

TAIWAN AUSTRONESIAN LANGUAGE HERITAGE CONNECTING PACIFIC ISLAND PEOPLES: DIPLOMACY AND VALUES¹

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ABSTRACT

As we engage in the current Pacific arena of diplomacy and cultural values, the position of Taiwan as an early linguistic factor in the dispersal of its languages is important to observe. The region is increasingly using this linguistic heritage to seek collaboration and partnership. Since Neolithic prehistory, Taiwan has ushered in the Austronesian languages that became about 1,200 in number spreading across most of Island Southeast Asia and Oceania for several thousand years, extending from origins, with examples found in the Formosan languages, through the Malayo-Polynesian languages of the islands of Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Micronesia, Melanesian islands, Polynesia, and across the Indian Ocean in Madagascar. These languages are valuable, regardless of their extent, influence, or number of speakers, as part of the basic richness of humanity—a far-reaching interconnecting legacy of communication and worldviews. This article explores the concept of Taiwan and Austronesia—positioning historical roots and contemporary languages and cultures as valuable peaceful and sustainable development tools for island inter-connectivity across the Pacific that can be used to seek collaboration and partnership due to their association with heritage.

Keywords: Taiwan, Austronesian languages, Pacific, heritage connections, diplomacy, linkages of peoples

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Recently, Pacific islands regional integration is a peaceful process based on cross-cultural understanding among peoples of common language heritage. As Austronesian-speaking peoples are spread in communities across the entire Pacific region, the position of Taiwan in the Western Pacific is important to observe as an early linguistic factor in the dispersal of languages. In the past decade, Taiwan has harnessed its Austronesian heritage to foster peaceful alliances in the Pacific region. Politically, the People's Republic of China (PRC) claims Taiwan and tries to prevent Taiwanese self-determination by international political isolation (Crocombe 1999a, b). Yet in 2002, through the initiatives of the Taiwan national government (Republic of China, ROC), Austronesian Forums were inaugurated in the Taiwan capital, Taipei, for enhancing cooperation among Austronesian-speaking countries including official representation from the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Nauru, Marshall Islands and Palau.³

Taiwan associations are based on almost forgotten old connections with far-reaching Pacific linguistic origins. The present term Austronesia is based on linguistics and archaeology supporting the origins and existence of the Austronesian Language Family spread across the Pacific on modern Taiwan, Indonesia, East Timor, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Micronesia, Polynesia, the non-Papuan languages of Melanesia, the Cham areas of Vietnam, Cambodia, Hainan, Myanmar islands, and some Indian Ocean islands including Madagascar. Taiwan is in the initiating region. Archaeological sites of Austronesian speakers spread across the Pacific: Taiwan has the earliest cultural sites and settlements, and the settlements become younger and younger as they spread further and further out. The earlier Taiwan Late Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) cultures of the region (described by archaeologist Sung 1969) lasted until the arrival of Neolithic peoples. At that time, the region of Taiwan was the Asian eastern coast. Paleolithic peoples, following large grazing mammals, moved across plains of what is now the Taiwan Strait. Later, after the last ice age when Taiwan became an island, Neolithic cultures were transported by sea craft probably originating from continental river estuaries. The pre- or early Austronesian languages originated with the development of these Neolithic cultures in Taiwan since 6,500 years ago. After several thousand years of incubation,

³ Taipei's Declaration of Austronesian Leaders (2002), the Forum of Austronesian Cooperation and Exchange (2003), and the Austronesian Forum (2007) were established in Taiwan to "share opinions and research on indigenous wisdom" and rights as a platform for understanding Austronesian speakers in terms of their "political, social, economic and cultural development" for building "a compact and orderly network to enhance the world's awareness and respect of indigenous people." In my opinion, there is a problem with using the term "Austronesian" when referring to "leaders" and "cooperation" as it refers to a language family, and should not be used otherwise. See, http://heasc.he.fju.edu.tw/index_en.htm

the languages codified and spread across the region probably acting as an early trade *lingua franca*.⁴

About 4,500 years ago, cultural evidence from Taiwan in the archaeological record, such as Nephrite jade (*Feng-tian yu*) from Hualien, indicates that artifacts moved southwards to the Philippines via the Batanes Islands (Bellwood and Dizon 2008). This is a key scientific indicator. The oldest sites of particular cultures point to the sources of those cultures. Archaeological evidence from about 3,500 years ago shows that the initial Austronesian speakers dispersed into the Pacific to Western Micronesia (the Marianas and Palau archipelagoes), and from the Bismarck Archipelago. Early sites exhibit red-slipped pottery, some of which is decorated with impressive designs, and radiocarbon-dated sediment cores of burnt materials indicating human presence. Later, people moved to more remote areas of Oceania: Vanuatu, Loyalty Islands, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa. In the last 2,000 to 1,000 years, evidence is found as far afield as Hawaii, Madagascar, and New Zealand, thus completing modern Austronesia.

Robert Blust (1985, 1996), a linguist, and Peter Bellwood (1997, 1999, 2009), an archaeologist, have championed the "Out of Taiwan" theory based on Formosan language concentration and antiquity. Jared Diamond (2000), in his *Nature* article "Taiwan's Gift to the World" illustrates how this happened. Stephen Oppenheimer and Martin Richards (2001) offer an alternative to the "Taiwan to Polynesia theory" by giving evidence that "genetic anomalies" that signify Polynesian populations, also known as the "Polynesia motif," are sourced from the Indonesian archipelago. It is certainly true that Oppenheimer and Richards have established that genetically, most likely the people of Polynesia probably had ancestors who had lived for a long period in current day eastern Indonesia, yet the Austronesian issue is about the dispersal of languages, not the dispersal of genes.

The people of Taiwan did not give rise to the population of Austronesia; rather, the early Formosan languages gave impetus for regional communication, trade, and cultural development that extended in an arc through Island Southeast Asia. The earlier populations of the Sunda region of the South China Sea originated from migrations walking across a sub-continent of Southeast Asia during the last ice ages—prior to Neolithic settlement in Taiwan. This belongs to the Holocene demographic prehistory of Southeast Asia.⁵ Richards (2008) states: "Our genetic evidence suggests

⁴ For archaeology and ethnology *vis-à-vis* Austronesian speakers and Taiwan, see Blundell 1995, 1997, 2004, 2009; Chang 1989; Chen and Chang 1996; Kirch 2000; Li 1989; Lien 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995, 2002; Tsang 2000a, b.

⁵ Professor of archaeogenetics, Martin Richards, at University of Leeds, has provided evidence that a

that probably since about 12,000 years ago these people began to recover from... [ice ages, climate/weather changes]... and expanded greatly in numbers, spreading out in all directions, including north to Taiwan, west to the Southeast Asian mainland, and east towards New Guinea. These migrations have not previously been recognised archaeologically, but we have been able to show that there is supporting evidence in the archaeological record too". "I think the study results are going to be a big surprise for many archaeologists and linguists on whose studies conventional migration theories are based. These population expansions had nothing to do with agriculture, but were most likely to have been driven by climate change—in particular, global warming and resulting sea-level rises at the end of the last ice age between 15,000–7,000 years ago." As a result of the sea rising, Sundaland—a Southeast Asian sub-continent—became present-day Island Southeast Asia.

Austronesia is a term of modern history.⁶ Although the Austronesian Language Family traces its origins to prehistory, its spread and scope was not recognised until 19th century linguistic research was conducted, primarily by Europeans—missionaries, colonial servants, and tradesmen—doing language learning, recording, and comparison. The efforts of Jules D'Ormont in 1883 gave raise to the terms Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. Ethnolinguistics in the early 20th century further pursued the region to define languages, such as pioneers Otto Dempwolff and Erwin Stresemann. Wilhelm Schmidt initiated *Anthropos* and facilitated the overarching term of Austronesian as a language family of the Formosan and Malayo-Polynesian speakers (see Blundell 2009: 402–403, 2011).

Today, Austronesia is often used as a sweeping generalisation—for a mix of origins, languages, societies, cultures, geographies, and peoples. The Austronesian Language Family is the largest, most widely-extended pre-European colonial related group of languages (see Figure 1). The languages number about 1,200 and represent 20% of the world's total. They are spoken by 270 million to 300 million people, mostly island-based, in a region that

substantial fraction of Southeast Asian people's mitochondrial DNA lineages (inherited by matrilineal descent), developed within Island Southeast Asia. Genetic evidence offers new theories about human migration into Island Southeast Asia (covering the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysian Borneo)—taking the population timeline back by thousands of years. This is about peoples of the Southeast Asian Sunda Continental Shelf before it submerged after the last Ice Age. Clearly not about languages, the Richards' DNA-based argument is about migrating people dating back 50,000–7,000 years ago. Does this counter the theory of Neolithic peoples expansion from Taiwan driven by rice agriculture about 4,500 years ago known also as the "Out of Taiwan" model? In my view, the Richards study is about early peopling of the region and the later Taiwan influences are about language dispersal across Island Southeast Asia.

⁶ I define history as the written record of events, reflections, thoughts, religions, lineage, etc. By contrast, prehistories are primarily oral traditions.

extends across the Pacific and Indian oceans (Wurm and Hattori 1981, 1983). Most of these languages are in danger of extinction.⁷

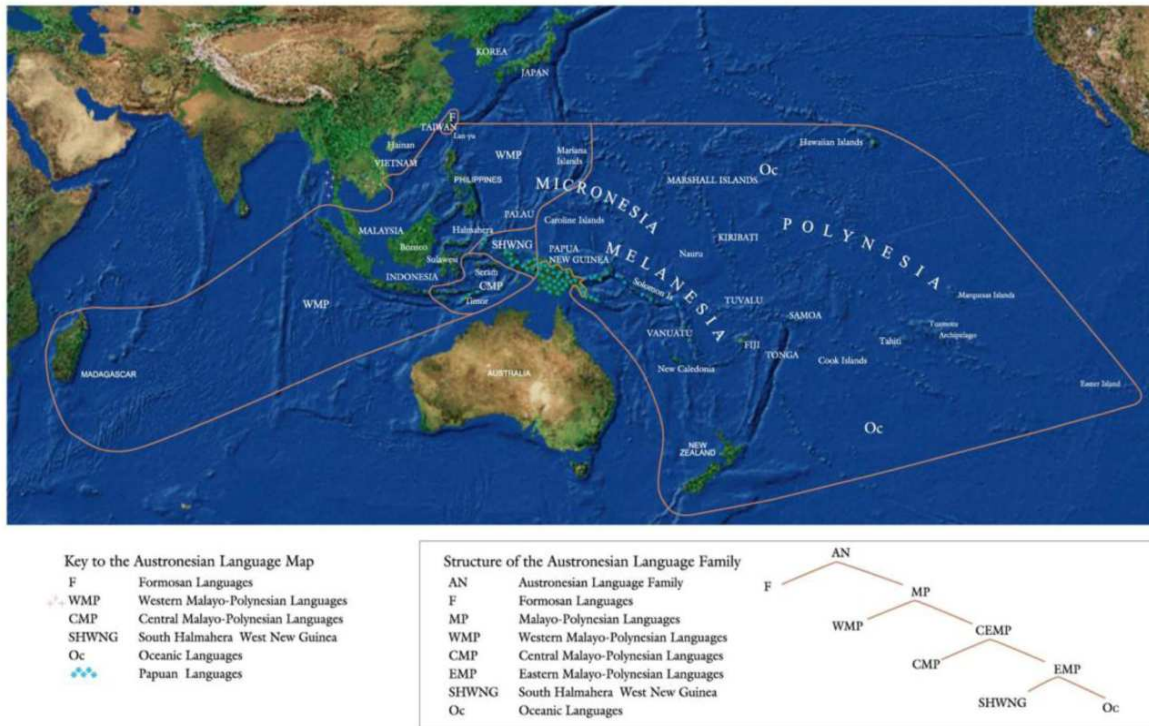


Figure 1: Dispersal of Austronesian Language Family (ref. Robert Blust) (Bellwood 2009: 343–344).

Utilisation of sea craft to leave the Asian mainland and voyage outwards is the hallmark of this island language family. In Taiwan, fourteen Austronesian-speaking peoples are officially registered as the Formosan language groups and Yami with the ROC Council of Indigenous Peoples (see Figure 2). Yet, there are many more groups in Taiwan, counting historic societies—and revitalisation of languages is currently taking place. These language groups represent just 2% of the Taiwan population and have long faced discrimination and marginalisation. Yet, the Taiwan (ROC) in its current situation of international isolation *vis-à-vis* PRC diplomatic pressure could be seen in a positive light as their cultures and communities benefit from heritage recognition with resource aid giving a non-Chinese source to the island.

⁷ For definitions on language endangerment, see Wurm 1997.

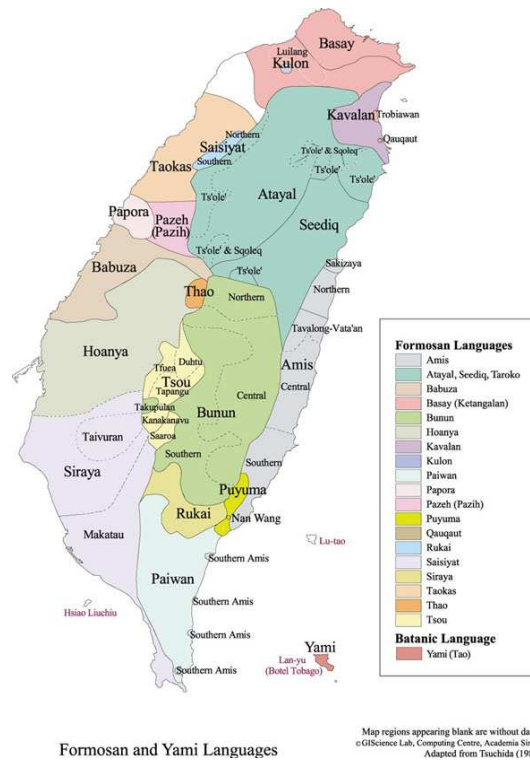


Figure 2: Map of Taiwan indigenous languages and cultures: *Formosan and Yami Languages*. Adapted from Tsuchida (1983). GIScience Lab, Computing Centre, Academia Sinica (Blundell 2009: 45).

New ways of looking at connections are before us. "Being Austronesian" is beckoning as a source of heritage pride,⁸ becoming known across the Pacific (see, Anderson 2009; Tsai 1999). How will the social sciences deal with the issues, and recent claims?

AUSTRONESIAN LANGUAGE HERITAGE FROM TAIWAN

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—as opposed to those that we don't know or don't accept (Buckland 2004).

⁸ See, Appadurai 1981.

Michael Buckland (2004) draws these concepts stated above from Fentress and Wickham (1992) writing on the processes by which narratives come to be (1) selected, (2) adopted, (3) rehearsed, and (4) adapted. The process that will become the accepted mythic account, including our heritage of information systems, is a legacy that we use and influences what we do. It is a consequence not only of the past, but also of past decisions about adoption and implementation.⁹ Our sense of history is doubly accidental, because it depends not only on what narratives happened to be composed, but also on which ones were accepted, "received," and incorporated into our sense of the past.

Taiwan has an obvious linkages with Austronesian-speaking peoples across the Pacific. This was culturally acknowledged in the establishment of the Austronesian Forum in 2002. This initiative was to interact with Pacific peoples. In 2006, the Austronesian Forum in Palau appealed for United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage status for endangered Austronesian languages and their associated cultures. Politically, to include Taiwan in UNESCO World Heritage programs is blocked by the PRC.¹⁰ Yet Taiwan, with its impressive list of Formosan languages, could not be ignored (Li 2000, 2001a, b; 2009).

Taiwan is not only a language stepping-stone into the Pacific from the Asian continent; it served as the incubator for the language family to develop linguistically and culturally. But what about the people in Taiwan, are they Austronesian? No—people cannot be a language family, anymore than I could be an Indo-European person. Here I am writing English, I am, therefore, a "speaker" of a language from the Indo-European language family that was dispersed across Eurasia and included the languages of Ireland and Sri Lanka for thousands of years up to the 16th century, and since then has included languages worldwide such as Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English. I am not, however, an Indo-European person. Austronesian speakers in Taiwan are connected in a similar way to languages dispersed across numerous islands to the east and southwards. People share common vocabulary from Taiwan to Hawaii, such as *lima*—"give me five", the number five, or fingers on the hand. Legends are prevalent of the people of short-stature who provided environmental and cultural knowledge to the Austronesian speakers upon their arrival on an island, even though the island was completely uninhabited prior to settlement. Cultural systems, beliefs and art enjoy patterns of similarities

⁹ Amis heritage of East Coast of Taiwan, see Li et al. 1992; Li 1998.

¹⁰ A dozen possible tangible world heritage sites are located in Taiwan—yet, China prohibits application to UNESCO in Paris (see Blundell 2003). Other potential intangible culture includes the nominated to World Heritage "eight harmonic voice music" of Bunun (see Hsu 1987a, b).

across the great expanses of ocean—a conduit of linkages across a region known as Austronesia.

CONCEPTUALISING TAIWAN

Taiwan became conceptualised as an island from early maps charted by the Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, French, British and Japanese. These maps include the island called Formosa (in Portuguese)—or Hermosa (in Spanish)—from the 16th century—sometimes just as a chart of the island (as with Dutch maps)—and at other times in the context of the Asia-Pacific region (Portuguese maps). The Ming and Qing maps of Imperial China illustrated the island as an archipelago in watercolor and ink with sweeping majestic green-blue mountains spewing waterfalls down into circular bays and river mouths. Port names were given for voyage destinations along the western coast, such as Sin-kang (near Tainan in the south), Lu-kang in the center, and Tamsui in the north—facing Fujian across the Taiwan Strait. The eastern side of the "mountainous archipelago" showed clouds merging with airy space. Later, the island's East Coast was mapped by circumnavigating European cartographers. And the Formosan islands (usually three)—with the Tropic of Cancer running through them—*became one*.

Taiwan was known as a destination for trade where peoples lived: "raw" and "cooked." The raw people were the "headhunting savages" who were trading, yet elusive in the island's Central Range, East Coast, and Orchid Island. The cooked people were those that were Sinicised through association, intermarriage, or acculturation with people from Fujian or other parts of China, such as the Hakka. They remained on the Westside plains to cultivate and/or trade for forest products like deer hides and camphor wood. A north-south "red line of control" demarcated boundaries of which the semi-raw peoples mixed with the semi-cooked peoples (see Figure 3).

Fujian Province reached to the island's line of control—as the Emperor of China ruled only taxable or tribute bearing peoples. To the east of the boundary—people were deemed strange, unruly, and not worthy of the empire. Mainland Fujian itself was considered a mountainous hinterland province bordering a dangerous sea—and access to Taiwan meant crossing the rough domain of pirates to marshy coasts. From 1683¹¹ to 1885, the Qing ruled the Western part of Taiwan as a prefecture of Fujian, and then

¹¹ At that time Qing Emperor Kang Hsi commented: Taiwan is a "trifling place—taking it adds nothing and abandoning it is no loss."

under Governor Liu Ming-chuan it became a province—yet, "raw savage" peoples continued with their own sovereignty of the Central and Eastern regions. In 1895, concluding the First Sino-Japanese War, the Treaty of Shimonoseki gave Korea its independence from being a tributary state of China and allowed Imperial Japan to occupy the Peng-hu Islands and the Qing administrated regions of Taiwan without formal Chinese interference, although local people defended their homes, and the remaining indigenous peoples of the Central Range and East remained open to Japanese military discretion.¹² Taiwan was eventually subdued by Japan, with modern mechanized warfare—combining the "raw" with the "cooked" peoples into *one island* for the first time in the early 20th century.¹³

So now, what constitutes Taiwan and where does it belong? In terms of its geomorphology, it's an island riding on the East Asian continental shelf being uplifted by the Pacific tectonic plate. During the last Ice Age, it was the mountainous East Coast of Asia with the Taiwan Strait a forested and grassy plain.



Figure 3: This 1901 map illustrates a red line demarcating the heritage of Qing control of people on the left side—leaving the other regions of Central and Eastern Taiwan to the self-ruling indigenous groups. Initially, the Imperial Japanese government of Taiwan from 1895 ruled up to line of control—then proceeded with military expeditions to conquer eastward. The map legend for the red line: Approximate boundary line separating Savage District and Territory under actual Japanese administration (James W. Davidson 1901. Courtesy of Wei Te-wen, SMC Publishing).

¹² The Treaty of Shimonoseki (Letter of Imperial Peace) of 1895 states that Japanese sovereignty over the Formosa archipelago would not be disputed by China, or any other state, over the next 50 years.

¹³ For the past hundred years of Taiwan history, see Huang et al. 1997.

Now as an island and connected to Austronesia by language heritage, Taiwan is uniquely positioned and tenaciously determined to represent its indigenoussness. Taiwan was self-governed by locality until the first half of the 20th century when Japan, by military force and techniques of modernised infrastructure, united the island. From 1945 to 1949, under ROC and United States allied occupation—the island was designated as a province of China.

In 1949, Taiwan became the seat of the ROC government, and remained a designated province. From 1952, with the San Francisco Peace Treaty and in 1953 the Taipei Peace Treaty, Japan relinquished its claim over Taiwan, giving resolution to its people for self-governing determination specified by the United Nations Charter in the framework of international law and diplomacy. Yet, Taiwan remained under ROC martial law until 1987. Since then, social democracy has given raise to political authority of the Taiwan electorate.

Modern China lays claim to Taiwan and its people. The PRC constitution states that 56 ethnic minority nationalities are in the realm of its republic—including peoples indigenous to Taiwan known officially as *gaoshanzu* (high mountain peoples). The term is a collective gloss for Taiwan indigenous Austronesian speakers including the seafaring Yami (Tao) of Lan-yu Island (Botel Tobago). Yet Taiwan and Lan-yu have comprised more than 20 indigenous languages and cultures (see Figure 2).

Now, to further confuse matters, former Taiwan (ROC) President Chen Shui-bian declared... "Aborigines in Taiwan are a branch of the Austronesian family. Studies by various academics even conclude that Taiwan may be the place where all Austronesian peoples originated." Remember that the term Austronesian is about a language family—not "aborigines" and not a source of human origins from Taiwan.

Also, the Council of Indigenous Peoples Minister Icyang Parod stated: "We will also seek to register Taiwan as the origin of Austronesian peoples with UNESCO."¹⁴ Another Council representative told me that on his trip to Australia, he told Australian Aboriginal people about their place of origin in Taiwan. He asked me why "They looked confused, and why they didn't know they came from Taiwan." I replied that Australian Aborigines migrated to their continent across the Sunda land bridges of Southeast Asia about 60,000 years ago. They were a Paleolithic culture. Austronesian speakers began much later as Neolithic cultures—and not

¹⁴ See, *Heritage* 2007. Will UNESCO register Taiwan as the origin of Austronesian peoples?
http://www.nowpublic.com/will_unesco_register_taiwan_origin_austronesian_peoples

settling in Australia. Yet both terms Australia and Austronesia etymologically are similar words derived from Latin *austrālis* "southern wind" and for Austronesia with the Greek *νήσος* (*nêsos*) "islands" making for "southern-sea islands."

TAIWAN AND ITS PACIFIC DILEMMA

As the PRC's influence in global affairs has extensively grown, Taiwan is reduced to official recognition by 23 independent states worldwide—six of those governments are from countries in the Pacific. Taiwan (ROC) President Ma Ying-jeou's first Pacific visit was postponed in 2009 due to the pressures of rescue and relief work after the southern Taiwan destruction of Typhoon Morakot that happened earlier on 8 August, but the delay also resulted in a change in the program. The original plan drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had intended to convene the Third Taiwan-Pacific Allies Summit in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, following two similar summits initiated by former Taiwan (ROC) President Chen Shui-bian in Palau, September 2006, and the Marshall Islands, September 2007. For President Ma, his office decided to replace the summit with traditional bilateral state visits to the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, Solomon Islands, and Palau. Former President Chen initiated the Pacific summit approach to build a consolidated "democratic community" among the nations of the Pacific including, if not modeled on the democracy of Taiwan.

This multilateral strategy aimed to improve the regional image by promoting better governance and progress in a range of fields that complemented the "Pacific Plan" drawn up by the 15-nation Pacific Islands Forum. Australia and New Zealand welcomed the strategy as an innovative departure from the notorious past practice of "money diplomacy" fostered by the rivalry between the authoritarian People's Republic of China and democratic Taiwan (see Engbarth 2010).¹⁵ President Ma renounced the multilateral approach in the Pacific region, based on a "diplomatic truce" between the Kuomintang (KMT) also known as the Chinese Nationalist government based in Taipei, Taiwan, and the Communist Party of China (CPC) ruling from Beijing. The idea is based on the view that KMT Taiwan and CPC China are now in a stabilised relationship that is more sincere than group cooperative ties with the six Pacific island countries.

¹⁵ See, http://www.etaiwannews.com/etn/news_content.php?id=1212335&lang=eng_news&cate_img=logo_taiwan&cate_rss=TAIWAN_eng

A TAIWAN SENSE OF PLACE

For years, people in Taiwan have been advocating a sense of place in *being* uniquely Taiwanese.¹⁶ However, until recently, the sense of Taiwan as indigenous received few listeners since the world trend was more greatly in favor of the China perspective. The indigenous view, with its own definition of "being" is now gaining acceptance; however, as a sense of quality. It is a developing sense of living aesthetics *vis-à-vis* the local ethos (see Hsieh 1994; Blundell 2009). This trend is a regional theme throughout the Pacific islands in the social sciences of politics, economics, and tourism (Adams 1984; Crocombe 1999a, b).

People are expecting a social understanding in their own environment in the context of the greater region—a Pacific view more sensitive and aware of indigenous cultures. This Pacific cross-cultural aesthetic is gaining acceptance among the general public. It is experiencing *a way of doing things* in other cultures and finding that other worldviews offer completeness that people would traditionally expect from their own culture (Arnheim 1974; Maquet 1986; Blundell 1996). The awareness in the past years has created an ethos evident from the planning of cultural facilities and activities, to the layout of public spaces, and museums (Woods 2009) and has brought out awareness through conservation and presentation. Public venues in Taiwan offer an atmosphere for performance groups and guests to share music and dance while imbibing the cultural ethos.

A new emphasis on our mutual world heritage is acknowledging specific places interconnecting a region offering a hopeful future. When an identity basis for a culture serves people in urban settings tracing them back to their roots, our modern societies take on a new vividness. Taiwan is conceptualising its sense of island-ness¹⁷ as a path determined by its people bridging oceans with languages and cultures for sustaining linkages of vitality and diversity. A myriad of political, economic and social factors are placed before it—yet, the outcome should be positive for the generations who will inherit the connections of island futures.

¹⁶ For identity of tradition and modernity, see Barnes *et al.* 1995, Chaigne *et al.* 2000; Chen *et al.* 1994; Cohen 1988; Faure 2009; Gold 1994; Hsiao 1989, 1990; Hsieh 1987; Keyes 1979; Tsai 1999.

¹⁷ See, Jazeel 2009 for his conceptual view of "island-ness" (related to Sri Lanka).

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