



Plant pigment extraction workshop in progress. Photo courtesy of TNUA.

Indigo as critical pedagogy

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The workshop was also an occasion for us to share and further refine the bachelor's and master's syllabi being developed as part of the HaB project 'Indigo: Developing a Curriculum across Borders' with the student community and other members of the faculty of the Graduate Institute of Architecture and Cultural Heritage at TNUA. The HaB programme was represented by HaB advisor Françoise Vergès; academic director Aarti Kawlra; Yoko Inoue, a multi-disciplinary artist-educator at the Bennington College, Vermont, USA; and Jocelyne Vokuoma of the Institut des Sciences des Sociétés, Centre national de recherche scientifique et technologique (INSS-CNRST), Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Signalling a new relationship between HaB and Kyoto Seika University, the workshop also welcomed Yuji Yonehara of the Center for Innovation in Traditional Industry, Isanori Oha from the Office of International Education, as well as Kyoto-based indigo artist and guest faculty at the university, Mitsuyasu Tanio.

Day 1: Field visits

On the first day we visited Zhuo Ye Cottage, a family-run homestay and indigo production and dyeing studio in Sanyi, in Miaoli county, a three-hour drive from Taipei. We were guided by Mr Tzu-Lo Cho, the second-generation owner of Zhuo Ye Cottage and an artist who works with indigo and batik techniques. He led us through his farm where he grows various plants for their natural dyes, including indigo varieties such as *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius* (Assam indigo), *Indigofera tinctoria*, *Polygonum tinctorium* (Japanese indigo) and *Isatis tinctoria* (woad). We were invited to observe the indigo-making process using sedimentation technology, which is the most commonly applied method in Taiwan. In the indigo-making area there were different basins for soaking the leaves and threads, and for mixing the dye liquors for oxidation. At the studio, we could follow the progress of indigo dyeing techniques from handmade pieces to the semi-automated production of broadcloths. The Zhuo Ye Cottage also applies natural colours in their culinary services, which were sampled by us at the sumptuous vegetarian lunch that delighted our international guests.

The next indigo production and use site was the National Taiwan Craft Research and Development Institute, the top-most institution in Taiwan for crafts research and education. Here we had the opportunity to interact with textile weaving and dyeing experts, Ching-Fen Hsiao and Si-Zheng Zheng. We also visited the Natural Colour Farm, founded by Zheng and his partner, indigo artist Wen-Jun Tang.

Here, various indigo plants are cultivated both for production and for educational purposes, including *Strobilanthes cusia*, *Indigofera suffruticosa* Mill., *Indigofera tinctoria* L., *Polygonum tinctorium*, *Isatis indigotica* L., and *Marsdenia tinctoria* R. Br. from Sarawak, Malaysia. The Natural Colour Farm provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the indigo-making process. In the dyeing workshops it offers, students of all ages are made familiar with the plants and the production process of indigo as well as given the opportunity to experiment with the various dyeing techniques.

Day 2: Sharing, discussions and plant pigment extraction workshop

Day 2 began at the FuturePast Lab at TNUA, with a welcome address by TNUA president Kai Huang Chen and introductions by the participants. This was also an occasion for self-introductions and a presentation of the HaB vision and the 'Indigo across Borders' project. After lunch, it was time for the natural pigment extraction workshop. The participants, guided by Hua-Chen Huang, lecturer at the Department of Fine Arts, explored the campus collecting plants from which we later learned to extract colours and produce pigment.

From a humanities across borders perspective, the extraction of colours and pigments from plants is a method of knowing, of engaging with a place and its lived history and of making transversal connections. The process of pigment extraction was not only an occasion for 'doing' but also coming closer to the immediate environment, constructing a colour map of the university campus walking about collecting plants, and recognising and archiving them for their pigments in a kitchen-like studio/lab setting. The plant pigment extraction workshop brought different people together, including indigo artists, researchers, PhD students, fine arts students and cultural heritage students, to produce alternative ways of seeing and

knowing a place. The workshop was followed by a discussion on how colour extraction can be used as educational material and method for a variety of experiential pedagogies in different contexts. In particular, our conversations revolved around the knowledge practice of indigo in Taiwan to trigger critical reflections on its meaning and practice in other Asian and African contexts. We also discussed the parameters for building a syllabus (including a shared vocabulary and learning modules) that would eventually contribute towards a 'Humanities across Borders' curriculum.

Day 3: Roundtable on Indigo as critical pedagogy

The third day began with a discussion of the syllabi for the BA and MA courses 'Indigo across Borders' and 'Indigo Liquid Museum', introduced by me under the HaB programme at TNUA. As part of their final project, MA students of the 'Indigo Liquid Museum' course presented their curatorial project proposal for a global indigo liquid museum. The group with the best proposal was invited to present at the HaB roundtable. This group of four young ladies made a proposal for 'Global Indigo Studies' by reviewing the development of the indigo dye and exploring the relations between the indigo dye and the different stakeholders involved. The other BA level 'Indigo across Borders' course exposed students to harvesting the indigo plant on a local farm, to indigo arts and cultural forms around the world as well as the critical issues pertaining



Walking around the university campus to collect plants for pigment extraction. Photo courtesy of TNUA.

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to indigo in contemporary society. A key aspect of this course was to connect students—the young generation—with indigo practitioners and to learn from this mutually sympathetic connection, which became quite profound after the harvesting and indigo extraction experience. We all sensed this very clearly from the students' final proposals on Indigo and the thoughts they presented from their notes after each class. The indigo artists, researchers and community members working together in the two courses, and over the last seven years, were all more than willing to join the methodologies workshop, share their ideas on how to develop an indigo syllabus, and to learn together! Given the vibrant discussions during the three-day long HaB workshop, the two courses will be presented during the 11th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 11) in Leiden, the Netherlands, in July 2019. Moreover, the courses will be revised and implemented in Semester 108-1 at TNUA (from September 2019).

Finally, the group moved to a roundtable format presenting short provocations that explored the reasons for creating an indigo syllabus—what, why, how, and for whom. This was followed by the participants splitting up into four breakaway groups, each of which discussed indigo across the following four themes: (1) Place, Belonging and Nature; (2) Word, Memory and Meaning; (3) Practice, Knowledge Production and Reproduction; (4) Market, Aesthetics and Ethics. Following guidelines provided by the workshop conveners, each group discussed the assigned theme from their own specific context. What emerged was the possibility of using indigo as critical pedagogy to interrogate prevailing discourses and disciplinary knowledge such as development; heritage; urban ecology; design and fashion; material culture; history of colonialism; agricultural and development economics; dye chemistry; linguistics; geography, and so on. By making indigo and its practice familiar and bringing it into classroom discussions, each group was able to see 'indigo' as a tool for self-reflection and critical pedagogy beyond the classroom.

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