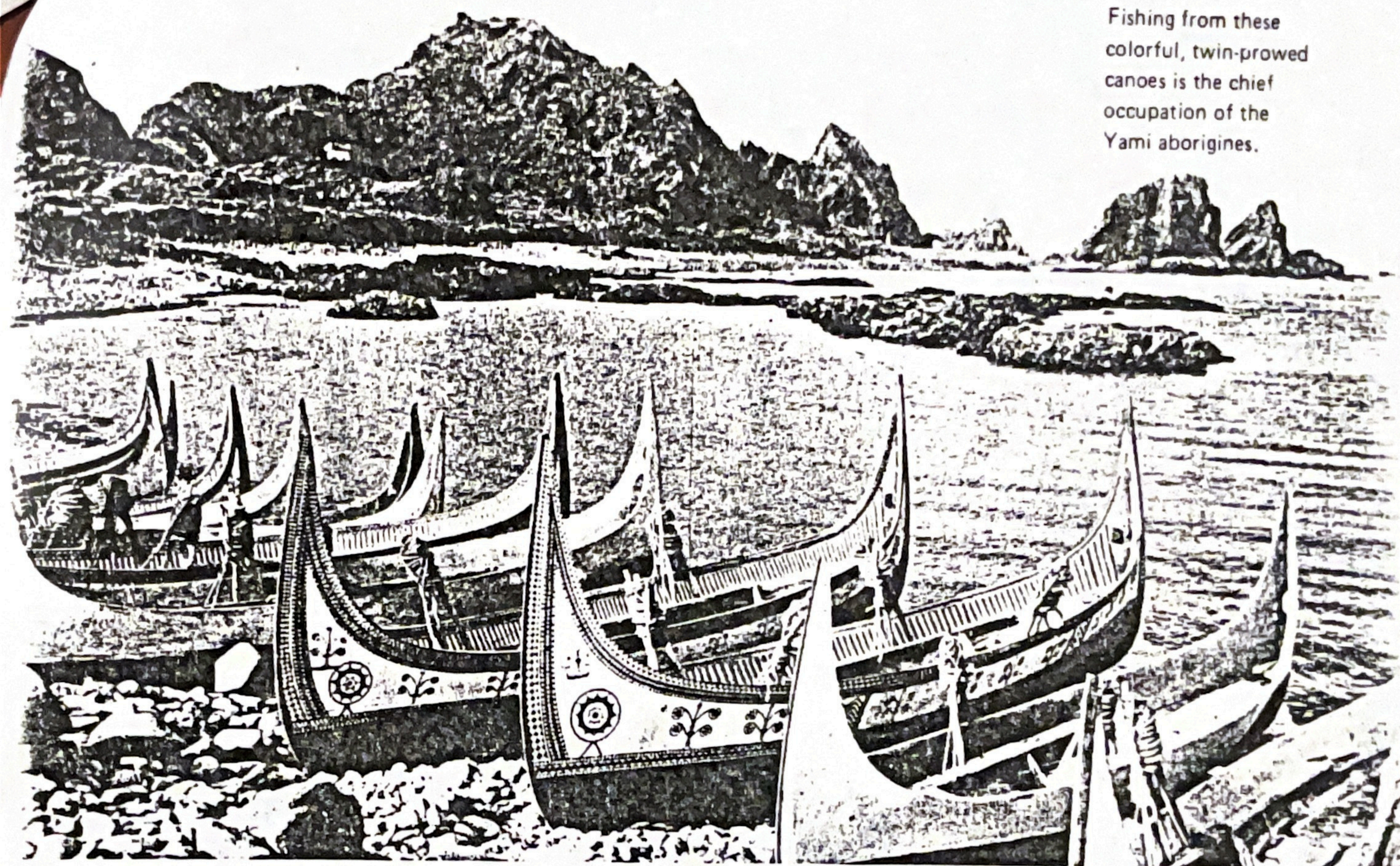


Fishing from these colorful, twin-prowed canoes is the chief occupation of the Yami aborigines.



sloe-eyed, they have pitch-black hair and high cheek bones. The most primitive and smallest in number of the nine aborigine tribes extant in Taiwan today, the Orchid Islanders remain a mystery as to their origins and history.

They are presumed to have crossed over from the nearest of the Philippine Islands (less than 100 miles away) about 2000 years ago, but they have been classified as Micronesians, and their unique dialect derives from the Malayan language. The Japanese considered these simple fisherfolk and their origins fascinating enough for the Imperial University of Tokyo to set up an "anthropological museum" on the island which intensively studied the Yamis for many years.

From their half a dozen villages nestling on the lower slopes of the green hills, the Yamis look out on the stark and strangely-shaped rocks on the coastline and in the nearby waters. The islanders maintain a familiarity with these 250-odd rocks and have special names for each one of them. A greenish-brown reef some distance offshore is called "Battleship Isle" because of its unusual hulk-like formation.

In the last weeks of World War II American bombers spotted this "target" in poor visibility conditions. Believing it to be an anchored Japanese warship, the airmen unloaded tons of bombs on the hapless pile while the islanders cringed in terror.

Another of the well-known rocks on the island are the wind-hewn pair called "Yin-Yang," representing male and female sex symbols, or, according to Chinese philosophy, two elements in balanced harmony. The Yamis consider these stones symbolic of fertility. But there has been scarcely any population growth on this uncrowded island. For many decades the number of people has remained constant, whether by Nature's intervention (the Yamis' life span is shorter than the Taiwanese) or by Yami intention not to share their primitive little Eden with too many others.

However, the Orchid Islanders don't mind sharing their tiny homeland with visitors, on a temporary basis. They may no longer send out welcoming committees each time a tourist comes ashore—unless, of course, he is planning to open a chain

of tobacco shops, but, nowadays the Yamis have a renewed friendly approach and an attentive curiosity about strangers.

Still they have shown little interest in adapting themselves to 20th Century civilization, and prefer the simple life-style of their forefathers. They have no desire to complicate their peaceful existence, and are afraid that too much contact with outsiders will make them lose their identity as a people with their own special customs and traditions.

Back in Taipei, Taiwanese officials have mixed feelings about Orchid Island. They recognize the Yamis' wish to preserve their old way of life, but they want to see the island developed into a more accessible tourist locale with all the amenities necessary to play host to many more visitors. Taipei wants to convince the Orchid Islanders that this would be good for them.

Meanwhile, the officials, whose offers of free clothing are constantly refused by the Yami men, have not even been able to convince them that clothes are good for them.