

11 *The rise and fall and rise and fall of Proto Malayo-Polynesian*

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1 Introduction¹

The career of the Malayo-Polynesian (MP) language family has had its ups and downs. Originally proposed as a name for the great language family spread across much of the Pacific Ocean, parts of mainland Southeast Asia, and as far west as Madagascar, the term ‘Malayo-Polynesian’ was later replaced by Wilhelm Schmidt’s term ‘Austronesian’, and was then subsequently rehabilitated by Robert Blust (1977:10) as a name for the Austronesian languages spoken outside Taiwan. The hypothesis that all Austronesian languages outside Taiwan belong to a single subgroup was first proposed by Otto Dahl (1973) (Ross 1995b:102, fn.25) and is generally accepted by Austronesian scholars:

The unity of the Malayo-Polynesian languages is probably not open to serious question, and Proto Malayo-Polynesian is readily reconstructible. (Ross 1995b:69)

...2. there is unambiguous evidence for a subgroup, which includes all extra-Formosan languages’... (Blust 1995a:586)

Blust regarded these languages as a first-order subgroup of Proto Austronesian, and while he gave explicit evidence for his claim that these languages formed a subgroup, he simply assumed by default that they were a first-order subgroup of the proto-language. In this paper I will try to show that this assumption is almost certainly incorrect, and I follow up a few of the consequences of this conclusion.

¹ This paper germinated while I was spending five months at the Centre Nationale de la Recherches Scientifiques sur l’Asie Orientale in Paris under a grant from the French Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale de la Recherche et de la Technologie, and owes much to extended discussions I had there with Laurent Sagart and Lawrence Reid. I would like to thank the Ministry for its support, the CRLAO for its hospitality, and Laurie and Laurent for their time and ideas, as well as acknowledge with thanks theirs and Woody Mott’s comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I hereby absolve them of all responsibility for what I have done with their suggestions in the final version.

2 Malayo-Polynesian as a first-order subgroup

The assumption that Malayo-Polynesian is a first-order subgroup of Proto Austronesian is well established in the literature:

I have argued for the following major divisions: 1) Austronesian splits into at least one Formosan subgroup and Malayo-Polynesian (MP = all extra-Formosan Austronesian languages.) (Blust 1990:232)

The Malayo-Polynesian (MP) hypothesis (that all extra-Formosan languages belong to a single first-order An subgroup, while the Formosan languages constitute one or more first-order subgroups) rests on the following phonological (and some non-phonological) innovations:... (Ross 1992:25)

Many scholars consider that the Austronesian language family has four highest subgroups. Three of these subgroups comprise languages confined to Taiwan. The fourth subgroup – Malayo-Polynesian – includes all of the Austronesian languages spoken outside Taiwan. (Bellwood, Fox & Tryon 1995:5)

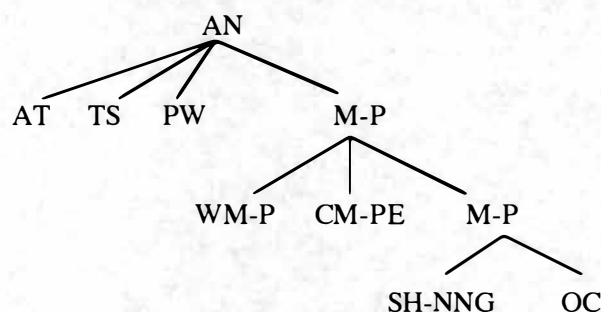
Ross (1992) has partly abandoned this reconstruction on the following grounds: 1) he regards the Formosan and Malayo-Polynesian (MP) languages as members of different highest-order Austronesian (An) subgroups... (Blust 1997:4)

Comparative linguists are now in general agreement about the basic shape of the Austronesian family tree. Most today use the classification developed by linguist Robert Blust (1977, 1978, 1982, 1993, 1995a). This classification...divides the Austronesian family into at least two major groups, of which one, Malayo-Polynesian, includes all Austronesian languages not located in Taiwan (see Figure 4.3). (Bellwood 1997:104)

Words and meanings can only be reconstructed for Proto-Austronesian if cognates are found in the languages of two or more of the primary subgroups (Formosan and Malayo-Polynesian) and if... (Bellwood 1997:110)

The following tree representations from the literature add a bit more detail to the first-order subgroup picture.

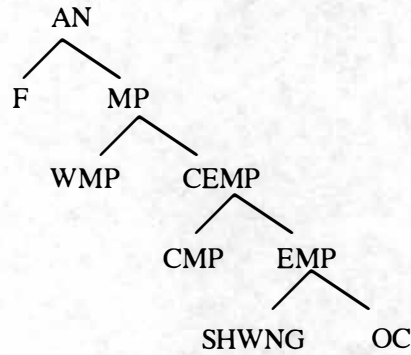
The following subgrouping of the AN language family will be assumed.



AT: Atayalic (Formosa), TS: Tsouic (Formosa), PW: Paiwanic (Formosa), M-P: Malayo-Polynesian (all AN languages outside Formosa)... (Blust 1977:2)

A subgrouping theory that is now accepted by many Austronesian specialists is depicted in Figure 1:

Figure 1: A higher order subgrouping of the Austronesian languages (after Dahl 1976; Blust 1974, 1977a, 1978a, 1982b, 1983/84a)

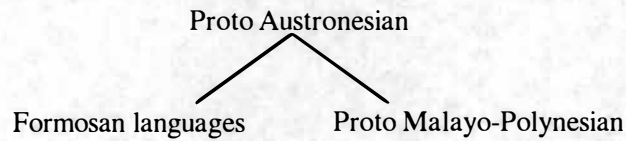


AN = Austronesian, F = Formosan: one or more primary subgroups in Taiwan, here treated for reasons of convenience as a genetic unit. ... (Blust 1988:16-17)

Essentially the same diagram or its upper branches is repeated in later works by Blust and others, for example in Blust (1980:208; 1988:16-17; 1995a:586); Lynch (1993); Tryon (1995:20); Li (1997:157); and Ross (1995b):

Figure 2 shows the major subgroups which developed from one daughter-language of PAN, namely PMP. (Ross 1995b:67)

Figure 10: Schematic diagram of the diversification of Austronesian languages



(Ross 1995b:68; first branching)

Alternative hypotheses are sometimes given a passing mention and then subsequently ignored. For example:

The major subgroups of Austronesian are therefore as follows:...

1.2. Malayo-Polynesian (all Extra-Formosan languages according to Blust, although Reid [1982] excludes some Northern Philippine languages from Malayo-Polynesian and places them in a separate subgroup intermediate between 1.1 and 1.2; see also Starosta [1995] for an even more complex tree at this level). (Bellwood 1997:105)

Assuming the validity of the first-order subgroup hypothesis, anything found in any MP language and in one Formosan language can be reconstructed to PAN, and features found only in Formosan languages cannot. Until quite recently, this was the cornerstone of most work on PAN reconstruction:

Blust (1977) proposed an An family tree which recognized three primary branches in Taiwan (Atayalic, Tsouic, Paiwanic), and a single Malayo-Polynesian branch comprising all the other An languages. In later publications (as Blust 1982; 1983/84a), the Formosan languages are treated for purposes of lexical reconstruction as constituting a single primary branch. The difference...reflected a view that no lexical reconstruction could be safely assigned to Proto-Austronesian (PAN) if its known distribution is confined to the Formosan languages, since the latter have been in close geographical proximity and hence in a potential borrowing relationship for perhaps six millenia [sic]. (Blust 1995a:587-588)

More recently, the MP cornerstone has begun to show some cracks. For example, Formosan languages now have a limited licence to promote their own candidates for PAN reconstruction:

Appendix 1 It differs from earlier reconstructions that I have made in allowing 'Formosan-only' distributions to count as evidence for PAN on the following conditions: 1) reflexes must appear in at least two primary subgroups in Taiwan, and show no phonological irregularities, 2) if reflexes appear in only two primary subgroups in Taiwan these subgroups (or the relevant constituent languages) in general must not be contiguous. Exceptions are made only where the phonological evolution of forms in the two witnesses is so different that a borrowing hypothesis is unlikely.' (Blust 1997:19)

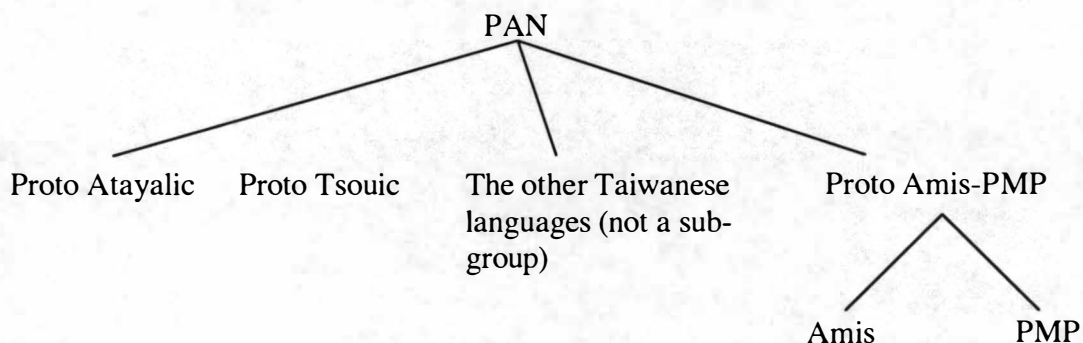
3 MP and the reconstruction of Proto Austronesian

Whether or not Proto Malayo-Polynesian (PMP) is a first-order subgroup of Proto Austronesian (PAN) is an important question. If the answer is positive, then facts about languages in the PMP family can be used directly in the reconstruction of PAN. That is, any property found in one MP language and one non-MP language can probably be reconstructed at the highest level. If the answer is negative, however, the reconstructed PAN language might look much less like PMP. Of course Blust cannot be faulted for failing to give evidence for the first-order subgroup status of PMP, because it is not possible even in principle to give such evidence. Instead, first-order subgroup status is arguably the default assumption until evidence is found for moving a node down the family tree:

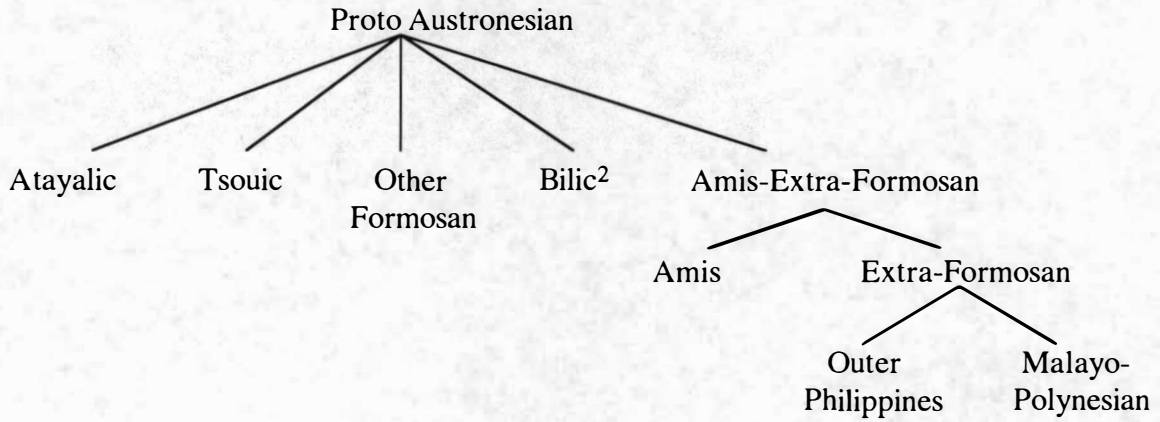
It follows that if no evidence of [exclusively shared innovations] is found for assigning a language or group to a subordinate node within a tree that language or group must be assigned directly to the highest node. Direct assignment to the highest node is, in effect, the default case, and can only be overridden by evidence that clearly favours assignment to a lower node (Figure 1): (Blust 1997:2)

Oddly, however, the requisite evidence for moving the PMP node farther down in the family tree has been available since the appearance of work by Mark Harvey (1979, 1982) and Lawrence Reid (1982) on phonology and continuing with work by Stanley Starosta on verbal morphology (1985, 1994, 1995, 1996). The subgrouping trees (1) through (3) that follow below all reflect the conclusion that PMP is not a first-order subgroup:

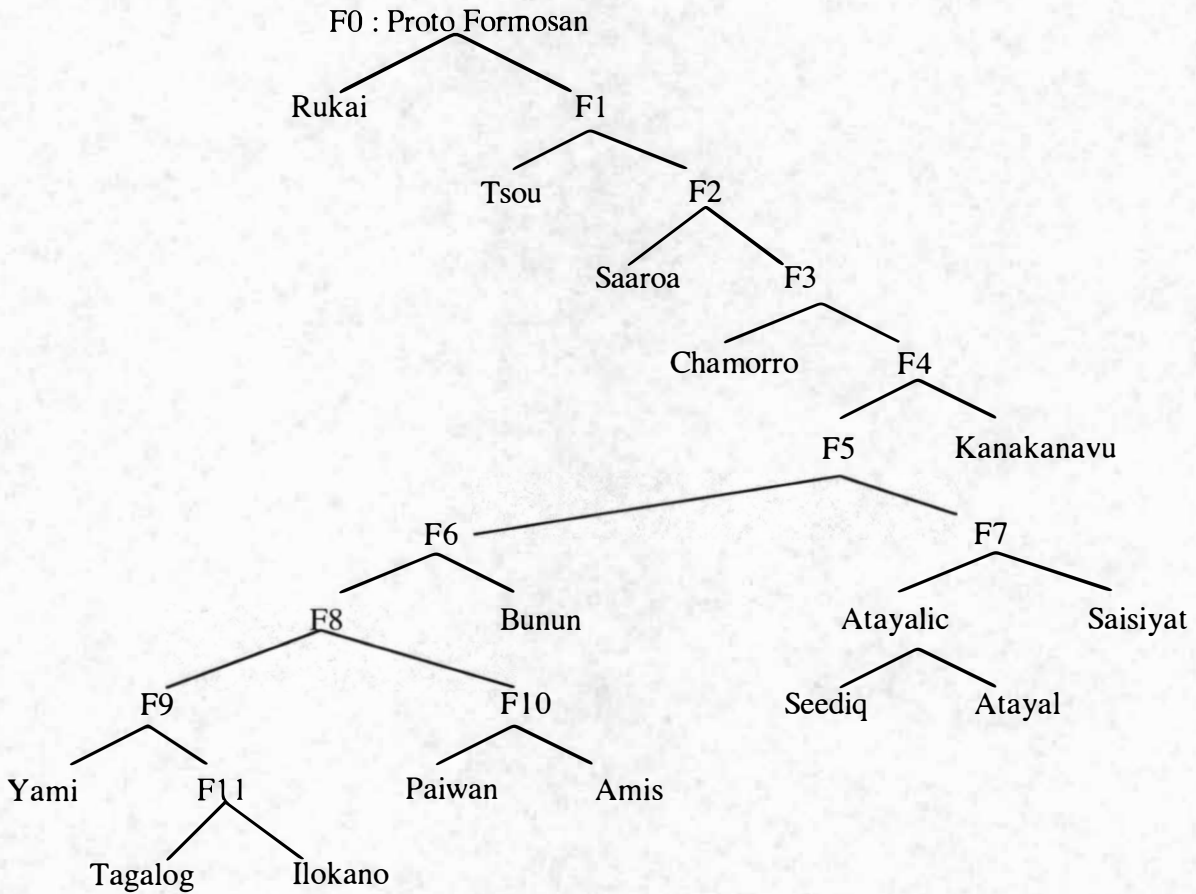
(1) Austronesian higher-order subgroups (Harvey 1979:104, 1982:93):



(2) Austronesian higher-order subgroups (Reid 1982:213):



(3) Grammatically based subgrouping of Formosan languages (adapted from Starosta 1995:691)³



² Laurie Reid informs me (pers. comm.) that he no longer considers Bilic to be a first-order subgroup of PAN.

³ Here F8 is comparable to Reid's Amis-Extra-Formosan (AEF), and F9 to Blust's Malayo-Polynesian.

In spite of the existence of this evidence, however, the PMP node has continued to dangle unconcernedly from the PAN node in the work of many linguists and prehistorians. Peter Bellwood should apparently also be included in the group who accept the lower-order subgroup status for PMP, although the quotes above indicate that earlier he had accepted the first-order subgroup position. Thus, his own recent subgrouping diagram (Bellwood 1997:103, below) shows PMP as subgrouping with one of the Formosan subgroups rather than branching off directly from PAN, in contrast to the claims of Blust and the other first-order subgroup proponents. In a recent email (Bellwood, pers. comm.) he states that he is in agreement with the lower-order position of PMP and attributes the apparent confusion to differences in the interpretation of the term 'first order'.

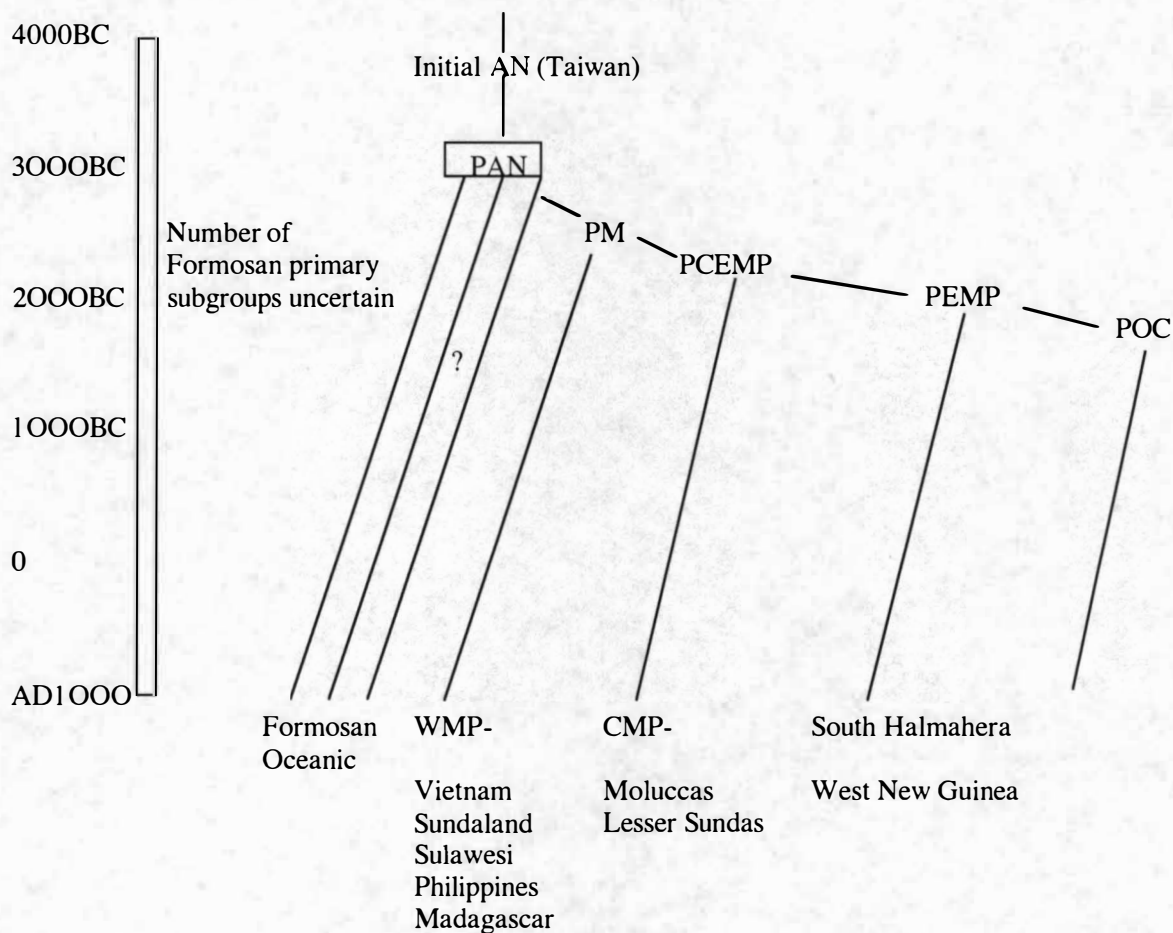


Figure 4.3: A 'family tree' for the Austronesian languages, derived from the subgrouping of Robert Blust

AN = Austronesian; MP = Malayo-Polynesian; WMP = Western Malayo-Polynesian; CEMP = Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian; OC = Oceanic.

4 Extra-Formosan as a non-subgroup

Malcolm Ross seems to have been the first person to introduce the concept of 'linkage' into Formosan linguistic studies (Ross 1995b:45ff.). A 'linkage' is a group of languages that has

arisen as a result of dialect differentiation rather than abrupt separation (see Ross 1995b:46), and he thinks that this is the model that best fits the Formosan situation:

If we were to attempt to redraw Figure 1 less ambiguously using the conventions above, we might arrive at something like Figure 9 below. This says that Proto Malayo-Polynesian (henceforth PMP) diverged from the Austronesian languages of Taiwan as the result of separation (when its speakers left Taiwan more than 4,500 years ago). This is a reasonable assumption. (Ross 1995b:47; see also Tryon 1995:20)

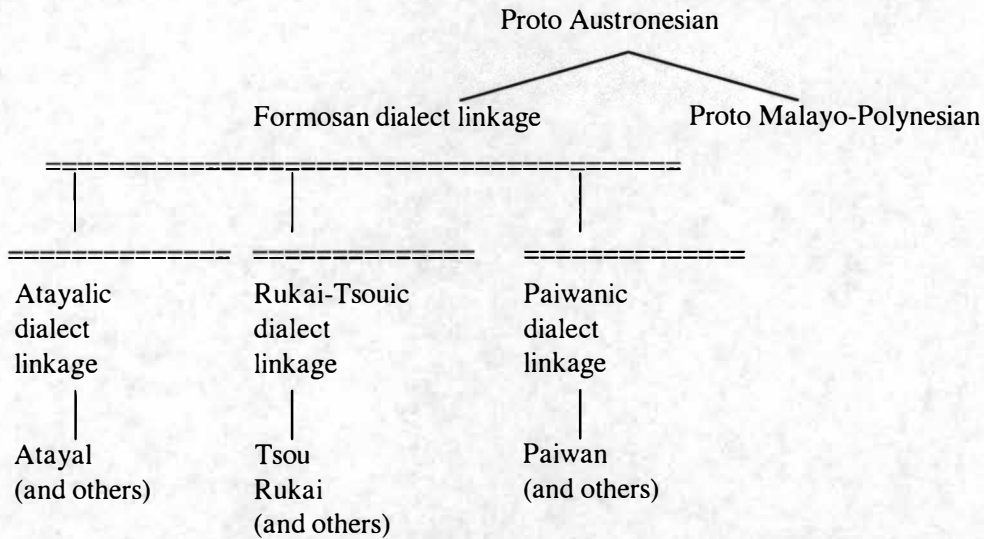


Figure 9: A hypothetical (but not necessarily correct) representation of the earliest branchings of the Austronesian language family. (Ross 1995b:48)

Ross’s statement and his diagram raise a paradox that has been lurking in the shadows since the first-order subgroup was first proposed. The diagram and the work of previous first-order subgroup-oriented linguists up until this point assume that PMP broke off from the rest of the family by separation rather than by dialect differentiation. This assumption is crucial, since it is the only justification for regarding MP as a point of triangulation for PAN reconstruction. However, (i) if PAN broke up 5000 years ago (Bellwood, Fox & Tryon 1995:5), (ii) if ‘Proto-Austronesian diversified into a linkage of dialects and/or languages before the speakers of what later became Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP) left Taiwan’ (Tryon 1995:23), and (iii) if pre-PMP left Taiwan from the east coast some 1000 years after the initial break-up (Li 1997:157–158), then how could the break-off of PMP have possibly been by separation rather than by dialect differentiation? Where did the PMPs spend that millenium while they were waiting for the southbound boat to Botel Tobago and the Batanes Islands? Is it conceivable that, conscious of their linguistic destiny and the needs of later historical linguists, they held themselves in splendid isolation from linguistic intercourse with their relatives for that entire period?⁴ Another quote by Ross indicates that he in fact did not hold such a belief:

4 ‘As the term implies, languages diverge by separation when two or more communities speaking the same language become sharply separated socially and/or geographically so that contact between them is more or less severed and as a result the two languages change in different ways and perhaps at different speeds.’ (Ross 1995b:46).

Circumstantially, it is almost certain that PAN had diversified into a linkage of dialects and/or languages before speakers of what was to become PMP left Taiwan. It is therefore relevant to ask from which part of the linkage this pre-PMP broke off. (Ross 1995b:69)

This latter position, though, is not reconcilable with the 'clean break' scenario that Ross described at the beginning of his article:

...Proto Malayo-Polynesian (henceforth PMP) diverged from the Austronesian languages of Taiwan as the result of separation... (Ross 1995b:47)

and depicted in his Figure 9 above, nor with any of the reconstruction work based on the first-order subgroup hypothesis, all of which crucially assumed such an abrupt separation. That is, the second linkage scenario potentially invalidates any reconstruction based on one MP language and one or more Formosan languages.

To add to the worries of PMP, evidence has been accumulating from work on Formosan languages that even the claims of subgroup status for the extra-Formosan languages are questionable. In each case, properties proposed as evidence for this hypothesis have proven to be either not characteristic of the whole extra-Formosan group or shared with some but not all of the Formosan languages. The impression is becoming stronger that the PMP speech community, if there was one, would have had to be part of a dialect chain spoken in eastern Taiwan. I will refer to this chain, blending terms used by Malcolm Ross (Ross 1995b:48) and Robert Blust (Blust 1997:12, 13), as the East Formosan Linkage (EFL). If this view is correct, then evidence from an appropriately demoted MP grouping of languages is no more and no less privileged as a basis for PAN reconstruction than evidence from other members of this chain which are currently spoken in Taiwan.

4.1 Subgrouping criteria

Do the extra-Formosan languages form a subgroup, and if so, do they form a first-order subgroup? As Blust has stated (1997:2), a subgroup is a first-order subgroup if no evidence of exclusively shared innovations is found for assigning a language or group to a subordinate node within a tree; and, as Harvey (1979, 1982), Reid (1982), and Starosta (1985, 1994, 1995, 1996) have shown, there is evidence that the MP languages share exclusive innovations with languages of eastern Taiwan. Some of the best support for this claim has been provided recently by Blust himself (see §4.5 and §4.6 below), though he has not accepted the conclusion pointed to by his own evidence.

So, the MP languages are not a first-order subgroup. But then, does it follow that they are a lower-order subgroup (LOS)? If we can find a set of innovations shared by all the MP languages and none of the Formosan languages, they are; otherwise, they are not.

In his influential 1997 article, Robert Blust proposed a set of shared innovations which he claimed justified treating the MP languages as a subgroup. I would like to go over the list in light of some of the things we have learned in the past twenty years and show why at least 4 of the 5 criteria can no longer be accepted. Darrell Tryon (1995:22-23) conveniently summarises the innovations proposed by Blust as a justification for the MP subgroup, and I have further abbreviated them here. For 4 of the 5, I will give reasons why each should be rejected.

4.2 #1: The 'Second Austronesian Politeness Shift'

However, in all regions outside Formosa we find that the short form of the pronoun corresponding to **kamu* '2nd pl' is typically, although not exclusively used as a singular pronoun,⁵ explained as a "politeness shift"...Blust concludes that the change **-mu* '2nd pl' > *-mu* '2nd sg' is therefore taken as evidence for a non-Formosan (Malayo-Polynesian) subgroup of the Austronesian languages... (Tryon, ed. 1995:22)

The first problem with the adduction of this criterion is that if this shift is 'typical' but not 'exclusive' in Tryon's words, then it is not an innovation shared exclusively by MP languages. Thus it cannot be used to justify this subgroup. The second problem is that **mu* does in fact appear at least as a component of second person singular forms in Formosan languages, so this property is not coextensive with the MP language family.

Examples:

Rukai:

<i>musu</i>	2s Nom free form, Maga dialect (Zeitoun 1995:139)
<i>-moʔo</i>	2s Nom bound form, Mantauran dialect (Zeitoun 1995:140)
<i>muʔu</i>	2s Topic free form, Mantauran dialect (Li 1996)
<i>mosoa</i>	2s Obl, Tona, Labuan, and Tanan dialects (Zeitoun 1995:140)
<i>mosoanə</i>	2s Obl, Budai dialect (Zeitoun 1995:140)

Kanakanabu (Tsuchida 1976):

<i>musu</i>	2s Gen clitic pronoun
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Saaroa (Tsuchida 1976):

<i>iimukasū</i>	2s Topic free form
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4.3 #2: *-en* focus pronouns

Blust suggests that in languages outside Taiwan the **-en* suffix [on pronouns] indicates goal focus, while on the Proto-Austronesian level the only meaning that can be securely attributed to **a(N)ken* is that of absolute possession.... (Tryon 1995:22)

This claim is rather difficult to interpret because 'focus' is a morphological property of verbs, not of pronouns. Stated in a more precise and theoretically-founded way, the intended meaning may be that a set of pronominal forms ending in a reflex of **-en* occurs in Formosan and extra-Formosan languages to mark absolute possession, but that the same forms also occur in extra-Formosan (MP) languages marking the Agents of transitive ('goal focus') verbs. If that is the intention, the claim is not obviously true. First of all, the Formosan evidence seems rather thin. Of the ten Formosan languages I have personally worked on, only Saisiyat and Paiwan show probable reflexes of this form (Saisiyat *yakin*,

⁵ Blust does not state clearly whether the PMP form is supposed to have been genitive singular or just singular:

...a reflex of **mu* as a 2nd sg. genitive pronoun is unknown in any Formosan language.

Since **mu* is unambiguously reconstructible as a PAN plural pronoun (matching **kamu*), its use as a singular pronoun must have been an innovation...this innovation...took place in... 'Malayo-Polynesian'... (Blust 1977:9-10).

Paiwan (*ti-yaken*), but the Saisiyat form is described as accusative (Huang et al. 1996:3) and the Paiwan form as nominative ('Fokus'; Egli 1990:154-155). Neither is characterised as marking absolute possession. Secondly, even if Blust's description of the properties of the **-en* form does characterise some MP languages, it certainly does not characterise all of them. To cite two MP examples, Yami *yaken* is only nominative and not limited to co-occurrence with transitive 'goal focus' verbs, while the Tagalog *akin* indicates absolute possession or the Locative case form, but not transitive agents. It would be interesting to find out just what Blust meant by this criterion, and which MP languages it is supposed to characterise.⁶

4.4 #3: Loss of *S

PAN preconsontal and final *S disappears, the resultant final shewa [sic] merging with *a in all Malayo-Polynesian languages. (Tryon 1995:22)

I have found no counterexamples to this criterion.

4.5 #4: *maŋ-*

At the same time, another innovation which is reflected right across the Malayo-Polynesian region is the use of the PMP verbal prefixes **paŋ-*, and **maŋ-* to form verbs where the agent is the subject from verbs where the patient is subject... (Tryon 1995:22)

However, as demonstrated long ago by Shigeru Tsuchida (1976:168, 171, 257-258), this morphological property is also found in Formosan languages. The presence of reflexes of **maŋ-* in Formosan languages has also recently been conceded and exemplified by Blust himself:

Typologically most languages that have been called Western Malayo-Polynesian have a prefix reflecting **maN-* which is used in the formation of active verbs, agentive/instrumental nouns in **paŋ-*, and the phonological process of nasal substitution when these prefixes occur with stems that contain certain initial consonants [sic]. These features are not found as active parts of the grammar of any Formosan or CEMP language. However, traces of nasal substitution and of the prefixes **maN-* and **paN-* do appear in some Formosan and OC languages, and thus suggest that their appearance as productive features in WMP languages is a retention from PAN. (Blust 1997:31)

In Amis the pattern not only exists but is fairly productive:

(4) (Wu 1995:98; orthography regularised)

miadop ci aki to fafoy
 hunt Aki pig
 'Aki is going to hunt a pig.'

⁶ For a detailed and theoretically informed reconstruction of these and related forms, see Reid (1997:9-10, 15).

- (5) (M2010833057a;⁷ Chen 1987:83)
sapiadop kina koang no lomaqako
 use.for.hunting this gun of my.family
 'My family uses this gun for hunting.'
- (6) (M2010833058a; Chen 1987:83)
mamiadop kina waco no lomaqako
 assign.to.hunt this dog of my.family
 'My family uses this dog for hunting.'; 'This dog is used for hunting by my family.'
- (7) (M101017.1; Starosta's field notes)
miasik ko babahi i nacila i lomaq
 sweep – woman at yesterday at house
 'The woman swept the floor yesterday in the house.'
- (8) (M2010803055; Chen 1987:80)
mamiasik cira to adawang no cacodadan
 assigned.to.sweep that with front of school
 'He is assigned to sweep the front of the school.'

Amis *mi-* verbs are grammatically intransitive, and *mi-* in forms such as (4) *miadop* and (7) *miasik* are morphophonemically *m-pi-* in structuralist IA (item-and-arrangement) terms. In all cases I am familiar with, the *mi-* corresponds to *pi-* when preceded by another prefix, as shown by (4) *m-pi-adop* versus (5) *sa-pi-adop*. The *mami-* forms are thus not analysable as *ma-mi-*, but must rather be *maŋ-* plus *pi-*, with nasal assimilation of *-ŋ-* to the point of articulation of the following consonant, parallel to the nasal assimilation of *m-* to *pi-* in *mi-* verbs.⁸

4.6 #5: The merger of PAN *C and *t

Other phonological innovations upon which the PMP subgroup is based. These include the merger of PAN **t* and **ts* as PMP **t*. It should be noted, however, that of the languages of Taiwan both Amis and Bunun share this phonological merger. (Tryon 1995:22–23)

The invalidity of the **C*/**t* merger as a criterion for regarding MP as a subgroup has been known for many years. Thus Raleigh Ferrell (1969:64) used this merger to include Yami, an MP language, in his 'Paiwanic II' Formosan subgroup:

⁷ Numbers from Starosta's field notes data base.

⁸ 'I am not convinced yet about the evidence for *maŋ-* in Formosan languages. If it is found, what is the form of the underlying nasal, engma or *n* (as in Chamorro)? I think this is relevant to the whole history of this affix, because I think that the nasal is a frozen ligature, and it shouldn't be engma if it is found in Formosa. The possibility that the assimilation and deletion processes were independently innovated there must also be considered. Much more is still to be said on this topic...' (Laurie Reid, email, 9 October 1998)

Using a somewhat different approach, I have tentatively made a simple two-part division of Paiwanic according to whether the languages do or do not conserve the distinction between the proto-Austronesian phonemes **t* and **C* recently posited by Dyen (1965b). In Paiwanic I (see above, p.25) this distinction is maintained; in Paiwanic II, as apparently in all Austronesian languages outside Taiwan, this distinction disappears.

Mark Harvey (1979:103) used it as a criterion for his 'P-Amis-PMP' subgroup:

However, [PMP] does share the merger of **t* and **ts* to *t* with Amis, Bunun, Siraya and Kavalan. Of these languages, PMP appears to have the most similarities with Amis. Amis has the *ka* pronouns which the other three languages do not.

Finally, based on Blust 1997, Laurent Sagart in an email (pers. comm. 1998) notes that Kavalan, Basay and Trobiawan share this merger.

It is not the case that those linguists most heavily committed to the existence of the MP subgroup have been completely oblivious to the phonological evidence against it. For example, Ross, who crucially assumed the correctness of the MP hypothesis in his reconstruction of PAN verbal morphology (Ross 1995a; see Starosta 1994), was aware of the phonological counter-evidence to PMP. His reaction to it was to relegate it to a footnote and send it to committee:

As noted, the Formosan languages Amis and Bunun also share in the merger of PAN **C* and **t*, and may therefore form a subgroup with PMP. This is a hypothesis which needs further research. (Ross 1995b:101, footnote 11)

Blust (1997:13) gives Ferrell's 'Paiwanic II' even shorter shrift:

The closest previous approximation to East Formosan is Ferrell's 'Paiwanic II' which inexplicably appealed to the less distinctive **t/C* merger rather than the unique **j/n* merger in defining the group. As a result, Kavalan, Amis and Siraya were thrown together with Bunun, and more egregiously, Yami, in a heterogeneous collection of languages which concealed the core of a legitimate and important phylogenetic unit.

Four pages later, Blust (1997:17) recognises the problem with using the **t/*C* merger to support the first-order subgroup hypothesis:

First, as noted above, the merger of **C* and **t* is shared with East Formosan languages and with PMP.

His reaction to this long-known evidence against this last criterion is to simply dismiss it as a 'convergent merger' or 'convergent evolution', that is, as an accidental similarity:

All languages which share the merger of PAN **j* and **n* also share the merger of PAN **t* and **C*. Although the latter change has also taken place in Bunun and in PMP it is otherwise unknown in Taiwan. The simplest hypothesis is therefore to posit three convergent mergers of PAN **t* and **C*: one in Proto-East Formosan, another in Bunun, and a third in PMP. (Blust 1997:13)

Bunun shares certain phonemic mergers with several other languages. However, in every case these appear to be products of convergent evolution. First, as noted above, the merger of **C* and **t* is shared with East Formosan languages and with PMP. (Blust 1997:17)

While the evidence for an East Formosan Linkage (EFL)⁹ is becoming more and more credible, I am unable to follow Blust's reasoning for excluding PMP from membership in it. It is not clear to me how essentially the same set of phonological¹⁰ and grammatical properties can bring Amis safely inside the fence but place PMP beyond the pale.

5 MP languages as part of the EFL

Over the years, circumstantial evidence has been accumulating in support of something like a Greater East Formosan Linkage, which incorporates at least some MP languages. I will present some supportive examples here.

5.1 Linguistic support

1. General

It is claimed [by Wolff] that 'There is clearly much by way of phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical innovation that would support the proposition that the Austronesian languages of Taiwan are close to the Philippine languages, especially those of northern Luzon. (Blust 1997:29)

It seems likely that Proto Malayo-Polynesian, the language ancestral to all extra-Formosan languages, may subgroup with a small number of Formosan languages, probably in the south of Taiwan, and research is needed to identify innovations which may be shared by south Formosan languages and Proto Malayo-Polynesian. (Ross 1995a:771)

Interestingly, as noted in Starosta (1996:9), this is the same Ross whose reconstruction of PAN verb morphology in the same paper is completely dependent on the first-order subgroup hypothesis he calls into question in this quotation.

2. Lexicon

Similarities in vocabulary are more obvious across Philippine languages and certain languages of southeast Taiwan than across the rest of Taiwan. Structural similarities, and in particular the elaborate system of verbal 'focus' (in which a wide range of semantic roles may occur as the topic or subject of a clause with each role marked by a distinctive affix on the verb), occur across a range of Philippine languages and some (but by no means all) Formosan and western Indo-Malaysian languages... (Pawley & Ross 1993:9)

⁹ It is possible that the current appearance of intersecting circles of innovations could eventually be replaced by a classic Stammbaum once the innovations from PAN are re-reconstructed in accordance with the LOS hypothesis.

¹⁰ The **C/*t* merger is only one of the mergers that PMP shares with the EFL, but space limitations do not allow me to consider them all in detail in this paper.

5.2 Archaeological support

1. Ferrell's 'Paiwanic II' and the 'Littoral Culture'

Much of aboriginal Taiwan's coastal areas were occupied by a fairly uniform culture complex, which I shall call the Littoral Culture. This complex extended along the east coast, across the northern and southern extremities of the island and throughout the wide southwestern plain (see Figure 2, page 28). The geographical distribution of this culture coincides approximately with that of the coastal Paiwanic II languages (Kavalan/Ketagalan, Ami, Siraya). The Littoral Culture is noticeably more similar to cultures of the southwestern Pacific area than are the other Taiwan aboriginal cultures. (Ferrell 1969:27)

6 PAN that never was?

One conceptual problem that pervades the discussion of phonological and morphological reconstruction in the upper branches of the Austronesian language family tree is the problem of circularity. As is well known, claims about reconstructed forms and innovations depend on assumptions about subgrouping, and vice versa. Thus statements such as 'Language A preserves the PAN distinction between **x* and **y*' cannot be accepted if the PAN reconstructions themselves are based on invalid subgroupings, and a statement that 'morpheme **abc* must be reconstructed for PAN' is invalid if the evidence for reconstructing **abc* is confined to what turns out to be a lower-order subgroup or dialect linkage of PAN.

This problem shows up in the case of Malayo-Polynesian, where reconstructed PAN forms are used to determine innovations and decide whether the MP languages are a first-order subgroup, even though these same forms had originally been reconstructed already assuming that it was a first-order subgroup. If PMP was not a first-order subgroup but rather a member of the EFL, then some forms previously reconstructed at the PAN level based only on MP and EFL evidence might actually go back only as far as Proto EFL. This then undermines claims about what was present in PAN, what was retained, and what was innovated. The following citations illustrate arguments which must be re-evaluated in this light.

Many lexical items which are otherwise widely distributed in An are missing from particular languages. For example, the Atayalic languages show no trace of **maCa* 'eye', **laNiC* 'sky', **Sikan* 'fish', **Caqi* 'excrement', **ina* 'mother', **ama* 'father', **enem* 'six', **walu* 'eight' or hundreds of other words which belong to cognate sets that are represented both in Formosan and in extra-Formosan languages. Are we, therefore, to conclude that the Atayalic languages split off from all others before these lexical items were innovated? (Blust 1997:27–28)

To answer this rhetorical question, we need to go back and re-examine the basis for each of these reconstructions. If one or more of them is reconstructed on the basis of MP and EFL languages only, then it is indeed quite possible that 'the Atayalic languages split off from all others before these lexical items were innovated' in EFL.

One other inference about East Formosan can be justified: members of this group have been in continuous contact with the sea since the break-up of PAN. That is, we can be certain that they never underwent a retreat into the mountainous interior followed by a return to the coast. This inference is supported by the appearance of terms for marine fauna and other terms related to the sea that have cognates over a wide geographical area outside Taiwan, but which are absent from other Formosan languages. These terms include Basay /nutse/ 'squid, cuttlefish' (PAN *(*nN*)*usi*), Kavalan /bubur/ 'jellyfish'

(PAN **bubuR*), /penu/ 'sea turtle' (PAN **peñu*), /umaŋ/ 'kind of hairy hermit crab' (Tsuchida 1994) (PAN **qumaŋ*), and /rayar/ 'sail' (PAN **layaR*), Amis /ʔiso/ 'whale' (PAN **qiSu* 'shark'), and Siraya /pagig/ 'stingray' (PAN **paRiS*). (Blust 1997:13-14)

If these items turn out to have been reconstructed to the PAN level on the basis of eastern Formosan and MP evidence, then they may not have existed at all in PAN, and thus tell us nothing about how the eastern languages got where they are now after the breakup of PAN.

In the area of morphology, Blust states in the abstract for his 1995 paper on the semantics of the *-*an* locative:

The Proto-Austronesian (PAN) affixes **Si-*, **-um-*, **-in-*, **-an* and **-en* played a central role in the construction of utterances. In the more common view, as exemplified by Wolff (1973) all of these affixes except **-in-* functioned as voice markers (VM) in the verb, while **-in-* signaled tense or aspect, often in conjunction with a VM. Starosta, Pawley and Reid (1982), on the other hand, have expressed the view that these affixes had exclusively nominalising functions in PAN, and developed verbal functions at a later period in the history of the An languages. This paper attempts to show that both verbal and nominalising functions must be attributed to the VMs at all stages in their reconstructible history. In particular it argues that the syntactic functions and lexical semantics of **-an* only partially overlapped in PAN and many of its descendants, making it difficult to characterize this VM semantically. More generally the problem of reconciling the syntactic functions and lexical semantics of PAN **-an* raises questions about the discreteness of the inflectional/derivational distinction in morphology. (Blust 1995b)

'The more common view' referred to is of course the first-order subgroup view. If it is incorrect, then a number of these forms and their multiple functions probably did not exist at the PAN level. The necessity of reconstructing both verbal and nominal functions for these morphemes, the fuzzy lexical semantics that comes with them, and the possibly drastic consequences for morphological theory, are unavoidable only to the extent that the first-order subgroup hypothesis is valid, otherwise the problem may not exist. In my 1995 version of the LOS hypothesis, these problems do not arise, since only two of the forms cited by Blust, **-um-* and **-in-*, can be reconstructed at the PAN level at all, and their lexical properties are fairly straightforward.

Analogous problems pervade Malcolm Ross's reconstruction of PAN verbal morphology (Ross 1995a). If the first-order subgroup were correct, there would have been a lot of morphology that got lost on the way to some of the modern Formosan languages (see Ross 1992:12), especially in Rukai:

(ii) Le Rukai présente des caractéristiques syntaxiques que l'on ne trouve nulle part ailleurs. Aucun de ces dialectes n'a préservé le système flexionnel qui caractérise aussi bien les langues aborigènes de Taiwan que celles des Philippines. (Zeitoun 1995:101)¹¹

but if not, most of the Philippine-type verb morphology in Formosan languages turns out to be the result of post-PAN innovations (Starosta 1995).

If the first-order subgroup is wrong, then it will also affect work on prehistory which has assumed its correctness. For example,

¹¹ 'Rukai exhibits syntactic characteristic that one does not find anywhere else. None of these dialects preserved the inflectional system that characterises the aboriginal languages of Taiwan as well as those of the Philippines.' (Author's translation).

To date there is no trace of rice in the earliest (Ta-p'en-k'eng) Neolithic culture identified in Taiwan around 6,000 B.P., although rice appears at around 4,500 B.P. Nonetheless, linguistic evidence is unambiguous in supporting the inference that PAN speakers had rice. Moreover, chronologically earlier cultures in southern China which are arguably the most likely antecedents of the Neolithic populations on Taiwan, also had rice. So, to date at least, the rice which PAN speakers must have cultivated during the initial settlement of Taiwan has, indeed, been lost from the archaeological record. (Blust 1997:27)

If the unambiguous linguistic evidence referred to were based crucially on the assumption that MP is a first-order subgroup of PAN, then it would be only as valid as the increasingly dubious first-order subgroup hypothesis. In this particular case, fortunately, John Wolff (1994) has presented data that confirms the reconstruction of at least the word **pagey* 'rice plant' at the PAN level on anybody's subgrouping, without the need to refer crucially to MP evidence.

7 Conclusion

So, what does the future hold for Proto Malayo-Polynesian, and for the analyses that are predicated on its existence and first-order status? I am afraid the prospects do not look very good for the first-order subgroup hypothesis at least. Robert Blust's 'Subgrouping, circularity and extinction: some issues in Austronesian comparative linguistics' (Blust 1997) may be an indication of the shape of things to come. Although the topic of this paper is 'Austronesian comparative linguistics', and although its scope ranges temporally and geographically from supposed Austronesian speech communities on the China mainland to Austronesian migrations from Taiwan to the Philippines and out into eastern Indonesia, there is almost nothing substantive said about Malayo-Polynesian. We do not find the family tree diagram which is normally included in such papers and which would have immediately revealed the author's current position on the status of MP. The table of phonological changes covers only Formosan languages, though adding an MP column would have been easy enough, and would have made the table much more revealing. Table 3, 'A classification of the Formosan languages based on shared innovations in phonology', would also have been much more useful if it had included an entry for MP. I found only one statement that I could interpret as a restatement of the author's old first-order subgroup position:

CONCLUSION: At least nine primary subgroups of the AN language family appear to be represented among the extant and extinct languages of Taiwan. These groups are residual in the sense that they show no positive evidence of exclusively shared innovations by which they could be joined with other languages under a subordinate node within the AN family tree. In this respect they differ from *all* other AN languages, *most* of which exhibit innovations attributable to PMP... (Blust 1997:18; italics mine)

The 'all other An languages' presumably refers to the MP subgroup, but if so, it is difficult to interpret the quantifiers 'all' and 'most'. If MP is a subgroup, there must be one or more shared innovations that define it ('all'). But if some of them do not exhibit the characteristic MP innovations ('most'), what is the basis for assigning these languages to the MP group in the first place? The overall effect one gets from the paper is that of a language family going out of favour at court. One is reminded of successive editions of Soviet history books in which discredited revolutionary comrades have mysteriously disappeared from the old photographs.

To end, let me remind the reader that I have considered two questions in this paper: (1) Is MP a subgroup? and (2) Is it a first-order subgroup? The answer to the second is almost surely negative, but in considering the first, I have addressed only the 5 points originally presented by Blust in support of an MP subgroup and rejected only 4 of the 5. It is quite possible that other shared innovations will be presented which reconfirm the existence of this subgroup. For example, Laurent Sagart (pers. comm.) notes the use of reflexes of **dilaq* to mean 'lick' in Formosan languages but 'tongue' outside. It might be possible to combine this and other lexical evidence with Blust's original criterion #3: Loss of **S*, and perhaps to revise criterion #1: The 'Second Austronesian Politeness Shift' so that it referred unambiguously to monosyllabic genitive second person singular reflexes of **mu* and dealt with the exceptions hinted at by Tryon. This might restore some credibility to the claim that the MP languages constitute a lower-order subgroup. So, MP could rise again someday, but it will almost certainly never again ride as high as it once did.

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