

ORIGINS OF THE FILIPINOS AND THEIR LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This is a subject that is still controversial, both as to the area of origin and the routes between that area and the Philippines. There are two opposing hypotheses on both subjects. Both hypotheses are agreed that the differing major languages and the many different dialects spoken in the Philippines at the time of Portuguese and Spanish entry to the Philippines in the early 15th century were all of the Austronesian Super Family. That is where the agreement ends.

In the Philippines, the two best known hypotheses are those of Peter Bellwood and mine (Solheim). While my hypothesis—which will be the main subject of this presentation—started developing over 40 years ago, Bellwood's is more recently developed and has had much greater acceptance outside of the Philippines. Simply put, he believes that Proto-Austronesian originated in eastern South China opposite Taiwan and was brought from there to Taiwan by maritime Chinese bringing with them rice agriculture; this around 7000 years ago. After about 2000 years, developing several distinct Austronesian languages in Taiwan, there was movement of people speaking one unknown Austronesian language to northern Luzon, bringing rice agriculture with them. The rice agriculture led rapidly to increasing population and absorbed most of the hunter-gathering populations they came in contact with in the Philippines. They moved south through the Philippines and by about 4500 years ago had reached southern Mindanao and from there spread south and both east and west. By this time the Austronesian branch that had developed somehow between Taiwan and the Philippines was widespread and is now called the Malayo-Polynesian language family.

My hypothesis is much more complicated with no simple direct route to and through the Philippines, but with exploratory maritime movement bringing peoples in many directions over many different routes. This goes back with remote origins over 50,000 years ago from coastal present day eastern Viet Nam and South China. I hypothesize the beginning development of Pre-Austronesian in the general area of the Bismark Islands south and east of Mindanao. From this area the development of Proto-Austronesian as a trade language took place among the maritime-boat people who were sailing in all directions throughout the South China Sea, including to Japan and Korea, and throughout much of present day Island Southeast Asia. With the development of the Malayo-Polynesian Language Family (still a mystery to me) after about 4000 years ago from southern Mindanao they spread east into and throughout the Pacific islands and ultimately spread west to Madagascar around 2000 years ago. From about 6000 years ago the Philippines was central too much of this development.

Introduction

I have written two general articles, one short (Solheim 1999) and the other long (Solheim 1981), about the prehistory of the Philippines and the relationship with

surrounding areas. There has been much more fieldwork and publication relevant to this paper since they were written. At the time they were written I did not feel it important to present the one major different interpretation involving the origins and spread of Austronesian languages as it had not started to develop at the time of the earlier article and was little concerned with the Philippines in the later paper.

There are two differing hypotheses on the origins of the Filipinos and their languages. Peter Bellwood includes the Philippines in his much wider scale hypothesis on the origin and spread of the Austronesian languages and the peoples speaking these different languages. He does not present an explanation for the Philippines as a specific topic. The two professional linguists whose opinions on this matter I am acquainted with—Robert Blust (1984-1985) and Lawrence Reid (1982)—“both agreed with Bellwood] that a Pre-Austronesian form was in South China and brought by people moving by boat to Taiwan where Austronesian developed into its original form. Both agree with Peter Bellwood (1984-1985), following Shutler and Marck (1975), that Austronesian was taken south from Taiwan to the northern Philippines, spread south through the Philippines, and from southern Mindanao spread both west and east.” (Solheim ND).

The opinions of all these authors have evolved since these early statements and I have been unable to keep up with their evolving interpretations. I continue quoting myself (Solheim ND):

If I understand Bellwood correctly the main Austronesian stem apparently evolved in the Philippines into Malayo-Polynesian and then branched into many further Malayo-Polynesian languages in the Philippines and as it moved both west and east from the southern Philippines. There is no Philippine language that I know of as having been suggested as the ancestor of the Malayo-Polynesian languages of the Philippines and the rest of Island Southeast Asia, and no language that I know of in Taiwan has been considered as Pre- or Proto-Malayo-Polynesian. Therefore Malayo-Polynesian, according to Bellwood’s theory, must have developed directly out of one of the Taiwan Austronesian languages (i.e. Proto-Malayo-Polynesian) as soon as its speakers reached the Philippines. This seems like an impossibility to me, but I am not a linguist.”

I emphasize again, as I have done in many other articles, that “Austronesian” is a linguistic term and is the name of a super language family. It should never be used as a name for a people, genetically speaking, or a culture. To refer to people who speak an Austronesian language the phrase “Austronesian speaking people” should be used. Genetically the Nusantao have become a mixture of many different peoples.

Presenting the second hypothesis, i.e. my interpretation of the archaeological, linguistic and genetic data for the origin of the Filipinos and their languages, is the body of this report.

Where did the Filipinos Come From and How Did They Get Here

Filipinos and most of the peoples of Island and coastal Mainland Southeast Asia were a maritime oriented population. The formation of this population goes back at least 50,000 years, long before the development of Austronesian languages and took place on the Southeast Asian mainland.. This maritime development is indicated by the first people

going to Australia from Southeast Asia and this happened some over 50,000 years ago as has been shown by Australian and New Guinea archaeology. At that time the sea level was much lower, but it still would have been necessary to cross water out of site of land for several days between the nearest Indonesian islands to Australia. Once this was done there must have been two-way contact for some time. This suggests that rafts with some sort of center board to provide some directional control must have been in use at that time.

There is no archaeological indication how early small boats came into use. I suspect that they were invented and first in use well up one or more of the major rivers of southeastern China and/or northern Viet Nam around 13,000 years ago or earlier. The first, crude, heavy earthenware pottery known not only in eastern Asia but in the world starts showing up in four widely separated areas in Siberia, Japan, southern China and northern Viet Nam. All of this was at about this same time, made in the same way and the same forms (Vandiver 1998a-b; Ha Van Tan ?; MacNeish et al 1998.) The knowledge of how to make this crude pottery must have been spread down and up major rivers and along sea coasts in small boats with or without single outriggers. Some of the islands of Japan were connected to the mainland at this time, as was Taiwan. For some reason these early sailor-potters did not stop in Taiwan, or at least their rare, early sites have not yet been found.

With very little archaeological evidence I hypothesize that single-outriggers for these small boats had been invented sometime between 13,000 and 10,000 years ago as contact between central, coastal Viet Nam and the Bismark Islands, northwest of the northwestern end of New Guinea by around 10,000 years ago is indicated by the spread of arboriculture and some of the plants involved. Several types of shell artifacts have been recovered in the general Bismark area at around this time and earlier and appear to have spread to the west at a somewhat later date.

Sailing from Mainland Southeast Asia to the Bismark area and south to the Solomons would have been possible with single-outrigger canoes. Moving out into the Pacific over much wider ocean distances probably needed larger, double-outrigger canoes. It has been hypothesized that the double-outrigger was invented somewhere along the east coast of Viet Nam at an unknown date, allowing long distance travel out into the Pacific. I hypothesize that this was happening to Taiwan, the Philippines, into western Micronesia and back out to the Bismark area by 6000 years ago now using the double-outriggers, larger canoes, but without bringing the knowledge of pottery manufacture, would then have been able to extend their explorations further to the south and east into the Pacific.

What had been happening in the Philippines during this time? Palawan and Mindanao would have been in contact with coastal Viet Nam and South China, but not bringing in agriculture. It is quite possible that arboriculture was brought in to the Philippines during this time both from the west and the east. While archaeological sites in western Palawan show that there was contact with Viet Nam, and there was probably contact between coastal South China and coastal northern Luzon, the Babuyan and Batanes Islands and Taiwan. These maritime boat people I have called the Nusantao.

The Nusantao

The importance of the maritime organization of many people in Island Southeast Asia first came to me in 1963 (Solheim 1963:258). I had this to say: "The majority of the prehistoric relationships between Formosa and Southeast Asia do not appear to me to be direct, but the result of small movements from a common general source in South China

and northern Indochina and possibly even more important, diffusion of specific culture elements in all directions from late neolithic times on.”

My concept of the Nusantao and its associated Nusantao Maritime Trading and Communication Network (NMTCN) has evolved considerably over time since I first proposed it (Solheim 1975:158). In my book on the Nusantao (Solheim ND) I have gone into considerable detail to explain this evolution of the two terms, but this book will not be out until a month or two after this paper is presented. I leave the details for those of you who might be interested to my book and here present the latest definitions that I have made (Solheim ND).

Probably originating along the major rivers in the mountains of eastern, central Viet Nam during the late Pleistocene, “The Nusantao are a prehistoric, maritime-oriented people along with their cultural descendants who have maintained their cultural orientation until today or the recent past in many coastal and island areas in Southeast Asia, coastal China and north to Japan and Korea, and Oceania. I believe that the concept of the Nusantao and their expansion is “useful in understanding the widespread dissemination of particular inter-related languages and items of material culture, even though none of these actually define the Nusantao.” It is also of major importance for explaining the origins of the Philippines and of their languages, as I see it.

In the beginning the Nusantao were primarily fishermen and expanded their territory for fishing out of curiosity looking for new fishing areas (Solheim 1981: 33-34). Coming into contact with new people and settlements they began to add trading of materials available in one area but not in an other. “In this way, without major movements of people, a relatively informal, long-distance trade that also involved long-distance communication of ideas, knowledge, genes, and language (in the form of the trade language that people moving through this chain needed to talk to others) could have developed. This sort of trading system would help explain why, in the absence of migrations of people and in an area where there were differing cultures, so many forms of stone artifacts, ornaments, patterns found on pottery, etc., were shared over such a wide territory.”

“While I was writing this article [1981] my concept of the Nusantao was shifting from an all-encompassing “Austronesian speaking people” to a maritime oriented trading people probably speaking an Austronesian language. In 1985 I changed the first definition as follows (Solheim 1984-1985:85-86): “To remove [the term Nusantao] from a direct relation to a language and to a biological entity I now define Nusantao as natives of Southeast Asia, and their descendents, with a maritime-oriented culture from their beginnings, these beginnings probably in southeastern Island Southeast Asia around 5000 B.C. or possibly somewhat earlier.”

“Most of the Nusantao probably spoke a pre- or related Austronesian language, but there may well have been at times some that spoke a non-Austronesian language. At the time of this redefinition I did not consider non-maritime Austronesian speakers as Nusantao. “The Nusantao and the non-maritime-Austronesian speakers no doubt [were] constantly mixing genetically, culturally, and linguistically. Their genetic ancestry no doubt varied from time to time and place to place to include Southern Mongoloid—probably as a central core—and Melanesoid, and I would suggest that this may well have been the case from their very beginning.”

Through time, as the Nusantao expanded their fishing and trading areas there was also a gradual expansion in the variety of maritime orientations. The extremes extend from

whole families who lived until a generation ago, all their lives mostly on their boats to families that had permanent or relatively permanent bases on land.” (Solheim ND).

The Nusantara Maritime Trading and Communication Network

I like very much what Wolters (1999) has said about the importance of maritime communication for Southeast Asia. I quote portions from my review of his book (Solheim 2004: 101-105):

The sea provides an obvious geographical framework for discussing possibilities of region-wide historical themes. The sea facilitates communication between peoples, and there is much of it. Indeed, Coedès characterizes the Southeast Asian seas as “a veritable Mediterranean formed by the China Sea, the Gulf of Siam and the Java Sea. This enclosed sea, in spite of its typhoons and reefs, has always been a unifying factor rather than an obstacle for the peoples along the rivers.” (Coedès, 1968:3-2).

The peoples on and near the shores of the Southeast Asian seas were certainly in communication with each other from very early times. . . .

The sea to which I am now referring is not the Southeast Asian “Mediterranean” but what I shall describe as “the single ocean,” the vast expanse of water from the coasts of eastern Africa and western Asia to the immensely long coastal line of the Indian subcontinent and on to China. The sea defined in this manner, was, I believe, a significant fact of life in earlier Southeast Asia not only because treasure from distant places always arrived but also for other reasons that I shall consider. [I would add that this should include all of the Pacific islands, except some portions of New Guinea plus Japan and Korea.]

I conclude my comments on “the cultural matrix” by considering an alternative vision of prehistoric Southeast Asia unimaginable, I suppose, in 1982. Few developments excited me more when I prepared myself for writing this postscript. I seemed to have stumbled on a long-awaited launching pad in Southeast Asian prehistory. I refer to the concept of “heterarchy” in contradistinction to “hierarchy,” the concept usually associated with this region. The concept of “heterarchy” is examined in Joyce Whites contribution [White 1995] to a volume on *Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies* ...in which she revalues evidence from some amply stocked prehistoric burial sites in northeastern and central Thailand.

Her analysis and argument are sufficiently thorough to convince me, at least, that she has established a promising direction for future prehistoric archaeological research and also for historical studies of early Southeast Asia ... her essay provides insights in connection with continuities in southeast Asian historical experience and contributes towards delineating the “regional” shape of southeast Asian history ... White understands the term [“heterarchy”] to signify societies that exemplify: Cultural pluralism; indigenous economies that tend to be characterized by household-based units of production, community-based economic specialization, and competitive, multi-centered, and overlapping mechanisms for the distribution of goods rather than

monopolies controlled by a single center, social status systems that tend to be flexible in practice and include personal achievement even where ascribed systems exist in theory, conflict resolution and political centralization strategies that tend to have alliance formation ... at their core, and that may be periodically renegotiated.... [White 1995:104], (122-23). . . .

Wolters points out in several places (28, 114 footnote 30, 134, 139, and 148) the importance to the overlord of the mandala of being “up to date” and the importance of rapid information dissemination over Southeast Asia.

“The past in Southeast Asia in general and including Vietnam would therefore be perceived for its relevance to the present and not for its own sake, It was ‘now’ and being ‘up-to-date’ that mattered (148). On the other hand, as earlier mentioned, continuity is evident in all of Southeast Asia from prehistoric times up to the present.”

The NMTCN was the prehistoric and historic equivalent of the present day e-mail network. In its communication over the vast area of its coverage it provided up to date information on all subjects of interest to its members.

At this point I leave Wolters, but continue with a little of my own comment (Solheim 2004: 105-106). “My concept of the Nusantao Maritime Trade and Communication Network presents a good example of many of the comments mentioned by Wolters for demonstrating the unity of ‘Southeast Asia,’

“I proposed the term Nusntau in 1975 [Solheim:158; I later changed the spelling to Nusntao] to refer to ‘people of the southern islands.’ I said that it should apply both to the people and the culture of those who spoke Austronesian.

Difficulties soon became apparent in the use of this term. At present the term has two uses. The first is used as a general term: The Nusantao . . . refers to a maritime-oriented people who originated in eastern Island Southeast Asia and along the southern coast of the South China Sea at the end of the Pleistocene with its sea levels rising to the general level of today. Many varieties of this maritime orientation developed over time and are still found today. What I am most concerned with is my second use to refer to those who have specialized in maritime trade; for this I use the term The Nusantao Maritime Trading and Communication Network. This network ultimately spread to wherever Austronesian languages are spoken today, including the coast of China, Korea, Japan, and probably the Americas” (Solheim ND).

I emphasize that the Nusantao who were maritime people were knowledgeable about life on the land as well as on the sea. After arboriculture, horticulture and/or agriculture were known these people expanding into the Pacific always had a base on land. They brought with them domesticated plants and animals which became important in their life after they had exhausted the fish and shellfish of the area to the extent that they did not provide sufficient food.

Prehistory of the Philippines According to Archaeology, Genetics, Linguistics

I believe that we are all agreed that archaeology, genetics and linguistics do not present the same picture of prehistoric and historic development and expansion. There obviously has to be some correlation among the three as all three are developed and expanded by the same people, but each one evolves on its own through time. To my knowledge very little research has been done on the detailed genetics of the Philippine people. There has been some done with the several Negrito groups, but to my knowledge

this has only shown that they are not closely related to each other, rather they are more closely related to their near neighbors over time. It is my personal supposition that the ancestors of the Negritos were the same as of the general Southeast Asian populations say 20,000 years ago and that they evolved very rapidly to their distinguishable appearance when they started living in very similar ecological situations in the rainforest. I know of no Negrito skeletons that have been excavated in archeological sites. I go no further in treating genetics.

Linguistics is an other matter. I suspect there has been more study done of the Philippine languages than of the archaeology, this, much of it, by the Summer Institute of Linguistics. I do not try to examine Philippine linguistics in any detail, but rather come at it from the other direction, i.e. the relationships of the Philippine languages to the other Southeast Asian languages. As all of the local languages of the Philippines are Austronesian in origin languages are a common way of approaching the origins of the Filipinos.

Gaillard and Mallari (2004) have provided us with eight different maps showing proposed routes by different authors of Austronesian coming to the Philippines. A major portion of each route had to come by water. Wolters (179-180) mentioned that “Evidently, the boat was conventionally used in island Southeast Asia as the metaphor for emphasizing the meaning and importance of an ‘ordered social group,’ whether it be an organized social unit or the spatial classification of social groups within a larger social framework.” For the Philippines the *Barangay* or *balangay* (meaning boat) was a word known by the first Spaniards to come to the Philippines. When Antonio Pigafetta went ashore to talk with the chief of Limaswa, they met in a boat on the shore. When they arrived at Luzon they found that *balangay* was also used for the smallest political unit of Tagalog society. “The word *barangay* call[s] attention to two important characteristics of the sixteenth-century Philippines . . . dependence on boats and highly localized government” (Scott 1994: 4-5).

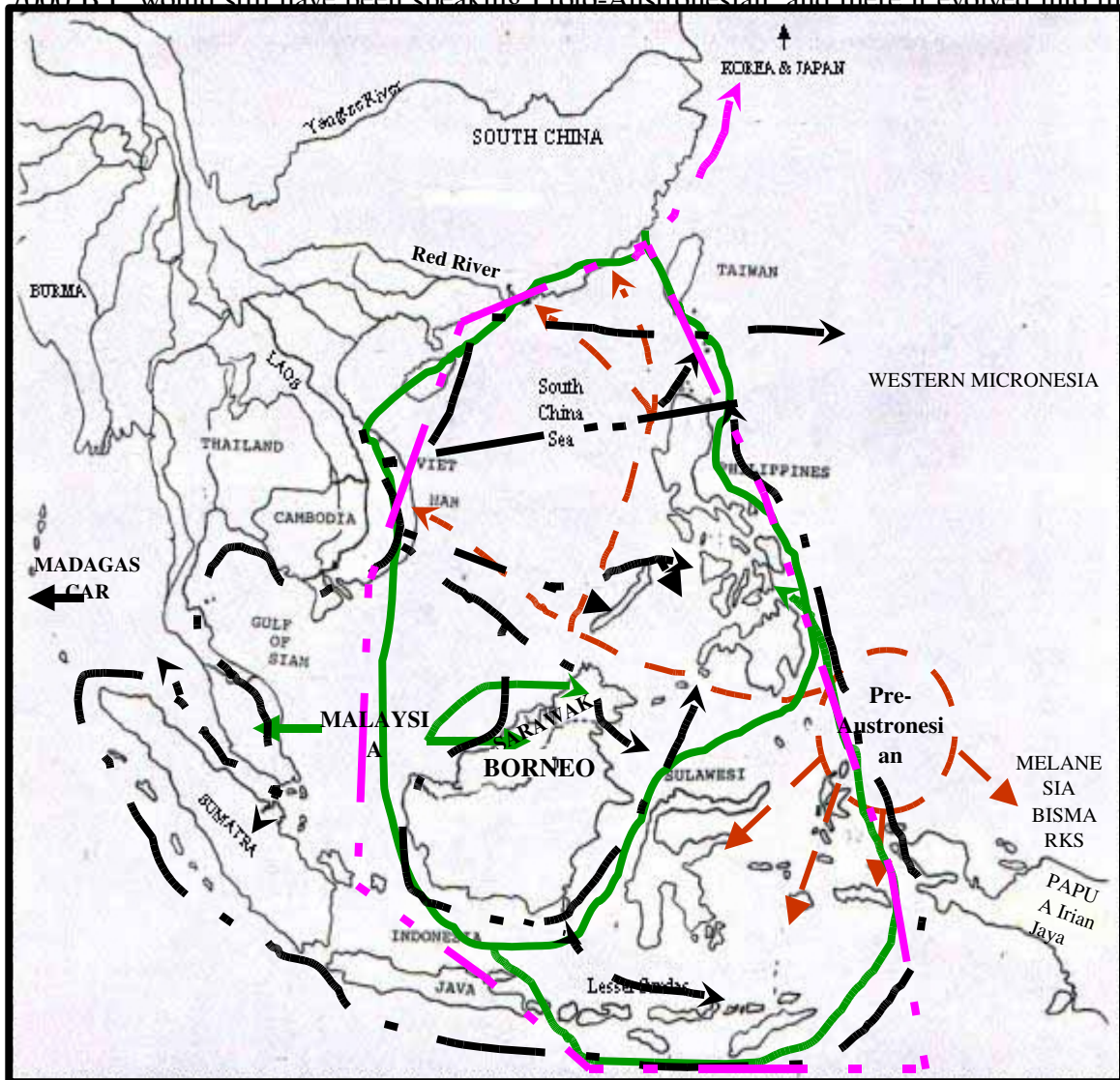
Itbayat, the most northerly of the Batanes Islands north of Luzon has, a number of different words for boat. Maria Mangahas has reported at a Brown Bag lunch of the Archaeological Studies Program on 1 September 2005 that an elderly informant on Itbayat told her that one of the words for boat (*vanua*) also means homeland. “One of the interesting parts on Dr. Mangahas’ talk is the linguistic relation of the word *vanua* with other Austronesian words in the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Its cognate words *vanua*, *banua*, *benoa*, and *fanua* all denote the concept of village, port, town, house, land, country, cosmos, and even boat” (Vitales 2005 :19).

In their early movements by water before 5000 B.C. I long ago had hypothesized that the Nusantao developed a trading/ communication network between the northern Philippines, Taiwan, and the coast of South China and northern Viet Nam. I suggest that it was the trading people making up this network who helped develop Austronesian out of Pre- and Proto-Austronesian, as a *lingua franca* by which they were able to communicate among themselves and the peoples with whom they traded in the Nusantao network.

Linguists agree that a trade language **must** start with some regularly defined language that has evolved with admixtures of other languages. I would now agree with this, but say that Austronesian had its beginnings, as Pre-Austronesian, by around 12,000 B.P. and as it is impossible to take linguistic origins back this far in time there is no way that we can discover its probable single linguistic family origin. Thus I would say that at the present time this is a non-problem.

The route that I have proposed for bringing the Austronesian languages and its speakers to the Philippines is very complicated and actually is many different routes (Fig.

1). For my interpretation of how Austronesian came to the Philippines it is necessary to go back to the beginnings of Pre-Austronesian. I have proposed that the origin of Pre-Austronesian was in the Bismarcks in northwestern Melanesia (Wallacia could be considered its homeland) and then Proto-Austronesian developed among the sailors and their families of the NMTCN in their communication and trading back again to the west through much of coastal eastern Indonesia and the Philippines, and along the coast of eastern Viet Nam and South China. This resulting communication brought with it the knowledge of the *Tridacna* shell adze and other shell artifacts and ornaments. As the Nusantao came in contact with Proto-Austro-Tai speaking people along the coasts of South China and northern Viet Nam and up the major rivers of this area Proto-Austronesian (still a trade language) further evolved. The people moving from South China to Taiwan about 7000 B.P. would still have been speaking Proto-Austronesian, and there it evolved into the



Dispersal and further development of Pre-Austronesian



Proto-Austronesian Development



Area of Development of Proto-Austronesian



Figure 1. Suggested formation and movement of Pre-, Proto-, Austronesian and Malayo-Polynesian languages.

Pawley and Green (1973:35-36) had this to say about the cultural content of Proto-Austronesian:

“They had a mixed economy, based on agriculture and fishing, but supplemented by hunting and arboriculture. Cultivated crops included taro, yams, banana, sugarcane, breadfruit, coconut, the aroids *Cytosperma* and *Alacasia*, sago, and (probably) rice. . . . They sailed outrigger canoes. Their tools were of stone, wood and *shell*. . . .” (final italics mine).

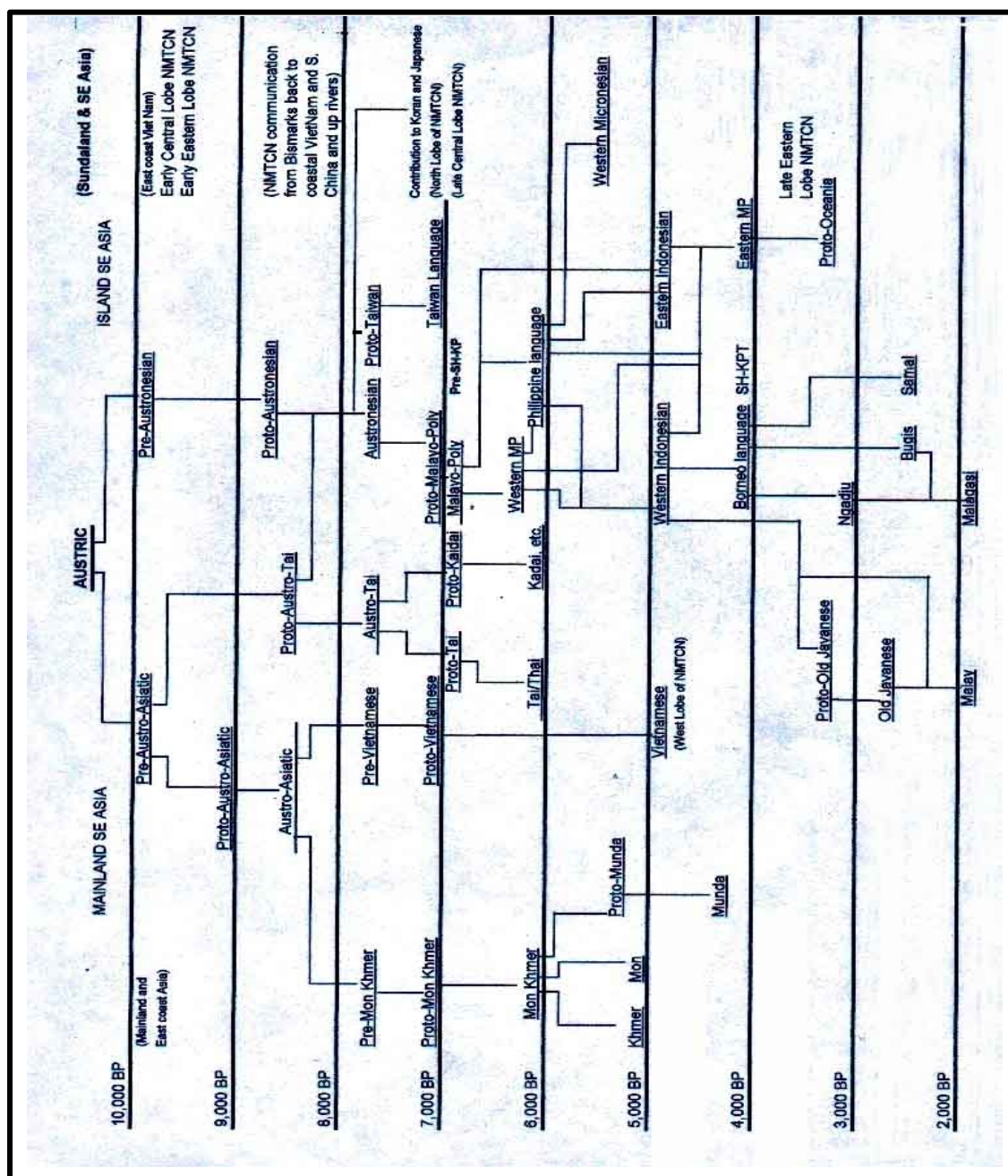


Table 1. Linguistic tree showing the origins and development of Austronesian and Malayo-Polynesian out of Austric as proposed by Solheim.

The presence of shell tools was at least one element of the culture of the people speaking Proto-Austronesian that had been added as a result of their presence in the Wallacea/Bismarks area. The use of shell for tools in this area goes back before 12,000 BP.

If I understand correctly, Austro-Asiatic and Austronesian evolved out of Austric. I have proposed that Austric languages were spoken in greater Southeast Asia before the rising of sea levels to present day levels and that with the rise of the sea level the Austronesian languages developed in the newly formed islands of the east and Austro-Asiatic developed on the mainland.. I present above my Table I showing my interpretation of this development as included in my Nusantao book (ND).

Summary and Conclusions

If I am correct in my suggested formation and movements of languages as illustrated in Figure 1 it can be seen that the Philippines is within the areas of development and movement of all levels of evolution of the languages from Proto-Austronesian into Malayo-Polynesian. It could be possible that development of Pre-Austronesian could have included southeastern Mindanao. Very little archaeology has been done throughout this area in recent years. What has been done and reported by Spoehr (1973) and Solheim et al. (1979), was done long before we recognized the earliest materials recovered.

We do not really know whether Taiwan might have been involved in the development of Proto-Austronesian. All we can say is that several different Austronesian languages evolved there presumably out of Proto-Austronesian. There is no indication that Pre- or Proto Malayo-Polynesian were present there. I have mentioned (ND) the possibility that Amis may have moved north from the Philippines at a relatively early date. I do not know whether the Amis language has been compared to any of the Philippine languages, but I have felt there were indications of contact between the Amis and the Philippines that have not been seen with any of the other Taiwan ethnic groups. The only definite relationships between the Philippines and Taiwan are between Itbayat and Botel Tobago the latter being an island off the southeast coast of Taiwan. Here the people of both islands recognize that the ancestors of those living on Botel Tobago came from Itbayat (long ago). I have gone into the relationships between Taiwan and the Philippines in my Nusantao book (ND).

My interpretations of the relationships of the Philippine languages, all being western Malayo-Polynesian, all suggest that the Philippine languages are related in an ancestral way with all the other Western Malayo-Polynesian languages.

The trading relationships of the NMTCN go in every which direction. For the Malayo-Polynesian speakers this suggests to me that Filipinos were in communication directly and down the line with all coastal areas of Southeast Asia and to some extent up

the major rivers to the interior and that they are a genetic mixture that would result from these contacts. From my interpretation presented in Table I it can be seen that I feel that at the earlier times of the NMTCN, the Philippines were pretty much at the center of this network.

Until much more archaeological excavation has been done and final reports published in all areas of Southeast Asia the details of these relationships can only be hazily recognized. The one thing I feel confident in saying is that all native Southeast Asians are closely related culturally, genetically and to a lesser degree linguistically.

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