

Austronesians by
peter bellwood,
wilhelm solheim ii,
and zeus salazar



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The term Austronesian contextually refers to a population group present in Southeast Asia or Oceania who speaks, or had ancestors who spoke, one of the Austronesian languages. Apart from the Polynesian people of Oceania, the Austronesian people include: Taiwanese Aborigines, the majority ethnic groups of East Timor, Indonesia and Malaysia. There had been several theories that posit the Austronesians as the origin of the Philippine population.

Among the leading proponents of these ideas are Australian National University professor Peter Bellwood, American anthropologist and the most senior practitioner of archaeology in Southeast Asia Wilhelm Solheim II, and Filipino anthropologist Zeus Salazar. Their viewpoints are to be separately presented here. Bellwood's Austronesian Diffusion Theory/ Out-of-Taiwan (OOT) Hypothesis/ Mainland Origin Hypothesis Rather than believing that Austroloids were the ancestors of the Filipino race, Professor Bellwood argued that Austronesians were the roots of the population inhabiting most of the Asian territories today.

His Out-of-Taiwan Hypothesis is based largely on linguistics and is mainly derived from American linguistic Robert Blust' model of Austronesian diffusion, lately known as the Blust model. Bellwood incorporated archaeological data to Blust's idea to arrive at his own theory. He posited that between 4500 BCE and 4000 BCE, developments in agricultural technology in the Yunnan Plateau in China created pressures which drove certain people to migrate to Taiwan. This is what explains the term " Out-of-Taiwan Hypothesis".

Bellwood also believed that these people either already had or began to develop a unique language of their own, which he referred to as "Proto-Austronesian". By around 3000-3500 BCE, these groups started differentiating into three or four distinct subcultures, and by 2500 to 1500 BC, one of these groups began migrating southwards towards the Philippines and Indonesia, reaching as far as Borneo and the Moluccas by 1500 BCE, forming new cultural groupings and developing unique languages.

He called all the languages formed outside Taiwan "Malayo-Polynesian". Meanwhile, the language developed in the Philippines and Indonesia was then termed "Western Malayo-Polynesian" By 1500 BC, some of these groups started migrating west, and they reached the Madagascar area around the 1st millennium. Still others migrated east, settling as far as Easter Island by the mid-13th century.

This widespread movement gave the Austronesian language group the distinction of being the most widely distributed language groups in the world at that time, in terms of the geographical spread of the homelands of its languages. Bellwood's simplified theory about the origin of the Filipino race then, is that the people of the Philippines are the descendants of those cultures who remained on the Philippine islands when others moved first southwards, then eastward and westward.

Solheim's Nusantara Maritime Trading and Communication Network (NMTCN) or the Island Origin Theory According to the anthropologist Wilhelm Solheim II: " I emphasize again, as I have done in many other articles, that 'Austronesian' is a linguistic term and is the name of a super language family.

It should never be used as a name for a people, genetically speaking, or <https://assignbuster.com/austronesians-by-peter-bellwood-wilhelm-solheim-ii-and-zeus-salazar/>

aculture. To refer to people who speak an Austronesian language the phrase 'Austronesian speaking people' should be used. This statement emphasized that the pioneers of the Austronesian-as-the-origin-of-Southeast Asians idea posits that the Austronesian is a group of languages rather than a group of people. Wilhelm Solheim's concept of the Nusantara Maritime Trading and Communication Network (NMTCN), while not strictly a theory regarding the biological ancestors of modern Southeast Asians, does suggest that the patterns of cultural diffusion throughout the Asia-Pacific region are not what would be expected if such cultures were to be explained by simple migration.

Where Bellwood based his analysis primarily on linguistic analysis, Solheim's approach was based on artifact findings. On the basis of a careful analysis of artifacts such as improvement of traditional lithic chopper and chopping tools, he suggests the existence of a trade and communication network that first spread in the Asia-Pacific region during its Neolithic age (and that which he referred to as the Nusantara Maritime Trading and Communication Network).

For his theory, he coined the term "nusantao" which means "island people". He also presented a different route of movement of the Austronesians from that of Bellwood's model. According to Solheim's NMTCN theory, this trade network, consisting of both Austronesian and non-Austronesian seafaring peoples, was responsible for the spread of cultural patterns throughout the Asia-Pacific region, not the simple migration (or movement, as Bellwood put it) proposed by the Out-of-Taiwan hypothesis.

Solheim consequently came up with four geographical divisions delineating the spread of the NMTCN over time, and he called these geographical

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divisions " lobes. " Specifically, these were the central, northern, eastern and western lobes. The central lobe was further divided into two smaller lobes reflecting phases of cultural spread: the Early Central Lobe and the Late Central Lobe. Instead of Austronesian peoples originating from Taiwan, Solheim placed the origins of the early NMTCN peoples in the " Early Central Lobe," which was in eastern coastal Vietnam, at around 9000 BC.

He then suggests the spread of peoples around 5000 BC towards the " late central lobe", including the Philippines, via island Southeast Asia, rather than from the north as the Taiwan theory suggests. Thus, from the Point of view of the Philippine peoples, the NMTCN is also referred to as the Island Origin Theory. This " late central lobe" included Southern China and Taiwan, which became " the area where Austronesian became the original language family and Malayo-Polynesian developed. In about 4000 to 3000 BC, these peoples continued spreading east through Northern Luzon to Micronesia to form the Early Eastern Lobe, carrying the Malayo-Polynesian languages with them. These languages would become part of the culture spread by the NMTCN in its expansions Malaysia and western towards Malaysia before 2000 BC, continuing along coastal India and Sri Lanka up to the western coast of Africa and Madagascar; and over time, further eastward towards its easternmost borders at Easter Island.

Thus, as in the case of Bellwood's theory, the Austronesian languages spread eastward and westward from the area around the Philippines. Aside from the matter of the origination of people, the difference between the two theories is that Bellwood's theory suggests a linear expansion, while Solheim's NMTCN theory suggests something more akin to concentric circles, all

overlapping in the geographical area of the late central lobe which includes the Philippines. Salazar's View of the Austronesians

Zeus Salazar, like Solheim, believed that the Austronesians carried with them their culture as they spread all over Southeast Asia. However, he further posited that there are "gaps" between the technological knowledge as demonstrated by the late development of technology in the middle regions of the country. These gaps, according to Salazar, were due to the prolonged stay of the Austronesians in coastal areas of the country before penetrating to the inner regions.

Nevertheless, he admits that the Austronesians were the ones responsible for culminating a great part of the Philippine culture and civilization. He once stated, "Ang pinakatiyak na migrasyon hanggang ngayon ay yaong tungo sa karagatan, ang pagsasaibayong-dagat ng mga Austronesyano, ang pinakamaagang ninuno ng mga Pilipino... Sila'y nagdaan sa peninsula tungong Indonesia muna upang mapunta pagkatapos sa Pilipinas, sa Pasipiko, at sa Madagascar. This statement of Salazar reflected his parallel ideas to that of Solheim's. However, he is known to focus more on studying linguistic aspects and evidences about the Austronesian's diffusion, and he later found out that several Filipino words such as dalubhasa, balita, bahay, aso, niyog, araw, anito, karayom, mana, and apoy among others, were of Austronesian origin.

Setting aside the fact that there are numerous theories about the origin of the Filipino race, with each one positing their own assumptions, it still cannot be denied that they collectively help in understanding and reconstructing our own history as they lead to further and more inquiry about our fragmented

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past. Whatever theory one may believe in, the important thing is that prejudices and biases are removed and instead, being scientific is employed in our search for a clearer and more solid view of the Philippine prehistory.

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