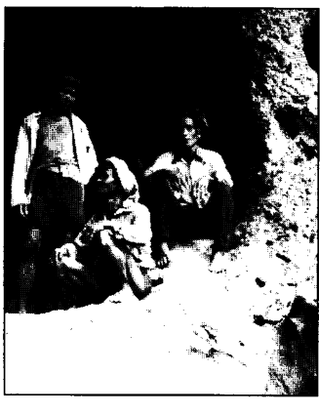
Tasaday lived at the caves. He did not volunteer to do it himself, but his point was, why hadn't the proponents of the Tasaday done it?

Among the anthropologists who defended the original Tasaday research, the most vigorous was Stanford University's Molony. At the AAA session she said that her analysis of tribal words collected in a 2-week visit to the caves under Elizalde's supervision in 1972 indicated that the people spoke a "distinct" language that could not have been faked, certainly not by children. She found that the Tasaday used no common agricultural terms and no Spanish-derived words of the kind used throughout the Philippines. She concluded that the tribe could be a splinter from an older group, having gone its own way in the rain forest before agricultural skills were developed, never developing any of its own. On the other hand, Molony said, the Tasaday might have lost the skills of a more advanced parent group *after* diverging in the forest.



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Meeting point *for anthropologists, photographers, and Tasaday.*

But to the doubters, this hypothesis does not make the Tasaday unique nor does it tell how long they lived in isolation, if at all. Clearly it does not support the idea promoted by journalists in the early 1970s that the Tasaday are 20th-century survivors of the stone age. However, Molony wrote last fall (*The Sciences*, September/October 1988) that some linguistic studies indicate that the Tasaday have lived "on their own" in the forest for "between 571 and 755 years." At the AAA session, Molony said she has learned to be more cautious and now speaks of the Tasaday's linguistic "separation," not their "isolation." She also agreed that the Tasaday may have lived apart from other tribes for as little as 100 to 150 years.

Arguments based on the uniqueness of the Tasaday language seemed to lose their punch when Clay Johnston, a nonanthropologist, told his story. A member of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (which translates the Bible), Johnston spent 10 years in the Southern Philippines during the 1960s and 1970s, learning the local languages. But he first learned about the Tasaday at home in suburban Virginia in 1972, when his wife had the television on and suddenly called him from the living room urging him to listen to people in a *National Geographic* television special. The people on TV were identified as Tasaday, and Johnston said, "We could understand everything they said." Last fall, at the request of a reporter, Johnston was given a copy of a tape Molony made while at the Tasaday cave in 1972. He concluded the language on it was "90% equivalent to Manobo," the one he spoke while living in the Philippines. He had people in three villages listen to it, and all could understand it. By one widely accepted standard, Johnston said, languages with a 75% overlap are the same. Thus, he calls the speech on the tape "a dialect of Cotabato Manobo."

At the day's end, Richard Lee of the University of Toronto, billed as "the leading authority on modern hunter-gatherer societies," was asked to sum up. He cast his vote for the hoax thesis, citing five compelling but unanswered questions:

- If the Tasaday lived in their caves for hundreds of years, "where are the middens" or rubbish heaps? The caves are clean, and no one has investigated any heaps outside.
- If the Tasaday did not hunt, grow food, or get food from neighbors, and if the local wild food is too scant to support an active existence, "what did the Tasaday eat?"
- What happened to the tools? The modern-day stone axes of the Tasaday are too crude for most purposes except cracking nuts, which can be done with unfinished stones. More finely wrought "heirloom tools" were photographed but have since been lost.
- "Where are the other groups?" Population experts agree that the number of Tasaday found in 1971 (about 25) could not have survived without replenishment from outside. But two supposed kin groups whose names Elizalde elicited from the Tasaday have never been located.
- Why did the Tasaday for centuries avoid bartering with nearby farming villages (the nearest one is just a 3-hour walk away), preferring to spend much more time searching for inferior food in the forest?

These questions may serve as a starting point for the next round of inquiry under Eggan, which is to deliver a report in 1990. Meanwhile, recent visitors report that the Tasaday, having left behind their jungle costume and diet, are now mixing with the local villagers so effectively that only the most skilled experts can tell the difference between a real Tasaday and the "newcomers."

■ **ELIOT MARSHALL**

Uncertain Future for Chinese Students

Congress has granted a reprieve to Chinese students and visiting scholars in the United States who fear reprisals if they return home. But their future is still far from assured.

Federal law currently requires foreign exchange students holding what are known as J-1 visas to return to their home countries for 2 years after they complete their studies in the United States. The rule is intended to prevent a brain drain from developing countries. But many of the Chinese students openly protested the crackdown in Tiananmen Square last June and an estimated 2000 have stayed on in the United States after their visas expired.

Last week, Congress passed legislation that would indefinitely extend the visas of any Chinese student or visiting scholar who applies, with no questions asked. But the Administration has opposed the legislation on the grounds that it will further strain relations with China, and many of the students fear that President Bush will let the bill die in a "pocket veto" while Congress is in recess. Indeed, the Chinese foreign ministry last week condemned the bill.

The Administration has been pushing an alternative plan. Unlike the legislation passed by Congress, it would require students applying for visa extensions to state their reasons for doing so. Many of the students fear that they would be labeled traitors by the Chinese government if they say they are seeking political asylum.

Xu Guanghan, a doctoral candidate in engineering at Stanford University, who has been lobbying on behalf of Chinese students at northern California campuses, says that students would rather go back than subscribe to the Bush plan. But "no one dares to go back home at this moment" because they fear arrest, says Xu, who was one of many Chinese students who converged on the Capitol Hill last week to lobby for the bill.

Their fears may be justified. Many Chinese researchers, particularly those in the social sciences, are still under arrest, according to U.S. China watchers and human rights groups. These include Yang Wei, 33, a former graduate student in molecular biology at the University of Arizona, and several scholars from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. As recently as last month, Chinese troops were still stationed in the academy's facilities in Beijing.

■ **MARJORIE SUN**