

Taiwan's Endangered Ethnic Groups: A Predicament and Its Protection Proposal

Chih-Huei Huang

Abstract

Since ancient times, many ethnicities have lived in Taiwan and developed a multicultural, more or less symbiotic society. But the populations of those groups vary enormously. According to statistical data from the Ministry of the Interior in February 2015, the populations of the officially recognized 16 ethnic groups totaled 540,000. Depending on their various population scales, in this paper, I would distinguish these 16 groups into three different categories: (1) Stable state: This refers those groups whose population is more than 30,000, including the Amis, the Tayal, the Paiwan, the Bunun and the Truku. These five ethnic groups account for about 90 percent of the entire aboriginal population. (2) Vulnerable state: This refers the groups whose populations are fewer than 15,000 and include the Puyuma, the Rukai, the Sediq, the Tsou and the Yami/Tao. The situation of the latter three is more serious than the other two. (3) Endangered state: This refers those ethnicities of fewer than 2,000, like the Kavalan, the Sakizaya, the Thao, the Hla'alua, and the Kananavu. In addition, some unrecognized Plain ethnics such as the Siraya, the Pazeh, the Kaxabu, the Taokas, the Papora, Babuza and so on are also put in category 3, their cultural existence is in jeopardy.

Although these last groups have fewer people, their cultures are deep-rooted in Taiwan, and because of the ecesis to the ecology, they have survived to the present. Each one is unique and irreplaceable, and all are important to multiculturalism in Taiwan. But the government has not devised any appropriate cultural protections besides protecting their languages. However, language does not represent the whole of culture and cannot prevent the loss of the population. The aim of this article is to explore the cultural survival of Taiwan's endangered ethnic groups, analyze their historical roots, assess their current

situations, and deliberate survival strategies. I conclude by proposing five major areas of protection in hopes that help create an environment more friendly and sustainable.

Keywords: endangered language, aboriginal ethnics, Plain ethnic groups, survival, extinction