

みんなのポジトリ

国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

The Route to Ramie Cultural Ecology

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2020-12-10 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Taru, Yuma, Watan, Baunay メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.15021/00009619

The Route to Ramie Cultural Ecology

Yuma Taru

Lihang Studio, Taiwan

Baunay Watan

Lihang Studio, Taiwan

Abstract

Ramie, a traditional fibre plant called *kgi* by the Tayal, was for thousands of years the basic material in the clothing of Taiwan's indigenous peoples. However, during the period of Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945), because of the use of other types of clothing, the cultivation of ramie gradually petered out. Then ramie became a cash crop, and indigenous people began to grow large quantities; however, the rise of Taiwan's petrochemical industry in the 1960s and 1970s caused ramie to disappear again. In 1992, upon returning to their Tayal homeland to engage in cultural research and investigation, the authors began to seek the origins of Tayal clothing culture and ways of revitalising it. Over the past 25 years, a process encompassing research and investigation as well as analysis, classification, and reproduction of traditional clothing, has seen traditional clothing gradually reappear in Tayal villages, and has led to the development of dyeing and weaving education. The ultimate goal is to restore traditional systems and concepts while giving the villagers modern scientific knowledge and skills. We hope to develop a new concept of self-sufficient Tayal village life that connects traditional and modern spiritual values through the Tayal *gaga* social system (*gaga* refers to traditional moral codes). To this end, a planting plan for the ramie ecological cycle was developed, based on traditional Tayal *gaga*. It uses the system of ramie planting, production, and marketing, based on resource sharing, mutual assistance, environmental friendliness, and recycling, and finally forms a new village development model that combines ecological sustainability, culture, and economy.

I. Introduction: Cloth Weaving and the Lives of Tayal Women

Traditionally, Tayal women wove cloth all their lives. When a Tayal girl was born, her grandmother would give her a swaddling cloth; when she was 11 or 12 years old, she would learn to weave her own skirt, and before marriage she would weave her own wedding dress; as a wife and mother, she had to be responsible for the clothes of all the family members. We know this from the records of the Japanese colonial period. In a

report compiled by the Taiwanese Governor's Office, it is described that women strip and bleach the raw hemp, spin it, and weave the garments (Rinji Taiwan Kyukan Chosakai 1915: 88). Before she died and crossed 'the Ancestors' Bridge', a Tayal woman had to prepare her own burial shroud¹⁾.

Tayal Women's weaving changed during the Japanese colonial periods, especially around the time of *kominka* 'the imperialization policy'. The Governor's Office promoted to assimilate the indigenous consciousness into the Japanese. The Japaneseization of various aspects of life led to the use of needle and thread for sewing. The women began to make clothes out of cotton and wool.

After World War II, economic influences also affected their garment making. With the penetration of the monetary economy, clothes made in industrial production also permeated the indigenous society. The costumes, which took a long time to make and had low commodity value to the outside world, were no longer made in the indigenous society. The art of weaving, which was supposed to be passed down from mother to daughter and grandmother to grandson, has been severed between generations. The decline of weaving also caused a decline in the cultivation of the materials used to make clothes.

The indigenous movement in the late 1980s promoted the revival of indigenous culture. The production of traditional clothing is one of them. Initially, they focused on the production of traditional forms of clothing, but over time, they began to revive the tradition, including the materials. Ramie is the most important and commonly used material for indigenous clothing.

II. Ramie and Indigenous People

For thousands of years, *kgi*, or ramie, was the basic material Taiwan's indigenous peoples used for clothing. *Kgi* provided the fiber for Tayal weaving.

Both of this paper's authors are Tayal and our ancestors were pre-literate and pre-industrial. Generations of experience working with ramie developed processing and production methods that conform to modern industrial chemical and physical principles, yet are ecologically friendly and can coexist and flourish with nature. In light of this, we later generations cannot help but be proud of our ancestors' accomplishments.

In traditional society, ramie was so widely used that each family would grow enough to provide fibres for its own cloth weaving and the making of daily appliances. Elders recall that each family was self-sufficient in ramie. It was generally planted alongside mountain fields or work huts. The Tayal practised swidden agriculture in mountain fields. In addition to food crops, they grew Makino bamboo for construction material, and planted alder trees to improve soil fertility. More importantly, they grew ramie for the weaving of clothing and other daily necessities.

For the Tayal, *kgi* was not only the main raw material for women's cloth weaving, but also had a deep connection with the making of men's daily necessities. Pack straps were knitted on bow looms using ramie, as were the hunter's net bags and ropes.

However, as the onset of Japanese colonisation saw the industrial production of

other fabrics, the planting and use of ramie gradually died out, causing ramie's first crisis. However, ramie fibre became an important source of military cloth because of its durability, so it was promoted as a cash crop which could be bartered for salt, salted fish, cloth, fine industrial cotton thread, dyeing pigments, and other everyday goods. Therefore, ramie flourished in the Tayal mountains until the end of World War II. After Taiwan's economic recovery in the 1960s and 1970s, the rising petrochemical industry replaced traditional materials with industrial cotton thread and chemical fibres like Tetron. Once again, ramie disappeared from the land of Taiwan.

III. Ecology and Growth of Ramie

Ramie is a perennial herb plant with a long, single high-strength fibre, fast moisture absorption and dissipation, and good heat conductivity (Photos 1 and 2). After



Photo 1 Ramie (*kǐ*), is a tall-growing herb (*Boehmeria nivea*) (2019, Lihang Studio)



Photo 2 Ramie seeds (2019, Lihang Studio)

degumming, the fibre becomes white and lustrous, and can be used for spinning, or blended with cotton, silk, wool, or chemical fibres. Many world-famous handicraft fabrics are made of ramie fibre.

Ramie requires plenty of water because of its large leaf surface, swift water evaporation, and fast consumption of nutrition needed for its rapid growth. It grows best in areas with annual rainfall of 800–1,000 mm, with relative humidity of about 80%. The main component of fibre is cellulose, so the light intensity and daily sunshine duration have a great influence on its yield. Insufficient sunshine weakens photosynthesis, resulting in weak stems, thin skin and fibre cell walls, slow growth, and poor harvests. However, too much sunshine, high temperatures, and dry weather also inhibit the growth of the ramie stem, cause fibre cell walls to be lignified, and produce poor quality and quantity of ramie. Therefore, ramie is generally planted in mountains on flat land, gentle hill slopes, or alluvial soil, because soil in such places is deep and loose, with rich organic matter. It drains easily but retains water and nutrients.

Traditional ramie farming used extensive (rather than intensive) management. Ramie grow from the apical buds of each branch of the underground stems and extend above the ground to become stems. Traditionally, farmers harvested the plants after observing that the skin had changed from green to brown, and began bearing flowers and seeds. This usually took about three months, or ninety days, providing three harvests a year. The dry, cold weather of winter produced small, thin ramie, which was often chopped and discarded as fertiliser. However, in good conditions, the ramie could grow between 1.5 and 2.5 meters in height. Ramie can also be planted by seed. The optimum temperature for seed germination is 25–30°C, and ramie grows best at temperatures of 15–32°C.

The indigenous peoples of Taiwan have a long history of planting ramie on mountain and hill slopes (Photo 3). Because of its luxuriant branches and leaves and



Photo 3 Ramie harvesting in a mountain field (2019, Lihang Studio)

flourishing roots, ramie mulching not only reduces water evaporation, maintains soil moisture, reduces soil erosion and surface loss, but also benefits the growth of ramie. It is an excellent economic crop for developing ramie textiles. However, it is to be regretted that pure hand-made ramie fibres have been replaced by industrial cotton and ramie yarns, as this involved the loss of traditional indigenous practises.

In the past 20 years, indigenous cultures in Taiwan have been enjoying a renaissance. Traditional costumes are being researched and reproduced, with vigorous exchanges and mutual influence between different villages and tribes. This has led to ramie being planted and cultivated again in many parts of Taiwan. This revival would have been unimaginable 25 years ago, when ramie had all but disappeared.

IV. Growing Roots to Support Ethnic Education

After graduating from college, Yuma Taru (one of the authors of this article) began working at the Museum Section of the Cultural Center of Taichung County (Huludun Cultural Center of Fengyuan City today). Her work brought her into contact with the collection and management of indigenous cultural relics. This set her on a path to research indigenous, and especially Tayal clothing: a path she has followed for nearly thirty years. In 1992, feeling that this research had to go deeper into tribal villages, Yuma decided to leave Civil Service and return to her Tayal homeland to study and investigate its traditional culture more deeply (Photo 4). To improve her research techniques, she went to graduate school to learn more about modern theories and methods. With this increased knowledge and ability, in 1995, what became her true mission (revitalising Tayal clothing culture) took off. Her work led her to study museum collections at home and abroad, and back to the villages to interview tribal elders. Trial and error have built and enriched her experience, from reading ethnographic literature, to studying old



Photo 4 Reproductions of traditional Tayal clothing (2019, Lihang Studio)



Photo 5 Analysing the collection of Tenri University Sankohkan Museum, Japan (2019, Lihang Studio)

photographs, to reproducing actual outfits. She also established a precedent of cooperating with museums to reproduce traditional clothing. In recent years, she has woven more than 500 pieces of clothing for museums at home and abroad (Photo 5). In particular, cooperation with the Taiwan National Museum of Prehistory has resulted in the complete reconstruction of the eight regional groups of the Tayal, thorough reproduction of Tayal shell and pearl clothes, and the publication of two important books (Fang 2008; Fang and Yuma Taru 2016).

As the research progressed, the authors developed dyeing and weaving courses to teach village women how to process traditional cloth, as well as to reproduce traditional materials in Lihang Studio managed by the authors. Nearly 25 years of work, with the participation of over 300 women, have resulted in traditional clothes reappearing in villages and beyond. Attention is paid not only to transmitting weaving and dyeing skills to village women, but also to growing deep roots: the hope of a nation lies in its children. For a nation to be strong, early childhood education is essential. With no resources or support, we still believed that we could continue for a few years on our own.

We planned to recruit 450 people to donate NT\$10,000 (approximately US\$330) each year, which would raise NT\$4.5 million (US\$150,000) annually, to buy land and build a school for ethnic education. The plan was for Yuma to raise the money from individuals. However, this plan came to a standstill. The workshop continued in the S'uraw Folk School in a traditional bamboo house for six years, providing a platform for village children to learn Tayal culture in depth (Photos 6 and 7). We are grateful to all the teachers and friends for their support.

Our challenge at indigenous education developed beyond our surroundings. Our close friend and famous filmmaker, Yapu Pilin, is also Tayal and a school teacher, has always shared his awareness of the issue with us. He continued his efforts to make indigenous education a reality in public schools. Fortunately, in 2017 our experiences were finally adopted by Taichung P'uma Experimental School which was first officially recognized as an ethnic school, so our work on cultural revival was not in vain.



Photo 6 Picking ramie fibre; village ethnic education (1996, Lihang Studio)



Photo 7 Village early-childhood education, at S'uraw Folk Education School (2012, Lihang Studio)

Our Tayal kindergarten has successfully been extended to experimental primary schools, and we are continuing to develop special Tayal dyeing and weaving schools. Although many people in the tribe do not fully understand or support Yuma's ideals, the children and the elders (the most important links) are very enthusiastic. Yuma believes that as long as we produce concrete results, the support will come, stating: 'We need to lay down a strong foundation, not float unmoored, to build a solid house of ethnic education.'

We hope that on this strong foundation, we can develop steady, healthy education,

as well as prove to the authorities that villages really can act independently. Colonialism has diluted our culture, but our goal is to rebuild traditional systems and concepts hand in hand with modern scientific knowledge and skills. Our vision is of self-sufficient village life connecting traditional and modern spiritual values through the Tayal *gaga* (moral code).

V. Conclusion: The Ecosystem of Ramie

Reproducing traditional clothing calls forequires the whole process of growing ramie and producing the fibre. This experience taught us a great deal about ramie as a crop, and how to couple cultural renaissance with economic necessity, leading to a double success in which cultural and economic needs are satisfied. We developed a planting plan attuned to the ecological cycle of ramie, based on the traditional Tayal *gaga* concept of sharing. The core value of this is resource sharing and mutual assistance, founded on environmentally friendly methods and recycling, to create a new tribal village development model that merges sustainability, culture, and economy.

Tayal weaving culture inspired the ecologically friendly Ramie Circular System. This combines traditional concepts of nature and deep cultural knowledge with contemporary science and technology. The Tayal dyeing and weaving system begins with planting, and combines ramie, including its leaves, stems, sticks, and roots, with traditional knowledge and closeness to the land, and natural recycling, to reach the goal of self-sufficiency, as shown in Figure 1.

Efforts to bring new life to traditional clothing culture, as well as cultivating and spreading ramie have, over the past thirty years, produced results not only in the Tayal tribe, but have extended to other indigenous peoples, including the lowland Pingpu tribes. These efforts have reached the Trnan Tayal of Wulai in Taipei, the Takekan Tayal of Taoyuan, the Malikaowan Tayal of Hsinchu, the Beishi Tayal of Miaoli, the Nanshi Tayal of Taichung, the Slamaw Tayal of Lishan, the Skayaw Tayal of Taichung, the Saisiyat of Miaoli, the Nan'ao Tayal of Ilan, the Sediq of Nantou, the Kaxabu of Puli, the Tsou of Alishan, the Siraya of Tainan, the Kanakanavu of Kaohsiung, the Paiwan of Pingtung and Taitung, the Kavalan of Hualien, and the Truku (Taroko) of Hualien. All of these indigenous peoples have joined in seeking out cultural roots and reproducing traditional clothing, with many exhibitions to show for their work.

We firmly believe that the indigenous people of Taiwan have gradually changed their attitude towards their traditional culture and the ideas and practices of reproducing traditional clothing. Thirty years ago, indigenous people had an indifferent, 'wait and see' attitude, but now they see the light at the end of the tunnel and believe in what they must do to regenerate their own culture. Although the process and results are still in development, we believe that with the help of our ancestral spirits, the culture which best represents Taiwan in the future will be magnificent indigenous cultures.

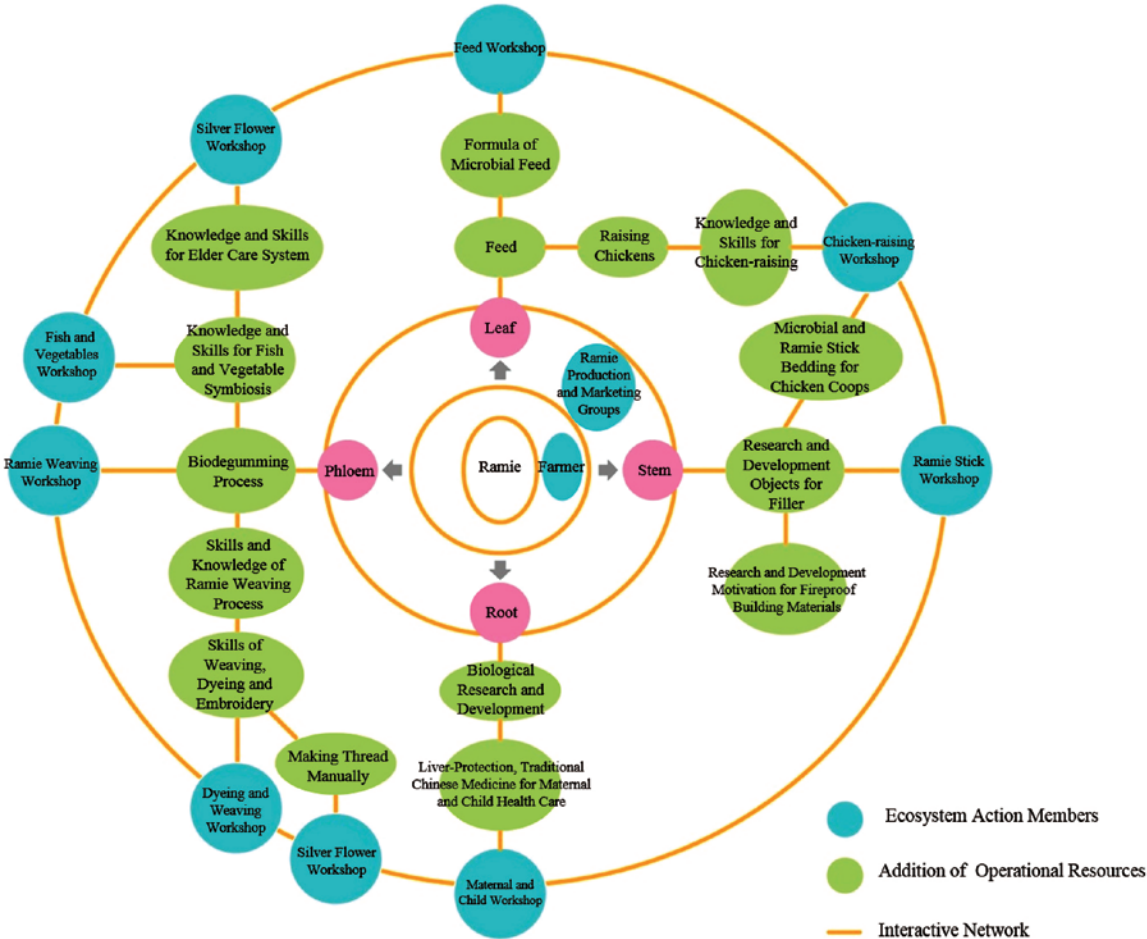


Figure 1 “Fireproof” instead of “Fire-proof” in ‘Research and Development Motivation...’ ‘Knowledge and Skills for Chicken-raising’.

Note

- 1) There is a legend in the Tayal tribe that when a person dies, his or her spirit crosses the rainbow.

References

Fang, Chun-wei (ed.)

2008 *Chongxian Taiya (Reappearance of Atayal)*. Taitung: National Museum of Prehistory.

Fang, Chun-wei and Yuma Taru (eds.)

2016 *Biru Na Tminum Atayal Daan xiliuyu taiyazu zhibu ji fa: chujieban (Weaving Wisdom of the Atayal People in Ta'an River Areas: Basic Level for Leading and Applying)*. Taitung: National Museum of Prehistory.

Rinji Taiwan Kyukan Chosakai

1915 *Banzoku kanshu chosa houkokusho daiichikan*. Taihoku: Rinji Taiwan kyukan chosakai.