

# CHAPTER 1—THE RESEARCH

## 1.1. Purposes of the Research

The main purpose of this research is the recordation and documentation of the few remaining Laipunuk-born Bunun individual's oral history, and to provide a comprehensive account of Laipunuk's *full* history in the English language. This research is significant in the field of *Taiwan Studies* as it serves to reconstruct the ethos and cosmos of a special and select group of pre-1930 Laipunuk-born Bunun elders. When these few remaining Bunun elders are gone, we lose this primary resource and with them any opportunity to discover their rich knowledge of history, cultural tradition, and details of events surrounding the Japanese incursion. Due to the late arrival of Japanese Colonial rule in Laipunuk, the Bunun elders can shed light on a time when their culture was intact. From them we can learn of indigenous family life, hunting, agriculture, trade relations, and cultural behaviors particular to the region. Furthermore, this research developed to be mutually beneficial to both researcher and participant and offered a sense of reconciliation to the Bunun elders.

Currently, there is very little information available on this topic for following reasons: (1) inadequate literature from the Qing dynasty; (2) remoteness of Laipunuk and late arrival of Japanese forces, there was very little research or information produced by the Japanese<sup>2</sup> and only a handful of photographs ever taken by them; (3) events occurring in the late 1930's resulted in a mass exodus of every living person from the region by 1942 and the burning of houses by the Japanese; (4) inconsequential documents were produced during the KMT period (mainly forestry records); (5) only a small number of articles and several theses have been generated during the current People's Democratic Party (DPP) period thus far<sup>3</sup>; (6) there is at present no information available in English.

This study, with its conclusions and recommendations, opens a path to cultural conservation and a retrieval of ethnic identity, and addresses many current issues, the resolution of which is desperately sought after by Bunun elders, their descendants, and the diverse peoples of Taiwan. In this way, the purpose of this research is to make a significant contribution to the developing

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<sup>2</sup>Author's note on Japanese reference materials: firstly, Dr. Ying-kuei Huang has located and researched several Japanese *Field Reports* (1904 and 1922) pertaining to Laipunuk. He was interviewed by the author and these findings are presented in Chapter 4.2; secondly, there were three public announcements appearing in the 1941 Japanese *Friend of Savage Report* and this material was incorporated in Chapter 4.3.

<sup>3</sup> For a complete list of Chinese materials from the period, see the Chinese Language Reference section.

field of *Taiwan Studies*, to offer a sense of reconciliation to Taiwan's indigenous peoples, and to serve as a lasting academic and ethnohistorical record.

## **1.2. Methodology and Procedures**

Although academics perceive oral history as a research methodology, for the Bunun it comes naturally. Oral history is the way they traditionally pass on their story and life experience. In this way, institutional oral ethnography benefits both researcher and informant.

This qualitative research uses an ethnohistorical case study approach, which is an appropriate methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed to compare and integrate oral history with limited existing literature. By definition, ethnohistory is an “anthropological study of cultures lacking a written history of their own, chiefly by examining their oral traditions and comparing them against whatever external evidence is available, as written accounts from other cultures of contact with these societies” (Webster's 2004: 273). This comparison is necessary in order to reconstruct the cultural tradition and social identity of a people who experienced abrupt and severe cultural degradation in their youth. The case study approach is suitable for this thesis, which seeks to delineate and reconstruct the social fabric and perception of cosmos of the Bunun from the perspectives of the few remaining individuals who can recollect the time and place of query.

One of the major characteristics of this research design is that it captures the meaning of how Laipunuk elders describe, in their own words, their personal-life experiences, and the historic events that shaped their perspectives. Through examining the elders' narratives and perspectives I identify commonalities in their experiences and viewpoints and then look across their realities through cross-case analysis. These cultural portraits can then be compared with existing literature on Bunun cultural tradition and history.

Bunun participant interviews have been translated to English and organized into appropriate categories, such as spiritual beliefs, headhunting, wine making, trading, and other perspectives of indigenous epistemology. The nature of expression and the content revealed by informants generated the final categories chosen for this thesis.

The procedure of data collection and recordation forming the heart of this project, centered on the narratives of Bunun elders, employed digital video and audio recording equipment. Data was translated into English by working with elders, their families, and bilingual individuals

familiar with the Isbukun dialect once spoken in Laipunuk. In some cases informants also spoke in Japanese or Chinese (or mixed); in such cases the translation process followed the same methodology. Where appropriate, a Bunun *Romanized* script has been provided in order to preserve the language's atypical nuances and philosophy.

The *raison d'être* of ethno-history serves to place oral history into perspective through an understanding of existing information. Informant data analysis occurred in four stages:

1. organizing the raw data
2. generating categories
3. arranging the emerging categories
4. searching for alternative explanations

Given the circumstances of this study, primarily the limited literature targeting the Laipunuk people and region, information was gathered from interviews with the informant's families as well as Taiwan-based scholars in the related fields. This additional data has been imperative to this case study. Through the recordation, translation, and documentation of primary resources, and the examination of existing literature, scholars, and Bunun descendants, this research is an authentic and unique compilation and construct of the people, place, and time in query.

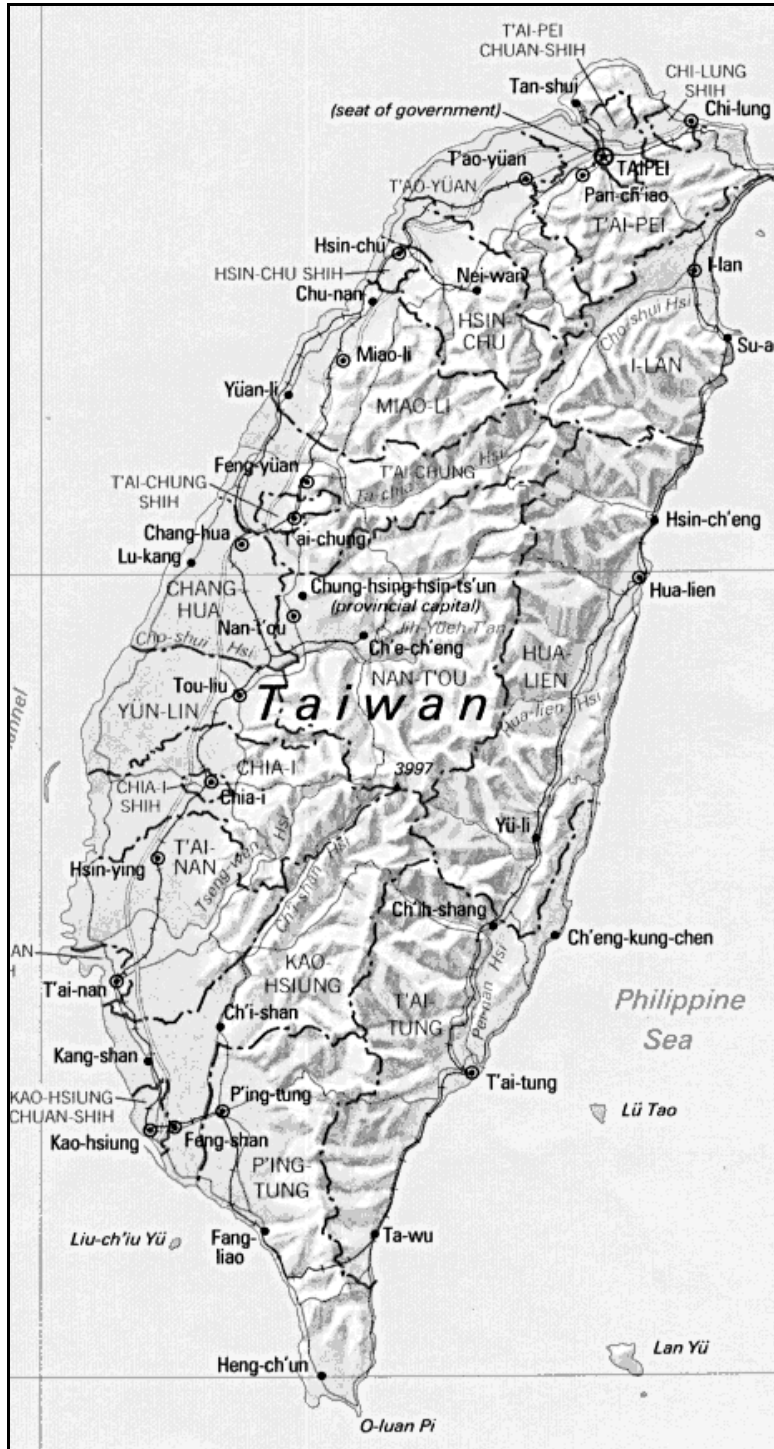
### **1.3. Topography and the Natural Environment**

#### **Taiwan**

Taiwan has 200 mountain peaks over 3,000 meters. Rising to the greatest height is the 3,952-meter Jade Mountain. These mountains gave haven to the indigenous peoples throughout repeated centuries of traders and invaders. The relationship between the mountains and the indigenous peoples will be a reoccurring theme throughout this thesis.

The island of Taiwan is nestled between the world's largest continent (Asia) and the world's largest ocean (the Pacific). It is 394 km long and 144 km at its widest point. With a total land area of 35,801 sq. km, Taiwan is over three times the size of the land area of the Big Island of Hawaii (10,458 sq. km). It is located between 21°53'50" and 25°18'20"N latitude and between 120°01'00" and 121°59'15"E longitude. Consequently the Tropic of Cancer dissects the island. The southern tip of Taiwan is approximately the same latitude as the island of Kauai, Hawaii. Taiwan is separated from China by the Taiwan Strait, which is about 130 km at its narrowest

point. The island is almost equidistant from Shanghai and Hong Kong. *Map 1* shows the topography and north-south orientation of Taiwan's mountain ranges.



*Map 1: Relief of Taiwan*

In the simplest terms, the western one-third of the island is a level plain well suited for agriculture and settlement, whereas the eastern two-thirds are stacked with extreme mountains that run north to south like the back of a great dragon. On the East Coast, the mountains rise steeply from the Pacific. Although only one-third of the land area is arable, Taiwan has a larger proportion of useable land than Japan. Natural resources and agricultural potential provided Taiwan's western plain with great importance.

Other important natural phenomena in Taiwan include earthquakes and typhoons. Whereas quakes are common and sometimes catastrophic (such as on September 21, 1999), typhoons are likely to occur from May to October; for a normal summer season may see any number of direct hits on the island. Given the composition of shale and soft limestone rock in the high mountains, massive landslides and flooding are just a few of the earthquake and typhoon-related perils endured by the mountain-dwelling indigenous peoples.

### **Laipunuk**

Laipunuk (Nei Ben Lu 內本鹿), the focal point of this thesis, is a remote area located primarily within Yen-Ping Township, Taitung County, Taiwan.

Covering approximately 15,084 hectares of natural forest, Laipunuk contains abundant flora and fauna. An alpine watershed, Laipunuk is comprised of an arc of high mountain peaks and ridges, the source of numerous small streams and rivers. These tributaries converge to form the Lu Ye River (originally called Pasikau River). The Lu Ye River flows down through Laipunuk's steep canyons and onto the East Taiwan Plain where it merges with the Beinan River and meets the Pacific Ocean just north of Taitung. The vast majority of the tributaries leading to the Lu Ye River have yet to be named.

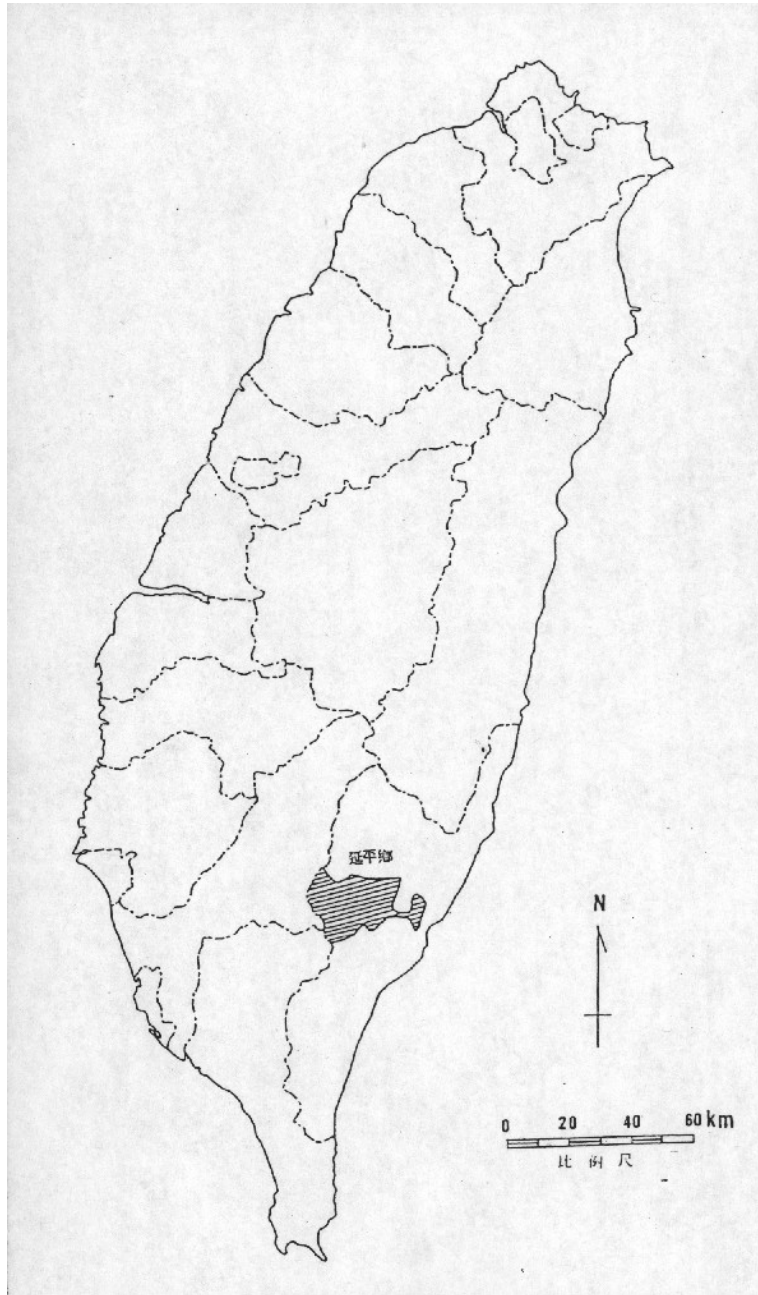
Access to the Laipunuk region has long been treacherous and difficult. Prior to the opening of the Japanese cordon trail<sup>4</sup>, most of the external trade relations to the area came from the west (across the central mountain range). The Japanese trail was carved into the canyon walls and crossed through the heart of the Lu Ye River basin from the small village of Hong Ye (Hot Springs Village) in Yen-Ping County to the trading village of Liu-Kuei in Ping Dong County, opening access to the Taitung plain. However, the Japanese trail has long been abandoned and due to erosion and landslides since 1942, gaining access to Laipunuk is once again extremely

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<sup>4</sup> The excavation of *Laipunuk Police Cordon* was agreed in the *South Tribe's People Meeting* in the fifth and sixth year of King Taishou of Japan (1916-17 A.D.) (Mao 2003: 321).

dangerous. Today, right of entry is obtained through permission from the government and is executed with support from skilled mountaineers and expert Bunun guides.

*Map 10* at the end of Chapter 4, serves as a reference throughout this thesis. *Map 2* shows the political boundaries on Island of Taiwan with Yen-Ping Township (延平鄉) shaded.



*Map 2: Yen-Ping Township*

Due to the absence of human activity (KMT logging around the outer reaches notwithstanding), Laipunuk has had a chance to ‘catch its breath’ and recover from human impact. Recently completed research by the Taiwan Forestry Bureau (TFB), working with indigenous Bunun, recorded 403 vascular plants, 71 ferns, 15 conifers, 317 flowering plants. They identified 18 medium and large size mammals (including the endangered Chinese otter (*lutra lutra chinensis*). There have been reported sightings of the endangered Taiwan bear (*ursus thibetanus*) by Bunun hunters and conservation researchers (Istanda, N. 2004 interview) and Langus Istanda vividly recalls her father bringing home a bear he killed early last century (Istanda, L. 2006 interview).

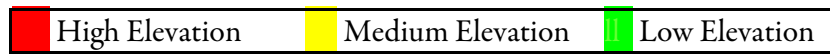
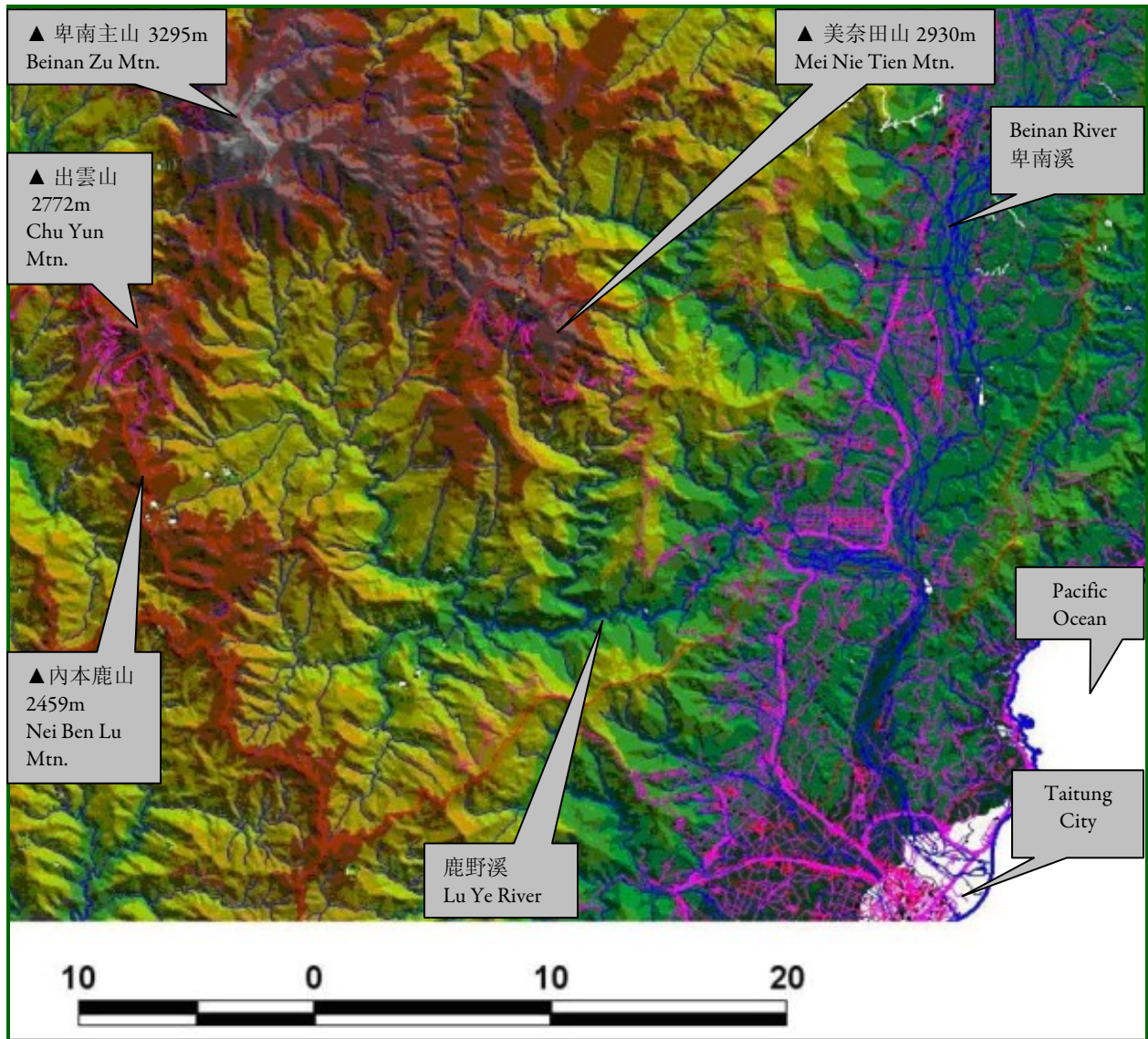
Laipunuk elders attest that the region was once an abundant hunting area. While on expedition in January 2006, I observed an abundance of Taiwan Barking Deer (*muntiacus reevesi micrurus*), the larger in stature Taiwan Deer (*mervus unicolor swinhoi*), saw innumerable areas dug up or rooted by wild pigs, and heard the screeches of flying squirrels each and every night. I sighted numerous birds of prey and various small birds. I saw very few monkeys. Although Taiwan’s mountains are notorious for deadly snakes, they tend to hibernate in winter and the 2006 expedition members saw only one single snake swimming in a brook. Among the natural treasures of Laipunuk, perhaps the most obvious and dynamic are the magnificent cypress trees<sup>5</sup> at the higher elevations, which can be thousands of years old.

Among the many high mountains surrounding the Laipunuk watershed, Beinan Mtn. (3,295 meters), Jian Qing Mtn. (2,720 meters), Chu Yun Mtn. (2,772 meters), and Nei Ben Lu Mtn. (2,458 meters), are orientated along a north – south divide, forming the backbone of the central mountain range in this region. To the east of these mountains the water flows eastward toward the Pacific, and to their west, the water flows westward toward the Taiwan Strait.

*Map 3* on the following page illustrates the topography of Laipunuk with outstanding geographic features illustrated by text boxes.

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<sup>5</sup> Taiwan Yellow Cypress, called *Banil* in Bunun, is especially valued by Laipunuk Bunun for a variety of uses.



Map 3: Outstanding Geographic Features of Laipunuk