

Chinese researchers seek origins of Austronesians

A research center has been set up to determine whether Austronesians originated on the Chinese mainland.

The International Research Center for Austronesian Archaeology in Pingtan, Fujian province, is led by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences institute of archaeology, and Fujian Museum.

The Austronesian language family includes those spoken by hundreds of millions of people in maritime Southeast Asia, New Zealand, the Pacific islands, Madagascar, etc.

Past research support the claim that Austronesian languages have their roots in Taiwan. But a new view has recently surfaced in the academic circle, suggesting that Taiwan was probably a mid-way station and the origins of the languages were on the Chinese mainland.

The research center is near a Neolithic site – the Keqiutou ruins – where archaeologists have found many stone tools including rudimentary hand-axes. The artifacts are similar to those found in Taiwan's Dachakeng ruins, believed to be the home of the ancestors of the Austronesians.

“It is a piece of significant evidence confirming a close link between Fujian and Taiwan in the New Stone Age,” said Zhao Zhijun, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Fan Xuechun from Fujian Museum, said the discoveries suggested that ancient people might have crossed the Taiwan Strait some 7,000 years ago and the Chinese mainland was indeed the original homeland of the Austronesians.

Researchers said they will first collect and restore the Keqiutou findings and display them at the center. It will then serve as a base for Austronesian archaeological studies.