

Puyuma

Introduction to the ethnic group

The earliest records of the group date back to the Yuan dynasty (1234 -1368) when the Puyuma traded with Han Chinese from western Taiwan. The Han Chinese named the place “BeiNunMi.” Later, the Dutch invaded and governed some parts of Taiwan from 1600 to 1662. They contacted and cooperated with BeiNunMi residents while mining in eastern Taiwan. After the Dutch left, the Puyuma took over the area and expanded their power north to Quanshan, Chishan, Kanuwao and Shinkang Townships and south to Dawu Township. The whole area was generally called “BeiNunMi Seventy-two Tribes,” which also included tribes of the Amis, Paiwan and other ethnic groups as well. In the Qing dynasty (around 1660), Koxinga and his troops also tried to find gold in this area but were defeated by the combative Puyuma.

Archives from the Qing dynasty record Puyuma groups with the name “BeiNunMi” in Jiang Risheng’s “Taiwan Wai Ji”(1683, 台灣外記) and Huang Shujing’s “Tai Hai Shi Zha Lu”(1736, 台海使槎錄). Another Qing source on the Puyuma states that in 1695 (the 35th year of Kangxi’s reign), governors of the Taiwan prefecture, Chen Lin and Lai Ke, travelled over the Central Mountain to appease the tribal people by conferring the title “King of the Puyuma” on their chief, Wenjie.

According to the Japanese scholar Hiroshi Shidehara, the Zhu Yigui rebellion occurred in 1721, (the 60th year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign), and those remaining loyal to Zhu, including Wang Jungin, fled to the Puyuma’s territory and planned another rebellion in 1772 (the first year of Emperor Yongzheng’s reign). Wang Zhang, who was the Tong-Shi (gobetween/translator) of Langciao (now Pingtung County), gave the King of the Puyuma clothes, shoes and an official hat as gifts. So the great chief helped to catch the leader of the faction remaining loyal to Zhu. As a result, he received the title of “Great King of the Puyuma” from the Qing emperor, as well as imperial regalia, an imperial hat and the right to rule the aborigines of eastern Taiwan. Puyuma power reached Haulien Harbor after this event (Hiroshi Shidehara, 1931). Nowadays, the word for local male elders’ ceremonial dress, lonbau in Puyuma, sounds similar to the word for imperial dress, longpao, in Chinese. It is possible that this ceremonial dress was modified from the imperial dress which the Qing emperor bestowed upon the King of the Puyuma as an official dress to have an audience with the Qing governors.

According to Puyuma oral history sources, their ancestors landed at Meihe village in Taitung County which is called Ruvaan by the Jiban Tribe and Panapanayan by the Nanwan Tribe. The “Place of origin of Taiwan aborigines” monument on the slope beside the road passing through Meihe Village was erected by the Jiban Tribe and the Jianhe Tribe in 1950. According to the oral history of the Jiban Tribe, two females and one male landed here. Their names were Paluh, Tavutav and Sukasakaw. After they settled, they produced many descendents. The older sister’s descendents were the ancestors of the Jianhe Tribe, the younger brother’s descendents formed the Jiban Tribe, and the other one’s descendents belonged to the Nanwan Tribe. Other Puyuma tribes originated from either the Jiban Tribe or the Nanwan Tribe. These tribes distinguish themselves as the bamboo-born group and the stone-born group based on their oral history. The two groups also have slightly different dialects. The Nanwan Tribe believes that their ancestors were born from bamboo, and the Jiban Tribe believes that theirs were born from stones.

During the economic boom of the 1980's, many Puyuma people moved to big cities in the north and south of the island in order to find jobs and make some money. But they have returned to their tribes to engage in farming and other agricultural pursuits since the beginning of the 21st century. Until now, they still have the Puyuma Northern Immigrants Association and the Puyuma Southern Immigrants Association. Both associations serve as gathering and communicating social organizations for Puyuma immigrants.

Geographical Distribution

The Puyuma is an ethnic group living in southeastern Taiwan, including the western foothills of the Taitung plateau and alluvial plains in the southern part of the Eastern Taiwan Valley. Based on linguistic analysis, the Puyuma is one primary branch of the Paiwanic language group in the Austronesian language family. However, the ethnic categorizing process of the Puyuma people has been a convoluted one.

The name, Puyuma, is a transliteration of an ancient large tribe's name (also known as Nanwang in Mandarin). At the earliest stage of the process, because the Puyuma's language and culture are closer to the Paiwan, Japanese scholars, such as Mabuchi Toichi, lumped them together with the Paiwan and the Rukai into one ethnic group, called the Lion Tribe, after they had finished their broad survey of Taiwan aborigines. Later on, the book "The Formosan native tribes: a genealogical and classificatory study" (高砂族系統所屬), which Utzukawa worked on as a coauthor, mentioned that the Puyuma's ancestral family system (karumahan) was a unique feature that should separate the group from the Paiwan as an independent ethnic group, and it adopted the name of the place of origin, Panapanayan, as their ethnic name. Panapanayan was the place on a coast near the MeiHe village to the south of the Jiben Township. The name Pa-Sher-Fan (eight sub-tribes) is another commonly used name for the group. Under KMT rule, the name of a tribal village, Puyuma, became a popular name for this ethnic group. However, this name has been questioned by the people, so when the eight sub-tribes began taking turns holding the united annual ritual (Nian-Chi) in 1989, they termed the entire ethnic group Pinuyumayan. This term means "to belong to the Puyuma ethnic group" and is different from the place name, Puyuma, in their language (Lin Zhixing, 1995:27). In the past, this group did not have a collective name for all members; rather Puyuma referred to one another by the name of their place of origin, so the use of the term Pinuyumayan never became widespread in Taiwanese society, and Puyuma remains a generally accepted term for this ethnic group.

According to records, the Puyuma have mainly dwelled on the Taitung plain. Their population is around 10,000, and they are spread out in the southern part of the Taitung valley, but mainly live in the coastal area between the south of the Beinan River and the north of the Jiben River. Taitung City is the biggest residential area. Aside from these places, there are people living in Tungher Township in Taitung County and Laiyi Township in Pingtung County, as well. Some people who stay in Taimali Township in Taitung County, Manju Township in Pingtung County, and Mudan Township in Pingtung County are most likely enculturated by the Paiwan ethnic group; and those who stay in HENCHUN Township are possibly enculturated by the Han Chinese. Therefore, the above groups are not included in the population statistics. The total population of the Puyuma is not great, but its influence on the politics and history of eastern Taiwan is very significant. The possible explanations of this fact include two points. First, the Puyuma occupy the pivotal confluence of

several main rivers on the Peinan Plain in Taitung which controls the entrance to the mountains and the Huatung Valley. Second, they take an open-minded attitude when they interact with the outside world.

Social Structure and Social Organizations

Puyuma social structure and organizations are based on kinship ties. The smallest social unit is the family (ruhma), then lineage (sarumahnan), and the clan (samawan) is the largest. A village (zakal) is composed of several clans. Normally, a clan has a large ancestral spirit house (karumahan) managed by its priest (rahan), who is also in charge of related seasonal rituals, such as the millet harvest festival (murahijavan), and the grand hunting festival (mangayau).

In addition to the kinship-related social units, there are Men's Houses in every tribe, which are the main organizations in a village where tribal affairs and decisions on fighting with enemies are handled. Members of the Men's House are male adolescents and adults. Some other ethnic tribes have only one Men's House in each tribe, but the Puyuma tribes usually have more than one Men's House. For example, the Peinan Tribe has six Men's Houses. Before the time of outside governmental rule, they lived under a system of tribal self-rule. Men's Houses were built at the entrances of the tribal village, serving as the military camps on the border or guard posts of a fort. Members of the Men's Houses closely watched people coming and going. When women or seniors took trips outside, the men acted as their bodyguards to protect them from headhunting by hidden enemies. In order to defend their tribes, the Puyuma also have another social organization, The Age System, to work together with the Men's House. The Age System is as rigidly structured as an army. Every man must join the Men's House, which is similar to a man's military duty under the mandatory military service system.

As for the leadership, one type of leader is the clan's priest (rahan). A priest with higher social status leads other priests from different clans in performing rituals and makes decisions on tribal affairs. Another type of leader is the ayawan, which generally means the head of the group, such as the head (ayawan) of the Youth club. However, the ayawan doesn't serve as a religious leader, but in some tribes, he even replaces priests (rahans) as an opinion maker.

The Puyuma are located in the Taitung alluvial plain, which is formed by the Bainan, Taipen, Lijia and Jiben Rivers, and is the largest delta along Taiwan's southeastern coast. This diverse natural environment contains ocean, plains, mountains, rich soils and swamps with wild grass, providing the Puyuma people with a multifaceted land.

<http://www.dmtip.gov.tw/Eng/Puyuma.htm>, also with more information.