



Threads of Time: Traditional Textiles and the Contemporary Transformation in Taiwan

25-28 November 2013, Leiden, the Netherlands

Willem Vogelsang (IIAS)

FROM 25 TO 28 NOVEMBER 2013, a delegation from Taiwan visited IIAS for an intensive one-week series of events that focused on the theme of traditional Taiwanese textile crafts. The programme, which included a series of lectures, demonstrations, workshops and a small exhibition, paid special attention to the use of indigo dye and the weaving techniques of the indigenous Atayal tribe. The programme was sponsored by the Taiwanese Ministry of Culture in the framework of its 'Spotlight Taiwan Programme' and organised by Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA) in cooperation with IIAS, and supported by the Textile Research Centre (TRC) in Leiden.

Exhibition

The Atayal people, one of the 14 indigenous communities in Taiwan, believe that the lifetime of a human being is woven by god. The temporary exhibition 'The Spinning of Life' at the Textile Research Centre in Leiden (www.trc-leiden.nl), which was set up in the context of the Taiwanese visit to Leiden, took the form of a circle interlinking with other circles. It showed the interaction between people, and emphasised that the opening of each circle sends out welcoming messages for more people to join. Featuring different textiles and outfits and celebrating various types of Atayal woven forms, the exhibition attracted a steady stream of visitors. It also acted as background to the indigo dyeing workshops and lectures organised during the same week.

Lectures

On Tuesday 26th November, the programme included a series of lectures by representatives of Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA) and the Zhuoye Studio, which is dedicated to the revival of the traditional craft of indigo dyeing.

In the morning, in the stately *Gravensteen* building in the ancient centre of Leiden, Professor Lin Hui-Cheng gave an introductory presentation of the concept of cultural heritage in Taiwan and the various cultural heritage transitions over time. Professor Lin is the Director of the Cultural Resources School and Professor in the TNUA Graduate Institute of Architecture and Cultural Heritage. Next, Professor Chiang Min-Chin from

Above left:
Atayal, Takekan
Group men's short
jacket, wrapping
cloth and necklace.
Above right:
Atayal, Wushe
Group women's
wrap skirt and sash.

the same Graduate Institute focused on Taiwanese textiles as a form of intangible heritage. Professor Chen Wan-Lee (Director of the Center for Traditional Arts and Professor in the Department of Theatre Design of TNUA) talked about the education of traditional arts at TNUA. Finally, Mr. Cho Tzu-Lo from the Zhuoye Studio presented an example of indigo revival.

In the afternoon the programme continued at the Textile Research Centre with a lecture by Ms Yuma Taru (Atayal artist and founder of the Liang Studio) entitled *Atayal traditional weaving and its contemporary transformation*. The day was concluded with a viewing of the exhibition 'The Spinning of Life' and a reception.

Indigo dyeing workshops

On Wednesday 27th November, a series of workshops was organised at the Textile Research Centre (located at Hogewoerd 164 in Leiden), which introduced the participants to the techniques of indigo dyeing. Indigo dyeing has been practised in Taiwan for hundreds of years, but disappeared from ordinary life in the twentieth century due to the import of chemical dyes. In the 1990s, researchers started to revive this traditional craft. The Zhuoye Studio in Taiwan intends to preserve the traditional techniques as well as to improve the production process with modern technology. The Studio also hopes to bring the indigo memories back into everyday life. They make indigo clothes, everyday items, decorative items and art works in order to bring indigo back into daily life and allow more people to get close to this clean and non-toxic traditional industry.

The three consecutive workshops, given by Ms Cheng Mei-shu and Mr Cho Tzu-lo, of the Zhuoye Studio, focussed on making beautiful indigo motifs with chopsticks, wooden sticks and rubber bands, or with wax-resist techniques (batik). Before the start of each of the workshops (which were fully booked well in advance), a 20-minute introductory lecture was given in order to present the traditional processes and techniques involved in producing indigo dyes. The lectures also touched upon the historical development of the indigo industry in Taiwan and introduced the Zhuoye Studio.

Review of the *Asiascape: Digital Asia* conference

Revisiting the Emancipatory Potential of Digital Media in Asia

24-25 January 2014, Leiden University, the Netherlands

Florian Schneider

Editor's note: below are the opening paragraphs to F. Schneider's report, which can be read in full at <http://tinyurl.com/digital-turn-in-asian-studies>

LIKE ANY INTERDISCIPLINARY ENDEAVOUR, studying digital communication in Asia can be challenging: not only does such work have to convince area specialists, it also has to connect with research across different disciplines, such as anthropology, economics, political science, media studies, or the computer sciences. About a year ago, several of my colleagues and I discussed how we could create a platform for those who are taking on that challenge. We decided that we needed a new academic journal, and that the work that we would showcase there should also be accompanied by events and discussions, both online and offline. As a result, we are launching the first issue of our new journal *Asiascape: Digital Asia* this March, and in the run-up to that launch we organized an international conference at Leiden University to discuss what it means to be part of the digital turn in Asian studies.

From the 24th to 25th of January 2014, we asked participants to help us revisit the debates surrounding digital media and their potential to emancipate people. Throughout five panels and three sessions of lively plenary discussion, our contributors presented empirical evidence from societies in Asia and debated the theoretical and practical implications of how digital media are used in diverse settings, ranging from China to Korea, from India to Indonesia.

Rather than going chronologically through our conference programme, which is available online along with the book of abstracts, I want to take this opportunity to highlight what issues we came across in our discussions and suggest how our work on 'digital Asia' might fruitfully proceed. Before the conference, we asked our guests to send us answers to three short questions about digital media and Asia, and much of our discussion revolved around the responses to these questions: where might we find 'digital Asia', how should we study our subject, and who might benefit from digital media's supposed 'emancipatory potentials'. I'll go through each of these questions in turn. Throughout, I'll also include examples from the conference, links to various useful resources, as well as reference to related books and articles.

Asiascape: Digital Asia is a new academic journal on the political, social and cultural impact of digital media in Asia. Information: www.asiascape.org

