

# The Dispersal of the Formosan Aborigines in Taiwan

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There are some twenty different ethnic groups of the Formosan aborigines. There was virtually no written record for them until 400 years ago. In this paper I shall trace the dispersal of each Formosan tribe and show it on a map, as based on linguistic, ethnological and various other information, such as the oral history of the natives and written documents in Dutch, Chinese and Japanese. I shall indicate the directions and stages of the dispersal of each tribe. Only rough migration routes and dates can be given at this stage of knowledge. They will be modified when more information is available.

The Formosan tribes include Atayal, Saisiyat, Bunun, Tsou, Rukai, Paiwan, Puyuma, Amis, Kavalan, Ketangalan, Kulon, Taokas, Papora, Babuza, Pazeh, Hoanya, Thao, Siraya and Qauqaut. The migration of the Yami people to the Orchid Island, which belongs to the Batanic group of the Philippines, will be shown on a different map. ( [Please, see the attachment](#)).

## 1. The Atayalic Group

The Atayalic group is comprised of two main subgroups, Atayal and Seediq. They share about 45~49% cognacy in the 200 basic vocabulary wordlist. Thus they are estimated to have split off from each other about 1,600 years ago, as based on lexicostatistics (Li 1983:16, Note 19). About mid-eighteenth century, the Atayal subgroup started to disperse to the north and the Seediq subgroup dispersed to the east. Those who dispersed to the north became the Ts'ole' subgroup of Atayal. The Ts'ole' subgroup arrived at the upstream of Hoping River about 1750. The latest wave of Atayal dispersal was the Squliq subgroup of Atayal, which arrived at the midstream of Hoping River, Fushing county and finally Wulay county around 1820~1850 (Mabuchi 1954).

## 2. Bunun

The massive migration of Bunun started around the turn of the 18th century, i.e. about 300 years ago. The Bunun tribe was originally settled in the midwest of Taiwan, all in Shinyi county. It dispersed to the south and east. The first subgroup to migrate was

Takopulan, which had been resettled to the south of Tsou by the mid-18th century. Then there were two main waves of dispersal: The first to the south and southeast, and the second to the west and southwest, including Isbukun, Takivatan and Takbanuaz subgroups. The latest migration was the northern subgroup, including Takituduh and Takibakha.

### **3. The Tsouic Group**

The Tsouic group used to occupy a fairly large area in the southwestern parts of central Taiwan. Due to the invasion of the other tribes and contagious diseases, it shrank to the relatively small area as today.

The oral tradition says that the Tsouic group originated in Mountain Jade. About 2000 years ago, the group split into two, northern Tsou and southern Tsou. Northern Tsou moved down along Nanzihshian River and dispersed to the west, while Southern Tsou moved down along Laonong River. The latter further split into two, Kanakanavu and Saaroa about a few hundred years ago.

### **4. The Rukaic Group**

The Rukai tribe was originally located to the north of the northwestern part of its present settlement. The first split was the Mantaoran, which may have come into existence more than a thousand years ago. It was geographically adjacent or close to Saaroa, a Southern Tsouic subgroup, as evidenced by the heavy borrowing between Mantaoran and Saaroa. The second stage of split was the Maga-Tona subgroup which dispersed to the northwestern part about 1000 years ago. The third stage of split was to disperse to the south. This subgroup further split into two, one to the south to Budai county, and the other to the east. Later on, the latter further split into Taromak (Tanan) and Labuan. The Taromak subgroup eventually migrated all the way to Tanan, Taitung, while Labuan moved to Budai to join the Budai subgroup.

### **5. Paiwan**

The Paiwan tribe was originally settled along Ailiao River, near the foot of mountains. At the beginning of the 17th century, Paiwan gradually dispersed to the south. A subgroup moved to the east and eventually crossed over the Central Mountains. Paiwan distribution during the Dutch period (1624-1662) was already roughly the same as it is today. According to the oral tradition of Paiwan, there had been other settlers in the area of southern Taiwan before Paiwan arrived (Mabuchi 1954).

## **6. Puyuma**

Between Paiwan dispersal to the south and the arrival of the Dutch, a subgroup of Puyuma dispersed to the southern tip of Taiwan in early 17th century. They dominated over the Paiwans in the area and became ancestors of some Eastern Paiwans. The second wave of Puyuma migration was from Zhiben to the north, called Nanwang today. (Mabuchi 1954)

## **7. Amis**

The most diversified Amis dialects are in the northern and central parts of the Hualian-Taitung Plain. The dispersal of the Amis must have taken place from the north to the south. When the Bunun and Atayal tribes expanded their territories to the east more than 200 years ago, the Amis in the northern and central parts were forced to migrate to the south. Under the pressure of the Puyumas, the Amis in the south were forced to migrate to the north. Thus there were both directions of their migration. Some Amis moved to the west and crossed over the Central Mountains (Mabuchi 1954).

## **8. Ketangalan**

Based on the linguistic materials collected by Ino (see Tsuchida 1985) a hundred years ago, the most diversified area of Ketangalan, which consists of Northwestern (Basay) and Southwestern (Luilang and others) subgroups, was at the downstream of Tamchui River. It can then be inferred that Ketangalan split into Basay, which dispersed to the east along Keelung River, and Luilang and some other closely related dialects, which dispersed to the south in Banchiao and Shindian areas. About 400 years ago, a group of Basay speakers moved south by sea to Yilan in the northeast coast of Taiwan. About 100 hundred years later, the Southwestern subgroup moved further to the west to Nankan and to the south to Puding in Taoyuan. See Tsuchida (1985) and Li (1991, 1999).

Based on the Spanish materials during the Spanish period (1626-1642), Senar spoken in a village at the mouth of Tamchui River was considerably different from the other dialects in northern Taiwan, and so was Tamchui (Borao). Evidence from the Spanish documents also seems to indicate that Ketangalan started to disperse from the downstream of Tamchui River.

## **9. Saisiyat and Kulon**

Saisiyat, which used to occupy a much larger geographical area before the expansion of

the Atayal people, is linguistically closest to Kulon, which was located in Taoyuan prefecture during the Ching dynasty (Tsuchida 1985). Saisiyat and Kulon are coordinate with the five western plain tribes and form the Northwestern subgroup of Formosan languages (Li 1985a). The most likely origin of these seven language was somewhere between Tatu River and Tachia River not far from the coast. The Pazeh tribe has remained more or less in the same area around Fengyuan. About two thousand years ago, the Saisiyat and Kulon subgroup split off from the Pazeh area and dispersed to the north. About a thousand years later, Kulon split off from Saisiyat and moved further north to Taoyuan, while Saisiyat dispersed to the mountain areas in the northeast.

## **10. The Western Plain Tribes**

Four tribes in the coastal western plains of Taiwan: Taokas, Papora, Babuza and Hoanya are most closely related to each other (Tsuchida 1982, Li 1985a). Linguistically the most diversified area is at Tatu River. It can be inferred that the center of dispersal for the four tribes is also in that area. About 1000 years ago, this language group split into two, Hoanya and the rest. Hoanya dispersed to the south while the other subgroup, which can be named "Baburan," dispersed to the west. At a later stage, Baburan split into Papora and another subgroup. At a still later stage, the other subgroup further split into two, Babuza and Taokas. The Taokas moved to the north of Papora probably by the sea, as the interior area was occupied by Pazeh, which is more distantly related and hostile to the four western plain tribes.

## **11. Thao**

Among all the Formosan ethnic groups, Thao is most closely related to the four western plain tribes, as based on phonological and lexical evidence (Blust 1996, Li 1998). However, there are less than ten exclusively shared lexical innovations between Thao and the four tribes. The lexical evidence indicates that Thao must have had close contact with Babuza and Taokas since it split off from the others about 2000 years ago. Based on the linguistic evidence and oral history of Thao (Li 1999), the Thao tribe was probably settled in the area of Zhuoshui River. Perhaps with pressure from the other tribes, it migrated to the east to the mountain areas. About 800 years ago it moved north to the Sun-Moon Lake areas, including Yuchih and Shuili counties.

## **12. The Siraya Group**

During the Zheng Dynasty (1661-1683) of Taiwan, some Siraya people in Tainan Plain started to retreat to Jiashian, Liugui and Muzha areas at the foot of mountains in the east until

around 1722. This Siraya migration displaced the Taivoan people in the interior area and, from 1736 on, the latter were forced to move from the mid-stream of Zengwen River to Nanzih and Laonung rivers (Chang 1951). Similarly the Makatao people in Pingtung were forced to retreat to the foot of mountains in the east.

There were three routes for Sirayaic migration to the east coast of Taiwan (Chang 1951):

1. The northern route: to cross over the Central Mountains from Laonung River to Shinwulu coast;
2. The central route: from Fangliao to Pilam (Penan) via Dawu;
3. The southern route: from Hengchun to Pilam along the southern coast of Taiwan.

### **13. Qauqaut**

Based on the oral traditions of various Atayal villages, Qauqaut was originally settled in the mid-stream of Takiri River (Liwushi in Chinese). Due to the pressure of Atayals in the expansion of their territories in mid-18th century, Qauqaut started to move down the Takiri to the east coast. Later Qauqaut moved north to Langsu in Nan'ao before they moved to Nanfang'ao and then to the north of Su'ao. (Mabuchi 1931).

### **14. Migration of the Western Plain Tribes to the East**

In 1804, more than a thousand people from five western plain tribes (Taokas, Papora, Babuza, Pazeh and Hoanya) crossed over the Central Mountains and moved to Wuwei, north of Nanyang River in Yilan. A few years later they were defeated and compelled by the Chinese from Zhangzhou and evacuated to Luodung and Dongshan, south of Nanyang River (Yao 1829:71).

From 1823 to 1840s, five western plain tribes migrated to Puli in central Taiwan (Chang 1951, Appendix II).

### **15. Kavalan Migration to the South**

In 1840, the Kavalan people from Kalewan village started to migrate to the south via Su'ao by the sea. They first settled near Milun Mountain in Hualian. Later they expanded along the east coast further down south close to Penan (Chang 1951, Appendix II). Some people (Blundell, p. c.) believe that they also took an inland route in Hualian-Taitung.

### **16. Yami of the Batanic Group**

The Batanic group, which is comprised of Yami, Itbayat, Ivatan (including Ivasay and Isamorong subdialects) and Babuyan, may have been settled on the Batanes for four or five thousand years. It started to split into two subgroups about a thousand years ago. One subgroup remained on Batan Island, and the other dispersed to the north to Itbayat Island. About five hundred years later, a group from Itbayat moved further north to Lanyu (Orchid Island). At about the same time, a group from Batan Island moved down south to Babuyan Island.

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