But the hunter-gatherer lifestyle continues to fascinate her, both because it may offer a healthier diet and because it allows us to explore our own foraging origins. Now she is turning that interest toward Taiwan, a tropical island believed to be the grandmother of many South Sea cultures, including the Malay, Filipinos, Hawaiians and Maoris.

“Neolithic Taiwan was an incubator – something was going on there,” she said.

Hunters and gatherers lived on Taiwan for thousands of years before Chinese farmers arrived. Yu wonders what prompted that Chinese immigration 6,000 years ago and the later pioneering expansion into the Pacific. She feels Taiwan is the perfect place to study humanity’s resiliency and ability to adapt to new conditions.

“Although Taiwan tribes use modern farming equipment today, some still cultivate ancient crops,” she said. “I can compare labor-intensive crops (like millet) with hardy ancient crops (like taro) and see what these modern-day farmers can tell me about labor costs and resiliency. “Living off wild things is not only healthy but can be productive,” she continued. “We need to rediscover the knowledge the ancients had.”