# THE AMIS,[1] AND PREHISTORY, IN CULTURAL HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT IN TAIWAN[2]

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ABSTRACT

*There has been a concerted effort to develop and effectively manage a definition of a "sense of place" in Taiwan. While history is the record of the past, heritage is what contnues from the past that influences our present lives. This paper looks at Taiwan's attempts to explore and maintain heritage among the Amis of the east coast, and in museums based on the local archaeological record. These ongoing projects are integrated in local community and national efforts.*

> Heritage is what we have now from the past: The goods that we inherit from our parents, the residues of toxic wastes, memories and artifacts that we cherish and retain, our genetic inheritance, and such culture as we have absorbed and made our own. Included in our cultural, intellectual, and professional heritage are the historical narratives we know and we accept, and which help shape our sense of identity. (Buckland 2004)

Over the past fifty years or so, in the Asia Pacific, there has been an effort to develop a "sense of place." This paper intends to draw the reader's attention to the current state of Taiwan indigenous cultures *vis-à-vis* recognition of their ethnic heritage (in Barnes *et al*. 1995, see esp. Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines, I Chiang, Lava Kau 1995; also Hsieh 1987) in the context of their national standing. What are the programs to support these local ethnicities? In Taiwan since the mid-1980s a number of local visitor centers, cultural centers, and museums have been developed for an influx of visitors. And, for the indigenous people themselves, there is an increased desire to conserve their heritage. Large dance areas, traditional housing in open-air museums, eco-cultural tourism, and craft centers are the developing trend in Taiwan for the Amis, and other indigenous groups. At the same time, island-wide prehistory has come to the forefront of public attention with the building of museums reminding that the past serves as a way to identify national consciousness.

## THE PAST, HISTORY, AND HERITAGE

Michael Buckland, Professor Emeritus at the School of Information Management Systems, University of California, Berkeley, suggests that it is useful to distinguish between the *past*—what happened; *history, accounts of the past*; and *heritage*, which is those parts of the past that affect us in the *present*. To be more precise, history depends arguably on more than what is inscribed as documentation of the past. Otherwise the events that have transpired are no longer directly available to be referred to. The past is knowable only indirectly through histories—descriptions and narratives of what happened. For every aspect of the past, there are many narratives or none. As many factors influence what histories are, they are always multiple and incomplete. Buckland draws his concepts from Fentress and Wickham (1992) by which narratives come to be (1) selected, (2) adopted, (3) rehearsed and (4) adapted. He writes about the processes that determine what will become the accepted mythic account as opposed to "those that we don't know or don't accept" (Buckland 2002). The legacies that we use are the consequences not only of the past, but also of past decisions about adoption and implementation, and our current selections.

In Taiwan since the 1895 Japanese colonial occupation, archaeological and ethnological work has been conducted to better understand the south sea island cultures.. This was the Japanese *literati* recognition based on research of a prehistory and its "living descendants" in continuum (Lamley 1964; Huang and Li 1993; Huang *et al*. 1997; Shimizu 2000). Yet, this was not to arouse local awareness and interest. It was for "ivory tower" academic recognition for Japan's role in its proper colonial quest. Since the acquisition of Taiwan by the Republic of China in 1945, the concept of heritage has been related to the cultures of the Chinese mainland. The Austronesian-speakers of the Taiwan area were relegated to "beyond the mountain status" or mostly extinct *pingpu* "Formosan speakers of the plains" (see Li 1955; Chuang *et al*. 1988; Hsieh 1994; Liu and Pan 1998; Faure 2000).

From the 1980s with the lifting of martial law and liberalization polices enacted, the indigenous people found a voice for their cultural self-determination.This has led to the awareness in the general public that is supporting indigenous recognition. The unique layered stone architecture of the Paiwan and Rukai and their rich material culture (Chen 1968; Tseng 1991; Chiang 1992), or the vocal brilliance of the eight harmonic songs of the Bunun and the Amis great singers, have been observed by scholars and the public as of the highest order of achievement.[4]


*Figure 1. Map of Taiwan*

## TAIWAN HERITAGE SITE POTENTIALS

The people of Taiwan have achieved renowned economic success globally since the 1960s and their diplomatic resourcefulness has given the island continued acknowledgement from the international community and respect for self-determination.

It is time to consider and take stock of the remaining natural and cultural treasures that offer a perspective of Taiwan's unique living environment. Tourism as the indicator of present trends states that interest in ecology and ethnic heritage will continue to be based on the services of travel and related resources in Taiwan (Blundell 1992;

Chen 1992). With this in mind, preparation must be made in each sector of business and government with increased awareness of the impending impact of visitors, and the value of such visitations in each area.

Taiwan is an island system composed of other islands from Lan-yu (Orchid Island) southeast of Taitung to the 64-islet Penghu archipelago (The Pescadores) of the Taiwan Strait. Politically the mainland coastal islands such as Kinmen and Matsu are included in the Taiwan area (Fig. 1). The implication is that "Taiwan society" is spread over a complex multidimensional array of eco-niche islands with Taiwan as its centerpiece. The heritage is based on a fragile and eroding environment that has succumbed to industrialization. In anthropology, it is known that the past is a resource to be utilized in the present (Appadurai 1981). This "scarce" resource could be considered as a rich item or complex system in the realm of cultural heritage, important as a marker *of, by* and *for* humanity. Once heritage has been recognized and established as a matter of record for the world to observe, the obvious next step is to open the doors for the public to take notice and visit the sites that were previously, at most, only read about.

Local cultures have preserved their uniqueness despite the impact of rapid modernization. Internationalization has been the guide for Taiwan in the world network especially for trade. The information technologies that are so much integrated in the development of Taiwan are acting as a link to this globalization process. Since the 1980s, Taiwan has become increasingly concerned with its cultural and environmental role in the international community. A national park system was established to insure sustainable natural heritage. Institutions and government agencies are working to contribute to the increased public awareness and academic exchange to enhance knowledge of the cultural heritage in Taiwan (e.g., Hu 1996; Chen 1998). As the past is maintained to be a precious resource, increased emphasis is becoming apparent in the society at large to protect and instruct on its meaning and value. Documented sites of prehistory and history are becoming important as a link to attach meaning to the population of today in terms of archaeological and ethnological literacy (Lien 1989; Chen 1995; Chen 2000).

In 2001, World Heritage Day was launched in Taiwan (following the initiative of such a day held in France since 1984) furthering pride locally by associating "world heritage" with Taiwan. In 2002 the Cultural Environment Year was initiated in Taiwan. Twelve sites were recommended by the Council for Cultural Affairs to be reviewed by local historians, cultural experts, and government agencies. In March 2003 the council appointed an operations committee to manage to oversee the maintenance and preservation of potential world heritage sites in Taiwan (see Chang 2003). As the government of Taiwan has not participated in the United Nations since 1971, there are no heritage sites registered with the UNESCO.[5] Yet, the cabinet-level Council for Cultural Affairs has listed sites of the Taiwan area for possible consideration to facilitate a local "sense of well being" in the worldwide arena of heritage sites. The possibility of twelve sites, feasible or not, include: (1) Yangmingshan National Park, (2) Tamsui Historic Foreign Customs Houses and San Domingo (known locally as "Red-haired Fort"), (3) The Old Mining Township of Chinkuashih in Taipei County, (4) Kinmen Island, (5) Old Mountain Line Railway in Miaoli, (6) Alishan Forest and Railway, (7) Basaltic Columns of Penghu, (8) The Chilan Cypress Grove, (9) Taroko National Park, (10) Peinan Archaeological Site, (11) Lan-yu Island, and (12) the loftiest peak in Eastern Asia, Yushan (Blundell 2003). In Taiwan there is increased momentum for establishing a heritage conscious society at the local level for both tangible and intangible heritage assets aiming for international standards.

## HERITAGE AWARENESS IN EASTERN TAIWAN

The concept of heritage or cultural preservation has been historically complex in Taiwan due to different government policies. Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule from 1895 to 1945. Unlike the Chinese mainland experience with the Japanese during the first half of the 20th century, the Taiwanese have a tacit respect for the colonial government of Japan that placed Taiwan on the world stage in terms of modernization. From 1947 to 1987, Taiwan experienced martial law as a way to safeguard the stability of the ruling political *status quo* under the Kuomintang (KMT) government. With the lifting of 40 years of martial law in 1987, Taiwan has experienced a renewal in heritage consciousness based on the island's unique past. This awareness has circulated across communities through the region of the Pacific (Crocombe 1999). Specific cultural traits based on pride are increasingly being conserved in different counties. The northeast coast Ilan (Yi-lan) County government has been the most successful in Taiwan in presenting its people—with a sense of living within "Ilan culture"—as a unified system of heritage resources emanating from indigenous *pingpu* Austronesian-speakers (Kavalan) and Han Chinese roots (see Blundell 2000:425-427; Faure 2000). Hualien County is proud of its Taroko National Park as a theme related to natural beauty, the marble industry, and its relations with indigenous peoples of Atayal (e.g., Taroko) and Bunun groups of the Central Range, and Amis groups of the coastal and Hua-tung valley regions. Further south in Taitung County, there is the spirit of six Austronesian-speaking groups namely, Amis, Bunun, Paiwan, Puyuma, Rukai, and Yami (also known as Tao [pronounced *da'wu* meaning people] of Orchid Island).

Various ethnic groups with different languages and customs have inhabited Taiwan from the Paleolithic (from about 30,000 years ago) to the Neolithic beginning from about 6,500 BP (Liu *et al*. 1993). In the early seventeenth century, the Han Chinese migrated to the island from southern and central China to mix with the indigenous *pingpu* people. This assimilating process yielded the Han Chinese as the majority population. In turn, the Han Chinese culture has exerted a considerable influence on local traditions. However, languages and customs of the native peoples have continued affirming ethnic identity (see Keyes 1976, 1979; De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1982;

Hsieh 1987, 1994; Chen *et al*. 1994; Chaigne *et al*. 2000). As Taiwan is a key ancestral source of Austronesian speakers, the island is rich with ancient indigenous cultures and prehistory. There is an increasing literature from archaeology and ethnology on Taiwan area Austronesian speakers and their relationship to other Pacific regions (Beauclair 1985; Chang 1989; Hsu 1993; Li 1999; Bellwood 2000; Blundell 2000).

## AMIS CULTURE IN THE EAST COAST NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

Taiwan legislation has permitted the Ministry of Transportation and Communications to create large tracts designated as important landscape and cultural heritage reserves as "Scenic Areas" with onsite administration for management. Areas were selected as being of national significance with specific local qualities of interest to visitors. To date, 12 nationally important scenic areas have been organized separately from national parks, here listed in order of establishment the Northeast Coast National Scenic Area, East Coast National Scenic Area, Penghu National Scenic Area, Dapeng Bay National Scenic Area, Hua-Tung Rift Valley National Scenic Area, Matzu National Scenic Area, Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area, Tri-mountain National Scenic Area, Alisan National Scenic Area, Mao-lin National Scenic Area, North Coast and Guanyinshan National Scenic Area, and Southwest Coast National Scenic Area. These are designed to retain the natural and cultural essence of the region with limited new commercial and private building construction.

The East Coast National Scenic Area (ECNSA) administration is establishing cultural centers and parks for the general public to share and experience indigenous cultures in local context, and to provide a place for public education and recreation (Blundell 1997). Since the opening of the Amis Cultural Centre in November 1995, at Tuli, Taitung, as a part of a visitor center at the headquarters of the ECNSA, it has been a forum for the Amis to practice and demonstrate their traditional arts and ritual in an area designated for tourism. This open-air park has provided a place for exhibiting Amis craft and creating awareness for the visiting public. The site's wood and bamboo construction representing Amis architecture was based on the research of the Japanese ethnographer Suketaro Chiji'iwa (1960) in 1943 (Figs 2 and 3).

The Amis dwelling was traditionally rectangular facing an open area to allow space for household gatherings. It was taboo to have an entrance facing directly to the back of another house. The structure was made with wood posts (such as from areca trees and hard woods), rattan floors, and walls were woven plaited split bamboo and mud plastered, and the roof made with thatched straw. After several years, it was necessary to renovate the structure to keep it in shape. The entrance to the dwelling sometimes was located on the shorter side of the building. The roof eaves come over the outside wall of the dwelling, creating a sheltered area usually lower than the height of a person. Outside of the structure's walls a porch surrounds the dwelling protected by the eaves, making an area for the storage of farm implements and other things.

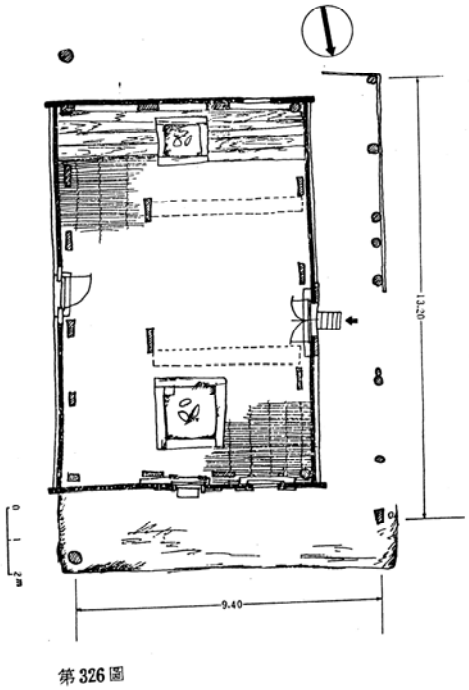


*Figure 2. House floor plan by Suketaro Chiji'iwa, 1943 (1960).*

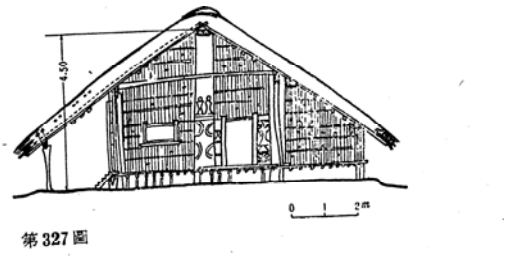


*Figure 3. House elevation by Suketaro Chiji'iwa, 1943 (1960).*

The Amis work to achieve public recognition in the folk arts like other indigenous peoples in Taiwan. The Amis villages in eastern Taiwan are presently making notable strides with their relatively large populations and colorful traditions (Fig. 3). This is especially evident during the harvest festival (Huang 1994), which has a government-listed calendar of designated events.

Publicized in a calendar poster for visitors are the Amis festivals in such venues as a performance amphi theater for ceremonial singing (Sun 2002), dance and thepresentation of selected cultural activities (see Anderson 2000:301). The famous annual rites of the Amis are


*Figure 4. Tinted postcard of late Japanese period entitled "A dance of savages." Courtesy of Te-wen Wei.*

performed after the rice harvest festival between July and August for about a week or longer whose purpose is to unify the groups, initiate the next generation and promote their common welfare. The length of the festival depends on the decision made by village leaders. At the gathering there is a ceremony for worship of ancestors and for a commitment in respecting the leadership of the elder age grade groups. The age groups convene in competitions and training activities, as groups for fishing. Groups work in the festival for the preparation of foods and to participate in the great circle dance (Fig. 4; see Li *et al*. 1992; Huang 1994; Li 1994).

## RECENT MUSEUMS OF TAIWAN PREHISTORY[6]

Recently several important museums have opened in Taiwan to give the public a fresh perspective on its prehistory and ethnology along with an array of indigenous cultural parks (see Yao 1987; Lu 1993; Wang 1996). One of the most spectacular finds happened during the leveling of the ground for rail sidings at the construction of the Peinan Railway Station in 1980. The heavy equipment scraped the ground below floor level of a Neolithic village exposing more than a thousand slate-coffins. Earlier this site marked by erect megaliths was recorded on terraces of the Peinan River, Taitung, about a century ago, and later tested for other cultural evidence in the mid-1940s by the Japanese excavators, Takeo Kanaseki and Naoichi Kokubu (see their publication of 1956). Wen-hsun Sung and Chao-mei Lien of National Taiwan University were contracted to salvage excavation at the southeastern edge of the railway sidings from 1980 to 1989. The revelation of the extent of this repeatedly inhabited Neolithic site dated 5000-2000 BP[7] made it a registered first class monument, as by far the largest and most complete site of its kind in Taiwan, and perhaps the Western Pacific discovered to date. The site warranted the building of the National Museum of Prehistory in Taitung with a cultural park and onsite visitor center (see Lu 1996; *National Museum of Prehistory Guide Book* 2002). This was initiated with a planning bureau established in 1989 under the directorship of Chao-mei Lien.

Early in the planning there was a plan to have a national museum onsite. Once the plans were considered, it was realized that the museum construction would severely damage the site. So, near the site an open-air cultural park and a visitor center were established adjacent to the ongoing covered excavations of the Peinan Culture. At this particular site there is a rich continuum of habitation with breaks and returns with similar patterns of material culture, namely the slate coffins and their direction of orientation, grave offerings of earthenware pots, jade earrings and bracelets, and other refined stone and earthenware implements.

This museum was built near the Kang-le Railway Station (one stop south of the Peinan Railway Station) in Taitung and initially opened in 2001.[8] The galleries of

Natural History include the geomorphic formation (Penglai orogeny) of the island, The Life of the Prehistoric Peoples of Taiwan, Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan, Archaeology as a Science, and especially Peinan Culture. The museum is fitted with research laboratories, lecture theaters, archival and storage facilities on ten hectares of land that includes an open-air performing arts venue and botanical park.

The National Museum of Prehistory is the premier facility of its kind in Taiwan and represents a potential laboratory of prehistory and ethnology for the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia (see proposal by Li 1989 for Taiwan as a living heritage laboratory from prehistory). The beauty of this institution is that there is space for the local east coast communities of Taitung to express their art forms with a venue that is appreciated by both performers and the public, especially for festival events at the National Museum of Prehistory Plaza and at the Peinan Cultural Park. Opposite, on the south side, an extensive open-air "Austronesian Cultural Park" is being developed.

Another important prehistory to early history museum is located in Taipei County at the southern mouth of the Tamsui River (at Ba-li) coincidentally facing the famous early Neolithic 6,500 BP Tapenkeng Culture (TPK) site. The Shi-san Hang Museum at Ba-li (northwestern Taiwan) was recently built to display finds of an Iron Age Culture that practiced iron forging between 1,800 and 500 BP. The site of Shi-san Hang (meaning 13th trading post) was excavated under the direction of Cheng-hwa Tsang and Yi-chang Liu of Academia Sinica from the late 1980s (see *Han Sheng* 1991; Tsang 2000; Tsang and Liu 2001). Its findings gave evidence of an indigenous *pingpu* village settlement in a Chinese trading network that extended across Southeast Asia. This museum is the first archaeological museum of northern Taiwan, and opened in 2003. It will assist in establishing the "Seashore Community Museum" for the local people. Again this project was developed based on an important archaeological discovery.

Other public interest programs and museums with local and national support are being planned for the near future.[9]

## CONCLUSION

In Taiwan, people are reflecting on the importance of renewed cultural awareness for island-wide inheritance based on their living indigenous ethnic groups and evidence from prehistory. It is a heritage identity of the present with data coming from the recent or distant past.

Cultural heritage is about the way we live. The recognition and demarcation of the contributions to heritage comes from both private and public agencies. The notions of museums from the 19th century and cultural centers from the 20th century are bringing forth a better understanding with heritage. Yet, to make a living interface with shared heritage, the facilitation of knowledge should be more apparent and available in a manner that speaks to living cultures. The point is "what we know," is what we live by. The educational process is critical in our modern lives. And, "how we live" derives increasingly from the administrative responsibilities of the sociopolitical process. As the past is skewed by the selection of available knowledge through evidence, it is our research on culture and the circulation of such knowledge that is required for decision-making in the evaluation for the utility of cultural resources.

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## NOTES

1. Amis people (also known as Pangcah) represent the largest population (about 140,000) of a possible 370,000 ethnic indigenous people living in Taiwan. They live primarily between Hualien and Taitung along the Pacific coast and longitudinal rift valley between the coastal mountains and Central Range, along with scattered numbers in Pingtung County (Hengchun). But, also there is a population of Amis who moved to cities such as Kaohsiung in the south, and in the north, Taipei, Taoyuan and Keelung (Thorne 1999). The Amis traditionally are a matriarchal society giving women the authority of kinship, yet men are organized according to the "graded age of groups" with the senior age groups holding village political authority. The village organization retains both systems as a social way of doing things. In daily life, women were traditionally able to maintain rice fields. In the past men boasted of their hunting skills, and as a hunting-and-gathering people, they returned to the village with a bounty of forest and coastal goods (see Chu 1975; Li *et al*. 1992).

2. The presentation "Heritage and Cultural Orientation of the East Coast of Taiwan" for the Melaka IPPA 16th Congress, July 1998, scheduled for the *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association*, 22 (2002) became incorporated into the paper for the Taipei IPPA 17th Congress, September 2002, entitled "Asia Pacific Cultural and Heritage Resource Management: Themes in Monsoon Asia" and was revised for this publication.

3. The author, David Blundell (Ph.D. Department of Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles) has contributed a number of articles on cultural resource management. Since the 1980s Blundell has been teaching at National Taiwan University and National Chengchi University in Taipei. His works include Empowering Austronesian language and culture mapping, paper for the *6th Conference of the European Society for Oceanists*, Marseilles, France (2005) [in press for *Pacific Linguistics*], The traveling seminar: An experiment in cross-cultural tourism and education in Taiwan, *National Association for Practicing Anthropology* (*NAPA*) *Bulletin*. 23:234-251 (2000), and he edited

*Austronesian Taiwan: Linguistics, History, Ethnology, Prehistory*. Berkeley: Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California (2000). Write to: International Institute, 11248 Bunche Hall, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1487, USA. Project email: pacific@berkeley.edu

4. Formosan music generally has become internationally acknowledged from studies. See Hsu 1987a, 1987b; Cheng n.d. [1989]; Esarey 1996; Li and Wu 2000.

5. When referring to Taiwan, in 2000 UNESCO adopted the designation "Taiwan (China)," and with reference to the Republic of China, the United Nations uses "Chinese Taipei."

6. See Blundell 1997 for the planning of the National Museum of Prehistory.

7. See Sung 1995; Lien 1991, 1993, 2000, 2002.

8. See Blundell 1997:237-238: it was projected in this article that the National Museum of Prehistory would open in the "late 1990s or by 2000."

9. Another planned museum is located in the Southwest region of Taiwan. It is also from salvage archaeology, this time from the Tainan area. The Peisanshe Site at the Tainan Science-based Industrial Park has revealed a vast array of Neolithic remains of the Wusantou Phase (2,800-2,000 BP) and the Tahu Culture (3,300-2,800 BP).

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