

《ivucung誰迷了路》 *ivucung: Unraveling the Riddle of Our Roots**

Directed by You Zhisheng (游志聖), 2019, 105 minutes, color. Distributed by Taiwan Indigenous Television (臺灣原住民族電視台).

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I *ivucung: Unraveling the Riddle of Our Roots* offers a glimpse into the vibrant, interconnected worlds of Indigenous weavers in Taiwan as they work to revitalize ancestral knowledge. This feature-length documentary was created in 2019 by a team from Taiwan Indigenous Television (TITV): Producer/Director Sayun Bilang, Director 游志聖 (You Zhisheng), and writers Nanik Ruljadjeng (李文怡) and Nikar (高芯妤). It is an extension of a five-episode television series about the research and renewal of Indigenous knowledge, and won Best Humanities Documentary at the 2020 Golden Bell Awards (Taiwan's most prestigious national television awards). The film's name comes from the Indigenous Paiwan language: “i” means to actively lead along or draw in, while “vucung” means knotted rope. Together, “*ivucung*” speaks to a dynamic connectivity, a process of relinking past and present lives.

Created by an almost entirely female production team, women's stories are at the heart of *ivucung*, which follows weavers from three of Taiwan's sixteen state-recognized Indigenous tribes. First, we meet Yuma Taru, an Atayal weaver and textile artist who works with museums to recover Indigenous designs and techniques from their collections. Yuma offers guidance to a group of Paiwan weavers, led by Ljumiayang Tjakulavu and Kedrekedr Maljaljaves, as they travel to the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan to analyze the ancestral textiles held there and prepare to replicate the designs back home. The film's third strand follows a collective of SaySisyat weavers who revive clan designs and weave formal clothing for their central biennial ceremony, the *paSta'ay*. *ivucung* spins out each narrative

* Co-created by producer/director Sayun Bilang and writers Nanik Ruljadjeng (李文怡) and Nikar (高芯妤).

slowly and meticulously, supplementing observational scenes and interviews with animation and archival footage. The filmmakers also remain attentive to cultural distinctions between Atayal, Paiwan, and SaySiyat peoples throughout, even as they tell a shared story of intergenerational connection, knowledge transmission, and the labor of revitalization.

Indigenous weaving cultures in Taiwan are incredibly diverse, with patterns and practices specific to each tribe and, in some cases, each family. Historically textiles played a central role in many Indigenous communities, they are a “second skin” that reproduces material and spiritual culture. Each detail carries meaning: The *pusiljevavaw* (front collar) of Paiwan work clothing slants upwards at an angle, to remind family members to work hard and set their sights high, while the SaySiyat God of Thunder design signifies the god who brought millet and farming knowledge, ensuring that no one would go hungry. Beginning in the 17th century, a series of settler colonial regimes disrupted Indigenous practices, and in the 20th century weaving was finally displaced by industrial textile production. Many weaving designs and technologies were considered lost, surviving only in distant memories and ancestral garments stored in museums. The *ivucung* weavers set out to recover their ancestral heritage and bring weaving back to their communities in the wake of this profound rupture.

Indigenous weaving is also part of Taiwan’s national narrative. As the Taiwanese government asserts its presence on the global stage, it recognizes Indigenous cultural revitalization as emblematic of the nation’s unique heritage and diverse society. In 2016, the Ministry of Culture named Yuma a “national living treasure,” and in 2020 the same title was extended to Ljumiayang. While such recognition may increase visibility, it also operates within a framework of strategic multiculturalism, in which Indigeneity comes to index local authenticity in Taiwan’s national imaginary (Friedman 2018). National branding projects coopt Indigenous knowledge (Zemanek 2018) as the state celebrates material cultures of performance and arts while downplaying colonial violence (Simon 2020). This means that even as Indigenous cultural workers are elevated in the national imaginary, the labor behind their accomplishments and the history of dispossession that necessitated their work in the first place remain largely invisible.

ivucung works against this. The film skillfully brings into focus the many layers of physical, intellectual, and emotional labor that are interwoven in each textile. As Yuma explains, “If you really lose something from your life, it takes ten times the effort to get it back.” On screen, close-ups capture the embodied labor of weaving: hands deftly guiding shuttles through scarlet threads, fingers carefully unpicking complex patterns in search of a mistake. Research on designs and techniques is

equally rigorous, ranging from highly technical textile analysis to crop cultivation, as well as language learning, archival data collection, and cultural recovery. Extended scenes of the women's training and preparation foreground the time and energy this work demands: we see SaySisyat weavers rehearse for a community fashion show, while Paiwan weavers diligently practice textile analysis in preparation for their trip to Japan. And as these women become knowledge holders, some also take on the work of cultural mediators, teaching across communities and negotiating with museums. Underlying each step is the emotional labor of reckoning with colonial dispossession and reimagining relationships – with each other, with ancestors, and with future generations.

Indeed, part of what is so striking about *ivucung* is how intimately it portrays the network of relationships that surrounds and sustains the weavers. Scenes in the SaySisyat workshop are full of playful teasing and gentle encouragement, small moments of care that convey a sense of deep pride in one another's work. Weavers also look to the future, passing on cultural knowledge to their children and imagining future generations who will carry their project forward. But to look ahead, these women must first reconnect with their ancestors by looking to the past. Ancestral relationships are difficult to convey onscreen, and here the filmmakers creatively turn to a range of material signifiers. For the SaySiyat weavers a glass of millet wine, an offering to ask for guidance, express gratitude, and apologize for breaking taboos, serves as a material link with past generations. Similarly, when Ljumiayang, Kedrekedr, and Yuma arrive at the Museum of Ethnology in Japan, the textiles they visit are not simply research objects, but living embodiments of their *vuvu* (Paiwan: ancestors). They collect data in dialogue with these ancestors, marveling together at their skill and imagining what they might have been thinking as they wove. These conversations are overlaid with detailed close-ups of the textiles, whose deep colors and intricate inlays fill the screen with the presence of past generations.

The intimacy of these scenes speaks to the production team's close off-screen connections with the weavers. During my doctoral fieldwork with TITV I had the opportunity to observe this firsthand when I joined a screening of *ivucung* in the SaySisyat weavers' community. The extended film team was present, as were Yuma, Ljumiayang, Kedrekedr, and the SaySiyat weavers in outfits they had woven with their family designs. Although everyone had already seen the film, watching it together was a joyful reunion and a celebration of a collective accomplishment. After the screening, producer/director Sayun Bilang and director You Zhisheng shared their production story. Over the course of filming they identified deeply with the weavers and came to develop their own knowledge of weaving and a commitment to its resurgence. What was meant to be a 50-minute television episode ended up

becoming a feature documentary that took two years to complete and had to be broken into two parts for broadcast. Such offscreen engagement reflects what Faye Ginsburg describes as “relational filmmaking,” which prioritizes ethics, relationships, and an aesthetics of accountability (Ginsburg 2018). Jesse Wente, director of Canada’s Indigenous Screen Office, articulates a similar concept with his “cinema of listening,” a media practice that starts with conversations long before the camera is turned on (Deerchild 2019).

In both the community screening discussions and the film itself, there was common emphasis on the idea that while many weavers may publicly share aspects of their work, they focus first on their own communities. This is particularly important within the broader context of Indigenous cultural revitalization in Taiwan. Many events and material productions tend to emphasize intercultural exchange and education; textiles in particular have become iconic representations of Indigeneity and Taiwan’s multiculturalism writ large (Barclay 2017). *ivucung* certainly acknowledges the role of outreach: The film opens with a stunning exhibit of Yuma’s textile arts in the Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport and closes with a public presentation by Ljumiayang at the National Museum of Prehistory in Taitung. But between these moments the film pivots significantly, turning “inward and away” (Coulthard 2014, 44) from the Taiwanese settler state and toward Indigenous communities. We see this pivot in the SaySiyat weavers’ commitment to creating clothing for their families to wear during formal ceremonies, textiles they intend to remain in their community. At the same time, Yuma works to reestablish Indigenous control over all aspects of the material production of weaving, beginning with ramie cultivation. She explains her vision of Indigenous self-sufficiency: “I hope that one day Indigenous peoples’ won’t need to rely on others to get by in life. They can support themselves.” With this shift, *ivucung* positions the weavers’ work as a decolonial process of self-production and self-recognition. The women in the film weave for their own reasons, on their own terms.

Through this turning inwards, and throughout its many interconnected storylines, *ivucung* asserts weaving as a sovereign practice culturally, artistically, intellectually, and materially. Reconnecting with ancestors and reclaiming knowledge is part of a decolonial practice, a way for weavers to heal from colonial trauma and sustain future generations. That said, it would have also been helpful to understand how these women fit into the broader world of Indigenous weaving in Taiwan. Many young Indigenous designers have started their own workshops or fashion labels and creatively integrate traditional weaving practices across a range of media. But this is, perhaps, a subject for the program’s next season. As it is, *ivucung* lays an excellent groundwork for understanding connections with ancestral past and imagining

possibilities for the future. It should be of particular interest to anthropologists and artists engaged in cultural revitalization, as well as museum staff working with source communities.

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