

Afterlives of the Clouded Leopard

*Likulau Heirlooms and
Paiwan Culture*

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Abstract: This paper analyses the afterlives of the *likulau* (clouded leopard), through its spiritual presence and material traces among the indigenous Paiwan people of Taiwan. Despite having been locally extinct for over half a century, the clouded leopard still continues to inhabit the myths and imaginations of the local population. In traditional Paiwan culture, the clouded leopard held a special status, and its skin and teeth were used to make ritual clothes and adornments for the village chiefs. In this paper, I explore the significance of these *likulau* artefacts in contemporary Paiwan society. I also examine how the Paiwan's interactions with and the cultural significance of these objects have evolved in connection with environmental changes and social transformations of Paiwan society. As embodied in these material traces, the clouded leopard is both absent and present, extinct and alive. I explore this spectral presence via the concept of *survivance* (Didi-Huberman), examining how the ambiguous persistence of the clouded leopard relates to the resilience of traditional Paiwan culture.

Keywords: *Paiwan, clouded leopard, afterlife, survivance, indigenous peoples*

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In the humid Taiwanese winter of 2019, I visited the Paiwan village of Laiyi in Pingtung County (屏東縣·來義部落) in southern Taiwan. It was my second visit to the village, and I was hoping to discover some clouded leopard items, fragments of the past still alive in the present. Together with a colleague from the university, I sought out some potential owners of such items. After sitting in one family's living room for an hour talking about clouded leopard artefacts, I was wondering if they would make an appearance this evening or not. I could only wait and see if the owners were inclined to show us them, which is not always the case. That evening, we were in luck. at a certain point, *ina*¹ went upstairs and returned with a leopard skin and a headdress which she laid out in the middle of the room. The skin had been cut from head to tail on the underside of the belly in order to allow it to be laid flat. The room went silent. The animal seemed to fill the space and integrate into the social circle of the house. The owner displayed the clouded leopard hide very carefully, with slow movements, making sure not to damage the skin. In that moment, the clouded leopard hide was not just an item destined to be photographed. Looking at the skin we could almost feel the presence of the clouded leopard; this material object brought the past back to life in the present, making visible what usually remains hidden. Looking at these material traces that continue to haunt Paiwan society, this paper explores the complex afterlives of the clouded leopard. Despite having been declared locally extinct by scientists, the clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) maintains a ghostly presence for the indigenous Paiwan people. I will begin by presenting the Paiwan and their relationship with the clouded leopard, or *likulau* (in Paiwan). Then I will discuss the significance and agency of the remaining artefacts made from the bodies of clouded leopards. These artifacts, I argue, constitute a form of *survivance* for the species. Finally, I will examine how a new kind of artefact, artificial replicas or imported skins, have come to compensate for the impossibility of producing new artefacts from the Taiwanese clouded leopard.

1 *Ina* is a Paiwan term to designate a woman who is older than you, and can be translated as mother, aunt, grand-mother, etc.



Figure 1:

Two old clouded leopard skins: a vest and a full body skin. Laiyi village, Pingtung county, November 2018. Photograph by the author.

Paiwan Clouded Leopard Culture

The Paiwan live in the Southern and South-eastern parts of Taiwan in Pingtung and Taitung Counties, on either side of the Central Mountain Range (Zhongyang Shanmai 中央山脈). They are often divided by government classification into four dialectal groups according to geographical area: the northern, southern, eastern, and central Paiwan.² They are also divided into the *ravar* group in the north of Pingtung County, with geographical proximity to the Rukai people, and the *vutsul/butsul* groups in the south and east.³ This research focuses on the *vutsul* Paiwan, which is a hierarchical society divided between a highest community leader (*vusam mamazangiljan*), the nobility (*mamazangiljan*), the leader helpers (*pualu*), and the commoners (*adidan*). Parallel to this inherited social hierarchy, other kinds of social status are acquired by merit and personal abilities, such as shaman (*pulingau*) who is sensible to the spirit world, and warrior (*rakac*) who is an expert at hunting and headhunting. Paiwan social and individual life is organized around the community and the practice of sharing between members. Sharing unifies the community by means of the circulation of goods and values through the social ranking system. Traditionally, the Paiwan were hunter societies, in which all the men were both hunters and warriors, known as fearsome head-hunters. In the past, hunting and gathering alongside small-scale agriculture was the basis of Paiwan life.

During my fieldwork, from 2018 to 2022, I made several short visits to Paiwan villages to conduct interviews, and two longer stays of six months in Taitung and in Pingtung for participant observation.⁴ In the first part of my fieldwork, I mostly met with chiefs and noble families who are generally the ones in possession of clouded leopard

- 2 This administrative division into four groups is not so evident in reality, where differences are more related to migration path. Two neighbouring villages may speak different dialects, for example.
- 3 The *vutsul* can be further divided between the *vutsul* in the north; the *paumaumaq* in the central part; the *chaobolbol*, *sebdek*, *parilarilao* and *skaro* in the south; and the *paqaluqalu* in the east (Chiang Bien, 1984). These groups share a similar social organization and rank system.
- 4 All interviews and discussions were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

items. However, after 2020, I also met with hunters, shamans, and elders, in order to deepen my understanding of the leopard culture, and the past relationship of Paiwan society to this animal. Most of my informants were men over the age of forty, although I also talked with a few younger hunters in their thirties as well as some women. As a white woman and non-indigenous foreigner, it took me a long time to understand the social context of the Paiwan community and notably the actual authority conflicts between traditional hierarchy and new elites. I decided to restrict my research to the central (Pingtung County) and east Paiwan (Taitung County) groups, which are linked by migration pattern, and share the same sacred mountain, Dawu (*kavulungan*).⁵ Dawu mountain is considered as the land of the spirits and ancestors and the place where the leopard used to roam. The central Paiwan have been the main owners of leopard artefacts for generations and stories of leopards are still told in Taitung to this day.

As said, it was not easy for me, as an outsider and a woman, to integrate into the masculine world of my fieldwork. At first, hunters rejected my requests to join them on a hunt or to go up to the mountains: They would often say it was too dangerous and therefore unsuitable for a woman. The Paiwan nowadays usually hunt at night with powerful headlights which reflect the animal eyes and blind them, allowing hunters to shoot their prey with shotguns. They often hunt in small groups of two to four, but some also go alone. The main game species are muntjacs, serow, and flying squirrels, though some more adventurous hunters also trap boar or go deeper into the mountain to shoot deer. These days, the animals are mainly used for food, as most people do not want to spend so much time preparing the skins. As I spent more time living in the community, a man in Taitung finally agreed to bring me on a hunt. His friend was sceptical, saying that I would bring bad luck and warned me not to touch their weapons. That evening I experienced my first hunt with the Paiwan and we killed two muntjacs and a flying squirrel. I did not slow them down and without complaining I carried the body

5 Despite some dialectal and minor customary differences, these two groups share a similar social organization and ranking system.

of the muntjac I was given. On our way back to the village, the man told me I was welcome to join the hunt again. It seems that contrary to his friend's prediction my presence had brought them good luck. After that, I accompanied a number of different hunting parties and gradually came to be accepted. My skill at hiking was recognized and praised. While hunting in the mountains and hiking, I learned the most about the relationship between the Paiwan and the local ecosystems. I tried to see the world as they do, and listened to whatever they wanted to share with me.

From my mountain experiences, I learned that the Paiwan have established different kinds of connections with animals. The Paiwan distinguish between *qudzipan*, or domestic animals, which are taken care of and who live in close proximity with humans (such as pigs, dogs, or chickens), and wild animals, *sacemel*, which are usually subdivided into three main categories. The first category is the usual game (*liewu* 獵物) that my informants often jokingly described as the animals wearing high-heels (that is hooves): wild boar, muntjacs, serow, deer. The second category comprises animals perceived as sacred, because of their link to the spiritual world, and are therefore taboo to be hunted: for example, the hundred pacer pit viper [*Deinagkistrodon acutus* 百步蛇]. The third category is situated in between the previous two: animals which are not sacred, but are also not usually hunted because of their specificity and rareness, such as the black bear [*Ursus thibetanus formosanus* 黑熊], the mountain hawk-eagle [*Nisaetus nipalensis* 熊鷹], and the clouded leopard [*Neofelis nebulosa* 雲豹]. An addition, one might identify a fourth category: rodents and small clawed animals, which were not eaten in the past, but now, under the influence of other groups, have been integrated into the Paiwan diet. An elder in Taitung told me that these small animals were considered the prey of the clouded leopard and the hawk-eagle and as such were not eaten. In other words, this was a form of sharing the game between humans and leopards. Hunting practices have been a major part of the Paiwan way of life, providing food and supplies for making clothes and other objects. In the past, hunters used furs for blankets and clothes, but also used other parts of the animal to make ritual artefacts. The Paiwan consider hunted

animals as gifts given by their ancestors.⁶ Without the spirit's agreement, hunters cannot be successful.⁷ Before going on a hunt, the Paiwan recite prayers and make small offerings of alcohol or betel nuts asking the spirits for their permission, support, and protection. After a successful hunt, they also perform offerings to thank the spirits. The restrictions of hunting rights imposed by the various colonial regimes (Japanese; Chinese Kuomintang or KMT [國民黨]) on indigenous people has restrained their ability to interact with animals and limited the production of artefacts made from the bodies of those animals. For the Paiwan, hunting remains an important means of maintaining a link with their local environment, and spirits. To give up hunting would be to give up their roots in their ancestral land.

The clouded leopard was first “discovered” and introduced to the West by the English diplomat and naturalist Robert Swinhoe in 1862, who visited the Dawu mountains and documented the species.⁸ During the Japanese colonization of Taiwan (1895–1945), the colonial administration kept records of indigenous hunting which established how many animals were killed by various ethnic groups each year. These records indicate that the Paiwan killed the most leopards, but that other indigenous people were also hunting them, most notably the Atayal in the north.⁹ Other traces of the leopard's presence during this period are the old Japanese photographs of skins and artefacts made and owned by the Paiwan. Since the indigenous peoples of Taiwan had no writing system, it is harder to account for the leopard's presence before the Japanese colonial period. Nevertheless, my informants often described the leopard as the predator which lived in the high mountains and kept the wildlife population in check.

6 It is difficult to classify the Paiwan as either an animist, totemist, or perspectivist society since they borrow elements from those various ontologies. Indeed, social ranks are associated with special rights notably in link with some specific animals (totemism principle). Though the Paiwan social realm is comprising humans and nonhumans in a collective of beings overseen by the spirits and ancestors (animist principle). Finally, in Paiwan societies can be observed extra-human and intra-human perspectivism. Some humans (warrior, shaman) in certain conditions transform into animals, while humans can also be inhabited by ancestors in dreams or through possession.

7 Informal discussion with a hunter, Tuban village, Taitung county, 2020.

8 Swinhoe, “Mammals of the Island of Formosa”.

9 Mabuchi, *Collected Works*, 76–77.



Figure 2:

A vest made of clouded leopard skin. XinLaiyi village, Pingtung county, March 2019.

Photograph by the author.

Their slow extinction is one of the reasons for the abundance of wild-life in Taiwan today, with a surplus of monkeys and muntjacs left without predators.

The clouded leopard has an ambiguous status within Paiwan culture(s): as the largest predator on the island¹⁰ it was highly valued, yet it was not considered sacred. It is only after many interviews and discussions that I began to grasp the paradoxical status of the clouded leopard: the feline was neither a sacred nor a game animal, but one that could be killed when encountered by chance or caught in a hunting trap. In such circumstances, they were seen as a gift from the ancestors that could not be refused. For example, an elder of Qijia village (七佳部落) in Pingtung County explained to me:

In all my life I have never heard elders talk about how you can catch a clouded leopard. [...] It was not seen as a game animal. Maybe it would be caught by mistake in a trap, and, because it was already dead, it would thus be brought in to make skins. So, the elders do not talk about how to catch a clouded leopard. Is it taboo? Or prohibited? Some secret prohibition?

If a leopard had been killed, a ceremony (*palisi*) had to be conducted in order to appease the spirit of the animal along with the other spirits. If the ceremony was not carefully performed by the village shaman (*pulingau*), it could bring bad luck and cause accidents, sickness, or even death to the hunter's family (or even to all the villagers).¹¹ Hunting a clouded leopard in the past was not a trivial endeavour, because of their intelligence and their scarcity. It was rare for a clouded leopard to be killed, but when it did happen, the hunter who brought one back to the village would gain social status. Indeed, some interlocutors told me that, in the past, in order to become a warrior, one had to have killed a clouded leopard, a mountain hawk-eagle, a black bear, or cut off the head of a (human)

10 Taiwanese black bears are larger, but they are not considered predators since they feed primarily on leaves, shoots, roots, and fruit, although they have been known to eat insects and small mammals on occasion.

11 Interview with an elder and hunter, Wenle Village, Pingtung county, 15 March 2019; interview with an elder and hunter, Tuban village, Taitung county, 25 November 2020.

enemy.¹² Back in the village, the leopard's body was first kept outside of the living area, where a ritual to thank and comfort the spirits was performed before allowing the carcass inside the village perimeter. The clouded leopard was then given to the highest chief (*vusam mamazangiljan*) who kept the skin, teeth, jaws, and tail. In Paiwan culture, the chief is also the steward of the communal land, so they received part of whatever had been hunted or collected on their territory. The *mamazangiljan* then had the duty to redistribute meat to the families in need, the sick, or the elderly. They were at the centre of the community economy of giving and receiving. Some informants told me that the meat was eaten collectively by the villagers, while others claimed that it could not be eaten, and that the body was buried instead. The parts kept by the *mamazangiljan* were used in the chief's regalia as vests or headdresses. Many indigenous peoples use animals to symbolize power or to recognize their authority.¹³ Each animal may be associated with some special power or quality which are then correlated to the person using animal-made artefacts or emblems. In the Paiwan case, reserving clouded leopard ornaments for the highest chief is also a recognition of their social status and position as the centre of the community. Not all the chiefs wear these kinds of items but for those who do, these artefacts come to reinforce the visualization of the social order. In the process of being transformed from a wild animal into a cultural artefact the clouded leopard passed through the hands of various different members of the community (hunters, the shaman, the chief, commoners). This passage symbolized the unity and sharing principles of the Paiwan. Furthermore, through the ritual ceremony (*palisi*), the shaman also re-initiated a link with the spiritual world, to

12 Interview with an elder and hunter, Wenle village, Pingtung county, 15 March 2019; discussion with a noble woman and four Paiwan elders, Jialan village, Taitung county, 4 December 2020. Headhunting was a common practice in the Austronesian world, important means for the production and reproduction of the society. In headhunting practice, enemies are usually perceived as foreigners, or even not fully human. But when the enemy's head was brought back to the village, it was transformed into a friend or family member. The Paiwan associate in their narrative the hunting of three types of wild animals and the headhunting. The transition process is similar with the clouded leopards, that pass inside the cultural sphere after being killed, and are integrated into the family, coming even to represent them through the materiality of the artefact.

13 Jerolmak and Tavorý, "Molds and Totems", 65.

thank the ancestors for offering this gift. Paiwan society was historically united horizontally (between all members) and vertically (with the spirits and ancestors) through the process of incorporating the leopard into the community.

Colonial Impact on the Human–Animal Relationship

It is generally agreed that the local extinction of the clouded leopard began with the period of Japanese colonial rule, which lasted from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War. The disappearance of the clouded leopard coincided with the efforts of the Japanese administration to “civilize” and “Nipponize” Taiwanese indigenous people. In practice, this meant forced resettlement of indigenous people in villages controlled and organized by the Japanese, and the requirement to speak Japanese and adopt the cultural manners of the occupiers.¹⁴ All those transformations impacted the Paiwan relationship to the environment and wildlife. The education of indigenous people was notably focused on the introduction of writing system and insertion into market economy. The literacy effort impacted the indigenous people oral system and initiated the slow erosion of traditional oral history. It is plausible to assume that many of the stories relating to the clouded leopard have been lost or survive only as vague memories because it was not considered necessary or desirable to write them down. In this way, most informants do not know the origin of a given clouded leopard item, nor for how many generations it has been in their family. Most of my interviewees told me that it has been too long, that I had come too late to collect these kinds of memories.

At first, this absence of memories of the objects’ history appeared to me as a lack or a lacuna. Gradually, however, I came to appreciate that it is equally important to reflect on the traces that remain within the object itself. Indeed, part of their significance is still infused in these material items, handed down from generation to generation, and this also applies to the new replicas acquired in more recent times. The articulation between historical trauma, social change,

14 Rubinstein, *Taiwan*; Matsuoka, “*Fandi*” *tongzhi*.

and the transitional process of the material artefacts' meanings is complex. The transformation of these artefacts, their loss of significance and disappearance from view, followed by their recovery and new significance—all of this is linked to the process of *survivance*. In this paper, I use the term *survivance* rather than survival, since the latter tends to refer to the biological fact of continued existence. *Survivance*, on the other hand, conceptualizes the idea of a lasting presence, not only in a biological sense but also symbolically and spiritually. The Anishinaabe writer Georges Vizenor uses the concept of *survivance* when discussing the First Nations of North America. According to Vizenor, *survivance* is an “active sense of presence” over historical absence, and the word encompasses both survival and the idea of active resistance.¹⁵ In my research, *survivance* refers to this holistic aspect of natural and cultural continuity in the face of disappearance. The transformation of the narratives surrounding the leopard and its material afterlives are not signs of its disappearance but rather, of the persistence of a presence that adapts to a changing social and natural world.

Paiwan societies have undergone many changes with their integration into dominant societies, first the Japanese, then the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT), which remains a major political party in Taiwan. The Paiwan were forced to adopt new cultural systems, languages, and find their place in a market economy, with a significant exodus toward the cities starting in the 1960s. In the villages, the power of the *mamazangiljan* has diminished because of the loss of traditions among the younger generations but also because of competition among chiefs. The dislocation and relocation of villages under the Japanese and the KMT have weakened local chiefs' power and challenged their authority with the establishment of new chiefs not based on traditional ranking. While living within a community, I observed the manifold kinds of conflicts over authority that exist today: between various chiefs drawing their legitimacy from different times, bloodline relations to the traditional chief, designation by the Japanese, but also presently new elites relying on wealth and education.

15 Vizenor, *Survivance*, 20.

While in the past a village could only have one *vusam mamazangiljan* recognized by all, today a village can have two, three, or even more chiefs fighting to establish their legitimacy. I realized that traditional regulations are less binding, as the elders' and chief's authority is less respected and new values become accepted. The logic of commodification more often comes into conflict with old rules of sharing or hunting taboos. For example, animals not hunted in the past are now seen as fair game and hunted game is sold outside the village rather than shared. Clouded leopard items are representative of these social changes. During major festivals or weddings, it is now common to see people dancing while wearing synthetic leopard fur without consideration for their social position. New-found wealth allows people without traditional chief status to buy expensive leopard skins from other countries and wear them as status symbols. This, at times, can come in conflict with traditional *mamazangiljan* who may not have financial means to buy such goods. Taboos become more flexible, slowly disappearing as people tend to rely on the power of wealth in competition with the past social order and norms.

The Significance and Agency of Clouded Leopard Artefacts in Contemporary Paiwan Society

Today, only a few authentic clouded leopard artefacts remain in Paiwan villages and I mostly found them among the central Paiwan in Pintung. Those precious artefacts are usually kept in the family house and only displayed for important ceremonies or festivals (weddings, five-year covenant *maljeveck*). Nowadays, synthetic or imported skins are often used as substitute of the original artefacts. The leopard items are usually vests made from the skin, or head-dresses made with the tail and teeth. The vests are long tunics with no sleeves. The front part is often made from red fabric with black patterns sewn on it, often resembling animals killed by the person who owns the tunics, or else Paiwan emblems such as the sun, the hundred pacer viper, and human heads. These patterns are closely correlated with social rank, but the insertion into the national society impacted the respect for those rules. The back part of the vest was made from leopard skin and is very rigid, although sometimes

both the front and the back of vests were made from leopard skins. The headdresses are made from the tails of leopards, crafted into a band to put around one's head. On the front part of the headdress, a leopard's jaws and/or teeth are sewn in a circle, often along with a round shell or colourful beads. On the side and the top of the headdress, hawk-eagle feathers, boar's teeth or skins, or muntjac antlers are often added.

It took me some time to find any authentic items. At first, in 2018, all the artefacts I encountered were replicas: synthetic or imported. Gradually, however, it appeared that genuine items still existed in Laiyi Township Pingtung County. Sometimes, long discussions were necessary before I permitted to see the leopard artefacts. It was a process of testing, acceptance, and building trust before the Paiwan families would show me their leopard artefacts and allow me into their intimate circle. As I spent more time living among the Paiwan and learning the local language, I was more welcomed to see items and talk about them. I was asked many questions about myself too: why I was there? What was the point of my research? Being a student at Donghua was helpful, since it is a university known for its Indigenous Studies department and many of my informants had relatives or friends studying there. I mainly spoke Mandarin with the people, but over time I learnt more Paiwan words. The fact that I had no religion was regarded with suspicion—many indigenous communities are converted to one of the various Christian churches in Taiwan¹⁶—but it ultimately allowed me to avoid taking sides. The slow integration process was important for my informants to be more confident about my presence and to show me their precious heirlooms. When they were brought into the room, the objects were generally set down on the table and offered to me to view. In those moments, they always became the centre of attention. These artefacts are imbued with a special kind of energy. When one focuses one's attention on the leopard skins and other precious objects, they seem

16 In Taiwan there are multiple religious groups, with an important concentration in the indigenous communities, eighty per cent of which are converts to Christianity. However, many indigenous people go to church while also holding on to their traditional religion and beliefs in private.

to come alive and, in a sense, speak for themselves, transporting the viewer back to another time. Indeed, they might look shabby, with the fur coming apart, but observing them, one can imagine and come to feel the presence of the clouded leopard which otherwise remains invisible. The time when leopards still roamed the mountains and their skins were still worn by chiefs is also a time when indigenous cultures were less diluted by outsider value systems. Looking at these precious inherited objects allows people to feel a connection with that vanished past.

After having seen a few original artefacts and encountering many replicas, I come to wonder about the present significance of leopard items: do they still provide a link to the past, or are they losing their meaning for younger generations? What is their importance when authentic skins can be substituted by replicas? But most importantly, how does the leopard live on in these material items after the death of the individual animal and the local extinction of the species?

Survivance

Precious goods made from leopards still elicit a powerful affective response and nostalgia. According to my informants, such artefacts contain the soul or breath (*nasi*) of the animal which still lives within the material. The artefacts represent the material trace of a culture and a history that no longer exists, and at the same time they constitute the ghostly presence of an animal which still inhabits the cultural memory of the Paiwan. So, how to consider the persistence of the *likulau*'s presence?

One way to approach the ghostly persistence of the clouded within Paiwan culture is through what Georges Didi-Huberman calls “survival” [*survivance*], a concept he derives from Aby Warburg’s discussion of the *Nachleben*, or “afterlife”, of images.¹⁷ Warburg introduced the concept of *Nachleben* to describe the power of images, their ability to pass through time and maintain their efficiency to act on the imagination.¹⁸ The efficacy of the image lies in its meaning, but that

17 Didi-Huberman, *Surviving Image*, 16.

18 Didi-Huberman, 50.

meaning can change and evolve in response to the needs of the time. In anthropology, the related concept of *survival* refers to early debates based on an evolutionist vision of societies. Notably, Edward Tylor, steeped in the ideology of that epoch, used the concept to explain that while societies progress within a linear timeframe, they still tend to hold onto old institutions, customs, or beliefs that are no longer adapted to their new stage of development.¹⁹ For Tylor, those outdated practices and beliefs lasting within ostensibly “modern” societies should be eliminated because they lag behind society’s progress. As a discipline, anthropology has always been interested in the transformation of cultures over time: what is transmitted or not, what changes during the transmission, and what remains the same. All those questions touch on the idea of *survival*. In Warburg’s usage, the idea of *Nachleben* (afterlife) helps to account for the transition between various states of a single image, whose significance may change over time but still survives.²⁰ It is not just a question of material or practices, but also of the “life” of the image—or in the case of the Paiwan, the clouded leopard—and its affect.

The IUCN Red List classifies the clouded leopard as locally extinct in Taiwan, and when I began my research, this was how I thought of the animal, as already gone. This absence was echoed in the silence surrounding the *likulau* during the first two years of my fieldwork (2018–2019). But after spending time with the men in the mountains and getting to know them personally, that silence was suddenly broken and people began to tell me stories, legends, and beliefs about the leopard. I also directly observed how my informants interacted with their ecosystem, trying to be more attentive to the interaction between human, natural, and material elements. By means of these observations, I came to understand my informants’ world better, and following that, their narrative. I realized that I had been wrong to focus on the question of whether the leopard was really extinct or not, as for them this question was irrelevant. What people were trying to tell me was that the leopard is still present in Taiwan, albeit not as an animal of flesh and bone. Once I realized that for the

19 Zeebroek, “Survivance ou intempérance?”

20 Didi-Huberman, *Surviving Image*, 50–51.

Paiwan death and disappearance do not mean emptiness but another form of presence, an afterlife, I was finally able to further my research. The *likulau* inhabits a liminal position: absent but still present, both dead and alive.

In this case, if the *likulau* remains as a presence, spiritual and mental, what part of the leopard aura is located within the material artefacts made from its body? The concept of survivance is complex and paradoxical because it combines the ideas of rebirth with that of perpetual death. This concept can help us to think of the relation of the Paiwan to the leopard as a living being, as an object, as a memory, and as the presence of an absence. An informant in Taitung told me that when a Paiwan warrior dies, he becomes a clouded leopard and continues to roam his hunting territory to protect it. Another informant expanded this account, saying that at his death, a warrior would first become a hawk-eagle flying in the sky and looking over its territory, and that when the eagle dies, it falls from the sky and is transformed into a clouded leopard and goes on protecting its land. And finally, when the leopard dies, it becomes water bamboo, providing water for men going into the mountains. When the water dries up, the soul of the warrior finally can go back to the ancestors' land in the Dawu mountain (*Tjagaraus*). The leopard's presence goes beyond the animal and is correlated in Paiwan cosmology to the transitional processes between life and death, humans and spirits. Listening to this legend, I understood why the potential extinction of clouded leopards does not seem to mean a total disappearance, but instead appears as a ghostly presence in the Paiwan mountains. Life and death are entangled and not clearly distinguishable from one another. Ghosts, as a direct invocation of the past, induce a complex relationship with time, disrupting the structure and chronology of history, blocking the possibility of organizing the present and the past, which both become present and overlapping. To speak of ghosts is to speak of the entanglement of history with the present, and accepting the possibility of a presence-absence.

In the humanities, there has been a growing interest in phenomena of haunting since the 1990s, notably with Jacques Derrida's *Specters*

of *Marx*, to discuss collective and individual trauma or experience of historical violence that refuses to disappear. Derrida argues that we should accept the presence of ghosts and not doubt their realities, since in haunting phenomena absence and presence cannot be separated. In their introduction to *The Spectralities Reader*, María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren write that the spectral specificity is to remain liminal and ungraspable, coming to question the past, present, and future: “the ghost also questions the formation of knowledge itself and specifically invokes what is placed outside it, excluded from perception and, consequently, from both the archive as the depository of the sanctioned, acknowledged past and politics as the (re)imagined present and future.”²¹ Ghosts cannot be understood without looking at the past experiences they are related to, nor without looking at the present condition that brings them back.

The clouded leopard in Taiwan answers to a similar logic, a past that refuses to be erased from memory and continues to haunt the Paiwan, a collective history, and the trauma of its disruption. Extinction induces trauma with the severance of some bonds among living beings, and the impact of this loss on the local environment. The leopard’s disappearance occurred during the Japanese occupation, when both the social system and the natural habitat were transformed by colonial activities. Both social transformation and the loss of the *likulau* brought about a new form of relationship between humans and felines. Tong Chun-Fa explains that for the Paiwan, death is the symmetrical opposite of life, it is two complementary aspects of the human transition within a continuous cycle. The newborn comes from the spirit world and the dead return to it.²² The leopard as a spiritual presence can still guide this transitional process toward the spirit lands, though in the contemporary world, the warriors themselves are disappearing, forgetting their duties toward the community and the land, and how to fulfil them. Elders complained to me that people are leaving the village for the cities, and so they forget about their culture and their ancestors. Because of that when they die, they cannot find the path back to their ancestors’

21 Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader*, 9.

22 Tong, “Funeral Rituals”, 103.

land in the Dawu mountain and their souls keep roaming indefinitely. Speaking of a ghostly presence refers to those losses and those evolutions of the social world that occurred in close link with the natural world. But spirits do not have to be negative and fearful for the Paiwan, on the contrary, they are part of the balance and cycle of life itself, and thus are an important part of the Paiwan world. In this view, the *likulau*, guide of the dead souls, has become a spirit itself that can keep acting on the world. A world without spirits makes no sense for the Paiwan, and that is also why the spiritual afterlife of the leopard remains so significant.

In this context, does extinction mean a clear death and disappearance of the *likulau*? It seems that the answer is no because the animal is still alive under other manifestations, physical and mental. In this way, *survivance* is useful for thinking about this absence-presence of the extinct animal, because it encompasses the idea of transmission via tradition but also the process of transformation and hybridization that the leopard undergoes: first by being made into ritual objects, and then in the way these objects themselves are changed through use and acquire new meanings. Through extinction, the relationship to the animal has been transformed and the maintaining of the human–animal bonds become a challenge. The meanings associated with the leopard and objects made from it can also change as there are no more possibility to interact with the living animal. Yet in this process of estrangement, the traces of the clouded leopard seem to remain and perpetuate its presence. The memory or trace of the *likulau* in turn becomes a relational presence, acting at a performative level.

Haunting

In February 2019, there were reported sightings of the clouded leopard in Taiwan in Taitung County, near Anshuo village. So far, there is no hard, scientific evidence of the leopard’s reappearance, but the leopard nevertheless lives on, as a spectral trace of the past that manifests its presence. One year after the alleged sighting, I went into the community where the leopard had been seen and asked the locals about it. A hunter explained to me:

The one who saw it the closest was driving a scooter and bumped into it. That person is now in Shimendi and is my apprentice. When he told me about it, he thought it was a leopard cat [石虎 *Prionailurus bengalensis*], but we don't have those here. I asked him to describe it and the pattern on its body. After he had described it, I knew without a doubt that it was a *likulau*. But this was not a big one, it might have been a cub.

The ghostly body of the clouded leopard, seen by a few witnesses, comes back to tell its story and make people remember it, keep talking, and wondering about it. This sighting gave people renewed hope. For the Paiwan, the *likulau* has an affective power that is akin to haunting. Haunting is often correlated with deeper emotional and historical entanglements, such as war trauma or personal experiences. When it comes to spectral apparition, as Grégory Delaplace notes, it is difficult to determine what exactly is perceived, because it remains outside of ordinary experience.²³ When looking at the leopard artefacts with my informants, they would not usually be able to express their feelings in words, but there was nevertheless usually a palpable change in the mood, and a shared sense that there was some presence in the room there with us, emanating from those items. This haunting, ineffable presence is somehow related to a sense that the past, that history and memory, has become the present, and that a framework or boundary separating the past and the present has been suspended. Such individual or collective experiences of the uncanny disrupt one's sense of time and make it difficult to share with others what one has experienced and what one has seen. My informants did not talk easily about their beliefs concerning the clouded leopard. Only in intimate settings, generally late at night, when most people were already asleep and just a few of us were still talking and drinking around the fire, might they tell stories of the *likulau* and the emotions they evoke.

The *survivance* of the clouded leopard in Paiwan societies is in part passed on by narratives and legends that come to re-enact the presence of an animal. After the sightings, my Paiwan informants

23 Delaplace, *Intelligences particulières*, 119–20

discussed the possibility that the leopard might not be extinct and that it still was still able to appear to people. One of my informants told me that Paiwan hunters still secretly believe in the clouded leopard's presence, but that they do not want people to know about it.²⁴ It is a living spiritual presence that helps people to keep a connection with the past. It allows them to escape the contemporary ontology, and (re)connect with the natural and spiritual worlds. In this way, the leopard, whether extinct or not, continues to act upon the present.

In the Paiwan language, stories of the past are divided between *milimilingan*, the distant past which lies beyond living memory and is akin to myth, and *taucikel* which refers to more recent historical events and can be seen as a form of oral history.²⁵ Today, the clouded leopard is further removed from the *taucikel* with fewer and fewer people having directly seen one or being able to remember it. It slowly recedes into *milimilingan*. As *milimilingan*, the leopard is neither lost nor fully absent, but persists as a reminiscence of the past that is still active in the present. In Paiwan society, ancestors and spirits are a significant part of daily social life; they exist alongside the living and exert an influence on their lives. Thus, while the presence of the *likulau* changes, how do material artefacts made from the leopard's body evolve in their production and values?

Transformation of the Artefacts' Production

The first time I had the opportunity to visit the owner of a leopard item, I was very excited and full of expectation to hear about its history. I arrived at the village in Pingtung one evening to meet with this informant, who was a member of an important noble family and in possession of clouded leopard artefacts. I first took some time to talk with him, explaining our research, its aims and why I wanted to see the items. To my surprise he was only too happy to show them to me. "I have a leopard headdress and vest and hawk-eagle feathers," he said, "wait here while I go get them." When he came back, I could immediately tell, even in the dim light, that the fur he was carrying was not from a real

24 Interview with an elder, Wangjin village, Pingtung county, 1 December 2020.

25 Ku, "'Mirimiringan' and 'Taucikel'"; Hu, *Paiwanzu de wenhua quanshi*.

animal but rather synthetic furs whose pattern and colour had faded. I asked about these artificial skins, made into headdress and vest, and a mutual sense of surprise arose from this first interview. My informant was surprised by my disappointment: was I not looking for leopard items, was he not showing them to me? I myself was wondering why he had told me he had artefacts if they were so obviously replicas? It turned out that he had sold the authentic artefacts a while ago when he needed money. Later he had bought these synthetic ones instead. I was shocked: how could he have sold such a precious heirloom? How could he happily show us the synthetic leopard skin without feeling any sense of remorse? What difference was he making between those two? At the time, it felt like I had failed, because I had not seen any authentic leopard items that evening. But later, thinking back on that event, it began to seem highly significant.

During my research into old Taiwanese leopard garments, I found that many people own fake skins made either from synthetic material or from skin imported from other countries. This observation first made me question the status of these kinds of artefacts compared with the old Taiwanese furs. The imported skins are a symptom of the extinction of Taiwan's leopards and the resulting scarcity of leopard fur. After the period of Japanese rule, the demand for clouded leopards increased and created an interest in importing skins and teeth from other countries, especially from China, Malaysia, and Indonesia. These skins are sometimes from other species of big cats, such as tigers. In the 1970s, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) strictly forbade commerce of animal parts and put a stop to this influx of imported goods.²⁶ In addition to the imported items, there are also replica skins and teeth made from plastic. Synthetic skins are easily recognizable by the colour of their material and their smooth shining fur. The real fur is darker more rigid.

There are several factors that drive the Paiwan to acquire clouded leopard products from other sources. Many of the original clothes or headdresses have been lost or sold by the families who owned

26 Cooper and Rosser, "International Regulation".



Figure 3:

A hat made from leopard skin,
imported from China.
Jiaxing village, Pingtung county,
April 2019.

Photograph by the author.

them. In many cases, the items were lost during the Japanese occupation, when many were destroyed or seized by Japanese forces. A few people spoke about items that had been buried in the ground in an attempt to keep them safe, but which, when the families went to retrieve them after many decades in the earth, had been all mouldy and decomposing.²⁷ Items have also been lost during forced resettlement.²⁸ In more recent years, some owners have sold them when they needed money.²⁹ Finally, animal skins, generally speaking, are difficult to maintain in good condition, and so a significant number of artefacts have simply fallen apart with age.

The extinction of the Taiwanese clouded leopard, the scarcity of the goods, and the social changes in relation with domestic and international politics have created new needs and new ways to use leopard artefacts. These items have evolved along with the transformations in Paiwan society. Imitation and imported furs have become a commodity as opposed to a rare, treasured historical artefact. These new kinds of goods are referred to by some informants as “deceptive” or “fake”, but others consider them as a new way to hold on to the traditions at least through visual representation. As an elder in Nanhe (Pingtung) explained to me, clouded leopard replicas are used by people to make clothes for important social events (e.g. festivals and weddings), but everyone can tell the difference from the authentic skin. I asked this elder if these replicas or imported skins still hold a similar meaning to the authentic ones. He answered that:

If you haven't hunted and caught this clouded leopard yourself, it doesn't have the same meaning. It is only if you caught it yourself that it would have a deeper meaning. If it is said to have been passed down by your ancestors, then it will be part of your family legacy, and so it will establish a connection to that legacy. You need to be able to talk about the historical lineage, you need to be able to tell the story of how this clouded leopard skin was been passed to you, and which of your ancestor hunted it.³⁰

27 Interview with a chief family, Wangjia village, Pingtung county 6 February 2018.

28 Interview with a noble family, Nanhe village, Pingtung county, 6 February 2018.

29 Interview with the chief family, Nanhe village, Pingtung county, 5 February 2018.

30 Interview with an elder, Wenle community, Pingtung county, March 2019.

This elder expresses the conflict between the achievement of killing a leopard yourself, which connects you to the leopard, the land, and the ancestors, and the act of buying a synthetic skin, which only gives you the appearance but without any form of connection to the natural and spiritual world. The story of these artefacts is important because it creates a link, bringing the ghost of the leopard from the past to the present through narrative.

The absence of the leopard has made it necessary to find new ways to maintain the bonds with these items and continue their transmission to future generations. Replicas and imported leopard items are seen as a way to keep the leopard in circulation within Paiwan society. However, imported skins are perceived as foreign and not directly anchored in Paiwan culture. Some families are in possession of both real and imitation vests and head-dresses. They wear the imitation ones during ceremonies if the weather is bad to avoid damaging the authentic ones. In Laiyi, I saw some old photographs from the early twentieth century showing Paiwan people wearing Taiwanese leopard skin vests and in other pictures imitation skins. Even though some of my interlocutors say it is better to have real skins or teeth, they think that wearing the other kinds is still a representation of the past relationship to the leopard, in the only way currently possible. For some other Paiwan, wearing fake or imported skins is a symbol of the way society is changing in relation to the market economy and the demands of tourism.³¹ Outside of the villages, leopard items are also a way to promote Paiwan culture, used in tourist activities and during festivals. For the past decades, the government has been supporting indigenous people's cultural costumes, foods, and traditions, in order to attract domestic and international tourists. While leopard artefacts are transformed into commodities, they also take part to a larger display of the Paiwan culture participating to commodification strategies within the national and international society.

31 Interview with a chief family, Wangjia village, Pingtung county, 6 February 2018; interview with a chief family, Xinlaiyi village, Pingtung county, March 13th 2019.

Clouded leopard artefacts have adapted to contemporary times and continue to act and provoke reactions. In the past those artefacts were emblems of the *mamazangiljan*'s social position, but now they are embedded in a more commercial logic and represent a new kind of authority based on wealth. In this way, rich families more often choose to display their wealth by wearing imported clouded leopard items or hawk-eagle feathers. In both cases, the act of buying expensive items is a direct challenge to the past social order and power.³² Buying and wearing items outside of one's traditional rights displays people's willingness to acquire new forms of power and influence in a contemporary world where the past is no longer seen as the dominant source of values to respect. In Marx's conception, commodities are not deprived of value, but when materials become artefacts and enter a commodified logic, commodity fetishism masks the origin of their value, and the production forces behind them. The value of leopard heirlooms derives from the transition of the animal from one world (natural) to another (cultural) through the mediation of the ancestors. The process of commodification of the new artefacts severs those links and masks their initial value.

While the animal has disappeared, artefacts remain one of the manifestations of the leopard's afterlife, supporting its ghostly presence which do not want to totally fade away. It is an absence (extinct) that made people speak about it, but this demonstrated at the same time the *survivance* of the animal under various forms and with possibly varying meanings. Authentic leopard artefacts are seen as more or less inhabited by spirits and souls depending on the way owners consider and interact with them, while the new items (replicas and imported) are symbols that can be transformed according to the needs of the time, influenced by a new elite's challenge of the past social order, and haunted by memories that refuse to disappear. These items are also pieces of the past that keep haunting the present and continuously make people wonder whether the clouded leopard is in actuality completely absent from the mountains of Taiwan.

32 Ku, "Names, Value, and Hierarchy".



Figure 4 (top):

A set of two vests made from imported leopard skins. Wenle village, Pingtung county, March 2019.

Figure 5 (bottom):

On the chairs, two vests made from synthetic leopard furs. On the table, a headdress of boar fur and a helmet made from muntjac leather, and in the front two hawk-eagle feathers. Pingtung county, 2019.

Photographs by the author.

Conclusion

Looking at Paiwan society, we can say that the clouded leopard maintains a haunting presence both in the Southern mountains of Taiwan but also within the Paiwan communities: it is a memory of the past that still acts and reveals itself in the present. This cat has maintained a relationship with Paiwan people: in the past as a living creature respected for its power and abilities, then as valuable goods cherished for their preciousness.

At present, although the clouded leopard seems to have disappeared, remaining items make it possible for them to perpetuate their relationship to their own past and to the animal, leading to an ambiguous form of presence both visible (material, graspable) and invisible (spiritual, mnemonic). The leopard heirlooms represent a liminal presence inducing feelings of loss and continuation, or transformation and permanence. Nevertheless, the meanings of these goods have evolved over time. They are today more and more encompassed in a commercial logic of buying and selling. In both cases, these items are still impacting the Paiwans and playing an important role in their culture. They create reactions and they continue to change as society is changing. The leopard's ghostly presence continues to configure human-environment relations for the Paiwan, since the feline has become a sort of spiritual presence, roaming the traditional territory, and remains between the Paiwan and the ancestors' world.

It remains an open question whether the clouded leopard extinct in Taiwan or not. For the Paiwan, who keep feeling its presence through artefacts and spirits, this issue has never been settled. My research led me to consider the possibility of an absence which would rather be an invisible but persistent presence: a ghostly presence. The time spend with my informants, made me realized that extinction is not a total ending but can be one more transformation, evolving the relationship between human and animals while efforts are made to perpetuate this bond. The *likulau* may no longer inhabit the mountains of Taiwan as a flesh-and-blood animal, but from the

Paiwan's perspective, it has never been "just" an animal. It was and remains an always ambiguous creature, a mediator between realms, not totally integrated into the animal world nor totally part of the spiritual or sacred world. In indigenous society where traditional knowledge, social reproduction, and the relation to the local environment are slowly eroding, maintaining the presence of the *liku-lau* is also a matter of resilience. In this context survivance is an act of resistance and of persistence. It is a reaffirmation of the Paiwan's specific ontology in the face of its threatened dissolution within the modern national and global society.

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