

Art and National Identity: A Case of Papua New Guinea

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Papua New Guinea is a young country with a history of only 30 years of independence. As is typical of a multi-ethnic country, the people's identity in regard to the nation is weak, and thus the government is always trying to keep nationalism strong. In this situation, art, especially traditional art, is frequently used to represent the nation and to encourage the people to be conscious of it. This paper examines how art is involved with the construction of national identity in Papua New Guinea.

In the case of multi-ethnic societies such as Papua New Guinea, to representing the nation by showing its tradition is not an easy task. Since there are a large number of ethnic groups, and each ethnic group has its own culture or tradition, it is hard to choose one cultural item or one ethnic group to represent the nation so that all people identify with it. In this situation, there are several methods employed to solve the problem.

One way to solve the problem is to collect cultural items from more than one ethnic group, or to collect from some areas and then to represent the nation with the collection of these items and these ethnic groups. For example, in cultural shows it is typical to demonstrate the dance of some particular areas to represent the whole nation.

The second way is to neutralize localities. By neutralizing the characteristics of specific areas, and making them vague, or stressing common characteristics of a large number of ethnic groups, it becomes possible to represent the whole nation. When a cultural item of a specific ethnic group is used, the theme can be modified or the shape redesigned, making the item non-specific. Neutralizing locality conveys the impression that a larger area is represented.

The third way to represent the nation is to invent a new concept. The concept must be somehow familiar to the people in the whole country, and it must cover the whole area of the nation. The concept must show differences from other areas or other nations and also show that it represents the particular nation. A cultural show, entitled "Mask Festival," in Papua New Guinea illustrates this concept.

Keywords: cultural show, nation building, national identity, Pacific Art Festival, Papua New Guinea

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INTRODUCTION

As an example of case studies in nation building, Papua New Guinea offers a unique viewpoint. Since the people in the archipelago have weak identity with regard to the nation for several reasons, the government always tries to keep nationalism strong. In the 21st century, the government of Papua New Guinea is still, as it were, in the process of nation building. It is possible to observe how the state is trying to keep the people's national identity strong. In addition, since Papua New Guinea has a short history as a nation, it is not too difficult to follow how it has been built. It has only been thirty years since independence, in 1975. Historical records and documents are still available. From these points of view, Papua New Guinea offers a case study of a new nation being built.

It is possible to see from many points of view how this is occurring. For example, it would be useful to follow the foreign policy of the nation, especially in terms of its relations to Australia, which used to be a colonial power. It would be possible to trace education policy, to understand how the concept of nation has been taught. This paper examines how art, especially 'traditional' art, is involved with the construction of national identity in Papua New Guinea.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA AS A NATION

Comparing Papua New Guinea as a nation with the other nations reveals certain characteristics. Firstly, it has a short history of contact with Western societies. It is reported that before Europeans colonized New Guinea, Chinese traders visited New Guinea Island and hunted birds of paradise for their trade. Those Europeans who visited New Guinea Island thereafter were scientists, adventurers, traders and missionaries. Their number remained small until the German Empire showed interest in the region at the end of 19th century (Griffin, J., H. Nelson and S. Firth 1979). In 1828, the Dutch colonized the western half of New Guinea Island (West Irian, or Irian Jaya). In 1884, Germany announced colonization of the northeastern part of New Guinea, and then began to run some plantations in Rabaul, New Ireland. Soon after, England declared that the southeastern section of the island was under its control. This was the beginning of constant European contact with the region. Although the

area was colonized by Dutch, Germany, England and later by Australia, they only administered the islands and coastal areas in the early period. The area did not appear to be of value to most European countries; they colonized it in order to show their prestige as great powers in Europe (Toyoda 2000a). Therefore, European administrations influenced only those areas that they could access from their respective ports without much difficulty. Only after World War II were other areas of the region influenced by European contact. The New Guinea Highlands, which is the least developed of these areas, has only half a century of history since contact with Europeans (Connolly, B. & R. Anderson 1988).

This means that quite a large amount of the historical records of nation building are still accessible. Beginning well before independence was granted, it is possible to trace records and documents regarding the progress of independence, and it is possible to trace how the nation has been built since. Many of those who became involved in the independence movement and subsequent nation building are still alive and available to make statements.

Melanesia, which includes Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and other islands, is one of the most ethnically diverse areas in the world. Papua New Guinea itself has more than 800 language groups (Dutton, T.E. and P. Mühlhausler 1991), and this is the second characteristic that emerges from comparison with other nations. The largest language group is Enga, which has a population of only two hundred thousand (the total population of Papua New Guinea is around five million in 2005). Most language groups have only a few thousand or a few hundred of speakers; some have only dozens. In short, none of the language groups in Papua New Guinea are majority languages; all of them are minorities. That is, Papua New Guinea is a country with only minorities and no majority ethnic groups.

This is related to the fact that no ethnic group has been dominant in this country in any way. Therefore, the nation of Papua New Guinea, which subsumes all 800 or so ethnic groups, has no historical continuity with any particular ethnic or the other social group in this area. Papua New Guinea, as an independent nation, is in this sense a completely new entity that came into existence after independence.

Thirdly, the independence of Papua New Guinea was not achieved through any nationalistic movement of indigenous people. Rather, it was granted by a colonial power: Australia. Australia let Papua New Guinea become independent partly because world opinion turned against the colonialism of European countries. Many colonies in Asia and Africa became independent during the 1960s and 1970s, and Australia had to take this wave of decolonization into consideration. That is, the independence of Papua New Guinea has been granted 'from the outside', in a context of increasing international pressures against colonialism. It has not been achieved 'from demand inside'. The people did not experience any nationalistic struggle against colonization, rather the independent cabinet was initially organized under the guidance of Australia.

The last characteristic of Papua New Guinea that differs from other nations, is that people did not have a concept of nation before independence was granted.

People's identities did not formerly cross their language groups, sometimes they did not even span clans or sub-clans. The highlanders in New Guinea Island used to fight even within the same language groups. The concept of country or nation did not develop very much among these people even after national independence.

As a result of the characteristics mentioned above, the people in Papua New Guinea do not have strong national identity. In fact, several areas tried to become separate countries when independence was discussed. The movement of Bougainville Island is a typical example. When Papua New Guinea was moving towards independence, the people of Bougainville Island claimed to be a separate, independent country. Bougainvilleans had a different history from people on the New Guinea Island, and the plan to be a part of Papua New Guinea was not widely supported among them. The people of Bougainville Island are culturally and linguistically closer to the Solomon Islands than to the rest of Papua New Guinea. During the time of European colonization, Bougainville was under Germany's authority together with New Guinea. It was for this reason only that Bougainville became a part of Papua New Guinea when the latter was granted independence.

Similar movements arose in other areas. The Papuan area, which had been a colony first of England and then of Australia, also claimed to be a separate country. In consideration of such situations, the state introduced a provincial government system when it became independent, which allowed each province to exercise a large jurisdiction. This was a result of compromise between centralization (which the government tried to achieve in aid of nation building), and decentralization (which was intended to discourage the other areas from demanding independence).

The movement of Bougainville continued to oppose the national government even after each province was granted a wide jurisdiction. On Bougainville Island, which constitutes North Solomon Province in Papua New Guinea, an enormous amount of gold was found in the 1960s, and Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL) began to mine it. The island was transformed into 'one of the largest industrial development sites in the southern hemisphere ... a classic case of machine-made modernity being dumped rather unceremoniously into primitive communities still on the edge of the Stone Age' (Ryan 1970: 328). In 1988, a group of landowners of this gold mine, who were dissatisfied with the company's actions toward the people, blew up a part of BCL's facilities. They stated that they wanted a renegotiation of the royalty arrangements, and ten million dollars in compensation for indigenous people. After this incident, the movement began to expand and developed into an independence movement. A former mine-worker, Francis Ona, formed the BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army), and claimed that there should be renegotiation of Bougainville's political status within Papua New Guinea, and even called for independence. In 1998, a peace treaty was concluded between the BRA and the national government, but the negotiation has not been concluded completely (Turner 2001: 28-31).

To avoid these separatist movements, and to unite the country as a whole, the government of Papua New Guinea has been trying to strengthen people's

identification with the nation. Several approaches have been taken to raise people's consciousness of being a member of a nation.

Education has been one of the major ways of developing the idea of the nation among the people. To develop national textbooks for school education, especially in the social sciences, is an example of this. After following the Australian education system in the early period of independence, the government began to develop original textbooks for the social sciences, which were intended to develop the idea of nation.¹

Using a common language is another way of developing a sense of belonging to one nation. As mentioned above, Papua New Guinea has more than 800 local languages, and it was hard for people to communicate with each other between different language groups. In this situation, spreading common languages is a way of developing a sense of nation. At the moment, English is used as the national language of the country, while Pidgin (Tok Pisin) and Hiri Motu are treated as official common languages. In the news of radio, the same contents are spoken first in English, then in Pidgin, and lastly in Hiri Motu. By speaking the same languages, especially Tok Pisin, people think that they are different from other language speakers, and they assert their sense of being part of a nation (Toyoda 2000b).

The preamble of the National Language Policy, 1989 says that 'in order to improve the quality of education, to strengthen traditional cultures and values, to facilitate participation by all citizens in national life, to promote national unity and to raise the level of literacy in tokples,² Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu and English, we recommend the development of education programmes to ensure that children, out of school youth and adults become literate in tokples, transfer their skills to Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu or English and maintain and expand their literacy skills in these languages (Letteral 1999).

ART AS TRADITION

Art in Papua New Guinea is diverse, and it is difficult to make generalizations. However, art in this area is famous for its range of sculpture and decorated material culture, such as masks, figurines, drums, canoe artifacts, and so on. Some specific areas have a rich and diverse artistic tradition, such as Sepik and Massim. In most areas, decorated materials are ritual objects, such as figures of ancestors, gods, and supernatural beings. But in some areas, such as in the middle of the Sepik area, items

¹ In the late 1980s, a series of textbooks for Community School (Grade 1 to 6) and for Provincial Highschool was published by Department of Education Papua New Guinea. The examples are *Land and Life in PNG* (for Grade 4), *National Government* (for Grade 6), *Papua New Guinea: Its Land and People, Government in Papua New Guinea, Government and the People* (these are for Provincial High School) and so on.

² Tokples refers to vernacular languages and other *lingua franca* which are spoken in rural areas.

in everyday use, such as tableware, weapons, shields and so on, are also decorated elaborately.

It is disputable whether the concept of art existed in Papua New Guinea (or in Melanesia) before contact with Europeans. Those who made these works did so not for aesthetic purposes, but rather in ritual and/or daily contexts.³ However, some indigenous people often give aesthetic evaluation to certain kinds of ritual or everyday items, and certain people are highly regarded as producing 'good' objects in an aesthetic sense. In this sense, it would be fair to say that Papua New Guineans have a sort of artistic tradition. Many carvings, ceramic objects and crafts were collected as curios and rare specimens for museums, and some of these were treated by aestheticians as 'primitive art' or 'tribal art.'

There are two types of traditional art which are adopted to strengthen the identity of the nation. One is plastic art and the other is performance art. The kinds of occasion when these kinds of art are adopted also vary. Typical occasions are official national events and tourism contexts.

Firstly, plastic art is often adopted as a symbol of the country. Many kinds of traditional carvings and sculptures are displayed in public places, such as buildings, banks, hotels and so on. These convey an atmosphere of 'Papua New Guinea' to the people who visit them. Most major public buildings are decorated with 'traditional' carvings and sculptures, and major hotels or companies sometimes display huge 'traditional' carvings. For example, the Wewak branch of Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation has posts modeled on that of *Haus Tambaran* (Spirit House) in the Sepik area, which produces a large amount of carvings. Wewak is the capital of East Sepik Province, and these posts create the atmosphere of Sepik area.

Some special plastic art forms are used to represent the nation. Traditional hand drums and slit gongs (called *kundu* and *garamut* respectively in Tok Pisin), are frequently used as symbols of the nation.

Performing arts are also used to represent the country. 'Traditional' dances, which are called '*singsing*', are performed at many national events. For example, when the nation welcomes foreign VIPs, dancing groups perform at the airport. This happened when Papua New Guinea became independent and the government invited the Prince of Wales to celebrate there, when the prime minister of Australia visited the country, and so on.

Tourism and related contexts also create 'the atmosphere of Papua New Guinea'. In most sightseeing spots, 'tradition' is stressed in many ways. A typical case is to show 'traditional' dances. These are frequently performed in sightseeing spots when tourists visit. For example, a tour called 'the Melanesian Explorer', which takes passengers along the Sepik River on a luxury cruiser, visits some villages along the

³ The question of whether the concept of art existed in Papua New Guinea (or in Melanesia) before contact with Europeans has not yet been answered. Plastic arts, and most performing arts, were mostly for performing rituals.

bank. When the passengers visit the villages, indigenous people organize dances for them (O'Rourke 1987).

'Traditional' plastic art is also used to promote tourism. In the case of the Melanesian Explorer tour, when the ship arrives in villages, people crowd together to sell many kinds of plastic art as souvenirs. These are carvings of masks and figures, necklaces, walking sticks, hand drums, net bags, baskets and so on (Silverman 1999).

Since the tourism in Papua New Guinea stresses colourful ethnicities, tourists expect a 'traditional' atmosphere, and material objects are produced for sale. Some materials are produced solely for tourists, and the forms and designs are being modified according to the tastes of this market.

Traditional dances are also shown in some hotels for tourists. Some hotels arrange a dinner show for guests, and the show usually features local dances. Some hotels in the highlands provide an Asaro Mudmen Show, and some in Port Moresby also feature traditional dances from the coastal area. The Asaro Mudmen, which is an evocative image of 'primitive man', is becoming a national symbol of Papua New Guinea (Otto and Verloop 1996).

When these kinds of art are used as objects for national identification, 'tradition' and/or authenticity are still stressed. This is especially common in developing areas like Papua New Guinea, and clearly contrasts with European countries which have modernized. It makes people aware that their own country has something different from European countries.

In the case of Papua New Guinea, people still have a tendency to identify themselves with traditional artistic forms and performances. Actually, some people are proud of having an unchanged tradition. One incident observed at the 8th Pacific Art Festival in Noumea, New Caledonia, illustrates this situation.

The Pacific Art Festival has been held every four years since 1972. The Pacific countries take turns playing host for the festival. Over a period of almost two weeks, delegation members from each country demonstrate their own art, including performing and plastic art. The festival aims at sharing culture and maintaining friendship among Pacific areas. Peace and harmony in the Pacific area are expected as outcomes of this friendship.

Since it is an international situation and a lot of overseas tourists join the festival, each country has an opportunity to introduce itself, especially its own culture. It is quite rare for performers to come into contact with foreign cultures besides Western popular culture. In this sense, the festival gives the delegation members opportunities to be conscious of their own culture compared with the other neighboring Pacific countries. The 8th Pacific Arts Festival was staged in Noumea, New Caledonia in October and November in 2000, and the author had a chance to observe the event.

The incident referred to was observed one day during the festival. An exhibition was supposed to be opened in a museum as a part of the Festival, and two groups were ready to perform their dancing as the opening ceremony of the exhibition. One was from Samoa, and the other was from Papua New Guinea. First, the Samoan group

performed their dancing. It was a show-like performance, as was the case in most performances from Polynesian countries, and the response of the audience met the performers' expectations. After the performance finished, one of the members of the Papua New Guinea delegation approached me and said proudly, '*Singsing bilong ol, em I senis pinis, ya. Tasol, yumi gat planti tradisen*': 'Their dancing has changed too much. But [in contrast] we have enough tradition.'⁴

This anecdote can be understood by comparing Papua New Guinea with other countries in the Pacific area. Papua New Guinea is a typical developing country by international standards, even when compared with other Pacific nations. Some areas of Papua New Guinea have still not been influenced very much by Western culture in many respects. It is the biggest country in the Pacific area in terms of population and land, and its large geographical size has meant that some areas are left untouched. The other Pacific countries have adopted European ways in many respects, but Papua New Guinea's huge land allows it to retain its own tradition. The process where the nation is adopting European elements could be seen as one of modernization in a positive sense, but at the same time it could be interpreted negatively as a process of losing tradition. In this context, the performer who spoke to me was proud of his country for having tradition, and he thought that the country was different from the others in that it still retained much of its tradition.

With a lot of international tourists in Pacific Arts Festival, performances with an aura of entertainment received generally good responses from the audience, and the performance of Papua New Guinea, which stressed tradition, was watched quietly. This tendency applies to the other Melanesian countries, such as Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. This kind of performance, where the tradition is stressed, is sometimes seen negatively as 'primitive', or unsophisticated, compared with the other countries' sophisticated, entertaining performance. But as one of the performers of Papua New Guinea mentioned, some people are proud of their tradition, and they consider other countries' performances to have lost their tradition and changed too much.

Of course, even when the indigenous people think that their culture is traditional and authentic, it is often the case that it has changed and adopted Western cultural influences (Keesing 1989). Or, it has been claimed that culture is always changing and is 'invented' continuously and that we cannot tell exactly what the authenticity is (Linnekin 1983). It has become clear that the Asaro Mudmen, which is becoming a

⁴ 'Yumi' in Tok Pisin means 'we', and it is used only when it includes the person who is being talked to. When it does not include him/her, we should use 'mipela' instead of 'yumi'. Therefore, it might be appropriate to use 'mipela' in this situation, where the person being talked to was the author, who is not Papua New Guinean. But the reason why he used 'yumi' instead of 'mipela' was probably that he felt sympathy with me and thought that I could be included in his group. I had had several occasions to carry out intensive interviews with the dancing members of the Papua New Guinean delegation before their performance.

national symbol of Papua New Guinea, does not actually have a long history in its current form. But what the people think is traditional and authentic is to be considered important, and it is being stressed in order to promote national unity.

Dr. Jacob Simet, who was the then executive director of Papua New Guinea's National Cultural Commission, mentioned independence and nation building in a programme aired on Radio Australia.

Culture was something which was presented as a symbol which was set up against colonialism. If there was anything to separate Papua New Guineans from Australians who were the colonisers at that time or even the rest of the world, it was culture (Radio Australia, Time to Talk).⁵

Culture in this context may be read as 'tradition', and 'tradition' is considered to be a symbol which separates the country from the rest of the world. In this sense, tradition is stressed to represent the nation.

CULTURAL SHOW — COLLECTION OF LOCALITY

As we have seen, it is useful to adopt 'tradition' to stress national identity. But when tradition is stressed in order to let people identify with the nation, at least one problem appears in multi-ethnic countries such as in Papua New Guinea. Since it has a large number of ethnic groups, and each ethnic group has its own culture or tradition, it is hard to choose one cultural item or one ethnic group to represent the nation so that all people identify with it. To show a cultural item of a certain ethnic group does not represent the whole nation, but only a specific ethnic group, or a particular local area. Those who do not belong to the ethnic group might not identify with the item of the other ethnic groups, even though they belong to the same nation. If there were any majority groups, the government could use them to represent the nation, and it would be likely that the other groups will accept them. But this is not possible in Papua New Guinea.

One way to solve the problem is to collect cultural items from more than one ethnic group, or to collect some areas, and to represent the nation with the collection of these items and these ethnic groups. This frequently happens in multi-ethnic countries when nationalism is introduced. In the case of Papua New Guinea, this is observed in 'cultural shows', which have been becoming popular since the 1990s. These are intended to introduce local dances to the public and draw attention of tourists, including those from overseas. It is also an occasion to show the tourists something Papuan; especially overseas travelers.

Cultural shows began their history with the Hagen Show and the Goroka Show,

⁵ http://www.abc.net.au/timetotalk/english/radio/stories/TimeToTalkTranscript_418681.htm (November 22nd, 2005)

which have been held in Mt. Hagen in Western Highland Province and Goroka in Eastern Highland Province respectively. The Goroka Show was first held in 1950s as a means of gathering together different ethnic groups and clans. The Hagen Show, which began in 1961, has been conducted more than 20 times. In the early period, these two festivals were held on alternate years, and after a break in the mid 1980s, each of them has been held annually. They provide tourists with opportunities to see dozens of traditional dances and costumes. They have also been displaying arts and crafts of the Papua New Guinea highlands.

Besides these Hagen and Goroka shows, several new cultural shows appeared in the early 1990s, and several cities began to hold them. Lae, the capital of Morobe Province and one of the country's industrial cities, began to hold the Morobe Show. Madang in Madang Province began to hold the Madang Show, and Wewak in East Sepik Province began to hold the Sepik Show. The Hiri Moale Festival celebrates traditional trade called Hiri, which used to be exercised in the Papuan area to trade pots for sago starch, and is now held every year in Port Moresby. The Mask Festival began in 1995 in Port Moresby and has been held every year at a different site. Some cultural shows are not held any more,⁶ and the major Cultural Shows which are still held regularly are, the Hagen Show, the Goroka Show, the Hiri Moale and the Mask Festival.

Shows are usually held in a large open field, such as a sports ground, or a public open space. Some dancing groups are invited and they perform their own local, traditional dances. The number of groups depends on the show, and in the case of a large show such as the Hagen and Goroka shows, dozens of groups join in. Each dancing group consists of twenty to thirty members, and they keep dancing, marching along a fixed route in the open field, or dancing in a fixed space. The groups keep dancing from morning to evening, and the show usually continues for two to three days. The space is fenced, and the guests are charged admission fees to get inside and enjoy the show from close up. The fee is usually several kina⁷ for each person depending on the scale of the show, and frequently extra fees for cameras and video recorders are charged.

These cultural shows are usually held by an organizing committee, which often includes the Provincial Government and the Tourist Board. They advertise for dancing groups who want to take part in the show and they select groups from the applicants. Performers are usually paid a certain amount of money to cover their travel expenses and accommodation during the show. The number of performers

⁶ The reason is mostly financial problems. The promoters expect income from admission fees, but usually it is not enough to cover all the expenditures of the show. They therefore have to find sponsors to organize the show. They usually ask local companies and hotels to donate some money, but it has been getting hard to collect these donations. After trying several times, they give up organizing the show.

⁷ In 2005 November, one kina equals around 0.33 US\$.

depends on the group. When the number is large, it gives the audience a dynamic impression, but the group has to cover accommodation and transportation fees for all its members. In the case of the 35th of Goroka Show in 1992, when the author had an opportunity to interview a member of the organizing committee, the interviewee mentioned that forty dancing groups had been selected from more than 130 applicants. Usually the best group is selected and a prize is awarded. Therefore, rivalry appears among the performers. Because of this rivalry, the performances are becoming showy, and the ornaments are getting colorful. In some Cultural Shows, it is forbidden to wear watches and sunglasses and to use artificial paintings lest the dances should lose their authenticity. It is usually expected that the judges will use adherence to tradition as a criteria when they select the prize winner.

It is expected that tourists, including some people from overseas, will come and see these 'cultural shows'. Travel agents, whether based in Papua New Guinea or overseas, advertise the show by making posters and leaflets for overseas travelers, and Papua New Guinea's national airline, Air Niugini, also advertises these shows as a tourist attraction. The airline often features kinds of traditional dances for its posters and pamphlets.

Although the size of the domestic audience is much larger than the overseas component, the promoters are mostly interested in the latter. This is simply because overseas travelers spend much more than the domestic audience members. Those from overseas stay in hotels, eat out at restaurants, and seek other entertainment. Those living in Papua New Guinea come and see the show in large numbers, but it is not expected that they will spend much money at the show. The admission fee is usually several kina, and this is still expensive for domestic people, and many of them can only watch the show from outside the fence around the stage. An extra fee is charged for those with a camera or video recorder, and this is set up considering that most overseas travelers have cameras or video recorders while few local people do.

These cultural shows, therefore, become opportunities to show the variety of culture to domestic guests, and at the same time to show overseas tourists something Papua New Guinean. A representation of the nation of Papua New Guinea can be seen in these shows.

In these cultural shows, the nation is represented as a collection of specific localities. In the case of a large 'cultural show', such as the Hagen or Goroka shows, dozens of dancing groups join, and in order to demonstrate that it represents Papua New Guinea as a nation, groups are invited from a large area of the country. These shows are held in the highlands area, and because of this, most applicants to the show are from the highlands. But the groups that are selected for the show are not only from the highlands but also from all over the country, although the number of the groups from the other areas is small. The show intends to represent the whole nation by choosing famous dances from all over the country.

Groups are usually chosen by dividing the whole country into regions, and selecting at least one group from each region. In the case of the 35th Goroka Show in

1992, the organizers selected forty dancing groups from four divisions: Eastern Highlands, the other Highlands Areas (Western Highlands, Southern Highlands, Enga and Simbu Provinces), Momase areas (the northern coast of the country, which are Morobe, Madang, and East and West Sepik Provinces)⁸ and the Islands areas (Milne Bay, East New Britain, West New Britain, New Ireland and Manus Provinces). Since Goroka is in Eastern Highlands, its own province was stressed and the Papuan region (on the southern coast of the country, which includes Gulf, Western, Central, and Oro Provinces) was omitted, probably because they are distant from the highlands area.

These are domestic situations, and the same principle applies also in international settings. The Pacific Arts Festival is a typical example where art is involved in representing the nation in an international situation. In the case of the 8th Pacific Arts Festival, the way to represent Papua New Guinea is the same as that adopted in the cultural shows. Since the nation has a great deal of cultural variety, organizers try to choose a smaller number of groups and to represent the whole nation.

The organization of the Papua New Guinean delegation to the Pacific Arts Festival was coordinated by the National Cultural Commission, which was under the Ministry for Culture and Tourism. This body was supposed to decide who would join the Festival, and how to organize the team. What they did was to divide the country into four regions, and to choose one team from each region. The whole country was divided into four regions – a division that is quite popular among Papua New Guineans. These four regions are highlands (Eastern Highlands, Southern Highlands, Western Highlands, and Simbu Provinces), Momase, Papua and Islands areas. By selecting at least one group from each of these four regions, they try to give an impression that these groups represent the whole nation of Papua New Guinea. This is exactly the same way that domestic cultural shows try to depict the national culture by choosing some specific regions to represent the whole nation.⁹

As a result of these selection and representation methods, some dancing groups have become popular, and they have come to appear frequently in these shows. Usually those dancing groups which attract people's attention, or those groups which are already nationally famous, are invited to represent the nation. For example, regular groups are the Asaro Mudmen from Asaro Valley in Eastern Highlands, Huli groups famous for their large wigs and yellow-colored faces, Hagen dancers with axes and spears in hands, Dukduk dancers from Baining, New Britain and so on. These are now becoming the most typical dances representative of the whole nation, and they

⁸ West Sepik Province has changed its name to Sandaun Province, but the name West Sepik is still sometimes used and the East Sepik and Sandaun Provinces are frequently categorized into two Sepik Provinces.

⁹ Actually, the dancing groups that were chosen for the festival were from East New Britain and Morobe Provinces, and they did not represent the four designated areas. The thing is that the expenditure for the delegation was to be paid by each province, and few provinces applied to the delegation members.

are frequently used in posters, pamphlets and leaflets in international tourism. They are now representing the nation by showing their traditional costumes and dancing. Especially, the symbol of the Asaro Mudmen is becoming popular, and is becoming a national symbol of the country. It is used in campaigns to promote tourism in Papua New Guinea and has appeared on almost every travel guide as an appealing symbol of this country (Otto and Verloop 1996).

PUBLIC BUILDINGS — NEUTRALIZATION

As I mentioned, together with performing arts, plastic arts are frequently used as symbols of the country, and many kinds of traditional carvings and sculptures are displayed in public places. Some traditional design has also been adopted in public buildings to create a Papua New Guinean air. One of the typical cases where local design was used is the façade of the head office of Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation (Photo 15).

Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation is the official bank of Papua New Guinea, and its head office is located in the business center of Port Moresby. It is, therefore, a symbol of business in Papua New Guinea. This was designed by David Lasisi, who was a graduate of the National Arts School, and it was based on the design of traditional masks and shields in Gulf Province. The important point here is that it is not an exact copy of traditional designs, but was redesigned according to modern tastes. It was a noteworthy fact that David Lasisi was not actually from Gulf Province, but from New Ireland (Thomas 1995: 186).

If authentic designs from Gulf Province were adopted exactly as they are, it would remind people only of a specific area, the Gulf area, and not remind them of the whole nation. By changing the original design and making it vague, the designs are capable of representing the whole nation. By neutralizing locality in this way, the design has become, pan-Papua New Guinean.



Photo 15. Head Office of Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation

Another typical example is Papua New Guinea's national Parliament House in Port Moresby, which was built in 1984 (Photo 17). It was the biggest building ever built in Papua New Guinea. Costing 22.4 million kina,¹⁰ and demanding the help of Australian architectural and building expertise, it was a national-scale construction project. The façade was copied from the traditional *Haus Tambaran* (spiritual house or men's house) in Arapesh in the Sepik area (Photo 16).



Photo 16. Haus Tambaran in Maprik

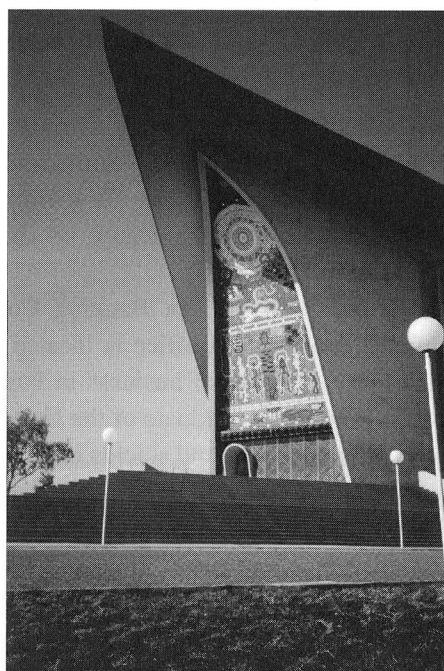


Photo 17. Parliament House in Port Moresby

The total design was done by Cecil Hogan, an Australian architect, but the design of the front façade was jointly done by students of the National Arts School (Simons, S. C. & H. Stevenson 1991). On the façade, the life of the people is drawn with a traditional motif. In order to represent the whole nation, the technique of collecting localities is used again. The land is shown with the sun, the moon, rivers, garden, sea, and so on. Typical crops in Papua New Guinea, such as taros, yams and sweet potatoes are drawn. Pigs, the most important domestic animals in Papua New Guinea, are also drawn. The design tries to show the diversity of the country by collecting many items from all over the country. The drawing aims to show the whole area of Papua New Guinea, from highlands to the coast and islands.

It is notable that the design used here does not inspire any specific area of Papua

¹⁰ In 1984 August, one kina equaled around 1.03 US\$ (Rannells 1995: 46).

New Guinea. For example, a male/female human couple are drawn at its center, and they wear traditional clothes of Papua New Guinea. They are dressed with aprons and big hair ornaments. They might be from the Papua New Guinea highlands, but they do not look like they are from a specific region of the highlands. Even whether they are highlanders or not is unclear.

The other drawings show the same characteristics. One drawing shows the agriculture of the country by depicting yams, taros and sweet potatoes. A pig is inside a fence, and fish are swimming in the sea. The figures represented here show a certain Melanesian air, but they do not recall any specific region (Simons, S. C. & H. Stevenson *op. cit.*). The Scottish artist and craftsman Archie Brennan, who has been associated with the National Arts School, coordinated the art content of the building. He brought about a synthesis of design elements from all over Papua New Guinea so that art work would not represent any one region but represent Papua New Guinea as a whole. In an interview with a flight magazine, he said ‘We worked very hard to design something which we felt belonged to this country yet for which one could not immediately say; yes that is Sepik, that is West (sic) Highlands, that is Trobriand.’ An example of this philosophy is evident in the Speaker’s chair of the Parliament House, which reflects the orator’s stool found along the Sepik River, but which is carved with a Trobriand touch (Newman 1986).

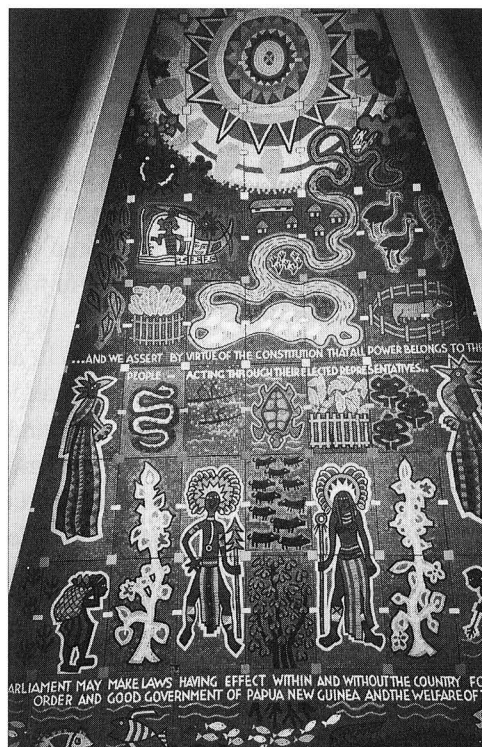


Photo 18. Façade of Parliament House

Stressing any particular area or ethnic group, would remind people only of the specific area and the specific ethnic group, and not of the whole nation. By neutralizing the locality of specific areas, and by making things vague, the designs are able to represent the whole nation. The figure is, as a result, pan-Papua New Guinean by neutralizing locality.

These designs, the wall of Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation and the façade of National Parliament House, were ordered by politicians and/or policy makers of the country, or the designers took their desires into consideration. In this sense, they have been drawn by intention to represent the unity of the country by neutralizing the character of local areas.

MASK FESTIVAL — INVENTING A NEW CONCEPT

Another way to represent the nation is observed in the Mask Festival, which has been held annually in recent times. A new concept is invented and used to represent the culture of the whole nation.

The Mask Festival began in 1995. The first three festivals had been held in Port Moresby, and it was moved to Madang in 1999. Madang is one of Papua New Guinea's typical sightseeing spots, and the change of location was explained as a financial consideration. In 2001, the location changed to Rabaul, East New Britain Province. In 2002, it was held in Rabaul again, and the organizing committee announced that they have made Rabaul the permanent host.

As mentioned above, cultural shows began to be popular in the early 1990s, but many of them, except some old shows such as the Goroka and Hagen shows, are not performed any more. Most of the new shows have been abandoned because of financial problems. They were not able to find enough sponsors. The reason why the Mask Festival is still held is partly because it is promoted by the National Cultural Commission, which is the national organization responsible for the cultural matters of the country.

The 1999 Mask festival, hosted by Madang, was held in an oval at the center of the city. Before the opening ceremony, the performers began to prepare for dancing. They put various ornaments in their hair, on their arms, around their waists and legs. Some put on wigs, and some painted their faces and bodies with natural and/or artistic dye. After the opening ceremony, each dancing group came into the oval and began to perform their local dances. The admission fee was two kina for adults, and one kina for children. The organizing committee said that they expected some three to four thousands kina as the total income from admission fees.

The leaflet of the festival insists that the mask, which is the title of the show, is an element of Melanesian culture. It explains the festival as follows:

The National Cultural Commission and the Madang Provincial Government will be hosting the 5th Papua New Guinea Mask Festival from the 13th - 14th

August, 1999, in Madang.

The Tumbuan¹¹ Mask Festival is staged as a National Festival to promote the Mask Culture of Papua New Guinea.

Masks, in the definition of the term, are found all over the world in many different forms and perform many different functions.

The types or class that has to do with the representation of spirits are found in East Africa, Melanesia and South America. Of this category, the Melanesian genre specifically has to do with spirits and mostly ancestor spirits. These types of masks, which we now call 'tumbuan' in Tok Pisin, are found only in Melanesia.

In Papua New Guinea, mask culture is found in the New Guinea islands, the Momase Region and the Gulf Province. Mask or 'tumbuan' are an important part of the cultures of Papua New Guinea. In many ways they are one of the most important cultural symbols of Papua New Guinea, which in many ways identifies our cultures from the rest of the world.

For the last four years, it has been the desire of the National Cultural Commission to maintain and preserve, in live form, this very important aspect of Papua New Guinea (National Cultural Commission 1999).

Although the festival was called 'Mask Festival', the groups which were performing dances were not only mask groups. The poster of the festival said that they invited four mask groups from various parts of the country. These were the Kilenge Mask Group from West New Britain Province, the Asaro Mudmen Group from Eastern Highlands Province, the Soaring Mask Group from East Sepik Province and the Duk Duk Mask Group from East New Britain Province. The poster said that another five mask groups in Madang would join the show. It also said that another nine groups would perform their dances.

The festival leaflet, which seems to have been printed after the poster, said that nine mask groups were invited. Five other mask groups were mentioned: the Kaian Mask Group, Toto Mask Group, Gamal Mask group, Bosman Mask group and Awar mask group. They were all from Madang Province. It also said that 10 other groups would join the show.

It became clear from these materials that the groups which joined the festival and performed dances were nine mask groups and 10 other groups: the number of mask groups was less than half of the total. Besides, among the nine mask groups, some did not actually wear masks in the strict sense of the word. Some wore a sort of big hair ornament, and another carried a big spirit whose body was like a big box. They were not supposed to be literally classified as 'mask' groups. But the organizers used the term 'mask', and the emcee, appealed to the audience to join the festival, emphasizing

¹¹ Tumbuan is a word meaning 'a wooden mask, a masked figure in a dance' (Mihalic 1971). In this context it means traditional masks widely made in Papua New Guinea.

that there were 'mask groups' from many parts of the country.

The mask, in this sense, was an invented concept to cover the whole culture of Melanesia, or Papua New Guinea, and it was invented by the national government, or more specifically by the elite of the national government, to identify the culture of Papua New Guinea and to strengthen the concept of the nation.

Masks are commonly seen in most parts of Papua New Guinea. As the explanation of the Mask Festival says, masks are found in the New Guinea islands, the Momase Region and the Gulf Province. It does not mention the highlands area, but it covers northern and southern coast and islands areas, which means most of the nation. Although the people in the highlands do not have mask culture, they quite often see masks from other areas, and they are familiar with this. The leaflet also says that masks in Melanesia are different from those in the other areas in that they have to do with spirits and mostly ancestor spirits, and that they are unique to Papua New Guinea. The concept of 'mask' is, in these senses, handy and excellent in representing the whole country of Papua New Guinea.

In 2002's Mask Festival, one of the organizers voiced a similar opinion in a newspaper article:

Festivals such as this one are important to the maintenance and continuity of indigenous cultures, including that of mask cultures.

It is the national platform on which the nation-state recognises, accepts and supports mask cultures as an important part of life of the people of this country.

Mask cultures no longer belong in the swamps of East Sepik, the isolated shores of New Ireland and the forests of West New Britain.

It now has a place in national cultural life through this National Mask Festival. Have an enjoyable eighth National Mask Festival (Post Courier).¹²

Here we see the intention of the elite of the nation to make the mask seem unique to Papua New Guinea, and to make the mask a 'symbol' of the nation.

The festival has been hosted in different areas since it was first held in Port Moresby. In 1999, the festival was moved to Madang, where it stayed for two years. The organizer mentioned that the festival was not originally intended to be held only in Port Moresby, and the reason why they had changed the site was financial. The location of Madang made the travel expenses of the performers cheaper. Madang is connected with the other cities by land, and the islands and the other areas can take the marine routes. On the contrary, Port Moresby is not connected by land with most cities, and the organizers have to pay large airfares to most of the performers from outlying areas.

The change of location from Port Moresby did make sense on this point. But it

¹² Post Courier 2002 Momase and NGI are homes of mask culture (July 18th). <http://www.postcourier.com.pg/20020718/supplement05.htm> (November 22nd, 2005).

was also said that the change of site was motivated by the need to locate the festival within the mask culture area. Masks are popular on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea and the surrounding islands, and not in and around Port Moresby. Therefore, the move to Madang and also to Rabaul makes sense in that it should be held in the areas where the mask culture is popular. This reflects the organizers' intention to make masks a symbol of the country's culture.

The title of the festival has also been slightly changing, and this also reflects the intention of organizers to make the festival a sort of national event. In 1999, it was called 'The 5th Annual Papua New Guinea Mask Festival,' but the poster of the festival said 'Tumbuan Mask Festival', and stressed the traditional atmosphere by adding the indigenous word 'tumbuan'. But since 2001, the title has become 'National Mask Festival'. The poster of the festival in 1999 ended by saying that 'Be proud of our culture and be a part of the festival' (National Cultural Commission 1999).

CONCLUSION

The use of 'tradition' to represent nation is frequently adopted by developing countries. Papua New Guinea is not an exception. Tradition is a useful way to highlight domestic culture in that it stresses differences from other countries. On many occasions tradition is adopted to promote national unity. In fact, some forms of traditional plastic arts and performing arts have come to be sort of national symbols, such as the Asaro Mudmen and *kundu* and *garamut*.

In the case of multi-ethnic societies, to represent the nation through displaying tradition is not easy. Each ethnic group has its own tradition. The nation encompasses each different tradition, but none of these is able to represent the whole nation. Especially, in the case of Papua New Guinea, which has no majority ethnic group but only many minorities, this tendency is strong. In this situation, several methods are used to represent the nation, or to strengthen the unity of the nation.

The first way is to represent the nation as a collection of localities, or the collection of specific regions. This is done by collecting cultural items from more than one ethnic group, or by collecting items from some areas, and then representing the nation as a collection of these items and ethnic groups. Usually something that can attract people's attention, or something famous throughout the country, is used to represent the nation. Showing dances of particular areas is an example of representing the whole nation. By adopting this method, several dances are becoming popular, and some of them have become a sort of national symbol, like the Asaro Mudmen, or the Huli wig men.

The second way is to neutralize localities. By neutralizing the characteristics of specific areas, and making them vague, or stressing common characteristics of a large number of ethnic groups, it becomes possible to represent the whole nation. When a cultural item of a specific ethnic group is used, the theme can be modified or the shape

redesigned, making the item vague. This way it does not recall any specific ethnic group, or specific locality. By neutralizing locality, an impression of representing a larger area is conveyed.

This method is frequently used when it applies to exterior design of buildings. The façade design of the Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation is a typical example. The design is based on those of Gulf Province, but it has been slightly redesigned so that it should not recall a specific province, but rather the nation of Papua New Guinea as a whole. The drawings on the façade of the National Parliament House are another typical example. The designs show the life of the people in Papua New Guinea, but do not to recall any specific local area. By neutralizing locality, these two buildings have succeeded in representing the whole nation.

The third way to represent the whole nation is to invent a new concept. The concept must be somehow familiar with the people in the whole country, and it must cover the wide area of nation. The concept must show differences from other areas or other nations and show that it represents the particular nation.

An example of this in Papua New Guinea is the concept of the 'mask' to represent the culture of the whole nation. Using the title of Mask Festival, the event is held every year to encourage people to identify with the culture of the nation. Masks are very familiar cultural elements all over Papua New Guinea. The explanation of the Mask Festival stresses that the masks in Melanesia are different from other masks in that they have to do with spirits (mostly ancestor spirits). The mask is therefore a handy and reasonable concept to represent the unique culture of the country of Papua New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea is still in the process of nation building, and the government is still continually trying to strengthen national identity among the people. There are many ways to foster national identity. No doubt art is one of them.

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