

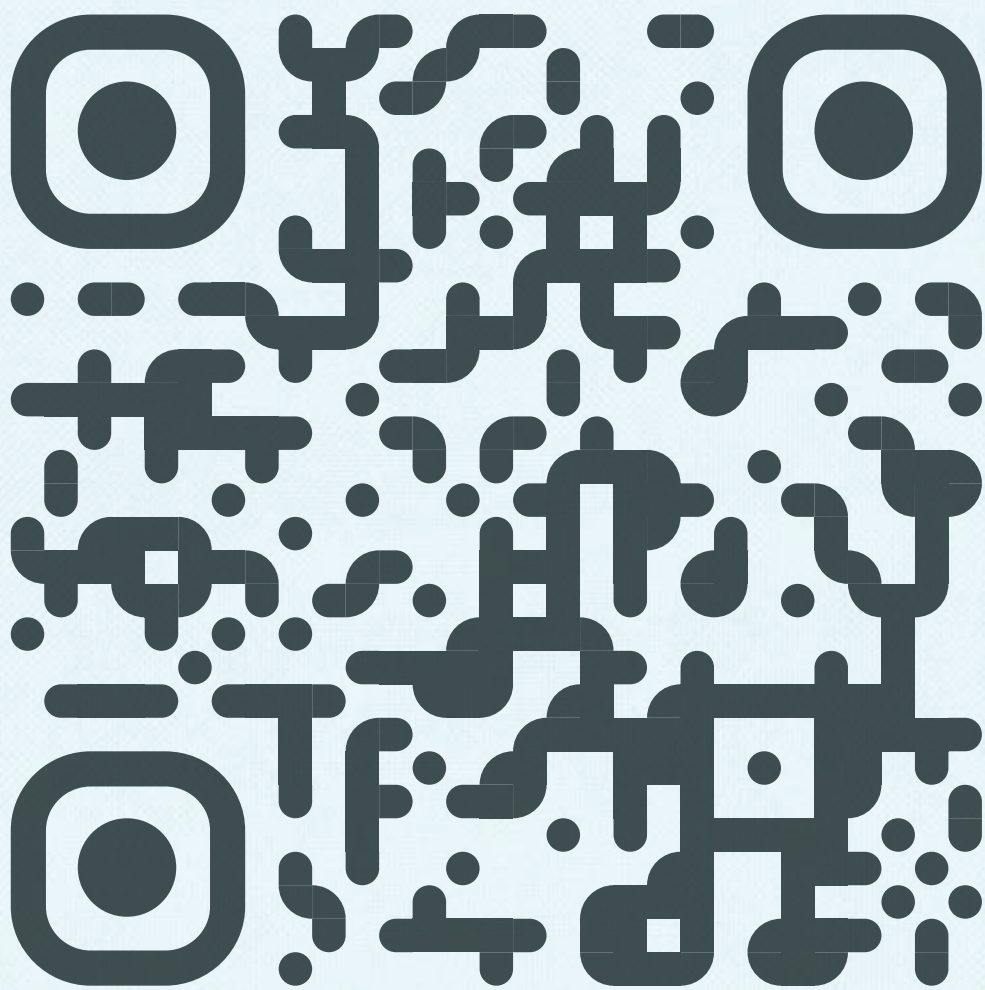


Passing the Baton

Finding the Feel of Your Own Body

taSilotor : komi:im  
ray basang ka  
hin'azem





**原視**  
INDIGENOUS  
SIGHT

IPCF  
雜誌

從原住民族的角度看世界  
圖文好看線上版

[inSight.ipcf.org.tw](http://inSight.ipcf.org.tw)

*rako a vatvatek : pangaktoktowan no mitarek a itetngehan*

# Initiating Comprehensive Conversations Between Peoples and Cultures

o mapiamoamowen so iweywawalam no tao am, kabledbedan ya vazay no tao siciakoa ya. ipatak o makdeng a iweywawalam do pikaililian no yancomin a macita da no malalavayo a tao am, o ya mivazay do 《原視界》 a toa am, da ciraraen o tao do ili a ya omononong do vazay, ipakatopos da no malalavayo a tao so macikekep jira kavakavavatanen do ili.

kakzeben o karo no tomita so 《原視界》 a vakong am, da nicirara o 賽夏族 a isocia mingarang si hewen a ta:in tawtawazay, nimangay do Kazingko do ili no Amis do 太巴壠, a macinanao a mitanatana, ipakacita so mitarek a ipipinapinan a iweywawalam no yancomin, da ipanci do jia o pangaktoktowan no mitarek a vazay no itetngehan. do ipipinapinan no yancomin am, makdeng o mitanatana a mamareng so vaanga aka no pepraranom, o ipitanatana no Amis aka no Tao do Pogonso am, raro o mitarek so pipeypangayan, o tao do Pongso am, pitareken o kakanan no mavakes aka no mahakay. do iweywawalan namen a tao do Pongso am, no mavitos rana o apiavehan am, apwen rana o ka pitanatana no mahakay; do iweywawalam no Amis am, mavakes o mitanatana, am ji miangay o pakapiaen no mavakes aka no mahakay, do kabledbedan no adan a ipipinapinan no Amis am, o mavakes am, kalovotan da inyapowan no mipinapinan a tao.

kakzeben o kapacinadnad da masinananao no malalavayo a ato am, ko ipanci jinyo a malalavayo mangakakteh am, masanib a maciamizing do rarakeh aka pacilovot do kaylian a macinanao do cicirawat no kakoa. Ipakatopos do pimasawdan no ineypa aka no pangaktoktowan a topos do kataotao, to macilolo o ka pipakatkat no panakenakeman a ikapia no onowned do araraw.

Traditional culture preservation is a constant challenge for every generation and community. To provide an additional channel for the next generation to learn about their original culture and history, the *Indigenous Sight* magazine team traveled throughout the island and collected life experiences and stories from community members so that the younger generation can have more exposure to the precious and beautiful indigenous cultures.

We took a new approach to expand the scope of this issue's feature. Young SaySiyat artist hewen a ta:in tawtawazay was invited to learn how to make Pangcah pottery at Tafalong Community. Pottery culture plays a significant role in many indigenous communities, and through the exciting interactions between SaySiyat and Pangcah artists, readers can appreciate the diverse aesthetics of the two peoples.

I find a lot of differences between the pottery cultures of the Tao and the Pangcah, the most significant one being the role of different genders. In Tao communities, the men begin making pottery in August, when the fly fish season ends and the northeast monsoon arrives; but for the Pangcah people, the potters are mostly women. This not only means different aesthetics in the pottery but also highlights a cultural feature of the Pangcah: women are the mothers of all creators.

When it comes to learning more about your own culture, I encourage young community members to look beyond the internet. There are so many ways we can interact with different cultures now. You can also physically go to your community and visit family or participate in community events. Immerse yourself in the life philosophy of the communities, and I'm sure the experience will change your mindset and lead to a better life.

Panirsirngen do yanbonkay  
Chairman of the Indigenous  
Peoples Cultural Foundation

瑪拉歐斯  
Maras



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# Finding the Feel of Your Own Body

taSilotor: komi:im ray basang ka hin'azem

We played sand pit in the children's playground,  
we played with clay in art classes at school,  
and built sandcastles on the beach,  
the fun we enjoy in "playing with soil"

is a traditional culture that  
the Pangcah is losing.

Thousands of years ago, the Pangcah  
made utensils with natural soil.

The utensils and ritual cups needed in every household


are all made in a period that occurs only once a year.

But with the introduction of convenient plastic  
products, clay was gradually phased out,

only a handful of the Pangcah is still holding  
onto the traditional skill of making pottery,

and the image of potteries has transformed into  
purposes of crafts and collectibles.



A photograph of a man with a white headband, smiling and sitting on a dark stone wall. He is wearing a dark green long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. To his left is a tall wooden post with a circular carving of a person with arms raised. The background is filled with large green banana leaves and bunches of green bananas. A ladder is leaning against a wall on the right.

Note: "taSilotor: komit:im ray basang ka hin'azem" means "passing the baton: searching for feelings of the body" in SaiSiyat language.

In this issue,

Indigenous Insight invited hewen a tain tawtawazay, a SaiSiyat youth,

to visit the Tafalong Community and learn the culture of Pangcah Pottery.

What kind of empathy will the disappearance of the Pangcah Pottery skills inspire,

when the SaiSiyat has no literature review related to potteries?

What will hewen gain out of this journey?

# Learn Pangcah Pottery Making with hewen a tai:n tawtawazay

hewen a tai:n  
tawtawazay

Born in Miaoli in 1993

MA in Interdisciplinary Art of Taipei  
National University of the Arts

Winner of Visual Arts Award,  
2020 Pulima Art Award

Dedicated to learning  
indigenous cultures



I am hewen a tain tawtawazay, SaySiyat from Miaoli. It took me two years (2018-2020) to recover my indigenous name. My mother is Hakka, and my father is from Kaehkaeh'oe'an Community in Nangzhuang, Miaoli. I relocated to Taipei to continue my education in high school, and am currently based in Taipei for work. I call myself a SaySiyat child recognized by the ancestral spirits halfway through the journey. Growing up unfamiliar with my own culture and without awareness of my identity, I only came to realize the fundamental questions, as asked by my friends, after leaving my hometown, who is the SaySiyat people? Where did my ancestors come from? Who am I? I then began developing my creative project lohizaw : Returning to the Migration Route of the SaySiyat, which starts with tracing the family history, going into Nangzhuang and Shitan in Miaoli to retrace the migration path taken by our ancestors, a journey of constant search for our contexts. Currently learning the SaySiyat language and weaving, and participating in indigenous cultural affairs.

I was extremely excited to be invited to learn in an Pangcah Community. For the longest time, my knowledge of indigenous issues or cultures came mainly from literature, exhibitions, performances, and conferences, rarely have I had the opportunity to dive deep into other indigenous communities. Since I am also learning about indigenous cultures, I am curious about how other indigenous peoples deal with similar topics. In the past, I have had access to the Lalaulan Community of the Paiwan people for my personal creative project and got to know the local youth and their youth association. The SaySiyat people have no class system, so the youth association system really got me thinking about the ways different indigenous peoples work, and further learning about the differences and similarities between the different ethnicity and cultural development. For me, it can further build up this cognition towards myself.

Pottery making just so happens to be a question I have been harboring regarding indigenous cultures. Lately, I have been focused on the relationship between the SaySiyat and archaeology and noticed that I have never heard elders mention that the SaySiyat people have pottery-making skills or of any artifacts or archaeological remains regarding ceramic wares. The SaySiyat mostly used plant-based vessels in the old days, such as bamboo cups, bamboo bowls, wooden bowls, or leaf wraps. Tools used in rituals were mostly bamboo products as well, including bamboo cups and bamboo skewers. Since the SaySiyat people blended with the non-indigenous people earlier in recent history, it was relatively easier for us to gain foreign ceramic and metal wares through trades, hence I know very little about SaySiyat pottery making. Plus, the term "pottery day" does not even exist in our language. Does it have to do with the fact that there is no soil suitable for pottery making in our surrounding environment? Or did we used to have pottery-making skills but lost them in time? These are the questions I harbor and hope to gradually find answers to in the future.

I very much look forward to this opportunity, not just to learn the Pangcah way of pottery making, but also the perfect opportunity to learn about the Pangcah culture, knowledge, and wisdom, and also to better acquaint myself with Guangfu in Hualien. I've only ever been here as a tourist, and understand this place very superficially. On the other hand, I am very curious about the wild vegetable knowledge of the Pangcah. In recent years, I have been going into the forests, slowly building up my knowledge of forestry. I look forward to taking a glimpse at the forestry culture and plant usage of the Pangcah, and even their value of life. Explore the development of the local youth and even gain insight into the development of indigenous communities and the problems they are facing, all of which are things I can learn from and reflect on. In short, I keep an open and anticipating mind to everything that is new to me.



# Pangcah Pottery, Starting from Tafalong

Afo' Olaw, 73-years-old  
Chief instructor at Mao'laway Studio

Inheritor of the Pangcah pottery-making culture



When Afo' was young, her ina ———→ “mother” in the Pangcah language who was very stern would always call on her to do all kinds of chores. In grade 2, she had to carry on her head a ceramic pot weighing quite a few kilos and walk a long way to get water from the spring, or help her ina pick out the weed and pebbles from the black clay to be used for pottery making. The only time children are not called on to help is when inas are making all kinds of potteries with the neighbor. Grown-ups might even shoo the children aside, getting them out of the way. But even if she was not part of the process, Afo' memorized the gestures and patting movements by heart simply by watching.

A few decades later, Afo' has become an ina with 3 children herself. The potteries that were used to carry water, steam red sticky rice, or drink wine from were long broken, slowly replaced by vessels of aluminum, plastic, and glass one after another. For a while, the orange-pink potteries became extinct in the indigenous community. When the September 21 earthquake struck in 1999, the disaster traumatized Afo' so much that she needed something to focus on instead. That was also when she met Hong Ming-De, who was teaching pottery making at the Tafalong Elementary School in Hualien County and creating ceramic arts. While learning pottery making from Mr. Hong, childhood recollections of watching ina making pottery came back to Afo', and those potteries and skills were precisely what is documented in literature as the long-extinct “Pangcah Pottery”.





"Pangcah Pottery", namely potteries made by the Pangcah, can be categorized as vessels for "daily" use and "ritual" use. The former includes water jugs, rice pots, ceramic yans, and wine bottles, each with its specific function; the latter refers to the cup used to pay tribute to the spirits and ancestors in rituals. Makers of Pangcah pottery are mainly women. They only make potteries once a year for the duration of one week, sometime between the time the seedlings for the second crop season have been planted and before the rice is to be harvested. The entire process includes collecting the soil, filtering out the impurities, processing the clay, shaping and making, and firing. Since it is very time and labor-consuming, women tend to make use of the time between farming to make the various vessels required at home, mainly for their own use, and only exchange with other indigenous communities when there are extra.

With aluminum vessels gaining popularity, the Tafalong Community has not produced any potteries since the 1960s, and the Pangcah pottery was almost buried in history. Fortunately, Afo' was there to witness the last generation of pottery making as a child, and with her childhood recollections as well as learning from the Fakong Community, not only did she retrace all the steps of ancient pottery making, but she set up the

Mao'laway, "ancient" in the Pangcah language



Mao'laway Studio, aiming to pass on the skills of Pangcah pottery.



Today Payrang

Child of Afo'



Kimsoy Lo'oh

Husband of Afo'

Expert in rattan gathering

The only younger person pottery-making skills in the Tafalong

A baker, excels at connecting pottery making with baking



# Unlocking the Pangcah Pottery

## Step by Step



## Collecting the Soil

Accompanied by the **owner of the brick kiln\***, the group sets off to the mine in Sado Community to collect the soil. The site is an indented pit, “the pit is indented due to the decades of soil collected by the brick kiln to make bricks, which also means that the soil we now collect is closer to the surface of the earth, making it stickier and purer,” says Afo’.

\*The site they are collecting the soil from belongs to the brick kiln, and the owner allows Afo’ to collect the soil that she needs to make potteries. Each time she collects the soil, Afo’s invited the owner to be present.

Prior to collecting the soil, we must first pray. Afo’ prepares two cups of rice wine, 3 pieces of betel nuts, and 3 cigarettes, and in the Pangcah language, she explains to the spirits of the sky, the earth, the mountain, and ancestors why we have come here, and that in so doing we mean to pass on the wisdom of ancestors, please do us no harm. After she finishes praying, Afo’ dabs at the rice wine with her finger and flicks it in three directions. She then lights the cigarettes, fixes them onto the grass blades, and waits for a little while before pouring the rice wine into the soil.

Only after the entire praying process is completed do we start shoveling to collect the soil, and even then, we only take the estimated amount necessary to make the potteries. Having bagged the soil, on our way back, Afo’ gives us each a pebble and reminds us to recite our name after we have exited the mountain, say “we are going home” and throw away the pebble. “This way, spirits in the mountains will not follow us home,” adds Afo’.

The previous generation collected soil from the Atomo Community, from collecting, drying, and sifting the soil to finally burning the pottery, every step was completed on the plot next to Afo’s house. They later switched to Sado because the soil there is even better for pottery making, and that is where the brick kiln extracts the soil they use.

## Filtering Out the Impurities and Sifting

After the soil collected is dried out, clumps will form, the dried soil must be laid out on a flat surface and hammered into tiny pieces. Before there were hammers, they used river rocks to smash the clumps, therefore every household had rocks stored specifically to smash the soil clumps with!



Once the soil clumps have been smashed, the impurities within the soil are revealed, which are usually foreign matters including grassroots, fallen leaves, and shells. Filtering out the impurities can be easy but extremely time-consuming. If the foreign matters are not filtered out at this stage, when the shaped clay expands during the heating process, the foreign matter will cause the piece to crack and sometimes even jeopardize the other pieces. So, this must be handled with care. In the old days, the elders would sit together and go through the soil together, and whatever they cannot finish on that day, they will pick up the next day. After the impurities are filtered out and all that is left is just soil, a **sieve\*** is used to make sure the soil is clean, leaving only the finest sandy soil.

Filtering out the impurities was the only process elders allow children to take part in. Afo' recalls helping as a child. But once the impurities are filtered out and grownups have begun processing and shaping the clay, the children are shooed aside.

\*The sieves used to be bamboo woven.



However careful you sift, something will always fall through the cracks, therefore the elders would make two items of the same vessel just in case one cracks. After all, if the pottery fails, one will have to handle a whole year without a stock pot and that would be a problem.

## Processing the Soil

After the soil is sifted, it is processed. Make a hole in the middle of the soil mound and pour in water. The water must be added slowly, too much moisture will not do. It is entirely up to experience how much water to add, and you decide by feeling the soil with your hand. The soil and water are mixed and slowly kneaded into a ball of clay. After the clay ball is somewhat firm, the clay ball is pounded with a beer bottle or tossed up and down with the hands to make it smooth and firm.



In the beginning, small pieces of clay dirt will stick to the palms, but as you process the clay, the bits will gradually form a clump. When the pores in the clay ball become finer and finer, and the ball no longer feels sticky, or when a slight touch at the clay ball can smooth out the crinkles on the surface, it means the clay is well processed and ready to be used as potting clay. To make larger pieces, river sand can be added to increase stability and prevent the pottery from violent contractions, making the pottery more firing tolerant.



If the potting clay is not to be used immediately, it can **be stored in a zipper bag\*** to keep it moisturized. Today explains that it's like culturing the clay, clay balls that have sat for a while are much easier to handle. He usually keeps some for spare as well.

**\*Traditionally they would wrap them in banana leaves.**

## Practice Moulding

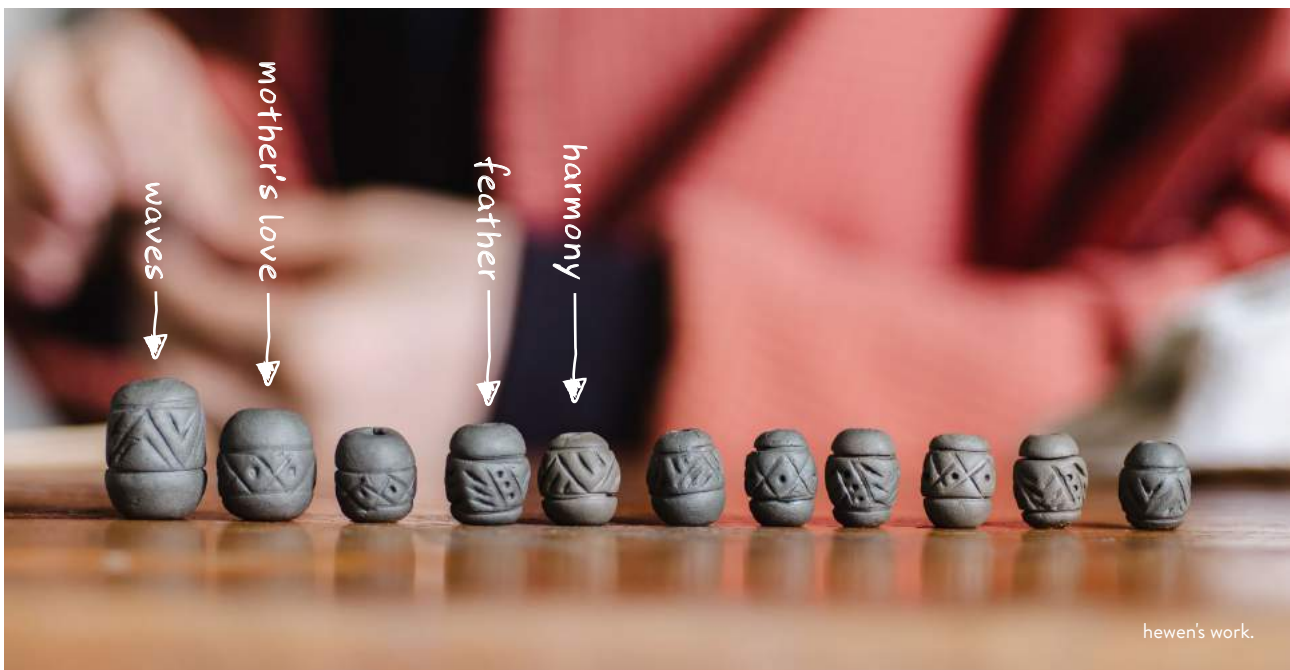
First time shaping, Afo' had hewen start from small, a "ceramic bead". The practice ceramic bead is about the size of a phalange. It can be shaped into a spindle, a sphere, or a stripe, or wrapped around the stem of a leaf to make a curvy bead with the arc of the stem, just as she prefers. These ceramic beads can be made into accessories such as necklaces and bracelets.



Take an appropriate amount of clay from the ball and knead it with both palms to make the desired shape before carving onto the bead a pattern with a tool. Using tools such as straw, ball pen, bamboo skewer, and blade, Afo' also taught her a few traditional Pangcah *patterns* which stand for waves, mother's love, feather, and harmony, so that hewen can carve onto her own ceramic beads.



Afo' demonstrates.



hewen's work.

# What does a SaySiyat Think

## What is it that made you decide you want to come home and learn about your culture?



It was in 2014, my junior year in university. I returned to my indigenous community to take part in the paSta'ay, and that was a real wake-up call. The song and dance began at 6 o'clock that day, and I was sitting in the tourist area next to the ritual site. I carried with me the traditional indigenous clothes my grandmother gave me, but I couldn't bring myself to put them on. I knew that I must wear traditional indigenous clothes when I dance, but I don't even know how to dance. I could only sit with the tourists and watch everyone else dance because I don't think I'm good enough for the clothes. I asked myself then, "can I really be a SaySiyat?"

After the paSta'ay that year, I would sometimes spend weekends in my indigenous community doing field research for no specific purposes. But the turning point to my returning to the community to learn about my culture was in 2017 when my father passed away, and within 100 days, my grandmother passed away as well. Right there and then, I wanted to recover my own indigenous name but there was no one left in the family that I could ask. I went to talk to my relatives, but no one from my father's generation understood the family history, so I had to visit the elders in our community one by one in search of the migration history of our family. My late father actually discussed with me that he wanted to return to the indigenous community upon his retirement, but in the end, it was all too late. As an afterthought, I felt that my father's decease was so that I could finish his journey for him.

## What past memories or experiences have you had regarding making pottery?



My past pottery-making experience was the pottery course taken at the university, where we touched on the basics of processing the soil and shaping the clay. Coincidentally, prior to receiving this invitation, members of our community found clay near Xiangtian Lake and the elders began to wonder, "why does the SaySiyat not make pottery?" So before coming to Hualien, I interviewed elders in my indigenous community regarding pottery making, and one 80-year-old elder recalled seeing his/her grandmother making pottery. But such information was provided by one elder only, we cannot be sure if that was an isolated example. However, there are words related to pottery in the SaySiyat language, for example, lese is clay, towih is a clay pot with a narrow opening for winemaking, and kako is a clay pot with a wide opening for pickling vegetables. Therefore, the elders presumed that we should once have had a pottery-making culture, otherwise where did these words come from? We just probably lost it along the way of migration or assimilation with the non-indigenous peoples.

## What do you think about your first contact with the Pangcah Pottery today?



The way I see it, there are two differences between the Pangcah Pottery and the SaySiyat, and one commonality. The difference lies in the sacrificial offerings. The Pangcah prepares three sets of offerings for a soil collection ritual, but the SaySiyat only prepares one set. For SaySiyat, the other world is in reverse, the less we give the more the ancestors receive, on the contrary, if we give more, they will find us stingy. The other difference is the soil consistency. Before today, I collected soil from Xiangtian Lake with

# about Pangcah Pottery?

our SaySiyat elders, but the soil from Xiangtian Lake oxidizes and changes color very easily, not so for the Pangcah soil.

The commonality I observed is how traditional cultures are like “tests put to us by the ancestors”, a trial of the heart. The sifting of soil prior to making pottery is like the preparation steps prior to weaving fabric, the complicated steps of collecting and scraping ramie, and twisting the thread, followed by sorting the warp, mounting, and weaving. One wrong step, which will not be noticed at the moment, will only be revealed at a much later stage when the pattern turns out wrong, and when we regret “why didn’t I sort the wrap better in the beginning?!” Such regret is much like that of remaining impurity causing the pottery to crack and burst.

## How do you feel about trying your hand at making ceramic objects for the first time today?



The teachers helped me with processing the soil so there was no problem, but when I have to do it alone in the future, I can see that I will have to pay attention to moisture control. During the shaping practice, Afo’ had me start with ceramic beads, first big and then gradually going smaller. I really felt it getting more difficult. I also made a ritual cup on the side. Even though there isn’t a term specifically for the ritual cup in the SaySiyat language, only wine cups for toasting, nowadays, when I do anything related to the SaySiyat culture, I have the habit of pouring wine for our ancestors as well, which is why I wanted to make a cup.

## Does the SaySiyat have cultures that have once disappeared but are now being revitalized, like the Pangcah Pottery?



We have “tallolong”, the River Cleansing Ritual, during which our people refrain from fishing and hunting around March to April, a movement very similar to environmental restoration. This ritual has not been practiced for thirty years, and this is the third year of its revitalization. The ritual begins with a “river-side meeting”, in which elders would gather to discuss public affairs. After the meeting, a blessing ritual will be performed for the river and the earth to give the fishes a better living environment. Afterward, everybody would dine together. The entire ritual lasts roughly half a day. However, strictly speaking, the River Cleansing Ritual was more than just an event in the old days. Back then, people understood that this was a period when we allow the environment to reproduce and thrive. But for now, we start by working to retrace the essence of our culture.







# Shape Up that Clay Pot

After the shaping practice yesterday, Afo' lets hewen work on a bigger sized Atomo\* today, which is a commonly seen everyday life pottery. All that is required as tools are a wheel, a tray, and a wire brush.

\*Clay pot used specifically to hold water.

Take an appropriate amount of clay, and toss the clay ball up and down to force out the air. Next, we begin shaping the clay. The clay ball is placed on the wheel, the right thumb pressed into the center of the clay ball with four other right fingers supporting the exterior, while the left hand slowly turns the wheel. This action aims to create a dent in the middle of the clay ball, forming the clay body.

Check your nails beforehand, or the long nails will leave marks on the body.

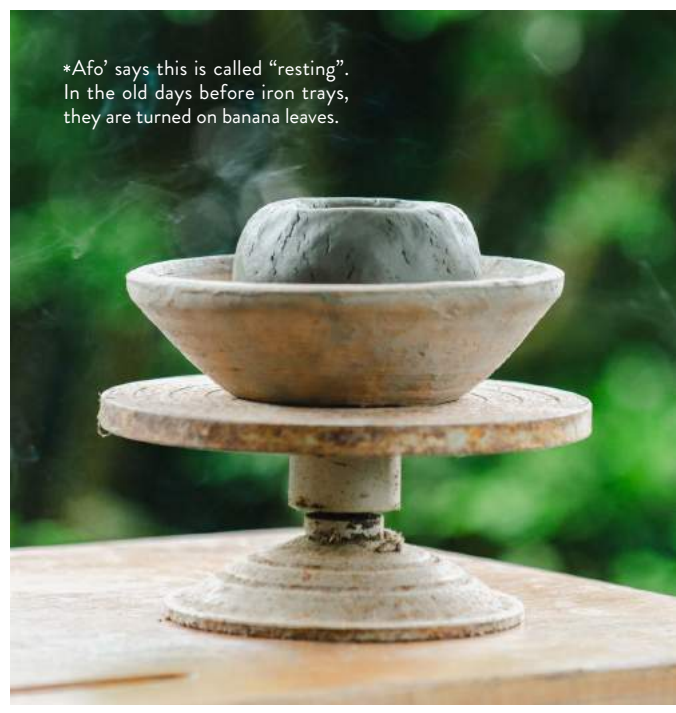




Now comes the key part of throwing, using the fingers to shape the wall in equal thickness. The width of the bottom opening is shaped first, followed by the wall. What makes this action difficult is that you can only feel the thickness with your fingers and eyes, you cannot measure it with tools. If there is a difference in the thickness, the thicker area will dry slower and can easily crack after firing. To prevent unequal thickness, what Afo' does is when she has shaped the clay to an extent, she places the clay body **on the tray to sit for a while\***.

The tray used by Afo' is a ceramic tray made with soil from Tafalong, which can absorb water. The clay body will sit there for a while, allowing the tray to absorb the moisture from the body and wait for the shape to finalize, then she observes where the thickness may be unequal. This process can be repeated several times.

\*Afo' says this is called "resting". In the old days before iron trays, they are turned on banana leaves.





Confirm the clay wall is of consistent thickness, then the left hand is pressed against the inside of the pot while the right taps the exterior wall with a wooden slab, firming up the pottery with the tapping (or you can hold a stone against the inside of the pot for support). The final trimming comes in two parts, the first is dipping the finger pulp in slurry and smoothing out all the crinkles. The second is brushing the cylindrical opening with a wire brush, adding on a layer of clay strip, then tapping repeatedly with the wooden slab to finalize the shape.



Another way of shaping is the coil method. First shape the base, then add the coil layer by layer. This method allows for the pottery to go higher with more variations in curvature.



Once the shaping is complete, utensils such as a wooden pen, scraper, or wooden knife are used to carve the intended pattern. The commonly seen patterns include mother's love, the universe, waves, harmony, feather, and the sun. To draw a continuous straight line, you can keep one hand on the wooden pen that is drawing the line, and the other turns the wheel.





Once the carving is done, we wait for the pottery to dry to a certain level before sending it off to the kiln for firing. “If the pottery feels cold to the touch, it means it hasn’t dried out yet,” Foday touches the pottery to his face while saying, “you can feel whether the pottery is dry or wet, just like you can feel whether the pillow under the sun is dry enough to put away.” If the moisture content is too high in the pottery, it will crack and burst during firing.

## A Duel Between High Temperature and Clay

The studio fires the pottery in an electric kiln. Once the pieces are in place, they start adjusting the temperature. Foday sets the electric kiln to reach 100 degrees in the first hour so that excess moisture can evaporate, then reach a maximum of 1,050 degrees in the next 9 hours, a temperature he believes will give the pottery the best coloring. Once the maximum temperature is reached, the electric kiln needs to sit for 48 hours for the temperature to cool before the kiln can be opened.

There is no fixed temperature setting to the electric kiln, the weather that day and the desired coloration determine the minor adjustments. Generally speaking, firing on a rainy day leads to a glossier color, while the higher the firing temperature, the darker the pottery color.

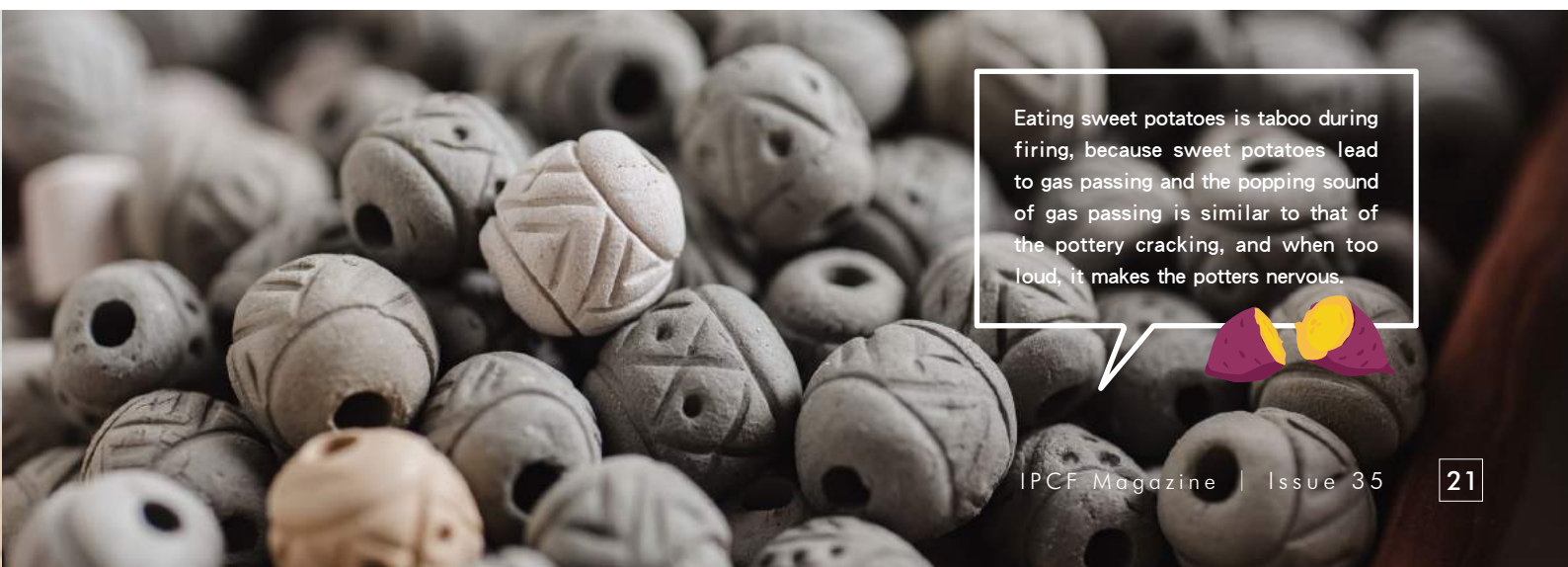


Setting temperature.

Traditionally, pottery firing is done via smoldering in a grass pile. Prior to firing, we pray to the spirits of the sky, earth, mountain, and ancestors, just as we did for the soil collection, and pray that the firing goes well. After praying, we set up the firing site. In the past, it is generally a blank space next to the field. First, you dig a pit, then you lay down layer by layer rice straw, rice hull, and pottery pieces, and on top, you lay down rice hull, Arrow Bamboo, rice straw, and timber, then start the smoldering for three days and two nights with the fire tended to at all times. With ash created throughout the firing process, it lands on the pottery leaving black smoked traces.



hewen carving her name on the bottom of the clay cup she made.



Eating sweet potatoes is taboo during firing, because sweet potatoes lead to gas passing and the popping sound of gas passing is similar to that of the pottery cracking, and when too loud, it makes the potters nervous.



# Breaking the Ice with Pottery, Narrowing the Gap Between Different Ethnicities and Cultures

**What observations have you made making different potteries in the last two days?**



The main difference is I learned to use my hand to make a concave body today. Yesterday, I made the ritual cup by first rolling out a sheet of clay and a base, and gradually shaping the cup with the combination. But today, I started with a clay ball and slowly dug the indentation so that the pottery is firmer in shape. This method using the hands may seem easy, but control of the “moisture” and “temperature” is very important. I panicked a little during the process because the clay keeps cracking, and I think that it is due to a lack of moisture. The other thing is the temperature, with constant contact with the air, the surface becomes dry while the interior is still wet, so the exterior cracks very frequently. To make sure the speed of drying is consistent inside and out, you have to hold the piece in your palm and use the temperature of your hands to evaporate the moisture within. And lastly, it’s the concept of “resting”. Shaping clay is not something that can be completed with a snap of fingers, it takes proper resting for the bottom to become firm. With a steady foundation, the pottery is thus able to stand shaping upwards.

**Is gathering with Afo’ and her family for a drink and chat tonight a scenario common to your own indigenous community as well?**



Yes, like when I interview elders in the community, I always bring wine, it’s a like simple ritual to ask elders to share their wisdom with me. I often bring the rice wine that costs NTD 45. We drink every time I return to my community, I think. When there is wine, there is a lot to talk about, and we like to call it a “post-meeting”.

**How has this trip influenced you regarding searching for the pottery-making culture in your community?**



I may share with elders in my community my experiences here, then discuss possible future actions with some friends. I may have learned pottery-making methods this time, but SaySiyat pottery-making seems non-existent so far despite having heard of anecdotes from elders and the fact that we do have relevant terms in our language. So this feels to me like a tradition, yet also something brand new. When I go home and face cultural affairs as such, I have to be very careful. This is a road I have recovered with much effort, I only have this one community. It is also my responsibility to my indigenous community.

## There were lots of talks shared just between you and Afo' while making potteries, anything you would like to share with our readers?



Afo' gave me some tips about romantic relationships. For example, when you choose a man as a husband and become a wife yourself, there are certain grounds we need to stand firm on. Afo' shared with me her experience, "you have to find your own faith." This is faith in a broad sense, which can include religion, ancestors, or believing in the person you talk to or the things you want to do.

## Are you excited about the wild vegetable gathering tomorrow?



Very much so. I have very little knowledge of wild vegetables, and I would like to know how the Pangcah, being the people of wild vegetables, observes plants. Unlike the Pangcah, able to recognize all kinds of plants, the SaySiyat eat just a few, for example, a kind of fern called baehko', the *Diplazium Viridissimum*. We usually put it in the soup or blanch it and make a salad. It tastes just like the Vegetable Fern, but tougher in terms of fiber. We also have plenty of Yellow Rotang Palm in our mountains. I have heard my Atayal friends say that it is edible, but I don't know how to eat it. My only impression of this rattan is the pain because I have been pricked by it before, haha.



### Afo' & Today Facing Difficulty in Passing On the Pangcah Pottery

Established in 2002, the studio aims to pass on the Pangcah Pottery to future generations. However, over the years, Afo' has met only one student who really wanted to learn, but that student was unable to spend much time making pottery because of young children at home. Most of the younger generation in the community just to try their hands at it, that's all.

Art Taking Root in Hualien is a project the studio is working on, commissioned by the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Hualien. The project aims to promote Pangcah Pottery to people outside the indigenous community, with students coming from all over Taiwan and some even flying in from Penghu to learn. Starting next year, the studio plans to take the courses outside Hualien. The short-term goal is to introduce Pangcah Pottery to everyone and recover the traditional culture of firing by burning grass in the ground. The long-term goal is to have Tafalong Pottery-Making registered as an intangible cultural asset and continue sharing it with society.







# Open that Kiln!

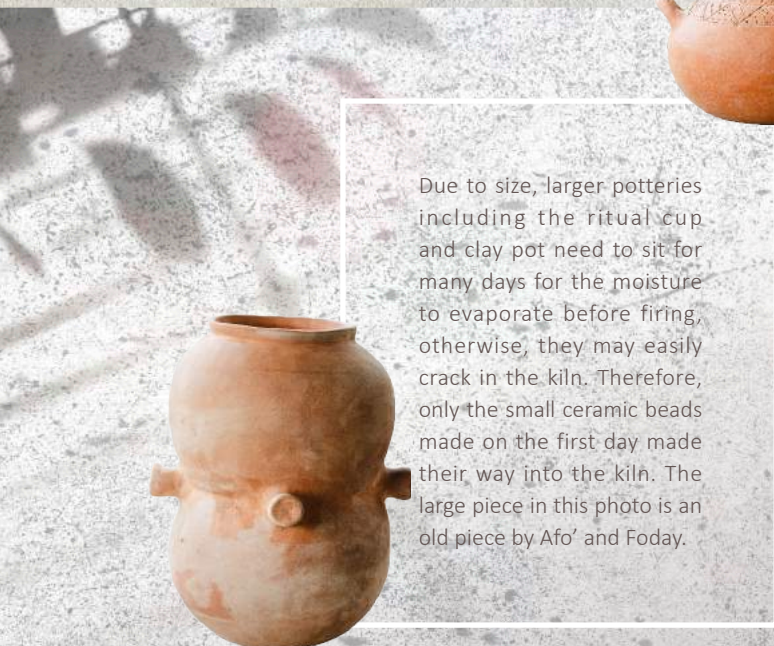
## Big Success.

### Now Wild Vegetable Gathering



On the third day, we can finally open that kiln! After cooling for almost 40 hours, the electric kiln is still rather hot, and you need gloves to not get burnt. The first things we see upon opening the kiln were the boxes of pink-orange ceramic beads. Removing the layers, we are pleasantly surprised. Despite being fired in the same kiln, each piece comes out a little different in coloring. Foday shares that for larger pieces, even different parts on the same piece would have different coloring, which cannot be controlled. Such is the surprise and joy of kiln firing.

Afo' also reminds us to remain happy when opening the kiln, thanking the ancestors in our hearts for blessing the pieces.



Due to size, larger potteries including the ritual cup and clay pot need to sit for many days for the moisture to evaporate before firing, otherwise, they may easily crack in the kiln. Therefore, only the small ceramic beads made on the first day made their way into the kiln. The large piece in this photo is an old piece by Afo' and Foday.





The whole troop arrives at the field of Afo' and Kimsoy, where various types of wild vegetables consumed by the Pangcah can be found. Even though their main purpose is to gather Yellow Rotang Palm, Afo' has already picked quite a bunch of wild vegetables along the way, including Black Nightshade which works wonders for a hangover as well as being a delicious side in instant noodles. "Elephant grass core can help quench the thirst in the mountains, it can also be sauteed or made into a cold dish," Afo' adds.



Black Nightshade



The look on hewen's face after eating the Elephant grass core.



Kimsoy cutting down the Yellow Rotang Palm.

A little further down, we see a whole row of Yellow Rotang Palm in front of us. Yellow Rotang Palm is a kind of wild vegetable the Pangcah male learns to gather at a young age. You can tell whether a boy knows how to use a knife when collecting Yellow Rotang Palm, and one can become a laughingstock if he doesn't know how to gather the palm. Yellow Rotang Palm is also an important food in rituals, a high-quality dish that is served to the elderly and wise.



Kimsoy demonstrating how to peel the Yellow Rotang Palm.

In the past, you go into the mountains to gather the palm, but with Afo' and Kimsoy aging, they bought planting stocks to plant in their field so they can pick some whenever they want them. Kimsoy reminds us that this Palm is barbed and very prickly and must take extra care when peeling. For hewen who is gathering Yellow Rotang Palm for the first time, this proved to be a rather difficult task.



The thorns must be removed before bringing the Yellow Rotang Palm home.

The *dongec* (the rattan's stem) must be processed immediately upon arriving home. The dongec can easily oxidize and turn dark with exposure to air, so with a pot of water ready, peel the palm skin by hand and cut the white dongec into pieces to soak. Afo' shares that the Yellow Rotang Palm is a delicacy for the Pangcah. When children see her peeling the dongec, they get very excited, "wow! It's going to be a feast tonight."



Kimsoy teaches hewen how to cut the dongec, it must be soaked in water immediately after.



Afo' takes out the **Koreng\*** and gets ready to steam some sticky rice. This Koreng is handmade by Afo' and comes in the two parts of top and bottom. There is a clay slab with holes in between, and a handle on the two sides so it can be picked up easily. On the outside, It is covered with patterns for the "waves" and "mother's love", symbolizing the love Afo' puts into preparing meals for her family.

The sticky rice is placed inside the Koreng and heated with a fast stove. In less than half an hour, 2 kilos of sticky rice is well-steamed. Good heat conduction is another feature of ceramic wares.

For lunch today, we have dongec and spare rib soup, salted pork, and sticky rice, food infused with the Pangcah culture. Even though the purpose of this trip is to learn to make Pangcah Pottery, to end with food that is lovingly prepared by Afo' and her family not only warmed our hearts but also really satisfied our appetites.



# Walking My Path, No

## How does it feel to open the kiln and see your own work?



The color is nothing like the soil! The soil we collected was dark grey, but after firing, it turned pink-orange, feels like switching from the cold color palette to the warm. When I held the burning hot pottery in my hand, I thought to myself, this took me two whole days. In this day and age when mass-produced pottery is a dime in the dozen, it cannot be easy for the pottery-making skills to be passed on in today's world. But I can relate to why the elders used to cherish what they had in the old days, these things just cannot be bought with money.

## How did you feel going wild vegetable gathering for the first time?



The first time that I heard the elephant grass core is a wild vegetable was when Afo' picked it from their field. As Afo' said, you get to experience how a cow feels chewing on hay. The Elephant grass core is very juicy and really quenches the thirst. Then it's the peeling of the palm, it really was hard! That was my first time peeling anything with a sickle, and I swung miss all the time, so embarrassing. The toughest part of all is that every dongec has different levels of maturity, and different levels of strength are required. The younger dongec is softer and comparatively easier to peel, but it still takes a lot of strength. I only peeled three and I was already sweating profusely. I can imagine just how strong Afo' and the others are. Returning to the studio to peel the dongec, revealing the white dongec inside, and then breaking them into pieces with the bare hands was actually a rather elegant process. The dongec is one that is fierce on the outside but soft on the inside. I will try gathering dongec when I return to my own indigenous community.

## What do you think making pottery means to the culture after the past three days?



Many of my friends think that there must be a reason why these things were forgotten in time, either because they are not convenient enough or that their existence is no longer required in the present age. But then why make pottery? Many people asks why not just use glass or plastic cups? I believe that the main difference lies in the patterns on the ritual cup and pot. The patterns carry the stories of the people. If we replaced it with a glass cup and lose the stories carried by the patterns, the spirits of the people will disappear as well. For example, we learned that harmony and mother's love are symbols of cultural essence, philosophy of life, and values. Pottery is valuable not just as a utensil but also in its inherent culture. Indigenous peoples had no written language, how did we record our stories? Most of the time via patterns, patterns that convey plenty of messages.

## What would you like to say to the three teachers?



Thank you for everything in the past three days. I made a small atomo this time, and at the end, ina said, "I hope Afo' is in there." To me, that could mean so many things. I wonder if that meant her soul is in there, or the skills she taught me are in there, or that I am in there. Ina performed the Pangcah process of naming for me yesterday, not an official one, but I was very blessed. I see it as an encouragement for my own beginning. I hope that I can share the wisdom I have received here with the elders and youth of the SaySiyat, and that when I discover something new or gain wisdom in my own indigenous community, I will come back and share it with them. I hope that this is a beginning with roads to lead to the future.

# Surrendering or Stopping

I watched the teacher shape her clay while I adjusted the small clay pot I held in my hands, and most of the time, the teacher would keep reminding me, "shape slowly and go lightly, not too fast, feel with your hands, feel the thickness of the clay." The clay pot or the piece of clay in my hand can only be experienced by my hands, feel its thickness, moisture, and stiffness, that's how we can handle it. During the process, we kept "smoothing over the wound", smoothing over the cracks on the clay pot. We were naturally nervous when we saw cracks, but the teacher simply said that cracks were inevitable, that clay can crack easily crack due to stretching and loss of moisture, "just smooth it over, don't worry about it." Her words are always a boost to the heart. Shaping clay may seem like a process of repeated smoothing, stretching, converging, and firming, and psychologically, it's like when we face difficulties in life, we should just face them and deal with them. When clay is firmly and solidly shaped, our minds have also reached a balance and completion. It is an extremely comforting process. I believe that Afo' finds great comfort in life while learning about traditional cultures or simply during the process of creating.

In this journey, I see different peoples facing the same issues. Be it the SaySiyat or the Pangcah, we are all facing problems of the youth leaving indigenous communities, unwilling to learn traditional skills, or even feeling indifferent about traditional cultures. I asked my teachers while making pottery, whether they are worried that the skills they finally recovered may again face a gap in inheritance, and they nodded gravely. When looking broadly at the issue of passing on indigenous cultures, we can't help but wonder where are the youth? Why will they not learn about their own traditional cultures? Is passing on cultures really dependent on outside resources? How necessary is cultural revitalization? These are the questions I asked myself on my way home. We face the same issues regardless of our ethnicity. I hope that by learning across ethnicities, I can observe how others solve problems and reflect accordingly.

My main takeaway this time is "sharing". In addition to learning how to make Pangcah Pottery, I have also gained better insight into the historical context and cultural knowledge behind such skills, via the oral history provided by the teachers. The teachers were very gracious in saying that I can "share what you have learned today with your people, try to apply it to the clay in your own community and we can learn from one another." Having been with them for the past three days, I saw their perseverance and patience for their culture and their tenacity and courage toward life. Filled with emotions and energy, I return home feeling grateful for this encounter, ma'alo'.







Passing the Baton >>

