

WALKING HISTORY by Michael Xiao Chua

WE DID NOT COME FROM THE ITA, INDONES NOR MALAY!

We were taught in school that the Filipinos came from the Aetas, Indonesians and Malays who came here in different “waves of migrations” as hypothesized by archaeologist H. Otley Beyer. The aetas came first from Borneo to Palawan through land bridges that appeared in Southeast Asia during the Ice Age. Then, through boats, the Indonesians, then the Malays. When this was first taught to me by my teacher in Grade 1, my beloved Ma’am Luz, I imagined aetas bringing sacks of land and were putting soil on their way as they walked on the sea to form the “land bridges.” Far out.

Only when I went to the University of the Philippines Diliman and took my first history class under Prof. Carlos Tatel that I learned that as early as the 1970s, the Beyer theory was already challenged and most in the academe does not believe it anymore! Although the aetas came here using land bridges, that’s the only verifiable thing from the theory. Shock.

According to F. Landa Jocano, there were already people who evolved from here. According to archaeologists, evidence can be found from stone tools left by the so-called *Homo erectus philippinensis* in a Cagayan Valley cave (500,000/250,000 BC) and the *Homo sapiens* in Novaliches (150,000 - 100,000 BC) as well as the human remains of a woman (skullcap and jaw) found in Tabon Cave of a *Homo sapiens sapiens* (28,000 - 7,000/5,000 BC). Dr. Armand Mijares and his team recently found what is now believed to be the oldest human remains in the country, a third metatarsal bone of a foot found in Callao Cave in Cagayan, that predates the Tabon Man, 67,000 years ago.

But the group of ancestors who can culturally explain our race are what social scientists call the Austronesians. Originally it is a term ascribed for the southern (from the Latin *auster*, south winds) island (from the Greek *nêsos*) language family that spread across Southeast Asia. There are two competing hypothesis on the origin of the group of people that spoke these languages. Wilhelm Solheim II, the father of Southeast Asian Archaeology believed that these people he called “Nusantao” came from the Sulu-Celebes area. This is island origin hypothesis that theorizes that the peoples of Southeast Asia spread from the islands through networks of trade, intermarriages and migrations.

This was challenged by a younger archaeologist Peter Bellwood, who found different jade lingling-os or earrings across Southeast Asia with almost the same design, hinting that the Austronesians came “out of Taiwan” some 5,000 to 1,500 BC to the Philippine Islands. In whatever case, the two theories can agree that the Filipinos were one of the first Austronesians and that, as I was told by Bellwood himself, a sophisticated maritime culture developed in these islands and with the use of outrigger canoes, the spread of people became possible in Southeast Asia, Oceania, New Zealand, Hawaii and as far as Easter Island in South America and Madagascar in Africa!

Therefore, despite the 171 languages and culture in the Philippines, we can have a basis of unity through our base culture of our Austronesian speaking ancestors.

2 November 2011