

2 People and Language




At a Glance

- Customs of Taiwan's indigenous peoples
- A multilingual land
- Aging population and declining birth rates

The overwhelming majority of Taiwan's population—over 95 percent—are of Han Chinese ancestry, the remainder composed of indigenous Austronesian peoples and recent immigrants. Han Taiwanese are the descendants of immigrants that arrived in two main waves—first, in the 17th century after the Manchu invasion of the mainland, and later, in 1949, when the ROC government relocated to the island. Austronesian peoples, meanwhile, have inhabited the island for millennia. In recent years, an increasing number of marriages between ROC citizens and foreign nationals, including many from Southeast Asian countries, has further diversified the nation's ethnic makeup.

For its size, Taiwan has an unusually diverse linguistic environment. Mandarin, the official language, is almost universally spoken and understood, while large sectors of the population also speak Taiwanese and Hakka. In addition to these members of the Chinese linguistic family, Taiwan's indigenous groups have their own Austronesian languages. Immigrants from various locations in mainland China and around the world have also brought with them their mother tongues, adding even more hues to Taiwan's ever-growing linguistic tapestry.

 Children perform folksongs in traditional attire during the Hakka Tung Blossom Festival. A celebration of Hakka culture, this annual event reminds people, young and old, to return to their roots. (Chang Jia-wei, courtesy of the Council for Hakka Affairs)

People

Han Peoples

Seeking refuge from upheavals during the transition between the Ming 明 and Ching 清 dynasties, the ancestors of Taiwan's Han 漢 peoples began migrating from China's southeastern provinces to the island in sizeable numbers in the 17th century. The majority of these early immigrants were Holo 河洛, mostly from areas in southern Fujian Province 福建省 (e.g., Zhangzhou 漳州 and Quanzhou 泉州) as well as Hakka 客家 from eastern Guangdong Province 廣東省 (mainly Huizhou 惠州, Chaozhou 潮州 and what is known today as Meizhou 梅州).

Immigrants from Quanzhou settled in coastal regions and those from Zhangzhou tended to gather on inland plains, while Hakka immigrants inhabited hilly areas. Clashes between these groups over resources led to the relocation of some communities, and, as time passed, varying degrees of intermarriage and assimilation took place.

Holo

The Holo people are the largest Han group in Taiwan, accounting for approximately 70 percent of the population. During the Ching dynasty, a large number of single Holo men from mainland China married women of indigenous Austronesian groups. Hence, many in Taiwan who consider themselves Han have indigenous ancestry as well. With Austronesian as well as Japanese influences—the latter as the result of the half-century of Japanese colonial rule from 1895 to 1945—the Holo in Taiwan have developed a hybrid culture quite different from that of their cousins in mainland China.

A traditional Holo residence typically featured red-brick walls and a red-tile roof. The most basic structure consisted of a rectangular building with a main

living room sandwiched between two other rooms. Depending on a family's wealth and size, wings were added, creating a four-sided, enclosed compound or three-sided, semi-enclosed compound with a central courtyard. Houses in the Kinmen Folk Culture Village 金門民俗文化村 best represent such traditional Holo dwellings, whereas the Lin An-tai Historical Home 林安泰古厝 is the oldest and best-preserved traditional Holo residential architecture remaining in Taipei City.

Hakka

The Hakka, who make up about one-fifth of the Han population in Taiwan, have a long history of periodic migration—hence the name Hakka, which literally means “guest people”—and a reputation for diligence and frugality. Traditionally, their residences were made with black-brick or white-plastered brick walls and black-tile roofs. Some pre-modern Hakka residences were built with red bricks and red tiles, indicating a Holo influence.

The Hakka were also known for their communal spirit, as exemplified by their multistory *weilongwu* 圍龍屋 apartment-style dwellings, which could accommodate hundreds of clan members. The fortress-like structure of such buildings—with no windows on the ground level—and concentration of so many people provided collective security in earlier times when government was weak and local communities had to look after themselves. Examples of *weilongwu* architecture can be seen in Taichung County's 臺中縣 Dongshi Township 東勢鎮 and Pingtung County's 屏東縣 Neipu Township 內埔鄉.

Hakka traditions include tea-farming opera, folk songs (see Chapter 17, “Culture”) and worship of the Lords of the Three Mountains 三山國王 and *yimin* 義民, ancestors who sacrificed their lives to protect their communities.

Immigrants Arriving in 1949

The ROC government’s relocation to Taiwan in 1949 occasioned an influx of 1.3 million people from the Chinese mainland to the island. The majority were soldiers, civil servants or teachers. Unlike earlier immigrants, these people came from all over the mainland and included not only Han Chinese but also ethnic groups from Mongolia, Tibet and southwestern China. The cultural influence of this wave of immigrants can be seen, for example, in the fact that all major regional Chinese cuisines are found across Taiwan.

Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Malayo-Polynesian peoples have lived on the island for millennia, with archeological evidence confirming their presence dating back 12,000 to 15,000 years. They may have come from Pacific islands or what are now southeastern regions of mainland China. Their languages belong to the Austronesian linguistic family, whose over 200 million speakers inhabit an area of the globe that stretches from Madagascar in the west to Easter Island in the east and from Taiwan in the north to New Zealand in the south. Some scholars have suggested that, in light of the wide variety of Austronesian languages in Taiwan, the island may be the springboard of the diaspora of Austronesian peoples across the Pacific that began some 6,000 years ago.

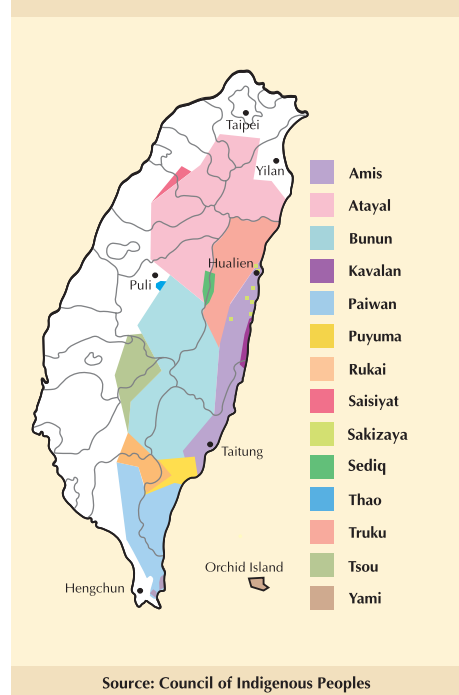
As of the end of 2009, the collective population of the 14 officially recognized indigenous groups stood at approximately 504,500, or about 2 percent of the total population of Taiwan. The three largest groups—the Amis 阿美, the Paiwan 排灣 and the Atayal 泰雅—accounted for nearly 70 percent of that figure.

Though distinct from each other in many ways, the various groups share

certain customs with one another and with Austronesian peoples in other parts of the world. These include building elevated houses, weaving with bamboo and rattan, tattooing and chewing betel nuts. These groups also have similar observances, such as coming-of-age ceremonies and harvest festivals.

Over the centuries, while the more remote indigenous groups have tended to maintain distinctive communities, others have blended in with Han society and downplayed their Austronesian heritage. With today’s society-wide appreciation of ethnic diversity and affirmation of ethnic equality, however, many who still remember and treasure their Austronesian heritage—including descendants of the Siraya 西拉雅, Luilang 雷朗, Taokas 道卡斯 and Pazeh 巴則海 peoples—are pushing to receive official recognition as indigenes.

Distribution of Indigenous Peoples



As is the trend the world over, the cultures and lifestyles of Taiwan's indigenous peoples have changed radically in the course of modernization. No longer are their livelihoods based on hunting and gathering or slash-and-burn agriculture, while many live and work in urban areas. Succeeding generations are also losing fluency in their ancestral tongue in favor of Mandarin. Much of their traditional culture, therefore, is in danger of disappearing.

To preserve and rejuvenate the cultural heritage of Taiwan's aborigines, the Cabinet-level Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) 行政院原住民族委員會 was established in 1996. The CIP is in charge of formulating policies and planning and implementing programs to improve the lives of indigenous groups in the areas of education and culture, health and welfare, employment and land management.

Amis

Numbering nearly 183,800 and residing mainly in valleys and coastal areas of eastern Taiwan, the Amis are Taiwan's largest indigenous group. They are divided into the Nanshi 南勢, Xiuguluan 秀姑巒, Coastal 海岸, Taitung 臺東 and Hengchun 恆春 tribes. Each tribe has its own dialect, set of customs and style of dress. The group's most important festival of the year is the *Ilisin* harvest festival, which is held variously from one to seven days between July and September. It includes rituals for celebrating the transformation of boys into men and is well known for the vibrant singing and dancing of participants.

Formerly, the Amis had a matrilineal clan structure and system of inheritance. Decisions on family affairs including finance and property holdings were made by the female head of household. Important affairs concerning marriage or the allocation of wealth were determined in a meeting with the uncles on the mother's

side. Public affairs involving tribal politics, consensual laws and religion were dealt with by a male leadership group that included members of different age groups. Though these practices are no longer prevalent, their influences over the Amis can still be seen today.

Atayal

There are about 80,000 Atayal, whose homeland is in northern Taiwan's central mountainous region. In bygone times, important affairs were decided by a council of elders, and social interaction was regulated by an ancient *gaga* system of rules and beliefs. Believing that violation of such rules would result in punishment by spirits, the Atayal would, for example, sprinkle food on the ground to appease spirits when eating outdoors. Ancestral spirit worship is still an important group ritual among the Atayal.

The Atayal have developed sophisticated weaving skills featuring intricate patterns and designs, which, in the past, could determine a woman's social status. In Atayal tradition, red is a favored color for clothing, as it symbolizes blood and the vitality of life, with the power to dispel evil. V-shaped facial tattooing was once a part of Atayal coming-of-age ceremonies, in recognition of courage among young men and embroidery mastery among young women.

Bunun

Numbering around 51,450, the Bunun 布農 are concentrated in Taiwan's central and southeastern mountainous regions at an average altitude of 1,000 to 2,000 meters. Millet is revered by the Bunun, who traditionally based their concept of time on the biorhythm of millet and believed that millet plants have souls and feelings. Bunun society used to have a patriarchal structure, with single households

typically consisting of multifamily clans numbering up to 60 members.

Major Bunun festivals include the “millet ceremony” at harvest time as well as the millet-planting festival held between November and December, where their famed eight-part harmony *Pasibutbut* is sung to the gods for a bountiful harvest. The pre-hunt “ear-shooting ceremony,” or *Malahtangia*, is a ritual in which arrows are shot at animals’ ears in the belief, in earlier times, that this would ensure a successful hunt. These days, it only marks Bunun boys’ passage into adulthood.

Kavalan

The Kavalan 噶瑪蘭, with 1,200-plus members, are one of the eastern coastal peoples, most of whom have been assimilated through marriage into the dominant Han population since the latter’s arrival in the plains of Hualien 花蓮 and Taitung counties. Nevertheless, people of Kavalan ancestry are striving to revive their cultural heritage, including language, myths, banana-fiber weaving skills and shamanist practices, with Xinshe 新社 community in Hualien County’s Fongbin Township 豐濱鄉 serving as their cultural hub.

Believing that every living creature has its own spirit, the Kavalan have developed unique rituals, including the *Kisaiiz* group healing ceremony to dispel evil spirits. Like the Amis, they traditionally have a matrilineal clan structure and system of inheritance, but clan chiefs can be male or female, chosen by election.

Paiwan

The Paiwan are around 88,300 strong and comprise two major subgroups in southern Taiwan: the Ravar 拉瓦爾亞 and the Butsul 布曹爾亞. In bygone days, this group had a strict social hierarchy consisting of chieftains, nobility, warriors and commoners, and their ranks were identified by their clothes and decorative

apparel. Commoners tilled the land but could be elevated to the warrior class through marriage or by achievements in warfare, hunting or sculpturing. Today, the clothing designs that were once exclusively worn by chieftains can be donned by others, although the headdress still remains privileged attire.

The Paiwan are famed for their glazed bead ornamentation and skill in carving wood and stone. One of their most commonly used decorative motifs is the highly esteemed hundred-pace viper (*Agkistrodon acutus*) totem.

It is believed that during the Paiwan’s 15-day *Maleveq* celebration held once every five years, the spirits of their ancestors come down from Dawu Mountain 大武山 to commune with them. In earlier days, their reverence for ancestral spirits was symbolized by sculptures inside their dwellings.

Puyuma

The Puyuma 卑南, based in Taitung County and numbering around 11,850, can be divided into eight tribes, each with its own legend about its origins. For instance, while the mythology of the Nanyang 南王 tribe says their ancestors were born from bamboo, that of the Zhiben 知本 tribe claims that their progenitors sprang from stone.

In their former traditional society, property ownership was matrilineal, with the eldest daughter inheriting the family’s wealth. A communal *trakuban* building served as the tribal political center and as a school for males, who, before marriage, underwent military training and were tasked with defending the community. Some young men still wear head wreaths in recognition of having attained manhood.

Puyuma women are known for their exquisite embroidery skill. Geometric patterns of dancing figures executed in

cross-stitch style are among the features that make Puyuma embroidery unique.

Rukai

The 11,900 Rukai 魯凱 are concentrated in Pingtung, Kaohsiung and Tainan counties. Traditionally, they had a patriarchal hierarchy of nobles and commoners. The lily was symbolic of nobility, and only highly regarded commoners recognized as spiritually pure or brave had the honor of adorning themselves with the flower. Still, commoners could elevate their social status by bringing in large harvests or by marrying up.

As part of the annual *Tsatsapianu* harvest festival held in August, Rukai men bake millet cakes on stone slabs and divine the harvest in the coming year based on the qualities of the cakes. The climax of the *Tsatsapianu* is a rope swing ceremony for eligible young men and women. The higher and longer a woman can be swung by her beau, it is said, the greater their chance for a blessed marriage.

Saisiyat

The Saisiyat 賽夏, numbering about 5,900 and scattered in Miaoli 苗栗 and Hsinchu 新竹 counties, are best known for their *Pas-ta'ai* ceremony to commemorate the spirits of the Ta'ai—a short-statured, dark-skinned people who they say were the earliest inhabitants of Taiwan and passed on many of their skills to the Saisiyat. Legend has it that because Ta'ai men sexually harassed Saisiyat women, the enraged Saisiyat men killed virtually all of them. Afterward, the Saisiyat experienced years of poor harvests. To placate the spirits of the dead Ta'ai, ritual chanting and dancing are performed four nights in a row once every other year.

Traditionally, each clan is represented by an animal, plant or other totem. During the Ching dynasty, the Saisiyat adopted Chinese surnames derived from their clan totems, such as *Feng* 風 (wind), *Ri* 日 (sun) and *Xia* 夏 (summer). Some members of the group can speak Hakka or Atayal due to their geographic proximity to neighbors who speak those languages.



Dressed in traditional garb, several Rukai tribes revel in a joint harvest festival. (Liu Chia-sheng, courtesy of the Tourism Bureau)

Sakizaya

The Sakizaya 撒奇萊雅 are a small group with a population of about 450 who live on the Qilai 奇萊 plain in Hualien County. Because they have closely interacted with the Amis for a long period of time, the customs and attire of the two groups became essentially identical, and about 30 percent of the Sakizaya language is similar to that of the Amis. It was not until 2007 that the Sakizaya were officially recognized as a distinct indigenous group.

Fusion with the Amis is said to have come about when the Sakizaya fled their coastal plain homeland and sought refuge in the mountains after losing a battle against Ching troops in the 19th century. Only by disguising themselves as Amis did they avoid being annihilated.

To this day, Sakizaya elders still perform the rice-giving *Mivakivaki* ritual for welcoming young people into the ranks of adults.

Sediq

The Sediq 賽德克 were officially recognized as one of Taiwan's indigenous peoples in 2008. Numbering around 6,600, they are mostly concentrated in Nantou County's 南投縣 Ren'ai Township 仁愛鄉. Previously, they had been classified as Atayal since the Japanese colonial era, given the two groups' similarities in terms of language, customs and religious observances. The Sediq are famous for their courageous uprising against the Japanese colonial rulers beginning with the Wushe Incident 霧社事件 in 1930 (see Chapter 3, "History"). Some 1,000 of them lost their lives in the conflict.

The Sediq are renowned for the intricacy of their weaving and embroidery, with a preference for star-like and other geometric patterns against a white background. Some among their society are still guided by an ancient *gaya* or *waya*

set of rules for everyday life, including family affairs, agriculture, hunting, religious ceremonies and social roles.

The *Sisin* is regarded by the Sediq as a sacred bird, whose songs, traditionally, were interpreted as guidance for making important decisions such as those regarding hunting or marriage.

Thao

With a population of around 690, the Thao 邵 people's homeland is in the environs of Nantou County's Sun Moon Lake 日月潭. One of their legends has it that their ancestors discovered the lake while chasing a white deer and moved there after seeing the area's beauty and natural abundance. Later, they began to cultivate crops on earth-covered bamboo rafts floating on the lake and became adept at carving hollowed-out tree-trunk canoes. Among the Thao's unique preserved traditions is the pestle song and dance, mostly performed by women, during which the rhythm is set by tapping pestles on stone.

In Thao society, decisions regarding ceremonial rituals are made by the chief, a hereditary position passed on from father to eldest son. In the corner of many Thao homes hangs an *ulalaluan*, a basket containing ancestors' clothing arranged in chronological layers, in which ancestral guardian spirits are believed to dwell.

Truku

The homeland of the Truku 太魯閣, who number around 25,850, stretches from Hualien County in the vicinity of the famous Taroko Gorge 太魯閣峽谷 named after them into the mountainous western borderlands of Nantou County. The word *truku* is translatable as "mountainside platform," "habitable place" or "watchtower." Three to four centuries ago, it is said, a group of Truku set off eastward from their original haunts in

Nantou, climbed over Mount Qilai 奇萊山 in the Central Mountains 中央山脈 and settled in Hualien's Liwu River Valley 立霧溪谷.

Truku chiefs are elected and have the duty to represent their tribal villages in external affairs, mediate internal disputes and maintain social harmony. Though they and their assistants receive no monetary reward for their services, they are sure to be invited to take part in any celebration or party hosted by tribe members. Regarded as the teachings of Truku ancestors, the *gaya* rules of conduct used to be strictly observed in the belief that violation of them by even one person could bring extensive punishment upon an entire clan or tribe. Ceremonies are held every year to praise and seek the blessings of ancestral spirits.

In bygone days, the Truku were noted for their hunting skills, and only those who had mastered such skills were allowed to wear facial tattoos. Among Truku traditions that remain important today are weaving and knitting, along with knife-making techniques and shamanistic practices.

Tsou

Numbering about 6,730, the Tsou 鄒 people are concentrated mostly in Chiayi County's 嘉義縣 Alishan Township 阿里山鄉 and are divided into northern and southern subgroups that have variations in dialect and customs. Their social and political organization is characterized by a strict patriarchal structure and well-organized clans. In earlier times, public affairs were conducted by men in the *kuba*, a sacred building where rituals were held and young men had to stay to receive training before getting married.

The *Homeyaya* harvest ceremony held in July or August is the Tsou's most important celebration. Skilled at hunting and preparing animal hides in bygone

times, they observed taboos against hunting bears and leopards. The *Miyatjgu* ceremony of one of the Tsou tribes, which had been discontinued for many years, was revived in 1993. It is based on a belief that ancestral spirits bringing peace, health, beauty and other blessings reside in sacred shell beads. Priests are the keepers of the beads, which are brought out into public view only for the annual ceremony.

Yami

Orchid Island 蘭嶼 off Taiwan's southeast coast is home to about 3,750 indigenous people officially known as the Yami 雅美, but who, in their own language, refer to themselves as the Dawu (or Tao) 達悟, which means "the people." Genetically and culturally, they are related to indigenous people of the Batan Islands in the Philippines. Unlike the indigenous peoples of Taiwan proper, their traditional livelihood and culture are tied to the ocean. Unique aspects of their customs include loincloths worn by males as daily attire and a hair-swinging dance performed by women. Also, they are the only indigenous people who, traditionally, never produced alcoholic drinks.

The *Mivanwa* and *Mangegen* are two of the most important rituals for the Yami. The former is held in February or March to pray for an abundance of flying fish, while the latter seeks blessings for a new boat. A large-size, canoe-style Yami boat, which takes up to three years to build, has a capacity of 10 adults and is constructed by putting together 21 to 27 wooden planks without using a single nail.

Traditional Yami homes are houses of stone and wood built in depressions hewn out of stony hillsides facing the ocean. This enables them to withstand fierce typhoon or gale winds, to remain cool in the summer and to retain heat in the

winter. Traditional society is patriarchal, but with no formal social or political hierarchy. Social affairs are handled by the male heads of household and fishing groups, while disputes are settled by the immediate family and relatives of parties to the argument.

Immigration and Emigration

The National Immigration Agency 入出國及移民署 under the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) is in charge of affairs related to emigration and immigration. Between 1991 and 2009, the number of foreign nationals (not including people from mainland China) living in Taiwan jumped from around 30,000 to 403,700, mainly due to the arrival of blue-collar guest workers beginning in the early 1990s as well as a recent increase in marriages between ROC citizens and foreign nationals. In 2009, guest workers in the fields of manufacturing and construction accounted for about 75.9 percent of the total foreign population in Taiwan; domestic helpers 9.0 percent; students 4.4 percent; English teachers 1.5 percent; and businesspeople and engineers, each at less than 1 percent.

In 2009, more than 1,600 ROC citizens emigrated to other countries. Statistics show the United States was the top destination, followed by Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Recent Immigrants

Starting in the late 1990s, there was a marked increase in the number of marriages between ROC citizens and foreign nationals. MOI statistics show that in 2009, marriages of ROC citizens to foreigners (21,914 couples) accounted for one in every five marriages, with 60.7 percent of non-ROC spouses from mainland China (including Hong Kong and

Macau), 16.7 percent from Vietnam, 4.1 percent from Japan and 3.7 percent from the United States.

Demographic Trends

The first census in Taiwan, carried out in 1905, indicated that there were 3.12 million people living on the island. Forty years later, the population had doubled to 6.62 million. Although a baby boom after World War II caused a rapid increase in population, subsequent policies and family planning helped slow growth. The population growth rate in 1957 was 3.5 percent, which declined to 1.8 percent in 1982 and further dwindled to 0.36 percent in 2009.



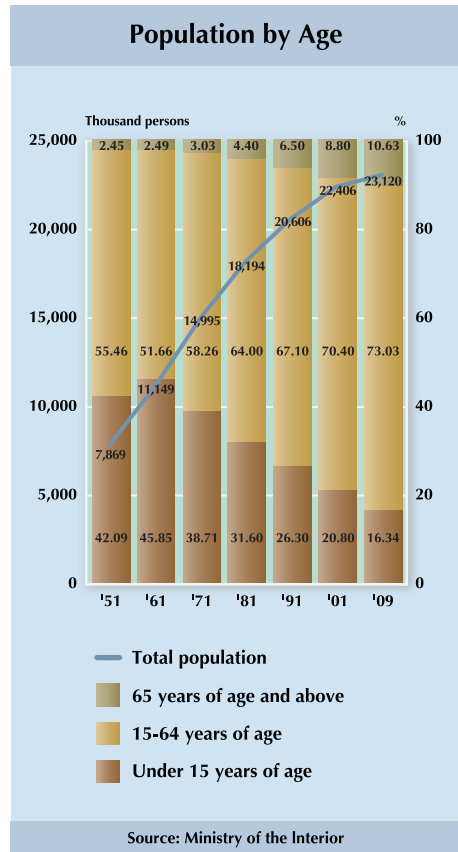
In 2009, a Taiwanese woman of childbearing age gave birth to only 1.05 children on average. To counter this declining birth rate, the government is providing a wide range of incentives to encourage childbirth and child rearing.

The total fertility rate (the average number of children born to a woman during her childbearing years) was five during the 1960s. It then fell to two in the 1980s, and was 1.05 in 2009. This latest figure is among the lowest in the world. In 2009, the number of babies born was 191,310, with a ratio of 108 boys to 100 girls, while the crude birth rate declined from 22.97 percent in 1981 to 8.29 percent.

Statistics show that the declining birth rate has been accompanied by a rising average age of marriage and a rising divorce rate. Between 1981 and 2009, the average age at first marriage rose from 28.1 years to 33.9 years for men and from 24.5 years to 30.3 years for women. Meanwhile, the divorce rate rose from 0.83 percent to 2.5 percent. Moreover, single persons as a proportion of the above-20 age group grew to 42 percent (or 7.6 million people) in 2009. At the end of 2009, the sex ratio in Taiwan stood at 101.34 males to 100 females.

The population structure has undergone great changes over the last few decades, and Taiwan is now an aging society. With medical advances raising the average life expectancy over the years, the proportion of people aged 65 and older has been steadily increasing. In 1949, it was 2.5 percent of the population, and in 2009, 10.6 percent. The 15-64 age group, which comprised 56.4 percent of the total population in 1949, grew to 73.0 percent in 2009. Conversely, the proportion of those under 15 years of age has been decreasing.

Based on these trends, the Council for Economic Planning and Development 行政院經濟建設委員會 has forecast that Taiwan’s population will peak at 23.84 million in 2026, and then fall to 20.29 million in 2056. By then, the proportion of those 65 or older will increase to 37.5 percent, while the percentage of those in



the 15-64 age group will decline to 52.3 percent, and the percentage of people under 15 will fall from 16.3 percent in 2009 to 10.2 percent.

To counter the effects of an aging population on national development, the government has been promoting a new population policy. This policy, mirroring those adopted by other nations facing a “graying” society, aims to foster an environment conducive to raising children, improve pre- and post-natal care and preventative health care, further raise the quality of life through education, establish a comprehensive social security net, promote environmental protection and sustainable development, and formulate an appropriate immigration policy.

Languages

The written language intelligible to speakers of all Sinitic tongues is Chinese, one of the few ideograph-based writing systems still in use on a large scale. While mainland China adopted “simplified” characters in 1956 in a bid to ameliorate its widespread illiteracy, the ROC continues to employ “traditional” written characters. While Mandarin is the official language of the ROC, large segments of its population speak Taiwanese 臺語 and Hakka 客語, and Austronesian languages are still used by indigenous peoples. At the same time, the study of foreign languages has gradually taken root as the nation becomes more connected to the world community and as more immigrants have made the ROC their home.

Official Language

Mandarin, known as *Guoyu* 國語 (national language) in the ROC, can be traced back to the official language in the late Ching dynasty, which was based on the dialect spoken around Beijing. To help people speaking different dialects learn proper Mandarin pronunciation, the Ministry of Education (MOE) formulated the Mandarin Phonetic Symbols 注音符號 in 1913 as a standard phonetic system. This system, consisting of 37 phonetic symbols and four tone marks, is still taught in schools today.

Over the years, a variety of Romanization styles have been developed to make Chinese phonetics easier to learn. The most popular among these are the Wade-Giles system, the Tongyong Pinyin system 通用拼音 and the Hanyu Pinyin system 漢語拼音. To conform to a global convergence spearheaded by the 2006 U.N. Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the ROC government decided in December 2008 to

switch to the Hanyu Pinyin system. (For a comparison of different Romanization systems, see Appendix IV.)

With a substantive commitment to language education, the ROC offers some of the best resources in the world for foreigners wishing to study Mandarin. The Mandarin Training Center 國語教學中心, established in 1956 by National Taiwan Normal University 國立臺灣師範大學, was the first institution to offer language courses for foreigners in Taiwan. Today, 30 university-affiliated institutions provide Mandarin programs. Details on Mandarin programs are available on an English-language website set up by the MOE at <http://www.studyintaiwan.org>.

Other Languages

Over the last decade, there has been growing awareness of the importance of preserving Taiwan’s rich linguistic heritage. This has led the central and local governments to promote education in Taiwanese, Hakka and Austronesian languages. Since 2001, primary school students have been required to take courses in at least one of these languages.

Taiwanese

The Taiwan Southern Min language 臺灣閩南語, commonly known as Taiwanese, is the mother tongue of the Holo population in Taiwan. Among a variety of methods for representing this language in written form, the earliest and most popular one was the Romanization system known as *Pêh-ōē-jī* 白話字, which was first introduced by Presbyterian missionaries. The MOE also unveiled the Taiwanese Language Phonetic Alphabet 臺灣閩南語音標系統 in 1998 and in 2006 rolled out the Taiwanese Romanization Scheme 臺灣閩南語羅馬字拼音方案 for language teaching. Most Holo, however, remain untrained in reading these systems.

Hakka

The Hakka language in Taiwan has five variants, of which the Sixian 四縣 and Hailu 海陸 dialects are the most widely spoken. Sixian is prevalent in Hakka communities in Miaoli, Pingtung and Kaohsiung counties; and Hailu is most commonly spoken by the Hakka population of Hsinchu County.

Like Taiwanese, Hakka is primarily an oral language, and fluency in Hakka is becoming increasingly rare among young people in Taiwan. To promote the language, the Council for Hakka Affairs (CHA) 行政院客家委員會 has carried out a number of plans, including creating a database for basic Hakka language materials, publishing dictionaries of the various Hakka dialects, providing funds to schools to teach Hakka and administering language proficiency tests. In 2009, a record number of people registered for the test, with the high-intermediate level pass rate increasing considerably from the year before. As indications of growing interest in the language, the exam passers in 2009 ranged from age 8 to 84, and 8 percent of the test takers were from non-Hakka backgrounds. The CHA also sponsors research on the Hakka language and culture, chiefly through university programs.

Indigenous Languages

Taiwan's indigenous languages, classified by linguists as Formosan languages, belong to the same Proto-Austronesian language family as Malay and Hawaiian. Overall, the number of indigenous language speakers is declining, as new generations growing up in cities become more fluent in Mandarin or Taiwanese than in their tribal tongues. To help keep these languages alive, the MOE has included them in school curricula while the CIP has conducted indigenous language proficiency tests.

A number of indigenous languages were Romanized by Christian missionaries during the Dutch colonial period in the 17th century (see Chapter 3, "History"). The writing system developed for the Siraya is a notable example. The Siraya used this system for signing contracts with Han people into the 19th century, after which they became largely assimilated and used Chinese characters. In 2005, the CIP and the MOE jointly promulgated the Romanization-based Writing Systems for Indigenous Languages 原住民語言書寫系統 for 12 languages and dialects.

Foreign Language Education

For decades, English as a foreign language has been a required subject for students in junior and senior high schools in Taiwan. In 2005, English was made compulsory from the third grade. In support of English learning, the MOE commissioned the Language Training and Testing Center 語言訓練測驗中心 to develop tests for five proficiency levels. From its inception in 2000 to March 2010, more than 3.8 million people have taken these exams.

As for alternatives to English, the MOE implemented the Plan for the Promotion of Second Foreign Language Study in Senior High Schools 推動高級中學第二外語教育計畫 in 1999. By 2009 school year, more than 480,000 students had taken elective courses under this plan, including Japanese, French, German, Spanish, Korean, Russian and Latin. The most popular choice in 2009 was Japanese.

Numerous public and private educational institutions provide the public with ample opportunities to learn foreign languages. While the most popular foreign languages taught in Taiwan remain English and Japanese, interest in major European languages has been growing. Also, a rising number of immigrants and

guest workers from Southeast Asia has prompted schools to provide courses in such languages as Indonesian, Thai and

Vietnamese. These immigrant languages were, for the first time, included in the MOE's subsidy program in 2010.

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