



Plutut: Embrinah sapah dgiyaa

Passing the Baton

A Long Overdue
Homecoming in Mountains

o ili am ya mapikepkep jiaten aka no ineynapo ta no kokoa

Communities Attach Us to Our Ancestors, In the Same Way the Umbilical Cord Does

o ili am, neymakdeng a da pakacitan so iweywawalam no kanakan, o rako a karatayan am, ya mipakatkat so pangaktoktowan no tao, ipakatopos do pikepkepan no ineynapo aka no akakawan. ko pamanakem no kalialikay ko am, abo o zampo do vahay no kokoa, amizingen namen o rarakeh a miraraod, pangozayan namen o aep aka no araw do talitalilisan no tao, iciakmey na omiteng a ranom a omapno so teneteneng do kataotao.

tomacilolo o pipa karangan no teneng do talitalilisan no tao ya, ta no onongan o mina panisiboan no ineynapo no kakoa am, pangozayan o panga' a'apan aka no ipipinapan no kakoa do pimeymasaodan. mapinpin ori a, apia o kapadket sia do wanglo so makakaday a vazay, aka pacilovot da no malalavayo a tao a omonong do nikapowan da itetnge' an.

da nicirara no 《原視界》o 太魯閣 a malalavayo, a mingaran si Lowking Hana, nimangay do 內本鹿 a ili no Bonongco, macinanao do iweywawalam, aro o nimacita na do ili a cicirawat no ineynapo da no kakoa. ala makeykai rana o kapaciray da sia no yanbokay do tizibi so makman sia a vazay, inaway no macilovot sira o aro a isocia a mapatnek so nipareng da a apzapzatan, ipakacita da sia no aro a tao so teneteneng no yancomin.

Communities are pivotal venues where our Indigenous children form thorough understanding about our cultures. Surrounded by the environment endowed by nature, we learn, grow, and come to understand the close-knit relationship among ancestors, our land, and us. What impresses me most is life in the underground house without electricity, and listening to the old members chanting when I was little. At that time, our life was decided by night and day, and little by little, we developed our cultural literacy and identity.

As I have always believed, the body of knowledge of Indigenous peoples is determined by our “living space.” Therefore, it is the field trips of the abandoned indigenous settlements that enable Indigenous peoples to regain our life knowledge about fishing, hunting, and objects making. In addition to returning to the venues where our traditional life took place, we can establish comprehensive geographical and networking data by employing modern technologies. As a result, society’s general public will be inspired to visit and learn about the abandoned indigenous settlements. Through this we can foster a communal identity.

For this volume of Indigenous Sight, we have invited a young Rukai person, Lowking Hana, to Laipunuk to learn about the traditional Bunun life. Ancient indigenous communities can be compared to the umbilical cord that joins us with our ancestors and nurture an understanding of the precious life knowledge. The Indigenous Peoples Cultural Foundation plans to make a series of relevant programmes and encourage more artists to design artwork based on the abandoned indigenous settlements, in order to re-create the cultural heritage of each indigenous community.

Panirsirngen do yanbonkay
Chairman of the Indigenous
Peoples Cultural Foundation

瑪拉歐斯
Maras

INDIGENOUS SIGHT

Issue

37

Published by: Indigenous People Cultural Foundation

Publisher: Maroas

Chief Editor: Magaitan

Coordinator: Sun Lin-Fong, Sige Umay

Executive Editors: Lovenose, Bali

Art Coordinator: Bali

TEL: 02-2788-1600/0800-581-600

FAX: 02-2788-1500

E-mail: ipcfservice@mail.ipcf.org.tw

Editing & Production: Business Today Publisher

Journalist: Kuo Po-Jiun, Chiu Mu-Jung

Photo Credit: Lin Jing-Yi; Huang Jiang-Bing

Art Editors: Amanda Chang

Illustrator: Lin Jia-Dong

Translators: Ker Nai-Yu, Chen Deh-I, Lai Yu-Hsuan,

Lin Shi-Fen

Indigenous Language Translators: Vagyatan (Tao), Tsai

Li-Hsiu (Thao), Miming Karaw (Truku)

Address: 8F, No.96, Sec. 1, Nanjing E. Rd.,

Zhongshan Dist., Taipei City

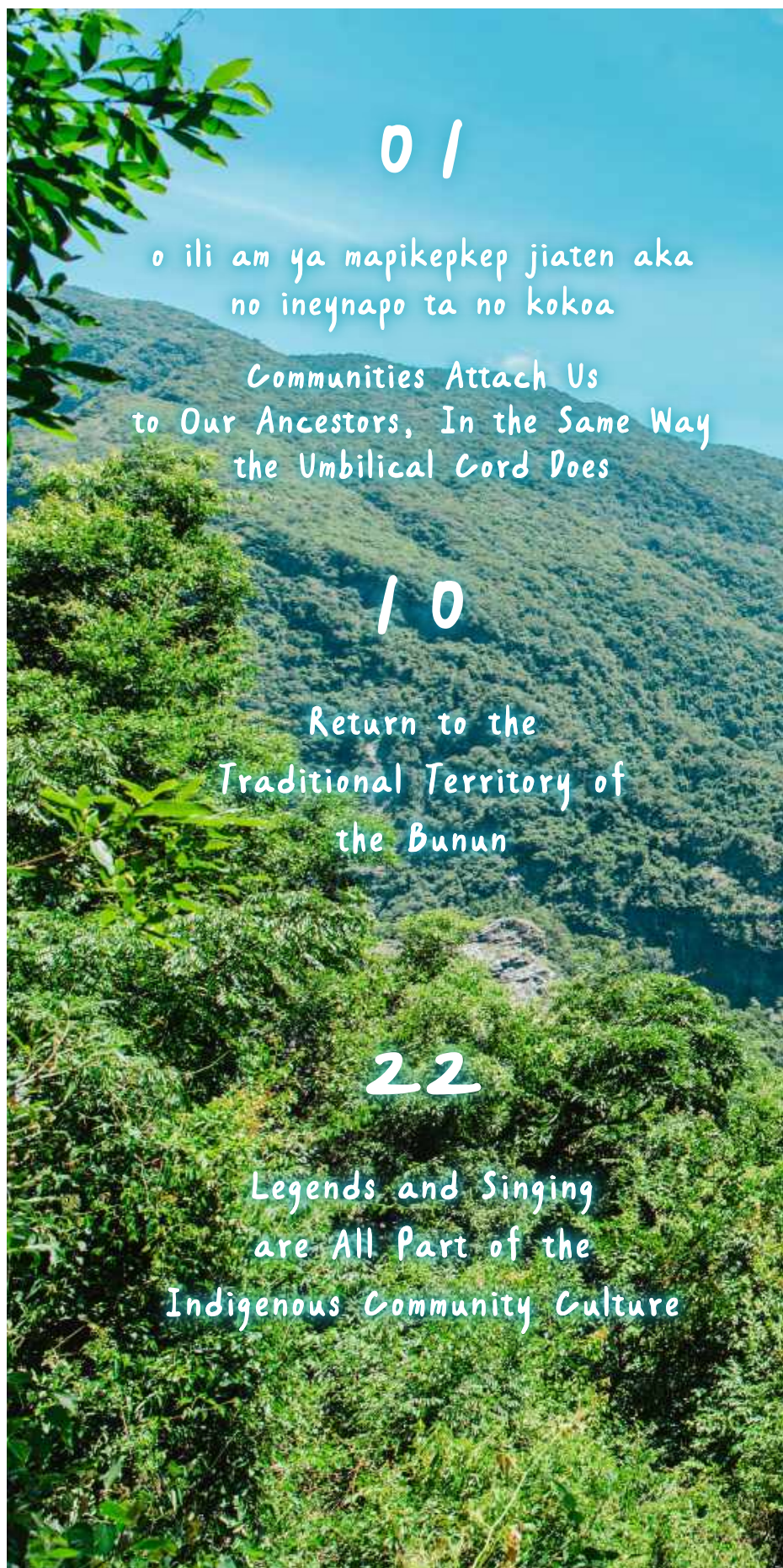
Tel: 02-2581-6196 ext. 336 Fax: 02-2531-6433

All rights reserved, reproductions of this publication will be prosecuted. Do not repost without written consent from the publisher.

All content in the publication does not represent the view of the Foundation. License Code : Chunghwa Post Taipei Magazine No. 2064

(mail category: "Magazine") ISSN : 2313-111X

Looking at the world from an indigenous perspective.
Online version: insight.ipcf.org.tw



01

o ili am ya mapikepkep jiaten aka
no ineypa ta no kokoa

Communities Attach Us
to Our Ancestors, In the Same Way
the Umbilical Cord Does

10

Return to the
Traditional Territory of
the Bunun

22

Legends and Singing
are All Part of the
Indigenous Community Culture

06

Lowking's Min
at Laipunuk

08

Back to Laipunuk,
Surrounded by
Mountain Peppers

14

Self-Projection and
Slowly Build Up
the Indigenous Knowledge

18

Learning about
the Bunun from
Forestry Plants

26

Life in the
Bunun Stone Slab
Family House

30

Take the First Step to
Become a Better Me

Passing the Boton >>



A Long Overdue Homecoming in Mountains

Laipunuk is the southmost stop of the migration of the Bunun people, and the final blank space on the map of Taiwan during Japanese colonization. After much bloodshed and confrontations, the Bunun people were forced to relocate on a large scale to flat land. Although the mountain remained in place all this time, they never got to return home.

In 2001, the younger generation of Bunun youth returned to the old settlement in the mountain to rebuild the culture and memory of the Bunun. This month, Indigenous Insight invited Truku singer-songwriter Lowking Hana to return to the Bunun traditional territory with them, learn of the legacy wisdom of Bunun ancestors, and exchange and pass on the meaning of searching for one's roots.

Plutut: Embrinah sapah dgiyaq





Note: "Plutut: Embrinah sapah dgiyaq" means "Passing the Baton: Returning to the Homelands in the Mountains" in Truku language.



Lowking's Min at Laipunuk

Min, "becoming" in the Bunun language, meaning "the processing of becoming".

Accidentally joined the Ngasal Maku in university, an indigenous student club, and was exposed to various indigenous cultures in abundance. The first thing I learned was the "age class" of the Amis people. I once heard an Amis friend say, "people in the same age class are like real brothers." I felt then that the Amis know what solidarity means, whereas the Truku is all about the family, in the case of a difference in opinion, we listen to our elder ones in the family. I then learned the Amis songs and dances, and found that they often dance holding hands with each other, which is very different from the Truku dance, we tend to mimic the animal movements more, which probably has to do with the fact that we lived in the mountains. Observing the features of different indigenous people from their dance moves, I noticed that the Amis are more about the entire community whereas we Truku are more about the family or individuals, and we're probably more attracted to heroism (LOL).

Later, I learned about the Paiwan culture, and the nobility structure that was specific to them was surprising to me. It is hard for me to imagine that it is a status you are born into and that difference in one's status can directly make an impact on one's clothing. One of my impressions of the Paiwan is its "extravagance". Despite being mainly black, the glazed beads on the traditional clothing and feather dressing on the head are all very extravagant, and the women's heels are as high as they can be. The Paiwan is without a doubt a romantic people with countless weddings and even the tradition of carrying the wood of love is preserved.

When it comes to introducing the features of the Truku people, the first thing that comes to my mind is "swift and fierce". From the literature review, we sense the fierceness of our people, take the well-known historic events such as the Wushe Incident and the heroic Truku War, for example, you see us both fierce and gentle. Pgagu, the head-hunting flute, is a traditional music instrument and a ritual item of the Truku. After the head of the enemy is brought home and hung outside the family house, the Truku hunter will play a song on the head-hunting flute to mourn the dead and show his gratitude: we were once enemies, but you have honored my family, so now please rest in peace here. Such romanticism is incomprehensible to the contemporary world, but I am so often deeply attracted. Indigenous peoples hold nature in gratitude and awe, hence the rules to follow when entering the mountains, rituals to pray for safety, and taboos to avoid. For example, our elders used to rely on Psisil, bird fortune-telling, before going into the mountains, and I wonder if the Bunun people have similar customs.

I am both nervous and excited about this journey because I don't have much experience of being in the mountains, but I can hike, no problem there. It is a rare opportunity to spend time in the mountains with the elder ones, I consider myself lucky and feel very grateful that the elders are willing to share their life experiences with us. The Truku and Bunun people are both mountain peoples. This trip will, for one, make up for my lack of experience being in the mountains, as well as allowing me to see if the Bunun see the mountains in a different way compared to us. But whatever the case, it will no doubt be challenging for me to adapt to life in the mountain as someone from the city.





Lowking Hana

Truku from Chongde in Hualien

Nominated as Best Indigenous Singer
for 32nd Golden Melody Award

All sunshine and optimism

Emerging Indigenous R & B Singer



Go GO!



Back to Laipunuk, Surrounded by Mountain Peppers

In 2002, a helicopter carrying 15 elder ones landed in Laipunuk in Yanping Township, Taitung, on a patch in the woods previously cleared by youths in the indigenous community. The flight only took 10 minutes, but the elder ones have been waiting for over 60 years.

Laipunuk is the traditional territory of the Bunun people. With its location deep in the mountains and the Bunun people so swift and fierce, it was “the remaining blank space on the colonial map of the foreign regime”. In 1941, protests against the group relocation policy of the Japanese colonial government led to the “Laipunuk Incident”. After much bloodshed, the Japanese government burned down their stone slab houses and millet fields before relocating all of them down the mountain. The blank space on the map was thus filled, but the rising black smoke has also since blocked their way home.

With indigenous movements emerging internationally in recent years, the history of the “Laipunuk Incident” was reconstructed in 2000, and two years later on Human Rights Day, the elder ones finally returned to their homes in the mountain. The year 2002 was also known as “the first year of Laipunuk”. Watching the elders cry as they sang “Kimigayo”, the national anthem of Japan, the younger generation that initiated the “Return Home Program” decided to continue this journey back home, and revisit the mountains each year to rebuild their family houses, clear up the trails, and investigate the old community.

In 2019, the Taitung Forest District Office of the Forestry Bureau worked with Laipunuk Workshop to convert the Cycas Work Station along the old trail into a learning base, and named it Itu Mamahav tu Laipunuk*. The mission of the base is “min Bunun”, and has since developed 10 courses including the use of plants, hunting, setting traps, and dissection. Bringing their people back to the mountains is just the first step, Mamahav hopes to cultivate more indigenous youth to pass on the traditional wisdom and knowledge of the Bunun, through generations of practices.

History/Civics teacher
in middle and
elementary schools

Katu (Sinsin Takishusungan)

Dahu Takishusungan

The all-mighty
handyman

Storyteller of
Laipunuk history

Hexagonal warrior
of Laipunuk

* "The learning ground of Mamahav" in the Bunun language. Mamahav is the name of the old settlement, which is "mountain pepper" in the Bunun language, the namesake of the abundant mountain peppers growing around the settlement.

Langus/ Man-Yi

The weaving guru
of Laipunuk

Kau Tansikian

A ballad singer
who never remembers
the lines

Cara

Return to the Traditional Territory

Most people think of those who live deep in the mountains and sing Pasibutbut when they think of the Bunun people, but the Bunun didn't start as mountain people, they actually originated from Lamungan, downstream of Zhuoshui River (currently where the Nantou Service Station sits). Legend has it that a great flood forced Bunun ancestors to migrate higher up the Central Mountain Range and the Yushan Mountain Range, thus dispersing the 5 main communities* in between the rivers along the mountain ranges. Later, due to growth in population, they continued to migrate toward the Laklak River basin in Dafeng, Hualien, east of the Central Mountain Range (and further onto Yuli and Cepo'), before turning south toward the three branches of the Beinan River in Taitung (XinwuLü River, Luliao River, Luye River). In mid 19th century, one of the migrating groups settled in Taoyuan District, Kaohsiung, and the group that migrated furthest south reached Laipunuk', mid-upper stream of Luye River, and that group was the family of dssitalam, the second eldest in the Istanda (surname Hu) clan of isbukun Community. Since then, the Bunun resided in Laipunuk' for almost half a century before things began to change when the Japanese arrived in Taiwan.

* Take todo (Todo Community), take bakha (Bakha Community), take vatan (Vatan Community), take banuad (Banuad Community), isbukun (Isbukun Community)

of the Bunun


Halfway into its colonization in Taiwan, with the majority of indigenous peoples already conquered and the demand for forestry resources from Taiwan increasing, it became ever more urgent for Japan to control the indigenous peoples yet to surrender. The Japanese colonial government placed security and high voltage electricity in the mountains surrounding the Bunun, and stationed police posts along the security path for surveillance and communication purposes. The Mamahav settlement we know nowadays was exactly where the Qingshui Police Post used to locate, at the entrance to the Laipunuk' area.

The standoff between the Bunun people and the Japanese government lasted over a decade. When the Wushe Incident broke out in 1930, the Japanese colonial government implemented the group relocation policy the following year and forced indigenous communities out of the mountains. That was when the Bunun people left the Laipunuk' area, where they have resided for generations. Moving from a higher altitude to a lower altitude

environment led to problems in adapting, and people became ill. One of the community members, Haisul, even lost two children due to this relocation. In 1941, Haisul decided to go headhunting and return to Laipunuk'. He attacked the various police posts along the security path by night and cut off bridges necessary for connection and communication to prevent pursuing forces, but eventually, he was lured out by his own people and got arrested. This was known as the "Laipunuk' Incident". After this, the Japanese colonial government demanded the mountains to be fully evacuated, burning down family houses, millet storage, and farmlands, and relocating everyone away from the mountains.

When the Japanese left in 1945, the mountains were controlled due to White Terror during the martial law period. Hence, despite the change in regime, the Bunun people still couldn't return home. In 2000, with indigenous movements on the rise, the history of indigenous peoples gradually gained attention, and Bunun tu Asang, the Bunun Cultural and Educational Foundation, reconstructed the history of the "Laipunuk' incident" via interviews. Two years later, they initiated the "Return Home Program", taking the elder ones home for the first time since 1942. "I never thought I'd ever return home again in my life," many elder ones who took part in the program shed tears.

Nowadays, Itu Mamahav tu Pasnanavan' is pushing for more programs to take place in the mountain, hoping to rebuild the relationship between man and the land, explore the connection between man and the indigenous peoples, and regain the ability to be man.



I always fall asleep during history classes at school, but today I'm completely taken in by the Bunun history.

The Ancient Trail is the Road Less Traveled

Having heard from Katu about the migration history of the Bunun over the century, and hiking along a part of the path leading back to the old settlement, we can really feel how each step represents the history of Taiwan as traveled by the ancestors.



Japanese Security Path x Taitung Cycas Nature Reserve

The ancient trail we are on now is the security path built during the Japanese colonial period. The reason the entrance to the mountain is fenced off is because of the most abundant and widely distributed wild Taitung cycas in the area. To protect these valuable and rare plants, a nature reserve is set up, and an application is required to enter.



Isolated Security Guard

Along the way, we see the remains of a family house. The owner of this house was a security guard during the Japanese colonial period and made a living working at the Qingshui Police Post, therefore no space was set aside for farmland around the family house. This family house has stone slabs stacked in a Herringbone pattern, rotating at a 45-degree angle vertically. It provides a stronger frictional force and better stability, whereas if stacked horizontally, the stone slabs would slip easily. The family house layout is a typical U-shape in reverse. There are no stone slabs with holes drilled found on the floor, therefore we assume that the door was built with a wooden frame and grass and the roof was stacked sogon grass, which explains why only the wall structure remained.



Squirrels like to hide seeds in between stone slabs and boars tend to smash against the stone slab walls in order to get to the seeds, which would cause the walls to protrude. But it could also be due to the outgrown roots.





The Historic Remains of the Laipunuk' Incident

To block the connecting path for the Japanese police, Haisul, the main person responsible for the Laipunuk' Incident, cut off the wire cable suspension bridge connecting the two mountains. The cement bridge piers stand to this day.

The Power Never Generated

Setting forth industrialization in Eastern Taiwan during its later colonial period, Japan selected two locations to build hydroelectricity plants (known as Project Qingshui), and one of which was Luye River. The narrowest point of the river bed is the most appropriate location to build a dam, and the officers built houses for engineers stationed there. However, as the Pacific War soon broke out afterward, all hydraulic engineering ceased, leaving only the remains of the cement foundation, the reservoir, and the flag pole base.



What is Your Clan?

The Bunun people are used to environments with steep slopes and relatively small patches of flat land, which provide smaller areas to live in. Therefore, the social structure of the Bunun is based on families and rarely do they come in large communities. Unlike other indigenous peoples that tend to mark their territory with the community as a unit, the Bunun is all about the clan.



We don't dance as much as the Amis people, because if we dance all over the place, we might fall off the cliff.

Self-Projection and Slowly Build Up

Share with us the process of you learning that you are indigenous, and how you felt during that period?



When I was preparing for my senior high school entrance exam, my mother asked if I wanted to take the indigenous language proficiency test. My first reaction was, “what? I can do that? Am I indigenous? How have I never heard you talk about this growing up?” Then I recalled the time I spent with my grandmother on my mother’s side, how she would speak to me in our language, but no one ever told me that it was the Truku language.

I later passed the exam, but even though I knew I was indigenous, life didn’t change much for me. The indigenous status didn’t make a difference to me. When I started university and had to introduce myself to people, I didn’t have much else to say after telling people that I was Truku. I began to feel bad about it and felt that I didn’t deserve this status, like it was just a show I put on. Back then, I often questioned myself, “so am I really indigenous? But my family is indigenous.” It was rather conflicting for me for a while. Then a senior female classmate invited me to join the indigenous school club Ngasal Maku. I got to spend time with other indigenous persons, and that was when I realized that there are many urban indigenous persons like myself, all searching for a way to return home, and that slowly changed how I felt. I may still not know enough now, but nothing will stop me from sharing the fact that I am indigenous. We all grew up with different backgrounds, and I shouldn’t have to feel ashamed for being urban indigenous.

Growing up in the city, how did you learn about the history of your indigenous community?



Even though my grandmother on my mother’s side spoke the Truku language, she spent time away from her father and went to a Japanese elementary school for a while, and only returned to her indigenous community during the summer to take care of the millet field. So there wasn’t much that she could share with me. Some of what I know about the history of my people were through research and much digesting, some were shared by my Truku senior male classmate who grew up in an indigenous community, and others I learned while taking indigenous language courses at university. In recent years, I got to know some people from my indigenous community and began taking part in some of the events hosted by the younger generation in the community. All of which slowly built up my knowledge of the Truku.

Have you visited the traditional territory of the Truku people before?



Not the traditional territory of the Chongde Community, but I have visited that of the Gukut Community. I was taking part in the event hosted by the Taiwan Indigenous Association of Truku Youth, and the tour guide introduced the mountain behind the indigenous community, the family houses, the plants, and the trails as we hiked. When taking part in activities like this, I project myself accordingly, “so this is how the Truku see their lands up in the mountain, this is the perspective from the mountain.” Just like reading a novel, I imagine myself as the leading character within. To me, these are things I’ve never experienced, so it doesn’t matter which indigenous community the experience came from, I self-project, and I share with others afterward, “this is what we Truku do up in the mountain, this is what I experienced in the Gukut Community.”

the Indigenous Knowledge



The tent pitched by Lowking.

Have you ever pitched your own tent and camped out in the wild? How is this different from your experiences in the past?



I have camped in camping areas before, and before we set out on this trip, I thought we would be staying in a very simple workshed in the mountain built with sheet iron, wooden board, and canvas, and I imagined it to be very challenging. But I found it to be much more pleasant after I arrived here, it's like an outpost for me, for I met a Truku friend lately and we've been talking about going hunting in the mountains in the future, experiencing life in the mountains, so this is like a practice round for me.

What are you expecting for tomorrow?



I don't quite understand what "making a broom" meant in our itinerary, is the Bunun broom different from other people's? I also look forward to learning about traditional crops, "diet" is an integral part of life and culture. I know that the Truku used to have a lot of traditional crops, but they have all disappeared, and exist only in the memories of the elder ones. So I look forward to learning about the traditional crops of the Bunun, and eager to learn how they have brought them back.







Learning about the Bunun from Forestry Plants

The forest gives life to abundant fauna and flora, which lends to the survival of the Bunun, the Bunun also developed ways to co-exist with the environment, being grateful and respectful of what nature has given them. Dahu took Lowking hiking along the trail to learn about the applications of the plants as well as share the Bunun concept of life.

Introducing the Mamahav Environment

It's All about the Moon

According to the Bunun world view, there were two suns in the sky, taking turns to shine, hence the 24-hour sunshine all year round. The heat made it difficult to grow any crops. One day, a couple came to work on their farmland. They placed their baby under the shade of a Formosan Palm tree and set to work, but when they returned, the baby was nowhere to be seen. Instead, a Taiwan japaure appeared where the baby used to be, and they came to the shocking realization that the baby had been sundried into a lizard. The couple was very sad, and the enraged husband embarked on a journey eastward with his older son, determined to shoot the sun down.



After hiking for a number of years, they finally reached closer to the sun. The husband held up the bow and arrow and shot the sun in the eye. The sky darkened immediately. The furious fallen sun demanded at the husband, “why shoot at me?” The husband answered that the heat deprived him of his child, and made it impossible for people to plant crops or to make a living. Upon hearing the reply, the suns became very compassionate. The fallen sun turned into the moon, and made a pact with them to always follow the changes and phases of the moon for important rituals, and that the moon must be

notified when they clear new farmlands. Therefore, the Bunun people began observing the phases of the moon and developed the “lunar calendar”. Prior to clearing the farmland, they will place two pieces of wood on the ground in the shape of the moon and perform a ritual, praying for a bountiful harvest of crops as well as demonstrating that this land has made a pact with the moon.

Beware When You Sneeze

Dahu cautions us to beware when we sneeze in the mountains. We must stop to take a rest and allow the bad spirits to pass through and leave first.



Companion Crops to the Millet

The millet field at the back of the Mamahav base has some companion crops, such as pumpkins and pigeon peas. With the millet already harvested, the land will rotate to grow sweet potatoes, black turtle beans, and anchun beans, a kind of bean traditionally grown by the Bunun people. Beans are very good supplements for protein during non-hunting seasons, and diverse crop rotation can help with plant diseases and pest control.

Laochi Palm for Water Supply

Without water bottles in the past, whenever the Bunun hunt in the mountains, they rely on streams or water-collecting plants for water supply. Laochi palm is very useful for collecting water, at 3 to 5 meters in length, it can collect up to 600ml of water, and when you chop off the end of the laochi palm, water will start dripping. When in mid or higher altitudes without streams nearby, sometimes the sambar will leave dents on the ground after rolling around, these dents will collect some water and be used as water supply.



Didn't realize we had to find the ones with leaves yet to spread...



2 Tap on every bundle of Formosan Palm to spread out the leaves. Tear off the wings along the center vein (leaves on both sides are lighter in weight, hence the name “wings”), leaving only the tougher center part. The wings can be used to make a smaller broom to be used on softer surfaces.



Making a Bunun Broom

1 Collect 10 to 15 Formosan Palm soft shoots in the mountain. Choose the ones with leaves yet to spread.



3 Dry the leaves until they turn brown.



4 Bundle up, measure up to elbow length and chop off excess bits.



5 Stick a wooden handle into the Formosan Palm leaf bundle, and tie them up with a piece of hemp cord. The side of the wooden handle wrapped with Formosan Palm leaves must be inserted into the tenon so that the Formosan Palm can spread wider and fluffier.



Formosan Palm broom completed!

6 Tie in bundles and in even bundle numbers for each row, the numbers increasing as you go along, making for a prettier finish.

Here I was thinking it's just a broom, didn't think it would take me almost 4 hours to make on...



Broom Slash Ritual Item

If your child still wets the bed after a certain age, the shaman will sweep the child with Formosan Palm to dispel the spirit of bed-wetting. Therefore, it is strictly forbidden to hit children with Formosan Palm or a broom, otherwise, you might bring back the spirit of bed-wetting.

Min Bunun, the Process of Becoming Man

When starting the fire that night, Dahu held a piece of wood cut from the Taiwan Red Pine, and explained what that little piece of wood meant.

"Sang*" is an important plant to the Bunun people for starting fire and life, we can see from the Bunun language the importance of "sang". The process of the tree beginning to produce resin is known as minuni sang. Min may make you feel uncomfortable, just like when you chop at a tree, the tree releases resin as a mechanism for self-protection, but this process also helps the Bunun to make torches that will light the night.



The Bunun is all about min, we don't tell you what we want you to become, it's not like being in class and the teacher has a question with a standard answer. We want you to experience it for yourself and see what you can become. The process of min may be tough, and you may get hurt along the way, but it's the unique min experience of every individual that shapes our differences.



* sang means "fire starter" in the Bunun language.
asang means "settlement".
isang means "breath of life".

Legends and Singing are All Part of the Indigenous Community Culture

Having heard the Bunun legend today, have you ever heard of Truku legends before?



There is also a Truku version of the sun-shooting legend mentioned today. The legend I would like to share is about sisil, the grey-cheeked fulvetta, and how such a tiny bird became the king of birds. A long time ago, birds in the mountains were to select a king, and they decided that whoever can push the boulder at the top of the mountain down the hill shall be the king. Many raptors including the Crested Serpent Eagle took part in the game but none of them could move the boulder. Then came the sisil, who moved away the cobble stuck in front of the boulder, and the boulder just rolled down the mountain. Therefore, sisil is considered a very wise bird, and the elder ones would use the sisil in fortune-telling. There is another legend regarding utux tmninun*. The Truku is good at weaving, and they believe that everything in this world is woven by the “wind” blowing through nature, and there is even a song called “sika bari”, the wind weaving song. The elder ones used to say that the wind brings the children women bear in pregnancy.

The spiritual bird of the Bunun is the black-naped oriole, and the Bunun believed that the spirit of good is found on the right, whereas the spirit of evil is found on the left. When you see the black-naped oriole flying from the left to the right during hunting, it foretells good fortune; but when you see it fly from the right to the left, it foretells potential danger.

* Spirit of weaving.



Have you ever made things with material sourced from nature before? How did it feel making the Formosan Palm broom today?



I have woven ropes out of palm fiber before, but never starting from scratch as we did with the broom today, where I had to do everything myself every step of the way. What I remember most about today was when we were hiking in the woods searching for Formosan Palm. It was rather challenging because I have never really hiked in the mountains before and was not used to being slapped by grass and branches, treading over the soft soil just so I could get to that one Formosan Palm leaf. Brooms are sold everywhere in hardware stores and retail stores. We didn't use ramie, only simple materials like hemp rope, so I hadn't expected it to be so time-consuming. It's very hard to imagine how it used to take a whole day to make one single tool in those days.



The broom can be used to dispel the "spirit of bed-wetting", does the Truku have objects you use to dispel spirits as well? What do you plan to do with that Formosan Palm broom?



Sweep the floor, I'm too attached to this broom, I'll never throw it away. And I will always remember that if you hit someone with this broom, they will wet their beds. Next time I have friends come over to visit, if someone pisses me off, I will swat at him with it.

The Truku has shamans, but I've never heard of objects used to dispel spirits. We have rituals for cleansing and dispelling of evil spirits, but the ritual is very discrete and always done behind closed doors, so if you're not the people involved you probably wouldn't know what went on. I don't know if it's the same for the Bunun.

You got to know some edible plants today, do Truku people eat wild vegetables?



There is a traditional dish that is like a mixed stew, with wild vegetables, animal bones, and millet cooked into a congee over a slow fire. I only found out like two years ago, it was specifically recreated by friends in the indigenous community as some of the crops used are no longer grown nowadays. Compared to the Amis which specializes in eating wild vegetables, the Truku has fewer types of wild vegetables. We are more like the Bunun, rather limited in what we could grow in the mountains.

Having heard the music performance tonight, how does indigenous music or a gathering like this make you feel?



All we indigenous need is a guitar, and we can have a ball. We indigenous peoples like to play singing games, and it was like that today, just too bad I wasn't very good at it. The guitar is a very accessible musical instrument. With just a few simple chords, everyone can start singing, and that's why it's a popular pastime in the indigenous community. "Singing game" is a culture shared by indigenous communities, sometimes people change the lyrics to make it a funny song. It is a representation of the indigenous culture. Anyone can play the guitar, sing, and play singing games, but nowhere else can you experience them as much as in indigenous areas.

I also experienced today what it's like to get to know a group of people based on their songs, and I feel that the Bunun is a comparatively conservative, reserved, and mild group of people. I asked if they have any happy songs? Or songs expressing love? But the Bunun don't have as many of these songs. They told me that in the old days, the parents decided the children's marriage for them, so the Bunun have fewer songs about love. The Truku is very different in this aspect, we have a culture where we have to earn our bride, hence the songs that reflect our romantic expressions.









Life in the Bunun Stone Slab Family House

The stone materials scattered in the mountain were all once homes to the Bunun. But here on flat land, a modern Bunun stone slab house is being built. Stacking stone slabs is like playing a jigsaw puzzle, there is a trick to stacking.

The Many Forms of a Bunun Family House

There is no fixed layout to the Bunun family house, some are in a reversed U-shape, some are square-shaped; some have windows or skylights, and some are above the ground or semi-underground. There are also a variety of ways to stack the stone slabs, which mainly depend on the type of stone materials collected. If the stones are mostly flat, the herringbone pattern may apply; if the stones are mostly round, then they are stacked on top of one another from the ground up in the order of large to small sizes.

The Indispensible Stove

Grain storage is usually found in the center of the family house from the entrance, and the standard layout involves one stove on either side of the grain storage. But on flat land, the lower altitude means higher ambient temperature, so most family houses have only one stove. For indigenous peoples, stoves serve as a way to bring a family together and keep the family house rich with life.

Only members of the family or members of friends' families are allowed inside the indigenous family house; to host non-family members, they will dine outside the family house.



How are the Roofs Built ?

Some family houses will drill holes in the stone slabs, then tie them up and secure them with rattan as rope; while others will cover the top with silvergrass, tree bark, and wood as roof. Checking for stone slabs with drilled holes in the remaining structure is a way to identify the method applied.

There is a Bunun taboo where only members of the family can climb onto the roof of that family house, if a female accidentally steps onto someone else's roof, she will have to marry into that family. The Bunun believes that outsiders might bring bad influences to the family or the spirits within.



Can't Do Without Pigs

Some Bunun family houses will have a pigsty nearby, since pigs are in the habit of digging and wood frames tend to collapse more easily, they will use bulkier stone slabs instead. Pigs are essential to the Bunun. "Pig slaughtering" symbolizes making a pact, which signifies recognition and acceptance by that family. Therefore, when children get engaged or married, the family will slaughter a pig and share the pork.

The Bunun Settlement Based on Kinship

The Bunun settlement is generally formed by families or friends' families. Even if you don't share the same last name, you move as a pack with the stronger family leading the weaker, keeping and watching each other's back.



Different Concepts in Family House Building !

The Rukai and Paiwan people also build houses with stone slabs, but they do it more meticulously. The reason is that the Bunun settlements migrate more frequently, and since they can't take the house with them when they move, they only care if it's stable enough to not collapse when the house is being built.

Building a Bunun Stone Slab Family House on the Flat Land

When Kau visited the old Asang Kasin Community and saw the remains of the many stone slab houses, he came up with the idea to “build a stone slab house myself”. Upon returning home, Kau observed the different types of stone slab houses in Laipunuk in the mountain, conducted research, and interviewed elders, before finally deciding to build a stone slab house on flat land as his wife’s workshop.

If there are any, windows in traditional family houses are mostly small and used as gun stands. Kau designed this window for natural lighting.



Even a workshop requires a three-stone stove and millet storage so that it can be used to pass on the traditional culture in the future. A bathroom is also included to meet basic needs.

The teachers taught me that the third layer of stones must be stacked in alternating positions to the lower two layers for better stability, and larger stones are to be used for the sides for a prettier finish.



Kau applied to a local river management office to collect riverbed rocks. Washed by the river, the stones are paler in color compared to the ones in the mountains. The riverbed rocks vary in sizes.

To prevent typhoons and earthquakes, mortar is filled in between the stones in this family house to stand firm on flat land.

Take the First Step to Become a Better Me

What do you remember most about the Bunun family house? How is it different from the Truku family house?



I had no idea that the Bunun family house was disposable! It is very hard for us accustomed to modern life to imagine that you may have to abandon your house due to the changes in the living environment, farmland, hunting ground, or taboo. After all, it is not easy to own a house nowadays. Also, when I saw the newly built stone slab house amidst the modern buildings on flat land, visually, it was very impactful.

I don't know all that much about the Truku family house, but the materials used were mostly bamboo, wood, and sogon grass. The Bunun community is based on the clan with friends and relatives living nearby, but the Truku is based on our own family, which is what I understood from my grandmother when she described the place her father used to live in.



For people who want to learn about indigenous cultures, where can they begin?



I started from the school club getting to know different people in the urban environment that we are familiar with, and through them was my opportunity to start engaging with the indigenous communities. Slowly you will find your way. It could begin with general activities like indigenous community tourism, or sports. Even taking part in an archery event is nice.

Stepping outside of your comfort zone could lead to pressure, and that is completely normal. You may feel like you're not ready, but just take that first step and you'll find yourself ready. Just like when I was producing my music album, I also felt that my Truku language was nowhere near fluent. But just like in Bunun, it's all part of the process. You are better today than you were yesterday, and that is enough. Just taking that step is one step further than the previous second.

What have you learned from the past three days?



From oral knowledge to physical practice, the actual experience has become part of my life and I got to know the Bunun so much better. I sensed how changes in the environment encouraged the fluidity of culture. In the language of shapes, the culture was possibly a circle in the past but a triangle in the present, but potentially a square in the next generation, but the core value stays consistent. The experience of getting up close and personal to nature is very valuable, and I encourage my friends and future generations to be more engaged with nature. Just like Katu said, we are an island country, but we are afraid of the ocean and forests, which is not normal. Now we have the opportunity to reestablish the connection, and that is very valuable.



Watching the scenery along the way, changing from buildings and roads to deep forests and gravel paths difficult to drive on, it's like going into a time tunnel, a journey traveling from the modern age to prehistoric culture unraveling. The ritual to announce our entry to the mountain means leaving everything that makes you and entering Laipunuk humbly. Being told that the base is just 200 meters up was a big relief to me since I had originally anticipated a climb of 2 to 3 hours all geared up. On our way up, we saw the remains of stone slab family houses everywhere, all relatively well-preserved, and that was a very good start for me for I am keenly attracted to historic relics. We stopped every now and then to hear the culture and stories of this forest. One time, we stopped in front of a red fence, which was the result of the struggle and conflict between the Bunun and the Forestry Bureau, and I think this is just one story among the many in Taiwan. From conservation areas being demarcated in the past to co-management with indigenous communities nowadays, I am optimistic that the people on this island will understand each other even better in the future.

On the first day, we spent about two hours listening to the migration history of the Bunun, and the various events serious and minor prior to and post the set up of the security path. While the stories were told, we sat on the ground under the shades of the large trees, with the cicada calling, the birds chirping, and the river flowing all mixed together, accompanied by loud insect flying sounds every now and then, it was a remarkable "classroom of nature". As the stories went on, the scenery along the way began to take on different colors and different shades of history, the lands we stood on also had more significance. The hike along the security path in the afternoon was rather tough, many rocks were loosening. I couldn't help but imagine how difficult it was to fight in the mountains, and no wonder the Japanese army had to mobilize 10 times more forces and required pre-investigation and construction works to achieve their purpose. "To understand the process of modernization in Taiwan, you need to come to Laipunuk; to understand Laipunuk, you need to start from the mamahav learning base." I thought back to what was being said at the beginning of this journey, and could relate even better.

Every night we would start a fire, and I would catch a glimpse of the Bunun philosophy of life from the fire starters they used. The word "sang" in the Bunun language for "fire starter" is the root of many words. Resin is produced from the wound of the plant as it was inflicted, and harm is caused during the process. But as time goes by, it could become a critical symbol. The changing process is different for everyone and everything, and while there may be harm and pain, it is precisely what makes all of us different. Tahu doesn't point this out directly but tells of such metaphors through objects in life, and this philosophy of life is very attractive.

I remember reading the itinerary before setting out, and thinking that it was going to be an easy journey. But each course turned out to be robust and substantial, and I believe that it was because I experienced everything for myself. Especially the Formosan Palm broom, I didn't understand in the beginning why we had to make a broom, but from collecting to processing the raw materials to making the broom, it took us an entire day (the drying process required 3 days so we skipped that part), and now I am deeply connected to the broom because it involved so much of my sweat, my energy, and my time spent. The primitive way of living may not be as convenient, but you will establish a connection with the land, and you will learn to cherish and be grateful for it.

The significance of land comes from the history that goes into it, the reserved Bunun lifestyle means that life is filled with philosophy.

2022.08.30







Passing the Baton >>

