

A New Hypothesis for Austronesian origin and dispersal

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Austronesian language family is one of the largest language families in the world. It covers a wide geographic area, from Madagascar to Easter Island, and from Taiwan and Hawai'i to New Zealand. This language family comprises more than 1,200 languages spoken by about 300 million of people. Since they share many common linguistic, cultural and genetic characteristics, it has been proposed that the Austronesian peoples presumably originated from a common source area. Hence, questions such as “Where was the source area” and “How did they disperse?” have become very important in the studies of human history of Southeast Asia and the Oceania. In recent years, several hypotheses pertaining to the Austronesian origins have been proposed by ethnologists, archaeologists, linguists and geneticists. Among the debates of these hypotheses, Taiwan's role has always received a great deal of concerns. This paper is in an attempt to propose a new hypothesis in terms of current evidence from Taiwan and its neighboring areas, called “ Multi-route Hypothesis”, which suggest that the ancestors of the Austronesian peoples living along the coastlines of Pearl River Delta, Hainan and the Tonkin gulf may have been able to sail to not only Taiwan, but probably also the Philippines and Sarawak from the northern coast of the South China Sea by multiple routes instead of a single route passing only through Taiwan and the Philippines.