



# Aboriginal Cultures of Taiwan

Reading Worksheet — Level F | [tahricteaches.com](http://tahricteaches.com)

Long before Han Chinese settlers arrived in the seventeenth century, the island of Taiwan was inhabited by Austronesian peoples whose ancestors had lived there for thousands of years. Today, the government officially recognizes sixteen **indigenous** tribes, though linguists believe Taiwan may be the original homeland from which Austronesian languages spread across the Pacific and Indian Oceans. These communities, collectively numbering around 580,000 people, represent a remarkable cultural and linguistic diversity that scholars are still working to document and preserve.

Each tribe possesses a distinct **heritage** shaped by its geography, from the coastal Amis who developed sophisticated fishing traditions to the mountain-dwelling Atayal known for their facial tattoos and weaving. The Bunun are celebrated for their polyphonic singing, while the Tao of Orchid Island construct elaborate plank boats used in flying fish ceremonies. Such practices were not merely artistic; they were deeply intertwined with spiritual beliefs and seasonal agricultural cycles.

During the twentieth century, indigenous communities endured significant **assimilation** policies under both Japanese colonial rule and the subsequent Nationalist government. Children were often forbidden from speaking their **ancestral** languages in schools, and traditional names were replaced with Mandarin equivalents. As a result, several languages are now classified as critically endangered, with only a handful of fluent elderly speakers remaining.

In recent decades, however, a vibrant cultural revival has emerged. Indigenous activists have successfully **advocated** for legal protections, land rights, and bilingual education programs. Annual festivals such as the Amis Harvest Festival and Paiwan Five-Year Ceremony attract both local and international visitors, while indigenous musicians and filmmakers have gained mainstream recognition.

Nevertheless, challenges persist. Urbanization continues to draw young people away from traditional villages, and economic disparities between indigenous and Han populations remain considerable. Yet many communities are finding innovative ways to balance modernization with cultural preservation, demonstrating that ancient wisdom and contemporary life need not be mutually exclusive.

## A. Vocabulary

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|-----------------------|---|
| 1. indigenous _____   | a. closely connected or woven together                                      |
| 2. heritage _____     | b. renewed interest in or practice of something old or traditional          |
| 3. assimilation _____ | c. consisting of two or more independent melodic voices sung together       |
| 4. ancestral _____    | d. noticeable differences or inequalities between groups                    |
| 5. advocated _____    | e. relating to ancestors or family members from the distant past            |
| 6. polyphonic _____   | f. publicly recommended or supported a cause or policy                      |
| 7. endangered _____   | g. at serious risk of disappearing or becoming extinct                      |
| 8. revival _____      | h. originating in and naturally found in a particular region                |
| 9. disparities _____  | i. traditions, customs, and history passed down through generations         |
| 10. intertwined _____ | j. process by which a minority group adopts the culture of a dominant group |

## B. True or False

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- \_\_\_ 1. Taiwan's indigenous peoples are descendants of Austronesian-speaking populations.
- \_\_\_ 2. The Taiwanese government officially recognizes ten indigenous tribes.
- \_\_\_ 3. The Amis tribe is traditionally associated with mountain hunting.
- \_\_\_ 4. The Bunun people are known for their polyphonic singing tradition.
- \_\_\_ 5. The Tao people of Orchid Island build plank boats for flying fish ceremonies.
- \_\_\_ 6. Indigenous children were always encouraged to speak their ancestral languages in schools.
- \_\_\_ 7. Several indigenous languages of Taiwan are now critically endangered.
- \_\_\_ 8. Indigenous activists have gained legal protections and bilingual education programs.
- \_\_\_ 9. The Amis Harvest Festival is held every five years.
- \_\_\_ 10. Economic disparities between indigenous and Han populations have largely disappeared.

## C. Fill in the Blanks

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**Word Bank:** indigenous, heritage, assimilation, ancestral, advocated, endangered, revival, disparities

1. The government recognizes sixteen \_\_\_\_\_ tribes whose ancestors lived in Taiwan for thousands of years.
2. Each tribe possesses a distinct cultural \_\_\_\_\_ shaped by its geographic environment.
3. Twentieth-century \_\_\_\_\_ policies forced children to abandon their traditional languages.
4. Activists have \_\_\_\_\_ for stronger legal protections and bilingual education programs.
5. A vibrant cultural \_\_\_\_\_ has emerged in recent decades, attracting both local and international attention.



## D. Comprehension Questions

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1. Why do linguists consider Taiwan significant in the study of Austronesian languages?
2. How did government policies in the twentieth century affect indigenous languages and identities?
3. What evidence shows that indigenous cultures in Taiwan are experiencing a revival today?

## E. Discussion Questions

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1. How can modern societies balance economic development with the preservation of indigenous languages and traditions?
2. What responsibilities do governments have toward indigenous communities whose ancestors were subjected to assimilation policies?

# Answer Key

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**A. Vocabulary:** 1-h, 2-i, 3-j, 4-e, 5-f, 6-c, 7-g, 8-b, 9-d, 10-a

**B. True/False:** 1-T, 2-F, 3-F, 4-T, 5-T, 6-F, 7-T, 8-T, 9-F, 10-F

**C. Fill Blanks:** 1-indigenous, 2-heritage, 3-assimilation, 4-advocated, 5-revival

**D. Comprehension:**

1. Linguists believe Taiwan may be the original homeland from which Austronesian languages spread across the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
2. Children were forbidden from speaking ancestral languages in schools and traditional names were replaced with Mandarin equivalents, leaving several languages critically endangered.
3. Activists have won legal protections and bilingual education, while festivals, musicians, and filmmakers have gained mainstream recognition both locally and internationally.