



Leather

Leather is a material with a long history. From ancient protective gear, horse equipment, and daily utensils to modern shoes, bags, and handmade accessories, leather has always been closely connected to everyday life. Through tanning, dyeing, and processing, animal hides are transformed into durable and textured craft materials, gradually developing into leather craft that combines both practical and aesthetic value.

The development of Taiwan's leather industry was closely related to the export-oriented economy after World War II. From the 1960s to the 1980s, as shoe manufacturing and leather goods exports expanded, tanning, processing, and OEM production systems gradually matured into a complete supply chain. Since leather materials relied heavily on imports, port cities and urban areas such as Taipei became important centers for material trade and technical exchange, while central and southern Taiwan developed into leather processing and mass-production bases through export processing zones and shoe industries.

After the 1980s, with industrial relocation and changes in the global market, Taiwan's leather industry gradually shifted from mass production toward design, branding, and handmade creation. The rise of urban leather craft studios and design brands transformed leather from an industrial material into an important medium for craft creation and lifestyle aesthetics.

One of the main characteristics of leather craft is that the material changes over time through use. Different animals, body parts, and environmental conditions create unique textures and surfaces, while scratches, wrinkles, and color changes formed through long-term use become shared traces between the object and its user. Since no two pieces of leather are exactly alike, damaged or aged leather objects often require careful repair through disassembly, patching, and stitching.

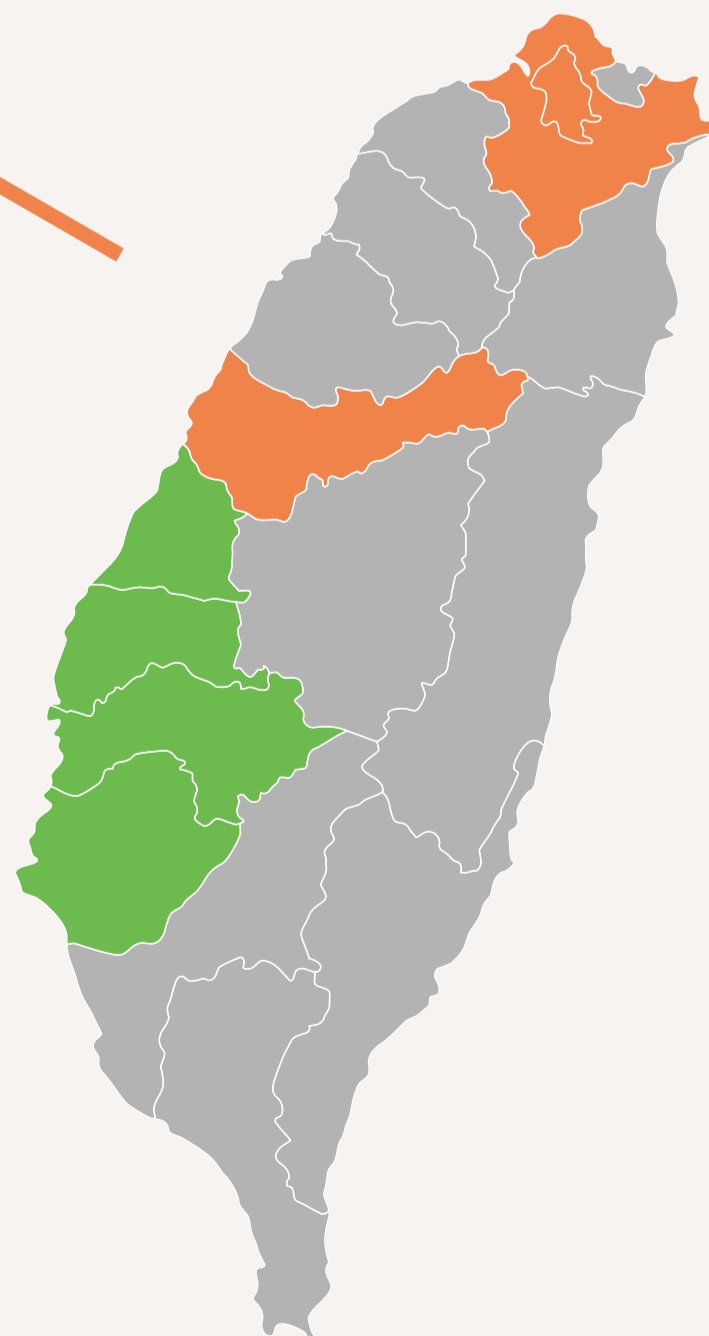
From industrial manufacturing to individual handcrafting, leather craft in Taiwan continues to develop between function, design, and emotion, allowing the material itself to become a record of time and daily life.

Northern Port and Urban Areas:

Centered around Taipei, these areas benefited from port trade and market access, becoming early centers for imported raw leather processing, technical exchange, leather craft, and education.

Central and Southern Manufacturing Areas:

During the export-oriented industrial period, shoe manufacturing and leather material processing networks developed in these regions. Supported by export processing zones and labor advantages, they became major production bases for leather-related products and OEM manufacturing.





Paper

The development of paper craft in Taiwan emerged through the long interaction between plant fibers, water resources, and daily culture. During the Qing dynasty, papermaking techniques were brought to Taiwan by Han immigrants, who mainly used bamboo to produce paper for rituals and daily life. During the Japanese colonial period, in order to develop high-quality cultural paper, the Japanese government actively searched for suitable water sources and environments, establishing the foundation of Taiwan's modern handmade paper industry in Puli, Nantou.

After World War II, the interruption of imported Chinese xuan paper, together with the growing East Asian painting and calligraphy market in the 1970s, led to a peak in Taiwan's handmade paper industry. After the 1980s, environmental regulations, rising labor costs, and inexpensive imported paper gradually reduced the scale of traditional paper industries. Some production areas shifted toward tourism, education, and design applications, transforming paper craft from a daily consumable material into a craft form with cultural and design value.

The development of Taiwanese paper craft is closely connected to local natural conditions. Puli in Nantou, with its clean water and stable climate, became Taiwan's most representative handmade paper center. Shallow mountain areas such as Xinpu in Hsinchu and Zhuqi in Chiayi, rich in Makino bamboo, developed clusters producing bamboo paper and coarse paper. Agricultural regions in central and southern Taiwan also used agricultural by-products to develop recycled paper materials, extending paper craft systems based on local fibers.

In recent years, cities such as Taipei, Taichung, and Yilan have reinterpreted the contemporary role of paper craft through museums, cultural brands, and educational programs. Paper is no longer only a material for writing and wrapping, but has become an important medium carrying local culture, design thinking, and lifestyle aesthetics.

From bamboo paper and handmade paper to recycled fiber materials, paper craft in Taiwan continues to evolve with changes in materials, industries, and cultural needs, leaving craft traces connected to the land through fibers and water.

Urban and Historical Centers:

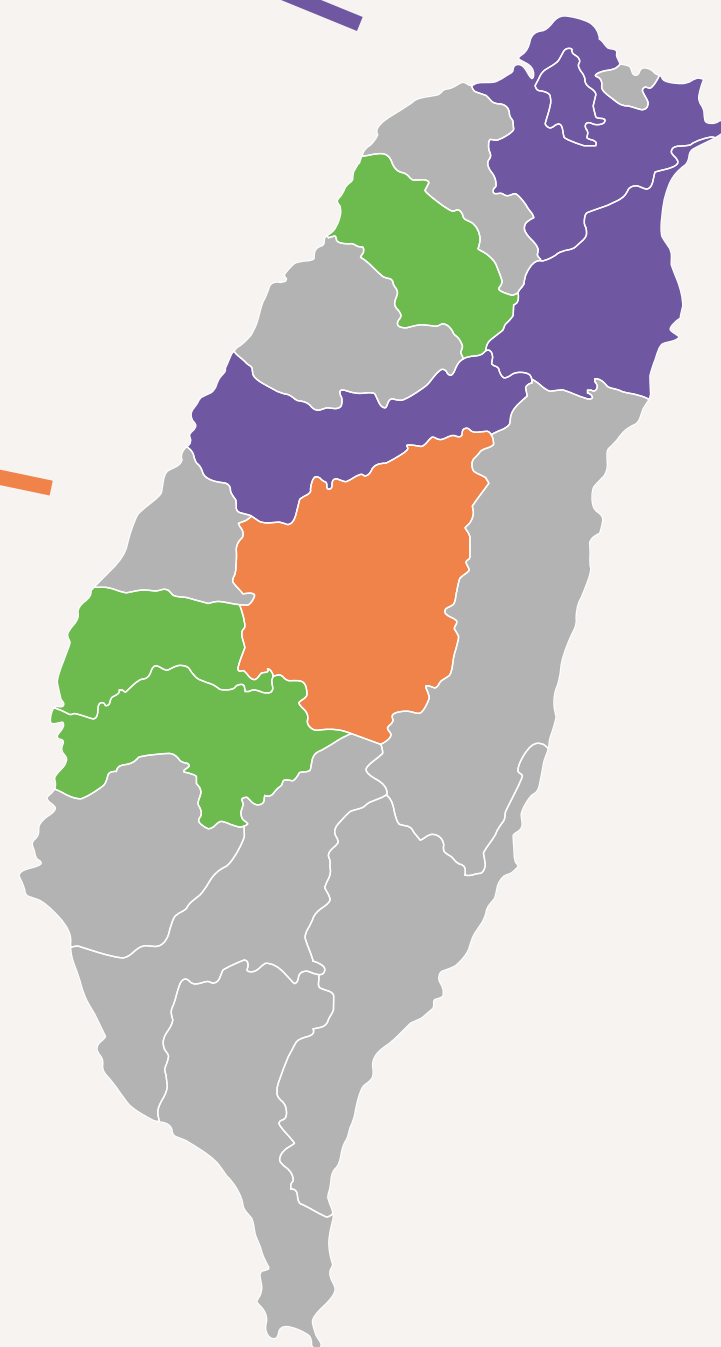
Including Taipei, Taichung, and Yilan. Rather than depending on natural resources, these areas developed contemporary paper craft through historical paper industries, industrial transformation, design markets, museums, cultural brands, and educational promotion.

Central Mountain Water Systems:

Represented by Puli in Nantou, where clean water and a stable climate supported the development of high-quality handmade paper, later expanding into cultural paper industries and tourism experiences.

Western Foothills and Agricultural Areas:

Including Hsinchu, Chiayi, and agricultural regions in central Taiwan. These areas relied on local fiber resources such as Makino bamboo and agricultural by-products to develop bamboo paper, coarse paper, and recycled paper materials.





Fiber

Fiber craft is a type of craft that uses fibers as its main material and develops forms through techniques such as weaving, knotting, dyeing, embroidery, and stitching. Fibers include plant materials such as cotton, ramie, bamboo, and wood fiber, as well as animal fibers such as wool and silk, along with modern synthetic fibers. These materials are first processed into threads or surfaces, then structured into flat or three-dimensional forms through different techniques.

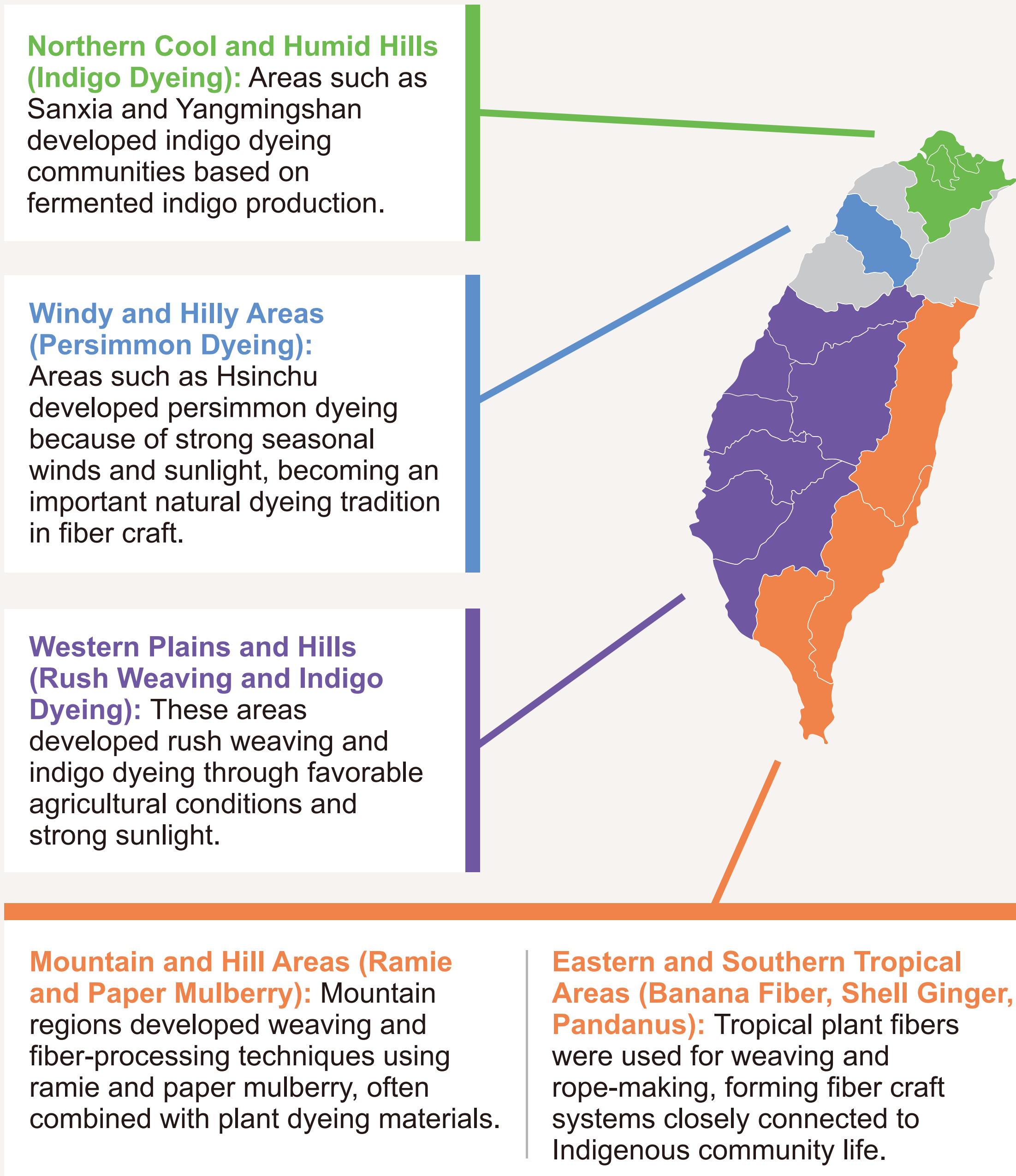
Because of their flexibility and adaptability, fibers can be woven, knotted, and layered into organized structures and spaces. Different materials and techniques also create a wide variety of textures and forms, giving fiber craft strong flexibility between function and artistic expression.

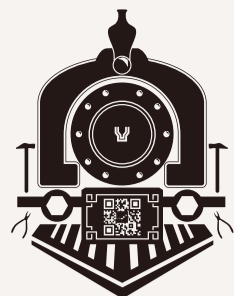
Taiwan's diverse climate provides rich natural fiber resources. Historical records show long-term use of ramie, banana fiber cloth, rush grass, rattan, and other plant fibers in daily life and local industries. Postwar surveys further revealed hundreds of usable fiber materials in Taiwan, providing a strong foundation for fiber craft development. After the 1950s, synthetic fibers further expanded material possibilities.

In the early postwar period, fiber craft continued to support daily life and folk religion. Techniques such as weaving, embroidery, and basketry were widely used in clothing, utensils, and ritual objects. From the 1970s to the 1990s, export-oriented handicraft industries created family-based production systems. As industries later shifted overseas, traditional handmade production faced challenges.

After the 1990s, fiber craft regained attention because of its close connection to land, culture, and memory. Rush weaving, knotting, indigo dyeing, weaving, embroidery, and flower-thread craft gradually developed from practical techniques into forms of cultural and contemporary artistic expression.

Using soft materials to build strong structures, fiber craft continues to weave together life, culture, and memory in changing times.





Wood

In prehistoric Taiwan and Indigenous societies, woodworking was not a single craft category, but a fundamental part of daily life. With abundant forest resources across the island, wood was easy to obtain and highly workable. Since prehistoric times, it has been widely used for house construction, boats, farming tools, and daily utensils, forming a craft system centered around wood.

The meaning of woodworking extended beyond practical use. From settlement structures and transportation to ancestral beliefs and ritual systems, carvings, pillars, and objects all reflected connections between survival, social order, and spirituality. Examples such as the ancestral pillars of the Paiwan people and the plank boats of the Tao people demonstrate deep understanding of materials, structure, and cultural traditions, linking woodworking with nature, daily life, and belief systems.

Before 1945, woodworking was not separated into categories such as wood carving, architecture, or object making. Instead, it existed as a living skill that crossed both daily and ceremonial use. In the modern period, influenced by imported systems and classifications, woodworking gradually became part of the fields of craft and art, with wood carving becoming one of its representative forms.

The development of Taiwanese wood carving was also influenced by immigrant culture. Many early craftsmen came from Fujian and Guangdong in China, later forming local craft clusters in Tainan, Lukang, Wanhua, Fengyuan, Daxi, and Sanyi, each developing diverse styles and techniques.

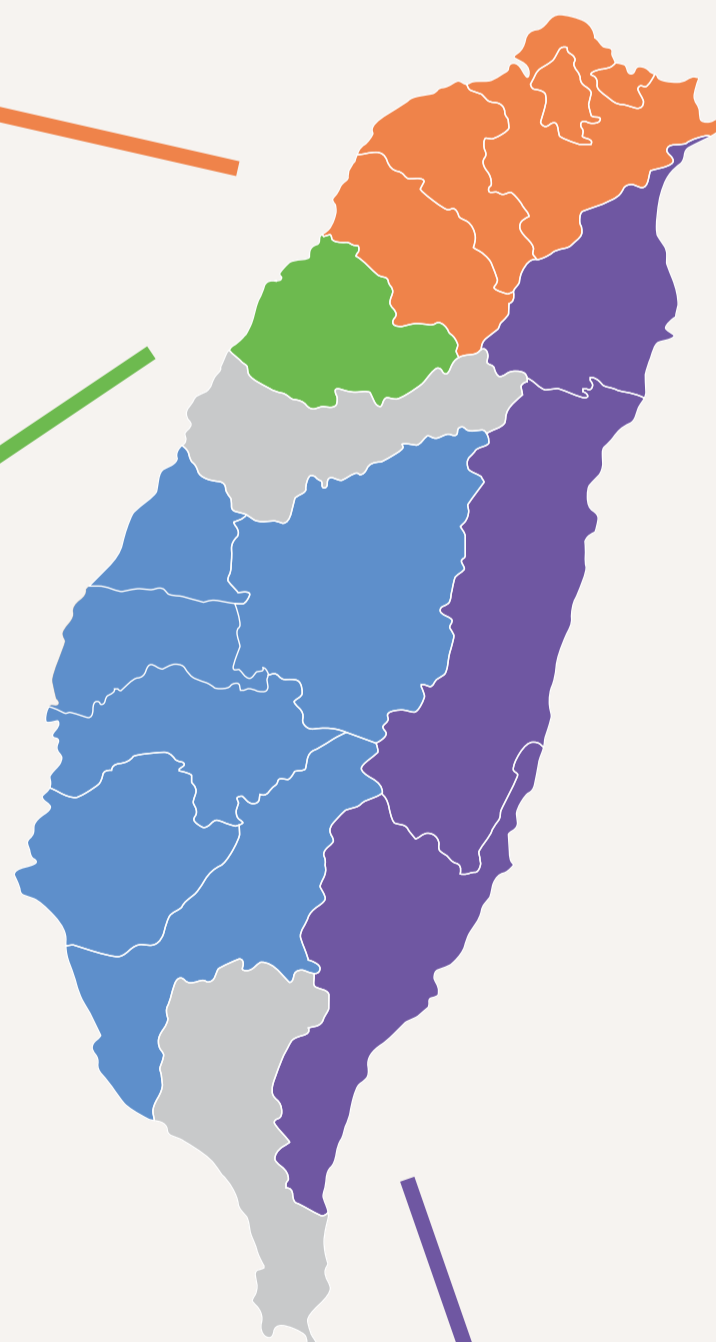
Northern Port and Urban Areas:

Port cities such as Taipei and Keelung benefited from trade and imported large amounts of timber, furniture, and wooden goods during the early Japanese colonial period, encouraging urban woodworking and early furniture workshops.

Sanyi, Miaoli: The mountainous and misty environment supported camphor tree growth. Combined with the camphor industry and reuse of camphor roots, Sanyi developed a woodcarving industry and tourism district.

Lukang, Changhua and Central-Southern Coastal Towns: Dense trade activity and religious culture created demand for temple woodworking, deity carving, altars, and religious furniture. Strong apprenticeship systems helped spread the skills of "Lukang craftsmen."

Eastern Coastal Areas: Driftwood carried ashore after typhoons and heavy rain became a unique material source. Coastal residents and Indigenous artists transformed it into wood sculptures and installations that combine natural forms with cultural narratives.





Glass

Glass is an amorphous material mainly composed of silica. It is transparent, hard, chemically stable, and highly workable. When heated, glass softens and can be shaped; after cooling, it hardens and preserves its form. Through transparency, refraction, and color changes, glass can also create unique visual effects. Because of these qualities, glass has long been used in daily utensils, architecture, medical containers, optical technology, and artistic creation.

The use of glass in Taiwan can be traced back at least to the Qing dynasty. Glass bracelets and ornaments found in Plains Indigenous tombs show that glass was once used as decoration and as a symbol of identity. Glass paintings introduced from China during the Qing period were also commonly used in furniture decoration, such as beds and dressing tables, carrying auspicious meanings and decorative beauty.

During the Japanese colonial period, Taiwan's glass industry gradually modernized. With the introduction of industrial technology, equipment, and Japanese investment, products such as glass bottles, lampshades, and medicine bottles began to be manufactured. Glass expanded from daily objects into an important industrial and medical material. Hsinchu, with its silica sand resources and natural gas supply, gradually became a center for glass factories from the 1920s onward, establishing the foundation of Taiwan's "glass city."

After World War II, Taiwan's glass industry continued to develop based on the factories and technical foundations established during the Japanese colonial period. In the 1950s, the Hsinchu glass industry entered a period of prosperity. After the 1960s, glass production expanded from industrial manufacturing into craft production and talent training. From the 1980s onward, with the introduction of new technologies and the rise of artistic creation, glass gradually shifted from daily utensils and tourist souvenirs toward a more artistic and cultural medium.

After the 1990s, glass craft became further institutionalized through local cultural policies and educational programs. Events and institutions such as the Hsinchu Golden Glass Awards, the Hsinchu International Glass Art Festival, and the Hsinchu Glass Museum established in 1999 became important milestones in the development of Taiwan's glass culture.

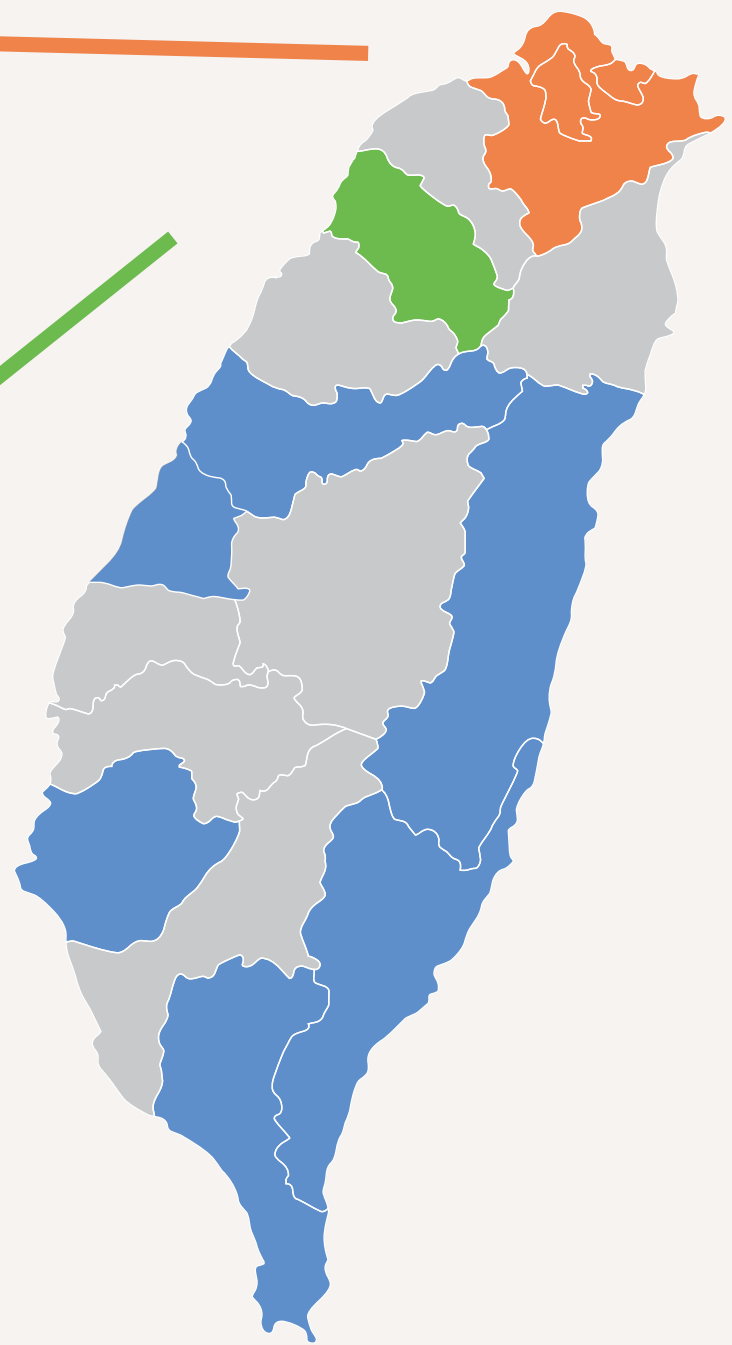
Today, glass craft is no longer limited to glass blowing, molding, or vessel production. It now includes kiln-forming, casting, mixed media, public art, and spatial installation. Through its transparency, refraction, and interaction with light, glass continues to connect technology, daily life, and aesthetics, while demonstrating the creativity of Taiwanese craft in material transformation.

Taipei and New Taipei Areas:

By the late Qing dynasty, small workshops using crucible kilns for handmade blown glass had already appeared in the Taipei area, marking the early beginnings of Taiwan's glass industry.

Hsinchu Area: The mountain areas of Guanxi, Hengshan, and Beipu in Hsinchu contain abundant silica sand resources and natural gas supplies. Combined with transportation advantages from the north-south railway, the area had the raw materials and energy needed for glass production. Glass bottle factories established during the Japanese colonial period gradually formed an important industrial cluster.

Other Areas: During and after the Japanese colonial period, some glass manufacturers relocated to Tainan and continued industrial production. In Taichung, Hualien, Taitung, and Pingtung, glass studios developed through tourism resources and art education systems, focusing more on cultural experience and artistic presentation rather than raw material production.





Stone

Stone tools and jade objects are important material remains for understanding prehistoric societies in Taiwan. Because of their hardness and durability, these objects have survived through time. In periods without written records, they were not only tools for survival, but also carried information about production methods, social organization, beliefs, and craft techniques, reflecting how people interacted with their environment and gradually formed cultural systems.

The development of stone craft in Taiwan can be traced back to the Changbin Culture of the Paleolithic period tens of thousands of years ago. At that time, people relied on fishing, hunting, and gathering, using pebbles from coastlines and riverbeds to make tools through direct stone-knapping techniques. Stone flakes and cores were used for cutting, scraping, chopping, and striking to meet basic survival needs.

During the Neolithic period (around 6,000 to 2,000 years ago), stone craft underwent an important transformation. Grinding and drilling techniques gradually matured, and stone objects evolved from rough chipped forms into carefully shaped, polished, and refined tools. This not only improved their function, but also showed a deeper understanding of stone materials and production processes. Stone objects gradually developed from simple tools into craft forms with both function and aesthetic qualities.

Around the beginning of the Common Era, ironworking technology was introduced to Taiwan, and iron tools quickly replaced stone tools as the main production implements. However, in inland and mountainous areas where iron was difficult to obtain, stone tools continued to be used for a period of time, creating a transitional stage in which stone and iron tools coexisted.

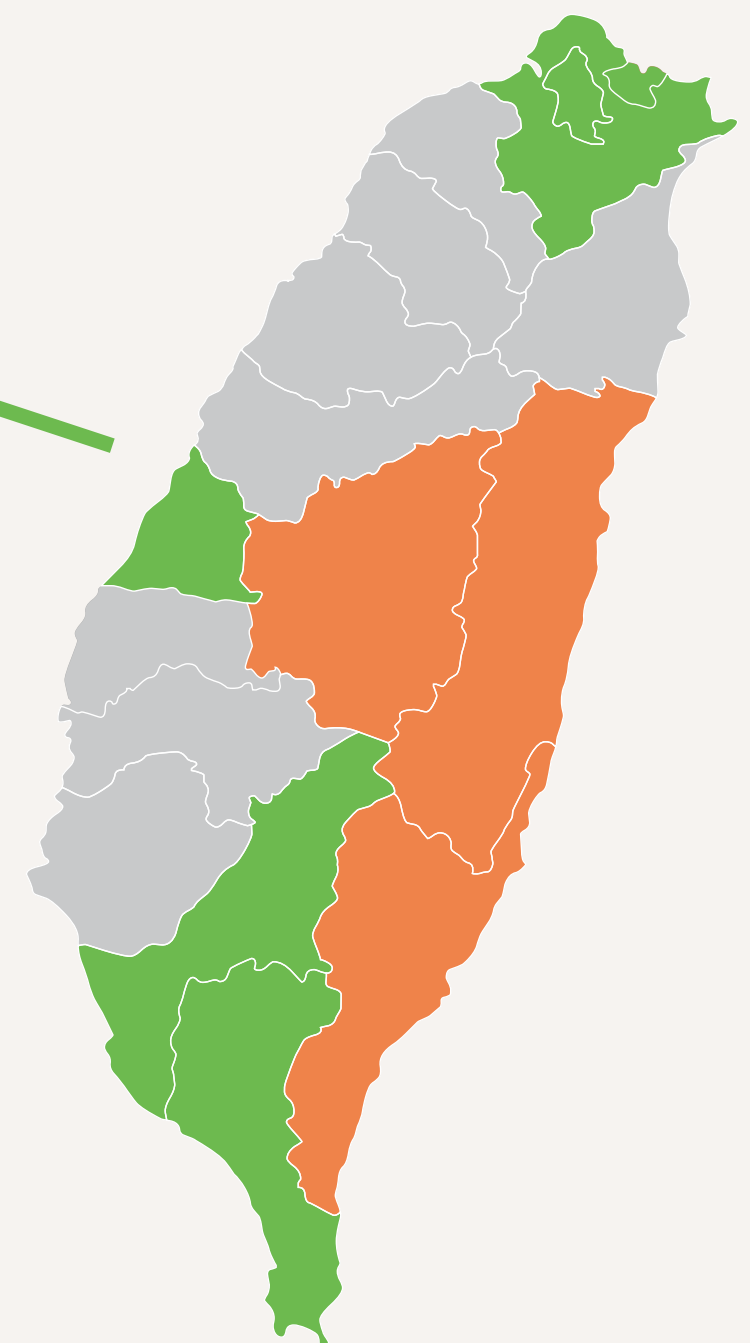
The development of jade objects further deepened the understanding of stone processing techniques. In the mid-20th century, the rediscovery of the Fengtian jade mine in Hualien marked a new stage in Taiwanese jade craft. During the 1960s and 1970s, jade mining and processing industries rapidly expanded, making Hualien an important jade carving center. Jade products became major craft exports during this period, though the industry later declined because of rising mining costs and decreasing resource quality.

In the 1980s, the discovery of large numbers of prehistoric jade objects at the Beinan archaeological site renewed attention toward Taiwan's jade culture. These artifacts demonstrated highly developed prehistoric craftsmanship and cultural meaning, reconnecting contemporary jade carving with historical traditions.

From chipped stone tools to finely crafted jade objects, stone craft in Taiwan has continued to respond to changing daily needs and cultural meanings, reflecting the ongoing transformation between materials, techniques, and society.

Western Carving and Creative Areas: Covering northern, central, and southern Taiwan. Although these regions lack mining resources, mature carving industries and craft education systems supported jade craft based on apprenticeship, studio creation, and exhibition activities.

Eastern Mining Areas: Represented by Hualien, where Fengtian jade and other stone resources are concentrated. The region developed jade mining and processing industries, later combining tourism, exhibitions, and hands-on experiences to form jade craft communities centered on local materials.





Bamboo & Rattan

Taiwan's warm and humid subtropical climate is well suited for bamboo growth. Bamboo forests are abundant and fast-growing, reaching maturity within three to five years. Because of its renewability and ease of processing, bamboo has long been an important material in daily life. Common bamboo species used in craft production include Makino bamboo, moso bamboo, thorn bamboo, and long-branch bamboo, distributed from the mountains of central and northern Taiwan to the southern plains. Each species has different flexibility and structural qualities, making them widely used for daily utensils and construction purposes.

Rattan mainly grows in tropical and subtropical forests and is known for its flexibility, bendability, and strength. It is often used together with bamboo. In both Indigenous and Han communities, rattan weaving was widely applied to fish traps, carrying baskets, containers, furniture, and other daily objects, developing alongside bamboo craft traditions.

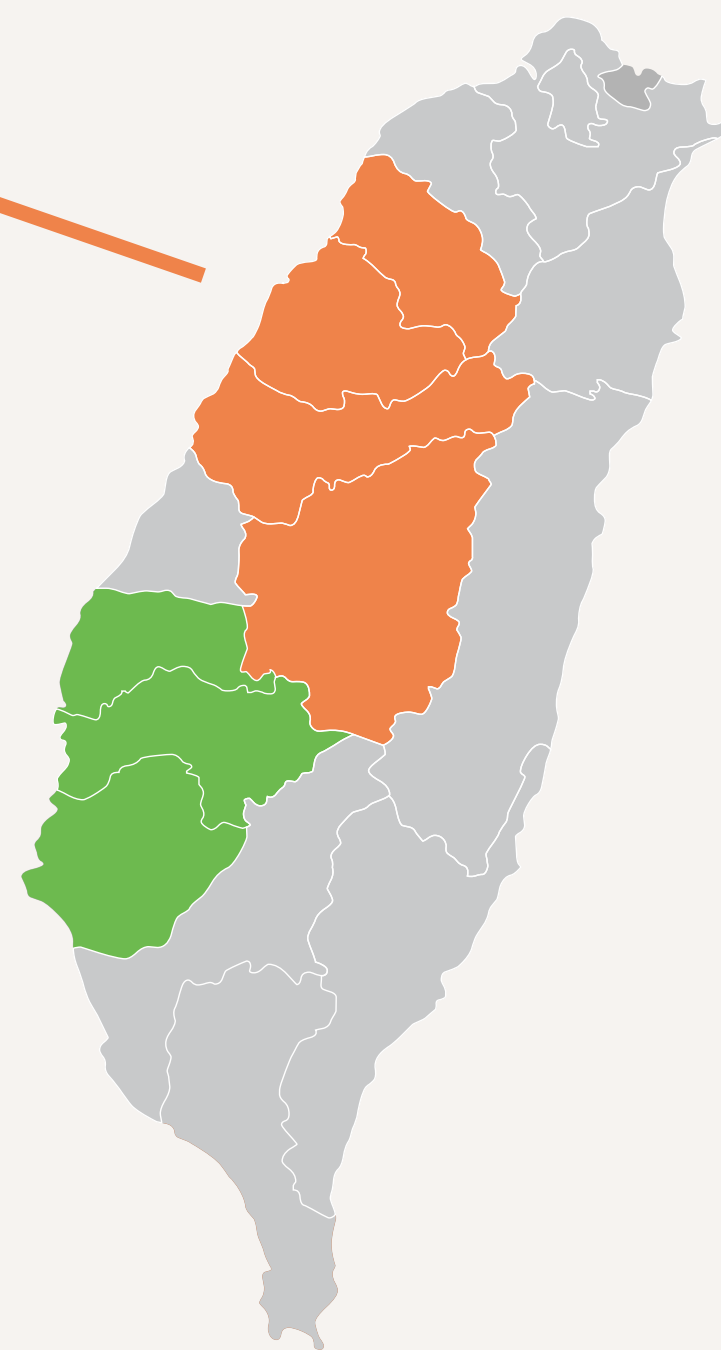
During the Japanese colonial period, bamboo craft training institutes and teaching centers were established in Zhushan, Nantou, to cultivate bamboo craft skills and technical knowledge. Zhushan gradually became an important center for bamboo processing and craftsmanship, transforming Taiwan's bamboo weaving style from simple and practical forms into more refined and varied expressions. After World War II, changes in craft systems, markets, and industrial environments shifted bamboo and rattan craft from production-oriented handicrafts toward a balance of function, form, and quality. With improvements in training and techniques, production processes became more stable and forms more diverse.

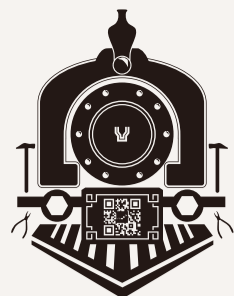
In 1956, the Taiwan Handicraft Promotion Center began promoting bamboo, wood, and rattan craft training, production, and sales in places such as Guanmiao in Tainan, Budai in Chiayi, Lukang in Changhua, and Zhushan in Nantou, establishing export-oriented market systems.

In contemporary practice, bamboo's flexibility and structural stability have made it an important medium for mixed-material creation, while rattan, due to decreasing natural resources, has gradually shifted from daily utensils toward spatial and sculptural expression. While continuing traditional weaving techniques, both materials have also entered into dialogue with modern design and contemporary art.

Zhushan, Nantou: With extensive bamboo forests, Zhushan is Taiwan's largest bamboo-producing region. During the Japanese colonial period, bamboo craft training institutions were established there, and in the 1970s the government created bamboo processing zones. These developments formed an industrial cluster combining household production and export industries, establishing Zhushan as Taiwan's bamboo craft manufacturing center.

Chiayi and Tainan Plains: Since the Qing dynasty, these areas developed concentrated bamboo craft industries producing farming tools, household utensils, and furniture. Continued development during the Japanese colonial period made them important centers for both domestic sales and export of bamboo products.





Lacquer

Lacquer art is a craft that applies natural lacquer or related coatings onto surfaces such as wood, bamboo, basketry, ceramics, and glass. It protects objects and extends their lifespan, while techniques such as layering, painting, carving, and inlay create refined decorative effects.

Early lacquerware in Taiwan was introduced through Han migration and trade, commonly appearing on chests, dressing tables, wedding beds, cabinets, furniture, ritual baskets, deity statues, and ceremonial objects. At that time, lacquer was often treated as part of furniture production rather than an independent craft category.

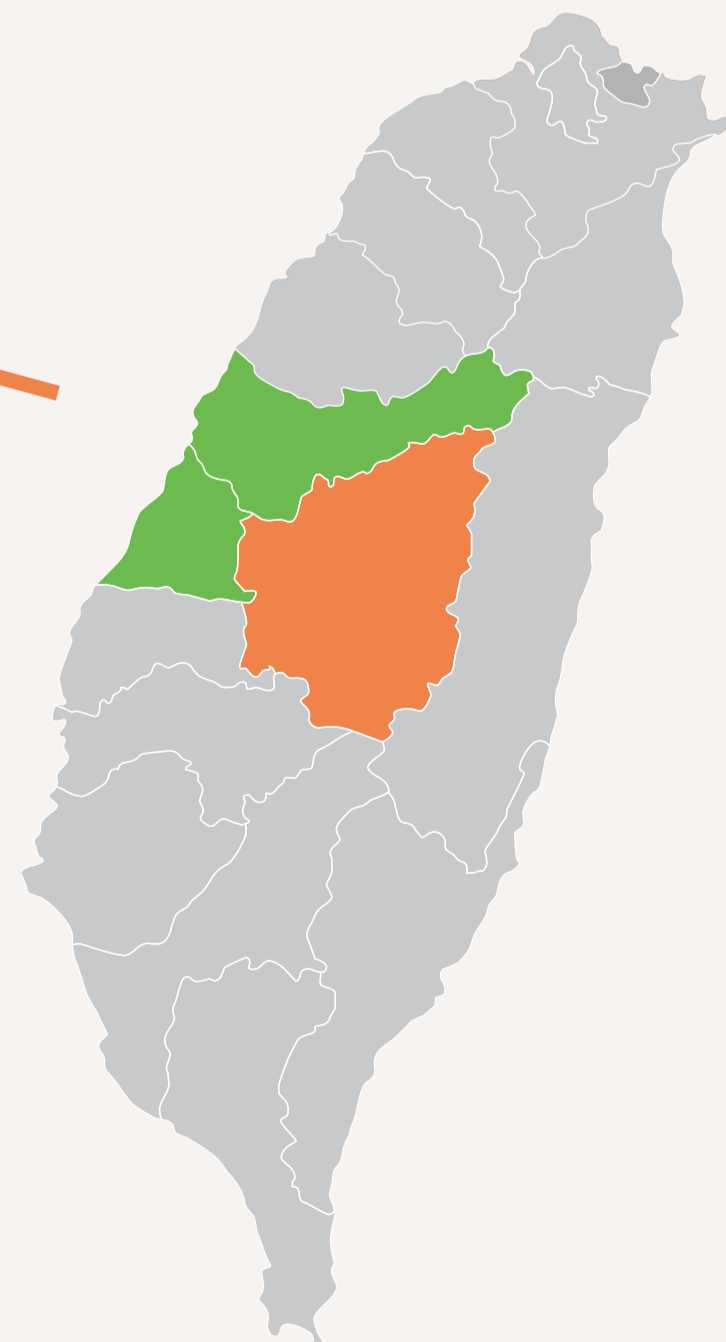
The local development of lacquer art in Taiwan became more established during the Japanese colonial period, when lacquer trees were introduced, cultivated, and studied. As lacquer supplies became stable, institutions such as the Yamanaka Public Art Lacquer Workshop and Taichung Craft Training Institute promoted lacquer techniques and education.

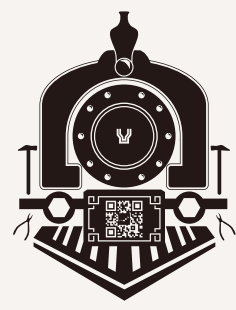
After World War II, lacquer craft developed differently across regions. Taipei developed Fuzhou-style lacquerware; Daxi in Taoyuan became known for lacquered hardwood furniture; Hsinchu developed mother-of-pearl inlay furniture; and Fengyuan in Taichung expanded lacquered wood production through the furniture industry and export markets. Caotun became known for daily lacquerware and basket-body lacquerware, while Puli in Nantou developed into Taiwan's main center for lacquer tree cultivation, lacquer harvesting, and lacquer refining.

From furniture protection to Penglai lacquer, basket-body lacquerware, and contemporary mixed-media creation, lacquer art in Taiwan reflects the long relationship between materials, techniques, and daily aesthetics. Once hidden within everyday objects, lacquer craft is now increasingly recognized for its independent artistic and cultural value.

Puli, Nantou: After World War II, Puli became Taiwan's main lacquer tree cultivation area because of its mountain environment and climate, developing systems for planting, harvesting, and refining natural lacquer.

Western Coastal Areas: Miaoli was an early lacquer tree cultivation area during the Japanese colonial period. Taichung and Changhua inherited both Fuzhou lacquer techniques from the Qing dynasty and Japanese lacquer techniques from the colonial period, developing dry lacquer and lacquered altar furniture connected to local religious and daily-life needs.





Metalwork

Metalwork includes the making and creation of works using gold, silver, tin, copper, iron, and other metals. Its applications are wide-ranging, including daily utensils, religious objects, wearable accessories, artworks, and contemporary craft pieces. Because metal is durable, workable, and reflective, it can serve both practical functions and cultural, religious, and aesthetic needs.

The development of Metalwork in Taiwan was closely connected to migration, trade, and local economies. After the mid-Qing dynasty, as society became more stable, goldsmithing and silversmithing techniques from Quanzhou, Zhangzhou, and Fuzhou gradually took root in Taiwan. Tainan, as the Qing dynasty capital, benefited from convenient water transportation and active commerce, becoming an important center for gold and silver craftsmanship. By the late Qing period, the city already had an area known as “Silversmith Street,” reflecting the prosperity of metalworking trades.

During the Japanese colonial period, gold and silver craft continued to develop. Silver shops gathered in Tainan, Lukang, Hsinchu, Dadaocheng, and Bangka. At the time, wearable jewelry formed the main foundation of Metalwork, with strong demand for wedding jewelry, daily accessories, and ceremonial items. Decorative objects such as Buddhist statues, vases, badges, and local-themed ornaments also appeared, extending Metalwork from practical objects into display and collectible works.

In the early postwar years, government restrictions on gold trading temporarily limited the development of Metalwork. After registration restrictions on silver shops were lifted in 1957, the industry gradually recovered. Between the 1970s and 2000s, alongside rapid economic growth and expanding manufacturing industries, Taiwanese Metalwork entered an important development period. Tainan became a major OEM center for gold jewelry production and was known as “Taiwan’s Gold Capital.”

After the 1980s, influenced by Western Metalwork education, Taiwanese metalworking gradually shifted from traditional apprenticeship systems to academic training. Metalwork became part of university art programs, cultivating a new generation of creators. Metalwork was no longer limited to practical and decorative functions, but also developed into contemporary artistic expression through mixed media, conceptual approaches, and bodily experience.

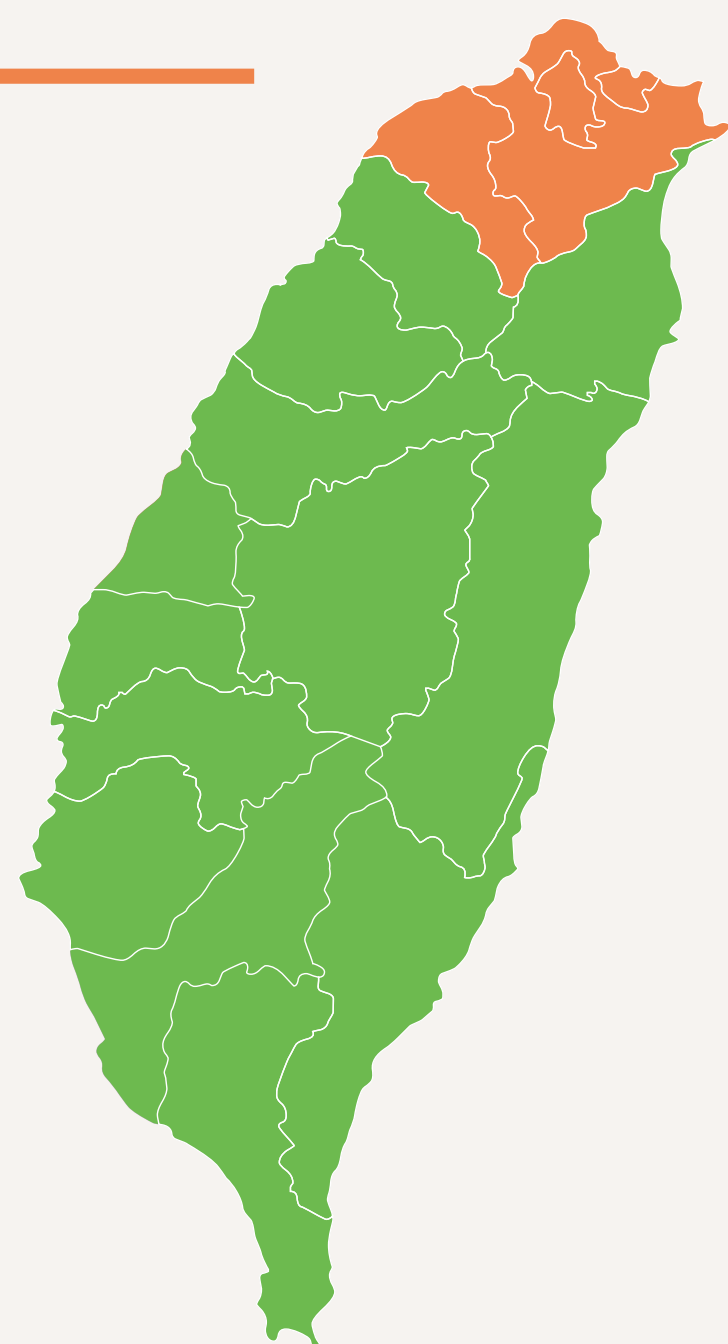
From silver shop streets to academic creation, Metalwork in Taiwan has undergone transformations through daily life, religion, industry, and art, reflecting the cultural value and creative possibilities of metal materials across different periods.

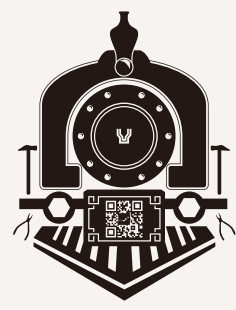
Northern Urban Areas:

Wanhua in Taipei and Banqiao became major export centers for cloisonné and enamel craft from the 1960s to the 1980s. At one point, Taiwan was known as the “Kingdom of Cloisonné,” with more than two hundred manufacturers.

Silver Shop and Family Workshop Networks Across Taiwan:

Since the Qing dynasty, goldsmithing and silversmithing spread across towns throughout Taiwan. After World War II, government gold control policies encouraged the formation of family-based metalworking studios that continued traditional apprenticeship systems. In central and southern Taiwan, stable demand for bronze and tin ritual objects, religious items, and household utensils also formed regional Metalwork networks.





Ceramics

The development of Taiwanese ceramics is closely connected to settlement growth, architecture, and daily life. In the 17th century, the Dutch introduced Han brick- and tile-making techniques to Taiwan for building construction. During the Ming Zheng and Qing periods, increasing demand for temples, houses, and city walls led to the growth of kiln industries across western Taiwan.

From the 18th century onward, the sugar industry increased demand for ceramic vessels. Snake kilns producing jars and daily pottery appeared in Nantou, Puli, and Zhushan, while Yingge developed pottery techniques brought from Fujian and gradually became an important ceramic center.

During the Japanese colonial period, Taiwan's ceramic industry modernized through technical improvements, raw material surveys, and new kiln systems. Japanese ceramic craftsmen also introduced new pottery and glazing techniques in places such as Nantou, Miaoli, and Beitou.

After World War II, ceramic production continued to expand. In the 1950s, daily-use ceramics grew rapidly, followed by architectural ceramics, painted ceramics, and export products. Yingge, Taoyuan, Hsinchu, and Miaoli became important production areas.

Taiwan also developed Koji pottery, mainly used in temple decoration. After a decline in the postwar period, Koji pottery revived from the 1970s onward and expanded into public art, gifts, and cultural tourism.

Today, ceramics in Taiwan range from functional ware and wood-fired pottery to contemporary ceramic art, combining traditional kiln culture, modern technology, and personal artistic expression.

Northern Urban Areas: Beitou pioneered high-temperature glaze and porcelain experimentation during the Japanese colonial period, becoming an important starting point for modern ceramic technology and aesthetics in Taiwan. Yingge, with its high-quality clay resources and transportation advantages, accumulated more than two centuries of kiln industry history and later developed into Taiwan's most representative ceramic production center through mechanization and industrial expansion.

Central Hills: Miaoli developed stoneware-quality production systems early during the Japanese colonial period and continues today with a coexistence of snake kilns, wood-firing culture, and studio-based creation. Nantou, with its transportation advantages and kiln history, developed a ceramic culture centered on functional ware, wood-fired kilns, and tourism-oriented ceramic parks.

Chiayi Koji Pottery: Koji pottery techniques were brought to Taiwan by immigrant craftsmen and long depended on temple architecture demands. Through craft lineages, glaze systems, and competitive workshop traditions, Chiayi became the most representative center of Koji pottery in Taiwan.

Southeastern Creative Areas: These regions developed large-scale ceramic works, including public ceramic walls, through exploration of local clay materials and high-temperature glaze techniques.

