

Bit delirious from lack of sleep and the twists and turns the day has taken, getting picked up at the airport after a sleepless night aloft by Dr Lin Yih-Ren's assistant David Reid (whom I knew from Students for Sustainability in Melbourne 2004 and who took these photographs) to the 300 km in 90 minute trainride the length of Taiwan for lunch with Dr. Lin and Sinya Huang, Prof of Contemporary and American literature to a powerpoint presentation at this Community University to a sacred old mango tree where the Earth is worshipped at the foot of spectacular rugged mountains growing out of the flat plain.



These were the folks who stopped the dam being built in the Valley of the Yellow Butterflies. They remembered Bob Brown coming here in 96 in solidarity and still have a Lake Pedder poster up in their office.



My host, Dr Lin Yih-ren is Director of the Research Centre for Austronesian Peoples at Providence University. We met last year at the "Keeping the Fire – Cultural Integrity, Wild Law and Economic Development" conference at the University of Wollongong where Dr Lin spoke on indigenous perspectives and I spoke on deep ecology on the religion of economics. Dr. Lin is the Asian representative of the

[International Society of Ethnobiology.](http://www.ethnobiology.org)

Now in the backseat of Dr Lin's wagon, out the window, urban, agricultural and industrial all jumbled together, heading towards the mountains. Bananas, coconut, betel nut, sugarcane, taro, rice. Mangos, fields of papaya and tomatoes netted from the birds. Bamboo, peanuts.

Taiwan is Formosa is the Republic of China not to be confused with the Peoples Republic of China. Back in the '70's, stupidly, Chiang Kai-shek missed the opportunity to have 2 Chinas in the UN (claiming that Taiwan was the only legitimate "China" and now big China keeps Taiwan out. He was only the last in the line of fleeing mainland China armies that settled here, same thing happened when the Ming dynasty fled from the Ching dynasty. Actually, some say that bit was just a pirate named Koxinga who was loyal to the Ming dynasty who retreated here and warred with the Dutch who were already here. Koxinga's mother was Japanese and this was part of Japanese legend giving them rights here. After China lost the Sino-Japanese war, part of the ensuing treaty had Taiwan (which the Ching dynasty didn't think very important) handed over to Japan which held it as a colony for 50 years till 1945.

Ching never ruled whole of Taiwan, aboriginal groups in the mountains and the east were independent and never ruled by anyone till Japan in the 20's and 30's made Taiwan into a modern state for the first time. One tiny but

fierce tribe of a few hundred held off the might of the Japanese army in their mountain fastness till poison gas was used to annihilate them.

Austronesian farming culture arrived here 6,500 years ago finding humans who had been here for 30,000 years, one aboriginal tribe has legend of short black people who were here when they arrived and taught them how to live here but the newcomers killed them off over some conflict, and to this day suffers deep regret that they did so. An important ceremony every couple of years remembers this.

Now there are Han Chinese and Hakka Chinese on the plains and the aboriginal people in the mountains.

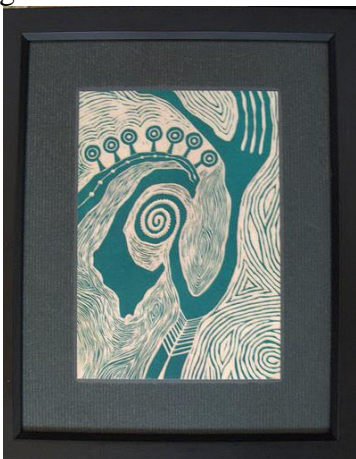
First mountain stop, we're hanging out at the aboriginal café art gallery, spectacular view of the plains over the wall of the urinal and from everywhere else, the whole building an incredible work of art, ferro cement roofs



shaped like an eagle beak at one end, great pile of driftwood rescued from Typhoon Morakot ready to be transformed into sculpture and furniture. Paiwan Tribe. I bought a t-shirt with a painting of a young warrior with spear that says in Mandarin and English "We must Liberate the Tribe".



Great connection with the artist, Etan, a Presbyterian minister in the tradition of liberation theology, had been working for the church administration in Taipei but came back to be with his people. A great artist and sculptor, he gave me a beautiful woodblock painting "Praying with the Heart of Taiwan".



The café had a wireless internet connection and I showed him pictures of my sculpture and we talked about my coming back to make sculpture at his café one day and about cultural exchange of Taiwanese and Australian aboriginal people.

We arrived after dark in the village of Wutai, inhabited by the Rukai Tribe, in a house sculpted within and without, supported by a mighty tree trunk more than a meter in diameter and all carved and varnished.



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Morning walk. Houses made from slate and timber as are the mountains themselves. Art was everywhere, each house a sculpture covered in carvings and paintings. Wild boars tusks, lilies, vipers, all the images of this tribe that we see repeated everywhere, on the insides and outsides of all the houses.



The ubiquitous image of the people with crossed arms holding is common to all the Taiwan aboriginal tribes, there was even a council of all beings doing the same, the animals sporting erections.



The viper is called "100 Pace Snake" cause that's how far you'll get if one bites you and no further.



Looking out into the spectacular mountains upon mountains vastness, whole huge segments of which had slipped away in Typhoon Morakot in August 8 2009 when between 2 and 3 meters of rain fell in that one event depending on where in the mountains you were. Wutai is at about 1000 meters looking up at mountain tops up to 2000, further north they go as high as 4000 meters. Everywhere you look the regrowth forest is intermingled with the huge scars, stripped to bare bones of rock.



Stopped to visit with Pa the woodcarver and hunter. His house was filled with art like every house we see here. Vast armchairs carved from beech logs, all made from found materials either windfall or obstacles burnt in the the swidden agriculture or flood debris. A great wooden couch with all the extraneous bits of gnarly trunk polished and shining, everywhere the beauty of the natural forms of twisted roots and burls retained.



Great boars head mounted on the wall, boars tusks and lilies, vipers, all the images of this tribe that we see repeated everywhere, on the insides and outsides of all the houses. He hunts wild boar, deer, civet cat, powerful little man, says he can carry a 300kg carcass on his back, shares the meat with everyone, especially old people love the game meat. With domesticated animals, they prefer to hang the flesh for 3 days to give it some taste. Government forbids hunting in the name of conservation but that means that no-one patrols the mountains and the illegal logging mafia are able to work unobserved. Or some hunters with their ancient interest in the mountains thwarted by the government are available for hire to guide the gangsters.



When he was a kid, Pa used to eat these sweet red berries, then 5 years ago someone explained that these were coffee, now he grows coffee from local seed, introduced by the Dutch? Or Japanese? Forgotten and now rediscovered. He makes us a pot of it then takes us for a walk to the beautiful, new, handmade Presbyterian Church, The most gorgeous artwork of all,



especially the sculpture alongside the stairs out the front of men straining in unison carrying and hauling a log up a mountainside. Two of the men are bowed under the weight of the log, three others straining on the vine that drags

them and their load uphill with live lilies and orchids underfoot. Giving incredible feeling of the shared sweat and effort of a communal undertaking which I understand at once includes the building of the church itself.



The mightiest slabs of slate, most magnificent beams of wood have been gathered here at the community's heart. As everywhere, all the twists and gnarls of the driftwood lovingly featured and polished and varnished. The cross above the pulpit is made of two round tree trunks.



From the balcony we look down at the large school. Because, post typhoon, the government is trying to relocate people to a village on the plains, only 30 children remain.

Amazing artwork carved into the stone walls showing the life of the people, of them splitting and carving and hauling the slate, of chopping the trees and hewing and hauling the timber, hunting and hauling the wild boar. Stopped and watched an old guy stripping sheaths from wild ginger stalks preparing them for weaving material, he gave me a little basket he'd woven.

Everywhere we drive back down the mountain construction work is going on stabilizing the road against the next typhoon, huge girders pounded into the rock to hold the road in place next time.



Interesting conversation coming down the mountain, the very mountain torn to pieces by Typhoon Morakot whose bones were showing everywhere, watching the vast expenditure to bring the road back where it had fallen away, seeing how with more such severe events the mountain roads would have to be abandoned, the cars ignominiously retreat. How important for the future of humanity to allow the remaining indigenous cultures to be, not to make them soft, not to try and assimilate them for they are our insurance policy, that if humanity is to continue after this pulse of plenty, after this brief flash of globalised technology, they are our best chance.

Lunch at a traditional Hakka restaurant, wood fire, noodles with bits of pig ear, pig intestine and other pig morsels from the common bowls in the centre of the table. Not bad. Chilies helped. Visited new cement levee banks maybe half km. from where the river banks used to be before Morakot had filled the river channel 10 metres depth of rock, sand and debris. How puny the excavators looked in the distance filling an endless line of tiptrucks as they dug the mountainside out of the river bed and hauled it away. Going to take 10 years. Unless there's another typhoon.

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Yesterday afternoon hard slog listening to long powerpoint presentations in Mandarin from this community development NGO named "Green and Fresh" who are involved in helping in the post-typhoon reconstruction. Plates full of big red rose apples (Wax Jambu) cut in half, local drink of dilute pineapple vinegar.

Then Dr. Lin gave feedback—had they thought about the possibility that such an event might recur? Why rebuild the same way as before only to risk everything wasing away again? Maybe we should think about investing less in vulnerable areas? Not build as lavish houses in places likely to be affected. They replied that they were subject to the Morakot legislation which said what would be funded for three years after the typhoon, thinking about the

bigger picture wasn't something that they had done much of.

I then added observations about deforestation and global warming. The reason for the vast flood damage was partly a result of the huge amount of water that came down, partly that the water carried so much debris from the collapsing mountains that it filled the river channel and so the water had to go somewhere else.

The scars of the mountains falling away would be visible for tens of thousands of years. Meaning that nothing like this had happened in the past for at least that long because such scars from the past were not to be seen. Climate science tells us that for each degree of warming the atmosphere holds another 7% water,

meaning more such events and probably more severe. Meaning that whatever else they did to help people recover from the last one, seems to me that it was they who should also be conscientising the community to understand the bigger picture and plan for the likely future.

Two of my deep ecology essays had been translated into Mandarin by Dr. Lin's students and they had read them and I answered their questions.

