

INTRODUCTION

*“We can say that this area (Laipunuk) was the last area to be annexed into the modern country ruling system (of the Japanese Colony on Taiwan)...
Laipunuk is the window of history”*

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The Bunun are one of Taiwan’s twelve indigenous Austronesian-speaking cultures. When the Japanese took control over the remote and densely forested region of Laipunuk they found nearly two thousand Bunun people living there. Laipunuk is among the very last areas to come under Japanese rule (Huang 2006 interview). During the mid-late 1920’s and until 1941, all of the Bunun people were systematically relocated to the Taitung plain along the Beinan River [see *Map 3*]. As the Bunun lost their hold of Laipunuk, similarly, the Japanese lost their hold of Taiwan. Between 1945 and 1949 the Nationalist Kuomintang Regime (KMT) replaced the Japanese as absolute rulers over the island and its peoples. The KMT did not permit the Bunun to return to Laipunuk and required them to speak Chinese and take Chinese names. According to Nabu Istanda, Culture Director of the *Bunun Cultural and Educational Foundation* and son of 84 year-old Laipunuk-born Langus Istanda, “The Bunun had learned from the Japanese that they must obey the global power and therefore conformed to the Chinese authority and made no effort to return to their native land” (Istanda, N. 2004 interview).

With the exception of KMT forestry activities in the 1960s and 1970s, Laipunuk was left behind and nearly forgotten by the mainstream Chinese culture and progress, which claimed much of Taiwan during the twentieth century. Today, not a single person lives in Laipunuk. Nabu Istanda remarks, “Laipunuk is an empty space, like a black hole” (Istanda, N. 2004 interview).

¹*Author’s note:* Dr. Ying-kuei Huang, Research Fellow at Academia Sinica, Taipei, appears in this thesis reference list under three headings: English Language References; Chinese Language References; and Personal Interviews.

As this thesis is the first English language documentation of Laipunuk, its purpose includes contributing a well-formed understanding of Taiwan history with respect to the indigenous peoples. *Chapter 1* overviews the research methodology and procedures, and provides an understanding of Taiwan's topography and natural environment. *Chapter 2* offers a brief yet well-rounded introduction to Taiwan's indigenous peoples: from Austronesian origins and movement theories; to a survey of twelve ethnicities; to an assessment of four centuries of foreign rule and government policies targeting the indigenous peoples. *Chapter 3* introduces the Bunun peoples and culture. *Chapter 4* serves as a literature review of Laipunuk history together with ethnohistorical research. *Chapter 5* presents the ethnographic narratives and ethnohistorical perspectives of two key informants, and together with an in-depth explanation of the research methodology employed, it shapes the spirit of this thesis. Where appropriate, research methods and methodologies have been explained at the beginning of sections and chapters, whilst findings have been presented at the end of sections or chapters. This thesis subsequently moves to its Conclusion and Recommendations. As a final point, it offers an anthology of the Bunun words found herein.



Photo 1: Thesis Informant (T.B. Istanda) Teaching Pasibutbut

Source: Author, 2004