Taiwan Indigenous Peoples

Taiwan indigenous peoples are designated with group names based on linguistic classification of the Formosan languages including the Amis, Paiwan, Atayal, Bunun, Rukai, Puyuma, Tsou, Saisiyat, Thao, Kavalan, Taroko (Truku), Sakizaya, and Sediq. Beginning in the 17th century Pingpu (平埔族, plains indigenous people) groups such as Basay, Ketagalan, Kulon, Taokas, Paze, Papora, Babuza, Hoanya, Siraya, and Makatao have assimilated with Han Chinese immigrants. The Kavalan is a Pingpu group that has retained official recognition for its cultural integrity. The Yami (Tao) are a group of the Batanic Malayo-Polynesian language inhabiting Lan-yu (Orchid Island). Together the Taiwan indigenous groups including the Yami represent the most northwestern speakers of the Austronesian Language Family that ranges extensively across the Pacific and Indian oceans.

During the late 19th century Japanese occupation of Taiwan, anthropologists and linguists assigned names designating nine indigenous groups. Today officially there are 14 groups. Group names are sometimes contested, such as the Yami considering in their own language the name Tao meaning the people.

From archeology it’s believed that from 6,500 years ago, Neolithic peoples crossed the Taiwan Strait to inhabit the island. In the Neolithic Age people utilized the technology of refined stone tools, weaving of cloth, earthenware, and architecture. According to modern genetic research, evidence shows that Taiwan people of the Mesolithic Age dating back 30,000 years integrated with the Neolithic settlers.

The first historical documentation of the indigenous people came from the Dutch record of Siraya in the southwestern region of Taiwan. Since then, other arrivals to Taiwan such as the Spanish, and especially the long term Chinese immigration from Fujian (Min-nan) and from other provinces of China, such as the Hakka, contributed to a complex ethnic and social diversity.