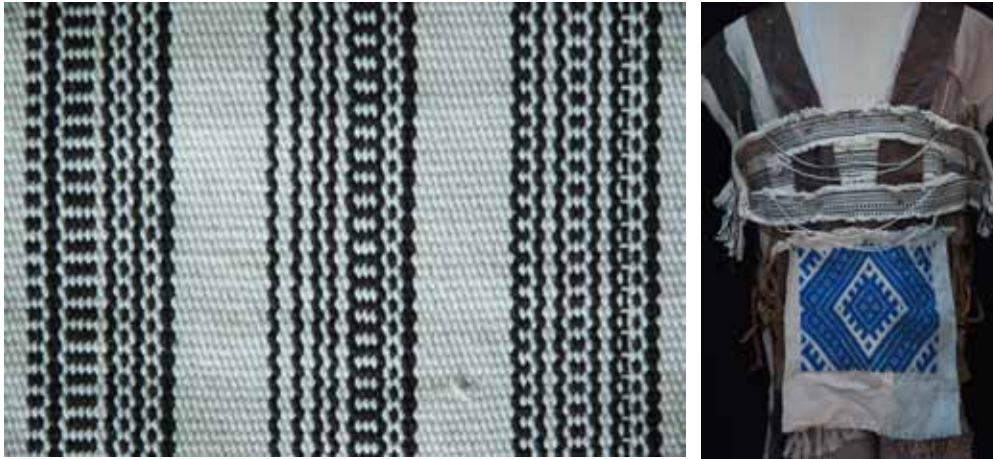


Figure 3.33-34: *Africussion* costume made with the hundred-pace snake patterned textiles.

Figure 3.35: A hundred-pace snake. (Digitalarchives.tw., 1986)

This incomplete textile (see Figure [3.32](#)) reminded me of the curve of a hundred-pace snake (see Figure [3.35](#)) and inspired me to pleat the textiles to make the textile look like a crawling snake and to place the textile remnant right at the centre of the costume (see Figure [3.33-34](#)). Because the textile [was](#) rather small, in order to [increase](#) the visual attraction, I placed two larger sized diamond-patterned textiles [next to it](#) to highlight the design. This costume design not only [provides](#) a feast for the eye, but also indirectly depicts the legendary story of the aborigines.





(Left) Figure 3.36: [The Black Line Lost Its Way](#), Atayal woven textile.

(Right) Figure 3.37: *Africussion* costume made [with The Black Line Lost Its Way](#).

The original design of the final piece known as “[The Black Line Lost Its Way](#)” (see Figure 3.36) was three very similar patterns which ran parallel to each other, but an inexperienced weaver had made a mistake in the warping process without knowing it. The weaver hadn’t **realised** that the patterns were not identical to each other until she wove but the result, unexpectedly, looked very creative. It was actually her second try. She made a warping mistake at her first attempt, and one of the three patterns looked different from the other two. She thought that she had made the necessary corrections and had every step right in her second try, but it became three entirely different patterns. Maybe it was the ancestors playing a joke on her, so she wryly remarked that her black line had lost its way.

I applied this idea of “[The Black Line Lost Its Way](#)” to my costume design (see Figure [3.37](#)). The accidentally created pattern, reminded me that my lines had also lost their way when I tried to do the warping motion. [Therefore, I incorporated the warping motion of the loom into my design: I laced together the three left-hand ends of the straps and likewise the three right-hand ends in parallel, and then deconstructed the parts between the straps or stripes by removing the weft so that other clothing materials, such as leather, could be laced in between them.](#)

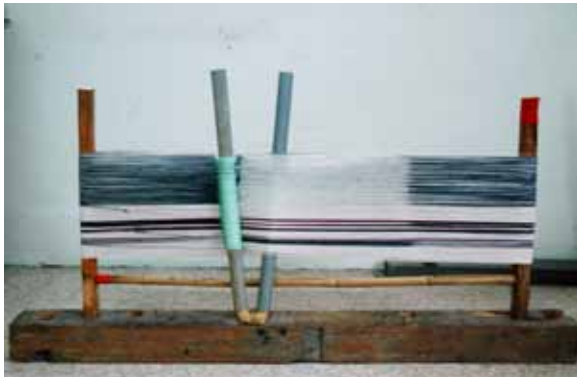


Figure 3.38: Back-strap loom warping, Da-an tribe, February 2005.

The idea of **laring** different clothing materials together came from **the** motion of a traditional back-strap loom (see Figure 3.38). The complete “**The Black Line Lost Its Way**” textile was dissected into pieces of straps which were **then** woven and laced together. Similarly, my personal weaving experience was woven together with that of the beginner weaver, who without conscious intent had created this “**The Black Line Lost Its Way**” pattern.

Perhaps weavers consider such textiles as a part of learning as they improve their weaving skills. I hold a different view because I think that imperfections have a more profound significance. They represent the experimental process of the manner by which the weaving tradition has evolved, under the accumulated wisdom and endeavour of countless weavers. Furthermore, these imperfect textiles, as Kayi’s own experience **suggests**, prove that challenges and difficulties can stimulate and give birth to creativity. In line with Laozi’s theory that “a man of great wisdom often seems to be humble”, (Laozi, 1996, p.19) imperfection **becomes** a driving force **which generates and creates something positive, and also draws creativity out of the aboriginal weaving tradition.**

The *Africussion* **designs** integrated flawed textiles with other materials **when they were woven together.** They also **represent** the integration of various aesthetics **of** different times, locations and communities. The design is **at the**

same time a collection of theatrical costumes, and a platform for intercultural dialogue. Visually, the costume designs of *Africussion* brought together my “imperfection aesthetics”, my knowledge of aboriginal weaving techniques and reflected the creativity essence of Taiwan’s traditional aboriginal weaving culture. The designed costumes, in my view, were dialectics of the past and present.

## Endnote

- 1 In a legendary story of Bunun, vipers and Bunun people are friends forever. Once upon a time, a Bunun couple had a new-born baby. But after the mother breast-fed the baby, she died of unknown causes. Before she closed her eyes, she asked the father to take good care of her child. So, to save the child, the father asked other relatives to feed the child, and those who fed the child all died of unknown causes. Soon, everyone got scared and no one was willing to take care of the baby. They even believed that the baby was possessed by evil spirit. The tribal fellows therefore collectively made a decision to ask the father to throw the baby away. So the father could only accede to the decision and took the baby to the deep mountain. He took off his warrior clothes as a blanket to wrap up the baby, placed the baby on a palm tree, and left. One day, he missed his child so much, that he again went to the deep mountain to take a look. The Bunun father surprisingly saw that his baby had turned into a beautiful hundred-pace viper, who told the father in Bunun language that “I am your child. Please don’t hurt me. My offspring, the vipers, will be friends with the Bunun generation after generation. Even though, vipers are poisonous, we will never hurt Bunun people. Instead, we will help Bunun to kill their enemies. However, if Bunun people find a viper, please send it back to the palm grove safely.” The father therefore made a deal with the viper that Bunun and vipers will be best friends forever and always help each other out.
- 2 In January, 2005, I set foot towards the Da-an tribe to undertake a fieldwork. Due to language barriers, my conversations with Kayi were short and simple. Kayi is a modest weaver. She only occasionally talked about herself, or told stories about others, upon my requests.
- 3 To ban the aborigines from weaving was like forcing the weavers to end their lives. Therefore, during Japanese colonization, many Atayal weavers would travel deep into the mountains to continue weaving secretly, in order to pass the tradition on to younger generations.
- 4 October 2008, Da-an tribe.
- 5 October 2009, Bukhara, Uzbekistan.
- 6 Each of the aboriginal tribes has its traditional colours. Yellow is not a traditional colour of the Atayal tribe, but has been commonly used by the Paiwan, Rukai, and Puyuma tribes.

## CHAPTER 4: THE COSTUMES OF ROMEO AND JULIET

This chapter aims to explore how changes in cultural identity had diverse effects on Taiwan's aboriginal weaving tradition, and how inter-cultural encounters were able to breathe new life into the classic Shakespeare play, *Romeo and Juliet*. The aesthetics of my *Romeo and Juliet* costume designs reflects the conflicts and confrontations resulting from shifts in cultural identity and brings a creative dimension to both the weaving arts practised by Taiwan's aborigines and to the theatrical arts themselves through the costume designs.

As with the *Africussion* production, the costume designs for *Romeo and Juliet* used aboriginal woven textiles and Taiwanese weaving techniques to explore the idea of an "Aesthetics of Imperfection". However, unlike the designs for *Africussion*, those for *Romeo and Juliet* employed a greater diversity of design elements in forms and materials that were the outcome of various inter-cultural encounters. One example of that was seen during the weaving process for the *Romeo and Juliet* costume production, where aboriginal weavers had more opportunities to interact and brainstorm with the theatrical artists, while I was given the chance to observe the weavers closely and see how weavers with different training and professional backgrounds reacted differently to the idea of bringing innovation to the traditional forms, when receiving stimulation from other cultures.

At the beginning of my research, I expected to find that the aboriginal weaving tradition had taken on a new identity that I could analyze along with its new aesthetics. However, the experience of creating the *Romeo and Juliet* costumes made me realise that when looking into tradition, one should not merely focus on whether the tradition has been borrowed to develop a new form, but concentrate on understanding the original traditions in depth.

Through continuing the dialogue between the two poles of convention and innovation in the design process, I was able to accept the opinions of the others, and bring myself and some of the aboriginal modern weavers around to a more balanced and objective view of aboriginal woven textiles.

#### *4.1 The Cultural Identity of Taiwanese Aboriginal Modern Weavers*

In my previous chapter I **have** examined the tremendous evolution in the living conditions of aborigines over the last one hundred years, the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time during which Taiwanese aborigines were forced to transform their original tribal way of living into one dominated by economic activities. This profit-inspired change was not the only factor in the evolution of the aboriginal weaving tradition. The newly felt significance of aboriginal cultural identity was also a contributing influence. Since 1990, Taiwan society has been engulfed by the antagonistic challenges of **globalisation and localisation**; yearnings for a lost time and space have grown into a global phenomenon. In their desire to uphold a fundamental belief and rebuild aboriginal weaving culture, many contemporary Taiwanese aboriginal weavers have dedicated themselves to the work of cultural restoration: two such **are the** Atayal weaver, Yuma Taru, who focuses on the reproduction of Atayal traditional textiles (there will be more discussion on this point below), and the Kavalan weavers of the Shin-She tribe, Hualien, who are devoted to the restoration of traditional banana fibre weaving<sup>1</sup>.

However, the weavers' understanding of, and attitudes toward, the idea of their cultural identity differ, depending on their respective age group, and their educational and residential background. Those differences in turn have influenced the weavers' work which shows that they hold different interpretations of the aesthetics of the weaving tradition. For instance, Lawyi Kayi, the experienced weaver mentioned in the previous chapter, has

never consciously woven her tribal identity into her work. Having lived in a tribe all her life, Kayi naturally has felt it unnecessary to reinforce the idea deliberately that she is an **aborigine**. Ever since she started to learn the skills of weaving, she has been an Atayal weaver, following in the footsteps of her ancestors. By being creative and expressing her passion for weaving, she integrates the aesthetics she has acquired in her daily life into her traditional woven textiles to present a new **weaving** form. Nonetheless, Lawyi **Kayi** represents not the present day but the old tradition of aboriginal weaving culture.

On the other hand, many aboriginal weavers from the younger generations fill the gap between the modern lifestyles they live and the tribal lifestyles that are replete with tradition. Living as they do in today's multi-cultural society, many aboriginal modern weavers naturally undergo a process of rediscovering their cultural identity. Hence, many of the modern weavers tend to reinforce and highlight their tribal identity by intentionally weaving into their textiles the traditional symbols, patterns and forms which they believe to be cultural assets of **their** tribe. Any moves to change these symbols, they feel, would present a confused image of the tribal identity; they perceive traditional patterns and forms as unchangeable. The result is that, in comparison to the older generation, young weavers try even harder to find traditional patterns and put much effort into duplicating the old forms in the **intent** of preserving tradition. Yuma Taru, my co-designer and costume producer for both *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet*, is representative of the younger generation of aboriginal weavers. The story of her life reflects how **young** weavers differ from **those of** the older generations in their efforts to cope with the challenges facing aboriginal woven textiles today.

Yuma's story provides a typical example of the way a highly educated elite aboriginal young woman can be strongly influenced by her beliefs in

the weaving traditions. When Yuma was a child, Yuma's father, a Chinese veteran and her Atayal mother moved to Taichung, and, as they wanted her to have the skills necessary to succeed in contemporary society, enrolled her in a school in the city. They were concerned about the negative influences she might receive living within her own tribe, and thought that she would be better off having no contact with it. However, while at college, Yuma attended a lecture on the costumes of Chinese ethnic minorities which sparked in her a sudden interest in her own tribe and a strong sense of responsibility towards it. No matter how hard her parents tried to tone down the tribal influence, she still felt a strong connection to her maternal Atayal heritage. Yuma passed her exams and after graduating from college, became a public servant as her mother expected. However, just a few years later, in 1992, Yuma's strong sense of social responsibility impelled her to disregard her mother's wishes, resign from her secure governmental job, give up city life and return to her mother's tribe.

Yuma Taru returned to the Da-an tribe to learn from her grandmother and great-aunt to weave on a back-strap loom. To learn professional weaving skills, Yuma applied for and won a place at the Graduate Department of Textiles and Clothing at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei; and after writing her thesis, "A Study of Traditional Atayal Textiles Production", was awarded a Master's degree in 1994. Having acquired expertise in traditional weaving from her tribe and now academic understanding, Yuma became a spokeswoman for, and a key proponent of, the aboriginal weaving culture. Yuma once said: "The only thing we have on our minds right now, is trying to preserve every aspect of our culture, seeing to it that it does not vanish again. If it does, the roots of Taiwan's aborigines will be lost forever, and the identity of the Formosan indigenous people will be obscured by the tides of time, leaving a breed of faceless natives" (Hsieh, 2007). Her life, educational background and multi-cultural encounters with the urban elite have made

Yuma realise her tribal identity makes her different from a typical Taiwanese, and have awakened her to the importance of acknowledging tribal identity. In the end, Yuma has become more actively devoted to the re-establishment of the aboriginal weaving arts, not only by way of her matrilineal connection to them but also by her strengthening of her tribal bonds.

On September 21, 1999, Taiwan was badly hit by an earthquake, which triggered the mudslides that buried Yuma's home in the Da-an tribe. After relocating to the neighbouring Xiang Bi tribe in Miaoli, Yuma spearheaded the launch of the Yeh-Ton Workshop work shop which aimed to revive traditional dyeing and weaving skills. She started to teach the women in nearby tribes to weave traditional textiles on a modern loom. Her workshop now employs about ten skilled weavers on a long-term basis, in order to maintain the productivity of the shop and to help the weavers improve their standard of living. The quality and artistic value of the Yeh-Ton made textiles have a reputation in the textiles profession of being woven by well-trained weavers capable of reproducing high quality, perfectly constructed, traditional textiles. Several of the weavers even have expertise in the most difficult brocade weaving techniques. The weavers are proud of the craftsmanship that enables them to weave inherited traditional woven patterns perfectly on modern looms.

The purpose of the Yeh-Ton Workshop is not confined to the one activity. In addition to weaving traditional textiles that can be traded commercially, the weavers of the shop, led by Yuma, tour the country teaching and demonstrating aboriginal weaving skills and exhibiting the items of their weaving culture as installation art. Some of their work, for instance, is displayed in the National Prehistory Museum in Taitung, with their "A Dream with Wings", winning the Excellence Award in the 1st Public Arts Awards. The Yeh-Ton Workshop is also engaged in various projects which attempt to reinvigorate



traditional skills. Since 2004, the [workshop](#) has been dedicated to developing new techniques in the reproduction of the Atayals' traditional woven textiles.



Figure 4.1-2: The reproduced traditional Atayal textiles by Yeh-Ton [Workshop](#). ([PChome E-paper](#))

Yuma was not content with simply duplicating a few typical traditional patterns so [she studied](#) and researched weaving methods in order to recreate unique traditional patterns copied from old textiles on a modern loom. With her efforts, Yuma Taru has created a new technique in traditional style weaving for modern [looms](#) (see [figure 4.1-2](#)). The reproduced [traditional Atayal](#) textiles, while the patterns look traditional, [are using modern techniques](#)--proof [that research](#) and [the](#) experimental process help to avoid making a [mere](#) "replica" of [an old textile](#). In 2008, a [paper](#), *Reappearance of Atayal: Catalogue of the Reproductions of Pan-Atayal Traditional Costumes*, was published by the National Museum of Prehistory in Taitung, depicting the fruits of the collaborative efforts of Yeh-Ton and the National Museum of Prehistory in collecting and reproducing Atayal costumes and handicrafts. The [work](#) has made a great contribution to the study and decoding of the finely detailed structures of antique back-strap loom textiles, and appropriately transformed the traditional woven codes into written patterns that enable a weaver to reproduce them on a modern loom.

While it is undeniable that [her](#) endeavours have greatly helped to promote the development of the aboriginal weaving tradition and the reawakening of interest in the heritage of tribal cultures, the success of Yuma's project also reveals that the usual stance of many modern weavers is to focus on tribal identity [as a means of defining](#) what is meant by "aboriginal [weaving](#) tradition". In brief, for those modern weavers, re-establishing the traditional weaving culture means that conventional patterns and symbols should be preserved. Therefore, for them the continued existence of the weaving arts rests mainly upon the idea of reproduction. However, that idea makes it difficult to encourage the weavers to bring innovation into the traditional craft, and hinders the advancement of the woven arts and the cultivation of talented weavers. In the end, the aboriginal weaving culture may become stagnant [since](#) so many weavers are reluctant to add [new](#) forms to the traditional. Furthermore, as the commercial need for symbolised traditional textile products for the [commercial](#) market is economically beneficial to aboriginal weavers, they are encouraged in their belief that they should conserve their cultural assets and safeguard their traditions. As they respond to the requirements of commerce, modern weavers become even more [set](#) in their desire to protect conventional traditions by reproducing the old patterns.

However, it could be argued that if the [aborigines'](#) traditional weaving arts are defined by many modern weavers as a collective cultural asset of all the tribes, and reproduction is limited to only certain fixed traditional symbols [only](#), a biased interpretation of the so-called "weaving traditions" may be the result. Such a practice, I believe, will weaken the ability of aboriginal weavers to create with any vigour; the personal characteristics of individual weavers will be ignored; and the development of aboriginal weaving arts will hit a [dead end](#). [Using](#) the concept of cultural conservation to protect aboriginal weaving tradition, therefore, is akin to shutting up historic curios inside

museums. They may well be preserved for thousands of years and provide a testament to past history, but they will inevitably lack vitality and vibrancy. Traditional arts can be strengthened and passed on through their interactions with the modern world, an aspect that is too often neglected.

## 4.2 Identity Crisis

The director of the production *Romeo and Juliet*, Daniel Yang, asked me why I wanted to use aboriginal woven textiles as the main design element for the play's costumes. In addition to the fact that I was actively exploring aboriginal weaving traditions, I felt that the "tribal identity" strongly held by Taiwan's aboriginal weavers could echo the "group identity" of each of the two families in the play. I therefore used aboriginal woven textiles as the costume materials to reflect the character of the play.

Social identity theorist Tajfel when describing how group identity affects individual behaviour, defines a person's feeling of group identity as being "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to this" (Tajfel, 1978, p.63). This helps explain why the modern aboriginal weavers use tribal symbols in their weaving: an attempt to proclaim their group identity and ensure the continuity of their weaving traditions. Shakespeare, likewise, uses issues surrounding group identity to create confrontations between the two families, the Montagues and the Capulets in his drama.

The crafts researcher, Juliette MacDonald explains, "Identity determines who we are, our roots, our position in the family and in the larger community. We are each constituted by multiple identities: national, social, cultural, racial, class, familial, gendered and so forth" (MacDonald, 2006). Identity is

a core element of our personal and cultural development, and an important indication of our individuality and common cultural heritage. While, most aboriginal weavers believe that identity is consistent, unified and fixed, recent post-modernist theorists claim multiple **identities**. “They, the post-modernist theorists, believed identity was fragmented, conflicted, constructed and always situated in a flowing process. As our life had been changing, in different contexts, everyone owns many different identities” (MacDonald, 2006).

Kathryn Woodward in her book, *Identity and Difference*, believes that “identity” is situated at a particular moment in the entire “circuit of culture”, and that it changes over time. She notes that changes in identity may appear as the relations between individuals and society also **change**. Such a correlation is highly complicated, co-existing, and closely intertwined. She states, “**identity** gives us a location in the world and presents the link between us and the society in which we live; this has made the concept of the subject of increased academic interest as a conceptual tool with which to understand and make sense of social, cultural, economic and political **changes**” (Woodward, 1997, p.1).

Identity **then is formed** out of differences. “Identity” comes about when the subject identifies itself from the others through a process of comparing the differences that exist between itself and others. Without that process of comparison, no “identity” would exist. Therefore, “difference” and “identity” are two sides of the same coin. Through competition between different social groups, the **hierarchy of the groups and the divisions between each and the others are drawn**. The word “**identity**” contains complex meanings – the same ethnic group “identifies” itself through genetic ties; and in a society with multiple cultures, the phenomenon of “identification” constantly emerges out of contradictions.

In Shakespeare's play, "identity crisis" and "fate" are the key elements driving the play. The animosity between the two feuding families of Montagues and Capulets is what leads to the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*. Exclusion was an important strategy for each of the two families as a way to strengthen their hatred of outsiders, consolidate the family advantages and reinforce their identity. Both the structure of Taiwan's aboriginal tribal societies and their strong family ties, as is evident in the setting of *Romeo and Juliet*, tend to exclude members of other tribes and outsiders, and in so doing a tribe is able to consolidate an individual's loyalty to, and his identity within, the group; and that group identity has the effect of strengthening the ability of the tribe to survive, compete with others, protect the group's interests and ensure the continuity of its traditions.

Despite the battling between the two families, the play touches the heart of its audiences not because of the confrontations, hatred and exclusion of outsiders, but because of the romantic love which fights against family traditions and old ideologies. The true love of the young lovers stands in stark contrast to the closed-minded familial bonds. The play reveals that the promptings of the free spirit can overcome feelings of hate and prejudice. In the balcony scene (Act II, Scene II), Juliet declares that her heart and feelings are different from those of her family. In accord with her family tradition she should despise Romeo, a Montague. Instead, falling in love with him, she follows her heart and discovers feelings that are more real and even stronger than the hate between the two feuding families. She questions the meaning of the family name and identity. Juliet speaks,

*"O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet...."*

Tis but thy name that is my enemy;--  
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.  
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,  
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part  
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!  
What's in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet;  
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,  
Retain that dear perfection which he owes  
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,  
And for that name which is no part of thee  
Take all myself."(Shakespeare 1999, p 254)

The scene clearly delivers the message that Juliet, inspired by love, is prepared to free herself from the family tradition. It also shows that when the identity of an individual conflicts with family loyalties, confused feelings over identity may ensue. Theorist Erik Erikson divided the striving toward identity consciousness into “seven different tasks or vectors” in an individual’s life and coined the term “identity crisis” for what he believed was one of the most important conflicts people face in their psychical development. According to him, an identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at **oneself** (Erikson, 1970, p.11-22). He explains, “as students move through the vectors, they become more aware of their own identity--including but not limited to their racial identity--and in turn more understanding of how their identity relates to other people’s identities and **cultures**” (Inkelas, 2006, p.6) This describes not only the group identity crisis of the Taiwanese aboriginal modern weavers but also the identity crisis of Juliet in the play.

The identity crisis or change in awareness that Juliet undergoes also suggests that the intrusion of different cultures can easily awaken a desire to determine one’s individual identity, and trigger a movement to question **familial beliefs** and traditions that **goes on to generate** a process of change. In the case of **Juliet's** identity crisis, Romeo, the enemy intruder, is the agent that inspires

Juliet's desire to change. So it is that, without the intrusion of different cultures and without there being a chance to encounter other cultures, it is difficult to have one's awareness raised and to be **provoked an examination** of the current status quo and to be motivated to create new traditions. The intrusion of an **outsider of** a different culture and **resulting awareness of** the comparisons and contrasts between them may help individuals within a group to surpass **cultural differences, break** with conventional beliefs and develop free will.

I find that the scene in which Juliet faces an identity crisis in awareness echoes that of the modern weavers in their struggle with tradition and innovation. In the past, individuals from the same group or community collectively fought against the intrusion of cultures from outside. In the past the traditional tribe, consisting mainly of members from the same group or community, tightly bound by its cultural identity, fought collectively against the intrusion of outside cultures and was highly stable. However, nowadays, under the international trend of **globalisation and deterritorialisation, individuals and cultural differences** bring in diversity from outside. Coming under the influence of a more diverse culture, societal members will tend to dissociate themselves from their traditions. As more and more aboriginal weavers become aware of the new interest in diversity in the modern world, and are caught in-between their traditional tribal culture and the new urban culture, they, **like Juliet**, may be precipitated into an identity crisis.

**The new generation of weavers** is not like the **previous** generations that lived in the tribe all their lives. Earlier tribal societies, where the values and identity of a tribe were more unified and simple, differed from contemporary modern society in which the relations between individuals and their groups are increasingly becoming more **and more** complicated as the cultures become more **and more** diverse. This has the knock-on effect of making tribal

identity **so much** more complex. Contemporary lifestyles provide young weavers with more contact with the outside world with the result modern weavers today straddle **the gap between** both tribal and urban cultures and that, naturally, means that the formation of identity from differences becomes even more complicated.

As **argued** above, cultural differences provide a foundation and a means by which individuals identify themselves from others, and identify others from themselves. Therefore, through their encounters with other cultures, aboriginal weavers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the common characteristics of their tribes and the uniqueness of themselves as individuals. As their understanding increases, an awareness of creating a work that not only adheres to their **tribal traditions**, but also **accords with** modern aesthetics, will arise. However, finding a balance between the two is not an easy task. Raising awareness is not synonymous with finding a solution that will change the status quo. At the moment, the development of aboriginal weaving arts is presently **stuck** in a bottleneck.

Traditional aboriginal weaving culture is a living art. Its continuation can only be assured by its integration into modern life by those aboriginal weavers who have acquired new experiences. As no one can control and contain the changes and development of a culture, the weavers shouldn't confine or limit themselves to what went before. The development of aboriginal weaving arts requires the joint endeavours of all weavers. If the vitality of the weaving arts is to **continue**, then efforts shouldn't be limited to conservation only. Instead, external elements should be added into the tradition, in order to induce an evolution of the art and promote new forms of tradition. Only by so doing can the traditional be reinvigorated and continue on.





Figure 4.3: Gregory Leong, Manchu Shoes: 'Mother of Australia' — Pauline's Superior Shoes 1999.

As a living art in the old days and a commercial product today, aboriginal woven textiles raise issues not only about cultural identity but also about the nature of textiles as aesthetic objects. The relationship between culture identity and aesthetic creativity becomes more important than ever today. There are many textile artists in the world who express themselves through the objects they make. One such is Gregory Leong, a Chinese-Australian costume artist. As you can see in Figure 4.3, (Australian Public Intellectual Network, n.d.), he uses “the meanings of costume as both symbolic and subversive devices” (Leong, 2001, p.91) to proclaim his identity as a member of a minority culture in Australia. There is also Kim Sooja, a Korean textiles artist, see Figure 4.4 (Cultureserve.net blog, 2008); she combines her sewing and *bottari*, made by ordinary people, with conceptual and Minjoong art and creates new possibilities and meanings that go beyond the common traditional forms and uses of *bottari*.



Woven textiles too could play an important role in allowing the aboriginal weavers to say something about who they are -- not only to express group identity but also to symbolize a weaver's individuality. Virginia Postrel discusses identity in the realm of cultural aesthetics and says:

“One of the marks of our aesthetic age is an ever more common refusal to let external authorities dictate authenticity...if the meaning of aesthetics is to signal identity, and if meaning arises from history, experience, and personality, then aesthetic authenticity cannot lie in some pre-existing definition of truth. It must come instead from the match between form and desire.” (Postrel 2004, p.116)

Aesthetic meaning, indeed, changes over time: we should not merely copy what we had before, but find our own interests and new forms for our age. That I believe is the true lesson to be found in the aboriginal weaving tradition. “[Much] of the value of aesthetics lies in its pliability, in our ability to direct the joys of form to new meanings or to strip form of its connections and enjoy aesthetics for its own sake, often leading to new associations” (Postrel 2004, p.95). Aesthetic authenticity is personal or social; therefore, the meaning and value of aboriginal woven textiles lies in more than their use as objects for consumption or as tribal symbols. I believe aboriginal woven textiles as handicrafts should be allowed to show more of the weaver’s creative abilities and more of her individual identity instead of being tied to what is fixed and traditional.

### 4.3 *The Designs of the Romeo and Juliet Costumes*

The production of *Romeo and Juliet*, discussed in this chapter, was mounted and performed by the School of the Theatre Arts of the Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA). Director Daniel Yang, a visiting professor from the University of Colorado and an expert in Shakespeare studies, said

that he wanted to mount an authentic classical Italian Renaissance-style *Romeo and Juliet* in Taiwan. Considering the budget and costume technical capacity of the costume department, we decided to set the production in the Renaissance-style of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. By way of the production, Yang said that he was going to teach and demonstrate to the TNUA students the technical skills involved in producing a classical Shakespeare play. From the outstanding quality of the outcome, the hard work of Yang, who indeed stuck to his word, is evident.

However, from the viewpoint of the visual aspect, I thought it would be difficult and contradictory to design the production in the style of traditional Renaissance culture using the local resources found in Taiwan. Since the actors and actresses were Taiwanese, speaking mandarin Chinese, the visual and audible contradiction inherent in the differences of the two cultures would not be easy for the audiences to ignore. I, therefore, came up with the idea of departing from the traditional setting. We could produce a classical Italian Renaissance-style *Romeo and Juliet* in Taiwan, but should highlight the local elements and break away totally from a typical *Romeo and Juliet* with an Italian setting. So, instead of taking the traditional period approach to the costume design, I created costumes comprised of the woven works of Taiwan's aboriginal weavers, which contained two tribal symbols and which at the same time had a highly decorative function, and merely suggested the Italian Renaissance period of the play's setting. By incorporating eastern elements into a western design style, I intentionally created a design scheme in which an encounter between two different clans could be staged. Since I believe that the tragic confrontations in the drama are mainly caused by "identity crises", I mixed the eastern and western cultures together, and highlighted the aesthetics of imperfection. I believed that by means of that "visual dialogue", or even clash, between the design elements, our production of *Romeo and Juliet* could be presented in the style I was suggesting, and the two feuding families

would have an identity with which our local audiences could more readily connect. I felt my design scheme would be much more meaningful as well to the entire production team than would a mere duplication of a typical western Renaissance style production of the play. My *Romeo and Juliet* costumes were, therefore, intended not only to coordinate the different scenes of the drama, but also to reflect the struggles of aboriginal weavers in their search for an identity within a diverse modern society.

Theatrical productions often draw on current social and political events in order to encourage audiences to reflect on their numerous underlying meanings. In a similar manner to that chosen for our production, many productions of *Romeo and Juliet* are staged with a contemporary setting and, although they are produced in different forms, all highlight the theme of conflicting identities--be they familial identity or ethnic identity. For example, the Broadway musical *West Side Story* based on *Romeo and Juliet* explores the conflict between two families--Puerto Rican immigrants and White Americans --living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Productions of the play have been set in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Pape, 1997, p.69), in the apartheid era in South Africa (Quince, 2000, p.121–125). In 1986, the Royal Shakespeare Company set the play in Verona but switchblades replaced swords, feasts and balls became drug-laden rock parties, and Romeo committed suicide by hypodermic needle (Halio, 1998, p.110). Similarly, Baz Luhrmann's 1996 *Romeo + Juliet*, a film based on the play targeted a young audience of similar age to that of the story's two lovers. With its California setting in Verona Beach and Sycamore Grove and the music of the film appealed successfully to its target audience--the "MTV Generation" (Tatspaugh, 2000, p.140). The film and its costume designs depict the "crass, violent and superficial society" of the contemporary younger American generation (Tatspaugh, 2000, p.142). Those examples affirm that a classical theatre piece can be as relevant today as when it was first staged if its key

elements reflect the cultures and the life experiences with which the audience is familiar.

The costumes in our production of *Romeo and Juliet* then, were designed to incorporate the Renaissance-style of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century when feudal society still prevailed in Europe. At that time, totems and colours were used as symbols of families or clans and served to distinguish one group from another. This tradition required unique totem aesthetics for each group or family. As has been mentioned above, costumes and woven textiles were important symbols used in affirming the tribal identity. Historically, costumes features have customarily been used by directors and costume designers in productions of *Romeo and Juliet* to serve as symbols of the differences and conflicts between the two families and at the same time to create visual tension.

For our production I highlighted the conflict further by fusing differing details in the costumes. Designed as they were in western Renaissance style but made of traditional Taiwanese textiles, the east-west flavours were a conflict in themselves; however, there was an additional clash or dialogue between the Shakespearean drama itself and the costuming, for the Taiwanese aboriginal cultural details in the costumes with their own new look compounded of the two different cultural elements (Italian Renaissance and Tribal Taiwanese) highlighted the high quality weaving skills of present day Taiwanese aborigines—the creativity and culture of Shakespeare in one time and place contrasted with those of the weavers in another time and place. The differences created a series of those contrasts that can often be seen when different cultures collide.

Aside from integrating the styles of different cultures into the costumes and details, I suggested heterogeneity and contrast through my selection

of costume materials. The materials I used in the costumes for the main characters were hand-woven textiles and leather, both traditional materials for aboriginal tribes, and felt, knitted fabrics and leather to symbolize the traditional in western material culture. In addition, I used felt and knitted fabrics to **make connection** with the colonizing period in Taiwan's history when aboriginals exchanged their goods with Europeans for woollen materials, and recycled woollen cloth as material for their own weaving (see Chapter 3.1). My concept of mixing various traditional textile materials in the costumes created further visual tension through the contrast and juxtaposition **of materials** from different cultures, and further demonstrated the cross-cultural character and perspective of the designs.

The dramatic tension rising from the conflicts in *Romeo and Juliet* was also reflected in the production of the woven textiles themselves, deliberately made by three different tribes. Those for the costumes for the members in the Capulet family were woven on traditional back-strap and modern looms by Vika Dansikian of the Kanding Bunun tribe in Taitung. The other textiles, such as those for members in the Montague family, Prince Escalus, Mercutio, Count Paris and the guests in the feast scene, were woven on modern looms by Yuma Taru's weaving workshop by the Siang-bi Attayal tribe in Maioli. The headdresses for most of the female characters were woven and shaped by Awai Da-in Sawan of the Peng-lai Saisiat tribe in Maioli. The different weaving sources **created** textiles differentiated by the personal characteristics of the weavers, **and used** with different tribal symbols **helped underline** the different identities of the two feuding families.

In addition to reflecting identity **conflicts**, the designs of the costumes were based on the idea of "Aesthetics of Imperfection" (See Chapter 3.2), is a kind of reverse thinking which allows us to find the ideal beauty. The "Aesthetics of Imperfection" echoes the tragic love of Romeo and Juliet. The

intertwined thematic elements are woven into complications leading to the tragic ending: the old grudge held by the two families against each **other**, **their** foolishness, their hasty actions and the events **that occur as the result of** a series of unlucky chances. The dramatic structure of the play, highlighting the conflicts, **contrasts**, irregularities, instability and sense of incompleteness **throughout emphasise** the sad fate of the two hapless young lovers.



Figure 4.5: The textile for the costume of the female guest in red.

Accordingly, the **costumes** in this production of *Romeo and Juliet* not only represented the dramatic tension created **by cultural** differences, but also **emphasised** the tragic quality and atmosphere **by way of** forms created according to the idea of an imperfect aesthetics. The imperfect features, namely, irregularities, instability and incompleteness, are intended to correspond to the tragic destiny of the two young lovers. As shown in Figure 4.5, a tragic atmosphere of incompleteness and instability was **suggested by the variation in density** of line and the sense of movement suggested by the arrangement of the design elements. In terms of costume **construction**, machine-weaving was replaced **by hand-weaving** and hand-knotting to convey the characteristics of “imperfect beauty.”



Figure 4.6: Juliet's costume made from felted cotton textile.

The costume design focused particularly on the technical side of handcrafting, ranging from hand-made dyeing, knotting and felting to the research and structure of the materials, in order to demonstrate fully the cultural characteristics and historical qualities of both the western Gothic and Taiwanese aboriginal tribal styles. The techniques and effects of the hand-made materials gave a natural flavour to the colours and quality of these costumes. In addition to the textiles, felting with a hand-made quality was used to reflect the characteristic of the Aesthetics of Imperfection, that is, to emphasize the quality of natural beauty. As shown in Figure 4.6, the fabric used for the costumes in *Romeo and Juliet* was felted cotton fabric. Compared to pure wool felt, felted cotton yarn gives a greater sense of delicacy to a fabric, allows it to drape more readily and permits greater variety in the detailing as well as producing a floating lightness in the cloth.

#### 4.4 The Production of the *Romeo and Juliet* Costumes

Of the costumes in the production, the most important were Juliet's three, which included a casual dress, an evening/wedding gown and a nightgown. The casual dress and the evening/wedding gown consisted of the same under gown made of fabric, and two different coat-gowns made



of aboriginal woven textiles and leathers. Juliet's costumes had multiple symbolic meanings. The **design** of the patterns and the woven structures of the costume textiles were intended to reflect the internal conflicts, struggles and awakenings over her familial identity arising from her new-found love for Romeo. The costume **designs were** inspired by the weaver, Vika Dansikian, who is able to use both traditional back-strap and modern looms. The combination of the two types of woven textile represents **Juliet's** turmoil and, as well, the contrast between traditional and modern, and adds another symbolic meaning to the costume (see Chapter 2.4.3).



Figure 4.7: Juliet's casual dress.

Figure 4.8: The patterns on the textiles for Juliet's casual dress include the blue squares symbolizing her ancestors' eyes, rainbow stripes at the lower left hand corner, black goat-hoofs to link to the rainbow, and the basic patterns of diamond-shape to represent hundred-pace vipers.

Juliet's casual dress connoted tradition, a centralized mind-set and family loyalty. When Juliet first appeared on the stage wearing the casual dress, she had not yet met Romeo and had no doubt in her mind regarding her family's traditions. Accordingly, her costume was woven on a back-strap loom **in line with her traditional and centralised mind-set**; and deliberately designed **so as** to emphasise the traditional nature of its production, as shown in Figure 4.7. The patterns on the dress were Bunun traditional patterns, as seen in Figure 4.8, signifying Juliet's loyalty to and identification with her family. The evening/wedding gown, on the other hand, was made on a modern loom--the modernity of the costume **symbolising** the awakening of Juliet's mind.



Figure 4.9: Juliet's evening/wedding gown.

Figure 4.10: The details of the textile for Juliet's wedding/evening gown.

In the evening/wedding gown, shown in Figures 4.7 and 4.8, the traditional tribal feature of diamond shapes has been replaced by variations of simple lines, colours and structures. The change represents Juliet's inner changes and highlights her new identity. Before meeting Romeo, Juliet had never doubted the conventions of her family identity. Romeo, however, evoked in her a different sensibility and desire. She discovered a different perspective on the old grudge, which brought about an epiphany for her and inspired her new understanding. She was now motivated and encouraged to challenge the boundaries of the family tradition. The costume reflects the **choice** that she **now faced: remain loyal or be disloyal** to that tradition. The variation in the details of the evening/wedding gown, as shown in Figure 4.10, illustrates the internal process of evolution that was stimulated by outside forces and, furthermore, echoes the identity crisis of the aboriginal weavers in **contemporary** society, **as** they are forced to replicate **traditional style work** on modern looms and in so doing face complex intercultural forces. Again, the details were deliberately designed with reference to the irregular and instable structure of the Aesthetics of Imperfection.

During the production process, impromptu interactions between **me and the** weaver, Vika Dansikian, were directly responsible for the development of

the textile design. From the beginning of the production, instead of simply placing an order and overseeing the design and production of my costumes, I decided to co-design with weavers of different tribes so that the costumes could function as a platform for cross-cultural dialogue. My design sketches intentionally left room for the weavers to **add in** their own ideas and feelings. I had deliberately left the pattern details and colours of the textiles for the weavers to decide on, and let them experiment in the weaving process. Throughout production, the aboriginal weavers were able to communicate naturally with and clash **with** western classical traditions; the interactions stimulated the development of new styles in textiles as they threw themselves into the creative side of modern theatrical arts. In short, the costumes in this production were the results of an open design, and the outcome of a series of experiments between me and the weavers.

Let me take Juliet's casual dress as an example. It had been decided that Juliet's casual dress would use the traditional patterns of the Bunun tribe, but after comprehensive discussions, both Vika Dansikian and I agreed that the traditional Bunun patterns needed variation to reflect Juliet's personality and the changes in her mind-set. We hoped that they would **evoke** a sense of instability and of floating, to fully present Juliet's inner world. I elaborated on that conception saying that this variation should be like "ripples," but Vika Dansikian, with her unique Bunun ability to visualize forms, suggested that the variation of patterns should resemble "a hundred-pace viper sleeping and snoring" (See Figure 4.11). Thus Juliet's casual dress gradually took shape. The piece of textile tells not only Juliet's story, but also the stories of Vika Dansikian and me. Three women from different cultural backgrounds were thus connected by a story and a little bit of imagination.



Figure 4.11: Enlarged image of the textile for Juliet's casual dress.

In designing the costumes for different members of the Capulet family, Vika Dansikian and I had lengthy discussions about how the status and personalities of different characters might be differentiated by means of the textiles, despite the fact that they would all follow traditional Bunun patterns. For the Bunun tribe, (see Figure 4.11 for the details of the textile for Juliet's casual dress), diamond shapes represent their good friends the [hundred pace](#) vipers; the ancestors' eyes [symbolising](#) a blessing from the ancestors; the goat hoofs mean that the brave warriors are as strong and vigorous as goats; rainbows are a sign of good luck while the trophy patterns are honourable symbols awarded only to hunters after they have acquired human heads or [the heads, teeth, bones or horns of](#) large animals. The beautiful and delicate traditional patterns on the back of [the](#) costumes for the Capulet men, known as "rainbow diamonds", are found [in traditional](#) Bunun textiles.

[Seeing my designs based](#) on the symbolic meanings of those traditional Bunun patterns and [hearing](#) my elaboration on the unique personality of each character in the play, Vika Dansikian soon decided that the diamond shapes (representing hundred-pace vipers), the goat hoofs ([symbolising](#) the strength and vigour of goats) and rainbows (the symbol of good luck) would be used as common emblems for the Capulet family. The eyes of ancestors, as seen in Figure 4.8, would only be bestowed on costumes belonging to core family

members, such as Lord Capulet and Juliet. However, Lady Capulet and Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, were excluded from those wearing this pattern as they did not deserve the ancestors' blessing because, there was [in this production](#) an implied incestuous relationship between them.

As for the honourable trophy pattern, Vika Dansikian thought at first that Juliet was the only member in the Capulet family [to have](#) shown enough courage to deserve [wearing that](#) particular pattern. Yet, the trophy pattern was also the sign for killing and fighting and therefore not suitable for females. At Vika Dansikian's suggestion, the trophy patterns were excluded [from](#) this production. This shows how the personalities of the Capulet family members were naturally blended with the tribal symbols of the Bunun. Influenced by foreign culture and the personalities of the Capulet family members, Vika Dansikian started to play with the traditional patterns. The process not only created the unique character of the costumes for the production but also demonstrated a possible way for traditional weaving to evolve.

Aside from working with the weavers on the costumes, I invited Awai Da-in Sawan, the bamboo weaver of the Saisiat tribe, to make Juliet's headdress in woven rattan. Millinery in the modern theatres is normally comprised of buckram and millinery wires, but the streamlined and three-dimensional style of the millinery popular in the early Renaissance-style reminds me of the three-dimensional design of bamboo and rattan weaving. Even though I possessed the skills and experience required in millinery making, knowing that bamboo weavers are renowned as the best weavers of [those](#) fibres, I felt that with her skills and experience Awai Da-in Sawan would [make](#) a better quality product and simultaneously enrich my design. For that reason, I invited her to participate in the making of eleven headdresses for all of the female [roles: i.e.](#), Juliet, Lady Capulet, Lady Montague, Nurse and the female

guests involved in the feast scene. Initially, Awai Da-in Sawan hesitated to accept my invitation when she saw the design sketches because she was not familiar with these styles. However, when I told her that I needed her to make these headdresses using her own ideas, she displayed a professional confidence and accepted the challenge. Among the eleven pieces Awai Da-in Sawan made for the production, the major ones were the headdresses for Juliet (see Figure 4.12) and Lady Capulet (see Figure 4.14-15).



(Right) Figure 4.13: The design sketch of Juliet casual dress and headdress.

(Left) Figure 4.12: Juliet's headdress.

I communicated with Awai Da-in Sawan in the same way as I did with Vika Dansikian; that is, I elaborated my sketches with story-telling and detailed interpretations of the personality of each character. However, different characters may differ in their importance. For example, unlike Juliet and Lady Capulet, minor characters such as the female guests in the feast scene **are** not roles of any depth or uniqueness of personality. Since Awai Da-in Sawan was highly experienced, I did not spend **so** much time where she lived with her tribe, working with her as I had with Vika Dansikian. Instead, I gave her the autonomy to elaborate at will in making the headdresses. Consequently, when I received the final products, I was surprised at the difference between her works and my design sketches for Juliet's and Lady Capulet's headdresses, as shown in Figures 4.13 and 4.16 respectively. **Meanwhile**, the outline, size and general proportion more or less resembled my sketches, the details of the headdresses, **particularly in the structure**, were completely different.

Interestingly, the headdresses for the minor characters, on the other hand, were identical to the styles in my sketches.



Figure 4.14-15: Lady Capulet's headdress.

Figure 4.16: The design sketch of Lady Capulet's costume and headdress.

Later when I asked Awai Da-in Sawan why she had altered the design, she said that it was because I had particularly explained and elaborated on the personalities of Juliet and Lady Capulet, and had said that I wanted her to make the headdresses according to her own ideas. Taking my description into account, she thought Juliet should be a beautiful girl, like a flower in full blossom, so she altered my design of a round hat as seen in Figure 4.13 into a flower shape as seen in Figure 4.12. Meanwhile, since Juliet was a girl with her own, often fairly rebellious **in** mind, Awai Da-in Sawan deliberately designed a sharp tip for each of the petals to signify that **of her**. As for Lady Capulet, Awai Da-in Sawan considered her to be an upper class and sexy woman but ultimately immoral. Therefore, she developed the shape of a female body or **calabash**, for Lady Capulet's headdress (as shown in Figures 4.14-15). For the female guests **at** the feast, because I **had** mentioned their social status only and **had** not **elaborated** on their personalities, Awai Da-in Sawan had no clue as to how she might represent the guests in her design. As a result, she made the headdresses exactly as they were in my sketches.

From the aforementioned process of making costumes and the experience of working with Vika Dansikian and Awai Da-in Sawan, **it can be seen** that clashes and communications with other cultures, particularly those brought about through in-depth communication, help **in** the creation of styles and patterns. **It also supports my contention** that what the aboriginal weavers **need most is not solely** an innate ability for original or creative thinking, but rather the appropriate environment for them to develop or to grow used to original thinking. In other words, if I had not described the characteristics of the roles in details, Awai Da-in Sawan would have been unlikely to establish an emotional connection to the designs. Most weavers need only the skills for simply imitating and copying an existing form, but cultural content is an essential driver for the evolution of form as well as **for** the evolution of techniques. From my **experience**, I have concluded that while “design for design’s sake” or “design for style’s sake” may conjure up temporary sensations, it will ultimately end in a sense of emptiness. Such an experience helps explain why the **commercialisation** and mass reproduction of aboriginal traditional textiles cannot initiate a breakthrough **in traditional** creativity. The problem with the weak development of aboriginal weaving handicraft lies not in commercialisation alone, but in the fact that **contemporary** content is not **utilised** to **enrich traditional** forms.

The experience of working with Vika Dansikian and Awai Da-in Sawan shows that aboriginal weavers’ indeed have the ability to innovate and think outside the confines of tradition. However, the experience of making the costumes for the production of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Yeh-Ton Workshop showed me that the modern weavers’ attitude toward innovation of traditional craft should be considered from another perspective. Of the making of the textiles woven in the Yeh-Ton Workshop for *Romeo and Juliet*, I was most impressed by the procedure of warping and weaving the textiles for **the** costume of the mediator, Prince Escalus of Verona, not because of the delicacy or the special



style of the **textile**, but because of the strength of the weavers' **reactions** to my work. Their **reactions** led me to reconsider why aboriginal modern weavers don't appear to like to create.

Prince Escalus, as the mediator in the play, not only halts the disputes and arguments between the two feuding families, but also functions as a balancing power that can **settle** conflicts and **stabilise** uncertainty. The tension between the opposing elements in the dichotomy, i.e., Escalus in his double role as both judge/mediator and law enforcer can be objectively **considered** a divided personality; I hoped to juxtapose elements such as "stability/tradition" vs. "instability/innovation" in the textiles for the Prince. After I had discussions with Yuma Taru, she designed the traditional pattern of red and white for Prince Escalus as shown in **Figure 4.17**. Then she suggested that I work with the weaver during the process of weaving, and guide the weaver in creating structural variations in an impromptu way so as to produce textiles which echoed Prince Escalus' **personality**.



Figure 4.17: The traditional textile for Prince Escalus' costume.



Figure 4.18: The creative textile for Prince Escalus' costume.

In contrast to **the way I established** relations with Vika Dansikian and Awai Da-in Sawan, I failed to spend time **making** a connection between the weaver and the character and left **her** with little understanding of Prince Escalus. The reason for this change in the weaving process was that all of the **other** designs had been the results of my communications and discussions with Yuma Taru; it was she **who** decided the details of the textiles and **then** arranged and

assigned the weavers to the work. Yuma occasionally had different weavers begin and finish a piece of textile to maximise workshop efficiency.

It happened that although I had discussed the character with Yuma Taru, the actual weaver had no idea of our discussions. As a result, I was in the dominant position of having all the knowledge and could regard the weaver as an extension of my own hands. Without any emotional interaction or communication, I imposed on the weaver my own ideas, without thinking of her own personal aesthetic experience. When I became excited by the outcome of my instructions, that is, a three-dimensional style with a loose structure in appearance as shown in Figure 4.18, I was growingly aware of the antipathy of the weaver who thought she was making an ugly textile and did not understand why she had to make a mess of her work. In hindsight, upon reflecting on my own motives and actions, I came to feel I had acted as a typical colonizer, forcing the weaver to identify with my aesthetics, and taking it for granted that she should accept whatever I had instructed her to do.

As a matter of fact, that weaver was one of the best in the Yeh-Ton Workshop. They were all very experienced and famous for their ability to deal with complicated and delicate patterns and took great pride in their ability to weave perfect, flawless patterns. However, what I was looking for was aesthetically the complete opposite of what they had been trained to do. The instable lines on the textiles as shown in Figure 4.18 were very different from the stable and regular patterns of traditional textiles, as in Figure 4.17, and that caused unstable rhythms in the weaver, both psychologically and physically. What was creative, exciting and interesting to me made the weaver very uncomfortable. The weaver was so troubled that Yuma had to arrange another weaver to complete the task.

At first, the experience evoked cross-cultural communication, but what

really interested me was why this weaver was unable to accept forms so different from the traditional ones. Mainstream society has long called for the innovation or diversification of aboriginal traditions. However, during the process of my fieldwork in the tribes, I gradually became aware that the weavers living in the tribes focused too much on the **learning of** weaving skills. Most weavers don't have the experience to create or design new forms and, as a result, are not very interested in innovation. They care more about displaying their skill **at** producing excellent traditional patterns and structures in the textiles; and the well-trained and experienced modern aboriginal weavers were all convinced that repeating and reproducing the tribal symbols was the best way to continue and reconstruct their traditions. It was all part of **their** cultural heritage; so, all their training and efforts went into precisely **reproducing** past forms.

In previous chapters, I **have stated** that there is a two-fold function in traditional aboriginal costumes: decoration and practicality. **Their clothing** served a decorative purpose by showing and allowing identification with the ethnic groups. On the other hand, it is essential for the **clothing** to meet practical needs such as covering bodies or protecting them from heat and injury. Hence, endurance and strength were important qualities in the textiles. The basic requirements of a good textile include a tough structure, and precision and integrity of weaving, which are also the main aims in the training of weaving techniques, while refinement of detail and a flawless finish are traditionally **found** to be the highest standard of aboriginal **hand-woven** textiles.

**Aesthetic** pleasure generally operates within a range of responses set by biological universals; taste and meaning have no anchor and vary from individual to individual as well as from time to time. Aesthetic pleasure and meaning are completely subjective, arising from experience and association

although groups of people may consider themselves to have certain tastes in common. The same form may convey a different meaning, or even none at all, to different people or in different contexts. In Taiwanese tribes, from the past to the present, “perfection” has always been the highest accolade in the weaving of traditional textiles.

With the advent of modern civilization, machines have long produced perfect durable goods cheaply. It is the greatest challenge of all for the weavers to create with their bare hands the precision and perfection that can only be achieved by machines. Nonetheless, most aboriginal weavers still believe in the meaning and value of the hand weaving of traditional and durable textiles. This visual preference is an aesthetic perception shared by almost all those in the aboriginal groups.

Weavers gain great pleasure, confidence and pride from copying traditional patterns perfectly as to do so enables them to identify with their ancestors as well as with themselves. Consequently, no aboriginal weaver would deliberately create a woven textile with flaws. Thus, it can be seen that “The Aesthetic of Imperfection” contradicts the traditional aesthetics and values of the tribes because the intentional “imperfect designs” and the other way of thinking challenge the skilled weavers’ weaving beliefs and habits, and affronts their traditional aesthetic desire to reproduce stereotypically “perfect” traditional textiles. What I had found creative and interesting was pointless and ugly to the aboriginal weaver.

Traditions are the cultural customs and ideals which are collectively shaped in a group of people over many centuries of its history. A cultural identity is unlikely to change overnight. Even though traditions may change as time goes by, the changes evolve gradually over the years. The response of the weaver in the Yeh-Ton Workshop made me question myself: I wondered

whether it was possible that I too in my own way was acting with a bias: unwilling to accept traditional conventions. The experience taught me to consider the feelings of those aboriginal weavers with **greater** sensitivity. It also reminded me to step back and **study things that were different**, with a more objective attitude, **with the intention of finding** balance between differences. To borrow the words from the artist Jacek Friedrich and to refer to the different **positions** of convention and innovation: “They each offer their own vantage points for observation. What is interesting is the never-ending polarity of the two approaches: despite centuries of attempts to harmonize them, they remain as different as **ever**”<sup>2</sup> (Cygan 1999, p.93). Tradition or innovation has always been the one of the more challenging subject of debate that **have** never found a definite answer. When it is not possible to form a consensus, perhaps what we need is the wisdom to learn to respect the differences **between** us and to live with such differences.

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## Endnote

- 1 In addition to ramie, banana trunk **fibre** is also an important textile material of Taiwanese aboriginal weaving culture, especially for the Kavalans tribe. Besides Taiwan, banana weaving is wildly practised in Southeast Asia and **the** Pacific islands including **the** Philippines, Okinawa and China.
- 2 These words were originally used in **a** debate **on** novelty and innovation by the artist Jacek Friedrich.

## CHAPTER 5: EXHIBITIONS

In the present chapter I shall elaborate upon what I believe to be a way in which inter-cultural exchanges can stimulate an innovation of traditional weaving by taking Awai Da-in Sawan, a bamboo and rattan weaving expert of the Saisiat tribe, as an example of an aboriginal weaver that has gone beyond the limits imposed by tradition. I shall then explain how my theatrical costumes were transformed into exhibition artworks and how as exhibited artworks they convey to us the cultural content of Taiwanese aboriginal weaving traditions.

This research is based on the practices of theatre costume design. The costumes I designed for the play, *Romeo and Juliet*, are more than clothes created for a theatrical performance: they are also installation art works which depict the stories and the deep rooted humanity of Taiwanese aboriginal weaving traditions. On a theatre stage, costumes are part of the overall visual effect the performance has upon the spectators; the same costumes in exhibition impact on the viewers in their own way -- exhibition viewers being a different audience from that of a theatrical production.

The three exhibitions for the costumes were curated in different venues and commissions. The first, *On Stage/Off Stage; Weaving/Embroidering: Theatrical Costumes Design Exhibit* in the Culture Gallery, National Concert Hall, National Chiang Kai-shek Cultural Centre, was a group exhibition organised by the National Theatre, in Taipei, 2005. In this exhibition, the National Theatre selected from the work of four different Taiwanese costume designers to show how a theatre production is elaborated through some of its visual elements—costumes and how cultural or artistic concepts are used to give the costumes context relating to the production.

The second exhibition, *Explore the Natural Fibres —Fibre Art Exhibition*, was also a group exhibition, organised by the National Prehistory Museum in Taitung, 2006, which consisted of examples of local aboriginal fibre crafters' works combined with works selected from the "Explore the Natural Fibres" workshop (see Chapter 2.3.3). The museum was trying to promote the use of traditional skills and demonstrate their possibilities to the local aborigines; I was invited to exhibit my costumes as examples of the use of a variety of traditional skills in inter-cultural designing.

The concepts of the two exhibitions reflect the idea of my practice research, and were recognised by different scholars in the field of theatre art. The evaluations of my paper, *Tradition and Innovation -- A Perspective on Cultural Identity of Taiwanese Aborigines from Textiles of Juliet's Costumes*, said, "Based on the research's interpretation of tradition and innovation in aboriginal textiles as well as her contemporary theatrical costume designs, this thesis demonstrates the author's deep reflection on the subject. Her research was conducted by way of cross-cultural dialogues and interactions during practice in the field of study, and by way of visual displays in theatres. This research has inspired the field with its originality, approaches and methods; and "In this paper... we can see that the author has been deeply involved in the traditional culture of Taiwanese aborigines weaving, while respecting the background of the original text [*Romeo and Juliet*] - Italy in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.... Her careful adaption of Taiwanese aboriginal textiles to the drama has indicated a chance of rebirth for this diminishing traditional craft. The revolutionary spirit of this project coincides with that of the Renaissance" (Anonymous newspaper evaluation, 2006)

In addition to the reviews from theatre art professionals, the Atayal weaver, Yuma Taru, who had collaborated deeply with me in my practice research, in the article of the National Prehistory Museum, mentioned how she felt

about our inter-cultural collaboration, “A cross-cultural collaboration like this project creates an efficient and creative opportunity for a group of experienced professionals. The creative process also freed aboriginal textiles from tradition. We could breathe and take an active part in the process. Traditional weaving was also enriched. This is the first step. I accepted the experiment because I wanted to see how traditional weaving could result in works of art -- not just as the traditional cultural elements that they are generally thought to be. Only after those elements become part of our life and hearts, are artists able to **internalise** and transform them in creative ways. They no longer are just **tools**” (Taru, 2006).

The third exhibition was a solo exhibition mounted at the invitation of the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines, a renowned **specialised** aboriginal museum in Taiwan. My work demonstrated an encounter with aboriginal weaving traditions from a new perspective. The museum’s article on the exhibition explained, “In this exhibition, costumes are more than just costumes. Costume designer, Wan-Lee Chen, conducted more than two years of **field-work** among the Atayal tribes in Miaoli and in the Kanding Bunun tribe in Taidong. With more than a decade of costume design experience behind her, she has blended traditional aboriginal Taiwanese weaving into thirty-nine sets of Renaissance Shakespearean costumes. The exhibition incorporates multiple media: contemporary art, traditional aboriginal textiles and digital recordings. Through a perfect combination of tradition and modernity, east and west, technology and craft, the tension filled exhibits engage all the concepts and objects on show in a conversation across time, space and borders.” A reviewer said, “In particular, images are projected directly on to bark fibre and on to the costumes. The exhibited objects reveal their own vitality; each image narrates its own story in a way that the true human history and the process of making the costumes are vividly presented before **the** audience” (Shia, 2006).



The exhibition displayed five installation art works selected from among costumes created for *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and mounted with remnants of textiles salvaged during the making of the costumes; video clips taken during my research were shown to add further information.

The production of a theatrical work requires that those involved work together as a team. As a result, each of the installation works incorporates and narrates the hard work involved in its manufacture and pays tribute to every team member that worked in wardrobe. The exhibition visitors were able to examine the designed works from up close and so appreciate the details and the textures of the works and infer the stories behind them.

The exhibitions served as a medium for showing how aboriginal weavers in the old days revealed their personal identities and told stories of their tribal glory in their works. The works on display were “a piecing together of a deeply felt experience as a dimensional form - creating something which not only reflects the current interest but gives insight into identity” (MacDonald, 2006). In exhibition, the designs clearly reveal their hidden meaning--the works are both self-portraits of the weavers, and portraits redolent of the past but highly relevant to the present. As Joanne Soroka, a textile artist from the United Kingdom, once said, “I am telling my own history, but also that of everyone else, the story which is the unwritten sum of human history” (Soroka, 2000).

### ***5.1 Evolution of tradition and inter-cultural integration***

In the previous chapter, I used the experience of the Yeh-Ton Workshop to discuss the issue of anti-differences under the phenomenon of direct oppositions. In the course of my research, I found that many aboriginal weavers today, working under the major restrictions of cultural conservation,

refuse to inject new ideas into traditional patterns and symbols. They copy the old patterns in their works, and believe that in that way they show respect for their ancestors and affirm their tribal identity: so doing gives them joy and self-confidence. However, I feel such beliefs fail to take into account the actual intent of aboriginal weaving culture. Behind the modern weavers' rejection of innovation, I believe, lies the fact that it is not that most modern weavers don't want to, but they just don't know how to incorporate new ideas into their works, having had no opportunity of cultivating their aesthetic sense. When one culture encounters another culture, people usually try to build connections with the different culture and to make **adaptations** to the new circumstances. But if the people fail to communicate with the intruding culture and fail to understand its values, they are unable to connect with the other culture and share its identity. Helping aboriginal weavers to relate and communicate with other cultures is, therefore, **one** key to a successful evolution of their weaving arts.

The success of the Yeh-Ton weaving shop shows that we can reflect our own natures in our work and at the same time respect the knowledge and skills of another culture. The life story of my bamboo basket weaving teacher Awai Da-in Sawan, a Saisiat, who made all the hats for the female characters in *Romeo and Juliet*, teaches us that innovative creation can indeed come about through inter-cultural exchange while one's traditional training is still respected. Her own experience of interacting with another culture and its outcome shows us one way a traditional art can be integrated into modern society. Although in a diverse society, bringing innovation to a traditional art through inter-cultural exchange may not be the only solution; it is, nonetheless, one way for traditional weaving to be carried on, without just duplicating old patterns. Sawan's and my designs for *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet* are examples of that way. In my costumes I used my skills as a designer to redefine and re-interpret and inject innovations into the

aboriginal weaving tradition, while Sawan, guided by her own sense of aesthetics, employed the weaving techniques that she had absorbed during her encounters with the lowland Chinese weavers to add to my designs and create “innovative” works that reinvigorate and pass on her tribal weaving traditions.

The evolution of tradition does not happen overnight, and to add innovation to the traditional takes great effort. During the process of evolution, tradition clashes and integrates with different cultures, abandoning some of its own character and absorbing some of the essences of other cultures and giving a new look to the traditional. Past history has shown that aboriginal weavers, during their interactions with other cultures, naturally changed materials, tools, patterns and forms, and modified their aesthetic sense. Cultural intrusions and inter-cultural exchanges almost inevitably bring changes to conventional ways of thinking. Weavers would first question, then re-define and reform their traditional ways. Sawan’s life story, described below, will show us an example of how a culture evolves under inter-cultural exchanges. But first a brief examination of the Taiwanese bamboo weaving industry.

There are two categories of Taiwanese aboriginal weaving: textiles to be worn exclusively by women, and basket woven items used daily by both men and women--carrying baskets, storage baskets, trays, conical bamboo receptacles and head-gear or rain wear. To the aboriginal Taiwanese, weaving fine textiles is more important than basket weaving, because the textiles carry important symbolic meanings in their tribal patterns and aesthetics; whereas, basket weaving is concerned not with the decorative, only with the functional. Thence, the craft of basket weaving has remained at a basic level and for lack of necessity has not evolved with the changing times.

While basket weaving has gradually disappeared from among the aboriginal

tribes, owing to **modernisation** the tradition of basket weaving took an unexpected turn and flourished in the lowlands in the 20th century. Bamboo had long been one of the most important economic crops in subtropical Taiwan. The development of the bamboo industry in Taiwan could be traced back to early Chinese settlers who used bamboo, as a readily available resource, to make all sorts of craftwork. At the time, the forms and skills of bamboo crafts were those carried over from Southeast China.

In the Japanese colonization period (1895-1945), in order to boost the efficiency of the bamboo industry and upgrade the quality of bamboo works, the colonial government invited Japanese weaving masters to Taiwan to teach local **craftsmen** to make Japanese-style goods, as well **as to** dye and varnish them. Their products were then sold to Japan. In the 1930s, the Japanese colonial government invited another group of weaving masters from Fuzho, China, to teach the Taiwanese new skills, and their products were subsequently sold to China. In that period, the skills of Taiwanese bamboo weavers were greatly improved and the entire bamboo industry made changes in its production and marketing methods. It no longer just supplied the local market with a small quantity of custom-made orders; instead, to meet the high demand from international markets, it transformed itself into a major supplier for the world. After the Second World War, the exports of the bamboo industry continued to grow. By the mid-1970s, the industry reached its peak with huge volumes of orders coming from Japan, Europe and the US, and attracted a high number of workers into bamboo weaving.

In 1952, when Taiwan's bamboo industry was booming, Sawan was born. She spent her early years watching her father, an expert in their tribe, weave baskets. Though she had always wanted to learn, however, her father **forbade** her to weave out of fear that she might hurt herself. Not before she was married did her father start to train her in weaving. Her father's tough

training gave her a solid foundation in the craft; **but**, while the aboriginal tribes of those days were struggling with widespread poverty, it was quite difficult for her to refine her skills. Hoping to help the family make more money and to be more competitive in the job market, Sawan decided to join a basket-weaving workshop for aborigines, organized by the local township, to upgrade her skills. In the workshop, she met Chang Hsien-ping, a Chinese master weaver,<sup>1</sup> who had a profound influence upon her. Her efforts and talent were recognized by Master Chang, who subsequently recruited Sawan into his own bamboo-weaving workshop. The experience of working with Master Chang not only helped Sawan economically but, more importantly, gave her access to the elite level of the skills and aesthetics of Chinese bamboo-weaving and enabled her to produce finely made basket products. Her experiences under Master Chang taught her a great deal. She has said that:

“...It was indeed a difficult time for me. For six years, I had to catch the very first bus in the early morning and spent two hours on the way to the workshop. I often stayed there late and took the last bus home. Then the next morning, again I got up early to catch the first bus. It was like that-- day after day. But I never complained, because I very much enjoyed weaving and was always eager to complete a product as soon as possible. Because we were paid by the project instead of by the hour, the more we made the more we were paid. However, the orders from Japan or America in Master Chang’s factory demanded high quality products; therefore, we were trained to be skilled in the production of fine works. Master Chang was a good teacher; he not only trained us well in technique but also educated us to be artistic and creative in our work. He placed a great emphasis on our producing perfect works. He said, a good product should be not only well-made functionally but also beautiful to look at. It was important for us to sculpt our work and complete it in fine detail. A fine product should be graceful and visually admirable. It was very meaningful to me to have the opportunity to work with Master Chang. He enabled me to become an artistic weaver, which in my tribe I would have never learnt **to be**”(Personal communication, October 2004)<sup>2</sup>.

Through her encounter with Master Chang, Sawan had the opportunity to learn **from**, and exchange **ideas with**, a different culture. That inter-cultural exchange contributed greatly to her outstanding achievements.

By the end of 1980s, bamboo products were replaced by products made with synthetic materials and started to lose their place in international markets. Also, because of the increases in land prices and wages, the labour-intensive Taiwanese bamboo industry rapidly declined **and** the major operators gradually moved to China and Southeast Asia. Although Master Chang's bamboo workshop had an international reputation, he was forced to close his business in 1992. At that point, Taiwanese aboriginal societies became increasingly conscious of their **own** particular ethnic identity and geared up for a retrieval of their tribal culture and traditions. Even though Sawan lost her job, she was able to move back to her tribe and thanks to her newly acquired expertise join in the reinvigoration **of the traditional tribal culture**.

Sawan was one of the dedicated activists who **have** helped promote the reconstruction of the tribal culture. In her woven basket works, she has interpreted the daily tribal life and its traditions. By the combination of the primitive vitality of the aborigines with the dedicated skills and aesthetics of the lowland Chinese, her artistic works contain essential elements from both cultures and are considered to be creative and unique by both levels of society: **they are** highly appreciated by mainstream Taiwanese society, and recognized and admired by the members of Sawan's own tribe. In 1998, she was awarded the National Craft Award which is the highest prize for traditional crafts in Taiwan. She is the first and only aboriginal basket weaver ever to be recognized with that honour. Her achievements epitomise the importance of inter-cultural exchange as a stimulus to achieving breakthroughs and promoting the evolution of a **traditional** craft.

In Sawan's case, the cultivation of a sense of aesthetics and the refining of her skills to the upmost have together been a key influence on her creativity. Her experience shows that the following three important elements should be integrated with one another in order to nurture a weaver's creativity and to allow the weavers to create finer and more delicate works: 1) the professional skills needed to weave high-quality works; 2) the accumulation of aesthetic experiences; and 3) a passion and ambition to create. By having interactions and exchanges with lowland professional weavers, and receiving long-term training, Sawan was able to upgrade the level of her professionalism, increase her capabilities and refine and improve her aesthetic sense. It was her strong motivation and passion for re-invigorating tribal traditions that helped her to make a breakthrough in both aboriginal and Chinese traditions and create works that combined the advantageous characteristics of two cultures

However, despite her strong drive to create new works, she couldn't have possibly created such fine work that breaks away from the confinement of traditional ways without inter-cultural stimulation and learning. Thus, the three elements cited above can be seen as indispensable. Influenced by cultural "differences", Sawan broadened her horizon, and by becoming more flexible in recognising and accepting other cultures, and by including their contents in her work, she has given Taiwanese traditional weaving a new face—one that bears the characteristics of diverse cultures. Sawan's life shows that, though a tribal tradition has to evolve in some way, a traditional skill or art can evolve and retain its vigour if it allows itself to accept innovation and creativity. It does not have to die.

## *5.2 Difference and Differance*

Sawan's story exemplifies cultural interaction as a vital force in the remaking and passing on of a traditional art. Sawan became a student of Master Chang

in order to learn bamboo-weaving skills from someone of another culture, and, having been exposed to new styles, returned to her tribe, and created new woven works that combined the Chinese and aboriginal weaving cultures but that were adapted for use in contemporary society. Her works represent both a breakdown of traditional leitmotifs and a re-development of the traditional. The process shows traditions evolving through the exchange of cultural differences, and a static state of cultural “differences” turning into a movement of “advancement” after a practitioner has become aware of the control of tradition.

The effect of difference upon the evolution of thought as proposed by Jacques Derrida, in his *Philosophy of Deconstruction*, helps us understand something of the evolutionary process undergone by such weavers as Kayi and Sawan. According to his concept the awareness of differences leads to a movement that he calls “*differance*” which leads in its turn to an overthrow or dismantling of binary or diametric oppositions, and on to the deconstruction of a tradition. He argues that to break down *finality*, differences need to be recognised by an act of self-reflection. The aim of this conscious endeavour is to reveal unconscious desires and ideas, so that an individual by becoming aware of them, can go on to free himself from the subject/tradition. Deconstruction, then, is a strategy for creating chaos and disorders that has to be carried out before ideas can be sorted out and re-arranged. That was the improvisational experience of Lawyi Kayi discussed in Chapter 3; and the intercultural experience of Awai Da-in Sawan in the discussion above; it is also to be found in the process of evolution itself.

Derrida argues further that merely to oppose tradition may lead to falling into the diametric opposite, and that the uncertainties, ambiguities and diversification of “*difference*” can make the boundaries of those opposites vague and unclear. Derrida believed that in the relationship between the



world and mankind, human beings are not the subject, but are at the centre of the world, and the world is not singular, but divergent with differences, saying:

“Subjectivity—like objectivity—is an effect of difference. [...] the subject, and first of all, the conscious and speaking subject, depends upon the system of differences and the movement of difference, [...] the subject is constituted only by being divided from itself, in becoming space, in temporizing, in deferral ...” (Derrida, 2004, p.25).

What is “*differance*” then? In short, a subject is defined by comparing and interacting with the other, the object. For instance, if we want to define whether or not the subject is beautiful, we have to start by comparing the subject with an object that “is not beautiful”. Therefore, in order to define the subject, we have to let the subject interact with the object. Thence, the beauty of the subject is constructed and defined upon the existence of the object. The movement and consequences for us in comparing the subject with the object can be considered as “*differance*”.

To explicate further: cultural and traditional differences set off a sequence of chain reactions: as the subject culture brushes up against a different culture, a series of actions and desires may arise from the interactions between the *one* and the *other*, as the subject culture recognizes it has differences from the other and then proceeds to learn from the other, and, because of that other culture, changes the status quo of its own culture. Realizing and recognizing difference is to recognize the existence of two different objects, with the other awaking doubts in the one. Such actions and movements are the process of “*differance*”. Derrida further defined the meaning of difference and “*differance*”. He said,

“*Differance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces

of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive (the action of difference indicates this indecision lies between activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed by or distributed between the terms of this opposition) production of the intervals....” (Derrida, 2004, p.24).

The continuous process of difference is forever turning up differences, preventing the subject/tradition from remaining static. A society lacking different identities within it is then rigid, plain, lonesome and dull. Differences and diversification inject energy into a society and learning from the experience of a different group or culture can bring about the discovery of a new character. That was the change thrust upon the Taiwanese weavers by market forces which later triggered desires for the subject/weavers to surpass their former selves and adjust themselves to change, to adapt to a new state and to discover new possibilities.

Progressive evolution according to the Theory of Deconstruction works for the destruction of the so-called subject and, given the method of deconstruction or dismantling, there’s neither such a thing as finality, nor such things as single standards. Thus, difference is a series of endless and successive movement, and provides a theory of multi-cultural recognition. Difference creates an open dialogic sphere - a sphere opened to multiple dialogues constructed to allow different elements to shuttle back and forth in it in endless interplay. The interactions of different thoughts invigorate the ideas of the subject.

By way of Derrida’s Difference Theory, we can further understand how multi-cultural recognition and cultural differences helped the traditional to evolve. In the previous paragraphs, I mentioned that to recognize difference is to recognize the existence of different objects, and through the process of “**difference**” more possibilities can be thought up that suggest ways to build upon a traditional foundation. However, the necessary key element that al-

lows “**differance**” to conjure up possibilities is that the subject has the capability to become aware of and absorb elements from another culture into his own.

From the viewpoint of design, “**differance**” is a representation of creativity. It is a way to change the status quo and model a new form. It is also a means of creating diversity and outlining differences. In light of that, the Theory of Differance echoes the idea of the Aesthetics of Imperfection that I discussed in Chapter 3. The Aesthetics of Imperfection is the process of searching for the perfect within the movement of uncertainty and irregularity. Imperfect aesthetic forms emphasize that the perfect does exist even amidst imperfections, and the search for perfection in imperfection brings evolution to real life. (See Chapter 3.2)

Both the Aesthetics of Imperfection theory and the theory of Differance propose that there is endless diversity and creativity in the two processes. However, the idea of Imperfect Aesthetics, in comparison with the Theory of Differance, places more emphasis on the connection between cultural content and artistic innovation. Cultural differences stimulate innovative ideas that may result in the formation of a new style since cultural differences activate the process of “**differance**”, trigger creativity, and, so, help an existing tradition to evolve.

From the above discussion, we can sort out three important characteristics of difference and “**differance**”. Firstly, through the process of identifying **differances**, then proceeding to “**differance**”, we can think **beyond binary or diametric** oppositions, and the traditional no longer has **the** limited value of “**either/or**”. By breaking down the subjective ideology/tradition, the narrow mindset of “**either/or**” can be broadened and the subject is set free to help reconstruct the meaning of tradition.

Secondly, differences can aid in the break away from the conventions of elitism. Currently the analyses of aboriginal weaving arts focuses mainly on how the woven works represent tribal identity or collective cultural assets, and the values and aesthetics of the works are determined accordingly while the weaver's skills and creativity to be found in the woven works are often disregarded. The Theory of Differance can encourage observations from diverse perspectives and help expand the cultural meaning and content of Taiwan's aboriginal weaving tradition.

Thirdly, the process of "differance" produces variations in definitions and provokes creativity and innovation. "Differance" is an existential phenomenon, and a movement of extension. Through countless numbers of diversions, new facets and definitions are created. That is how creativity works and tradition transforms itself.

From Derrida we learnt too that the processes of finding differences and "differance" can bring change in conventional ways of thinking. Facing comparison with elements of different cultures, original singularised orders, such as the existing social order, and an individual's ideology, creative habits, conventional ways of acceptance, and conscious and sub-conscious thinking, will be affected. Thus, it is that cultural differences can bring about an evolution in traditional ways of thinking and in aesthetic sense.

Moreover, difference and "differance" is an on-going movement which constantly breaks through the boundary of thought and avoids reaching a confined conclusion. This constant movement extends the action of thinking, allows free space for imagination, and encourages new experiment and fulfilment. Through the process of reconstruction, the current status quo will be incited to seek out even more possibilities. The endless succession of creation and evolution requires constant experiment and fulfilment; under those con-

ditions, as indeed Sawan's experience has already shown us, traditional practices do not have to die but can transform themselves to live in altered forms; but without those conditions, they do truly languish and if lacking contemporary relevance eventually disappear.

### 5.3 Echoes from Torii Ryuzo's Photos and the Exhibition Works

In 1993, I was invited to design costumes for an aboriginal Taiwanese production *Tales from the Mountains and the Seas*. While I was collecting the information, I found some old textiles and old photos depicting aboriginal people. I was very impressed not only by the lasting beauty and the delicate touches of the old aboriginal textiles, but also by the black and white photos taken by a Japanese anthropologist, Torii Ryuzo, collected in his photo album, *The Image of Taiwan Aborigines Through Torii Ryuzo's Eye: The Images through this Century*.

Those old photos were taken during the period from 1890 to 1896 by Torii Ryuzo, the first Japanese researcher to methodically document and photograph aboriginal Taiwanese daily life for use in anthropological and scientific research. His photos reveal the aesthetics of the old textiles, and gave me a deep impression of what the traditional life of the aboriginal people was like before modernisation and of how traditional artistic beauty was well incorporated into their lives. It was the first time that I had encountered old aboriginal photos. Later on, even though I had the opportunity to browse through other researchers' photo albums of ancient aboriginal tribal societies, Torii Ryuzo's photos still inspired me the most.

These old photos overturned the stereotype of contemporary aboriginal textiles I had in mind that commercialised and modern aboriginal textiles were the real aboriginal culture and simply linked the two together. These

old photos spurred my interest in studying the cultures and aesthetics to be seen in the traditional textiles, and in discovering the way these living artistic works were connected to their daily lives. From these old textiles, I discovered that the aboriginal people in old tribal society sought harmony between their daily lives and nature, and that the aboriginal ancestors had demonstrated considerable wisdom and creativity in their works.

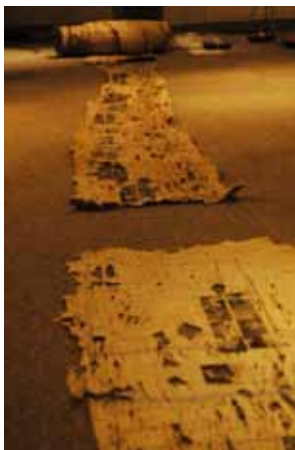
Instead of just changing the patterns woven into their works, the [Taiwanese](#) aborigine ancestors nurtured their creativity, developed new skills and their sense of aesthetics along with the change of materials, technology and living conditions (see [Chapter 3.1](#)). These photos let me go beyond the boundary of time and space to re-interpret and re-imagine the aesthetics and meaning of traditional weaving arts. Deep feelings inside me made me start to wonder [why it is that](#) we cannot see such qualities in modern aborigine textiles. Or perhaps we should further ask: why is that the [most](#) modern weavers cannot creatively weave new textiles as the traditional weavers did, and [why those](#) modern weavers do not dare to exceed the limits of tradition?

Later, while I was studying weaving culture for this research, I found that there are still some modern weavers practising and carrying on the aboriginal weaving traditions. These weavers include Lawyi Kay and Awai Da-in Sawan as [have been](#) mentioned in the previous [chapters](#). In their works, I saw that these weavers have [realised](#) the true spirit and content of the aboriginal weaving cultures, by taking creative inspiration from their own lives to renovate traditional ways. Most importantly, these weavers are not using their creativity to overturn or oppose tradition, but to undertake a way similar to the process of [“differance”](#) – that is to interact and [“talk”](#) with [the traditional](#) in a modern way.

I believe, therefore, that to pass on tradition is not to return to the past, nor

to duplicate the past, but to narrate the past, explain earlier experiences and gain mastery over the surroundings which memory once inhabited. Borrowing the term from Walter Benjamin, a weaver plays the role of “story teller” (Benjamin, 2003, p.316) Instead of restoring the stories of the lost past, a storyteller, in between the lost past and the yearned-for future, makes up a story to link together the shared past experience of the crowd with the present. It is in the light of that kind of mind-set that my exhibitions were created.

The exhibition in the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines was divided according to five different themes: *Kakemono*, *the Poetics of Lines*, *the Costume & Millinery*, *the Masks*, and *the Hands*. They were the artistic interpretation of the materials collected and developed during my practice research, and a re-examination and re-presentation of the true meaning of the aboriginal weaving culture from the perspective of modern aesthetics and modality. Hence the exhibition works were a re-birth of the traditional as well as a review and introspection of the research process. Among the five exhibitions, *Kakemono* was the most significant as it narrated in artistic form the whole of my research practice.



(Left) Figure 5.1 *Kakemono*.

(Down) Figure 5.2 The images displayed in *Kakemono*.

Figure 5.3 The designed costume patterns stitched on *Kakemono* with a sewing machine.

*Kakemono*, as shown in Figures 5.1-3, was a half-metre wide and 40-metre long scroll of giant bark cloth. It was composed of ten bark ribbons of approximately four-metres long, sewn together. The scroll was unfolded

to tell the stories of the entire **fieldwork** and design practice in my research between 2004 and 2006. On the scroll of bark cloth were printed the photographic journals recording the research process and the design blueprints for the textiles and costumes. This work was not only presented a record of the research process, but **served also as** a symbol in artistic form of the multiple layers of cultural meaning to be found in the traditional costumes of the aboriginal tribes.

My research was recorded mainly by photographic images, which became important assets in the research for works other than the costume designs themselves. Over 500 photos used in *Kakemono* (see Appendix 4: Images of *Kakemono*) were selected from a large quantity of photographic data, then printed on rice paper by means of screen printing, and finally patched onto the traditional bark cloth in **chronological** order as shown in **Figure 5.2**. By looking at these photos, the viewers could **visualise** the research process, as if reading a cross-cultural epic.

The concept of displaying these photos was inspired by my encounter with Torii Ryuzo's old photos in 1993 when the mobility of time and the memories framed in those images moved me deeply. The photos in *Kakemono* not only contained memories of the research process, but also allowed further examination of tribal tradition. Through these images, we could actually browse through the various weaving activities depicted just as **Torii Ryuzo's photo record** of the lives of earlier aboriginal people allows us to pass through the limits of time and to hold a dialogue with the traditional even after more than a century. The display of images in *Kakemono* demonstrated the aggressive power of creativity in nostalgia, a power to evolve from the traditional and solve the problems of the present.

In addition to the images, the use of bark cloth was a noteworthy feature in



*Kakemono*. After completing the design task for *Tales of the Mountains and the Seas*, I began further research for information and [for](#) archives on aboriginal weaving culture, and came across an anthropological thesis by [Manli Lin](#) (1960). To my surprise I found out that bark cloth was the material most commonly used by Taiwanese aborigines. In fact, bark cloth was widely used by many ethnic tribes in ancient times across a huge area from Sakhalin and Japan in Northeast Asia, to China, Taiwan and Southeast Asia, all the way to the South Pacific islands, west to the west coast of Africa and even farther westward to Latin America. With its comfortable and ventilating nature, bark cloth was particularly suitable for wearing in the humid and hot climate on the South Pacific islands. Consequently, delicate, abundant and diverse bark cloth cultures were created in those regions.

Bark cloth is known for the ready availability of the raw material and for the simplicity of its production. Taiwanese aboriginal people used to be very good at [using bark fibre](#) from their natural environment to make clothes in daily use such as hats, turbans, T-straps, skirts, belts, and such commodities [as](#) mattresses, and so forth. The raw material in Taiwan mainly came from paper mulberry trees. The process of making bark cloth involved peeling, beating, washing and sun-drying, but the essential step was a constant beating with either stones or wooden staves. It usually required the cooperation of both men and women to accomplish that step. However, because the plant fibres were weakened during the process of repetitive beating, bark cloth was [subsequently](#) apt to be easily damaged and subject to decay; thus, it was much less durable than linen fabrics. As a result, with the birth of modern weaving techniques with its warps and wefts, bark cloth was gradually replaced by ramie.

Bark cloth is unique not only in the technique of its production, but also in its printing craft. The development of printing [techniques](#) in China was very

much inspired and influenced by printed bark cloth. Generally speaking, bark cloth referred to un-dyed and un-printed bark textiles, while those printed or painted with decorative patterns were called “patterned cloth.” The technique of printing on bark cloth in Taiwan can be traced back to a very early age. The earliest record of it comes from the Three Kingdoms Period (approx. 220-280 BCE), as quoted in the preface to the entry of “Dongyi” (East Barbarians) in *Taiping Yulan (The Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era)* of the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD), describing how the people in Yizhou (now Taiwan) were capable of making fine cloth from tree bark and inscribing decorative patterns on the bark cloth. Fan Ye (398-445 AD), in his *Hou Han Shu (History of Later Han)*, depicted the barbarians weaving and dyeing the tree bark with grass and fruits. “This technique of printing patterns on the cloth with carved stencils is a part of through printing with porous stencils. It is a method of stencil printing. This technique has been used in China for a long time and is the origin of Chinese textile printing” (Zhang, et al. 1998) .

After I found this information about bark cloth, for a long while I could only imagine from the literature how it would look. I did not have the opportunity to collect further information on the technique of producing bark cloth until 2005 when I took part in the training course “Creation of Aboriginal Traditional Textiles” given by the National Museum of Prehistory, Taitung, where I met the Bunun weaver Vika Dansikian. This experience made me even more fascinated with bark cloth than ever. All during the process of peeling, beating and finally shaping the fabrics, I could feel the texture of natural fibres with my own hands, and sense the subtle differences of the texture of the fibres during the process of their creation.

The experience made me even more interested in bark cloth, and at the same time enriched my experiments on different fibre materials, such as hand-made paper and felt, which by then I had been carrying out for more than

a year. The close relationship between bark cloth and printing techniques further inspired the idea of putting images on bark cloth by using screen printing techniques. I ended up using the contents and techniques of the modern images to contrast with the traditional culture of bark cloth printing. The designed textile and costume structure patterns for the two productions of *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet* (see Figure 5.3), were stitched with sewing machines and covered up the photos along the bark cloth of *Kakemono*. With lines stitched on in an artistic form, this 40-metre long bark cloth displayed the materials of the productions, and acknowledged the efforts and professional skills of the production team. As a result, it added different layers to the photographic composition of *Kakemono* and enriched its cultural meaning.

The idea of stitching the figures onto the bark cloth was inspired by and originated from the Atayal facial tattoo traditions. Whilst the facial tattoo told of the myths of ancient traditions, the machine-stitched patterns articulated the story of the present. Among the Atayal, facial tattoos are closely related to the myth of their origin<sup>3</sup> and the customs of “Shunning Evil Omens.”<sup>4</sup> They are not only legends and memories of the tribe, but are also strong links to their rituals, kinship system and ethno-symbols. It is part of the very core of their traditions.

The tradition of facial tattooing for the Atayal is connected with their weaving culture. As girls reach the age of 14 or 15, they start to learn weaving skills from their mothers in order to prepare their own wedding dresses. As their skills advance, it is time for them to have facial tattoos. Young Atayal girls must pass a weaving examination given by the elder females in the family before they qualify for facial tattoos that show that the girls can handle their own lives and are ready for marriage.

The size of a girl's facial tattoo depends on her weaving skills, and ranks her in the marriage market. Highly-skilful women have the privilege of having certain patterns of tattoos on their breasts, hands, feet and foreheads as a symbol of honour. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the proficient Atayal weavers are entitled after death to pass over "*Hongu Rutux*" (The Rainbow Bridge) and return to live in the world of their ancestors. That is the goal that the Atayal women pursue all their lives as it signals a woman's social reputation (see Chapter 3.1). The tattooed face is said to be a promise and agreement left by the ancestors, so the descendants can be recognised and brought into the ancestral fold.

Tattooing itself is a process of suffering. The instruments used in tattooing include a 15-centimetre long stick with toothbrush-like metal needles on one side, a mallet about 25 centimetres long, and ink made from the soot from stoves. The girl to be tattooed lies on the ground, while the tattoo masters place the metal needles on their faces with one hand and hold the mallet to hammer the needles with the other. After the blood is wiped from the face with a thin bamboo slice, the ink is applied to dye the pattern.

The tradition of tattooing--that is, printing patterns on faces--reminded me of the techniques of sewing and needlework, and thus inspired me to stitch the designed textile and costume structure patterns on to the bark cloth. Given the length of the bark cloth, I chose to sew the materials on the bark cloth with sewing machines. That resembled the process of tattooing the weavers' faces and printing the codes of their lives. The stitched lines transformed the designed costumes and textile patterns into an artistic form, which symbolised the craftsmanship and labours devoted to producing textiles/costumes. The stitched patterns revitalised the aesthetics of the tattoo tradition bringing them into a modern modality. The project thus became a dialogue communicating with and approaching the past.

In addition to the contents, the form of *Kakemono* was an important feature in this exhibition. The 40-metre long scroll was not just a continuous textile, but also a representation of the aesthetic ideas of time and space in Chinese arts. It is well known that the art of Chinese painting is built on two forms: “scroll” and “axis.” These forms influence the viewer’s perception and at the same time present a specific concept of time and space: spreading, flowing and never-ending, which is the peculiar form of composition and perspective in Chinese painting. In terms of perspective, the composition influenced by Chinese philosophy has an unfixed perspective: the viewer’s viewpoint moves around the paintings and is free of the restraint of a fixed point of view.

Generally speaking, horizontal lines are associated with tranquillity and peace, but sometimes they also imply speed that breaks the limits of time and space. In **compositional** terms, **they are** an impromptu expression, which makes the composition more dynamic, flexible and active. The horizontal expression of *Kakemono* enabled the displayed images to be trapped within temporal and spatial limitations, and allowed the chronicle records covering three years to be displayed in a linear way. It invited the viewer to read the images, examine the textile design and the costume structural patterns of the work, as well as to appreciate the texture of the bark fabric.

Michael Sullivan, in *The Arts of China*, brought up the issue of “shifting perspective”:

“How was it, then, one might ask, that the Chinese painter, who insisted on truth to natural appearance, should have been so ignorant of even the elementary laws of perspective as the West understands it? The answer is that he deliberately avoided it, for the same reason that he avoided the use of shadows. Scientific perspective involves a view from a determined position, and includes only what can be seen from that single point. While this

satisfies the logical Western mind, it is not enough for the Chinese painter; for, why, he asks, should we so restrict ourselves? Why, if we have the means to depict what we know to be there, paint only what we can see from one viewpoint?" (Sullivan 1984: 166)

His explanation very subtly corresponds with the idea of "diversity" claimed by this research. *Kakemono* displays the images and the designed textile and costume structural patterns as a linear movement, and allows the spectator to read and comprehend this research and its interactions with different cultures, materials and techniques.

Among the parts of the exhibition, *The Poetics of Lines*, was an artwork composed of images other than those of *Kakemono*. It was a nearly 60-minute video diary, which recorded the practice of the fieldwork and the productions of *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet* from September 2004 to September 2006 (see Appendix 5: Video of *the Poetics of Lines*). The autobiographic narrative form not only affirmed the authenticity of the research, but also formulated new meanings and identities for the weaving tradition of visual representation.

The focus of my research had shifted from the textiles themselves to making a vivid representation of the interactions between me and the weavers. My research is the opposite of the traditional approach and **concentrates** on the textiles as the subjects, and the weavers themselves as the objects. The traditional approach may have "wholeness" in its collection of historical materials; but, without the love for, and understanding of, those who are described in the research, such research lacks devotion to life, let alone real heartfelt affection and experience.

Regarding the term "poetics," Ou Yung-sheng (2009), a Taiwanese professor of Education, suggests that "mythopoetic"- incorporating imagination, creativity, intuition, affection, passion and sensitivity – best describes the

ability and characteristics of the ancestors, as well as the main content of their lives and wisdom. The term “mythopoetic” is composed of “*mytho*,” meaning myth and story, and “*poetic*,” representing creativity. While mythology is the source of knowledge, creativity is the vehicle to express knowledge. Myths originate from our **unconscious** and can only be understood through experiences, interactions and communications. Gradually, the knowledge that they convey becomes the valued truth of human **experiences**.

My approach in this research is not that of scientific experiment. The documentary *The Poetics of Lines* told the stories of a journey, made with a broad aesthetic and humanist vision and curiosity, to gain an understanding of the meanings of aboriginal weaving tradition. The documentary, I believe, was the medium through which meaning was both re-created and redefined. In other words, the images did not only mediate the knowledge I had imbibed, but also affected **that** knowledge through fragmentation and negation. I believe, therefore, that my way of displaying images was the most provocative way for them to be viewed, and stopped the viewer from thinking about **representations merely** in terms of the objects represented. I hoped to have the viewer approach the exhibition with an eye toward the relationships and processes **through which** the representations were produced, valued and exchanged.



**Figures 5.4-5** The displays of *The Costumes and Millinery*.

The exhibits in the sections *Costumes and Millinery* (Figure 5.4 and 5.5) and *The Masks* (Figure 5.6) were chosen from the two productions, *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In the exhibition, the costumes that had been worn by the characters moving around on the stage had come, as it were to a sudden halt, which allowed the viewers in the exhibition hall to observe closely and slowly the details of the designs. The detailing and qualities of the handmade costumes may not have been apparent on the stage under the light effects given their distance from the audience; but now they could be recognised and appreciated, and reveal their visual tension and quality in a setting very different from the theatrical context.



Figure 5.6 The display of *The Masks*.

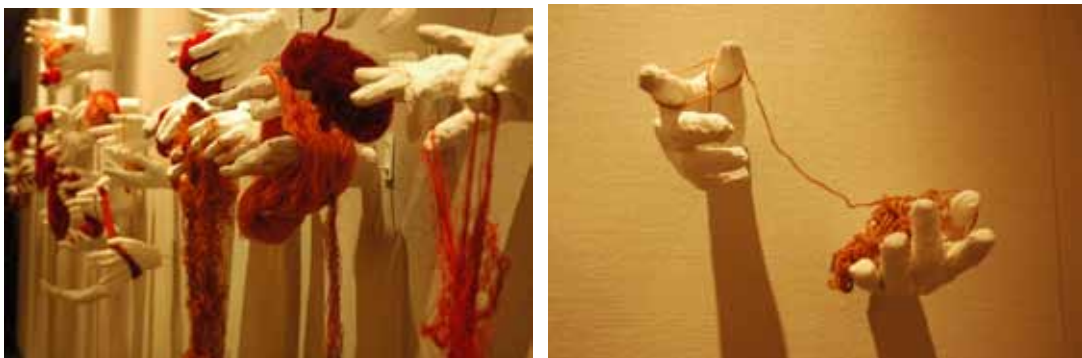
The objects displayed in *The Masks* were made of bark cloth for the party scene (Act I, Scene V) of the *Romeo and Juliet* production (see Figure 5.6). Whilst the purpose of the bark cloth in *Kakemono* was to show the natural character of the textile, its use in the masks was intended to create an artistic form from the traditional material by experimenting with different methods of shaping the bark fabric and using its natural resin to set it in the desired shape.

As I mentioned above, I was very much attracted to the bark fabric during



the training course provided by the National Museum of Prehistory. I learnt that the plant fabric was full of natural resin, which would become hard in the process of drying, and, hence, could be used in the shaping and modelling. It reminded me that in making costumes for the theatre, it is often necessary to make moulds to shape such accessories as masks, armours and hats. Therefore, I began to experiment with different ways of processing the fabrics. The masks in the exhibition were the result of my experiments to turn barks into pulps before shaping.

The traditional use of bark cloth focused on its function and overlooked its potential artistic application in the arts. However, modern experiments place more importance on the artistic features of the bark fabric, including its ductility, malleability and the variations in its density as well as its three dimensionality. The same material may be endowed with different meanings and functions over time. That bears witness to the fact that the traditional evolves along with the development of aesthetics and in that way are new traditions created. Nonetheless, whatever form evolution may take, there still remains the inseparable relationship between the primitive texture of the bark cloth and its application in mask-making.



Figures 5.7-8 The display of *The Hands*.

*The Hands* exhibition (see Figure 5.7 & 5.8) was composed of the leftover yarns from the two design productions and 33 pairs of plaster hands. Those are the models cast from the hands of the production team, which involved

staff from various professional backgrounds and cultural groups, including weavers, paper pattern makers, assistants, students and so forth. The display was meant to signify the habit of recycling materials in the weaving tradition, (see Chapter 3.1). The casts of those hands were intended to acknowledge the contribution made by the members of the production team, and represented the multilateral contexts of the behind the scenes work and my practice led research.

The design practice was instrumental in linking peoples from different groups and causing them to interact with the several varieties of cultural influences. The exchange of viewpoints among members in the production team led to an extremely fruitful result for my research, which was exactly what the workshop set out to archive. The practice was also a process of dealing with identity conflicts, which gave rise to **reflective** dialogues, influenced the design practice, and eventually **helped us all in a transformative** conflict resolution. In reflexive introspection, people “inquire foremost into what the conflict ‘out there’ means to them ‘inside,’ and how their own internal processes and priorities have been negatively shaped and can be channelled to positively re-shape the course of that exogenous conflict” (Rothman, 1996, p.347-8). Rather than simply reacting to opponents, people learn to examine their own reactions, and seek to better understand their origins.

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## Endnote

1 Chang Hsien Ping is one of the four contemporary bamboo weaving masters in Taiwan. His grandfather and father were known Lin grass weaving masters in central Taiwan. Chang grew up in this weaving family and was trained in **the skills of** making delicate structures and skills. In the period of the booming export-oriented bamboo industry, he turned to bamboo weaving and fell in love with its potential. Though never officially schooled in bamboo weaving, he combines bamboo weaving with classical aesthetics creatively. His bamboo works exude special charms with their delicate thin structures, classical forms and unique **coatings**. In 1990, when he was only forty-seven years old, Chang was **given** the Ethnic Artist in Bamboo Weaving by the Ministry of Education. Chang **was awarded** the youngest recipient at that time.

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2 Personal communication, Peng-lai tribe, October 2004.

- 3 Once upon a time, the Atayal people believe, there were only two persons born into the world, and they were brother and sister. The sister was worried that their family would end if they did not produce any offspring. She asked her brother to marry her, but he rejected her proposal because it was against ethic rules. She did not give up and instead worked on a plan to trick her brother. She told him that a wife would be waiting for him in a cave the next night, and he believed it. On the next night, the sister smeared soot on her face and waited for her brother in the cave. Her brother did not recognise that the girl was his sister so he married her, and that was how they produced offspring for human beings. Since then, it has been a custom for the Atayal women to have their faces tattooed before getting married.
- 4 In the ancient time, the Atayal people also believe, many young girls were dying suddenly from an unknown disease. The Atayal people were terrified but did not have any solution. One night, a girl dreamed of an ancestor telling her to inscribe patterns on her face so as to prevent being infected. She told her dream to the people in her village, but still nobody knew how to inscribe patterns on faces. Then a smart man thought of a method. He burnt the pinewood and collected the soot, then designed a pattern on a piece of cloth, and finally, inscribed the pattern onto girls' faces with a needle covered in soot. After the ceremony, the death of young girls miraculously stopped. Thereafter, it became an adolescent initiation ritual for the Atayal girls to get tattooed on their faces.-

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In a study of theatrical costume designs for the performances of *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet*, this practice research has reviewed the aesthetics and art values of the aboriginal textile works of Taiwan. The central aim of my research was to attempt to find an answer to the question: why was it that traditional weavers today, faced as they are with the mere duplication of tribal patterns, could not exercise the creativity that their ancestors had shown when creativity and adaptability are essential to the survival of a craft? Another of my aims was to reassess the true artistic value of traditional aboriginal weaving and to find some way that the weavers could connect with the modern world.

Currently, the “traditional works” made by modern aboriginal weavers lack creativity and any claim to uniqueness, owing to their commercialised production and an emphasis on ethnic identity. Because most of these hand-made aboriginal textiles, vying for profit in the marketplace, are often too similar to the mass-produced products from factories, it is difficult for the hand-made textiles to compete with the low-cost mass-produced products which they so closely resemble. With little to distinguish between handmade and factory-made, consumers see both as pan-aboriginal-style textile products. If the modern weavers continue as they are, and refuse to seek out a better way for the weaving tradition to survive, their tradition will eventually disappear.

Since the beginning of the Japanese Colonial Period (1895-1945), the studies of Taiwanese aboriginal textiles have been carried out mainly from an anthropological, ethnological, folklorical and sociological approach, focusing solely on the function of the woven works and the connotations of their use in religious rituals and other social events aesthetics. Generally, the research-

es ignored the artistic qualities in the work and failed to **explore and** discuss the aesthetics and weaving experiences that individual weavers left woven in their works, or to **consider** how those aspects might matter.

However, from the viewpoint of modern design, I believe a crucial factor in reconstructing the wealth of aboriginal weaving traditions lies in recreating and rediscovering the creative integrity **and energy** of the aboriginal woven tradition and reintegrating it into contemporary society. According to the theories of “Reflective Nostalgia” (Boym, 2001, p.49~50) and “improvisation creativity” (Ingold & Hallam, 2007, p.3), creative integrity in the production of aboriginal woven textiles can be achieved if the weavers become innovative and integrate their interactions with their current life into their work. My practice research revealed that an individual **creative element** is essential to a hand woven product and that there **is** a chance that artistic textiles **created by hand weaving** might continue the Taiwanese tradition and **at the same time** upgrade modern, consumer-oriented machine woven products.

My research methodology **was** grounded in continual, interactive encounters between design practice and fieldwork. As a way of bringing direct benefits to the aboriginal modern weavers, I **hope** my findings **will** inject a substantial boost to the development of aboriginal weaving arts. Different from research of a literary nature, my **interactive practice-led research included** the weavers in the process and **culminated in their being involved with me** in the production of textiles for the costumes created for **the performances of *African*** and *Romeo and Juliet*. Additionally, **both my observations of their weaving skills and the knowledge I learned from their stories collected during my fieldwork, were later used and gave rise to ideas that were transformed into elements of the costumes that I** designed for the two theatrical performances and which were subsequently displayed in **the** three exhibitions. The weavers’ skills and their stories **are now a** part of a broader reciprocal relationship

that is **still** on-going.

Reflection was the key to the successful functioning of my methodology and helped **me** to lay the foundation of the aesthetics of my designs. Donald Alan Schön points out that the theory “Reflection in Action” (Schön, 1983, p.62) is a flexible, adaptable, and feasible innovative design method that can provide solutions to the designers. Design is a process in which reflection and actions are mutually interactive. An interactive encounter can be seen in the circular relationship between myself, the weavers, and the production team of each play and the exhibition. The theory of “reflection” gave me **a** guide to handling and coordinating all of the problems I encountered. Under the process of reflection, a visual stimulation was transformed into an idea for a design innovation.

Learning weaving skills from Lawyi Kayi made me realize that weaving is not just a skill for making the necessities for everyday life, but a way for the weavers to display their creativity and a medium **by which** the weavers **are able** to **work out** their own identity as they live in their tribe. The learning process allowed me to better understand the true meaning that lies behind the aborigines’ traditional weaving culture – that is, the application of “creativity”. Moreover, Kayi’s weaving experience inspired me **also** to meld my past design experiences with hers and develop them according to the aesthetics of imperfection.

The idea for my first costume design project, the percussion performance *African*, evolved from my intention to **realise** the traditional, and gave me the opportunity to make use of my accumulated field studies and present the ideas of the *Aesthetics of Imperfection* in my costume designs. The thirteen hand-made costumes contain profound cultural values and show the structural beauty of woven works. To fit with the style of the costume, I applied

different weaving techniques, and included the recycled imperfect, woven textiles in my designs to **give** a dimensional look and cultural quality to the costumes. The different alignment of the strings and wefts, whether intertwined tightly or loosely, or overlapped with one another, represented the weavers' life-long memories and experiences. They are a language for me to use to describe the authenticity of the weaving traditions. They represent the experimental process of the manner in which the weaving tradition has evolved, thanks to the accumulated wisdom and the efforts of countless weavers. Those imperfect textiles make up **Kayi's** best works, created as they are out of her accumulated skills, and **experience and** the inspiration she has found from her daily life, **and** prove that challenges and difficulties can indeed stimulate and **generate** creativity. From a more abstract point of view, these costumes are symbols that reflect and interlock the present and the past. The costumes of *Africussion* are not simply works I designed for a **performance**, they also tell a story shared by all Taiwanese weavers.

In my second **project**--to design costumes for the Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*-- I was trying to take elements from two highly different cultures, Taiwan's aboriginal culture and the western Renaissance, and blend them. The assignment was like an experiment in inter-cultural clashes, trying to find a balance between the two cultures in the midst of conflicts and frictions. These costumes were not intended just for the creation of visual effect on stage, but for a re-examination of the identity crisis being suffered by aboriginal modern weavers. According to Erikson, an identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and of exploration of different ways of looking at oneself (Erikson, 1970, p.11-22). The identity crisis or change in awareness suggests that the intrusion of a different culture or different cultures can easily awaken the desire to affirm one's individual identity, and trigger a questioning of one's beliefs and traditions the two of which both effect a process of change. Under the influence of **globalisation** and de-territorialisation, more and more

aboriginal weavers have become aware of the new interest in diversity **attracting modern societies**. As **contemporary** weavers are caught between traditional tribal and urban cultures, an identity crisis arises. The “tribal identity” strongly held by Taiwan’s aboriginal weavers could be seen to echo the “group identity” concerns of the two families in *Romeo and Juliet*; while the scene in which Juliet faces an identity **crisis** -- having to choose between remaining a Capulet and allying herself with Romeo, a Montague -- echoes the modern weavers struggle with tradition and innovation.

Cultural differences provide a foundation and a way for individuals to identify themselves from the other, and identify the other from themselves. In that way, through encountering other cultures, aboriginal weavers have a more comprehensive understanding of the common characteristics of their tribes and their own individual uniqueness as individuals. As their understanding deepens their awareness of creating **works** that not only **adheres** to tradition, but also **matches** modern aesthetics, **could** increase. However, finding a balance between the two is not an easy task. Understanding is not synonymous with finding a solution that will change the status quo. Thus, the development of aboriginal weaving arts is still presently **stuck** in a bottleneck.

The concept of integrating various traditional textile materials in the *Romeo and Juliet* production created a visual tension through the contrast between and **the** juxtaposition of materials selected from different cultures, and further demonstrated the cross-cultural quality and multiple perspective of the costume design. The materials used in the costumes for the main characters were leather and hand-woven textiles, both traditional materials for aboriginal tribes, and felt, knitted fabrics and leather which **symbolised** traditions in western material culture. In addition to being a reflection of identity crisis, the designs of the costumes were based on the idea of the



*Aesthetics of Imperfection* in order to emphasise through the forms created the tragic quality and atmosphere of the play.

The important point of this design project is to be found in the production process: I discovered that the weavers in Yeh-Ton Workshop felt trapped in a dilemma when faced with a choice between respecting tradition and accepting innovation. This insight made me reflect on myself: was I being too subjective when I worked so very hard to silence the *leitmotiv* of tradition in order to stick to my idea of multicultural recognition? Imparting innovation into tradition doesn't mean that one should focus only on developing or experimenting with new patterns. Instead, one should have the wisdom to respect other cultures and those who hold different stances. At the beginning of my study, I was standing against "duplicating" the tradition. I firmly believed that innovation was the only way to bring new meanings and values to the aboriginal weaving tradition. However, having worked with modern weavers in person and having grasped a better understanding of their different opinions, I now believe that one should listen objectively to different voices before one can find the true meanings of and give new values to a tradition.

My exhibitions were different in the manner in which the textures of my designs were presented. The exhibition displayed five installation art works which were selected from among costumes of both the *Africussion* and the *Romeo and Juliet* productions and were displayed with video clips taken during the research process and with salvaged remnants of the materials used in the construction of my designs. They were the artistic interpretation of the materials collected during and developed from my practice research. The five installation works were an attempt to reveal the hidden intent of the designed costumes – how to create innovations out of traditions through inter-cultural exchange.

The evolution of Taiwanese tradition has been driven by their interactions with different cultures, which have been an important force in refashioning and the passing on of their traditions. During the evolution process, tradition clashes and integrates with different cultures, abandoning some of its own character **while** absorbing essences from other cultures and giving a new look to the traditional. The story of the **Saisiyat** bamboo weaver, Awai Da-in Sawan, gives us an example of how a culture evolves under inter-cultural exchanges. In her case, the key to the evolution of tradition **was** cross-cultural interactions and dialogues. As different cultures clash with one another, a process of comparison and absorption may take place. By interacting and exchanging with lowland Chinese professional weavers and receiving long-term training **from them**, Sawan was able to upgrade her professional **skills** and **deepen** her **aesthetic** sense of aesthetics and **increase** her capabilities. **Through** the cross-culture process, Sawan broadened her horizons, **allowed** herself to include the contents of other cultures in her work and **gave** a new face to traditional **Saisiat** bamboo basket weaving. **My** design works for *Africussion* and *Romeo and Juliet* are examples of efforts **and experience similar to Sawan's**. **In** my costumes I used my theatrical designer skills to **initiate** innovations **that redefined** and **re-interpreted** the aboriginal weaving tradition.

**My** research experience has been used not only in the theatre but also in my teaching. I have for the first time set up a workshop to introduce my Taiwanese art college students to the traditional aboriginal weaving experience. This entailed their living with a tribe, collecting in the woods the bark from which under instruction of tribal members they made bark cloth (tapa) and from it created slippers, hats, costume accessories even book covers; living with another tribe and observing the aboriginal rattan weavers as they worked and learning some simple weaving techniques themselves; and, with yet a third tribe, learning to extract the fibres from banana trees to produce banana

yarns, and subsequently observing the senior or master weavers at work as they executed the extra fine weaving for which the banana yarns are used.

I further applied my tribal experience to teaching when collaborating with the Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts, TNUA on an exhibition called *Pillow Project* set up to bring together some of Taiwanese and aboriginal crafters with local artists. They were given the project of creating a pillow intended for mass production. The primary intention was that groups would see one another's works and take inspiration from them and maybe use it in their future works.

From my research for this thesis I have come to believe that to pass on tradition is neither to return to the past, nor to duplicate the past, but to narrate the past, explain experiences past and present and gain power over the ambience that was once known in reality but now can only know in memory. This study was supposed to be a journey to explore the nature of creativity in the aboriginal weaving arts; however, it turned out to be a journey of self-discovery for me as well, as I re-examined and redefined my points of view through my interactions with the other weavers.

In this journey I found **some people** on my side but others on the opposite side as well. In the end I realise respecting differences is far more important than putting emphasis on the process of **"differance"**. Only by **accepting** different ways of thinking and different cultures can one find a more complete and satisfactory solution to the question of how to continue a tradition. **Derrida says there is no end to differance no rest as differences always emerge; the end is forever deferred, put off. That fits in with new ideas and creativity.** Therefore, the values and purposes of this study are not to offer an ultimate answer or the correct cure for all the ills besetting Taiwanese traditional weavers but to point out a new start for the next step.

In 1999, the Canadian poet Lesley Choyce once wrote the following phrases in his *Them and Us Exhibition* (MacDonald, 2006) These phrases inspired me a lot during my study and I would like to use them to conclude my research:

Whoever I am is greatly the result of all the other people who have been around me. If I surround myself with people who are just like me, I remain static, predictable, stagnant, dull and uninteresting. If I surround myself with people who are different, I grow, I change, I think, I flourish, I evolve, and I live life more fully. I am much happier to be inside this continually new and improving self. Identity is a powerful tool but only if it is always open to change. If it's a locked building, it's time for somebody to pry open the door. The door doesn't have to be wide open all the time, but the fresh air will be welcome often. Take advantage of all the otherness to get a good sense of who you really are and who you can be tomorrow. (Choyce, 1999)

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## GLOSSARY

*Africussion* - A performance by two music groups, the Ju Percussion Groups (Taiwanese) and the Harambee Dance Company (American) which specialises in African folk music. The title of the performance, *Africussion* represents, Africa/folk music and (Ju) Percussion/Taiwanese traditional music, the cross cultural encounter of the two groups/cultures.

*back-strap loom* - An ancient weaving device, widely used in many of aboriginal/indigenous tribes of the world. Unlike the treadle loom (see Figure 1.5), the back-strap loom is operated with the weaver's body movement. Moreover, the back-strap loom (see Figure 3.7) the back-strap loom allows the weaver to brocade designs into the fabric as it is woven. Brocade can be woven with a supplementary weft, added along with the ground weft. The elaborate brocading of patterns has given Taiwanese aboriginal traditional weaving its distinctive character.

*bottari* - The Korean term for a "bundle" wrapped with cloth. It is a very traditional way for the of safe-storing or transporting a family's worldly goods. Korean artist Kim Sooja uses the idea of bottari as an art concept.

*felted cotton* - A fabric of cotton that has been felted with wool fibre.

*free hand weaving* – The making of a textile with different techniques including weaving without a frame or loom, netting, knotting, twist and sewing.

*Han style* – Refers to the traditions of the Hoklo (Chinese that speak the Hokkien language), the Hakka (Chinese that speak Hakka language), and the Mainlanders (Chinese from Mainland China after 1948, that speak Mandarin) in Taiwan.

*imperfect textiles* - The wasted textiles, yarns and fibres from Yeh-Ton Workshop or [another](#) factory.

*KMT government* - KMT (Kuomintang) is a political party, which governed Taiwan in the period 1945 to 2000 and from 2008 up to now (2011).

*modern weaver* - Aboriginal weavers in the period after 1950. Most of them use modern looms instead of the back-strap loom to weave.

*off-loom weaving* – [Textile weaving without using a loom.](#)

*ramie* - A plant [fibre](#) that has been used since ancient times for by the Taiwanese aborigines. It is harvested and processed to yield strong fibers, which are used in the production of textiles.

*recycled woven textiles* – Otherwise wasted and discarded textiles (and yarns) used in costume design.

*supplementary weft* – Decorative weaving techniques in which extra ornamental weft threads are woven into textiles between regular wefts to create floating patterns above the ground weave.

*Taiwanese* – There are four ethnic groups in Taiwan. They are the Hoklo, the Hakka, the Mainlanders and aborigines. According to official governmental statistics, 98% of Taiwan's population is made up of Han Chinese (including the Hoklo, the Hakka, the Mainlanders), while only 2% ([c. 400,000](#)) are Taiwanese aborigines.

*Taiwanese aborigine* – The earliest immigrants in Taiwan, [which include](#) 13 tribes of Ami, Atayal, Bunun, Kavalan, Paiwan, Puyuma, Rukai, [Tao](#)

(Yami),Thoa, Tsou, Saisiat, Seediq, Sakizaya.

*Taiwanese traditional aboriginal weaving* – The back-strap loom weaving.

*twist* – In the spinning process fibres are twisted together to form yarn. I use the idea of twist as one of the free hand weaving techniques and apply it to the construction of my costumes.

*warp* - It is the set of lengthwise yarns that are held in tension on a loom, across which is woven the weft. The difference between back-strap loom and treadle loom warp is that the back-strap loom warp isn't cut into sections when the warp is set into the loom. Therefore, when the back-strap loom textile is completed, the textile is a ring-shaped, not a long, piece of fabric.

*weft* - The yarn is drawn across through the warp yarns to create cloth. The back-strap loom weaver uses the weft to create supplementary decorative patterns.

## Appendix 1: Practice Schedule

*Table a1.1: Fieldwork Phase I*

Timeframe	Weaver/Tribe/Workshop	Technique/Material/Activity
October 2004	Shu-li Lin, Atayal Shih-bi Tribe, Miaoli	Learning bow-string weaving and netting skills
October to December 2004	Awai Da-in Sawan, Saisiat Pong-lai Tribe, Miaoli	Learning bamboo/rattan weaving, collecting ramie fibre
October to November 2004	Printing Studio, TNUA	Hand making ramie paper and screen printing.
27 to 29 November 2004	Pastaa Festival, Saisiat, Miaoli	Observing Pastaa rituals and traditional costumes
January to February 2005	Yuma Taru/Yeh-Ton Workshop, Atayal Siang-bi Tribe, Miaoli	Learning back-strap loom and modern loom weaving
January to April 2005	Lawyi Kayi, Atayal Dan-an Tribe, Miaoli	Learning plain weaving skills on back-strap loom

*Table a1.2: First Costume Design Case*

Performance	<i>Africussion</i>
Performed by	Ju's Percussion Group
Location/ Time	National Theatre, Taipei 22 to 23 May 2005 Jihde Hall, Kaohsiung 24 May 2005 Chung Shan Hall, Taichung 26 May 2005
Products	13 sets (29 pieces)
Textile Production	Yuma Taru/Yeh Ton Workshop, Atayal Siang-bi Tribe, Miaoli, modern looms, March to May 2005
Costume Production	Shih-fen Lin, Chia-min Chen, free hand weaving, March to May 2005
Materials	Atayal textiles, leather

**Table a1.3: Fieldwork Phase II**

Timeframe	Weaver/Tribe/Workshop	Technique/Material/Activity
29 August to 2 September 2005	Felt workshop, organised by Jeanette Sandler, Keswick, UK	Felt making
3 to 4 September 2005	Millinery workshop, organized by Jeanette Sandler, Edinburgh, UK	making hats
October 2005 to February 2006	Aboriginal community fibre creation training, National Museum of Prehistory, Taitung	Bark cloth making, rattan weaving
November 2006	Puyuma Ka-di Tribe, Taitung	Beading, cross-stitching, weaving observation
November 2006	Rukai Da-nan Tribe, Taitung	Tribal life observation, Alpinia fibre collecting
November 2006	Vika Dansikian, Bunun Kan-ding Tribe, Taitung	Observing bark cloth making and nature dyeing
November 2006	Temí-Nawi, Seediq Cingliou Tribe, Nantou	Observing back-strap loom weaving, collecting ramie fibre

**Table a1.4: Second Costume Design Case**

Performance	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
Performed by	Co-produced by School of Theatre, TNUA & Taipei Culture Centre
Location/Time	The Metropolitan Hall, 9 to 11 June 2006
Products	37 sets (230 pieces of costumes and headdresses)
Bunun Textile	Vika Dansikian, Bunun Kan-ding Tribe, Taitung, back-strap looms and modern looms, January to May 2006
Atayal Textile	Yuma Taru/Yeh-Ton Workshop, Atayal Siang-bi Tribe, Miaoli, modern looms, March to May 2006
Headdress	Awai Da-in Sawan, Miaoli Saisiat, rattan weaving, March to May 2006
Costume	TNUA Costume Shop, hand weaving, felt, hand stitching, April to June 2006
Materials	Atayal and Bunun textiles, leather, wool felt, bark cloth

**Table a1.5: Exhibitions**

Exhibition	Location	Time
<i>On Stage/Off Stage; Weaving/Embroidering: Theatrical Costumes Design Exhibit</i>	Culture Gallery, National Concert Hall, National Chiang Kai-shek Cultural Centre, Taipei	29 October to 11 December 2005
<i>Discover by Hands, New Fibre Art-Special Exhibition</i>	National Museum of Prehistory, Taitung	8 July to 29 October 2006
	Lai-yi County Aboriginal Culture Centre, Nanhe Tribe, Pingtung	11 November 2006 to 7 January 2007
	Amis Fishing and Hunting Culture Centre, Chengkung Town Marina, Taitung	20 January to 4 March 2007
Bunun · Shakespeare · Saisiat—Chen, Wan-Lee 2006 Exhibition	Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines, Taipei	7 September to 5 October 2006



## Appendix 2 – Costumes of *Africussion*



a2.1

Figure a2.1  
Costume of a female musician.



a2.2



a2.3



a2.4



a2.5

**Figures a2.2-5**  
Details of female musicians' costumes.



a2.7



a2.8



a2.9

Figures a2.7-9 Front of female musicians' costumes.



a2.10



a2.11



a2.12

Figures a2.10-12 Back of a female musician's costume.



a2.13



a2.14



a2.15



a2.16



2a.17

Figures a2.13-16 Details of female musician's costumes.  
Figure a2.17 Design of a female musician's costume.



a2.18

Figure a2.18  
Front of a male musician's costume.



a2.19

Figure a2.19  
Back of a male musician's costume.



a2.20



a2.21

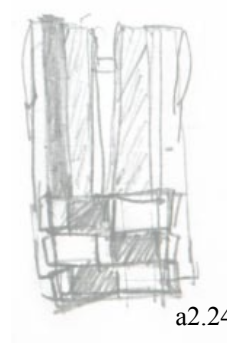
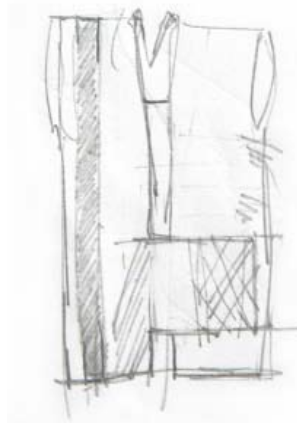


a2.22

**Figures a2.20-22**  
Front of male musicians' costumes.



a2.23



a2.24



a2.25



a2.26



a2.27

- Figure a2.23 Details of the hand-woven textile of a male musician's costume.  
Figure a2.24 Sketch of a male musician's costume.  
Figure a2.25-26 Details of the hand-woven textile of male musician's costumes.  
Figure a2.27 Sketch of a male musician's costume.



APPENDIX 3 – COSTUMES OF *ROMEO AND JULIET*



Figure a3.1 Capulet's costume.

Figure a3.2 Sketch of Capulet's costume.



a3.3

Figures a3.3-5  
Nurse's costume.



a3.4



a3.5



a3.6



a3.7

Figures a3.6-7 Details of Lady Capulet's costume.  
Figure a3.8 Lady Capulet's costume.



a3.8



a3.9



a3.10



a3a.11



a3a.12

Figure a3.9

Juliet's casual dress.

Figure a3.10

Side of Juliet's casual dress.

Figure a3.11

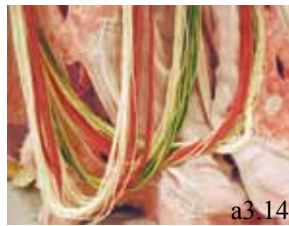
Back of Juliet's evening/wedding gown.

Figure a3.12

Sketch of Juliet's cloak



a3.13



a3.14



a3.15



a3.16

Figures e a3.13-16 Details of Juliet's night gown.  
Figure a3.17 Juliet's night gown.



3a.17



- Figure a3.18 Count Paris' costume.
- Figure a3.19 Details of Count Paris' hat.
- Figure a3.20 Sketch of Count Paris' costume.
- Figure a3.21 Details of the costume of the servant to Count Paris.
- Figure a3.22 Textiles of Count Paris' costume.
- Figure a3.23 Details of the costume of the Capulet servant.
- Figure a3.24 Sketch of Sampson's costume.



Figure a3.25 Costume of the servant to Count Paris.  
 Figure a3.26 Costume of the Capulet servant.  
 Figure a3.27 Sampson's costume.  
 Figure a3.28 Gregory's costume.  
 Figure a3.29 Tybalt's costume.



Figure a3.30 Romeo's costume.  
Figures a3.31-33 Details of Romeo's costume.  
Figure a3.34 Sketch of Romeo's costume.



a3.35



a3.36

Figures a3.35-36 Mercutio's costume.

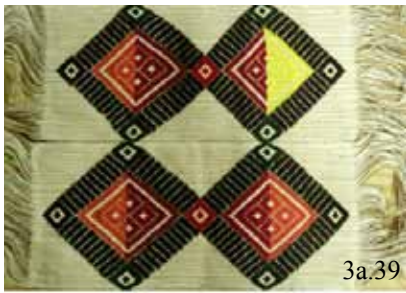




a3.37



a3.38



3a.39



a3.40

Figure e a3.37 Details of Montague's costume.  
 Figure a3.38 Montague's costume detail sketches.  
 Figures a3.39-40 Details of Montague's costume.



Figure a3.41 Details of Montague's costume.



Figure a3.42 Montague's costume.



Figure a3.43 Benvolio's costume.

Figure a3.44 Details of Benvolio's costume.

Figures a3.45-48 Shoes of Montague servants.



a3.49

a3.50

Figure a3.49 Balthasar's costume.  
Figure a3.50 Costume of Montague servant.  
Figure a3.51 Abram's costume.



a3.51



a3.52



a3.53



a3.54



a3.55

Figure a3.52 Back of Price Escalus' costume.  
 Figure a3.53 Front of Price Escalus' costume.  
 Figure a3.54 Details of Price Escalus' costume.  
 Figure a3.55 Sketches of Price Escalus' costume.



a3.56



a3.57



a3.58



a3.62



a3.59



a3.60



a3.61

- Figure a3.56 Patrol.
- Figure a3.57 Guard 1.
- Figure a3.58 Guard 2.
- Figures a3.59-60 Details of Friar Lurance's costume.
- Figure a3.61 Shoes of Friar Lurance.
- Figure a3.62 Friar Lurance's costume.



a3.63



a3.64



a3.65



a3.66



a3.67



a3.68



a3.69

- Figure a3.63 Costume of the purple-clothed female guest.
- Figure a3.64 Details of the costume of the yellow-clothed female guest.
- Figure a3.65 Details of the hat of the red-clothed female guest.
- Figure a3.66 Details of the costume of the red-clothed female guest.
- Figures a3.67-68 Details of the costume of the blue-clothed female guest.
- Figure a3.69 Details of the costume of the purple-clothed female guest.



a3.70



a3.71



a3.72



a3.73



a3.74



a3.75



a3.76

Figure a3.70 Khaki-clothed female guest.

Figure a3.71 Blue-clothed female guest.

Figure a3.72 Yellow-clothed female guest.

Figure a3.73 Male guest.

Figure a3.74 Red-clothed female guest.

Figure a3.75 Green-clothed female guest.

Figure a3.76 Details of the costume of the red-clothed female guest.

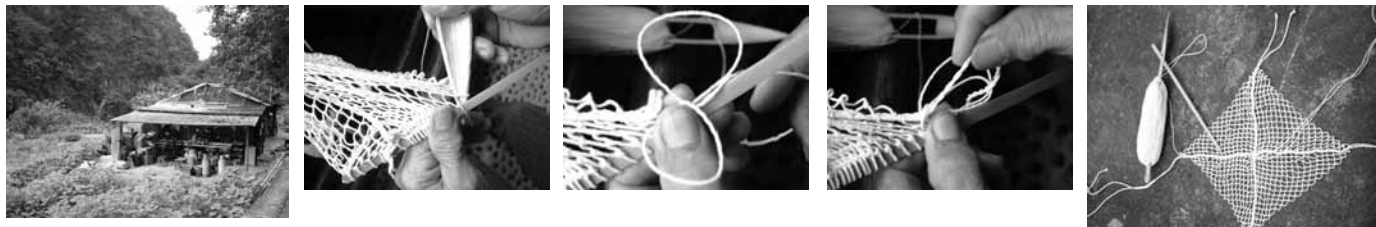


## Appendix 4 – Images of *Kakemono*

2004



Figures a4.1 Atayal Shih-bi Tribe, Miaoli. 3 October. Processing ramie fibre; demonstrating netting skills; making traditional weaving equipment; operating a modern loom.

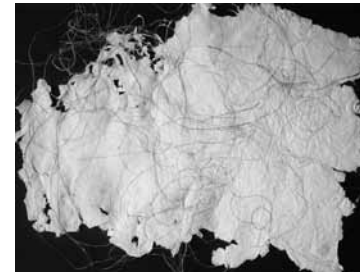


Figures a4.2 Atayal Shih-bi Tribe, Miaoli. 7 October. Demonstrating bow string weaving, netting and modern loom weaving.

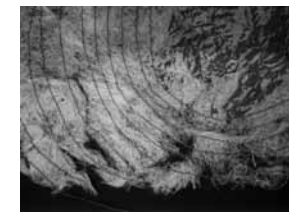
2004 2005 2006

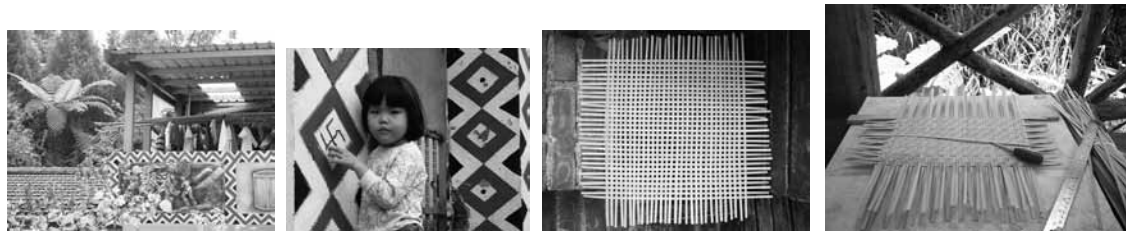


Figures a4.3 Printing Studio, TNUA, 9 October. Experimenting with hand-made ramie paper.



Figures a4.4 Printing Studio, TNUA, 9 October. Experimenting hand-made ramie paper and screen printing.

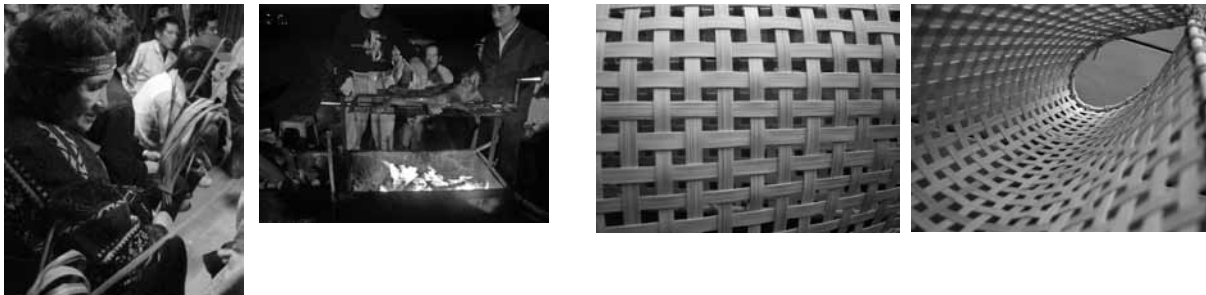




Figures a4.5 Saisiats Pong-lai Tribe, Miaoli. 13-14 October. Collecting ramie; bamboo weaving; Saisiat traditional hip bell dance.

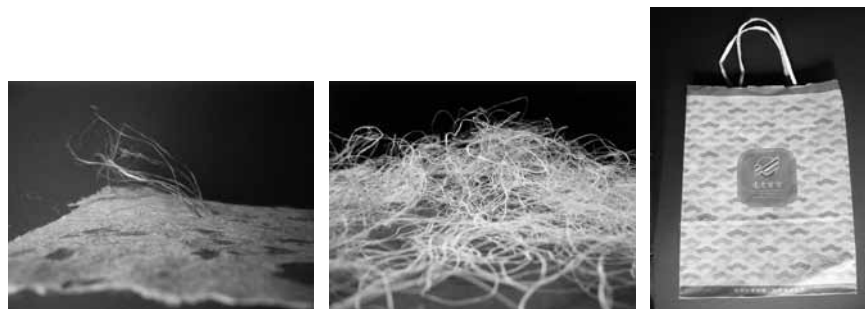


Figures a4.6 Saisiat, Shiang-tien Lake, Miaoli. 23 October. Wild grass weaving ritual.



Figures a4.7 Saisiats Pong-lai Tribe, Miaoli. October 25. Bamboo weaving.

Figure a4.8 Printing Studio, TNUA,  
25 October-3 November. Experimenting hand-made ramie paper.



Figures a4.9 Pastaai Festival, Saisiat, Shiang-tien Lake, Miaoli;  
Pastaai Festival, Saisiat, Wu-fong, Hsinchu. 28-29 November.



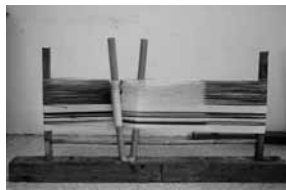
# 2005



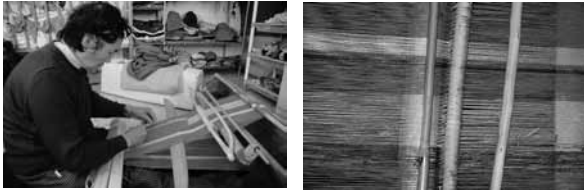
Figures a4.10 Atayal Da-an, Ten-gou and Mei-yuan Tribes, Miaoli. 26-28 January. Lawyi Kayi demonstrating warping and weaving on the back strap loom. Back strap loom making; Chang Fong-Mei and her works.



Figures a4.11 Atayal Da-an and Ten-gou Tribes, Miaoli. 3-5 February. Warping on the back strap loom; back strap loom making.



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Figures a4.12 Atayal Da-an, Miaoli.  
14-16 February. Lawyi Kayi demonstrating  
back strap loom weaving.

Figures a4.13 TNUA Costume Studio. 28 March.  
Bleaching, softening and processing ramie.



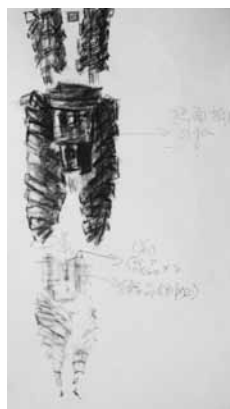
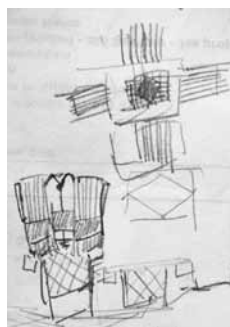
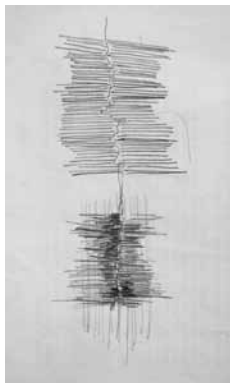
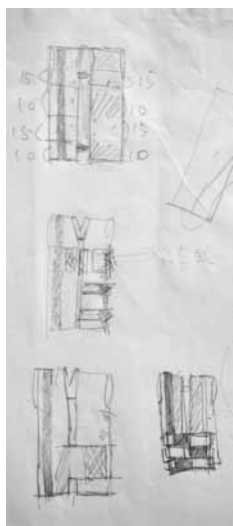
Figures a4.15 Taipei. 10 April. Custom-made  
threads for *Africussion* textile weaving.

Figures a4.14 Atayal Shiang-bi Tribe, Miaoli.  
6-7 April. Yeh-Ton Workshop demonstrating  
ramie fibre processing; workshop products.

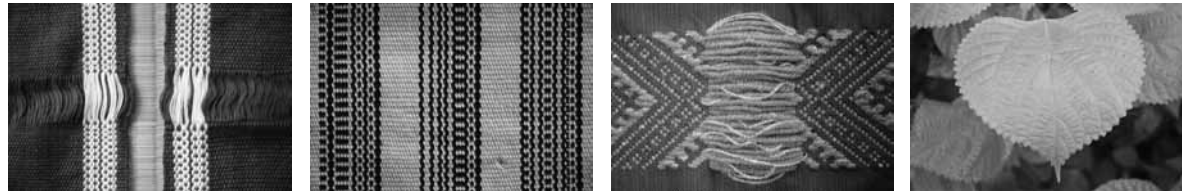




Figures a4.16 Yeh-Ton Workshop, Atayal Shiang-bi Tribe, Miaoli. 4-6 May.  
*Africussion* costume designs; costumes in production.



Figures a4.17 Atayal Shiang-bi Tribe, Miaoli. 11-13 May.  
Flawed textiles of Yeh-Ton Workshop and ramie leaves.



Figures a4.18 TNUA Costume Shop, 14-20 May.  
Producing *Africussion* costumes.



Figures a4.19 National Theatre, Taipei. 22-23 May. *Africussion*; backstage dressing.

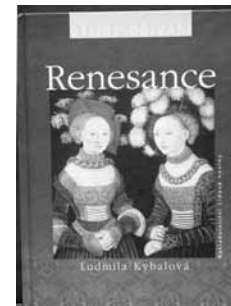


Figures a4.20 Chungsan Hall, Taitung Taichung. 26 May. Backstage dressing.



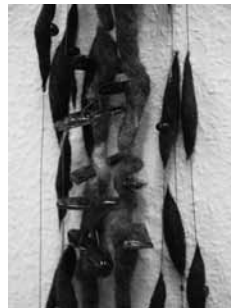
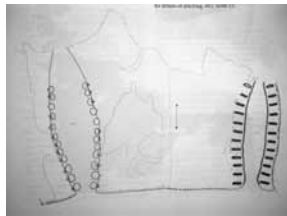
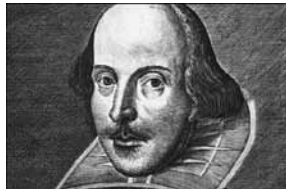
Figures a4.21 Edinburgh, Scotland. 24-28 August. Edinburgh Art Festival.

Figure a4.22 Keswick, Scotland. 29 August-2 September. Felt workshop.



Figures a4.23 References for costumes of *Romeo and Juliet*. 1-30 September.





Figures a4.24 Edinburgh, Scotland. 3-4 September. Millinery workshop.



Figures a4.25 National Chiang Kai-shek Cultural Centre, Taipei. 29 October. *On Stage/Off Stage; Weaving/Embroidering: Theatrical Costumes Design Exhibit*



Figures a4.26 Puyuma Ka-di Tribe, Taitung. 1-4 November. *Tribe visits.*





Figures a4.27 Seediq Cing-liou Tribe, Nantou. 9-10 November. Collecting ramie.



Figures a4.28 Taitung. 11 November. Collecting flow woods.



Figures a4.29 National Museum of Prehistory, Taitung. 12-14 November. Fibre creation training.



Figures a4.30 Taitung. 15-16 November.  
Bark cloth making.

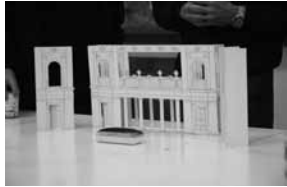


Figures a4.31 Bunun Kan-ding Tribe, Taitung. 17 November.  
Visiting Vika Dansikian and her bark cloth works.



Figures a4.32 *Romeo and Juliet* costume design drafts. 1-7  
December.





Figures a4.33 Department of Theatre, TNUA. 8 December. *Romeo and Juliet* design meeting.



Figures a4.34 National Museum of Prehistory, Taitung. 8 December. Fibre creation training.



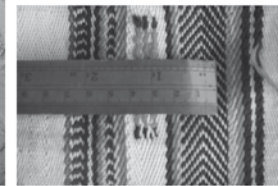
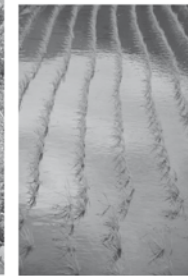
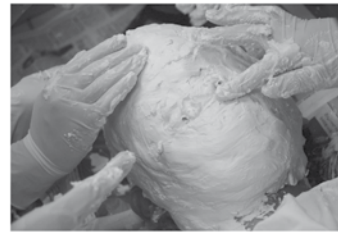
Figures a4.35 Taitung. 9-11 December. Collecting flow woods and rattan.



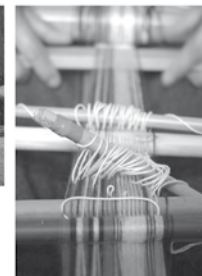


# 2006

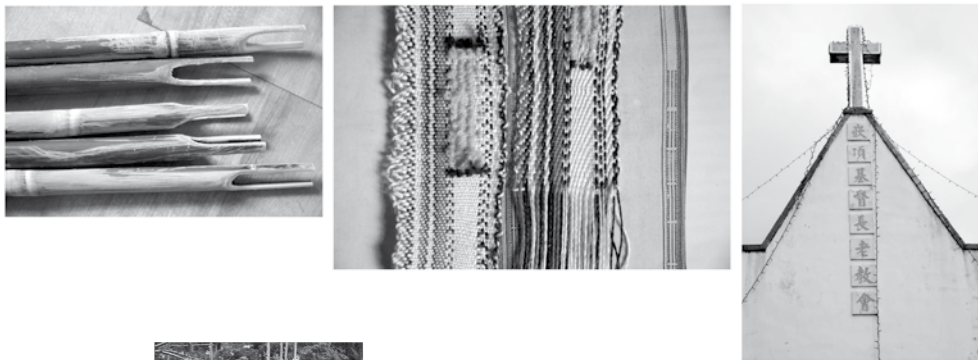
Figures a4.36 TNUA Costume Shop. 19 January. *Romeo and Juliet* costume making discussion, material shopping; making face moulds of actors and actresses.



Figures a4.37 Bunun Kan-ding Tribe, Taitung. 30 January-6 February. Vika Dansikian wove textiles for *Romeo and Juliet* and her daily life.



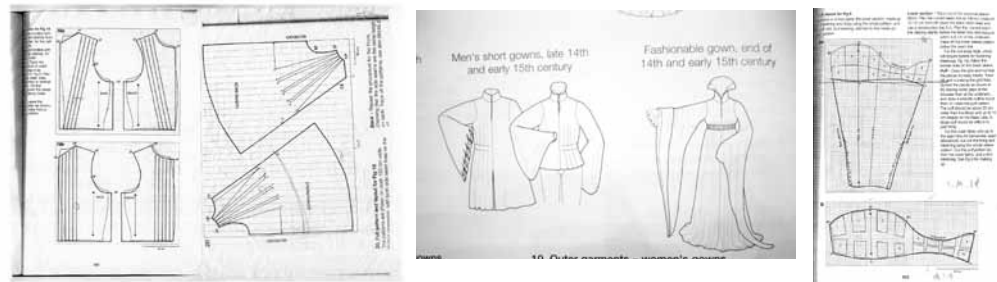
2004 2005 2006



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Figures a4.38 TNUA Costume Studio. 7-8 February. *Romeo and Juliet* materials, samples and references.

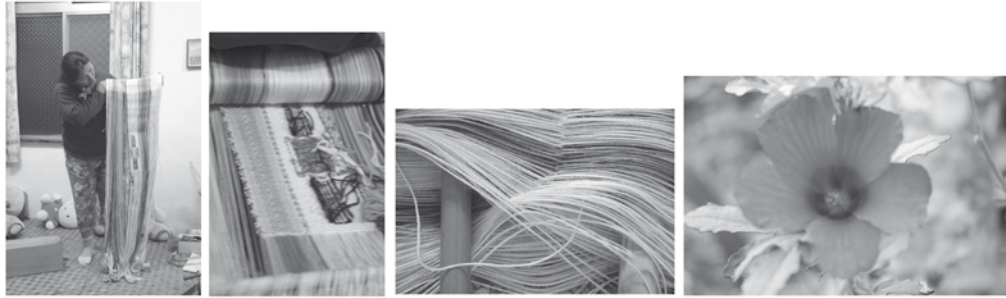


2004  
2005  
2006



Figures a4.39 Bunun Kan-ding Tribe, Taitung. 9-16 February. Festivities.



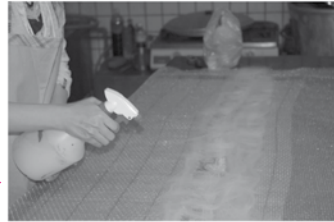


Figures a4.40 Taitung. 10-16 February. *Romeo and Juliet* textiles production; plant dyeing.

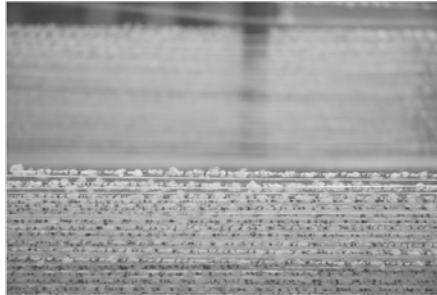


2004 2005 2006

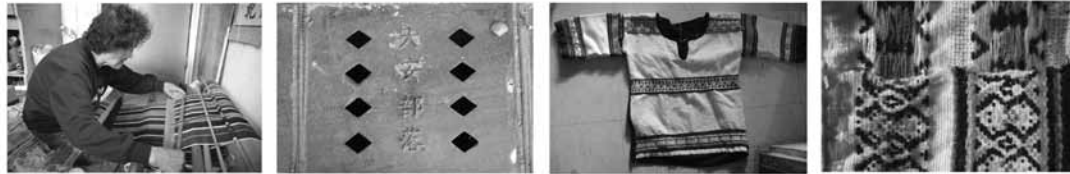
Figures a4.41 TNUA Costume Shop. 19 February.  
Sorting materials and making felt.



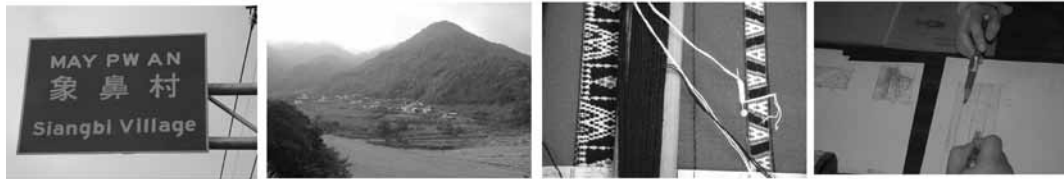
Figures a4.42 Department of Theater, TNUA.  
27 February. *Romeo and Juliet* production  
meeting.



Figures a4.43 Bunun Kan-ding Tribe, Taitung. 1-5 March.  
Vika Dansikian warped on the modern loom.



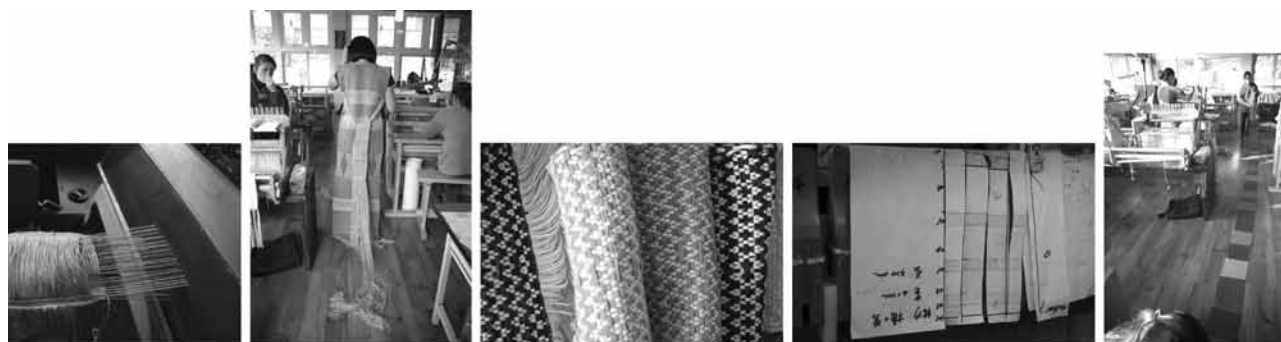
Figures a4.44 Atayal Da-an Tribe, Miaoli. 8-9 March. Lawyi Kay and her woven works.



Figures a4.45 Yeh Ton Workshop, Atayal Shiang-bi Tribe, Miaoli. 9 March. Discussion with Yuma Taru about *Romeo and Juliet* textile production.

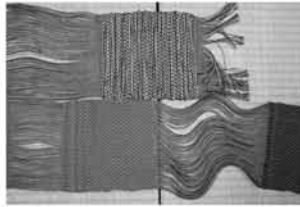
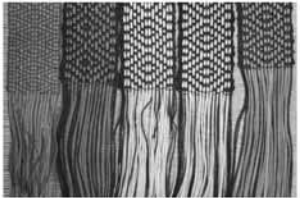
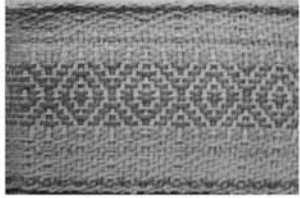


Figures a4.46 Shuei-shung, Chiayi. 10 March. Collecting materials.



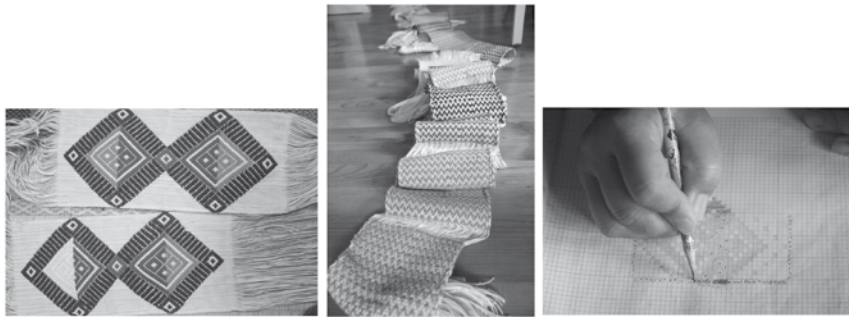
Figures a4.47 Yeh-Ton Workshop, Atayal Shiang-bi Tribe, Miaoli. 28 March-1 April. Producing *Romeo and Juliet* textiles



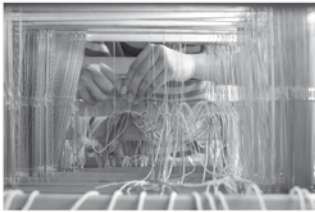


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Figures a4.48 Department of Theatre, TNUA. 28 March. *Romeo and Juliet* production meeting.



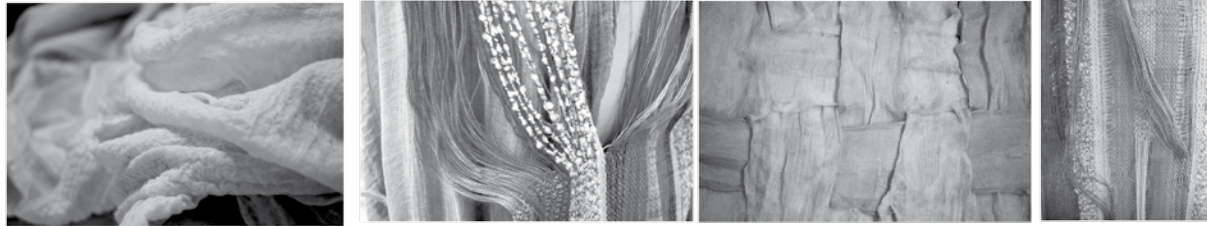
Figures a4.49 Department of Theatre, TNUA. 3 April. Design concept open forum; *Romeo and Juliet* costume colour rendering.



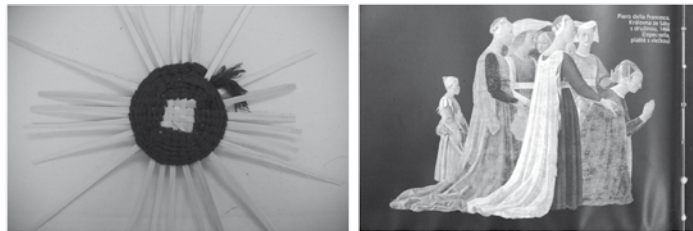


Figures a4.50 Saisiat Pong-lai Tribe, Miaoli. 7 April. Making hats.





Figures a4.51 TNUA Costume Shop. 10-12 April.  
Textiles, felt and shoes making.



Figures a4.52 TNUA Costume Shop.  
17 April. Assembling costumes.





Figures a4.53 Printing Studio, TNUA. 20 April.  
Experimenting silk screen printing on costume materials.



Figures a4.54 TNUA Costume Shop. 21 April.  
Costumes, textiles, shoes and hats making.



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Figures a4.55 TNUA Costume Shop.  
24 April. Costumes production and fitting.



Figures a4.56 Rehearsal Studio, TNUA. 24  
April. *Romeo and Juliet* stage model; group  
fighting rehearsal.





Figures a4.57 TNUA Costume Shop. 28-29 April.  
Costumes production.



Figures a4.58 TNUA Theatre. 2 May.  
Photos of *Romeo and Juliet* main  
characters.



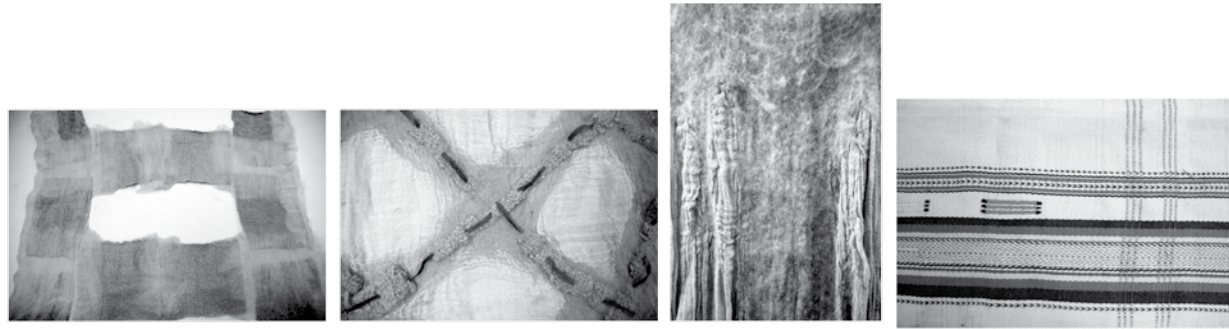


Figures a4.59 TNUA Costume Shop.  
6 May. Costumes production and dyeing.

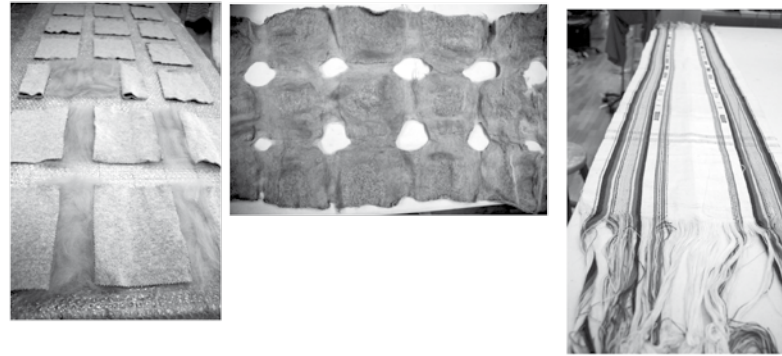


Figures a4.60 Taipei Culture Centre. 9 May. Press Conference.





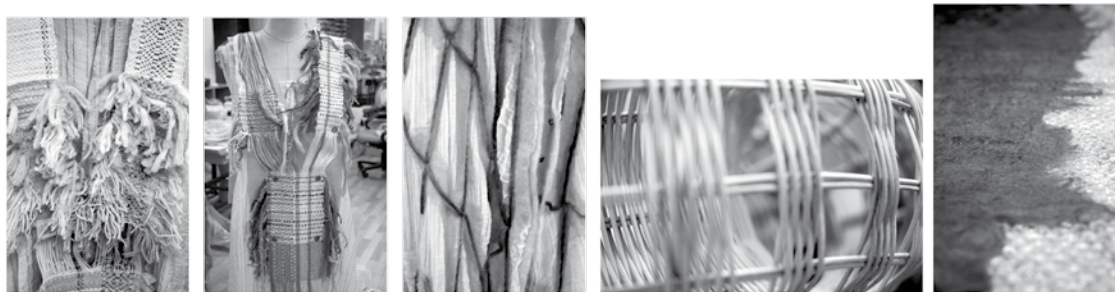
Figures a4.61 TNUA Costume Shop. 11-12 May.  
Felting and woven textiles making.



Figures a4.62 Department of Theatre,  
TNUA. 14 May. Rehearsal.







Figures a4.63 TNUA Costume Shop. 22-23 May. Costumes, felt and hats making.



Figures a4.64 TNUA Costume Shop. 26-27 May. Dyeing materials. Hair styling.



Figures a4.65 TNUA Costume Shop. 27 May.  
Making accessories.



Figures a4.66 TNUA Theatre. 30 May.  
Dressed-up rehearsal.



Romeo and Juliet



Figures a4.67 TNUA Theatre. 30 May.  
Photos of *Romeo and Juliet* characters.



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Figures a4.68 TNUA Theatre and Costume Shop. 1 June..  
Director Daniel S. P. Yang, dressed-up rehearsal, costume  
making, stage model.



Figures a4.69 TNUA Theatre and Costume Shop.  
2-3 June. Dressed-up rehearsal; costume crews.



Figures a4.70 TNUA Costume Shop. 5-6 June. Costume crews.



6 June.



Figures a4.71 TNUA Costume Shop. 6 June. Masks and hats.

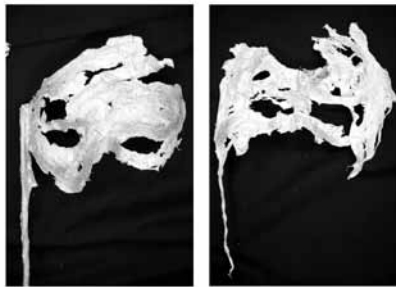


Figure a4.72 TNUA Costume Shop. 6 June. Costume crews.



Figures a4.73 TNUA Costume Shop. 6 June.  
Packing for the Metropolitan Hall.





Figures a4.74 The Metropolitan Hall. 7-8 June. Rehearsal.



Figures a4.75 The Metropolitan Hall. 9-11 June. Dressing; performance.





Figures a4.76 National Museum of Prehistory, Taitung. 4-5 July. "Masks", installation preparation and set-up.



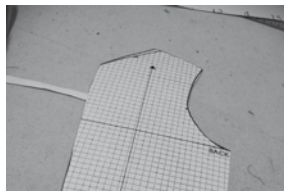
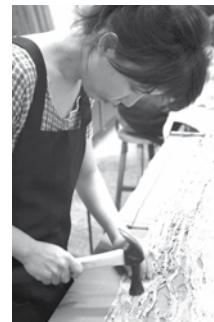
Figures a4.77 National Museum of Prehistory, Taitung. 4-5 July. Setting up for "Discover by Hands, New Fibre Art-Special Exhibition".



Figures a4.78 Bunun Kan-ding Tribe, Taitung. 6 July. Collecting bark cloth for "Bunun-Shakespeare-Saisiat-Chen, Wan-Lee 2006 Exhibition".



Figures a4.79 TNUA Printing Studio. 21 August. Preparing for “Bunun-Shakespeare-Saisiat—Chen, Wan-Lee 2006 Exhibition”.



Figures a4.80 Preparation. August 29 August-5 September. Preparing for “Bunun-Shakespeare-Saisiat—Chen, Wan-Lee 2006 Exhibition”.

Figures a4.81 Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines. 7 September-5 October. "Bunun-Shakespeare-Saisiat—Chen, Wan-Lee 2006 Exhibition".



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## APPENDIX 5: LIST OF AUTHOR'S PUBLICATIONS

### Books

- 2010 *Poetics of Threads: In Search of Alternative Aesthetics of Taiwanese Aboriginal Woven Textiles in Theatrical Costume Designs*. TNUA: Taipei.
- 2008 *Pillow Project - 34 artists collaboratively create a story of dreams*. ed., TNUA: Taipei.
- Weaving Tradition and Creativity: Weaving Workshops in Three Taiwanese Aboriginal Tribes*, ed., TNUA: Taipei
- 2001 *Legacy: The Description of Costumes and Props of the Dance Chart of Legacy, Cloud Gate Dance Theater of Taiwan*: Taipei
- 1996 *Tales from the Mountains and the Seas: Taiwan Aboriginal Clothing Research and Redesign*, Wan-Lee Chen: Taipei

### Essays

- 2008 Tradition and Innovation-A Perspective on Cultural Identity of Taiwanese Aborigines from Textiles of Juliet's Costumes, *After the Heteroglosia: Articles of Modern Theatre in Taiwan*, Bookman Books: Taipei, p.247-270.
- 2007 An Inquiry into the Tradition and Innovation of Modern Aboriginal Taiwanese Weaving through Costume Production of *Africussion*, Articles of 2005 Cross-strait Theater Education Conference, Taipei, Chinese Culture University, Dept. Drama & Theatre, October 2007, p.131-141.
- 2005 Cross-strait Theater Education Conference Proceeding, Chinese Culture University, Dept. Drama & Theatre: Taipei, p.131-141.

### Conferences

- 2010 Old Medium, New Design: In Search of Alternative Aesthetics of Taiwanese Aboriginal Woven Textiles through the Costume Design of *Africussion*, Textile Society of America 12th Biennial **Symposium** "Textiles & Settlement: From Plains Space to Cyber Space", Lincoln, Nebraska, **6-9 September**.
- 2008 Poetics of Threads, Documentary, Textile Society of America 11th Biennial Symposium "Textiles as Cultural Expressions", Honolulu, Hawaii, **24-27 September**.
- 2006 Tradition and Innovation-A Perspective on Cultural Identity of Taiwanese Aborigines from Textiles of Juliet's Costumes, "After the Heteroglossia: Conference of Modern Theatre in Taiwan", National Taiwan University, Taipei, **7-9 October**.
- 2005 An Inquiry into the Tradition and Innovation of Modern Aboriginal Taiwanese Weaving through Costume Production of *Africussion*, "2005 Cross-strait Theater Education Conference", Chinese Culture University, **Department & Theatre**, Taipei. 14~15, October.

### **Exhibitions**

- 2007 Poetics of Threads - 2007 **Wan-Lee Chen**, Creative Resource **Centre** for Traditional Arts, 23 July-**12 August**.
- 2006 Bunun · Shakespeare · Costume - 2006 Chen **Wan-Lee Chen**, Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines, Taipei, **7 September-8 October**.
- 2006 **Explore** the Natural Fibers - **Fiber** Art Exhibition, National Prehistory Museum, Taitung, **8 September-29 August**.
- 2005 Poeticness of Threads - On Stage/Off Stage; Weaving/Embroidering: Theatrical Costumes Design Exhibit, Gallery, National Chiang Kai Shek Cultural **Centre**, Taipei, 29 October-**11 November**.

### **Theatrical Costume Designs**

- 2010 *Mu-Lan*, Ju Percussion Group, National Theatre: Taipei.
- 2006 *Romeo and Juliet*, the Metropolitan Hall, Taipei.
- 2005 *Africussion*, National Theatre, Taipei.
- 2002 *The Tragedy of Nichola I Kuan / Beijing*, Performed at TUNA.
- 2001 *The Tragedy of Nichola I Kuan, The birds*, Performed at TUNA.
- 1999 *The 20<sup>th</sup> year of Gi-An*, Performed at NIA.
- 1998 *One day in the year of 1999*, Performed at NIA.
- The accidental death of an anarchist*, Performed at National Taiwan University.
- 1997 *The Memories in Hung Kong*, Performed at NIA.
- 1996 *The Inspector General*, Performed at NIA.
- 1995 *The School for Wives*, Performed at NIA.
- 1994 *Tales from the Mountains and the Seas*, Performed at NIA.
- The First Job*, Performed at the National Theater, Taipei, Taiwan.
- 1993 *The Beijing*, Costume Co-design, Performed at the National Theatre.
- 1992 *A Dream Play*, Performed at NIA.
- 1991 *Zen Sen*, Performed at NIA.

### **Dance Costume Designs**

- 2001 *Bamboo dream*, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, Performed at the National Theatre.
- 2000 *Green*, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, Performed at the National Theatre.
- 1997 *Portrait of the families*, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, Performed at the National Theatre.
- 1996 *Generation X*, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, Performed at the National Theatre. *Prairie- Totem Nowhere Goes*, Orchid Dance, Performed at NIA.
- 1995 *Dream*, The Brides of Black and White, Performed at NIA.
- 1994 *Sea*, Performed at NIA.
- 1993 *Kalmyk*, Performed at NIA.

## Others

- 1999 *The story of four women*, Movie, Costume Design.
- 1998 *La Traviata*, Opera, Hair & Make-up Design, Taipei City Symphony Orchestra, Performed at the National Theatre.
- 1995 *Li-Wa, Taiwanese Opera*, Costume Coordinator, Council for Culture Affairs Performed at the National Theatre.
- 1994 *Music Theatre-1994 Dream of Chimes*, Ju Percussion Group, Performed at the National Theatre
- Turandot*, Opera, Hair & Make-up Design, Taipei City Symphony Orchestra, Performed at the National Theatre.
- National Award of Excellence*, Costume Coordinator, Performed at the National Theatre.
- 1993 *Carmen*, Opera, Hair & Make-up Design, Taipei City Symphony Orchestra, Performed at the National Theatre

## APPENDIX 6 – VIDEO OF *POETICS OF LINES*



## APPENDIX 7 – VIDEO OF *AFRICUSSION* PERFORMANCE

**APPENDIX 8 – VIDEO OF *ROMEO AND JULIETTE* PERFORMANCE**