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## **Abstract**

### **The Secularisation of Identity in a Religious World: A Case Study of the Atayal Bienjing Village**

I-Chun, Wang

This study analysed the religious transition of the Atayal people of Bienjing village in Miaoli, Taiwan, and how it influenced the Atayals' conceptualisation of both the ethnic and cultural identities. The study focused on the Atayal people's mass conversion to Christianity in the early 1950s, which not only changed their worldview and cultural values but also altered their sense of belonging, as well as the idea of being an Atayal person. In investigating the process and influences of this conversion, I analysed the ritual performances, cultural values and cultural memories of the Atayal people to determine their understanding of the tenets of Christianity. I also examined the power structure, education and daily practices in the village to investigate how the social reproduction of religious beliefs influenced the production of their identity. As a result, rather than looking at the religious affiliations of individuals, their engagement in religious practices or the influence of religion on public matters, I proposed a new mode of 'secularisation' that looks at the experience of the sacred. By comparing the experiences of the sacred before and after the conversion, I have illustrated how, instead of being a religious act, the Atayal people's turn to Christianity was a process of secularisation that divided the Atayal world into the 'sacred' and the 'secular,' as distinct from its previous status as a whole sacred entity, thus differentiating the domains of 'religion' from 'culture'. Therefore, the modern Atayal identities—individual, social and ethnical—are also being secularised and multiplied. Such a change of the mode of identity from a religious perspective, I also argue, not only deserves further exploration for future studies on aboriginal groups' identities and religious conversions in Taiwan but also serves as another aspect in the discussion of the idea of secularisation in general.

# **The Secularisation of Identity in a Religious World: A Case Study of the Atayal Bienjing Village**

I-Chun, Wang

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

Department of Anthropology

Durham University

Dr. Yulia Egorova, Supervisor

Dr. Peter J. Collins, Supervisor

2014

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**The Secularisation of Identity in a Religious World:  
A Case Study of the Atayal Bienjing Village**

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I, the author, declare that none of the material in this Thesis has been submitted previously by me or any other candidate for the degree in this or any other university.

# Acknowledgements

Four years ago, armed with a background in cultural studies, I thought I was prepared for undertaking a PhD in anthropology—but I wasn't. The endless reading, pilot studies, and my very first fieldtrip were much tougher than I had imagined, and none of this could have been accomplished without the great assistance that I received.

Much gratitude goes to my supervisors, Yulia Egorova and Peter J. Collins, who offered solid support and advice every step of the way; they raised the whip when I needed a push and calmed me down when I was suffering from the notorious 'PhD panic'.

Thanks to all the participants from Bienjing and Hekou villages. It was their willing and selfless participation that made this study possible. Special thanks goes to my Atayal friend, Han-Pu Yu, who provided many ideas, and his connections, which broadened my study; the Bienjing Police Station staff, who made sure I was safe and properly fed wherever I went; and ZMC and his family, who offered me a home-like shelter during my fieldwork.

Last but not least, I wish to thank my parents, for their tremendous understanding and support of my non-profitable career as a PhD student; my FJU teammates in Taiwan, for letting me know I'm missed back home; and Lin Yu-Peng, for his patience during every academic discussion that we had. Also big thanks to my roomie, Eva Chen, who was there for me the whole time. I know I must have missed some names, but I'll never forget how generous you all have been in making this thesis possible.

## Foreword

Religion has long been taken as a conspicuous trigger of conflicts. The major conflicts in recent decades between nations, cultures and even people who share the same neighbourhood have mostly arisen not just because of politics, economic factors or a gap in power, but also because of differences of religion (Gillespie, 2008; P. Jenkins, 2002). Certainly, it would be problematic to claim that these conflicts were kindled solely by religious passion, but whether these conflicts contained a desire for improved social, political or economic circumstances, religion was the just banner under which the conflicts were fought. Nevertheless, together with the rise of globalisation, the trend of religious conversion has been one of the notable phenomena of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Scholars may once have predicted that the development of modernity would signal the end of religion, but the trend of religious conversion has challenged that notion (Hanson, 1997; Stark, 2000; Tschannen, 1991). These two seemingly contrary phenomena become arguable in the discussion of the fate of religion in the modern world, for on the one hand modern minds have become independent from the reliance on churches in most matters (Berger & Kellner, 1974); whilst on the other, new religious movements have also developed and rapidly prospered, attracting many to convert from their original beliefs, or create new ones (Patridge, 2004).

Religious transitions in modernity have attracted dedicated studies not just because they mark the subversion of an individual's worldview, but because they signify the mutation of relationships between the individual and their cultural surroundings (Buckser & Glazier, 2003). As Walter Benjamin once stated: 'memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation' (1968:97). The changes of religious memory would alter the chain of religious practices and traditions. In Herskovits' words, 'one synonym for culture is tradition' (1948:17), and cultural memory is closely integrated with religious phenomena (Assmann, 2006). Such changes in cultural traditions via the transition of religion are particularly apparent whilst religious conversion is taking place. Whether it happens individually or collectively, religious conversion always involves a series of social processes and incorporation that influence the cultural construction of

reality (Buckser & Glazier, 2003). That is why the rapid growth of the Christian population in the Global South caught the attention of academics, as the North is facing the greatest apostolic movement away from Christianity since the coming of modernity (P. Jenkins, 2002, 2006), and religion – or the Christian religion, at least – is heading towards two entirely different destinies in modern times.<sup>1</sup>

Intrigued by this modern global religious shift, the early theoretical and empirical studies of conversion were mostly based on the context of Christianity, and it is only in recent years that the focus of religious conversion studies has gradually spread to other religions such as Judaism, Hinduism and Spiritualism (Buckser & Glazier, 2003). Regardless of which religious context is taken, these paradigms of conversion have all indicated the intertwining of the structures of religion, politics and identity that influences modern lives far more than people are aware of (Buckser & Glazier, 2003), and the conflicts that have arisen as a result of these religious transitions have even more perplexing aspects entangled with the social and individual perception of conversion. Therefore, it is the aim of this study to examine how understandings of religion – that is, ways of conceptualising ‘religion’ – affect the perception of cultural surroundings, as well as to provide a model of the construction of identity – ethnically, individually and culturally – in relation to religious conversions.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Global South’ is used in tandem with the term ‘global North’, which usually refers to the wealthy, secularised and developed countries that are mostly located in the Northern Hemisphere; it is not merely a reference for geographical status, but also an economical and cultural indication of those regions which, rivalling the Churches of the East and West, Walbert Buhlmann (1976) calls the ‘Third Church’.

# **Chapter 1.**

## **Introduction**

## 1.1 Research questions

Anthropologists have categorised Taiwanese indigenous communities as peoples belonging to the Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) families (Bird, Geoffrey and Taylor, David, 2004; Hill, Pedro, 2007), which are traditionally characterised by animism and customs such as bonfires, face tattooing, leather coat manufacture and round dance (S. Wang, 2001). However, these traditional cultures have faced the crisis of disappearing since the Second World War, with conversion to Christianity being popular among indigenous groups (S. Huang, 1986; Y. Huang, 1983). The Christianisation of indigenous groups has naturally aroused the attention of anthropologists in Taiwan, but only a few of them have analysed religious transition with respect to the dialectic relationship between culture and faith, rather than in relation to the social and economic reconstruction in modern society (Chang, 2001; S. Huang, 1986). In 1982, research statistics showed that 185,635 indigenous people had converted to Christianity, which was 62% of the indigenous population of the time (306,138), whilst some other studies pointed out that the actual number might be even higher (Y. Chang, 2001). This Christianisation of indigenous groups has been called the ‘miracle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’ (Y. Chang, 2001).

If it is something of a conjecture to say that religious conversion to Christianity is the reason for the disappearance of tradition, at least we can reckon that at some point it was the rapid and fundamental change in the construction of modern societies that prompted the shift of social structures. Some academics see the religious transition of Taiwanese indigenous groups as the result of the interaction of internal forces, such as the local social context and family structures (Chang, 2001; S. Huang, 1980), whilst others conclude that it is due to external forces like the vigorous, denominational missionary approaches and doctrines, which are more ‘philosophical’ than indigenous religion, with more organised missionary institutions (Y. Chang, 2001; Shi, 1976). In addition to investigating the process of religious transition, Huang Ying-Kuei’s (1983) synthetic research on the changes in the cultural traditions and values among indigenous groups also points out the importance of looking into the historical context and more specifically the relationship between the religious transition and the shift in social structure, as the factors and motives would vary during the process of religious transition.

Through the efforts of anthropologists, it is now possible to argue that the existing concepts used by sociology and anthropology, such as 'religion', 'faith' or 'religious conversion', might not explain the aspects of religious transition that have taken place in indigenous societies, which are unlikely to divide the religious aspects from the moral orders, social life and codes of conduct. Converting to Christianity thus might also be said as leading to the metamorphosis of the life itself of indigenous groups. Furthermore, anthropological studies also developed and practised the approach of taking both the outer social and economic conditions and subjective understandings in order to analyse religious transition; that is, only when the social changes that are caused by certain conditions are considered subjectively as religious problems by the locals can they be recognised as the critical factor affecting their religious life (Chang, 2001; Y. Huang, 1991).<sup>2</sup>

Though these studies of religious transition highlighted the possible processes of the religious changes taking place among Taiwanese indigenous groups, they did not explain how the cultural traditions change with the groups' religious beliefs. Nor did they indicate the ways in which these changes in cultural traditions affected the different groups' ideas of the self, or how the 'external forces' function with the groups' religious structures. Further, they could not give a satisfactory answer as to why it is Christianity that pervades among the indigenous groups in modern Taiwan, and not Buddhism or Taoism, which the indigenous people would have been exposed to through their contact with the Han Chinese. Meanwhile, these studies of the cultural and social changes of indigenous societies due to religious conversion seem to suggest an equal religiosity between the pre-conversion and the post-conversion religious beliefs that operated on the agents, when the modern religious life of Taiwanese indigenous communities is in fact highly disparate in terms of religious attitudes, cognition, experience and action. Bearing these aspects in mind, in this study I will examine how and why the Atayal indigenous people in Bienjing village in Taiwan converted to Christianity, what this religious 'conversion' means to them, and how this 'conversion' changed their perception of the cultural surroundings and their

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in Huang Ying-Kwei's (1991) article *Dehanin and the Social Crisis: A Further Discussion on the Religious Conversion of the Bu-Nun People in Donpu*, he points out that the Japanese policy of rice farming in their late regime in Taiwan, although subverting the Bu-Nun people's economic structure and therefore affecting their traditional agriculture rituals, did not become the impact factor of their religious conversion to Christianity until years after, when there was an outbreak of malaria and the people started to believe it was the change in rituals that had caused the god (Dehanin) to bring death upon the people.

identities.<sup>3</sup> I will argue that the seemingly ‘religious’ act of converting to Christianity led to the ‘secularisation’ of the Atayal society and identity.

Before presenting my data, however, I will first identify and discuss a range of texts that have a direct bearing on my research. In the following sections I shall clarify and critically assess the concepts I’m using in this study to give a more comprehensive background to the research questions.

## **1.2 To frame the question / Literature review**

### 1.2.1 Secularisation and modernity

Max Weber (1946: 155) stated that the modern world was characterised ‘by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the “disenchantment of the world”’. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations’ (as quoted in Glasner, 1977: 44). This phenomenon of ‘rationalisation and intellectualisation’ during modernity is what has been widely recognised as ‘secularisation’ by sociologists and anthropologists. Yet, because of its different usages in different contexts and in relation to different experiences, ‘secularisation’ has become a controversial and discrepant term when it comes to the discussion of religion in the modern world. In order to clarify the idea of ‘secularisation’ used in this study, it is necessary to define, or at least to disambiguate, the connotations of ‘secularisation’ that appear throughout this study, as well as to review and examine some of the most influential theories in order to demonstrate my idea of ‘secularisation’.

The classic notion of secularisation was employed by renowned sociologists such as Weber (1946) and Durkheim (1961). Anthropological studies on the status of religion in modern society also understood secularisation as describing the decline of religion along with the progression of modernity (Finke, 1992; Hadden, 1987; Stark, 2000), and the term was used to address the retreat of religious power in modern society in regard to the reliance on the ethics, institution and normative guidance of

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<sup>3</sup> To remain the anonymity of the village, I’ve changed its name to ‘Bienjing’.



religion (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000). For example, A. F. C. Wallace (1966) and Bryan Wilson (1966, 1976) claimed that the development of science would eventually end the influences of religion and the belief in supernatural power. Wilson (1976, 1998) even argued that modern religious sectarian movements were essentially 'secularised', as they were usually formed by rational, scientific choices. These secularisation 'prophets', however, were soon challenged by the growth of religious activities in different parts of the world, which led to the review, redefinition and questioning of the grand narrative of secularisation in this sense (Berger, 1997; Dobbelaere, 1987; Hanson, 1997; Tschannen, 1991). Some academics have even seen the notion of secularisation as a mistake and argue that the world is in a period of religious revival rather than decline (Berger, 1997; Martin, 1965; Stark, 2000).

Of those new definitions and understandings of 'secularisation', José Casanova (1994) pointed out that they usually contain three discourses: secularisation as religious decline, secularisation as differentiation, and secularisation as privatisation (1994:7). Some academics have also simplified secularisation theory, devising three propositions: vanishing – the undermining of religious power towards society and individuals in modernity; differentiating – the disunion of secular matters from religious norms and institutions; and weakening – religions are marginalised and pushed into the personal, private sphere (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000:429). The difficulties of applying complex phenomena to a specific term and its aforementioned muddled meanings made Shiner (1967) suggest that 'we drop the word entirely' (as quoted in Swatos Jr. & Christiano, 1999). However, the value of the changing definitions and connotations of secularisation is that the term has been employed in a variety of ways to discuss the fate of religions in modern times. Therefore, the debate regarding secularisation should focus on how to grasp the dynamic relationship between modernity and religious transition, rather than dwell on its former thesis of the decline of religion.

Other than following the Weberian view of seeing rationality as the modern basis of religious belief and institutional formality, some scholars chose to understand the construction of modern religiosity from the macro-view of societal transition by keeping the idea of 'secularisation' but with a new, more nuanced definition. Dobbelaere (1981, 2002) viewed secularisation as a process with three dimensions: laicisation, religious change and religious involvement. This view interpreted secularisation as a complex set of religious transition phenomena: firstly, an evolution

process with the disengagement of social institutions from religion, which itself becomes a subsystem; secondly, the turn of the internal focus of religion from divinity to earthly matters; and, finally, the reduction of participation among individuals. Casanova (1994) later developed this multi-dimensional idea of secularisation by pointing out that it is constructed by these related yet independent dimensions/movements, although the direction and intensity of changes are not always consistent. Here, secularisation became a phenomenon with internal tension that is compatible with both the activation of individual religiosity and the decline of religious influence, as an individual could have a strong religious belief without building his/her religious identity and life on or around a certain institution or group ritual practice (Davie, 1994).

The social transformation of religiosity indicates the obligation felt by individuals living during the time of high modernity to make sense of their lives in new ways, without the guidance of institutional religion. This struggle of modern humans is what Berger (1974) called the 'homeless mind' in the absence of the 'sacred canopy', and what Giddens (1991) referred to as the 'existential anxiety' of identity caused by the increasing social reflexivity in 'high modernity'. It is, nevertheless, the reason Hervieu-Léger (2000:93) urges us to view modernity as something that is intrinsically paradoxical: it generates what 'is of essence contrary to it, namely heteronomy, submission to an order endured, received from outside and not willed'. On the one hand, in modernity the 'affirmation of the autonomy of the individual which undermines the authority of tradition paradoxically rekindles' (Hervieu-Léger & Lee, 2000:93); whilst, on the other, this affirmation of the autonomy of the individual also produces the need for beliefs in new socialised forms (Hervieu-Léger & Lee, 2000). Secularisation here is thus a paradoxical phenomenon leading simultaneously to both the prospering and the degeneration of religious activity, and characterised by its dialectic relationship with modernity, in the sense of both constructing and being reconstructed by modernity.

A criticism of the multi-dimensional, de-institutional idea of secularisation is its restriction to the Christian European environment. The insufficiency of this new theory of secularisation, just as in its classic notion, is the historically specific context of Europe's domination by the Christian church, and the fact that European society has always been characterised by individualism. The lack of academic attention to, and interest in, religious experiences outside Europe made some scholars suggest

framing 'secularisation' in specific societies under a specific historical context – namely, Western Europe after the Enlightenment – so that the variety of societal and religious transition could be viewed more flexibly on a global scale. A religious experience outside Europe that contradicted secularisation theories, for example, would be the thriving of Christianity in modern countries such as America, the Philippines, South Africa and Korea (Davie, 2002). In order to give a more comprehensive spectrum of secularisation theories, Davie (2002) applied Eisenstadt's (2000) notion of 'multiple modernities', wherein 'modernity' adopts different modes according to the varied contexts of politics, economy and culture in different societies. European modernity, while being the origin and the reference of different modernities when constructed among other non-European societies, is only one of the possibilities of practising modernity itself. The religious forms and transitions under this point of view can of course have multiple evolutions and results. Hervieu-Léger (2003) also suggested using the concept of 'multiple modernities' as the better solution to the problem of the singular linear and universalist views of 'classical' secularisation theories. She argued that, generally speaking, even though the canonical power of religious institutions is decreasing in modern societies, with regard to the different relationships between politics and religion in different cultures the influences of the religious symbolic structure can vary. This approach to secularisation no longer focuses on the influences of rationalisation or autonomy in the practice and belief of religion, but considers instead how religion invisibly constructs 'a' modernity both historically and culturally. In other words, it is not a certain universal principle of secularisation that determines the fate of modern religion; rather, its forms and ways are determined by the cultural summation of the religion (Hervieu-Léger, 2003).

The concept of multiple modernities offers another means of expressing and analysing the complex scenes of religion under different conditions of modernity that avoids the Eurocentric fault; however, those different modes of modernity which seem to be anti-Western and anti-modernity are, to a great extent, still modern (Eisenstadt, 1999a). This paradox of 'other' modes of modern civilisations is generated from the antinomy of modernity itself. From the very beginning, Eisenstadt argued, modernity (as developed in the West) has had its internal contradictory dimensions of totalising and multiplicity, control and autonomy, which have been referenced and reconstructed in its global expansion by different localities (Eisenstadt, 1999b). Nevertheless, which precise aspects of European modernity are being referred

to when European modernity is cited as a reference for these different modern civilisations? Even though some might have their own answers, such as reflexive institutionalisation (Eisenstadt, 2000), contextual histories (Hervieu-Léger & Lee, 2000) or specific forms of subjectification (Brown, 2001), it still leads the question back to where secularisation starts: to what extent can a certain religious transition be called ‘modern’ (Zizhe, 2008)?

Indeed, the idea of ‘multiple modernities’ (Davie, 2002; Eisenstadt, 2000; Hervieu-Léger, 2003) helped to free the dilemma of the theories of secularisation from their Eurocentric views and the varied results of religious transition in different modern societies; yet it does not satisfactorily solve the question of understanding the relationship between modernity and religion. Whereas the concept of multi-dimensional secularisation has its narrative flaw in a certain context (Christian Europe), the approach towards society, organisation and the individual is still influential for the studies of religious transition in all modern civilisations (Beyer, 1999).

Interestingly, Berger (2012: 313) later adopts a rather different approach where he argues that the advocates of secularisation have ‘confused secularization with pluralization, secularity with plurality’. Modernity, he argues, does not necessarily produce a decline of religion, nor necessarily produce a deepening process of pluralisation. This discrepant development of religion in the modern world is what Alfred Schütz called the ‘Relevance Structure’ (Berger, 2012; Chojnacki, 2012) – that in modernity, people can have both ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ characteristics, rather than being simply one or the other. Berger further refers this back to Casanova, who states that ‘all institutions have correlates in consciousness’ – in other words, when religious organisations are extracted from secular ones (for example, the separation between the state and the church, and science from theology, which have been driven by the rationalisation of modernity), the same differentiation would consciously happen individually and societally. This does not mean that religion has been omitted; only that it is separated from secular matters. A good example of the shift between these two identities in modern lives would be whether a person visits a doctor as well as seeking religious help when they are ill. Berger (2012) calls this ‘natural’ separation of the secular and religious in modern societies the ‘default discourse’ of modernity, which, again, leads the development of modern religion towards not one certain destiny, but plurality – that is, if there is any trait to be named as the universal

necessary religious production of modernity, it is plurality.

Berger's notion of the 'default discourse' of modernity avoided the circular nature of the aforementioned religious development argument, and also solved the uncertainty left by the concept of multiple modernities. However, such an idea still seems to be insufficient to explain, or analyse, the modes of religious transition – if we are not to view them as 'secularisation' – in those non-European contexts. Simply stating that the modern religious movement is pluralistic cannot help us to understand, for example, the massive conversion from the native religious beliefs to Christianity in Africa or Asia, or to predict how such changing religious lives will be manifested in modernity.

In this thick ethnography of the Taiwanese indigenous Atayal community, therefore, I shall challenge, or at least give an alternative perspective on, the concept of secularisation. We will see how the religious transitions of the Atayal people occurred in terms of the experience of the 'sacredness' that framed their model of 'secularisation', whilst existing religious institutions continued to play an important role in the people's public and private lives. Henceforth, instead of using it to talk about the relations between religious institutions, practices and individuals, I use the term 'secularisation' in this study to refer to the decline of sacredness and its separation from secular life with particular regard to the Atayal people's conversion to Christianity.

### 1.2.2 On religious conversion

Studies of religious transition around the world have indicated the various, and sometimes contradictory, trends of religious development in different cultures and regions. However, one thing we can know for sure is that religious transitions or religious movements have their own characteristics that are manifested in social and cultural contexts (Jean Comaroff, 1985; van Binsbergen, 1981). For example, the religious conversion to Christianity in South Africa was generally in the interest of 'healing and sustaining good health' (Pauw, 1980:328); in South Korea, Christianity was used to better adapt (materially) to the modernisation process after the war without compromising traditional Korean cultural values and ethics (Kim, 2000); and Latin America's turn to Protestantism from Catholicism stemmed from the needs of

economic improvement, spiritual satisfaction and social connections (Stark & Smith, 2010). These cases of converting to Christianity matter to the studies of religious conversion because, to a certain extent, it was the global expansion of Christianity in the twentieth century in a supposedly secularised modern world that drew the attention of many anthropologists and sociologists to the subject, and thereby framed the early discussions of conversion in general within the Christian (semiotic) context (Robert W. Hefner, 1993a; Rambo, 1993; YÜ, 2014).

The evangelical roots of the Christian paradigm of religious conversion can be traced back to St. Paul, who dramatically ‘converted’ to Christianity from Judaism on his way to Damascus (in Acts 9:1-31, English Standard Version). It can later be seen in John Wesley’s conversion to becoming a ‘real’ Christian by having a holy inner experience in 1738 (Wesley, 2005). The psychologist James Williams (2012: 155) described such a state of mind of conversion as a ‘great oscillation in the emotional interest’ that results in a ‘wavering and divided self’. Nock (1933:7) viewed Christian (and Jewish) conversion as ‘the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that the old was wrong and the new is right’, which can be marked by a transformative event. Another example of this sudden turn of religious belief is the Roman emperor Constantine the first, who allegedly converted to Christianity by seeing the sign of God before he won the Battle of Milvian Bridge (Gerberding & Cruz, 2004), prior to which he had seen a cross of light in the sky with the words ‘in this sign you shall conquer’. These examples thus served as the reference for the conceptualisation of conversion to Christianity in early literature.

However, as many studies showed later, religious conversion is ‘very rarely an overnight, all-in-an-instant wholesale transformation that is now and forever’ (Rambo, 1993:1); rather, it is a ‘process’ that does not always involve a complete ‘change of religion’ or repudiation of the past. For example, as Jordan Paper (1999) stated, religious belief in many East Asia countries has an ‘ethnic’ character that defines the culture and the society, so that Catholicism in China is ‘expanded’ to include ancestral tablets in the household, in order to facilitate continued engagement with the traditional world view. Even within the same ‘religion’, conversion also happens in an individual’s transition between different denominations to ‘add on’ (which was how A. D. Nock (1933) described pagans’ conversion to Christianity) one’s idea of the

(religious) world without abandoning previous beliefs (Rambo, 1993). In such cases, conversion can be said to be, in Peter Stromberg's (1990:43) words, a 'constantly recreated' religious view of the world. These different accounts of religious transition therefore highlight another fundamental factor in defining the essence of religious conversion, assuming that religious conversion is to change, conceptually or institutionally, from one religion to another (Boullion, 1982; Needham, 1972) – that is, what is religion?

I don't intend to expand the focus of this study to dwell on the definition of religion, though I shall clarify the Atayal participants' ideas about religious conversion and 'religion' in later chapters. Nonetheless, just as Jack Goody's (1986) study of the Ashanti people in West Africa showed that they did not have an independent idea of 'religion' until they were able to compare their beliefs with Christianity and Islam, oral societies' 'religion' is usually inseparable from the social activities (Goody & Watt, 1968; Goody, 1961, 1977, 1986, 1987). Such characteristics of their idea of religion are distinct from the Christian West's reference to religious belief or churches as being opposite to the secular, social aspects (McGuire, 1987). These essential differences on the experience of religion are why anthropologists such as John and Jean Comaroff (1991) questioned whether the classic Christian paradigm of 'conversion' could faithfully encompass the meaning of religious transitions in non-Western societies. Meanwhile, anthropological studies also began emphasising the factors and contexts that resulted in transitions in religious affiliation. From Robin Horton's (1971) intellectualist approach to Ifeka-Moller's (1974) take on social and cultural structures, studies of religious conversion not only further explored the models of religious conversion, but also revealed the complexity of religious conversion, which could involve changes at many levels, such as in political policies (Kipp, 1993), ethnic boundaries (Shepherd, 1996) or socio-economic structures (Robbins, 2004) as well as in the personal and spiritual spheres.

These different approaches and results of religious conversion studies also suggest the importance of understanding the changes in people's view of the world (Horton & Peel, 1976; Horton, 1971, 1975) as well as in the social and cultural structures (Robbins, 2004). When discussing the genesis of a new religion, in particular, a historical framework should be established, and the regional characteristics carefully considered (J. M. Atkinson, 1983; Geertz, 1973b; van

Binsbergen, 1981) in order to fully comprehend the subject's social, cultural and symbolic background, how they interacted with outer events, and how they were 'reproduced' and 'transformed' by the use of the converted religious belief (Chen, 1999; Jean Comaroff, 1985; John Comaroff, 1982; van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers, 1985). Religious conversion, therefore, is treated by many later researchers as a 'long conversation' between different factors and agents (Buckser & Glazier, 2003; Jean Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). In other words, religious conversion has to be taken as 'multi-causal' (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987:25) and a 'dialectic process of world building' (Berger, 1967; Robert W. Hefner, 1993a) that is appropriated by the converters (James & Johnson, 1988).

The issue of cultural continuity/discontinuity in religious conversion has also been raised during the seeking of cultural reproduction and transformation. Influenced mostly by the conversion to Christianity, many anthropological studies before Joel Robbins (2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2007) tended to focus on the continuity of the cultural elements, such as symbols, logics, structures and power dynamics, during religious transition, even when the characteristics of religious syncretism and bricolage had been noticed.<sup>4</sup> It was exactly this anthropological tradition of treating discontinuity in religious conversions as something that is too 'self-evident' to be further discussed (Chua, 2012) that led Robbins (2007) to criticise many past studies, including that undertaken by Jean and John Comaroff (1991), for 'sidelining' the implications of Christian culture to the converters (Gooren, 2014), when Christianity itself should be seen as a 'system of meaning with a logic of its own' (Robbins, 2007:7). Robbins, along with other anthropologists who share similar ideas, such as Fenella Cannell (2006), Matthew Engelke (2004, 2010), Olivia Harris (2006) and Brigit Meyer (1998, 1999), thus urge cultural anthropologists to treat religious conversion as an action of 'discontinuity' and 'rupture' between 'the past, the present, and the future' (Robbins, 2007: 11). Although Robbins' idea of the anthropology of Christianity was also criticised for being 'oblivious to the Protestant bias' (Hann, 2012) which failed to engage with other Christians (Rogers, 2009) and ignored the multi-faceted character of Christianity that could result in continuities as well as

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see: Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion* (1933); Arthur F. Glasser, *Conversion in Judaism* (1992); Robert W. Hefner, *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (1993); Buckser and Glazier, *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (2003); Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative* (Hindmarsh, 2007); and Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (1991).



discontinuities in different ways (Chua, 2012), his discourse of discontinuity is still remarkable in evaluating the impact of Christian conversions, and his attempt to align both anthropological analysis and native exegesis also provided an alternative tool to review the relations between culture and religious transition (Chua, 2012).

However, as well as taking the native exegesis into the analysis of religious conversion, Peter Gow's (2006) study of the Piro people of Peruvian Amazonia showed a rather different perspective on the debate on continuity/discontinuity in religious conversion. Gow noticed how little the Piro people talked about the conversion to evangelical Christianity in the late 1940s and 1950s while churches were described as the origin of their modern civil lives. The Piro people's 'forgetting' of their conversion, Gow explains, was due to 'their failure to use it as a very powerful conceptual tool for thinking about their past' (Gow, 2006: 237). Whether it was the practice of shamanism or the conversion to Christianity, the Piro people took these actions as a means to 'live well' under their cosmology, and so once that goal of 'living well' had been achieved, the conversion immediately 'lost its historical purchase and was forgotten' (Gow, 2006: 237). Religious conversion therefore became for them a 'historical action' rather than a 'historical event' (Gow, 2006). Meanwhile, in Yang's (2009) study of the Taiwanese Bunun people's conversion to Christianity, the people even claimed that the religious subject of their 'old' religion was 'just the same' as Christianity, and so they never experienced discontinuity. The various religious experiences of continuity/discontinuity are why Liana Chua (2012: 522) advocates treating religious conversion as a temporal and relational simultaneous 'positioning' of the people in a shared world, as this provides a bigger picture of not only the (dis)continuity of the past and the present, but also the changes of the 'whole network of social, political, and moral relations' (Chua, 2012: 522) during the religious transition, to disclose the various dimensions of the conversion.

Such an approach to religious conversion is especially useful when studying a group that was established by guidelines that are inseparable from their religious belief, such as the Atayal aborigines in this study. In light of that, in later chapters I shall demonstrate how the Atayal people in this study 'positioned' themselves between others before and after their conversion to Christianity, along with the changes in their perception of 'sacredness'. By doing so, I hope to give a more comprehensive understanding of how converting to Christianity brought religious,

cultural and political changes to the Atayals' lives while they claim to have been Christians all along – that is, how the discontinuity is disguised with continuity in the Atayal people's case.

### 1.2.3 The construction of ethnic identity

As 'identity' involves the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self (Leary & Tangney, 2003:3), transferring to being Christian from being non-Christian is certainly a big leap of identity. The study of ethnicity is almost inseparable from the study of identity, since what makes an ethnic group identify 'themselves' as different from 'others' (Conrad P. Kottak, 1997) greatly overlaps with what forms the group's ethnicity. They are, in fact, different aspects of the factors of ethnicity. In anthropology, the biggest debate regarding ethnicity is whether to treat it as a subjective recognition (emic) or an objective entity (etic), and whether it is an 'instrument' that can be mobilised along with the change of circumstances, or a transcendental, 'natural' status of human civilisations. With the former being the approaches to the formation of a group, and the latter being the cause of a group's identity, we have to note that sometimes those who are objectively considered the same group of people might show the instrumental features in terms of the discrepancy of identity, whilst subjectively different collectives could also have certain primordial links (Banks, 2005). This is why, by systematically reviewing the discourses of these theories, we could further analyse the transition of the recognition of the Atayal communities' ethnicity in this study.

Subjectivism assumes that the formation of an ethnic group comes from the subjective presumption of the people. Fredrik Barth's (1969, 1994, 2000) idea of the identity boundary, for example, considered 'ascription' as the key to the categories of ethnic groups, for 'culture' can only be recognised to describe certain traits of an ethnic group, and is not sufficient to link the 'one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences' (Barth, 1969:14). This is why Barth saw the ethnic group as the 'vessel', and argued that what's contained in the vessel (the cultural formation and contents) would change along with the contacts with different groups, as well as the transitions of the society and environment. An ethnic group, therefore, would continue its formation as long as the ethnic border was

maintained by the dichotomisation between the group members and outsiders (Barth, 1969).

Compared to Barth, Abner Cohen (1969) took a more radical position on the notion of ethnicity. Taking ethnicity as the product of modernity and capitalism, Cohen first criticised Fredrik Barth's objective presumption of the pre-existence of ethnic groups in his theory of the identity boundary. To him, ethnic groups as we know them today are in fact 'political groupings' of 'informal interest groups' formed out of the contacts and competitions with each other, as those traditionally isolated social unions such as tribes and villages have now all integrated into the structure of the nation-state (A. Cohen, 1969). Thus he argued that the production of, and the interactions between, ethnic groups should be taken from a materialistic aspect to analyse the political and economical relations not just within the group, but also with other groups (A. Cohen, 1969). Similar to Cohen's stance of viewing ethnicity in terms of political and economical structure, another radical subjectivist notion of ethnicity is the application of rational choice theory by studies such as those of Michael Banton (1983) and Michael Hechter (1986). By using Banton's (1983) study on Gypsies' identity, Hechter (1986) argued that human behaviours are the outcomes of the interactions between individual preferences and structural constraints, and that individuals only cooperate when personal benefits are attainable, whilst group members only engage with collective actions when 'they estimate that by doing so they will receive a net individual benefit' (Hechter, 1986:271). On this basis, the consciousness of ethnicity is thus the result of an individual's rational choice, which becomes the core of these subjectivist studies.

Objectivists, on the other hand, consider ethnicity as being formed by objective factors such as language (Fishman, 1972; Fought, 2006), kinship or the origin of culture (Malesevic, 2004). Of these objective factors, common ancestry has been argued by many anthropologists, including John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (1996), to be the most decisive. Hutchinson and Smith concluded in their edited book *Ethnicity* that common ancestry was the myth of origin that would give the members of an ethnic group a 'sense of fictive kinship' (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996:7) to create the possible (and maybe fictive) connections of not only the memories of the past, but also the biological relations. This kind of imagination-based, 'virtual' biological bond, however, was challenged by Pierre Van den Berghe (1987), who thought ethnicity should be established on more solid biological conditions. Despite his controversial

racist point of view, Van den Berghe's biological take on ethnicity also revealed the logical deficiency of the 'cultural factors' of ethnicity using an extreme case. He demonstrated the need for substantial biological evidence to support the 'cultural' factors with the example that the Japanese emperor could be deemed as 'embodying the spirit of the origin of the (Japanese) ancestor' (1987:16), whereas Queen Victoria could never claim to be the mother of India (Van den Berghe, 1987:62). By using that example, he argued that ethnic common ancestry is only valid when the conditions – cultural and biological – are satisfied. In other words, only when both cultural and biological factors share certain similarities, and marriages and kinships have been established in a group, can a common ancestry myth be recognised, and an ethnicity be formed, from these biological evidences (Van den Berghe, 1987). Van den Berghe's notion on ethnicity reflected how ethnic objectivists criticised subjectivism's inadequate psychological approach of self-ascription, social classification and strategic action without considering historical and social processes (Eriksen, 2002). However, in the meantime, his focus on biological evidence also exposed what Jack David Eller (2002) pointed out to be the danger of the objective cultural- and historical-oriented classification: that it needs a certain 'context' to make sense of.

The two opposite stances on ethnicity thus inevitably influenced the arguments regarding ethnic identity. One sees social identity as a natural ability (R. Jenkins, 1996), whilst the other treats it as shifting categories that would change along with different historical and social circumstances (Benedict Anderson, 1991) – the 'Mendelian Model' and the 'Lamarckian Model' (Joycelyn Linnekin & Poyer, 1990). With the former approach, Edward Shils (1957) and Geertz's (1963) primordialism has served as the early paradigm that sees the formation of ethnicity as coming out of the given, 'ineffable' 'primordial attachment', such as kin connection, particular religious community, or particular social practices. Geertz's primordialism was supported by different scholars in different aspects: Harold R. Issacs (1975) considered ethnicity to be biologically inherited, Greely and McCready (1975) saw it to be deeply influenced by cultural 'heritage', whilst Steven Grosby (1994) and Walker Connor (1993) respectively reaffirmed the primordialist assumption with psychological and historical approaches. Primordialism's view of the ethnic group as a transcendental status before individuals, and its emphasis on the intrinsic connections, however, was also criticised by instrumentalists for ignoring the factors

of social interactions and the economical and political backgrounds of the group (Banks, 2005).

In the same way that the subjectivists opposed the objectivist ‘primal assumption’ without taking social and historical contexts into account, instrumentalism emphasised the political and economical aspects in forming ethnic identity, taking ethnicity as the tool for people to win over social resources and exclude other competitors. Eller and Coughlan (1993:201) even called primordialism a ‘bankrupt concept’ in terms of its analysis and description of ethnicity. While the objectivist view is that there are observable cultural and identity differences between different ethnic groups, to instrumentalists such as De Vos (2006:11), these differences are in fact ‘subjectively symbolic or emblematic use’ of culture, ‘in order to differentiate themselves from others’. Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex (2010:3) also argued that differences in perceptions of ethnicity are ‘the difference between the ethnicity claimed by the people themselves and that is attributed to them by others’, so that ‘[in] either case the perception of ethnicity will rest not upon some scientific sociological truth but on subjective interpretation’. In addition to the above, instrumentalist criticisms of primordialism include its danger of stereotyping, and its lack of ‘rigor, explanatory power, and predictive value of structural analyses of behaviour’ (Stack, 1986:2). By bringing political, economical and historical aspects into ethnic theories, instrumentalism and subjectivism revealed the flexibility and fluidity of ethnic groups through changes in their circumstances, solved the difficulties in analysing the development of ethnicity in modern societies left by primordialists, and became the new paradigm of ethnic theories (Brass, 1991; Gurr & Harff, 2004; Wan & Vanderwerf, 2009).

Though no major scholar today would still apply classic primordialism, some still see primordial ties of ethnicity ‘as a product of culture, history, and/or foundational myths, symbols and memories’ that merge with both primordialism and instrumentalism (Wan & Vanderwerf, 2009). Anthony Smith (1996; 1992) further argued that rather than being ‘invented’ or ‘imagined’, ethnicity is ‘reconstructed’ by historic experiences and symbolic cultural activities that shape people’s sense of belonging to the group, unless such symbolic experiences of the past are changed. This form of ethnicity construction – what Smith (2009) now calls ethno-symbolism – reflected the differences of ethnicity construction in the West and in the Pacific observed in Linnekin and Poyer’s book *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific*

(1990). The Mendelian and Lamarkian models mentioned earlier are the two categories of ethnicity formation they observed with the Pacific peoples: the former, according to Linnekin and Poyer, is similar to the 'Western' idea of ethnicity, which is established on the person's biological inheritable characteristics, whereas the latter, as the common view of ethnicity of the Pacific peoples, emphasises the interactions between individuals and surroundings, resulting in 'consocial personhood' (Lieber, 1990:72). However, what we have to notice here is that even the so-called 'inherited' characteristics are part of the cultural identity developed by certain historical contexts. Linnekin and Poyer (1990) thus argued that the reference of ethnic identity does not have to be universal, but varies with social, historical and cultural contexts. The question we should ask about ethnicity, therefore, if I may alter the phrase a little, is 'under what conditions does (any kind of) ethnicity become the superordinate symbol of identification within a social system?' (Howard & Howard, 1977: 165; Linnekin & Poyer, 1990: 11).

This question encouraged studies that not only discussed how different cultures construct and express their own cultural identities with different social practices (such as Astuti's study on the Vezo people in 1995, but also explored how different identities of ethnicity, religion, gender and class are associated with or dissociated from people in relation to various social factors (such as Kipp (1993) and Thompson (2003)). Ethnicity, as the means to distinguish one group of people from others, should thus be understood as constructed and promoted under certain historical and social contexts, rather than in the form of congenital conditions. The question raised by Alan and Irwin Howard (1977) may be old, but it is still valid. At this point, the core of my study with the Atayal peoples should therefore be much clearer: I am investigating how a 'religious' group of people such as the Atayals understand their conversion to Christianity, and how that conversion changed their construction of identity, since their society was mostly based on religious practices. I will also analyse how that change of identity construction is 'secularised' along with their embracing of Christianity, for the 'traditional' construction of identity was in fact a series of sacred practices.

#### **1.2.4. Religious studies on Taiwanese Austronesian groups**

Before going on to analyse the data gathered in the field, it is necessary to give a

relevant historical context to better depict the background of this study. In this section I will introduce the studies of Taiwanese indigenous peoples, which help to delineate the construction of indigenous ethnic and cultural identities along with religious and social transitions. I will also give an overview of the studies of the Atayals, which provide a more detailed picture of the characteristics of the Atayal culture with regard to religion and identity. By presenting these previous researches, I hope to underline the uniqueness and complexity of religious conversions among the Taiwanese indigenous peoples, as well as to bring out the shortcomings in the past studies of religion and identity of the Atayals/indigenous groups in order to outline what this study is trying to achieve.

Systematic studies on the Austronesian peoples (also known as the ‘indigenous people’, 原住民) in Taiwan began at the beginning of the period of Japanese rule (1895–1945).<sup>5</sup> Out of political concern, the Japanese colonial government (the Taiwan Governor-General’s Office, 台湾総督府) started a series of anthropological researches on the indigenous peoples in Taiwan to have better control of them, in case these mountain-living ‘savages’ became threats to the Japanese regime (S. Huang, 2012). Among all of the Japanese anthropologists during that time, Ino Kanori (1867–1925) was the first to systematically distinguish the ‘indigenous’ ethnic groups from the previous cursory classifications of the ‘wild savages’ (生番, indigenous people who had not submitted to the Qing government, usually living in the mountains) and the ‘tamed savages’ (熟番, those who had submitted to the Qing government, usually living in the plain area). He categorised the Austronesian peoples into eight different families according to similarities of language and customs (Blundell, 2000). His categorisation became the most vital reference not only for later studies, but sometimes even for the indigenous people themselves through the modern nation-state education system. The ethnic group ‘Atayal’ was thus one of these eight recognised Austronesian groups (S. Huang, 2012). In the early stage of the colonial rule, understanding the religion of these Austronesian people was crucial in making policies, as they had completely different lifestyles from the majority of Han people in Taiwan (C. Huang, 1999). In the official researches, the Japanese tended to refer to the Austronesian people’s customs, such as taboos, shamanism, fortune-telling practices and beheading actions, as ‘superstitions’; whereas those ideas of souls and

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<sup>5</sup> After the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Qing government in China according to the Treaty of Shimonoseki, and became a colony of Japan for the next 50 years.

ancestral worship that could fit into Japanese Shintoism were put under the category of their ‘religious belief’ (C. Huang, 1999). Separating these Taiwanese indigenous ‘superstitions’ from ‘religion’ thus became a major paradigm during the Japanese rule (C. Huang, 1999; S. Huang, 2012).<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, academic studies took different approaches to avoid political ideologies being projected in the research. Being a Durkheimian, Furuno Kiyoto (2000[1945]) argued that those Austronesian ‘superstitious’ rituals should be seen as part of the Taiwanese aboriginal peoples’ religious belief, and that their religious life should be understood in terms of their ideas of ‘religion’, myth, ritual practices and religious structure. With that approach, Kiyoto (2000[1945]) thus came to a different conclusion on the Taiwanese Austronesian religions to the official records, suggesting the animist nature in Taiwanese indigenous religions, as well as pointing out the inseparable connection between the religious and daily practices of the indigenous people by analysing how the customs of farming became the foundation of worshipping. Koizumi Magane (1984[1933]) also stated the importance of those practices being part of the Taiwanese Austronesian religious belief, since they were generated from the peoples’ ‘lives and experiences’. In short, the two approaches of the Japanese anthropologists on the one hand reflected how the early researchers saw the concept of ‘religion’, and on the other established thick ethnographies that helped later scholars better understand the early lives of the Taiwanese aborigines (S. Huang, 2012).

With Japan’s defeat in the Second World War and the control of power in Taiwan transferring to the Chinese KMT government in 1945, the anthropological studies on the Austronesian peoples from then to 1965 mainly focused on the traditional social structures and their material cultures (S. Huang, 2012).<sup>7</sup> This focus on the ‘traditional’ aspects instead of the wider social and economical situations of the aborigines had its political contexts, whilst few studies of Austronesian religious life were about reconstructing the origins, developments, concepts and practices of the religions (S. Huang, 2012).<sup>8</sup> The categorisation of the aboriginal ethnic groups during

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Ino Kanori and Awano Dennojo’s *Taiwan Banjin Jijo* (Taiwan’s Aboriginal People, 1900); the *Official Report on Barbarians’ Customs* (1996); and Yuzuru Okada’s collections of studies published in the *Ethnographical Journal of South-East Asia, Oceania and Taiwan* in 1933.

<sup>7</sup> KMT is short for ‘Kuomintang’ (usually translated as the Chinese Nationalist Party), a political party that was officially formed in China in 1911. Founded by Song Jiao-ren and Sun Yat-sen, who was later recognised as the father of the Republic of China, the KMT was then defeated by the Chinese Communist Party during the civil war, and turned to Taiwan to continue its regime while claiming its orthodox authority over Mainland China.

<sup>8</sup> The representative studies during this period included, for example, Li Yi-yuan’s (1962) comparative



this time mostly followed the results published by Ino Kanori. Interestingly, the rapid spread of Christianity among the Taiwanese aboriginal communities did not gain much attention from the anthropologists at the time. Tang Mei-chun (1996[1957]) even considered such an ‘emerging religion’ as nothing but some ‘decorations’ to the traditional religious beliefs that would never replace the importance of the old religion. The few studies of the Taiwanese Austronesian conversion to Christianity (T. Chen, 1951; Chiu, 1966; S. Chen, 1951) also focused only on the freedom-of-religion policy carried out by the KMT government (S. Huang, 2012). There were even fewer anthropological studies on the social impact of converting to Christianity on the aboriginal peoples in Taiwan. Although Song (1963) and Chen (1966), respectively, addressed how Christianity was introduced and how it had replaced the social functions of certain traditional religious practices, and the role religion had played during the cultural transitions, religious conversion did not become a real subject of Taiwanese Austronesian studies until the 1980s (S. Huang, 2012).

From 1963, Taiwan started to transform from an agricultural society into an industrial one (M. Cheng, 1974), and anthropological interests turned to the progress of its majority Han societies. Researches on the Taiwanese Austronesian societies were undertaken less frequently until the mid-1970s (Y. Huang, 1999), when the ‘Taiwanisation’ movement affirmed the importance of local cultures. The ‘traditions’, such as the religious origins and developments of the Austronesian groups, were still popular topics from 1976 onwards, yet the social influences of religious transition were also being examined at the time. Religious rituals and concepts were employed to review not only the ethnic relations (I. Cheng, 1987), but also the social adaptation (M. Chen, 1973) of the Taiwanese Austronesian peoples (S. Huang, 2012). Seeing the close relationship between religion and society, the religious transitions of the aborigines thus became the focus of this period. With the mass conversion to Christianity amongst the Taiwanese Austronesian communities, research into their religious transitions started to investigate the cultural and social characteristics that could lead to such religious changes (P. Tang, 1996). Studies of the conversion to Christianity of the aborigines rapidly grew, and debates over whether such conversion was triggered by outer forces (Lu, 1988; Shi, 1976; Wu, 1986) or inner social and cultural structures (S. Huang, 1980; W. Huang, 1978) began to proliferate. However,

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research on the social and religious structures of Taiwanese Aborigines, Hsu Shih-chen’s (1956) summary of ancestral origins, and Ho Ting-jui’s (1960) study of tattooing customs.

though studies on the religious transitions of the Taiwanese Austronesian peoples were established, ‘it was exactly the focus of how each community adapted the modernisation through their society or culture that led to such studies, consciously or unconsciously, treating society and culture themselves as the tools of adaptation’ (C. Huang, 1999:70).

The emergence of Austronesian native anthropologists later in the 1990s broke the limits of the objectivism in the past studies, and brought new subjectivist aspects into the research on the Taiwanese aborigines that replenished the understandings of the societies (S. Huang, 2012; Y. Huang, 1999). The anthropological focus on the religious life of the Austronesian peoples in this phase still included the reconstruction of the traditional religious system, such as in the studies of Kubura (1991) and Tien (1992, 1997), whilst the issue of religious transition received even more attention and was examined from different perspectives. Taiwanese aboriginal peoples’ conversion to Christianity was linked to the political policies of both Japanese and KMT governments, and material aid from the churches (S. Lin, 1992), whilst the presumption of religion being an independent ideological system in the past studies was also reviewed (Y. Chiu, 1997). Meanwhile, the phenomenon of religious syncretism in the modern Austronesian groups that resulted from converting to Christianity was noted (Luo, 2000), and the transition of the relationships between the practice, forms and meanings of religious rituals and the aboriginal societies was also discussed (S. Huang, 2012). Wang Song-shan (1990; 1989) and Pan Ying-hai (1993) further analysed this increasingly evident cultural syncretism through the changes in the religious rituals, arguing that local culture is self-defined and redefined through adapting to the mainstream culture, thereby generating new community identities and self-consciousness.

Cultural and religious syncretism in Christian and modern nation-state contexts thus brought up the topics of the construction of ‘ethnicity’, ‘identity’ and ‘cultural categorisation’ of the modern Taiwanese Austronesian peoples (S. Huang, 2012). We first have to know that the Taiwanese Austronesian peoples’ collective conversion in the 1950s and 1960s is quite different from other cases in the world. Whether it was in African, American or Pacific societies, the success of converting to Christianity in the Global South usually had to do with the ‘white’ colonial power that engaged with political, economical or educational struggles (P. Jenkins, 2002). Converting to Christianity in those worlds – for example, Papua New Guinea – thus often became a

means to connect the ruled and the rulers (Robbins, 2009; P. J. Stewart & Strathern, 2009; A. Strathern & Stewart, 2009). However, not only has Taiwan never been dominated by the ‘white power’, but Christianity is also more likely to be used by the Taiwanese Austronesian communities to distinguish themselves from the majority Han society (K. C. Huang, 2000; Stewart & Strathern, 2009). That might be the reason why, in terms of ethnic identity, most of the studies tended to focus on the impact in relation to social and political aspects rather than in terms of religious transition (Chin, 2012; S. Huang, 2005), as converting to Christianity in many cases seemed to be the answer to reunite the aboriginal groups’ self-definitions under the rapid changes of modernisation (I. C. Chen, 2011; Y. Huang, 1992; Tan, 2005). Even those studies addressing the issue of ethnic identity through the changes in the nature of religious rituals – for example, Chang Hui-tuan’s (1995) research on the Amis people’s harvest celebration (豐年祭) and Hsieh and Su’s (1998) discussion of the Thao New Year Ceremony – focused on the functions of these modern ritual practices, rather than on how the change of religiosity in the rituals influenced the Austronesian peoples’ concept of ‘self’. We can, therefore, note that these studies reflected the distinction of ‘religion’ from ‘the society’ or even ‘culture’, which basically set the boundaries of the understandings and possibilities of the Austronesian researches. Recent studies’ deconstruction of the past concepts of kinship, politics and religion may have compensated for the lack of native points of view in past researches, but this deconstruction served only to reconstruct those ideas by using different cultural categorisations, such as the concepts of person, time, space and the relationship between material and the body (S. Huang, 2012). The presupposition of the category of ‘religion’, therefore, led to the previous studies seeing the conversion to Christianity as a sort of ‘transformation’ of the ‘old religion’, and often overlooked the religious impact of the issues that were not categorised under ‘religion’. That is also why, when reviewing all those researches in Taiwanese Austronesian religious transitions, discussion of ‘secularisation’ is almost omitted from discussion of related social, political and religious topics. As well as reconsidering the modes of secularisation, therefore, throughout this study I will review the possible meaning of the ‘religious life’ of the Atayal cultures, and how that might influence the definition and practices of who they are. The next section will be a brief introduction to the key characteristics of the past researches on the topic of Atayal religious belief and identity.

### **1.2.5 On Atayal religious studies**

The tendencies in the research on the Austronesian peoples in Taiwan noted above are also applicable to the studies of the Atayals. Between the Japanese retreat from Taiwan in 1945 and 1975, the two most comprehensive religious researches on the Atayals were the *Report of a Preliminary Ethnological Research in Juiyen Village* (瑞岩民族學調查) (H. Lin, 1950) and the *Atayal in Nan-ao: An ethnological study* (南澳的泰雅人:民族學田野調查與研究) (Y. Li, 1963). Being one of the earliest Austronesian studies after the KMT government took over Taiwan, the former was an attempt to prove the culturally inseparable relation with the Chinese in order to establish the legitimacy of the regime, rather than an attempt to understand the ethnic minorities' social organisations or customs (Chao-ju Chen, 1995). The results of the 'research', therefore, became something that is 'static, historical critical, and even transcendental' (Chao-ju Chen, 1995:7). Despite that, the *Report* still set the paradigm for Austronesian researches for the next 20 years in terms of the 'patchwork' study by a team of anthropologists. Later on, although Li Yi-yuan's study of the Atayal people in Nan-ao in 1963 gave a more comprehensive introduction to their emigration history, customs, religious beliefs and myths, the 'patchwork' nature of the research was criticised for its lack of a systematic, holistic view of the culture (Q. Chen, 1986).

Li's study (1963) also reflected the trend of kinship theories in anthropology in America at the time. Since the Japanese period, the Atayals' social – and perhaps religious – unit/concept of 'gaga' (pronounced *ŋaŋa*) has been the biggest puzzle to researchers.<sup>9</sup> Li's study assumed that all the social relations in Atayal society were based on kinship, and gave these social relations ethical explanations (K. C. Huang, 2000; S. Huang, 2012). During the industrialisation of Taiwanese society in the 1970s, the focus of Atayal studies turned to the functions of the traditional rituals and customs, and therefore highlighted the transitions of the traditional cultures in modern society. In dealing with Atayal societies, Chen Mau-thai (1973) argued that traditional Atayal people formed the kin-based 'social units' of *gaga* from their religious belief about their deceased ancestors, 'utux', and that the two concepts helped the Atayals to

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<sup>9</sup> Due to language variation among the Atayal people, *gaga* may be called *gaya* in different Atayal groups.

adapt to changes in circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Ho Chin-shan (1986) then further discussed how the Atayal people practised their religious belief – including the *gaga* – in different social organisations along with their conversion to Christianity. In later studies it was further argued that the ‘social unit’ of the *gaga* was being replaced by the church, which ‘transformed’ Atayal social and religious systems to Christian contexts and became the new way of adapting to modern life (Y. Huang, 1999).

With such a functional approach to the core concepts of Atayal culture, the native cognitions were often ignored, and the dynamics between the body, society and religious beliefs of the Atayals were also rarely discussed. Wang Mei-hsia (1990, 2003) thus drew on her own years of fieldwork to review the past understandings of the *gaga* and *utux*, and argued that the *gaga* is in fact a polysemic term that has different meanings in different contexts. She pointed out that the term *gaga* is extensively used to refer to social norms, ritual rules and prayers, taboos, personal features, daily practices and customs, and even ways of farming. Instead of being understood as merely the signifier for social or kinship units in the Atayal society, Wang (1990) further argued that *gaga* should be seen more as a ‘becoming’ mechanism of the Atayals’ understanding of history, society and religious belief (S. Huang, 2012; M. Wang, 1990, 2003). Wang’s analysis of the meaning of *gaga* gave a holistic view of how religion, economy, kinship and politics are defined around, and interact with, the concept of the *gaga*, and revealed the problem of applying traditional Han (or Western) cultural categorisation to Taiwanese Austronesian groups. Similar to Wang’s findings, the native Atayal researcher Yupas Watan (2005) argued that the belief in the ‘*utux*’ was practised through the *gaga* in every aspect of life, rather than being a religious system that was isolated from the society. These holistic studies of the Atayal cultural and religious concepts brought a new perspective to the discussions of the Atayal society. However, they were still conducted under the traditional anthropological cultural classifications that presumed a category of ‘religion’ that is opposed to the sacred and secular worlds (Y. Watan, 2005). This study, therefore, aims to challenge such presuppositions of the idea of ‘religion’ in the Atayal, and even the Austronesian, studies in Taiwan.

Understanding the religious ideas and practices of the Atayals is important because religious belief, from the earliest myth of their ethnic origin to their recent

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<sup>10</sup> As in footnote 8, *utux* may also be called *rutux* or *lyutux*.

conversion to Christianity, has defined who the 'Atayal people' are (whether in subjective or objective classifications) and what kind of people they want to be. However, most of the studies analysing the ethnic identities of the Atayals have tended to focus on the political, historical or custom-related 'cultural' aspects of identity construction to discuss the classification of 'ethnic groups' (S.C. Hsieh, 1992; Ma, 2002; M. Wang, 2008; Zheng, 2005), rather than analysing the changes in the ways Atayal people defined themselves in relation to religion (which will be presented in Chapter Four in this thesis). Even in the few researches dealing with the changes in Atayal identity with the conversion to Christianity, such as that of K. C. Huang (2000), the theological implications were limited to social functions and structures, and lacked the explanation of the 'production' and 'reproduction' of the Atayals' identities along with their religious transition. The missing discussions on the identity construction in the Atayal religious studies, in my opinion, results from the presupposition of the contradictory categorisations of 'religion' and 'society', the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. As modern theories of identity, being a subject of social science, are often established on rather secular – that is, political, social or psychological – ground, previous researchers also tended to understand the construction of identity based on these categories and overlooked how the religious belief of the Atayals played out in both the traditional and the modern Atayal societies. This is why in this area of Atayal studies, we find that the existing arguments relating to the 'transition' of modern Atayal identity are discussed only with reference to secular – that is, social, political and economical – matters, while the 'production' of identity in the traditional Atayal world is only considered from a religious viewpoint. Henceforth, from a micro perspective, this study is an attempt to examine the religious nature of the Atayal society through the eyes of 'secularisation', and how that changed the idea and the practice of the Atayal identity. From a macro perspective, by comparing the traditional and modern lives of the Atayal people I will contribute another model or concept of 'secularisation' to the discussions of religion in the modern world and the anthropology of Christianity, to serve as an alternative perspective for the wider study of religious conversion.

### **1.3 Plan of thesis**

With the objective of exploring the relations between the sacred and the secular, and

between religious change and the identity of the Atayals, the discussion in this study will first address the Atayals' idea of 'the self' (chapter three), and will then consider their concepts of 'conversion' (chapter five and six), of 'cultural self' (chapter seven) and their understandings of the 'boundary of identity' (chapter eight). In the next chapter (chapter two) I shall introduce the field site and the methodology used in this research.

The main arguments in this study are put forward in chapters three to eight. In chapters three and four, I review the core ideas of, and the relationship between, the '*gaga*' (the way of life) and '*utux*' (spirit) of the Atayal people, and how, through the practice of the *gaga*, these ideas defined the Atayal society and the traditional consciousness of the Atayal 'self' – the Atayal person (*tayan*). The changes in the traditional performances of rituals in modern contexts are raised in chapter five, which leads to further discussion in chapter six on the Atayal people's 'conversion' to Christianity and how the theological differences altered the traditional practices of being a *tayan*. By looking at the changes in the concept of '*tayan*', chapter six also argues that the introduction of Christianity differentiated Atayal 'society' from 'religion', and led to the 'disenchantment' with the traditional Atayal culture that caused the 'secularisation' of the society. Chapter seven then further analyses how this modern distinction between 'religion' and 'culture' resulted in the rupture of the Atayals' past and present, and the loss of cultural identity, due to the Christianised cultural values and religious structure. In order to address the changes in the Atayal people's identity, chapter eight examines in detail the impact of Christianity with reference to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural and symbolic capital, and reveals how the (secularised) identity of the Atayal people is reproduced through the structural change in the group's religious practices. The final concluding chapter (chapter nine) provides a full review of the findings in the study, and maps out the significance of them for wider studies in the anthropology of religion.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methodology**



Ethnography has been one of the most efficient methods of exploring cultural and social phenomena, as it enables the research participants to present their own ideas of the world, providing a qualitative approach to understand the nature of certain phenomena (P. Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). However, it is never easy for a novice anthropologist to understand how to ‘do’ the fieldwork, how to obtain others’ ideas concerning certain events and how to establish a rapport with the locals. As a highly independent form of work, the methods used in field research differ from one researcher to another, and they are often not explained accurately. E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1976) best addressed this issue in his book *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, before his first trip to Africa:

I first sought advice from Westermarck. All I got from him was ‘don’t converse with an informant for more than twenty minutes because if you aren’t bored by that time he will be.’... I sought instruction from Haddon... [h]e told me that it was really all quite simple; one should always behave as a gentleman... [m]y teacher, Seligman, told me to take ten grains of quinine every night and to keep off women. The famous Egyptologist, Sir Flinders Petrie, just told me not to bother about drinking dirty water as one soon became immune to it. Finally, I asked Malinowski and was told not to be a bloody fool (Evans-Pritchard, 1976:240).

Yet there are still principles we can grasp in the field. As anthropological field researches are in fact a process of studying the subjects’ thinking, emotions and actions rather than merely collecting data, doing fieldwork is always about empathetically understanding the meaning of different symbols in people’s daily lives (Moberg, 2013). In other words, field research is about more than the researcher ‘being there’ in the field, then ‘being here’ to write; it is a process of moving back and forth between the awareness of the researcher’s ‘self’ and the awareness of the ‘other’ that is being researched (Geertz, 1988). Such a way of working in the field – and therefore producing anthropological knowledge – can avoid the hegemony of scientific discourse from the etic point of view, as well as eschewing the unilateral description from the etic position (Conrad Phillip Kottak, 2010). Composing anthropological knowledge from field research is therefore to construct a multi-vocal narrative (Lett, 1987; V. Turner, 1967, 1974).

To do this, field research has to go beyond merely investigating the current status of the subject, and has to link every moment of now to its own historical context (Kahn, 2011). Therefore the ‘field’ of the fieldwork should never be confined to one village, one place or one group of people; it is also in the history and in the texts. By moving back and forth between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, and by carefully studying the history of the past (which, in a way, is also the ‘other’ of the current), the ultimate goal of the work from the field is, as Clifford Geertz put it: ‘[t]he textual connection of the Being here and the Being there sides of anthropology, the imaginative construction of a common ground between the Written At and the Written About... [It] is the *fons et origo* of whatever power anthropology has to convince anyone of anything’ (Geertz, 1988:144).

This chapter outlines and explains how I chose the research and analytical methods for this thesis. Firstly I will introduce the site of the fieldwork, providing an outline of the composition of its community and history, as well as explaining why it was chosen to be the field site for this study. Secondly I shall give details of the methods I used during data collection in the field, and how they might have helped or limited my research in terms of understanding the relationship between the community’s conversion to Christianity and its change of identity. Following that, I will demonstrate how the methods I used in the field were connected to the theories and approaches I applied in analysing and producing the anthropological knowledge from the data collected.

## **2.1 Constructing the field: Atayals in Bienjing village**

### **2.1.1 Selecting the field site**

My research was inspired by my interest in the modern Atayal people’s Christian faith and how it might or might not have changed their perception of their cultural tradition and values. Thanks to a family connection in the police department, I was quickly introduced to a few Atayal people who were able to show me their neighbourhoods in different areas of northern Taiwan.<sup>11</sup> The first two sites were in Wulai – a mountain

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<sup>11</sup> Though, to be fair, such a connection between the indigenous groups and local police stations was an unfortunate legacy of the Japanese rule in the early twentieth century, as the Japanese used the

area near Taipei that is famous for its hot springs. Though both of the sites are located in the same region, they have rather polarised statuses: one enjoys a culture of commercialism due to its thriving (or over-developed) hot spring business, whilst the other is located in a much more closed and distant area and has very limited resources and facilities. As I was trying to find a community where I could observe the possible ‘transformation’ of Atayal culture during the adaptation to modernity, I was introduced to Bienjing village in Miaoli County, where the economic structure is composed of a small-scale hot spring business and farming, encompassing three different Atayal communities (with two Atayal languages).

As a developing region, Bienjing village serves as a perfect site for me to see how the Atayal people cope with these different economic patterns, and how the church is involved in the different daily practices of the Atayals. The fact that there are three different communities in the village also gave me the idea to further examine the Atayals’ concept of ‘the self’ by looking at the relations between the three communities. After I decided to stay in the village, I was received by the head of the village (a position which is elected by the villagers) and lived in the small hot spring hostel run by him and his wife for over six months, from September 2011 to late March 2012.<sup>12</sup> Instead of seeing what was happening ‘from the door of my hostel room’, I spent most of my time having conversations with people, and participating in most of the events and work, in churches, people’s houses, their orchards, or even by roads and campfires.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the village head’s own social network, the local Atayal police officers also introduced me to chieftains, elderly people (who were born in the period of the Japanese rule) and Atayal culture workers in the neighbouring tribes and villages, and so my ‘field’ in fact covered five different villages in that area, though most of my work was conducted in Bienjing village. Working with the police officers did concern me at first out of fear that my relationship with them would make

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police to monitor and regulate the lives of the Atayals. The role of police stations in the indigenous areas today has been transformed into one of helper and protector of the people, but tensions between the Atayals and the police, and even between the Atayal native and Han police officers, still remain.

<sup>12</sup> My fieldwork ended earlier than I expected due to a severe injury to my right knee, but by the time I left, I had collected enough data for my research and had a preliminary framework of the arguments in the thesis. Therefore, although this field trip was rather short, it was nevertheless worthwhile. I also kept in touch with the participants afterwards when I was receiving treatment, to make sure that all my follow-up questions were fully answered.

<sup>13</sup> As Evans-Pritchard (1940) wrote in his work about his fieldwork with the Nuer: ‘from the door of my tent I could see what was happening in camp or village and every moment was spent in Nuer company. Information was thus gathered in particles, each Nuer I met being used as a source of knowledge, and not, as it were, in chunks supplied by selected and trained informants’.

people guarded towards me, but I soon found out that the Atayal native officers were well respected among the people, and they became a great help in terms of translating the Atayal language and being first-hand witnesses to the difficulties and problems the people are facing.

### **2.1.2 The formation of Bienjing village**

Although the origins of the Austronesians and the early history of immigration remain unclear, the major migration of the Atayal people from central Taiwan is believed to have taken place three or four hundred years ago, as they expanded towards the north and east of Taiwan due to the shortage of food and the growth of the population, becoming the most widely distributed aboriginal ethnic group in Taiwan (R.-G. Li, 1997). The migration is not only thought to mark the beginning of the Atayal people's inhabitation of Miaoli (see figure 1), the focus of this study, but also resulted in the varied presentation of the Atayal language and culture (see figure 2) (Taian Township Office, 1994).

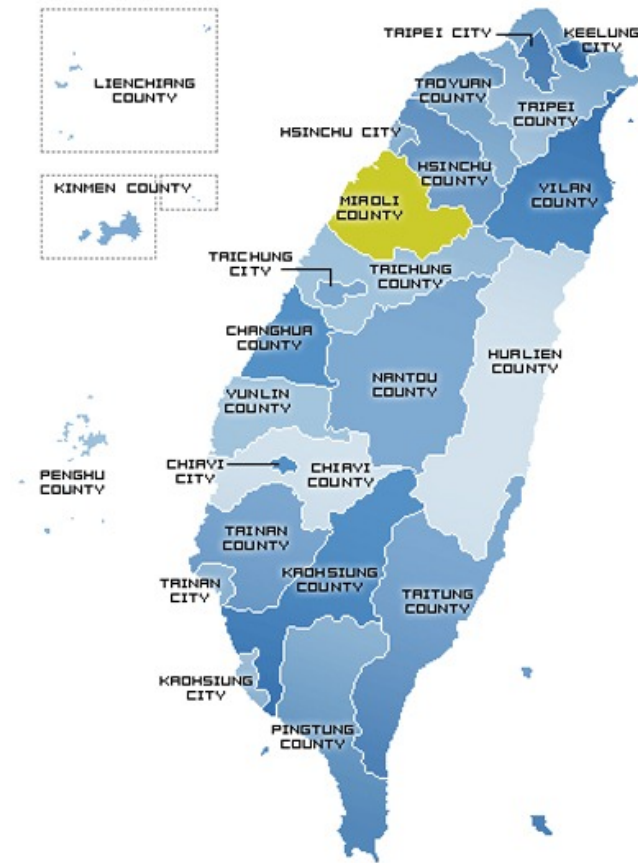


Figure 1, the administrative map of Taiwan. Miaoli, the county used in this study, is marked in yellow (movers-taiwan.com).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> <http://movers-taiwan.com/Miaoli-County/> (last accessed on 26 July 2012).

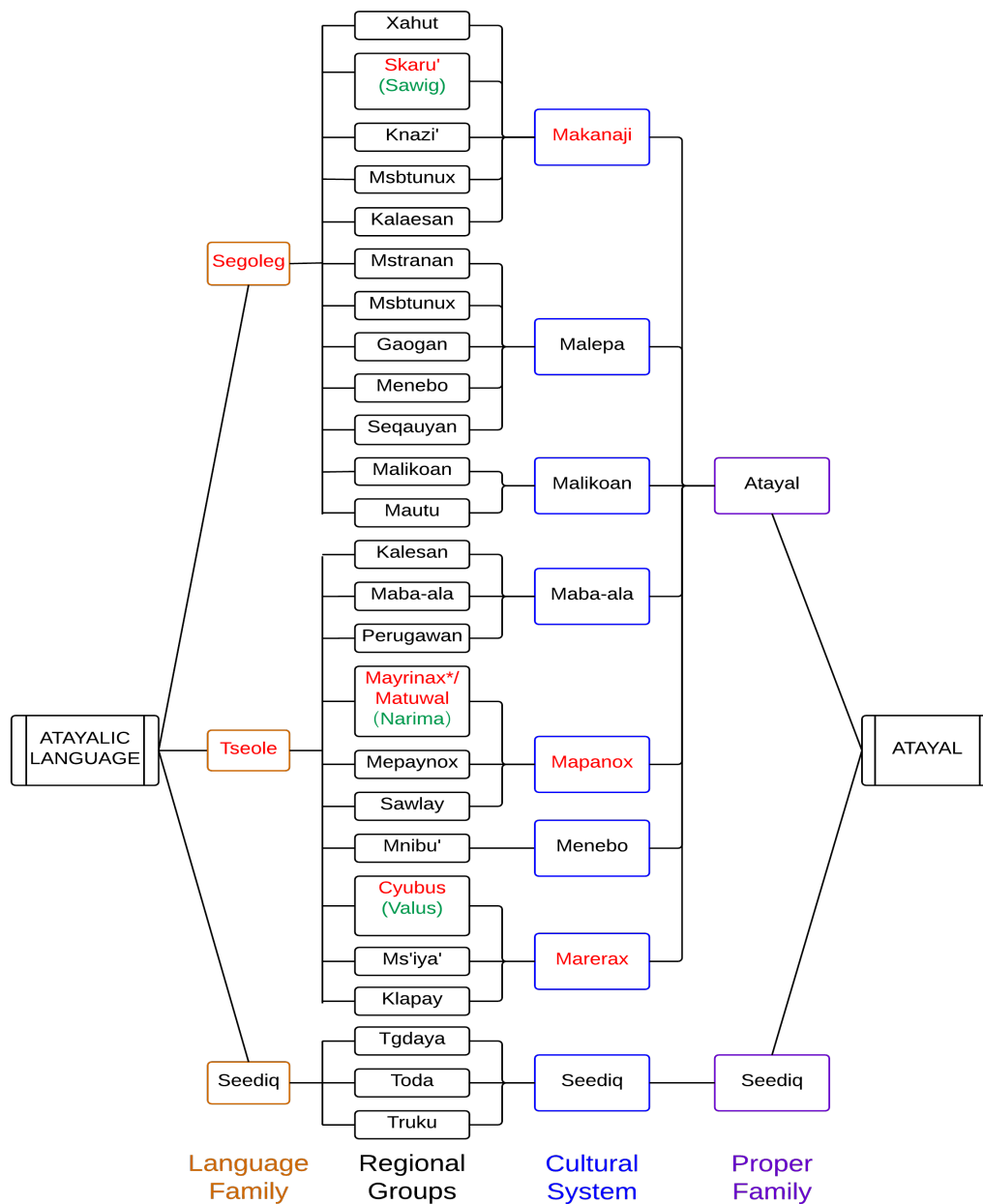


Figure 2, diagram of the pan-Atayal systems, adjusted from Ma Teng-yue's (1998) chart of the Atayal groups. The content is the same as in Ma's chart, but I rearranged the way it is presented so that readers can search any column in relation to both cultural and linguistic classifications more easily. I also added the names of the tribes in Bienjing village (marked in green), to indicate which language families, regional groups and cultural systems they belong to (marked in red).<sup>15</sup> In the column of

<sup>15</sup> The Atayal ethnicity was originally classified to contain two sub-groups of Atayal and Seediq, which is why the column 'Ataya' appeared twice at the right of the diagram. However, Seediq, and the group that was once categorised as its branch race, Truku, are now officially two independent aboriginal groups.

‘Mayrinax’ (with a star sign), I added the term ‘Matuwal’, as the Narima people suggested.<sup>16</sup> All the terms are in Atayal language.

The Atayal communities in Miaoli are distributed in the Taian Township, the only ‘indigenous mountain’ administrative district of Miaoli, which comprises one third of the land of the County (figure 3). The mountains and rivers in Taian divide the township into what the locals call the ‘front mountain’, which includes five villages, and the ‘back mountain’ area of another three villages. With better access to the town centre and the sources of hot springs, the villages in the ‘front mountain’ are usually better developed and have better facilities than those in the ‘back mountain’; the settlements in the front are also more dense than those in the back. Although they are divided into these administrative units, each ‘village’ in fact contains several ‘tribes’, which form a total of seventeen Atayal communities in Taian. What we have to note about these ‘tribes’ (部落) is that they were not always formed voluntarily. The relocation policy during the Japanese period had forcefully broken up many original Atayal tribes and put together different small clans as one settlement. The ‘tribes’ we see today, therefore, do not always conform to the Atayals’ definition of a ‘tribe’, which refers to a group following the same *gaga*. Thus in this study I will also use the term ‘community’ to refer to all the clustered settlements that are called by themselves ‘tribes’ (部落), to avoid the misconception suggested by the term ‘tribe’ in English.

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<sup>16</sup> The ‘Mayrinax’ group in Ma’s (1998) classification, according to the Narima people, should be Matuwal. Hence I put both in figure 2 for future reference.

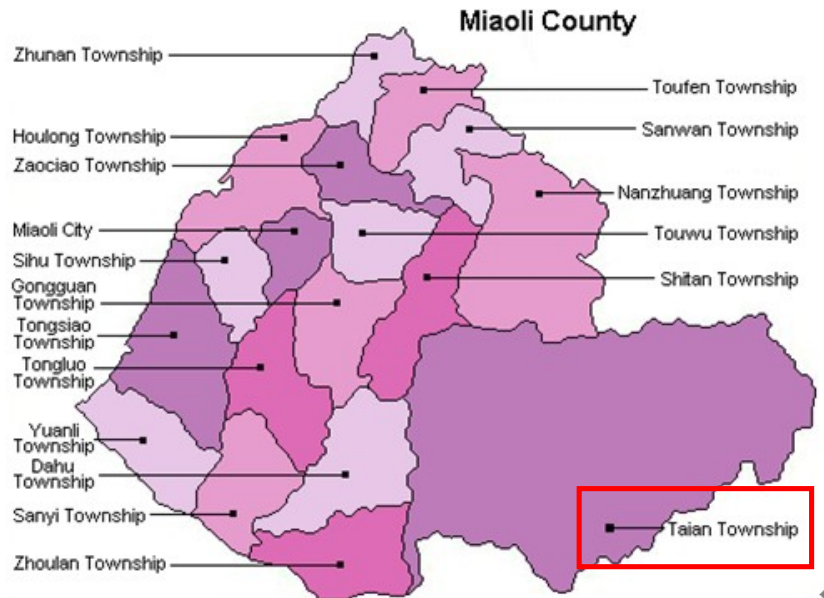


Figure 3, the administrative map of Miaoli (mapsir.com).<sup>17</sup>

The Atayal people in Taian can be roughly categorised into five groups: Skaru', Matuwal, Mepaynox, Cyubus and Ms'iya'.<sup>18</sup> Bienjing village includes three of these – Skaru', Narima/Matuwal and Cyubus – which cover the Segoleg and Tseole languages, and the Makanaji, Mapanox and Marenax cultural systems. In Bienjing village there are three Atayal tribes: Sawig (Skaru'), Valus (Cyubus) and Narima (Matuwal). The names of the tribes are actually the names of the places, and each tribe was formed by the union of different clans.<sup>19</sup>

### **2.1.3 The three Atayal tribes in Bienjing village**

The locals claimed that a few hundred years ago, several clans of the Narima were moved to nearby mountain areas to make their living; however, from 1913, the Japanese colonial government asked them to return to their current location so that they could be managed more effectively. The Japanese management policy relating to the aborigines gave the Valus area of the Narima to the Masingaw clan from Hsinchu, with the consent of the Narima *tumux* (chieftain), around 1928.<sup>20</sup> Later, in 1946,

<sup>17</sup> <http://mapsir.com/684/> (last accessed on 26 July 2012).

<sup>18</sup> See figure 2 for the classification of the Atayal groups.

<sup>19</sup> The names of the tribes have been changed for anonymity.

<sup>20</sup> The Japanese colonial government's ruling policy over the aborigines involved the use of military



another clan from Hsinchu came to the Narima territory and requested that part of the lands be given to them, beginning the formation of the Sawig tribe. Each of these clustered tribes retained much of their autonomy during the Japanese period and the first two years of the KMT rule, though they also needed to follow the public policies and were closely monitored by the Japanese. Sometimes the Japanese would also intervene in the elections of the chieftains to better suit their purposes, but that was not always the case. In 1947, the KMT government reformed the administrative areas in Miaoli that officially included the three tribes and reclassified them under the national administrative system as a ‘village’.

Today, there are about 670 Atayal residents in total in Bienjing village: 300 Narima, 250 Valus and 120 Sawig. The Sawig tribe, where the village head and his hostel are located, has the lowest population of the three communities but is the most developed. Being the closest tribe to the hot spring spot, and to the oldest hot spring hotel, which has been the police’s facility since the Japanese period, the Sawig people have long learned how to use their geographical advantage to run small businesses around the site. Following the establishment of other big private hot spring hotels nearby in the 2000s, many of the Sawig people became employees of those hotels, and the tribe has also undergone some landscape work to better meet the needs of tourism.



force during the early period. The ruling principle only changed to pacification during the 1920s, when **the government started to relocate several aboriginal tribes into a single clustered village**. These relocation activities – which came at the same time as the establishment of a large number of police stations that were known as the ‘police stations for the savages’ (chuzaisho) by the Japanese – not only made controlling the aborigines more efficient and easier, but also changed the scattered living style of the aborigines into the communal style we see today (Y.-H. Lin, 2010).

Figure 4, painted walls and a designed mailbox at a Sawig house.

Orchards are the other major source of income in Sawig, and especially in Valus and Narima. The main crops of the orchards in the village are persimmons and citrus. Since the younger generations prefer to work either in the hotels or in cities, the farming populations are aged around forty-five to sixty. This difference also reflects the educational changes between the older and younger generations and demonstrates Taiwan's transformation from an agricultural society into an industrial one. Meanwhile, as almost all of the children are Atayals, the local elementary school also started to include Atayal 'culture classes' in the syllabus a few years ago. These classes teach children mostly about the traditional living skills, material culture and Atayal language, but rarely touch on the subject of religious belief.

Currently, there is one Catholic church in Bienjing village, three Presbyterian churches (one in each tribe), and one Bethel church in Sawig.<sup>21</sup> These churches serve not only as centres for religious practices, but also as gathering points for the promotion of government policies, discussions of public matters and many other kinds of events. My fieldwork thus started by visiting the churches and participating in church services and events. From there I began to immerse myself in the local people's lives.

## 2.2 Fieldwork methods

During my fieldwork I used different approaches to compile the ethnography, in order to gain a much fuller picture of the transitions of religious ideas and practices, as well as the shift of the construction of identity. The following sections will be an assessment of the methods applied in the field.

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<sup>21</sup> This Bethel church belongs to the Taiwanese charismatic sect, 'Chinese Taiwan Christian Kuang-Ye Association' (社團法人中華台灣基督教曠野協會).

### 2.2.1 Participant observation

Participant observation has been one of the most commonly applied field research methods in anthropology since Bronislaw Malinowski's fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands in the early twentieth century. However, the term itself reveals this method's biggest controversy: how can one 'participate' and 'observe' at the same time?

Since observation is the 'fundamental base of all research methods in the social and behavioural science' (Adler & Adler, 1994:389), John and Lyn Lofland (1984) saw 'participation' as being only one of the minimum requirements of doing fieldwork, and yet the only goal. Participation therefore becomes the human 'instrument' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), 'the process in which an investigator establishes a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a scientific understanding of that association' (Lofland & Lofland, 1984:12). Raymond Gold (1969) identified four kinds of participant observation based on the degrees of participation and observation:

1. Complete participant: by concealing their role as a researcher, the researcher lives like the natives and is immersed totally in the lives of his subjects. This disguising of the researcher's identity, however, not only violates research ethics, but would also affect the validity of the research's objectiveness.
2. Observer-as-participant: the researcher participates fully with disclosure of his identity.
3. Participant-as-observer: the researcher states his identity and participates in certain social events.
4. Complete observer: the researcher only observes without participating.

Similar to Gold, Michael Patton (1990) also classified participant observation into different types: 'full participant observation', 'participant as observer', 'observer as participant' and 'full observer'. During my fieldwork, these types of participant observation were applied interchangeably in accordance with different situations and contexts (although from the very beginning I identified myself as a researcher). There were times when I drank home-brewed rice wine by the campfire and felt a special bond with the family who received me; but there were also times when I was forbidden from participating in certain activities (for females are not allowed to

participate in certain men's activities) and instead had to record what I saw from a distance, with barriers.

During my participation and observation in the field, I always kept in mind some principles recommended by experienced anthropologists, such as Rafael J. Engel and Russell K. Schutt (2012) who suggested developing a plausible and honest explanation about oneself to the participants, maintaining the support of the participants, being unobtrusive and unassuming, and being a reflective listener. These principles often reminded me of my objective position as a researcher, especially when I was eager to prove my hypothesis at the beginning of the fieldwork, or when I felt that I was being looked down on for being a female researcher. I began to be more open-minded about the unexpected answers and reactions, as well as being more willing to analyse the contexts and factors of those rather uncomfortable situations. These experiences then became the key in helping me to disclose the perspectives of this study that I had not previously been aware of.

However, from collecting data to producing the meanings, analysis and anthropological knowledge, there is always the risk of the researcher's subjective opinion being projected in the research, thereby influencing the reliability of the outcome (Bernard, 2002). That is why I used Pierre Bourdieu's (2003) idea of 'participant objectivation' to frame my own understanding of participant observation. Unlike the American anthropologists in the 1980s, who examined their own observations and their relations with the participants by 'returning' to the fields, Bourdieu pointed out that 'participant objectivation' is a means to explore 'not the "lived experience" of the knowing subject but the social conditions of possibility – and therefore the effects and limits – of that experience and, more precisely, of the act of objectivation' (Bourdieu, 2003:282). Thus it can properly enable the researcher to reflect on and recognise which social conditions framed the cognitive structure – the view of the world – of the research subjects, as well as of the researcher, in order to avoid biased interpretations in the study (Carrithers, 2005; Grbich, 2007). Through working in the field, I came to know more about not just my participants' views of the world and their lives, but also how my view of the world was built and influenced. Such 'objectivation' of my role in this study and my own ideas of the world served as a vital perspective in examining and identifying the cultural categorisation in the Atayal society, and became the foundation of what I am exploring in my investigation of the 'secularisation' of the Atayals in this research.

### 2.2.2 Interviews

Interviews have been an irreplaceable method of collecting information that could not be acquired by participation and observation, and of more comprehensively understanding the factors behind every action (Bernard, 2002). The interviews I undertook in the field were mostly informal conversations, unstructured chats and semi-structured talks (Bernard, 2002). These casual or formal conversations served not only as pathways to create ‘intimacy’ with the participants (Herzefeld, 2000), but also as an ‘essential feature of human experience’ (Liu, 2002:xii) that could help me to analyse how the participants construct their understanding of reality through their narratives.

Ethnographic interviews were the most extensively used interview method in my fieldwork and took place wherever and whenever was suitable for the participants (Bernard, 2002). Sometimes I would visit their houses after they had finished work and sit with them for hours, and at other times these talks would begin when I bumped into a participant at dinner time in one of the two small delis. Compared to the formal interviews I undertook (that is, the interviews with recording devices), these places of conversation made the participants more relaxed and willing to open up to talk about their own opinions, and to ‘express themselves in their own terms, at their own pace’ (Bernard, 2002:209). In the formal interviews, many participants would tend to be more conservative when answering questions they did not know for certain, telling me to go to the ‘experts’ (who in this study were the priests) to obtain the ‘right answer’, even though those questions were simply trying to find out the participants’ own opinions on their cultural and religious changes. On the one hand this tendency can be seen as a sign of the loss of their cultural knowledge; but on the other, it also shows the possible limits of and inaccurate interpretations in the participants’ attitudes towards certain cultural and social phenomena. Therefore, when I noticed that the ‘Hawthorne Effect’ was taking place for the participants – that is, that during the interviews they would try their best to be ‘politically correct’ and positive about their cultural identity after the conversion to Christianity (whilst advising me to see others for details on the religious and cultural changes) – I changed my strategy and used informal ethnographic interviews to investigate the participants’ general attitudes and

thoughts about certain events, and only used formal, structured interviews for the historical descriptions.<sup>22</sup>

By contrasting the narratives in these interviews, I was able to come up with reliable ethnographic data to depict the Atayals' ideas of the self, social relations and the world (Rapport, 2000). I also applied the oral history interview method to collect more comprehensive collective memories of the past social conditions and religious practices. This not only gave me a better idea of the factors involved in the Atayals' social and personal identities, but also allowed the participants to recognise how different events and changes influenced their daily practices, as well as to further reflect on their personal experiences of the past (R. C. Smith, 2001). The oral history interviews then came up with some interesting results when applied to some more abstract concepts. For example, as 'heroes' embodied the cultural values and were usually the indicative figures for moral and social characteristics in myths and legends (Campbell, 1993; Hegel, 1991), I asked my participants about stories of heroic persons they had heard in the past (the definition of heroes and further discussions are given in chapter 5). Although the answers may have varied slightly from participant to participant, the trends and transitions of their cultural values were revealed through such recollections of the Atayals' heroic history and the terms referring to heroic figures.<sup>23</sup> However, as all the interviews were conducted in Mandarin, a language that the Atayals only started to use about sixty to seventy years ago (many of them are bilingual in Atayal language and Mandarin), the participants didn't always find it easy to determine an Atayal term for what they wanted to say. Therefore, in addition to the dialectical differences between different communities, such translational difficulties represent another factor that led the participants to use different terms when referring to the Atayals' heroes. Nonetheless, even with the risk of mistranslating – and therefore misreading – the hero concept and what it represents culturally, the consistency of the heroic descriptions from the participants seemed to minimise the possible deviations whilst analysing the change of cultural values and its relationship to their religious conversion. Consistency in the connotations was also my evaluation

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<sup>22</sup> Deriving from an experiment designed to enhance the workers' efficiency in the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne plant near Chicago from 1924 to 1933, the Hawthorne Effect in sociology refers to 'the possibility that a subject in a research project may change his or her behavior in a positive manner simply as a result of being aware of being studied' (William H. Jr. Swatos, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> To avoid misunderstanding, the phrase 'heroic history' here is used not in Marshall Sahlins' (1985) sense of treating history as constructed by the heroic stories (as in his study of Fiji islanders), but to refer to the history of heroes.

standard while dealing with the construction of the cultural conceptions in different dialectical terms.

### 2.2.3 Images

As Jay Ruby (1996:1345) pointed out, ‘culture is manifested through visible symbols embedded in gestures, ceremonies, rituals, and artifacts situated in constructed and natural environments’. Visualising anthropology is not just doing ethnographic studies with fancy recording technologies or skills. It is another powerful way to embody the socially constructed cultural reality other than the textual, interpretive ethnographic script (Grimshaw, 2001; Ruby, 1996). In order to have a better understanding of the culture, religious shift and hero images among the Atayal people, I took pictures and videos – what Edward Hall (1959) referred to as the ‘silent language’ – to generate a first-hand ethnographic document without translation (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005; Heider, 1976; MacDougall, 1998). Photographs are also an efficient way to preserve the cultural traditions (Bank, 2001; Bateson and Mead, 1942; Edwards, 1992). What is understood here by ‘the silent language without translation’ is a way of communicating reflexively on the culture behind the camera. The pictures taken in this study therefore serve as a cultural discourse between those who are filmed and those who see the film, and lead to a further comprehension of the cultures of both the viewers and those being viewed (Hall, 1959; Ruby, 1996).

The images collected during my fieldwork were also used as an illustration of the representation of cultural and religious transition in addition to the textual description. Where applicable, I used a semiotic approach to analyse the images to demonstrate how social culture explains, or justifies, the social values and beliefs (Barthes & Lavers, 1972; S. Hall, 1997). As Geertz (1973:89) stated, culture is ‘an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life’. The composition of the image, and the denotation and connotation of the symbols contained in the image, thus served as the focal point during the analytical stage, with further comparison to the social reality.

#### 2.2.4 Historical literature analysis

As anthropology originated from studying isolated small – and usually oral – societies (Evans-Pritchard, 1962), early anthropological studies were often criticised for ignoring the analytical importance of historical data, or even treating historical data as merely the “background” to the ethnographic present rather than ... an integral part of the anthropological analysis’ (Silverman, 1979:413). However, as I mentioned earlier, a ‘field’ should be constructed geographically as well as historically to comprehensively understand every event in its own context, and the historical approach has now been established as a vital method to expand and deepen the comparative work of anthropological studies (Cohn, 1987, 1996; Kahn, 2011; Sahlins, 1981, 1985; Silverman, 1979).

Therefore, whilst in the field I also visited the local Township library many times to study the historical documents of the early Atayals left by the Japanese researchers in the early twentieth century, as well as the ‘history’ of Bienjing village and its neighbouring areas compiled by the local government. While the (translated) Japanese studies mostly focused on recording the customs and religious practices of the Atayals, the modern ‘records’ of the local history by the government, along with the commentaries on the impacts of different events, were rather partial and with strong subjective speculations from the authors. I also visited the local priests to have access to their missionary records. With these different documents and sometimes the controversial descriptions in them, I tried my best to determine their validity by using David Pitt’s (1972) old but practical principles of assessing: the social status, intelligence and language skills of the observers; the possible attitudes towards the people being observed; the content that was and was not written in the documents; the target audience; the writer’s motives; and narrative styles. In addition to the above principles, I often wrote down questions and thoughts developed from reading those historical documents and did a cross-examination with the participants to get a more objective – or at least more plausible from the emic perspective – reading of the past, and from there generated my further analysis (Robson, 1993; Sturtevant, 1966).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> In his article *Anthropology, History, and Ethnohistory* (1966), Sturtevant gave the example of how the objectively ‘suspicious’ account of the Seminole leader Coacoochee (Wildcat) escaping from prison by using a medicinal root to reduce his weight to get through the bars actually sounded correct



### **2.2.5 Data storage**

Ethnographic data can ‘easily be miscoded, mislabelled, mislinked and mislaid without careful data management plans’ (Wolfe 1992:293, as quoted in Murphy & Armitage, 2009:232). Hence, all the data collected in the course of my fieldwork were recorded, coded and categorised through Nvivo (Bazeley, 2007; Edhlund, 2008). As the interviews were conducted in Mandarin, verbatim transcripts of the interviews were firstly produced in Chinese, and then translated into English. Although the task of translation was quite time consuming, which meant that sometimes I had to hire someone to do it for me, this bilingual transcription could guarantee the original reference during data analysis.

## **2.3 Analytical methods**

From collecting data to generating solid cultural knowledge, ‘analysing’ is the unavoidable path to the end of the journey. Yet, without a clear purpose and method, one can easily get lost in the numerous analytical theories and approaches. William Miller and Benjamin Crabtree (1992) thus classified these different analytical approaches into four types by the categorisation style of the collected data: Quasi-Statistical Analysis, Template Analysis Style, Editing Analysis Style and Immersion/Crystallization Analysis Style. As to which method one should use, Miller and Crabtree (1992:24) suggested that it should depend on the methods and types of the collected data, the purpose and research questions of the study and its known knowledge, and the intended readers of the study. Seeing that this study interrogates the relationship between the Atayals’ religious practices/concepts and the transition of their identity, as well as how my participant observation in the field generated various types of data, I took the interpretive, flexible approach of the Editing Analysis Style to redefine the cultural/religious categorisations in the Atayal society, and then demonstrate the interrelations between the collected data (Miller & Crabtree, 1992).

That being said, my analysis did not always come after the data was collected, but often happened at the same time as the data collecting process, and even

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to the Seminole people, since they believed in the magical effects of the root. The Seminole people’s belief in magic thus leaves their construction of history not in the true effect of that medicinal root, but in an emic explanation of the past.

influenced the direction of the next stage of data collection during the later period of the fieldwork. Since my field notes and interviews were usually organised right after they were taken, reflections and sometimes intuitive interpretations came with them and thus also became vital in structuring the questions and topics of the following conversations. Following T. F. Carney's (1990) 'Ladder of Analytical Abstraction', this process was usually the main method for me to develop and test my propositions in constructing the early explanatory and conceptual frameworks for the issues I discovered (see figure 5 for Carney's Ladder of Analytical Abstraction). Carney's analytical ladder also provided guidance on how to organise and examine my understanding of the Atayals throughout the process of analysis.

## LEVELS

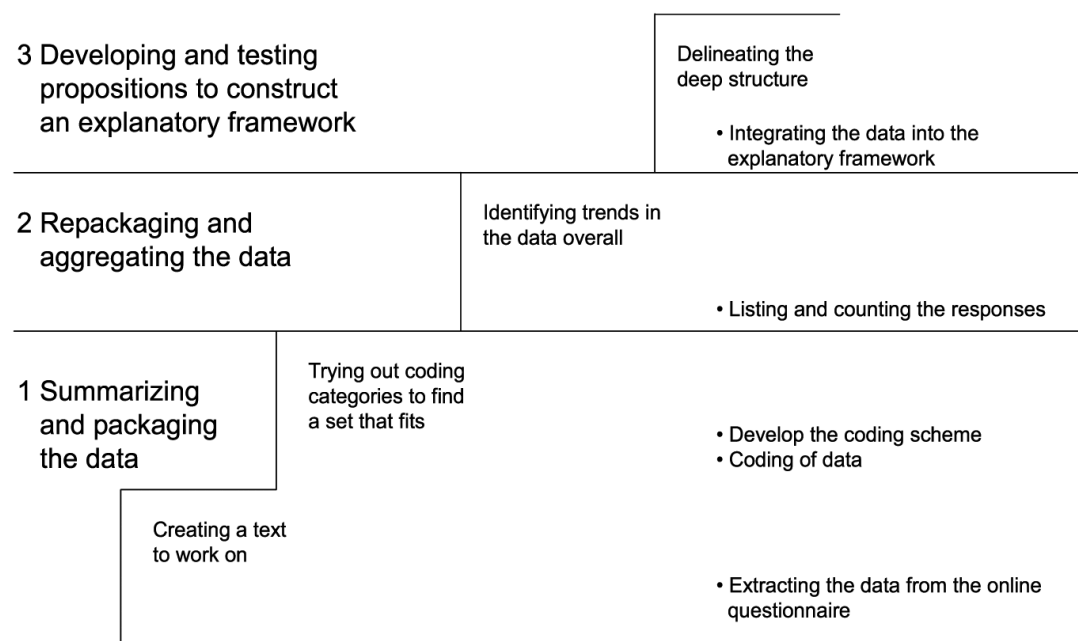


Figure 5, T. F. Carney's (1990:128) Ladder of Analytical Abstraction.<sup>25</sup>

### **2.3.1 Analytical framework**

As this study covers different issues of the Atayal society, from the religious conversion to the transition of cultural and ethnic identities, with the analysis I also employed different approaches to better reflect the nature of these aspects in the

<sup>25</sup> The picture is taken from the attachments to the journal article *Understanding customer knowledge sharing in web-based discussion boards: An exploratory study* (MKO Lee, 2006), which can be found at the following address: [http://www.emeraldinsight.com/content\\_images/fig/1720160304002.png](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/content_images/fig/1720160304002.png) (last accessed on 14 May 2014).

Atayal society. In the interviews I used narrative analysis to investigate the participants' experiences of the past (Riessman, 1993). This allowed me not only to construct the Atayals' memories of the past and their understanding of the world through 'what' they said in the interviews, but also to depict the interactions between the subject's self, the other and the continuity/discontinuity of the past by 'how' they spoke – that is, the 'emplotment' – in the interviews and conversations (Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993). However, none of these constructions of (religious) identity would be solid enough without the support of historical, cognitive and practical evidence. That is why I also applied a cognitive approach and Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice to form the arguments in this study. Therefore, in the following sections I shall further elucidate the cognitive analytical framework I used to engage with the questions raised in the introduction chapter.

### **Cognitive approach in anthropology**

In his article *Culture, perception and cognition* (2000), Tim Ingold challenged the ethnographical method in the anthropological traditions by pointing out the ontological gap between the researcher and the subject being researched – that is, the unpredictability and unobservability of the subjects' perceptions. In the British social anthropology tradition, Ingold added, the Durkheimian research paradigm has always focused on the 'social structure' rather than 'sensations', for personal feelings and perceptions are believed to be socially constructed, while sensations are private and individual. The Durkheimian paradigm in British social anthropology, therefore, values public, collective 'representations' of society instead of psychological premises (Ingold, 2000). North American cultural anthropology since Franz Boas, on the other hand, pays much more attention to individuals, whilst its achievements and methods are 'essentially psychological' (Ingold, 2000:159). American cultural anthropology then developed into two schools in terms of the relations between culture and behaviours. One suggests that cultural mechanisms should be investigated from social and public domains (Geertz, 1973b, 1993b), whereas the other, led by scholars such as Ward Goodenough, argues that 'cultural cognition can only take place by way of shared conceptual schemata lodged in the mind of individuals' (Ingold, 2000). The latter also led to the rise of cognitive anthropology in the 1960s. However, the trend of treating cultural knowledge as imported by the mind rather than given in experience also risks ignoring the dynamics and interrelations between

individuals and society. In order to react to such a distinction of seeing the society as an objective 'other', Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1994) put forward his idea of 'habitus' and the theory of practice to re-engage human behaviours with culture, arguing that cultural knowledge itself is generated 'in the course of people's involvement with others in the practical business of life' (Ingold, 2000:162).

Bourdieu's theory of practice not only deeply influenced the anthropological studies of cognition, but has also been extensively applied to different researches of human society. Jean Lave (1988), for example, combined the idea of cognition with the practice theory, and saw schema and social activities as a process of interaction. Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn (1997) also developed their arguments on the practice theory. In *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning* (Strauss & Quinn, 1997), they not only applied Bourdieu's view of schema and practice to investigate the meanings of social activities and phenomena, but also introduced connectionism, the mechanism that connects mental status to contextual experience, to deal with the internalisation of experiences in shaping cultural meanings. This approach explained how cultural meanings could be changed or transformed by subjective interpretations, whilst the objective world could maintain stability (Strauss & Quinn, 1997), and thereby avoid the danger of complete idealism or social determinism in understanding cultural transitions.

As I pointed out in the first chapter, in many cases religious conversion has different meanings and is viewed differently by the people converted – as a 'historical action' by the Piro people (Gow, 2006), for instance, or as a way to access better health by the South Africans (Pauw, 1980). I tend to view religious conversion by following Liana Chua's (2012) idea of 'positioning' in the networks of social, political and moral relations. This kind of positioning to a great extent echoes the recent cognitive views (such as connectionism) and Bourdieu's practice theory of culture: that is, how individuals internalise the culture during social practices; and how culture, in the meantime, becomes the reference for social practices. Just as Juan Sebastián (1998) saw religious conversion as 'not about our bodies, but about how we act toward others' (as quoted from Gow, 2006: 238), such a cognitive approach inspired me to better connect the issue of religious transition with the change of identity through the interactions between the self – ethically, individually and culturally – and the other. Here, Chua's 'positioning' echoes Bourdieu's idea of 'participant objectivation', which not only influenced how I view the interrelations

between the villagers' identities and their conversion to Christianity, but also how I 'positioned' my relations with the subject. I constantly introspected my role in the village not only as a researcher, but also as a Han person, a woman, and a non-believer to their God. In most instances I tried my best to be 'one of them', as an ideal, classic anthropologist should be, but at times I also felt strongly the unbridgeable chasm that lies permanently between the subject and the researcher, due to the fact that I was a Han person, a female researcher, and an outsider in the patriarchal, Christianised Atayal society. Such awareness, however, also made me more sensitive to, and able to see, how the politics, networks, cultural gaps and relationships operated between the tribes in the village, as well as between the tribes and their churches. It was interesting for me to observe how and when I was rejected/accepted, as I have mentioned earlier, after participating in certain events. This then drove me to embrace the idea of being both the emic and the etic researcher, and to discover how my position was actually 'flowing' from one to the other in different circumstances, due to the different mentalities of the villagers.

Cognitive analysis thus became a critical approach throughout this study. I not only used some concepts from psychoanalysis to analyse the social mentality of the Atayals, but also employed theories of 'memory' to examine the (dis)continuity of the cultural self through the relations between the religious transition and social practices, as well as the subjective conceptions of 'ethnicity' and 'religion', while dealing with the shift of identity and religious practices. Moreover, to further analyse the production and reproduction of the Atayals' modern identity and its relation with religious transition, I applied Bourdieu's (2000) reproduction theory to re-examine the interactions between the macro social structures and micro individual practices in the shaping of identity. These exercises might seem varied, but they all aimed to comprehensively present the dynamics between the religious transition, social practices and identity of the Atayal people.

## **Chapter 3**

***Gaga:***

**The Foundation of the Atayal Self**

### 3.1 The beginning of the journey

Scenes of chopped timber in piles outside households are common in Bienjing village, one of the administrative districts in Miaoli where different Atayal communities reside. It is common and yet vital for any community – such as the Atayals – living in the mountains to use timber for cooking, building, lighting and setting warnings, as well as heating and drying huts. It had never occurred to me that such a common scene would be the key that sparks my understanding of their self-identity, especially when most of the Atayals now see it not as inspiring, imbued with cultural significance or possessing any sacredness, but as trivial as any other pile of wood. Then one day, one of the research participants, the daughter of a *tumux* (chieftain), described what it was like to be a child in a *tumux*'s family more than forty years ago:

We were always sent to look for wood, not just any timber, but the certain kind that lasts much longer for burning. I don't know what it is called, but I would know it when I see it. These timbers would be used for the fire set in front of the house, where the people would get together after their work in the fields; and as a gesture of respect, they would take showers before they came. People would come to my grandfather, sit around the fire and talk about all kinds of things as my brother would fill everyone's cups with wine, but mostly they came to seek advice and blessings from him. My grandfather never replied with just words. He would sing his replies and blessings in certain ways, but sometimes I would not understand because the language was more difficult than the words used in day-to-day life. The fire had to be on all day, every day, and if it was raining we would take it inside to the house; I don't quite know why we had to keep the fire all day, but it was part of our *gaga*.

From timbers to *gaga*, I learned later that every matter in their life, regardless of how minor it seemed at first view, was significant. Such things represent the way of life inherited from their Atayal ancestors, passed on for centuries solely by oral means, and, more importantly, the way they build their identity.

### 3.2 The key of the ‘Atayalness’: *gaga*

In the previous chapter I briefly introduced the idea that traditional Atayal culture was based on the two core ideas of ‘*gaga*’ and ‘*utux*’. ‘*Gaga*’, literally meaning in the Atayal language ‘the words left by the ancestors’, included all the social and personal aspects that formed the regulation of ethics, law, social culture and even personal behaviours, and had multiple meanings in different contexts (Dai, 2005; Li, 1964; M. Wang, 1990, 2003). On the other hand, ‘*utux*’, from the anthropological viewpoint, was the reference for all the ‘supernatural’ beings in Atayal culture. It was the spirit that protected and punished the Atayals from harm and sins and it was what they would become after their death (Lee, 1982).<sup>26</sup> As the *gaga* was ‘the words left by the ancestors’ that defined the Atayal life, Atayal people believed that any violation of the *gaga* would be punished by the *utux*, whilst a *tayan* – which means a ‘man of Atayal’ – who followed ‘the right way to live’ would be rewarded, and become part of the *utux* after death. As the bearer of the Atayals’ religious belief, *gaga* performed a distinctive function, as Geertz (1973) sees it, of tying religious symbols to culture: it connected the world view with the way of living. For example, when seeing someone who was being rude to others or walking without the right posture, people would say this person ‘had no *gaga*’; judging a *tumux* or talking about the cultural authorities was also evaluated by how well one knew the *gaga*. In other words, *gaga*, in its broadest meaning, not only served as the guidance for the bodily ‘hexis’ (Bourdieu, 1977) that regulated the Atayals’ body language, but also formed the ethos – ideals, values and way of living – of the Atayals that distinguished them from others. *Gaga* thus not only served as the origin of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) of the Atayals, but also shaped the Atayal ‘self’ – the locus of experience, including experience of their own someoneness (Harris, 1989). In the following sections I shall elaborate in detail how the *gaga* operated in Atayal society, and the way in which it constructed their self-conception.

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<sup>26</sup> Some explanations of the two ideas can also be found in the *Atayal-English dictionary* by Søren Egerod (1978).



### 3.2.1. Gaga and Atayal social organisation

As I pointed out in the first chapter, the idea of the *gaga* in traditional Atayal society has been the biggest puzzle in the studies of the Atayal. However, early views that treated *gaga* as both the social units and the social norms (Chen, 1973; Li, 1964; Y. Huang, 1999) have recently been challenged and subverted. Led by the Atayal native researcher Heitaay-Payang (2002), recent anthropological studies of the Atayal are keen to see the idea of *gaga* as merely the reference for the system of Atayal customs, social and moral norms, and the view of the world, rather than referring to social organisation (Huang, 2000; Ma, 2002; M. Wang, 2003). Such changes in the understanding of *gaga* were not only influenced by the recent emergence of Atayal native researchers, but also resulted from improved knowledge of Atayal social structures. K. C. Huang (2000) first pointed out that the idea of *gaga* being the reference for social organisation was a misunderstanding of the relation between *gaga* and '*niqan*'. '*Niqan*', originally meaning 'the place for eating', was the basic social unit – the earliest form of an Atayal 'tribe' – and referred to a group of people who, literally, 'eat together' (Heitaay-Payang, 2002; K.-C. Huang, 2000). Different researchers have had different views on the formation of the traditional *niqan* – for example, the Japanese anthropologists Kojima Yoshimichi (IOE Academia Sinica, 1996) and Mori Ushinosuke (1996) saw it as a political or economic combination of a group of people, whilst the Taiwanese researcher Li Yih-yuan (1963) regarded it as based on kinship. Nonetheless, the function of such groups was the same as what were deemed to be social units of the *gaga*: in addition to 'eating', living and working together, every member of the same *niqan* would share the same *gaga*, meaning that when one member violated the *gaga*, the others would also have to take the punishment from the *utux*. That is, any sickness or misfortune, which was believed to have resulted from the punishment of the *utux*, must have come from the violation of *gaga* of the members in the same *niqan*.

Since *niqan* defined the Atayals' foremost geographic and social boundaries between 'us' and 'others', and therefore formed the basic social unit of the Atayal society, it is vital to clarify the reference, formation and functions of such a group. Although the term *niqan* in today's Bienjing village is usually deemed to refer to direct familial relatives (clan), which might explain why Li saw it as based on kinship,

some other participants were keen to agree with the Japanese anthropologists' traditional definition of *niqan*. In this alternative understanding, *niqan* is described as a group that was formed by people who volunteered to be bound together (and therefore could leave the group at their will), and need not be related.<sup>27</sup> Such a view of *niqan* was taken in K.-C. Huang's (2000) study. In later paragraphs, in the discussion of the operation of the *gaga*, I will demonstrate how I am more inclined to take this definition of *niqan* as the Atayals' pre-Christian self-identification, rather than treat it as being based on kinship. Apart from that, my interviews and past studies have confirmed few facts about *niqan*. A *niqan* was usually formed when there was a need for more land – it could have been due to a growth in the population, the worsening of production conditions, or simply a falling-out with members of the old *niqan* (Okada, 1959). An elected leader (*mrhuw* – after the Japanese period, the term used was *tumux*) would lead the volunteers in their search for cultivable lands where they could settle down. This new *niqan* therefore marked the separation of *gaga* from the original group. Although there could still be interaction between the old and the new *niqan*, such as sharing manpower or the spoils from hunting, the duties of labour and the religious contract – the duties of *gaga* – with the old *niqan* were dismissed (Heitaay-Payang, 2002; K.-C. Huang, 2000). As a new *niqan* would no longer share the labour and religious responsibilities of the old one, sometimes a new *niqan* would also be established to avoid the risk of sharing the religious punishment of the 'troubled' members of an old *niqan*, and thus to maintain social order (K.-C. Huang, 2000; Okada, 1959). Though they cannot be understood as evidence of *niqan* being formed out of mere political or material interests, these characteristics of the division and establishment of *niqan* show that in early Atayal society, blood ties were not the only factor in forming self-identification (K.-C. Huang, 2000).

The neighbouring *niqan* (two or more) would then form a '*qalang*' – an alliance of self-defence and hunting based on the territorial adjacency, which became what we know as a 'tribe' (部落) today. To manage affairs between each *niqan* in the *qalang* and between other *qalang*, a chief leader would be chosen from all the *mrhuw* of the *niqan*, but his duties were limited to communications between these organisations. The internal affairs of each *niqan* would still be handled by their own *mrhuw*, and the religious ties (in the sense that members of the same *gaga* would share collateral

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<sup>27</sup> Yet kinship could be a strong (and even unavoidable) driving force in volunteering. Meanwhile, marriages held within the *niqan* also often expanded the scope of kinship, which might have resulted in the term *niqan* being developed to refer to a clan family.

punishment from *utux*) would also remain within the *niqan*. However, the distinction between *niqan* and *qalang* has changed since the Japanese period primarily because of the relocation policy. Serving as a means to better control and reduce the threat from the allied armed forces, this ‘relocation policy’ not only broke up the alliances of *niqan*, but also damaged the order of the Atayal society by forcing the emigrating groups to merge into the ones that resided at the relocating lands. The new relocation area, meanwhile, was also usually marked by the Japanese government so that the police could easily monitor their daily activities. The original *qalang*, therefore, in many cases were either reduced or disassembled, and the scope of *gaga* (that religiously bound together a group of people) sometimes caused confusion amongst the new relocated groups (K.-C. Huang, 2000). The Valus ‘tribe’ in Bienjing village, for example, is the group of people resulted from the relocation policy: it was formed by one original *niqan* (that belonged to Narima) and three other immigrating *niqan* from Hsinchu ordered by the Japanese government. After years of marriage and interactions between these groups, the geographical boundaries of *niqan* have diminished, but the *gaga* still remain as the reference for the identity of the people of Narima, Sawig and Valus in terms of religious and tribal affiliation. The complicated usage of the term *gaga*, as we see here, has troubled many researchers even up until now and shall be addressed later. However, to the people who are living with it, *gaga* is never confusing, nor a ‘concept’:

‘Only those who are not *tayan* need to know and understand what *gaga* is.

We *tayan* live by it; we don’t learn it’ (Participant HBY, age 73).

### 3.2.2 *Gaga*: the way of life, or a way of life?

Similar to Michael Moerman’s research among the Lue people in Northern Thailand (Moerman, 1965), the Atayals’ use of the term *tayan* to refer to themselves is the ‘emic category of ascription’ of the Atayals’ identity, as well as what marks their social boundary of self from others (Barth, 1969). Such titles not only serve as the identity of the Atayal people in the village, but also frame how they identify others who share the same (or at least similar) ideas of religion and customs. *Gaga*, therefore, could be said to provide the ‘common origins’ (Astuti, 1995b; Barth, 1956, 1969) of their ethnic identity. Instead of calling the belief in *gaga* and *utux* a ‘religion’, the Atayal people would say it meant ‘way of life’, whilst being a *tayan* was to follow

such ways and customs that had been passed down for centuries. A facial tattoo (*ptasan*, see figure 6), for example, was what proved women and men to be true persons of Atayal. The eyes of the *utux* were drawn on their face, not only to serve as a form of blessing, but also to watch over – symbolically or religiously – these followers of the *gaga*. For men, it was the symbol that marked the skills and braveness expected of manhood; for women, it signified the qualifications of weaving, farming and housekeeping of wifehood – as being a proper wife was seen as the ultimate destiny of every Atayal woman. Those who failed to acquire such skills would be denied tattooing, and sometimes would even be banished from the tribe, as it represented great shame not only to the family but to the whole community. Even those who suffered infections during tattooing would be taken as having done things that violated the *gaga*, resulting in punishment from the *utux*. It was believed by the people that only on the completion of this facial tattoo could a person become a real *tayan* (*tayan balai*) and be able to be recognised by the *utux* after death and be part of it.

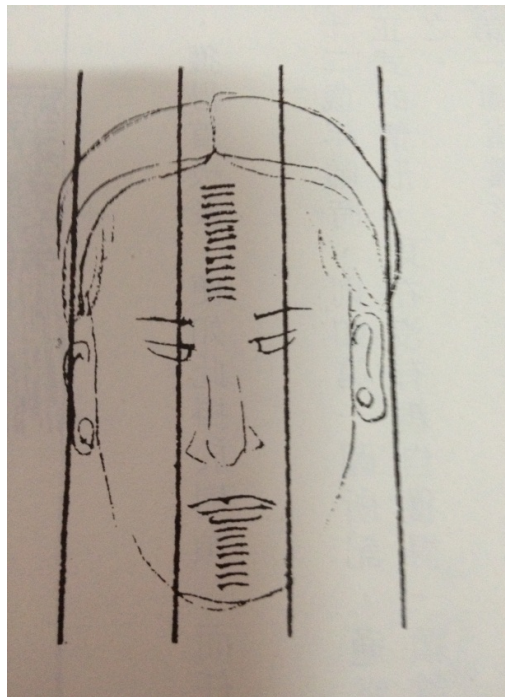


Figure 6, a drawing of the facial tattoo pattern for young men's initiation from a Japanese official in 1902. (Source: Taiwan Historica)

As the tattoos were situated on the most visible part of the human body, they became the symbol of the Atayal communities. It is worth noting that even though the patterns of the facial tattoo were basically the same, the early Atayal people would still be able to tell easily which communities others were from by the tattooing details (Ma, 2002). The facial tattoo thus symbolised three different social meanings: adulthood, religious blessing and cultural/ethnic identity. Only those who lived up to the *gaga*, and who possessed such a symbol of social approval, could hold the title of a *tayan* (Ma, 2002).<sup>28</sup> However, the subtle differences of facial tattoos were usually missed by early anthropologists. Whether it was Ino Knori, who first saw the people with this kind of facial tattoo as one ‘ethnic group’ in the Japanese period, or academics such as Wei Hui-lin (1965) in the early stage of the KMT rule, the ‘Atayal’ were usually described (and recognised) as one single group of people who have this kind of facial tattoo. The modern education system, based on this ‘anthropological knowledge’, greatly influenced the conception of the Atayal ‘ethnic group’ in the Taiwanese society. Such social influence is thus often seen as the major factor that resulted in the Atayal people’s modern perception of their own ethnic identity (Ma, 2002).

Indeed, if we look at how the villagers reacted towards the issue of the independence of those ‘supposedly’ Atayal sub-groups – the Seediq, for example – we can see how the social construction of ethnic identity operated. Due to their cultural similarity to the Atayals in terms of their religious system, origin myths and customs (including, and especially, the facial tattoos), the Seediq were first categorised under the Atayal family by the Japanese anthropologist Ino Kanori in the early twentieth century. This recognition continued for more than sixty years. Due to the language difference and the distance between living areas (the Seediqs live in the north east of Taiwan, whilst the majority of the ‘Atayals’ reside on the west side), the Seediq people started to advocate independence from the Atayal group in 2003, and were officially declared as an independent aboriginal ethnicity in 2008 (Ryo, 2011). Interestingly, when I raised this topic in Bienjing village, most participants would take it personally and more or less saw it as an insult to ‘the unity of the Atayals’.

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<sup>28</sup> One of the participants even told me that this facial tattoo served a similar purpose to the ‘ID Card’ during the Japanese rule, which was not only critical amongst the Atayal tribes in creating communal identity, but also vital for the Japanese government in monitoring the activities of the Atayal, as they were ‘notorious’ to the Japanese for being ‘rebellious’, whilst there are also a few of the villagers who believe the facial tattoo was forcibly imposed by the Japanese in order to distinguish the aborigines from the Japanese in the event of riots.

Many of the participants believed that the Seediqs should be called *tayan* instead of ‘*Seediq people*’, since that would indicate that they have the same ancestors, the same origins, and the same ‘way of life’ – despite the fact that the Seediqs have never referred to themselves as ‘*tayan*’, but only as ‘seediq’.<sup>29</sup>

These conflicts of identity not only happen to those who consider themselves outside the bigger Atayal family, but also exist amongst the tribes who see themselves as *tayan*. The people of the Sawig and part of Valus are usually called the ‘*kilhaku*’ by the local aborigines – mostly the Narima people, who have resided in the area for more than a century. Literally, *kilhaku* means ‘leaf’.<sup>30</sup> This name came about in the 1920s, when the Japanese government teased these people, who were ‘so poor that they could only eat leaves’, and called them ‘the group of leaves’ (‘*ki-ha*’ in Japanese means the leaves of a tree), an expression which contained a sense of contempt for the *kilhaku*’s impoverishment and lack of ‘manners’. The term ‘*kilhaku*’ not only indicates the Narima people’s perception of those ‘immigrants’, but also suggests that the *kilhaku* ‘have less culture’, since ‘they needed to move from time to time’ and are different in every way, from language to personality – even though they all call themselves ‘*tayan*’ (person/people of Atayal). ‘They are different from us’ is the foremost impression of the two tribes of the Narima people. Such a perception shows the latent fracture of identity that has long existed in the Atayal culture, which considers each *niqan* as an independent ‘self’ from ‘the others’ that are constituted by the law of the ‘*gaga*’, the authority of the ‘*tumux*’ and the belief in ‘*utux*’. A similar idea of such *niqan*-based identification can also be found among the pre-Christian *Seediq* people:

During the *Saramao* (the name of a *qalang*) Incident in 1913, a woman who married into *Saramao* from *Taroko* (another *qalang*) was attacked by the people of *Taroko*. She held her head with both hands and cried: “I am married here from *Taroko*, please don’t kill me.” Yet her head was still chopped off by the *Taroko* people. When a woman married to other *niqan*, she would no longer be related to her old *niqan*; though her own relatives might not kill her, she was nothing but an outsider to other members in the

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<sup>29</sup> The issue of the Seediq being separated from the Atayal will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>30</sup> Although most of the locals do not know why these people are called ‘*kilhaku*’, they would identify them by the language they use; one participant also suggested that ‘*kilhaku*’ means ‘relocater’ – indicating they have been relocated to the current place from somewhere else.

old *niqan*, and anyone could have her beheaded during a war (Kubura, 1991:65).<sup>31</sup>

Such conflicts of identity thus further raise the issue of categorisation: not only the most influential categories of the Taiwanese aborigines set by Ino Kanori, but also the classical concepts of ethnicity that put ancestry and blood ties as the primary standards of kinship that greatly influenced today's ideas about ethnic groups (Shimizu, 1991). As I pointed out in chapter one, recent research has revealed the multiple factors influencing the formation of ethnicity (and thereby ethnic identity) in different contexts (Joycelyn Linnekin & Poyer, 1990). Whether it was subjective 'ascription' (Barth, 1969), groupings out of political or material interests (Banton, 1983; A. Cohen, 1969; Hechter, 1986), or even more 'objective' factors such as language (Fishman, 1972; Fought, 2006), culture (Malesevic, 2004) and common ancestry (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996), these elements of ethnicity are more or less socially constructed (A. D. Smith, 2009), developed by certain historical contexts. The Mendelian and Lamarkian models of the ethnic identity of the Oceanic people, as Linnekin and Poyer point out in *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific* (1990), serve as proof of how living places and behaviour are at least as important as biological parentage in becoming the member of a group (Linnekin & Poyer, 1990: 8). This is why, when trying to understand the discrepancy and consensus of identity of an 'ethnic group' like the Atayal, it is probably best to focus on their **actions** rather than genetic ties in order to see how *gaga* is understood and operated as 'the way of life' in both pre-Christian and modern times. This might serve as a better angle to analyse how the location of the tribes not only set out the geographical boundaries of groups, but also marked differences in behaviour, given that the development of different *gaga* within a group would lead to the development of different behaviour.

### 3.2.3 The nature and formation of the *gaga*

When speaking of whether and in what ways the *gaga* was different in earlier times, many of the elders in the village recalled their childhoods with their parents as 'nothing but making a living'. What they usually were not aware of, or did not mention while describing the life of the past, however, was that these living

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<sup>31</sup> In Kojima Yoshimichi's (1996) research of the Atayals, he also recorded that during wartimes, the Atayal people were forbidden to contact the relatives in the enemy *niqan* without permission.

experiences involved many religious practices, including praying rituals before sowing, looking for good signs from the behaviour of birds when hunting, and all sorts of taboos regulating almost every aspect of a *tayan*'s life. One of the villagers added:

When I was little, my friends and I would throw stones at chickens just for fun. One day, an elder saw us playing, and then we were chided by him for 'being disrespectful to the land' ... I didn't know why we couldn't do that, but it is our *gaga* anyway; **in the past**, when an elder said things to you, you had to listen, this is *tayan* ... these *gaga* do not mean religion, but sometimes, most of them are superstitions.

For this male villager, this memory serves as a lesson in 'how we *tayan* should act', even though he neither fully understands the reason why, nor recognises that it has anything to do with religion. However, what he meant by 'superstitions' still refers to something religious – something that a *tayan* should not do otherwise it will 'upset' the Christian God. These complicated ideas and relationships between 'religion', *gaga* and *utux* shall be clarified later. What is certain here is that the traditional construction of identity of the Atayal people was not only 'religious', but also contained what Sahlins (1985) called the 'performative structures' (as quoted in Linnekin & Poyer, 1990) that are embodied in the practices of *gaga*, rather than coming out of the biological ethnic paradigm.

However, *gaga* were not universally adopted by all Atayal tribes even though they did share some basic ideas. Many differences can be found in Bienjing village's handling of these matters, but this was caused not only by the separation of living places of the people, but more importantly by the production of new *gaga*. A new *gaga* was usually drawn up when something bad happened to the tribe (such as disease or natural disaster) and all those rituals in the traditional *gaga* had been practised and did not seem to help. The *tumux* and the elders of the tribe would gather together to discuss a solution, and to see if such a solution was permitted from the signs of the *utux*'s will, the chief would go to a quiet place (usually on a mountaintop) to seek signs in which the solution was granted approval. The new *gaga* would become part of the traditions passed down by the tribe to the next generation, and this led to the diverse presentation of *gaga* amongst the Atayal people. In other words, *gaga* was not just a religious reference for living principles which was independent



from the transition of society, but a dynamic mechanism that changed along with the transformation of social norms and categories, to cooperate with, and adapt to, the influences of external or natural forces. With the separation of living places and the varying leadership provided by the *tumux* of each tribe in early times, the *gaga* could also differ from one tribe to another, and thus formed the various local identities amongst the Atayal groups. Therefore, since *gaga* was the reference for living principles, the conflicts between local identities might be said to have resulted from actions – or the guidelines for those actions – rather than differences in language, living places or ethnicity. In this way, *gaga* should be considered more as ‘a way of life’ rather than ‘the (universal) way of life’ for all Atayals. In the same way that Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989, 1994) sees the relationship between habitus and individuals, the interactive relationship between *gaga* and the actions of the Atayal people is thus socially constructed in certain contexts.

Before going into further discussions of Atayal identity, it is worth mentioning Rita Astuti’s studies of the Vezo in Madagascar in 1995: in the studies, Astuti (Astuti, 1995a, 1995b) points out the insufficiency of the ethnic theories that anthropologists and sociologists have used to explain and examine the identity of a non-Western group such as the Vezo. With the Vezo people, the mode of identity is based not on the ties of ancestry, nor cultural similarities in groups, but on learning and practising their ways of life. This ‘way of life’ made the Vezos not ‘a kind of people’, but ‘the group of people’ who followed such a path of practice, which subverted the Western idea of ethnicity (Astuti, 1995b). The Vezo people, to borrow Linnekin and Poyer’s (1990) term, are an exact example of the ‘Lamarckian’ model of identity. However, these people of Vezo also view the deceased ones as having a different model of relatedness – they became ‘one kind of people’ (*raza raiky*) that are related to the ‘kinds’ of their own descent groups (Astuti, 1995a, 2000). In other words, the deceased of the Vezo would have a ‘Mendelian’ model of identity rather than the Lamarckian one for the living. Such modes of identity in one group, Astuti (1995b: 464-465) further stated, reflected how researchers should focus on the ‘ethnotheories’ of different cultures rather than fixing them into ‘ethnic theories’.

Astuti (1995a, 1995b, 2000) and Linnekin and Poyer’s (Joycelyn Linnekin & Poyer, 1990) researches provided the insight for investigating the Atayal people’s identity. The Vezo people’s construction of identity for the living explains how

traditional Atayals formed their identity according to a Lamarkian model – the practices of *gaga*. However, from the Bienjing villagers’ disputes with the Seediqs, we spotted how modern Atayals’ identity today has become an ethnic construction – that is, a Mendelian model – based only on blood ties or the ‘common origins’ (as the *gaga* is understood today) of the shared cultures or ancestors. As the traditional Atayal identity was framed, on a certain level, religiously, we can speculate that such a structural change in identification and in the construction of the self – the idea of the *gaga* – from a Lamarkian to a Mendelian one must have involved a certain religious transition. This is also why the conversion to Christianity of the Atayals would become critical since, as *gaga* was both the bearer of their religious belief and the origin of the habitus, such a transition not only means that they changed or modified their religious world, but also points to shifts in the classificatory and practical structures of the Atayal society.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I illustrated the significance of *gaga* to the Atayal people, as well as clarified the usage and meanings of the term *gaga* under different contexts in Atayal tradition. In being the ‘way of life’ of the Atayals, *gaga* first of all not only established the regulations of the Atayal life, but also served as the foundation of their world view, which was based on their religious belief in ‘*utux*’. In other words, being the ‘doctrines of life’, *gaga* constituted the habitus of the pre-Christian Atayals and regulated their social practices, whilst the content of it could also be modified through religious rituals when encountering changes of circumstances. This coping mechanism thus made *gaga* not one universal set of ‘the way of life’, but various ‘ways of life’ that adapted to the changing environments of different groups in different areas. Meanwhile, *gaga*, as the reference that marked off the basic social unit – *niqan* – in the Atayal society, was also what defined the Atayals’ foremost sense of belonging. As I have demonstrated, although today’s Atayal ‘tribe’ was based on the idea of the traditional ‘*qalang*’, the alliances of *niqan*, the traditional division between ‘us’ and ‘others’, were actually established on the range of a ‘*niqan*’ – a group of people who shared the same *gaga* and bore religious responsibility together. It was such significance of *gaga* that defined what a ‘person of Atayal’ – *tayan* – was. To be accepted as a *tayan*, an individual had to practise the

*gaga* so that he or she could be marked with the symbol of *utux* on the face. As the facial tattoos of different *niquan* would have different details, the tattoos not only revealed the cultural identity of the Atayal people, but also, in the same way that the *gaga* differed, indicated the ethno diversity even within what is known as ‘the Atayal group’ today.

In the modern Atayal society, however, we see how *gaga* is much more narrowly understood from the Atayal people’s reactions to the issue of the Seediq’s independence. In this case, we see not only how *gaga* is now deemed by the Atayals to be the ‘common origin’ for all the groups who share similar ideas in life, but also how such an understanding of the *gaga* limited the imagination and recognition of identity. The mode of identity resulting from this modern conceptualisation of the *gaga*, moreover, is no longer by the Lamarkian practices of life, but by the Mendelian inheritance of blood ties. Although, in today’s Bienjing village, we can still notice the influences of the Lamarkian model in the attitudes of people towards each other (such as the way the Narima see the *kihaku* people of the Sawig and Valus), the fact that such attitudes would follow even with the people’s change of *niquan* indicates the dominance of the Mendelian model of the modern Atayals’ conceptualisation of identity. Since the traditional Lamarkian model of identity was based on the practices that served the purposes of religious belief, the transition in the identity of the modern Atayals to the Mendelian model thus indicates the ‘secularisation’ of the idea of the self, from following sacred practices to secular ties of origin. This forces us to ask: what kind of religious transition triggered this structural change of identity? To tackle this question step by step, in the next chapter I will investigate the idea of *utux* – the religious object of the pre-Christian Atayals – and how it is connected to the *gaga* that shaped both the world view and the sense of belonging in the traditional Atayal culture.

## **Chapter 4**

*Utux:*

### **The Sacred Nature of the Atayal**

In the last chapter I pointed out that the Atayals' ethnic identity changed from a Lamarkian construction to a Mendelian one along with the transition of their understanding of the *gaga*. I have also introduced the religious nature of *gaga*, and described how it was the source of habitus, the reference of social units and the sacred guidance of life. Therefore, in order to understand how religious transition could influence the Atayal people's social and cultural structures, and thereby the conceptualisation of the identity of the self, we should further investigate the relation between the Atayals' religious views and *gaga*. In this chapter I try to present, and clarify, the idea of *utux* with regard to the concept of personhood and the religious beliefs in the traditional Atayal culture in order to analyse the relationship between the body, rituals and religious structure. In this way I hope to establish the Atayal people's view of the sacred and secular worlds, and how such a view would affect their idea of who they are.

To understand the Atayals' conversion to Christianity, we must first discuss the religious subject – *utux* – in the traditional Atayal culture. In order to understand the idea of *utux* in the Atayal tradition, it might be best to look first at the concept of a 'human' in Atayal society. Generally a *tayal* (person) was believed to be formed of *hei* (flesh) and *utux* (spirit, or soul). *Utux* was also believed to be something that was only acquirable by humans, and that was immortal and stored in the eyes and body (K.-C. Huang, 2000), or some say in the blood (Y. Li, 1963). Human life was formed by the combination of *hei* and *utux*; sleep was the temporary departure of the *utux*, and death the permanent separation of the *utux* from the *hei* (K.-C. Huang, 2000). Such a relationship between the spirit and body in some early scholars' eyes was recognised as the idea of 'living' and 'dead' *utux*. However, recent studies have offered evidence that the existence of *utux* is constant, and the only difference between 'living' and 'dead' *utux* is where it resides, not its status. That is, the *utux* resides in the body when a person is alive, and goes somewhere else when the person is dead (Y. Watan, 2005). The divergence in categorising the status of *utux* might be due to the perceptions in different Atayal groups, but either way, the belief that *utux* is immortal is common to all Atayal groups.<sup>32</sup> The immortality of the *utux* was reflected

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<sup>32</sup> For example, the Gogan Sbtunux groups in Taoyuan believe the idea of *utux* can be divided into the '*utux mhuqil*' (the *utux* of the dead) and '*utux tminun*' (the *utux* of the living); whilst the Klesan people in Ilan consider *utux* as the 'spirits of the dead', and *rutux* 'the only existence in the universe' (IOE

in the naming customs in the Atayal culture: they do not have surnames, but use the father's name followed by a given name, and that given name may sometimes be the name of an elder who has just passed away. The idea of the immortality of the *utux* was not only revealed by the combination of the names of the deceased and newborns, which symbolically connected the ancestors to the living, but was also embodied in the belief that dreams were the visits of ancestors, as well as in the practice of burying a person with the tools they used in their daily work. This meant that the deceased one could still continue their 'living' in the world without the *hei* (K.-C. Huang, 2000).

*Utux* was viewed as a constant existence that resided only within or outside the *hei*; its status would not change when the human body perished. The power of *utux*, on the other hand, could only be revealed without the physical container of flesh. In human bodies, *utux* as the soul does not have particular power; whilst upon its 'permanent departure' from the body, it becomes the supernatural beings that the Atayal people would either worship or fear. In the early systematic record of the concept of *utux* in Atayal culture, the *Report on Barbarian's Customs* compiled in 1915, the Japanese anthropologist Yoshimichi Kojima documented that the terms *utux*, *rutux*, *otox* and *lutuk* in the Atayal languages referred to the spirits of the deceased, and sometimes also to an invisible god (IOE Academia Sinica, 1996). Given the relationship between the *utux* and the *hei* outlined above, such multiple references seem to be understandable according to the cause or means of death in the Atayal culture. When an Atayal person was killed, committed suicide, accidentally or violently died, or died alone, his *utux* would become a *yaqil utux*, the evil spirit that causes all kinds of wicked occurrences. Those who died in their beds, on the other hand, would become the *blaq utux* – the 'good spirits' – and join the other ancestors to look after the Atayals (K.-C. Huang, 2000). Thus, it is comprehensible that the *utux* was seen as 'the only religious subject' of the Atayals (IOE Academia Sinica, 1996). Also, as people have different strengths, *utux* was said to be strong or weak, but not every *utux* had the power to influence people (Huang, 2000; IOE Academia Sinica, 1996; Li, 1963; Watan, 2005).

It was believed that the *yaqil utux* were not able to cross the '*hongu utux*', which is manifested through the rainbow. Translates as 'the bridge of *utux*', '*hongu utux*'

refers to the bridge that link the worlds between living people and deceased ancestors, where the other side can only be reached by the ‘good souls’ (K.-C. Huang, 2000). One of the elders in the Bienjing village told me that in the past, people believed that whenever a rainbow appeared, someone must have passed away, and their *utux* was crossing that bridge to get to the other side – the side of the dead. There was also a story telling how each Atayal soul would have to cross the rainbow bridge. Under the bridge there was a giant crab (which was only visible to the deceased) guarding the gate to the world of *utux*, and those who failed to follow the *gaga* while they were alive would fall off the bridge and be eaten by the crab. *Yaqil utux*, however, were the spirits that would not even have the chance to reach the rainbow bridge due to the wrongful status of their death, and hence they were alone in death and left out of this world completely. Some of the villagers today still believe that these *yaqil utux* wander around the world of the living and that they sometimes cause trouble for people. The influence that the way in which a person dies has on the status of the ‘spirit’ is similar to the Han culture. The spirits of these ‘bad deaths’ are what the Han people called ‘ghosts’ (鬼) (Shih, 2010), a term which the modern Mandarin-speaking Atayals would use to describe the idea of *yaqil utux*. Like the ‘ghosts’, *yaqil utux* are homeless and hungry, and would wander on earth to haunt the living for their needs (Shih, 2010). Therefore, when consuming food outside their houses or in the woods – or hunting in the case of this study – the Atayals would put a small share of their food, or simply spill some wine, on the ground. This would serve not only as a gesture of respect, but also as an offering for these wandering *utux* to prevent them from causing disturbances. These disturbances – such as illness, hiding animals from the hunters or frightening people – were not necessarily deadly, but they might require the *mahuni* (shaman) to fix them if they became serious. However, *yaqil utux* was never the centre of the Atayals’ religious belief. This was not only because the numbers of *yaqil utux* were relatively small, but because the evils brought by them were seen as nothing more than malicious tricks compared to those who decided the fate and death of the Atayals: the *blaq utux* (Y. Li, 1964) and the *utux kayal* (Huang, 2000; Watan, 2005).

There is almost a consensus amongst Atayal studies scholars that the *yaqil utux* is of trifling importance in the traditional Atayal religious system; however, no such agreement has been reached with regard to the *blaq utux*, which is generally recognised as being the centre of Atayal religious belief. The classic, and the most

cited, research on the concept of *utux* is the work of the Taiwanese anthropologist Li Yih-Yuan, who proposed the Atayal *utux* as the only reference for all the supernatural beings, and suggested that the Atayals do not have hierarchies or ideas about the roles of supernatural beings, such as gods or ghosts, but only distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ *utux* or spirits (Y. Li, 1963, 1964). According to Li, *Utux* could refer to both the entirety of the spirits of the deceased ancestors, and to individual spirits. In other words, it could refer to both good and evil spirits, as well as to the *utux* which resides in an individual’s body. Meanwhile, as the Atayals believed that the world is watched over by *utux*, and that all the good souls would go and join *utux* after they passed the ‘rainbow bridge’, Li and his followers saw *utux* as the collective will of the good souls, which not only has the power to decide the Atayals’ destinies, but is also the origin of life and power (K.-C. Huang, 2000; Suzuki, 1992). This conceptualisation of the *utux* was criticised by some Atayal-native researchers and others for overlooking the **context** in Atayal language, which isolated the usage of the term from the sentence structure and resulted in the misinterpretation of the Atayal religious system. The criticism also includes how the studies, such as that of Li, misrecognised the *blaq utux* as the Atayals’ ultimate being, the *utux kayal*. *Utux kayal* is seen by the Atayal natives not only as predominating over the universe and having created the world, but also as the unique and highest religious subject that is **different from** the *utux*, which only has the power on the wellbeing of people (K.-C. Huang, 2000; Y. Watan, 2005).<sup>33</sup>

These distinctions matter because they are not only critical in understanding the process of the religious transition in this study, but also key to grasping how the relationship between sacred and secular worlds shifted together with the religious construction of identity in Atayal traditions. Therefore, the following sections focus first on the relationships between humans, *utux* and *utux kayal* in Atayal society and religious rituals, and second on the religious structure in the Atayal culture before and after their embracing of Christianity.

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<sup>33</sup> One of the criticisms of the misrecognition of the ideas of *utux*, *utux kayal*, and *blaq utux* in the previous Atayal studies is that the Han researchers tended to understand the Atayal culture and beliefs using the concepts of Han religions. Nonetheless, there are still similarities to be drawn between the Han and Atayal religious ideas for in both cultures, the relationship between the living and the deceased was a ‘contract’ with reciprocal benefits. *Utux*, when referring to the spiritual beings that exist after people died, might be seen as similar to the Han concept of ancestors (祖先), *yaqil utux* to ghosts (鬼), and *utux kayal* to gods (神). Such comparisons between the ideas of the two cultures were sometimes rejected by the Atayal participants, as they have been seeking to set themselves apart from the dominant Han society.



## 4.1 The sacredness in the idea of *utux*

The idea of *utux* – or, more precisely, what the signifier *utux* should be signifying in terms of a religious subject in the traditional Atayal culture – has long been the centre of debate when discussing the topic of Atayal tradition. Most Atayal studies (Huang, 2000; Li, 1963; M. Wang, 1990, 2003) agree that for the living people *utux* refers to their soul, but how it should be understood as the existence of a religious subject still remains controversial. Based on the idea of *utux* coming from human souls, K. -C. Huang (2000) believed that *utux* referred to the souls of the deceased ones, and that the *utux* who successfully crossed the *hongu utux* to the *utuxan* (the world of death), though different from the *yaqil utux*, held the same religious status as those wicked spirits that would bring their curse or help to the living out of ‘personal needs’. Following the Durkheimian path, Huang (2000) thus argued that such a human character of the *utux* and *yaqil utux* should be categorised as the subject of the Atayals’ shamanism, since the practices regarding both *utux* and *yaqil utux* were mostly utility oriented and lacked moral pursuits. The only ‘sacred’ – meaning being respected, not ‘feared’ as the Atayals felt with the *yaqil utux* – religious subject of the Atayals to Huang is the *blaq utux*, which is described as the ultimate reality, and the only possible source of morality and justice in Atayal society. According to Huang (2000), since the *blaq utux* is what the Atayals usually refer to when speaking of *utux* in a non-contextual circumstance, the *utux* in this sense should be written as *Utux* to distinguish it from the shamanic aspect of the term. Huang’s statement is seen as bold not only as he subverted the classic interpretation of the Atayal culture as having no distinction between god and ghosts, but because he further established the hierarchy of the religious system that marks off the division of the sacred, the supernatural and the secular worlds of the Atayals (S. Wang, 2001). Huang’s analysis is based primarily on the plural form of *utux* in Atayal language and his own field study and was intended to overturn the idea that *utux* referred both to all supernatural beings and to individual supernatural beings – an idea which had been prevalent amongst Taiwanese anthropologists since the 1960s. As to distinguishing between the roles of god, ancestors’ spirits and evil ghosts, Huang’s research and other studies opposed to Li’s are founded on events – *maho* and *smyus* – in which Atayals memorised and made offerings to their ancestors. In the following sections I shall elaborate on these

two ritual practices to further examine the essence of the idea of '*utux*' and its relationships with Atayal people, and to clarify the nature of the traditional Atayal religious practices and how they defined the nature of Atayal identity.

#### 4.1.1 Maho: offering to *utux*

*Maho* is also called *pslkotas*, *ubong* or *smyus* in different Atayal dialects.<sup>34</sup> Though the name may vary, the meaning and process of this event are mostly the same: it was the biggest and the last religious event of the Atayals' annual ritual cycle, and it was held after the crops were harvested to express gratitude to the *utux* for the abundance and peace over the last year, and to pray for another good one to come. The details of this event may be different in the Atayal tribes according to their own *gaga*. However, the point of this event in most Atayal tribes was to call the deceased ancestors back to enjoy the tribe's offerings, which would usually be rice cakes, raw meat from hunting and rice wine that was made from the harvests of the year just before the event. It was believed that this would satisfy the *utux* and that they would therefore bring blessings to the Atayal people. A traditional *maho* of the Narima people in 1915 was documented thus:

On the day before worshipping, wine, rice cakes and meat would have all been prepared in the households of the tribe, and the people would stop working on that afternoon. At the dawn of the worshipping day, each household of the tribe would put their wine in a bamboo tube, the rice in a bag, stick the meat, cakes and tobacco to offer to the spirits of the dead on the point of a bamboo, and take the bamboo to the house of the host to meet with others. Every one of them would wear new white clothes made from ramies, and they would go to a specific place on the outskirts (which would be different every year, and on that custom it is the same as with the savages in Da-Ke-Kan), yelling the names of the deceased family such as '*yutas*', '*yagi*', '*mama*' and '*yata*' as they stick the bamboos into the soil and pour the wine on it; then they would throw away the rice and go directly home without looking

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<sup>34</sup> Though the communities in this study refer to it differently, the term for this event in the official documents in Miaoli is *maho*, whilst in some groups of this study, the term '*smyus*' means another religious ritual; and so this study takes '*maho*' as the title for such an event.

back. Every household would have their own feasts and enjoy the day afterwards, with no need to work.<sup>35</sup>

(IOE Academia Sinica, 1996: 391)

The *psani* (taboo) of this event, for example in Huang's study of the Atayals in Hsinchu (2000), involved a variety of prescriptions and proscriptions. The *pslkotas* place could not be revisited again within a year, or the people would be cursed or get ill. Offerings to the *utux* could not be too great, as in the *utuxan*, 'the less (of the things from the world of the living) means the more' – in other words, giving one bag of rice would be generous, while giving ten bags would be deemed to be stingy by the spirits, would offend the *utux* and might result in adversity to members of the *niqan* (clan). Finally, the place should be left without looking back, as otherwise the people would 'see the ghost'.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Smyus: offerings for atonement

*Smyus* is also called *tambalay* in some of the Atayal villages in Miaoli, where *tambalay* means 'to subside' (Y. Watan, 2005). For the Atayals, the *utux*'s punishment for violating the *gaga* would be manifested in three ways: a poor harvest, unsuccessful hunting and illness (M. Wang, 2008). Therefore, some of the most important religious rituals are related to the treatment of diseases (Li, 1963; M. Wang, 2008). The religious treatment of disease is called *hmagup* (Huang, 2000; IOE, 1996; Watan, 2005), whilst *smyus* is the ultimate solution if such disease involves the anger of the *utux*. The timing for holding a *smyus* was usually related to the violation of *psani*, which resulted in illness or death in the community, and offerings needed to be made to subdue the anger of the *utux*. Unlike the *maho*, which was held by an elected host or the *mrhuw/tumux* of the tribe (who had to be male), *smyus* usually had to be conducted by the *mahuni*, a female who would give instructions for how to pacify the anger of the *utux* and to atone for one's sin, according to the visions from the *utux* in dreams. In Yupas Watan's study (2005), the traditional *smyus* of the Mesingaw group was recorded as:

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<sup>35</sup> The terms 'yutas', 'yagi', 'mama' and 'yata' are not names, but respectful titles for elderly people.

<sup>36</sup> The *maho* event in Huang's field is called *pslkotas*, in which 'ps' is the progressive tense in the Atayal language, as well as having the meaning of 'offering'; whilst 'lkotas' means 'deceased ancestors'. The term *pslkotas* thus literally means 'offer foods to the deceased ancestors', according to Huang.

*Smyus* is *mai yurak* (to give offerings). When doing a *smyus*, the offerer would bring the offerings outside in order to talk to the *utux*. For example, when a shaman is performing the sorcery (*hmagup*), she will tell the visions in the dream to the family of the patient; if she saw a chicken or a pig in her dream, the patient's family has to make the offering with a chicken or a pig ... the will of the *lyutux* (*utux*) is told to the shaman by the visions in dreams, to tell how the patient should atone for his sin with the offering of a chicken, or other things (required by the *utux*) ... So, put simply, *smyus* is a ritual performed for the patient to the *lyutux* (Y. Watan, 2005).

In Huang's view, *maho* presents the same relationship between the human and the *utux* (the ancestors) as with the *yaqil utux*: firstly, that both of them are 'negotiable' by offering food, and might bring adversity if they fail to satisfy the *utux*; and, secondly, that the ritual of offering foods to the *utux* in *maho* does not originate from 'sacred respect', but is undertaken out of 'fear' of the spirits of the dead in the same way that they fear the *yaqil utux* (K. C. Huang, 2000).

This typically structuralist stance makes Huang see the Atayals' relationships with both the *utux* and *yaqil utux* as ones that require an exchange of favours, which, according to Huang's quotation of Paul Tillich (2001), is in essence a performance of humanity that would not be 'sacred' and 'separated' enough to be the object of faith. To Huang (2000), such negotiability of *utux* not only meant the impossibility of establishing the absolute ground of morality, but also denied the possibility of the deceased ancestors being the 'sacred object' of Atayals' religious belief. *Utux*, as argued by Huang, should thus be seen as the subject of magic rather than religious belief.

Despite the fact that the phenomenological aspect of terms such as 'faith', 'belief' and 'religion' is still being debated in Huang's and other Atayal studies, these terms are used to refer to the spiritual construction that is based on the confrontation between the 'sacred' and 'profane' spaces in one culture. Such a statement of the essence of faith – which is usually seen as the core of religion, the 'sacred' being that

is independent from the ‘profane’ – comes both from the Durkheimian (1961) tradition and Christian experience. Durkheim (1961) distinguished the category of sacredness from magic as serving the group rather than individuals. So, we should bear in mind that, since *gaga* provided the reference of morality and social stability in the Atayal society, the rituals subjected to *utux* that came with the violation of the *gaga* would be voided – theoretically – if *utux* was not the arbitrator of *gaga*. We should also note that the *smyus*, which was held to atone for the ‘sin’ of violating *gaga*, has a meaning similar to what Mary Douglas (1984) understood as a major function of religious ritual: to purify polluted social orders. As sickness was regarded by the Atayals as a result of violating *gaga*, such illness also symbolised, in Douglas’ (1984:44) terms, the ‘dirt’ (defined as ‘matter out of place’) in the established social orders. *Smyus*, therefore, instead of being seen as a way of ‘bribing’ the *utux* to restore health, was more of a sacred action to restore the ‘polluted’ social environment by atoning for one’s sins. Meanwhile, since *gaga*, as a whole guiding system of life, had never been seen as containing two different domains of ‘religion’ and ‘magic’ (just as Durkheim (1961) acknowledged that not all cultures distinguish these two categories), such a boundary between the ‘sacred’, ‘magic’ and the ‘profane’ in the previous studies has therefore to be reviewed by a careful investigation of the relationship between *utux* and the Atayal people.

## 4.2 The relationship between the Atayal people and

### *utux*

The primary relationship between the Atayals and *utux* may be revealed by the method of burial in the Atayal tradition. In Bienjing village, when a person died, the family of the deceased would put the body into a squat position and bury it in a hole dug under/next to the person’s own bed, and cover it with wood or stone planks.<sup>37</sup> The squat position symbolised that the deceased could still ‘watch over’ the family, as lying down would block their view; and if the bed of the deceased fell down afterwards, that meant the deceased one had already passed the *hongu utux* to the *utuxan* and become *utux*, and the rest of the family needed to find a new place to live,

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<sup>37</sup> To confirm a person’s death, the Bienjing villagers would put the body in a bag and make sure the bag was not moving due to struggles. The person could then officially be pronounced dead.

as the house would become the living space for the deceased in another world. Such a custom explains why Atayals had to be much more careful in showing respect to *utux* when out in the woods, as they might step into some other *utux*'s territory left years ago without knowing it. For Atayals, burying the dead in the house was a gesture meant to continue the bond between the living and the dead before the latter left for the world of the spirits. Offerings would still be made daily as if the person were still alive. Such a bond would carry on even after the dead person had already arrived at *utuxan*, when offerings could only be delivered to the world of spirits through rituals such as *maho* or other daily religious practices, including '*bazi*' – the practice of spilling food or wine on the ground as offerings for the *utux* before every meal.

This bond between *utux* and the Atayal people was a relationship beyond the simple boundary of the sacred and profane and could be as sacred as in the rituals of offering making, and as 'down to earth' (as 'profane' in Durkheim's terms) as in other circumstances. In Wang's study (2008), when illness or bad luck lingered after the atonement ritual (called *smyus* in this study but with a variety of names depending on the Atayal dialect), *utux* would sometimes be blamed or threatened using the words of the *mahuni*, such as: 'if you do not make him recover from sickness, I will slash you just as slashing a reed' (M. Wang, 2008: 5). By these offering-making rituals and the Atayals' attitude towards *utux*, M. Wang (2008: 6) concludes that the relationship between the Atayals and *utux* was a 'contract' with mutual benefits. This was indicated by the prayers recited in *maho* from her field of study in Miaoli:

Our ancestors made a contract with you (*Lyutux*), and today we present you with the harvest. Please bless our people to have an abundant year with no sickness, and we wish to share our joyfulness with you again at the same time next year.

This 'contract' was regulated in the articles of *gaga*, whereby practising the rituals and living principles of *gaga* could not only construct the relationship between *utux* and the Atayal people, but also distinguish the identity of the tribe members (M. Wang, 2008). Thus, when someone broke the conditions in the contract (*gaga*), *utux* would have the right to inflict the punishment; and when adversity happened even though the *gaga* had been properly followed and practised, the Atayal people would also vent their discontent by cursing *utux* for the fact that the relationship between *utux* and the Atayals was complementary (M. Wang, 2008) rather than one of

opposition, such as that between the sacred and profane. However, although the participants in this study were not aware of such threatening action being allowed and saw it as disrespectful to *utux*, they also stated that *utux* was ‘the spirit that follows the people and protects the people, and it is neither ghost nor god’. They held that the relationship between them and *utux* was ‘just like families’, in which ‘parents (*utux*) and children (Atayals) would have expectations of each other’. If any of them broke the trust of the other, things could always be mended, as, ‘after all, they were our ancestors’. Of course, there are also many participants who could not explain what the relationship between *utux* and the Atayals was (or is) like; to them, ‘*utux* is *utux*’ – it was the protector, the punisher, the origin of *gaga*, and it could be scary, sacred or as benevolent as their own family.

Meanwhile, as there is a spatial distinction between ‘the living’ and ‘the spirits’ marked by the ‘*hongu utux*’, the world of the living for the Atayals was never independent from the world of the spirits. The blessing or punishment of *utux* were revealed through a good harvest or through individuals suffering from all kinds of illness, and rituals were held either to appreciate the patronage or to pacify the anger of *utux*. With these forms of the *utux*’s judgement on the Atayals’ way of life, the visits of the *utux* in dreams, and practices to avoid the tricks from *yaqil utux*, the existence of *utux* would be better interpreted as living ‘along’ with the Atayals rather than ascending to a status beyond them, even though it seizes people’s respect and achieves a certain level of ‘sacredness’. Through the ritual practices, not only could Atayals substantially and spiritually benefit from showing respect and offering foods to the *utux*, but the authority of *utux* would also be confirmed, by which the bond between the *gaga*, *utux* and the Atayals’ society could be strengthened. Thus, the relationship between the Atayals and *utux* is not one of opposition between the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’; it is a closely intertwined relationship that regulated the Atayals’ life through the dialectics between the *gaga* and *utux*.

As well as the *utux* that was closely integrated with the Atayals’ daily lives, there was also a religious existence that dominated the Atayal people’s idea of cosmology – *utux kayal*. The existence of *utux kayal* has been a controversial and abstract, though rarely discussed, idea that possesses an obscure status in the life of the Atayals. When Huang (2000) uses the term *utux kayal* he means the subject of the religious ritual *maho* – the only being that has the power to bring blessings and punishment to people. He further suggests that when the Atayals spoke of ‘*utux*’, what they meant was this

*'utux kayal'* rather than the spirits of the deceased ancestors. Yet in Yupas Watan's research (2005: 26), it is described as 'the invisible, unexplainable, infinite supernatural mighty power that is evident in every Atayal's mind'. Here, the meaning of *utux kayal* before the Atayals' conversion to Christianity is almost impossible for the participants to explain without recourse to Christian concepts such as 'God', 'Father' or 'Lord'. However, one thing we can be certain of is that to the Atayals, *utux kayal* has always referred to a 'greater power' than *utux*, to the 'almighty', the 'origin of the universe'. However, while they 'just know this for sure', they could not accurately point out what the *utux kayal* actually does in their life. As YH – the son of a *tumux* – states, 'it was seldom being brought up in our life in my grandfather's time'. *Utux kayal* has always been a distant and respectful – or purely sacred – idea to the Atayals. Watan (2005) also specifies that *utux kayal* was the factor the Atayals referred to when they failed to understand why things such as natural phenomena, death or serious illness happened. They would say it was the *utux kayal*'s idea and must be purposeful. However, the *utux kayal* – this 'ultimate reality' of the Atayals – was somewhat detached from their daily lives. It was their final explanation for all the unanswerable questions, the absolute truth and essence of every being, and in some Atayal native clergies' eyes, it was what the ancestors taught of '*tminu utux*' – literally 'the spirit of weaving', meaning the one who 'weaved' all Atayals' lives. But unlike *utux*, which was closely tied up to every aspect of life, there was never any form of religious worship towards *utux kayal*:

No, we did not worship *utux kayal* ... why? I heard that it was because they (the ancestors) did not know what *utux kayal* really was; they knew there was this great power, but they did not know its name, or how to worship it. But anyway, our parents, and their parents before them, all told us that *utux kayal* has always been there. Although they seldom mentioned it, they knew it was there and respected it from the bottom of their hearts. Then when the church came, they told us the name of it, so now we call it Christ or God, or Father, but it means the same power that created everything in the world.

(Participant SF)



In Watan's study (2005), a few participants stated that they would bring the problems to *utux kayal* when their *tumux* or tribal councils could not reconcile the conflicts between individuals or groups, an impasse often resulting in a duel to the death between the two parties. The one survivor would then be on the side of justice by the judgement of *utux kayal*. Nevertheless, contrary to that observation by Watan, the elderly participants in Bienjing village support the idea that *utux* was the object of such an act, and that *utux kayal* served as more of a symbolic than a substantial reference in seeking the driven cause of beings, even though the existence of *utux kayal* was never merely metaphysical. There is the possibility of the meanings and roles of *utux* and *utux kayal* being lost, or confused, in the past or during the theological translation to Christianity. However, on the other hand, unlike the 'ultimate reality' being the subject of worship in other religions for its mysterious and unspeakable character, the absence of worshipping activities to *utux kayal* was precisely due to the Atayals' intellectual insufficiency in grasping the possible forms of religious service. The lack of rituals or any other form of 'returning to the sacred' – as Durkheim (1961: page number?) put it – thus provides evidence of how unimportant *utux kayal* was not only in the Atayal people's daily lives, but also in their religious experiences.

Therefore, even though *utux kayal* was actually the key idea of the Atayals' construction of the world – the great power that was believed to 'weave' the lives of each Atayal from the day they arrived in the world until the day they left – what this weave looked like still relied on the blessings from *utux* by practising *gaga*. As Watan states in his study, 'the goodness and badness of luck or fate was depending on the environmental conditions and (ly)*utux*'s blessings' (2005: 32), when this *tminu utux* 'put the wisdom of *gaga* into Atayals' minds along with its weaving of Atayals' lives' (2005: 42), and the society would only be peaceful and harmonious by strictly following *gaga*. Therefore, the practice of *gaga* – that is, the daily practices – was in fact the practice of the sacred wisdom bestowed by *utux kayal*, and overseen by *utux*. The life of a *tayan*, we could further say, was the life of sacred practices.

## 4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I started by looking at the concept of the 'person' in Atayal culture in order to make clear the primary connection between *utux* and the Atayal people, and

raised the main dispute in the Atayal studies over the role and functions of *utux* through the two indicative rituals: *maho* and *smyus*. The reason why it is crucial to establish the status of *utux* in the Atayals' religious system is that it involves not only the later theological and cosmological translation of their conversion to Christianity, but also the nature of *gaga* – and thereby the nature of the Atayal identity. The 'nature of *gaga*' refers to the problem of whether we should divide the traditional life of the Atayals into 'religious' (sacred) and 'secular' (profane) domains. Drawing on both my own ethnography and previous studies, I then analysed the concepts of *utux kayal*, *utux* and *yaqil utux* in the Atayal religious practices to clarify the relationships between these supernatural entities and the Atayal people. I also argued that *utux kayal*, though believed to be the origin of the world, functioned merely as the final answer of the Atayal people's cosmology without possessing actual religious power **on people**, since there were no rituals to interact with or experience the sacredness of its being. In other words, *utux kayal* was a cosmological concept rather than a religious subject in the pre-Christian Atayal society. This does not mean that *utux kayal* did not possess a religious status in the pre-Christian Aatayal culture, nor the traditional Atayal cosmology lacked religious elements. On the contrary, the religious might of the *utux kayal* was revealed through the existence of the world itself, indicating the sacred nature of the Atayal's cosmology. The functions of sacred religious ritual, such as bringing about the collective conscience and collective identity (Collins, 2004a, 2004b; E Durkheim, 1961) and restoring and purifying the (polluted) social orders (Douglas, 1984; V. Turner, 1967), were embodied through the rites subjected to *utux*. From 'bazi' in daily life to *maho* each year, these rituals of *gaga* not only confirmed and reproduced the Atayal people's world view (which was created by the *utux kayal*), but also indicated the sacredness of *utux* in Atayal society, since *gaga* was the 'sacred contract' between *utux* and the Atayal people. The sacredness of *utux*, I argue, did not mean that the *utux* belonged to a 'sacred world' that was independent from a 'secular' one. On the contrary, as living in the world was to practise the *gaga* made with the *utux*, and every action a *tayan* made would involve the status of the *utux*, the Atayal people's early life should be seen as one of religious practices. Or further, since there were only good deeds (following the *gaga*) and bad deeds (breaking the *gaga*) that formed the order of the traditional Atayal world, we might even say that the pre-Christian Atayal world was characteristically ethical and thus inherently sacred. Meanwhile, the construction of the identity of a *tayan*, in

addition to the distinguishing of the *niqan*, was also based on the religious practices of *gaga*.

## **Chapter 5**

### **In the Changing World: Challenges to the Atayal traditions**

In the last two chapters I introduced the ideas of *utux* and *gaga* in the traditional Atayal society and showed how they were central to Atayal culture. From the categorisation of groups to the practice of being a *tayan*, what we have seen is not just how the dynamic relation between *utux* and *gaga* regulated the Atayals' life, but, more importantly, how their identity was shaped by the nature of their religious practice. Constructed by the unique relationship between the *tayan*, *utux*, *utux kayal* and *gaga*, the traditional world of the Atayal was one in which both secular and sacred domains were integrated, where each earthly action was part of the sacred contract with *utux*, each earthly matter was a sign from *utux* and each person was a container of *utux*. In this chapter, I will investigate the changes that led to the current, modern development of Atayals' notions of self-identification from political, economic and religious perspectives. As such, changes involve the transition not just of the religious elements in the *gaga*, but also of the foundation of morality – the order of things – in the traditional Atayal world. Later in the chapter I will analyse the different factors involved in the Bienjing villagers' conversion to Christianity, and how they reflected the transition of their idea of the self.

As religious conversion usually involves different levels of social and cultural change (Jean Comaroff, 1985; van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers, 1985), it has been suggested that religious conversion should be treated as a process, rather than as a single transformative event (Rambo, 1993). Under such circumstances, conversion is therefore a 'recreated' worldview (Stromberg, 1990) that could reflect the transition of the political environment (Kipp, 1993), social structures (Robbins, 2004) and even ethnic boundaries (Shepherd, 1996). These aspects of the process of conversion have not only influenced the interpretation of religious life in the modern world, but have also revealed the elements influencing the conceptualisation of the converters' identities. As I stated at the end of the last chapter, the traditional Atayal world could be said to be an 'ethical world' with religious practices, since in the traditional *gaga* a distinction was made only between 'good' and 'bad' deeds and there were no other categorisations. This chapter is an examination of this view by means of an analysis of the reasons for the villagers' conversion to Christianity. By the end of this chapter, I hope not only to unravel the changes in the Atayal view of the world, but also to enable the readers to have a better understanding of the idea of 'secularisation' as it is used in the following chapters.

## 5.1 The first challenge: Japanese modernity and

### Shintoism

The first challenge to the traditional relationship between *utux*, *utux kayal* and the Atayals came when the Japanese took control of Taiwan. Following their declaration of sovereignty in 1895, the Japanese had to suppress a number of riots across the land, so their intervention in the aborigines' culture and customs was not seriously implemented until the 1900s (Fujii, 2001). This stage of work was to 'educate' and 'civilise' the aborigines, mostly the children, not only to be able to speak Japanese, but also to understand, and therefore implement, the Japanese work on 'modernisation', including ways of farming and animal husbandry (instead of hunting) and all kinds of modern infrastructures (Fujii, 2001). Young men were also forced to log and carry trees for the Japanese and were given only small payments to 'buy' their living materials. Atayal customs, such as facial tattoos and funeral traditions, started to be officially prohibited. Those who still tattooed their faces would be given an unaffordable fine or labour punishment, and might be forced to remove the tattoo by a medical operation (B. Watan, 2005). Many young Atayals accepted Japanese rule, or saw these changes as beneficial as a means of fitting into the bigger society; others chose to follow the Japanese order for other reasons. Some Atayals, however, chose to hide and kept practising their traditions in deeper mountain areas that the Japanese forces could not reach, as well as trying their best to preserve their pride in being a *tayan* in the most traditional sense.



Figure 7, an elder with traditional dress who had his face tattooed during the Japanese period in Miaoli.

There is not enough evidence to show how much the religious beliefs of the Atayals were altered due to such changes in their customs and economic practices, and how the Atayals' identity was affected by the prohibition of the physical identification of facial tattooing. However, the aboriginal policy of the Japanese in the late 1930s could be said to be one of the most influential factors in the presentation of today's Atayal cultures in Taiwan. From the late 1930s to the end of Japanese sovereignty in 1945, the Japanese government implemented a series of 'Japanisation' (*kōminka*) movements across Taiwan. The aim of this strategy was to destroy local identities so that Taiwanese people would identify themselves as Japanese, and also so that the Japanese could obtain more resources and materials from Taiwan to support their war across Asia (Fujii, 2001). The methods used to implement the Japanisation policy included the popularisation of Japanese language and ways of living, and the allocation of extra rations during wartime for those who adopted Japanese names. The most fundamental change, however, was the compelling introduction of Shintoism, the national religion of Japan at that time, to Taiwanese society (Fujii, 2001).

In the Taiwanese Han society, the conversion to Shintoism consisted of transforming traditional temples into Shinto shrines and burning down the Han deities

and ancestral tablets. The Japanese believed that such actions would establish faith in the Emperor of Japan and thus strengthen Taiwan's support of war (Chou, 2003; Tsai, 1991, 2007). As the Atayals never had religious institutions which would be similar to those of the Han and the Japanese people, the method of converting them to Shintoism began with the banning of 'superstitious' customs – the customs that failed to fit in with the cosmology of Shintoism, such as facial tattooing and home burials. Meanwhile, those who chose to convert to Shintoism would be given 'rewards' – meaning that the position of Atayal people vis-à-vis their Japanese rulers would improve considerably following their conversion. The Japanese considered the practice of home burials to be a 'hygienic concern', and the Atayals and other aborigines with similar customs were required instead to bury their dead in cemeteries that were planned by the Japanese near each aboriginal community (Chou, 2003; IOE Academia Sinica, 1996; Tsai, 1991). The earliest instance of Atayals following the Japanese practice of outdoor funerals was the Mstranan people in Northern Taiwan in 1918. By 1933, only 7% of Atayals still practised traditional indoor funerals and burial (Ishimura, 2010: 30).

In Miaoli, according to the participant whose family had been in the business of funerals for two generations, Atayal burials in the Japanese marked cemetery, at first, still put the body in the squat position. Later, some started to follow the Japanese and Han people's ritual of laying the body face up, and used thin planks as a simple coffin. During my fieldwork, some said that the reason for using wooden planks in the first place was simply a 'copy' of the way the Han and Japanese did it, but some also stated that it was meant to give the corpse a 'shelter' to stay in, in the same way that the body was buried under the roof in the old tradition. It wasn't until the late 1940s, when some converted Atayal Christians started to have Catholic funerals with names written on a simple cross as a tombstone, that the funerals began to be more complicated due to the frequent contact with the Han people. Most of the Atayals now follow the churches to which they have converted in the way that they hold their funeral ceremonies.

The impact of common cemeteries introduced by the Japanese is revealed through the experience of the Mstranan people (Ishimura, 2010):

... under the influences of their (Mstranan) superstitions, they tended to see entering the cemetery as a taboo, and therefore



refused to clean the cemetery. In order to teach them the idea of ancestral worship, (we) taught them that the cemetery is where the dead can live peacefully, and thus they have to keep it clean; when making offerings to the ancestors in this cemetery, they would feel happy and bring blessings for generations ... This year (we) advised them to hold *obon macri*<sup>38</sup> ... After that, the aboriginal people said they have always been afraid of the souls of the dead, as sickness and bad things were all caused by these dead souls ... that's why they would rather not pass by the cemetery ... But now, they have started to worship (the ancestors) with respect and love out of fear.

(From the Japanese police newspaper *Taiwan Police Times* (台灣警察時報), No.117, March issue, 1927; translated by Ishimura, 2010)

The Atayals used to see the place of burial as a space for the spirits of the dead, which should not be entered in order to avoid offending *utux*. However, when asked how such a religious-related change of custom affected the Atayals' view towards *utux*, most of the older participants gave quite similar answers:

... they (the ancestors) were scared (of the cemetery and the spirits around) and felt burying the bodies outside would violate the relation with *utux*, but then they would go worshipping to avoid *utux*'s anger ... it's all the same no matter where you bury the body. As long as you respect them (*utux*), they will bless you.

(Participant SSK)

This proves that the bond between the Atayal people and *utux* did not seem to change because they had to compromise on their funeral customs. For one thing, the traditional taboo was to fear and respect *utux*, whose anger, it was believed, could be pacified through offerings, even under its Japanese name of *obon macri*. For another, though the spirit of ancestral worship of this Japanese *obon macri* is different from

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<sup>38</sup> *Obon macri* is Japanese, and is a series of offering activities to 'welcome' and 'send off' the 'ghosts' of ancestors; in Japan it usually lasts for days.

the Atayals' idea of *utux* worshipping, it still fits the Atayals' logic of life and death, and thus could be easily accepted as part of the culture.

The '*obon macri*' is also what the Atayals nowadays refer to as '*obon*' and '*ubong*'. In Yupas Watan's study (2005), the establishment of common cemeteries and *ubong* altered, or invented, a lot of Atayal communities' traditions of such ancestral worship. Today, in many Atayal communities, *ubong* is actually the Japanese name for *maho*, which was changed under Japanese instructions in order to cope with the responses from the Atayals regarding the common cemetery. In some other Atayal tribes, there may also have been both '*ubong*' and *maho*-like practices, the former only acting as an ancestral memorial ceremony that never existed before the Japanese period. This is also why the place for *maho* today is mostly in the common cemetery and not some place distant from tribes, as was the case traditionally – including in Bienjing village.

#### 5.1.1 In between Japanisation and Christianisation

In today's Bienjing village, the ancestral worshipping activity is called *maho*, *ubong* or *pslkotas* according to the Atayal dialect in each tribe. The younger generations (those under the age of 40), who are used to speaking Mandarin rather than their mother languages, now usually call it '*zhulingji*' (祖靈祭), literally meaning 'worshipping festival of the ancestors' souls'. Its literal meaning almost defines the term *zhulingji*'s connotation to the modern Atayals today. It is a one-day activity of thanking *utux* for a good harvest by making offerings in the cemetery, and apart from the offering-making processes, it is more like a festive activity. The *zhulingji* of the Sawig tribe in 2011 was held a week before I entered the field. Luckily, one of the participants provided a copy of the project proposal of the activity, which was used to apply for funds from the government, in which it states the whole process of the activity, as follows:

1. 04:00: Gathering (males have to gather an hour before dawn, and head to the cemetery led by the elder of each clan, with offerings such as a small piece of fresh meat, a small piece of preserved meat, a few crops and wine).
2. 04:45: Worshipping (the host leads the elders of all clans to say prayers, to call the ancestors' spirits to come back and enjoy the good harvest).

3. 05:00: Calling the spirits of the ancestors (about dawn, taking turns to shout loudly to the ancestors' spirits, from the host to the elders, and ask them to come back and share our offerings, taking care of the offspring).
4. 05:05: Prayers (by the host, and others repeat).
5. 05:10: Make offering (the elders lead their men in making the offerings).
6. 05:13: Finish and return home.
7. 10:00: Dance performance (by the dance group of the tribe).



Figure 8 (left) and 9 (right), the dance group formed by the women in Sawig performing a Japanese dance (left) and a traditional Atayal dance (right) at *Zhulingji*. Provided by Tseng De-Hua.



Figure 10 (left), hanging the offering of hunted birds.

Figure 11 (right), saying prayers led by the host (in white at the front). Provided by Tseng De-Hua.

The process of *zhulingji* was not much different from the *maho* or *ubong* in the Atayal tradition; however, its religious significance has shifted to more of a cultural level rather than a belief, and the meaning of *utux* to the modern Atayals also appears

to vary from the traditional sense. Describing the nature of *zhulingji* as more cultural than religious does not mean that it no longer contains belief in the religiousness or spirituality of *utux*, but indicates the **degradation of sacredness** and the cultural symbolisation of *utux*. This is due to the fact that, although the reason for holding *zhulingji* is perceived naturally by the participants to be part of the *gaga*, the idea of *utux* to them now usually refers to ‘spirits’, ‘ghosts’ or merely ‘souls’ that are different from *utux kayal* – the modern Atayal interpretation of the Christian God – and do not ‘watch over the world’ as the Atayals used to believe. This recognition towards the content of *utux* still carries the belief that the spirits of the dead might cause certain effects over the Atayal people who have disobeyed certain *gaga*. For example, most Atayal people believe that women should not touch the hunting guns or be in the hunting teams as it would, as a result of breaking the *gaga*, ‘bring bad luck’, and modern Atayals still follow what they might call ‘superstitious’ customs before they go hunting. The word ‘hunting’ can never be mentioned on the day of hunting, and simple offering-making rituals are made by putting cigarettes or wine at the gateway to the mountain, as otherwise *utux* might feel offended by their intrusion and cause accidents during hunting. Nonetheless, the sacredness of *utux* is being reduced in the conception of modern Atayals. For example, the symbol of *utux* – the diamond-shaped patterns (see below) – no longer possess the religious meaning of ‘the eyes of *utux*’, and the cultural – or religious – significance of the pattern, which was tattooed on the Atayals’ faces as the signature of both Atayal identity and the blessing of *utux*, has also been lost, as almost half of the villagers do not know what these patterns mean.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> In Bienjing village, the knowledge of the pattern has almost vanished in the age group of 30 to 70, which can be said to be the first generations after the KMT government took over the reign of Taiwan. Those under 30 usually have a better understanding of this knowledge, as the policy of aboriginal children’s education was modified in 1998 as a result of the cultural revitalisation movement of the aborigines in the late 1980s.



Figure 12, the diamond-shaped pattern in the Sawig tribe. This pattern used to be believed to be the ‘*utux*’s eye’ that was tattooed on the Atayals’ faces to ‘watch over’ the people, but now only functions as one of the cultural symbols to decorate the tribe or their own commodities to mark their ‘Atayalness’.

The idea of *utux kayal* experienced its first challenge with the Japanese authorities’ attempts to replace the Atayal people’s *utux kayal* with the Japanese Amaterasu-ōmikami, the *kamisama*. After years under the Japanese rule, the term *kamisama* was then appropriated in the Atayal language to refer to the ultimate reality, instead of *utux kayal*. Such usage is especially pervasive amongst the elder villagers, as most of their childhoods were spent under the Japanese rule during the process of Japanisation:

Participant YK: When I was a child, they (the Japanese) came and took the plate of *kamisama* to our house. They told us to worship it, and said it was our *utux kayal*.

Participant SF: The Japanese told us to worship the plate of Amaterasu-ōmikami. It means ‘the god in the sky’ in Japanese, and some people would say it was like our *utux kayal*; but that was the Japanese’s God, (because) their *gaga* was different from ours.

Many elders could not tell me whether '*kamisama*' means '*utux*' or '*utux kayal*', like the participant HK:

*Kamisama* means God, the church says it is Jesus ... I don't know that much, but they (*kamisama*, *utux* and *utux kayal*) are all the same ... it tells us not to do bad things, like stealing or lying ... I don't know what the difference is. They are just different names, but mean the same.

In terms of the effects of Japanisation on religious matters, the Atayals seemed not to change too much with regard to the structure of religious practice and how this structure functioned in their way of life. It is true that the means of Atayal identity construction – the facial tattoo – was deeply damaged due to the Japanese policies, and that some critical rituals, such as the setting of common symmetry and *obon macri*, became syncretised with the Japanese interventions in traditional customs. However, most of the participants also suggest that the form of their 'practices of life' under these changes generally remained the same, and was still similar to that of their ancestors in the old times. They indicated that even with the altered details, through the practice of rituals *gaga* was still the way the Atayals framed their identities 'ethnically' and culturally.

## 5.2 The second challenge: the coming of Christianity

The second – and possibly the most critical – challenge to the Atayals' relations with *utux* and *utux kayal* came with the arrival of Christianity in the late 1940s. Although the history of Christian missionaries in Taiwan could be dated back as early as the seventeenth century, and the first Presbyterian Church had been established in 1865, the early missionary work was mostly targeted on the Han Taiwanese and the indigenous people of the plain area (the 'tamed savages') rather than those living in the mountains.<sup>40</sup> The exclusion of the 'mountainous' indigenous groups (the 'wild

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<sup>40</sup> Taiwan was first exposed to European power and culture during the Age of Discovery, when the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) took over part of the lands in southern Taiwan (today's Tainan) as their colony to operate trading business in East Asia in 1624. To strengthen the ruling power, the missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church who came along with the company started their missionary work within the colonial territory – mostly with the 'Plain Indigenous' people and the relatively few Han immigrants from China. As Taiwan, as an island, was still an unclaimed territory, the Spaniards also took part of northern Taiwan (today's Keelung) two years after the Dutch, to compete with the growing power of the East India Company. The Dominican Order of Spain established churches on the lands to provide services for the Spaniards, as well as to carry out

savages’) from the early missionary work was partly due to the difficulty of getting there and the risk of being beheaded when entering the ‘untamed’ territories (W. Campbell, 1915). During the Japanese period, it was because of the segregation policy of the ‘wild savages’ – as a means to better control the aboriginal societies and maintain the promotion of Shintoism – which kept the Christian missionaries from contacting the aboriginal groups (Fujii, 2001). However, in the late 1940s both Catholic missionaries associated with the KMT government and those of the Taiwanese Presbyterian Church were granted permission to proceed with their missionary activities in the indigenous areas. The Atayals of Bienjing village were not strangers to other belief systems, such as Japanese Shintoism or the belief system (also known as the Taiwanese folk religion) of the Hakka Han people, whom they would sometimes trade with in Dahu just a few miles away.<sup>41</sup> However, these religious contacts did not compromise the Atayals’ faith in their way of life and how it related to their religious belief, not even with the Japanese religious intervention policy; and that, therefore, makes their later group conversion to Christianity worthy of interest.

### 5.2.1 The arrival of Christianity in Bienjing village

The first preacher to come to Bienjing village, in November 1947, was a Han Taiwanese from the Presbyterian Church. Chen Lan-Qi (陳蘭奇) came from the church based in Gongguan, Maioli. He began his missionary work in Wen-Shuei elementary school, mainly by teaching gospel songs and explaining their meaning (The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, n.d.). The missionary efforts, however, were not recognised by the villagers at the time. The failure of Chen’s missionary work was not only due to his Han identity – which made him an outsider to the Atayals – but also

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missionary work with the indigenous people in the neighbourhood. In 1642, Dutch troops drove the Spanish out of Taiwan. In 1662, the Dutch East India Company was forced to leave Taiwan after being defeated by the Chinese Ming loyalist Koxinga (Zheng Cheng-gong). Though Christian beliefs faded quickly in the wake of Koxinga’s rule over Taiwan, the influence of the Dutch missionary work was far-reaching; in some tribes of the plain indigenous people, there were even stories of how, once upon a time, they had ‘red-haired distant relatives’.

<sup>41</sup> Taiwanese folk religion is a syncretic belief originating from the southern provinces of China and combined with different ideas from Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and shamanism. The early immigrants from China brought their traditional religions, but the function and connotation of the deities and rituals were adapted to the local Taiwanese context along with the different needs and legends during the development of their cultivation (J. W. Liu, 1983; Wu, Yung-Mong and Hsieh, 2005).

because he represented a radical religious mindset that was incongruent with the traditions and customs of the Atayals, as he claimed that believing in *utux* instead of in Jesus was an evil act. A few months later, in February 1948, the family of Liu Guang-Nan were the first to be baptised, marking the start of religious conversion in the village. The Liu family moved to the city several years ago. However, according to the participant Gaisang – one of the early villagers who converted to the Church – Liu was, at that time, seen as ‘a bit weird’ (his ‘abnormal’ actions probably symptoms of a psychological disorder) even before his conversion, which discredited the belief itself. Nonetheless, it still encouraged 18 of the villagers to be baptised when the first Presbyterian Church of the village – Dabilas (the name of the place) Church – was founded in Valus in May 1949 (The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, n.d.). It is worth noting that these 18 converts were members of the same few families who chose to follow the decision to convert made by the man of the house: in the Atayal culture, the members of each family had to follow the decision of one male leader, and any refusal to do so would be seen as a challenge to authority. This relation between the family and its male leader also applied to that between a *qalang* and the *tumux*, which became the key to passing the values on to successive generations. The power structure behind such a pattern of conversion helps to explain why, even though most of the men responsible for making their families convert to the Christian faith have either died or moved away, Christianity remains the dominant faith within these families (and the village) today. Nonetheless, the participant Gaisang, one of the 18 early disciples, made the following statement on his conversion:

I thought what they (the preachers) said made every sense ... they told us not to steal, not to lie, and to be a good man, so I believed ... we didn't have beliefs before, only the words left from the ancestors, and what they said was just like the words of the ancestors.

This kind of ‘sameness’ between the traditional Atayal belief and Christianity was also observed by Shu-yuan Yang (2009) in the Taiwanese Bunun aboriginal group's conversion to Christianity. It indicates that the conversion to Christianity, as Yang (2009) pointed out, was rather a reconfirmation of the Atayal people being moral persons, instead of coming from the systematic rationalisation of their religious belief



(Bellah, 1964; Geertz, 1973a; Weber, 1993).<sup>42</sup> The emphasis on the ethical continuity between the traditional religious world and Christianity during the conversion was also seen amongst the Atayals who converted to Catholicism later.

In 1949, as well as the Presbyterian Dabilas Church being established, many Catholic priests came to Taiwan with the KMT government. Due to the defeat of the KMT (Kuo-Min Party) by the Chinese Communist Party during the civil war, Catholic priests were expelled from China and chose to continue their missionary activities in Taiwan, especially the indigenous areas. Initially these Catholic missionaries distributed material aid provided by the U.S. Catholic Relief Service. Such aid not only helped the people in Taiwan with their supply of materials, such as flour and dried milk, but also attracted many to become actively involved in church activities in Bienjing village – in the early years, Catholicism was even nicknamed ‘the religion of flour’ in the village. In 1955, a Catholic priest from Maryknoll church came to the village with another Atayal missionary, Lin Jin-shuei, as the translator to conduct missionary work and distribute material aid.<sup>43</sup> Although most of the villagers still saw Christianity as a foreign product, the Presbyterian Church’s previous efforts meant that the villagers were no longer strangers to Catholicism. The Catholic priest’s attitude towards the traditional Atayal culture, however, was rather different from the Presbyterian one. Unlike the Presbyterian Church’s missionary approach, the Catholic Church was quite open to the Atayal traditions – as participant HSF put it, they ‘never speak ill of the past Atayal traditions, not like the Presbyterian ones’. This openness of the Catholic Church is not new in the history of conversion across the world. As Fenella Cannell (2006) and Pamela Stewart (2009) have pointed out, out of the experiences of syncretising Christian and other European religious rituals, the Catholic Church has developed the ‘encompassment theory’ (P. J. Stewart & Strathern, 2009) to adapt to different religious and cultural structures, as long as ‘the presence of a transcendent deity ... is acknowledged’ by the converters. The Catholic Church’s open attitude, along with the material advantages they provided, soon attracted HSF of Narima – who was considered a young, intelligent Atayal man who had finished his study in the Japanese school – to be the first Atayal Catholic in the

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<sup>42</sup> The idea of ‘rationalisation’ in relation to the conversion to Christianity derives from Weber’s distinction between traditional religion and world religion, where the latter is seen as possessing a higher level of rationalisation.

<sup>43</sup> Maryknoll encompasses three organisations from the States that are part of the Roman Catholic Church and undertake overseas missionary activity.

village and its neighbouring Atayal communities. HSF gave his reason for being a Catholic as:

He (the preacher) told me many things, the history and doctrines of Catholicism; the history of Catholicism can be traced back to thousands of years ago, and so could ours. They say the world was created by a God in the sky, and so did ours. I found them (Catholic creeds) just like what we Atayals practised, especially the Ten Commandments – they fit what our ancestors have told us for a long time.

With this belief and the material aid from the Catholic Church, HSF turned to the *tumux* of different tribes in the front mountain area to share his excitement at finding this combination of abundant material life and a religion that fits the philosophy of the Atayals. ‘Especially butter,’ HSF added, ‘when I brought butter to the elders in the village and fried it with vegetables, they were all very surprised that you can taste beef in the vegetables, and I told them it was from the Church.’ At that time, the villagers had just gone through the chaos of the transfer of ruling powers, when all activities were temporarily left in a state of ‘anarchy’, and thus the material support attracted many of the Atayals, including some of the Presbyterian Atayal Christians, to go to the Catholic church and participate in missionary activities. Once the material aid had got the attention of the villagers, HSF went to the houses of local elites, such as *tumux*, elders, former Atayal police officers and those who were deemed ‘heroic’ as they had survived the Second World War, to persuade them to believe in Catholicism, for he knew that once these leading figures had agreed, the rest of the villagers would follow. This approach of convincing the ‘leading figures’ in the village showed how the power structure of the Atayals influenced their ‘way of life’. HSF’s personal testimony soon became his missionary statement to the local elites. His efforts to convince those elites to convert to Christianity were revealed to me later through a casual conversation with a group of both Catholic and Presbyterian villagers, when the participant SYK – the current *tumux* in Valus, whose father was first a Catholic then a Presbyterian church member – told me that his father believed that joining the church (whether Catholic or Presbyterian) ‘protects and passes down’ Atayal traditions. Everyone else agreed with him, and they were convinced that their ‘cultural traditions’ – *gaga* – would be even less distinguishable under a modern society that ‘is dominated by the government and economy’ without the churches, and

that is why ‘we aboriginal people all believe in Christianity’.

### 5.2.2 The social factors of conversion

The account above has to be reviewed in greater detail and in its wider social context. Constituted by the three tribes of Narima, Valus and Sawig, Bienjing village was not a unified administrative system before the KMT government took over Taiwan (Taian Township Office, 1994). Although from 1895 to 1945 the people in this ‘village’ had to follow the Japanese law, which was enforced by the Japanese police, the administrative system was still based on each tribe, the *tumux* would still have the power to run their own business and manage their people, and the necessity of contacting the Han people was primarily economic (S.-H. Wang, 2003). By 1950, the Bienjing area was named an administrative ‘village’, which not only officially took away the autonomy of each tribe and replaced it with different levels of administrative heads, but also meant that they could no longer be as self-reliant and detached from the Han – which had become the majority in the new ‘nation-state’. They were not required to be members of a certain ‘race’ as the Japanese required them to be, and they could not only be *tayan* and follow the *gaga* as they always had; they had to be ‘citizens’ – which was never taught in the *gaga* – of the nation, above all the other ethnic or tribal identities. On the other hand, in the 1950s, the villagers were facing a rather critical economic situation, as their traditional crops (such as corns, taros and bamboo shoots) were not competitive enough in the market, and those harvests could only be used to meet their survival needs rather than making money to conduct commercial consumptions. One other factor that influenced the villagers’ social conditions was the coal mine on the other side of the village, across the valley. Before the mine was flooded and abandoned due to Typhoon Gloria in 1963, the modern entertainment facilities, such as cinemas and pool tables, had made it the busiest place around the village. However, since these facilities required quite a significant sum of money to access, they became a symbol of discrimination to the villagers. Many of the villagers were teased by the Han coal workers, who would say something like ‘aboriginal people are just too poor to have rice, and can only afford sweet potatoes’ (participant JWS). Meanwhile, due to the need for transportation from the coal mine to the city centre, the increasing communications between the village and downtown Dahu also led the villagers not only to know a lot more about the social lives of the

Han Chinese, but also to be excluded from them.

These factors led to a change in status relations between the Han society and the Bunun Atayal. The villagers became not only an objectively marginalised group in Taiwanese society, but also a **subjectively** marginalised group in the nation-state, as they became aware of themselves as the ‘minority’. Thus the villagers recalled their lives at that time as those ‘rough days’ of ‘being poor’ when they were often ‘mocked by the Hakka people’. Some stole or felt dejected because they were having ‘hard times’, which was a reflection of the economical/social gap being recognised by the villagers, of the conflict of identities that was being felt by these increasingly marginalised Atayals. In the history of religious conversion, such social problems usually created the background, or the conditions, for people to seek help from a new religion or religious groups. For example, in his study of the Mexican Indians converting to Protestantism from the folk Catholicism, Turner (1978) noticed how poverty, caused by the Mexican government’s land policy and the social discrimination against the Tzeltal community, became the trigger of their conversion. Quentin Gausset’s (1999) research on the Wawa and Kwanja peoples’ choices of religious conversion in the Republic of Cameroon also suggested the importance of social problems. In Cameroon, Gausset (1999) argued, as the traditional way of life of the Wawa and Kwanja peoples was challenged by the development of modernisation, the Wawa people’s choice of Islam and the Kwanja people’s choice of Christianity was not motivated by material gain, since they did not obtain any resources by converting, but rather was driven by the need to escape ‘the traditional “state of ignorance” and higher social status that connected to these new religions’. Cornelia Kammerer’s (1998) study of the Akha highlanders in Burma and Thailand also showed a strong connection between religious conversion and social conditions, which was similar to the Atayals’ cultural and social backgrounds. Just like the *gaga* to the Atayal culture, the Akha people’s *Zah* was the core concept that regulated the Akha social norms, identity and moral standards (Kammerer, 1998). However, the social transitions that came with the development of modernity – the change of economical patterns and the subsequent inability to purchase ritual requirements, as well as the change in knowledge patterns from a familial to a national system – resulted in the loss of the *Zah* traditions amongst the younger generations and created the need for new religious rituals to cope with the new lifestyles. Although, in Kammerer’s (1998) study, one of the main reasons for the Akha people’s conversion

to Christianity was the preservation of the forms of the essential religious rituals of *Zah* that kept the Akha identity, these social conditions still reflected the push and pull forces being played out in the act of conversion, especially among the socially marginalised groups (Hawwa, 2000).

The push and pull forces, however, are not just social, but also psychological. The idea of the self to many scholars is constructed by both one's subjective awareness and the perceived social attitude (Heelas, 1981), and both subjective and objective awareness are in a dialectic interactive relation (Cooley, 1998; Mead, 1934b; Shaffer, 2005; Yeung & Martin, 2003). Jacques Lacan, in his mirror theory of the 'self' (1977), exemplified this argument with the formation of the ego of infants: as infants (those up to 18 months old) are not able to walk or stand on their own, they usually require other people's help to see themselves in a mirror. Infants at this stage cannot recognise and distinguish themselves from others in the mirror as they have never 'seen' themselves before, and they have to be helped to understand that the figure that moves simultaneously with them in the mirror is actually the 'looking-glass self' (Cooley, 1998). Nonetheless, this image of the self of infants is the self out of 'imagination'; infants 'see' themselves in a place where they are not actually 'there', thus making this idea of a 'complete self', paradoxically, established on misrecognising 'the other' as 'the self' (Lacan, 1977, 1978). In other words, the construction of the self is a process that always corresponds with the 'gaze' from outside our bodies, and therefore such recognition of our selves is always alienated, objectified and misrecognised (Lacan, 1977). This 'gaze of the Other' on a greater level, Lacan further stated, could be said to be the objectified knowledge or culture of our selves through which the image of ourselves becomes 'visible', and could be used as the reference of our identity (such as the knowledge of ethnicity in the national education, as I stated above). In Lacan's theory, because every subject's awareness of his own being always corresponds with the gaze of 'the Other', how we 'see' ourselves – that is, how we choose a particular objectified image over others – is dependent on 'the field of the Other' (Lacan, 1978:84). The way in which we perceive ourselves is critically determined by the social and historical conditions. The push and pull forces are not, therefore, the absolute social forces that would necessarily transform the pre-Christian lifestyles into modernity.<sup>44</sup> Rather, they only become the

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<sup>44</sup> For example, an Atayal community in Smagus, Hsinchu, exists in Taiwan with a Kibbutz-like lifestyle. Though Smagus also engages in and encourages tourism to increase its income, the whole

forces when the subject ‘encounters’ the imagined gaze – that is, as I suggested earlier, when the Atayals became ‘aware’ of their marginalised social status.

The conversion to Catholicism at a time of desperation, instead of to the Presbyterian Church beforehand, also took place under such conditions. On the one hand, the Atayals’ awareness of losing their identity in being marginalised – geographically, economically and culturally – from the Han-dominated nation-state pushed them to seek cultural, emotional and financial support from the religious group. On the other, the Catholic Church also provided material aid and a sense of connection and belonging to the greater, ‘social’ group of Christians. This sense of belonging connects not only all the Atayals in Taiwanese society, but also the whole Christian-aborigine community in Taiwan, and even ‘Christendom’ across the world. To the villagers, Christianity offered an alternative way to reconcile the social, economical and identification conflicts between the Atayals and the Han society – the synonym of the nation-state. In other words, the villagers’ first group conversion to the Catholic Church instead of the Presbyterian one, from the social perspective, was possibly due to the fact that the social conditions favoured their ‘revivalist application to new historical circumstances’ (Hefner, 1993: 18). These circumstances are not only ‘historical’, but also social and psychological, involving the subjective consistency between the inner/individual and outer/social identities.

### 5.2.3 The moral demand of conversion

To pursue consistency in identity through conversion, as Hefner (1993:17) put it, ‘need not reformulate one’s understanding of the ultimate conditions of existence, but it always involves commitment to a new kind of moral authority and a new or reconceptualised social identity’. In this case, the reconceptualisation of the church provided the moral authority, and their social identity can be revealed through the ways in which older villagers understand Christianity:

Sachiko (age 71): We did not believe in anything before (Christianity), we were just making a living, and following what our ancestors have told us about how to live ... and then we

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community still runs on a self-sufficient system and has its own administrative structure.

believe in the church, what they taught us about not to lie and not to steal is just like our *gaga*, they are the same.

Hanako (age 73): No, we did not have faith (religion) before (Christianity), but the principles of our *gaga* and the churches are the same. The churches just taught us how to worship, that is all.

Such cognitions of the Christian Atayals' current belief in Christianity are the most common ones amongst the villagers. Meanwhile, most of the villagers described Christianity as 'the same' as the 'way of life' they have been taught for centuries, and stated that the churches are only there to tell them 'how to worship'. Their knowledge of Christianity is almost limited to the ethical aspects that fit their codes of conduct. For most of the villagers (even those who go to church regularly), the only difference between the Catholic and Presbyterian Churches is that 'they have different ways of doing worship'. However, what 'worship' actually means to the villagers, in the context of the current faith in Christianity, is rather mundane. For Presbyterian members, 'worshipping' means going to church, singing gospel songs (in the Atayal language) and listening to the priest explaining how to live their life righteously, whereas for Catholic villagers, 'worshipping' refers to the ceremonies the Father holds every Sunday (even though they may not understand the reasons for holding such ceremonies), and listening to the Father telling stories with moral meanings about life. Many of the older villagers – who are the most regular churchgoers – are even found to be observing and following what others do in the service. When asked about such 'following' behaviour in the services, one of them responded with: 'I never understood the ceremony, but I know the priest is here to teach us the regulations of life.' Therefore, although the villagers do not always remember the stories in the Bible or understand when they should close their eyes and say 'Amen', they still see church as the place to teach and 'pass down' the connotations of *gaga*, the 'way of life' that connects them to the church.

The only exception to this understanding is the Bethel Church, located in Sawig, which is part of the Pentecostalism that values the use of spiritual gifts. Bethel Church was founded by a previous Presbyterian member in Sawig a few years ago, who claimed that he had a command from Jesus to establish the church, and brought along his family – who are the only members of the church now – from the Presbyterian church. Most of the Sawig people view the church sceptically, as they have never

experienced these kinds of ‘spiritual gifts’ and can’t explain them with reference to any of their previous religious experiences. Some even described it as having ‘no other aims but to take money from its people’. Others said the church ‘was based on imagination’ and disapproved of miraculous statements. The suspicion towards the Christian spiritual experience, and the lack of theological knowledge of the church, however, also provided evidence of the villagers’ conversion not being based on the ‘spiritual support’ of Christianity.<sup>45</sup> Instead, from participant HSF’s testimony of how the Ten Commandments was key to his conversion, to Sachiko and Hanako’s view of Christianity as being ‘the same’ as the ‘principles’ of life and the moral guidance in the old *gaga*, as well as the researches of the Atayal historians, we see not only how the Atayal people perceived the *gaga* as a whole system of ethics (rather than sacred and profane as discussed in previous chapters), but also how the Ten Commandments’ ‘universality’ and ‘foundational priority’ (H. Smith, 1991: 288) connected the traditional Atayal world to the Christian one.

The fact that ethical connection was the main reason for the villagers’ conversion to Christianity can also be recognised when we see how the Presbyterian Church reacted to the growing number of followers in the Catholic Church. By the late 1950s, the Catholic Church had already baptised more than 200 people – a third of Bienjing villagers.<sup>46</sup> This number of people indicated the success of the Catholic Church’s missionary policy compared to that of the Presbyterian Church. Although the current priest in the Dabilas church admits that their present ‘aboriginal theology’ is the result of years of working on the balance between the ‘culture’ and the ‘faith’, the church only started to revise their theological interpretation – that is, acknowledging that *utux kayal* was, in fact, in the Atayals’ knowledge, the Christian God – after the Catholic Church ‘stole away’ (as one of the participants put it) the hearts of the villagers. During this period, the Presbyterian priests gave up the previous approach of claiming the traditional Atayal belief as ‘false’, and instead focused on how the moral values are actually ‘the same’ as Christianity:

ZG: They (the Presbyterian Church) started to use our (Catholic) missionary methods after they saw we had got so many people

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Spiritual support’ here is defined as the ‘support perceived in the context of an individual’s relationship with God, focusing on perceptions and experiences of God’s personal love, presence, constancy, guidance, and availability for the self’ (Maton, 1989).

<sup>46</sup> The population of the village at the time was about 700 people (source: The Bienjing Police Station).



believing in the church ... Before that, they used to say that our rituals were deals with devils, and it was only after then they decided to do what we had been doing all along, saying that our traditions share the same spirit as Christianity ... and then people started to believe them as well.

From this, we can see that the later success of the Presbyterian Church in Bienjing village was achieved by claiming that Atayal traditions share ‘the same spirit’ as Christianity. By ‘the same spirit’, another participant gave a more accurate definition:

ZDC: ‘the same’ means that the **standard of conduct** as a *tayan* in the *gaga* is the same as what is written in the Bible.

By believing that the *gaga* and Christianity are, essentially, ethically ‘the same’, the villagers could retain their *tayan* identity by practising their *gaga* in church as well as receiving resources to help them better adapt to modern lifestyles – in which they found themselves being marginalised.

#### 5.2.4 The symbolic construction of conversion

The conversion to Christian belief in Bienjing village was a relatively peaceful and quick process. It did not encounter any real resistance except for the ‘observation period’ – as it was called by Gaisang – during the early stage of the Presbyterian mission. Whether the villagers belong to the Catholic or Presbyterian Church, they now usually describe their attitude towards their Christian belief as ‘how to live life in a good way’. Behind this general description, they would usually add a comment such as ‘the aboriginal tribes which converted to Christianity usually have a better life than those which did not’ (participant JWS). This kind of statement normally comes with the impression of Christianity – not just Catholicism during the early years – as being representative of the successful and ‘advanced’ modern society, able to provide substantial forms of support. These churches were not only able to provide all kinds of resources that fit the different needs of the locals (such as day-care centres for both kids and elders, or small trips for church members), but the ability to mobilise the church members also made the churches the channels of social resources, making churches the ‘replacement community’ (Devalle, 1992) of the Atayals. For example, whenever new government policy or welfare initiatives, promotions, or other

spontaneous communal activities were held in the village, these churches would serve not only as the venue, but also as the information distributor for these gatherings. The ‘good way’ of life, in addition to the ethical values that have been passed down in the *gaga* for generations, thus also refers to certain imaginary economic promises that reflect the villagers’ impressions of Christianity. In many cases, ‘going to church’ becomes the connection with resources (be they people or materials), and the ‘churchgoers’ would usually be the first to be informed of news, which might enable them to obtain more resources and thereby gain better socio-economic status. This is the substantial form of what ‘better’ means to the participants, which also strengthened the connection between these economic upper classes in the village and their churches, as well as reinforcing their belief in such a ‘way of life’.

Instead of assuming that such a connection between church and the ‘better life’ (substantial advantage) reflects the understanding of the villagers towards Christianity, it is, in Lacanian terms, rather a ‘fantasy screen’ (Nusselder, 2013) of the villagers reflected in Christianity. As I illustrated earlier, how we ‘see’ ourselves is the projection of the ‘imagined gaze’, which is constructed through imaging how ‘people’ see us in ‘the field of the Other’. The subject, however, is usually ‘unaware of’ this ‘awareness’ – just as the Atayal participant could not be aware that the ‘poor’ days in the past were based on the value of others. To explain the mechanism of the unaware awareness of the imagined gaze, Lacan (1978) proposed the idea of the ‘screen’ – which ‘protects us from, yet forces an encounter with’ (Marks, 2009) the desires and trauma during the engagement of others. In the case of the Atayals, these were the desire for a ‘better life’ and the trauma of being looked down upon by the major Han society. The screen, therefore, is the ‘locus of mediation’ (Lacan, 1978: 107) not only in establishing the authority of the other that enables us to ‘look’ at ourselves from a certain perspective (the field), but also to mirror the representation of ourselves so that we could see how the other is seeing us (see figure 13).

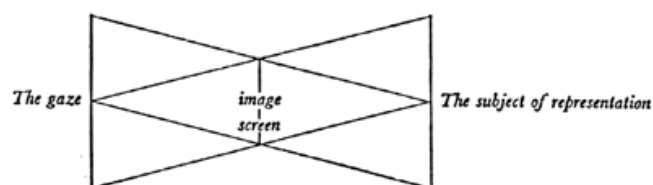


Figure 13, The relation of the gaze, the screen and the subject. (From *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis: The seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*.

Through this ‘imagined’ Christianity, the defects in the villagers’ reality – such as the conflicts of identity and the depression of being socially and economically marginalised – could be smoothly and consistently dispelled. As Stewart and Strathern (2009) suggest, the combination of the material and spiritual fields in the native religions of pre-Christian societies would also affect how the converts viewed the idea of religion in the modern context and also influence their expectations of whether the religion to which they were converting could meet both their ethical and material needs. In this view, the Christianity of the Atayals becomes the fantasmatic supplement that hides those defects of reality, the ideological supplement to keep their day-to-day world unharmed from the conflicts in reality.. Such fantasy does not construct itself only out of social conditions, but ‘consists of the order of images and that of meaning’ (Nusselder, 2013: 2), in which it is ‘more than a mirror-image or reflection of the real: it is also a (symbolic) construction of it’ (Nusselder, 2013: 2). This perception/imagination of Christianity, which in signifying the religion shares the ethics of the *gaga* (and is approximately equivalent to the understanding of the *gaga* of the villagers), thus also involves a series of symbolic constructions that transfer the Atayals’ recognition of the world from the *gaga* to the church.

The very first symbolic reconstruction of the Atayals’ belief system lies in epistemological, ontological and cosmological translation, which is also the ultimate matter of conversion in every culture (Robert W. Hefner, 1993b). A majority of my research participants described the time before the coming of Christianity as a time when they ‘did not believe in any religion, but just wanted to make a living’, as is taught in the *gaga*. As HSF commented, when he first heard about the ‘principles’ of Catholicism he found them ‘just like our beliefs, especially the Ten Commandments’. He went on to explain that there was a close fit with an idea in the *gaga* that made him believe that Christianity and the Atayals’ world view were ‘the same’: ‘there is a god above in the sky, who created all the beings in the world’. A Presbyterian Church pastor later also used an example from the Bible to explain their missionary approach, and how the Atayal people accepted it:

Men of Athens, I perceive in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE

UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you. God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things (Acts 17:22 – 25).

The practice resulting from an appreciation of this section of the Bible in Bienjing village was to give the *utux kayal* – the unknown God in the sky whom the Atayals believed created the world – a name: Jesus/God the Father. To the Bienjing villagers, *utux kayal* has always been an abstract idea, which exists without physical or even spiritual form. 'It' created the world, nature, and gave life – even the 'afterlife' of *utux* – to every being on the planet, as well as implanting wisdom in the ancestors' minds to establish the right 'way of life'. The *gaga* that outlined prohibited acts, such as 'do not steal', 'do not commit adultery' and 'do not covet others' belongings', and even the idea that 'the mighty power of the sky will give rewards to those who follow *gaga* and punish those who have contempt for the rules that have been made', had been valued as the core aspects in the lives of *tayan*. When these core values and the idea of *utux kayal* were reflected (and highlighted by the missionaries, especially in HSF's experience) in the Ten Commandments, a shared 'identity' between the Christian God and *utux kayal* thus became plausible, since these were the most crucial principles shared by both belief systems.

The other vital translation – or transformation – that Christianised the traditional Atayal belief was the re-formation of the idea of *hongu utux* (the bridge to the ancestors):

Sachiko: We used to say that when people passed away, their souls would be judged at the rainbow (which is the embodiment of the bridge to the ancestors). If they were good persons – 'good persons' meaning that they lived the right way of life, no stealing, no lying – then they could pass over the bridge to the other side of the ancestors. If they were not good while alive, then their souls would fall off the bridge, and be eaten by a big monster ... but

then we knew that rainbows are not the bridges our ancestors thought. When the church came, they said that there is heaven and hell, where the good and bad people would be, then we knew that saying that the rainbow is the bridge to the ancestors is a superstition.

HSF: When I was running around different villages to tell them about Catholicism, many people would ask me questions ... such as heaven, I told them it is like our ancestors said about the bridge of the rainbow: people who had done good deeds would go to heaven, and those who had not would go to hell ... only the rainbow has nothing to do with people's death – if you were in school then you would know, it is just a natural phenomenon like rain or the sun ... I told them there are places like heaven for people to go after death, just like what our ancestors have believed, but the belief about the rainbow was only our imagination. So they knew that Catholicism, (as) a religion that is believed by hundreds of thousands of people around the world and has been there for thousands of years, is just like what our ancestors have believed all the time.

With the ethical connection being confirmed, and the view of life being transformed in Christianity, it was thus reasonable for the villagers to believe that Christianity actually stood for their ancient belief. Christianity was thus confirmed as a more 'truthful' version of the Atayals' belief, and their doubts about certain ideas could be perfectly explained as imaginative human add-ons (superstitions). These reinterpretations of the Atayal belief system justified the renaming of *utux kayal* as the Christian God. Consequently, this *utux kayal*, now with the look of the Lord, would have to be known and worshipped in a Christian way.

The modern names of *utux kayal* – Jesus, God the Father and Lord – solved the problem of the Atayals not knowing the name of or understanding how to worship this ultimate reality. With the names given to this high God, and the people (missionaries) who had the knowledge of how to 'respect and please' this *utux kayal*, the Atayals came to know its method of worship: going to church on

Sunday. However, as the early missionary approach was to attract people to come to church without much need of Christian knowledge, and the process of this worship of *utux kayal* was always held and led by the clergies, most of the early Christian villagers were never required to learn the Christian doctrines or show how much they understood. Such a religious environment made the participants see ‘going to church on Sunday’ as worshipping *utux kayal* itself. Whether it was the gospel singing in the Presbyterian church, or the Mass that ‘has been practised for thousands of years’ in the Catholic Church, what the churchgoers had to do to conduct this worship was simply to ‘be in the church’ and do whatever the priests asked them to do. That is why, in the case of a marriage between two families from different churches, for example, the wife would see no problem in following the husband’s church in terms of belief, as ‘going to church’ itself had become the form of worshipping *utux kayal*.

However, when the Christian God became *utux kayal* – the ultimate reality of the Atayal belief – and the whole belief system of the Atayal tradition was transformed and fitted into Christianity, the core ideas of the *utux* and *gaga* in the Atayal culture were also being reconceptualised, since, as Roger Lohmann (2003) put it, ‘religious conversion involves discontinuing or severing with certain supernatural beings in favor of others’. The ‘others’ here is exactly *utux kayal*, the Christian God. By taking Christianity as a ‘better’ version – materially – of the Atayal belief, the *gaga* – the religious vocabulary that had previously been assumed to be left by the ancestors (*utux*) – was then believed to be actually from the Christian God with the proof of the Bible. Following that, *utux* cannot be the subject who punishes and rewards the people; it can *only* be the God of Christianity that has the power to do so. This fundamental Christian theology, therefore, marked the very first rupture not just of the relationship between the Atayals and *utux*, but also of the sacred status of *utux*, as we saw earlier in the *zhulingji*.

### 5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I began by looking at the very first ‘modern’ implications of the Japanese period for the Atayal people. These included subsuming the aboriginal

peoples into the 'national system' by forcibly teaching Japanese language, changing the labour value from usable to exchangeable (for instance, the Atayal people started to 'buy' daily materials by cutting down woods for the Japanese government), the introduction of the 'modern' Shinto belief, and, of course, the planning of residential settlements. Many of the Atayal traditions were also banned or altered during this time, which influenced the forms of certain rituals thereafter. However, Shintoism was never taken seriously, even with the help of other political strategies, and the elderly villagers also claimed that life in the Japanese period did not change much from the time before, and, for the most part, the relationship between *utux* (though sometimes it is also called 'kamisama' in Japanese) and the Atayal remained the same. *Utux* was still present in every person's body, as well as alongside the Atayal people to watch over their lives. Generally speaking, the practice and meaning of *gaga* in Atayals' daily lives operated in the traditional way.

The substantial change in the relationship between *utux* and the Atayal people happened through the conversion to Christianity. With the lifting of the missionary ban after the KMT government took over Taiwan, the Presbyterian and Catholic Churches began to expand their missions into this land of the pagans. The early years of the Presbyterian mission did not amount to much as, on the one hand, the villagers failed to understand the fundamental doctrines, whilst on the other there was no reason for the villagers to change their lifestyles, which had allegedly lasted for thousands of years. However, following their increased contact with the Han people in the ensuing years, the Atayal people's self-image began to change as they realised the marginal social and economical status they occupied in the society. In this context, the coming of Catholicism – along with the material aid it could provide – started to gain interest from the villagers, whilst the missionaries' emphasis on the similar moral ground between the Atayal traditions and Christianity gradually gained the trust of the people. Not long after the Catholic Church attracted more than two hundred villagers to convert in the late 1950s, the Presbyterian Church adjusted their missionary approach so that they also focused on ethical similarities, and the Bienjing villagers started to go to their churches as well.

However, we should note that since this 'conversion' to Christianity would not in itself bring any actual benefit to the villagers – as everyone would receive the same materials whether they converted or not – the Bienjing Atayals' conversion to Christianity was rather a symbolic action. To the villagers, converting to Christianity

not only meant that they could gain a ‘better’ socio-economic status in the modern society, but was also a reconfirmation of being ‘moral persons’. In the later paragraphs I also demonstrated how this symbolic action of conversion required the reconstruction of the symbolic system in the Atayal view of the world. During this reconstruction, the once unnamed *utux kayal* was known as the Christian God and the *gaga* became the Bible, while the *utux*, which was deprived of its divinity and of its sense of connecting these ideas to the Atayal people, suffered the most fundamental change in meaning. We do not yet have a picture of how *utux kayal* took over the divine role of *utux*, and how *utux* became the ‘souls’ of the deceased – instead of the traditional ancestor-god – in the modern *zhulingji*. These matters will be investigated in the next chapter.



## **Chapter 6**

# **The Beginning of the Secular in the Atayal World**

In the last chapter I focused on the Bienjing Atayals' conversion to Christianity and how that changed the religious structure – and thereby the sacred order of the world – in the traditional Atayal culture. The conversion to Christianity changed the relationship between *utux*, *utux kayal* and the Atayal people, and this chapter will discuss the transition of the meanings and practices of *gaga* under Christian influences, as well as the development of the relationship between *utux kayal*, *utux* and the Atayals. Most of all, I will demonstrate how the conversion to Christianity resulted in a radical change in the concept of the self, as well as creating the 'secularisation' of the once sacred Atayal world.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this thesis, the idea of 'secularisation' has been challenged by different studies from different perspectives. From the classic notion of the decline of religion along with the 'rationalisation' in the modern world (E Durkheim, 1961; Weber, 1946), and the decreasing need for religious guidance over daily matters (Finke, 1992; Hadden, 1987; Stark, 2000), to the retreat of religion from public into personal spheres (Casanova, 1994), the various religious activities and conditions not only made the secularisation debate even more intense, but also cancelled its universality of indicating the relationship between modernity and religious phenomena. Despite the idea of 'multiple modernities' (Davie, 2002; Eisenstadt, 2000) and Peter Berger's (2012) notion of 'plurality' being proposed to solve the linear view of history in the previous discussions of secularisation by suggesting that modernisation in different cultural and social contexts would result in different religious transitions, the arguments on secularisation still failed to reach an agreement.

In the debate on the 'secularisation' or 'sacralisation' of the modern world, meanwhile, N. J. Demerath (2007) argued that these two phenomena, instead of being in opposed binary positions, were rather in a dialectical relationship. By that, Demerath means that not only can the two concepts not be perceived and understood without one another, but each phenomenon is also the counteraction of the other (Demerath, 2007). Similarly, Terry Eagleton (2014) in his book *Culture and the Death of God* also talked about the swing of religious and secular powers in the modern world. But rather than treating the two concepts as being in an opposite or dialectic relationship, Eagleton saw the sacred experience of religion, to put it briefly, as having shifted to the belief in 'culture'. The argument of secularisation, therefore, is treated flexibly by Eagleton, for he looks not at the 'religious phenomenon' itself,

but rather at the ‘religious-like experiences’ that created the sense of sacredness. Although such a ‘shift’ of sacredness from religion to culture did not happen among the Atayal people, the idea of the shift of sacred experiences will be applied in this study to analyse the ‘secularisation’ of the Atayal world.

## 6.1 The Christianised *gaga* and rituals

As stated in chapter three, *gaga* has been used to refer not only to the customs and the set of cultural characters, but also to the ‘religious’ origin that framed the social identities in different Atayal tribes. Therefore, how *gaga* is represented in Christianity would also have influenced the formation of the villagers’ social identities. As *gaga* was the ‘way of life’, it could vary in different tribes in the same way that rituals with the same purpose and function would be held differently in various Atayal groups. Although the scope of the *gaga* between a *niqan* and a *qalang* changed under the settlement policy in the Japanese period, in Bienjing village referring to *gaga* as a way of identifying one’s social identity before the conversion to Christianity would still have been consistent with the scope of one’s ‘tribe’ (*qalang*). Meanwhile, as *gaga* in each tribe determined how rituals should be held and how life should be lived, it also shaped the knowledge of the world, as well as constructing the differences between the self/we and others in the minds of tribe members.

Taking Bienjing village as an example, if you had said ‘*isu ga magal su gaga na nanu*’ (what kind of *gaga* do you take) to someone 50 years ago, he or she might not have been able to understand it, but could only have told you that ‘*gaga*’ includes a lot of things, and that different *qalang* would have different *gaga*.<sup>47</sup> However, when the villagers embraced Christianity, the traditional *gaga* – which was inherited entirely through oral language – not only became dubious, because it contained many ‘superstitions’ (such as rainbows being the bridge between the worlds of life and death), but was also no longer the right way to live one’s life. The Bible – the book with the ‘real’ *gaga* that had been passed down for centuries – became the creditable source of the ‘way of life’. ‘*Gaga*’ was thus transformed into something that was not only ‘protected’ by the church, but was also **of** the church – it was ‘embodied’ and ‘emplaced’ in the Bible (A. J. Strathern & Stewart, 1998). The Christianised *gaga*

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<sup>47</sup> The structure of the sentence would be: *isu ga magal su gaga na nanu*  
 (you) (be) (take) (which) (gaga) (what) (kind)

therefore would be adopted not by the cultural/ethnic group itself (although more or less every newly established church would first have to adopt the local customs), but by the sects of different churches. This means that in terms of social identities, *gaga* no longer generated a distinction by identifying the cultural/ethnic group to which one belonged, but only revealed one's religious affiliation. In fact, today's '*isu ga magal su gaga na nanu*' in Bienjing village has been understood as 'which church are you in' rather than the literal 'what kind of *gaga* do you take' by the villagers. *Gaga*, in this sense, although retaining its function of guiding the villagers' lifestyles and religious belief, has disengaged from the 'tribal' aspect, since people from different Atayal communities could be in the same church. This social identity of being 'in the same church' is not only limited to the physical place of the church, but, more importantly, also refers to the religious sect of the church. In terms of social identities, *gaga* in modern Bienjing village is more of a signifier of religion than of different 'ways of life', whilst church becomes what it signified; it no longer involves the category of tribal or ethnic culture, but merely represents the Christian sectoral culture.

In balancing this similar-yet-new Christianised *gaga* of the church with the local rituals that had been practised for decades, the Atayals' relation with *utux* also had to be adjusted. Being baptised by the church not only signified the Atayal villagers' agreement to become Christians and symbolised the 'contract' they had made with God to follow the *gaga* that was written in the Bible, but also admitted the authority of the various clergies in religious matters. The clergies owned the knowledge of the *gaga* and therefore had the authority to tell the villagers what was the right 'way to live'. This religious symbol of being 'baptised', as Raymond Firth (1975) put it, involves a necessary process of transformation – the recreation of the new 'self' that includes the 'new' understanding of the person, nature and the sacred. This transition is not only a 'transformation', but also a 'transubstantiation' of the self, which influences how the individual sees himself socially (Firth, 1975). The next section investigates this transformation and transubstantiation of the self in the process of the Bienjing Atayals' religious transition.

### 6.1.1 Reconceptualising *utux*: from divinity to humanity

During early missionary work, the offerings villagers made in rituals were described as 'making a contract with the devil' by Presbyterian clergy (participant YM), and

those who held such a belief in *utux* were considered sinful. Such statements led some of the villagers to feel hostile towards the church. However, the Catholic missionaries took a different approach in reinterpreting the meaning of those rituals: the object of the rituals was *utux kayal*, and the offerings were merely symbolic – a part of the Atayals' material culture.

Participant YHP (age 43, former Catholic, now considers himself as spiritual): What we took of *utux* was just like the God of the church, only we didn't know that what we thought of as *utux* was actually *utux kayal* ... *utux* is just the souls of our ancestors, not God.

Participant HSF: The Catholic Church let us keep our cultural traditions, so we still have our *gaga* in worshipping ancestors. Like *zhulingji*, this is our *gaga*, our tradition. Some say that is wrong, that Christians should not worship like that, but it's not wrong; whom we say prayers to is God, we pray to God to look over us, look over the souls of our ancestors in heaven, and thank him for the past good year ... the food (offerings) is just symbolic, because they (*utux*) would not really come and eat it ... but it is our culture, our tradition, and it is just our way to memorialise the families that have passed away.

When the Bible became the creditable source of the *gaga*, and the authority of the clergies in the church had been established, replacing the role of *utux* with *utux kayal* (the Christian God) in the 'contract' of the rituals became both necessary and reasonable. It not only maintained the monotheism in Christianity, and gave this once 'unknown god' a clear image, but also reconciled the conflicts between the Christian belief and the inseparable part of the Atayal traditions. Under this theological interpretation of the Atayal rituals, a few of the Catholic priests in the early missionary years even actively took part in these rituals to better strengthen the Christian belief and the villagers' lives. The priests, for example, would lead the villagers in saying prayers to '*utux kayal*' before the Sunday lunch in the church after the Mass, to replace the food offering to '*utux*' in traditional Atayal customs. They would also encourage the villagers to seek religious support from *utux kayal* for those who were sick, instead of holding *smys* to make atonement with *utux*.

However, even with these replacements of *utux kayal* in different rituals, and the idea that Christianity actually equalled the religious object that the Atayals had always believed in, the villagers' relation with *utux kayal* could never be the same as, or even similar to, how they used to be with *utux*. *Utux* was connected with the Atayals through the practice of *gaga* in every aspect of life, and was the spiritual existence that walked among the Atayals, as well as **interacting** with the Atayals through different signs. Everything from the actions of birds to the visit of *utux* in dreams was *utux* communicating directly to every member of the *gaga*, and thereby the Atayals could make their moves accordingly. Yet with Christianity, the communication between the villagers and 'the object of the rituals' became rather unilateral. They pray to God before a meal to thank him for the food, not to share whatever they are having with *utux* as if they were still a family. They retain some of the 'superstitions' before hunting, but no longer require the signs from the birds to tell them whether *utux* sees it as a good day for hunting. When sick, the villagers still go to the clergy for religious 'treatment', but they're not given any specific instructions to 'reconcile' with God as the *mahuni* once were – they can only 'hope' to get better by the priests' supposedly powerful prayers.

Meanwhile, although the 'way of life' is recorded in the Bible, most of the elder villagers did not have sufficient ability in reading. The Bible was first translated into Japanese, and then into a Romanised version of the Atayal language, both requiring considerable expertise in the written language. The difficulty of obtaining knowledge of the 'new' *gaga* from the Bible not only made the clergies own the power of 'passing down' the *gaga*, but also enabled the priests to 'own' God. This is why, when speaking of the *gaga* they look to in order to live now, most of the participants suggested that I talk to the priests, as 'they are the ones who know about *the gaga* and *utux kayal*', and most of the villagers 'just follow what the priests ask'. This lack of knowledge of their 'way of life' amongst the villagers (especially the elders) was not caused solely by the villagers' inability in reading, but also by the different ways of learning *gaga*. In the Atayal tradition, *gaga* was picked up through different practices in different living experiences, as each place would have its certain way to follow in order not to violate the *utux*. For the elder villagers, the modern way of teaching the *gaga* in the church has always been a life-detached form of learning, and they often find that the priests 'talk too much to remember what [they] said'. Such a paradigm shift in religious knowledge (and thereby in the guiding principles of life) reflects a

significant change in the relation between the Atayals and the religious object from one shared by everyone and infiltrating every detail of life, to one owned by the few, and distant from the secular world.

The changes in how *gaga* is learned and recognised not only reveal the transition of the connection between *utux (kayal)* and the Atayals, but also indicate the detachment of sacredness from daily lives and its repositioning in the physical existence of the church. However, what the detachment of the religious object from the Atayals' daily lives leads us to consider are the social conditions that created the environment for this separation. In traditional Atayal society, most of the *gaga* was based on the mode of people's livelihoods, which consisted mainly of farming and hunting activities. Yet in today's Bienjing village, more than half of the working population now make their livelihood either working in local hotels or running small businesses, which require none of the *gaga*. Whether it is the traditional kind that was passed down by oral stories and practices, or the modern kind that is written in the Bible, religious knowledge, in most cases, is of very limited use in these work places. Even for those who still farm, the *gaga* would not always be adaptable, as it was based on the solar terms of traditional crops such as millet and ramie and not on the economic ones they are now compelled to produce due to market forces. The difficulty of applying the old *gaga* of traditional crops to modern ones is due to the fact that *gaga* was always a case-wise principle, in which each crop had different farming *gaga* to follow. Thus, for the villagers, crops other than the traditional ones are not guided by the concerns of *gaga*. As cash crops have replaced the traditional ones, the whole set of 'traditions' following those crops – which used to play a critical part in the Atayals' pre-Christian lives – have also gradually been forgotten. Despite becoming less important due to the changes in social conditions, the *gaga* of the villagers before Christianity was still the idea of truth, the reference for the source of life and the consciousness of the religious power itself. *Gaga* was, in Mircea Eliade's (1959: 21) words, the agent of the manifestation of the sacred. Nonetheless, the church's authority in the *gaga*, its way of 'teaching' the *gaga* and its specific form of worshipping the creator of the *gaga* – *utux kayal* – still consolidated the divorcement of sacredness from secularity in the Atayal villagers' daily lives.

### 6.1.2 Reconceptualising *gaga*: from sacred practice to the doctrines of the

#### sacred

To Eliade (1959), the essence of a religion is its ‘archetype’, which lies in the cosmogony of any culture, and is the sacred place where the God(s) lives. The space where humans live, unlike the cosmos of the God(s), is a space of chaos and dynamics that has to be symbolically ‘created’ in accordance with how the God(s) created the cosmos, so that we can feel oriented and meaningful and enjoy a sense of order in our life (Eliade, 1959). To repeat the ‘archetype birth of the cosmos’ (Eliade, 1971), and to imitate the cosmogony, such a recreation of the cosmos has to be based on a ‘centre’, which opens up the connection between ‘heaven and earth’ that allows us to have a grasp of the patterns of the sacred orders (Eliade, 1959). This ‘centre’, in other words, is the sacred space. The sacred space is not necessarily fixed in ‘one place’ but is built through the mark of ‘hierophany’ – be it an object, an event or even rituals that create a ‘break’ between the profane and the sacred worlds – that interrupts the profane temporality. Through the centre created in sacred space, the archetype of the cosmogony – the original model of the world at the time of the God(s) (*in illo tempore*) – could therefore be represented and experienced by ‘religious men’, allowing them to relive the sacred values oriented by the God(s) from the chaotic, profane world (Eliade, 1959). This representation, however, is not universally visible. It can only be seen and revealed to the eyes of the religious men that a ‘sacred object’ might only be an ordinary (and profane) matter to the non-believers, and a ‘sacred space’ might as well just be a field of wilderness to the heathens (Eliade, 1959). To a religious man, the object of hierophany (that is, the sacred) could be any existence of this profane world, retaining its part of the profane order until its sacredness is manifested. Only at the time of this ‘revelation’ would its sacred value of hierophany be distinguished from other secular beings (Eliade, 1959).

With Eliade’s notion of understanding one religion through the experience of ‘the sacred’, we can grasp how *gaga*, as the religious agent of the sacred experience that provides hierophanic character to Atayal life, is delivering different experiences of the sacred before and after the villagers’ conversion to Christianity. The villagers



agree that their current belief in Christianity is due to the *gaga* (more precisely, the ethics of the *gaga*) that they have always followed being accepted as ‘the same’ as Christian ideology. However, the cosmos from which the power of *gaga* derives is essentially different. One is created by *utux kayal* and occupied by *utux*, whilst the other is owned solely by the Christian God – the *utux kayal* – and is without *utux*. While the religious translation made the Christian God of *utux kayal* possible, the archetypes of traditional Atayal belief and Christianity are primarily different from each other. As mentioned above, due to pressure from the church, many of the Atayal customs are increasingly considered ‘superstitions’ that should be abandoned for religious reasons – for example, the sign of birds from *utux* before going hunting. However, even for those daily rituals which have been successfully transformed into Christian(ised) ones, the villagers still might not be able to pick up the ‘new’ customs when they have gotten used to the old ones (for instance, most of the villagers do not pray before eating at home, even though the offerings made to *utux* before meals have been replaced – at least in the eyes of Atayal clergy – by prayers). These customs, therefore, have not ‘transformed’ into other formations for the majority of the villagers, but remain mere memories of the old, superstitious culture. This difference in the religious archetype not only marks the fracture of the Atayals’ culture in ‘recreating’ their world, but also heralds the change in the villagers’ experiences of ‘the sacred’ – and thus the profane.

*Gaga*, as the ‘way of life’ that regulates all human life and forms the knowledge of the world for the Atayals, is without doubt the religious reference that, in Eliade’s sense, recreates the order of the cosmos and provides the sense of sacredness – even the ‘taboos’ in the Atayal culture should also be considered as sacred experiences, since they actually meant ‘the defiling of the sacred’ (Eliade, 1971). The ‘sacred space’ for traditional Atayals was, therefore, the world, or life, itself. The sacred space of the traditional Atayals was dynamic and could be repeatedly created and multiplied every time the *gaga* was practised in relation with the *utux*. The sacred space could be wherever – and whenever – the *zhulingji* and *smyus* were held, food was put on the ground to share with the *utux*, tweeting birds carried the messages of the *utux*, or even when a rainbow appeared. Each time these *gaga* were practised, a ‘break’ could be created, and the ‘centre’ could hence be built for the Atayals to reaffirm that the orders they ‘recreated’ in this chaotic world were just as of the world of the *utux*:

CCL (age 41): When the elders were practising the rituals they had before (Christianity), they were really religious and saw it as really sacred ... it means that they practised with deep respect to the *utux*, and believed that what they did and thought would all be seen by the *utux*. They had all kinds of rituals, big or small, pretty much everything would have its *gaga* to follow, otherwise they would violate the taboo.

HSF: The people in the old times believed that the world of the *utux* was just like ours. They (the *utux*) have to eat and go hunting like we do, but the idea was slightly different from ours; such as ‘a little’ (of substance) of our world means ‘a lot’ to them ... some say that our dog is their boar, but I never heard my father tell me that, and I don’t know what their dog would be (in our world) ... but anyway, we can eat boars, but dogs in our culture are not allowed to be eaten, that would be the same in both the worlds.

However, the *gaga* in the Christian archetype does not serve the same sense of sacredness as it did before. Many of the traditional *gaga* that would probably still work in the modern economic lifestyle – say, for example, the sign of the birds before going hunting – were seen as superstitions and were being abandoned by the church, which cut off the ‘traditional’ sacred experiences from life to a large extent. Even with the *utux kayal* (Christian God) being the subject of sacredness, and the fact that some of the *gaga* in the daily lives could still be practised in a different form (mostly prayers, such as saying prayers before meals instead of ‘sharing’ food with the religious object), the ‘break’ could not be created, as the performers did not see this kind of praying as sacred (though it might have ‘power’) and ‘interactive’ as in the traditional *gaga*:

HJ (age 45, Catholic): Praying is ... personal, I wouldn’t say it’s sacred. It of course would have ‘power’ if you are religious enough, which means that if you have followed the way of life that would please the God, then he **might** answer your prayer when you need help ... The prayers we say in daily life are also a way to please God, to let him know that you didn’t forget him ... You don’t require anything from him, just thank him for the

steady life you have now ... well it's actually not a big deal if you don't pray often in your life, a lot of people don't, they only pray in church. It's not like in the old times, when if you didn't do certain things, you were violating the taboo – that was superstition; no, it is just a personal act of Christians.

JZ (age 53, Presbyterian): Praying is praying ... it is what you have to do in the church, I rarely do that in daily life ... I don't really know what it is for, maybe a way of worship? But it doesn't mean that you can talk to him, maybe only those who have been to the Theological College can, like the priest, but I never feel I can talk to him.<sup>48</sup>

A significant 'break' for the villagers now, however, is that prayers are more often said in church. The meaning of a church to the villagers, in addition to being a place where people go 'worshipping' on Sunday mornings (and which only opens during that time), is that it is a place of religious authority – the place of *gaga* and of the priests who teach *gaga* (the priests in both the Catholic and Presbyterian churches all live in a separate room in the church). The church, therefore, is not only the centre of religious authority, but also the 'centre' – in Eliade's sense – that is different from other homogeneous (profane) space in the village:

ZFY (age 57, Presbyterian): I used to drink a lot with others, so I didn't go to the church ... because church is a sacred place, and I knew drinking is bad, I'd feel guilty there.

SYS (age 38, Presbyterian): I haven't been to the church for years ... I used to go there when I was a kid, but then I got into the bad habit of drinking and stopped going ... I think to many of us, church is a very sacred existence, so if I know I'm not doing good as what they (the church) expect us to be, I would feel ashamed and guilty in the church, a bit afraid of ... I don't know, maybe God.

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<sup>48</sup> The Taiwan Theological College was established in 1872 in Taipei by the Canadian Presbyterian missionary George Leslie Mackay to train professional clergies, and now every priest of the Presbyterian Church has to graduate from the institute.

YHP: When I was a kid, I lived in the (Catholic) church for a while. That was for studying before the examination of high school entries ... it was because the church gave a sense of sacredness that's different from other places; I felt like there's always a pair of invisible eyes watching every one of your moves, and that gives you pressure, so you would think that you have to study really hard.

This sense of 'the sacred' in the contemporary village, unlike that which was shared amongst the villagers whenever the *gaga* was applied to life events, not only becomes 'of the church' (and mainly takes place 'only' in the church), just like the *gaga*, but also marks the separation of the two spheres of life: the religious and the profane. Whilst – as I have pointed out earlier – being a '*tayan*' in the traditional Atayal society was a way to follow the sacred practices of *gaga*, here we should also ask: how does such a division of the world influence the conception of a *tayan*? How does this change of spiritual perspective, as Eliade (1960: 244) put it, 'take effect as a profound regeneration' of the Atayal people's 'intimate being'?

The traditional idea of a '*tayan*' was one of religion and culture. It was religious in that it involved the practices regulated by its religious founder *utux*; it was also cultural and social insofar as it represented the values of Atayals in practising the customs in one's community, *gaga*. The life of a *tayan* in the time when *utux* was in charge of religious matters was based on an intimate relationship with *utux*. However, as the Christianised *gaga* now only function as a 'moral guide' in most of the Atayals' profane lives, *tayan* in the modern Bienjing village is yet to be split into the 'religious' and the 'profane'.

As *gaga*, as the identification of social communities, shifted from tribes to the sphere of churches, one of the primary identities of the villagers became the affiliation with the churches, in addition to their blood ties. The affiliation with the churches, meanwhile, usually depends on the family leader's religious preference, rather than on personal choice. For most of the Presbyterian families, the newborns would usually be taken to the church to be baptised, whereas in the Catholic Church, where one has first to be a catechumen before being baptised, children are still identified as Catholics. The impact on their religious identity might not be revealed immediately, but is evident as time passes. For example, participant ZYC described how, during the

Chinese New Year holidays, other villagers like her find religious consolation in the city.<sup>49</sup>

... living on your own in the city too long, you would feel homesick, and when you are low or having bad times, it would be even harder ... my colleague in my working place used to take me to some temples she usually visited to pray for good luck, but I didn't feel they were places for me. Besides, I've been baptised and I shouldn't do that. Then I went to the church (in the city) ... I rarely went to the church when I was a kid in the village ... but (now) when I am in the church, I feel it is more like home, more suitable for we Atayal people.

Many of the villagers who work in the city and who were probably not familiar with the church during their childhoods also made similar statements, saying that they are more 'used to the atmosphere of churches' (participant CY) and feel like they 'should go to the church as it is a family tradition' (participant CGJ). Or, to them, 'Christianity is the religion for the Atayals' as 'it is the same as our traditions' (participant GX). To these participants, the term 'Atayal' has always connected to Christianity in terms of religion, whether Catholicism, Presbyterian or another faith group. For these young people, being Atayals simply implies that one is also Christian. Thus, for these Atayals, Christianity is a part of their 'tradition', and being a *tayan*, whether consciously or unconsciously, means being a Christian. Such a change in the young people's ideas about their identity and traditions, as Borut Telban (2009) put it, was exactly because when the old rituals and practices were abandoned through the new understanding of the world, the new religious practices generated along with that new world would further confirm that new understanding. In Bourdieu's words, as Telban (2009:155) further stated, these young people embodied 'a particular habitus and acquir(ed) relevant cultural capital'. However, this new understanding is also problematic. Since being a Christian to these young Atayals does not necessarily involve baptism or actual religious practices other than going to church (as a family tradition), the 'Atayals as Christians' identity is essentially secularly inherited. It suggests an identity that is not only self-ascribable but also 'inheritable', and which

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<sup>49</sup> Although the Atayals do not generally celebrate Chinese New Year, many families and the young Atayals who live in the city come back to the village for the holiday, since it is the longest national holiday in Taiwan.

runs in the bloodline.

## 6.2 Case study: Hekou village

The conflicts of the aforementioned Atayal identity can also be seen between the Christian and non-Christian Atayals. Despite the domination of Christianity over the Bienjing villagers and even the Taiwanese aboriginal groups in general, there were also Atayal people who chose different religious beliefs – for example, the Taiwanese folk religion – in their Christianised community. Although the few Atayals who turned to the Taiwanese folk religion had already moved out of Bienjing village, we might still see how the difference in religion (between Christianity and non-Christianity) affected the identity of Atayals through another example in Hekou village, which is ten minutes' drive away from Bienjing village and which I visited many times.<sup>50</sup>

Participant YLH's father was a *tumux* in Hekou village who converted to Catholicism in the 1950s. Despite being the daughter of a *tumux*, YLH did not follow her father's decision to become a Catholic, and instead became a Buddhist after she married. Not long after her divorce, YLH returned to the village with her son and joined the local aboriginal-dance troop. Although she has been back in the village for years, she still feels marginalised and feels that she does not fit in. This feeling of disengagement is especially obvious when she is unable to take part in almost all the biggest (religious) events in the village, such as *zhulingji* and Christmas, which involve the whole community. In fact, though all of the participants in both Hekou and Bienjing villages stated that religion is a personal and free choice to everyone, they still see examples such as YLH as being 'more like Han people' because of their religious choices. YLH considers herself a *tayan*, since she had always, as a child, participated in every 'tradition', whether it was Christian or not. She saw her religious belief as merely a 'philosophical guide' of life that helped her to get through different difficulties and that was not contrary to the 'principles' (by which she meant the ethical aspects of the *gaga*) of being a *tayan*. The villagers still call her a *tayan*, although they find it hard to recognise YLH as 'one of us', like other Christian villagers who inherited 'the traditions'. Similar example can also be seen on a wealthy

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<sup>50</sup> 'Hekou' here is also a fictitious name.

participant, who chose to follow and promote the traditional *gaga* (wherever possible) in daily practices instead of being a Christian. Such endeavour in restoring the traditions, however, did not gain the approval of the villagers. On contrary, some of the villagers even commented her as ‘the *tayan* walking on the wrong path’, who ‘shares the Atayal blood yet failed to see the “true” idea of being a *tayan*.’

The split in the religious and secular identities in *tayan* is therefore revealed. As the secular life does not involve the practice of *gaga*, one can be a *tayan* as long as the individual shares Atayal blood. However, an individual still needs to have a common religious identity – Christianity – if they are to acquire the more traditional, social sense of a *tayan* and be completely accepted in the modern Atayal community, which, following the years of missionary work, has become a ‘translocal community of coreligionists’ (Keane, 2007: 114) that largely eliminated the boundaries set by the *gaga* in the traditional societies. Such a split in the idea of a *tayan* not only shows how religious status affects a person’s social relationships in the Atayal society, but also reflects how the connection between the religious object and *gaga* intricately operates on the Atayals’ identity. Similar to the studies of how the tribal societies in Southeast Asia kept their own identity, distinct from the mainstream culture, by converting to Christianity (Robert W. Hefner, 1993b; Kammerer, 1998; Keyes, 1993; Kipp, 1995; Tapp, 1989; Tooker, 1989; Yang, 2009), the Bienjing Atayals also see Christianity as ‘their’ religion that distinguished them from the Taiwanese Han people.

## 6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I started by analysing the changes in the connotations of *gaga* and *utux* after the conversion to Christianity. In the early stage of the Atayals’ conversion to Christianity, the priests at the time were devoted to ‘Christianising’ the traditional Atayal customs by replacing the places of *utux* with *utux kayal* in the rituals, making the role of *utux* in these rituals not only return to the ‘human’ status of souls, but also merely a ‘cultural symbol’, in order to reconcile the theological differences between Christianity and the Atayal traditions. However, even with these efforts to bridge the traditional and Christian cosmologies, the Christianised God–man relationship is far less interactive than it used to be, whilst many other customs were also considered superstitions by this new *gaga*. This also indicates that, although Christianity shares

similar views to the traditional Atayal culture on the cause of the world and morality, the scope of divinity is rather distinct.

The differences between Christianity and the traditional Atayal culture in relation to the idea of the sacred can be seen from different perspectives. On the one hand, as the modern Christian belief became the instrument to eradicate the ‘superstitions’ in the traditional Atayal culture, the old, orally transmitted *gaga* became questionable, and the Bible’s written, tested words thus became the orthodox source of the *gaga*. Meanwhile, the villagers’ inability to read and write also resulted in the churches holding the authority of knowledge in the Bible, and the term *gaga* thus gradually became the byword for ‘church’. However, since the old *gaga* – the sacred contract with *utux* – was practised in every detail of life, and every action was an experience of the sacred in order to honour that contract, the ossification of the content of that sacred contract in the Bible led to the loss of its original coping mechanism to the change of environment, and shifted the practice (including worshipping rituals) and learning of those sacred words from life itself to the church. Later, as different churches have different ways of worshipping, each sect thus has its own ‘*gaga*’, and *gaga* also became the reference for ‘religion’ that signified, for the first time in Atayal history, the domain of ‘the secular’.

On the other hand, the source of Atayal identity also appeared to experience changes in its sacred character. As the scope of *gaga*, in terms of the way it functioned to identify social groups, shifted from being tribe centred to being church centred, the identification mode of the Atayals became sector oriented. In other words, the sacred distinction between the ‘we-group’ and the ‘they-group’ shifted from the invisible bond of *gaga* – and the geo-relationship deriving from it – to a sense of belonging both to the physical church and to the religious sect. In addition, the tradition of baptising newborns in the Protestant Church also caused the once lifelong sacred practice of ‘being a *tayan*’ to be changed to being ‘born as a *tayan*’, which subverted the process not just of the identification of the Atayal self, but also of the ‘sacred identification’ of the self. Although the Catholic Church does not share such a custom, the Christian environment in the village also drives the younger family members to see themselves as Christians even without baptism. Here, it was exactly such ‘privatisation’ of Christian belief that led to the duality of the term *tayan*: it can be sacred as a baptised Christian, or be secular as an ‘inherited’ Christian. However, since inheritance implies a bloodline without actually practising the *gaga*, the term



*tayan*, which was originally sacred, became a term with both secular and sacred associations. This mode of identification of a *tayan* is then extended to the whole Atayal community, where one can be a *tayan* by bloodline, but only a Christian *tayan* can be recognised as a social person of the Atayal.

## **Chapter 7**

### ***Tayan:* The Schizophrenic Self**

If identity is the ‘self’ constructed by the interactions between individuals and society (Blumer, 1986; Cooley, 1998; Jacobs, 2006; Mead, 1934b, 1992), any change in the conceptualisation of the ‘individual self’ would, therefore, involve the transition of the social, cultural self. That is to say, if analysing how the religious structure affects Atayal identity gives the possible answer to **who** is *tayan* in both the pre-Christian and modern contexts, as I have done in the previous discussions, then the exploration of the cultural self of the Atayals in this chapter will help to identify **what** is *tayan* in the transition/reinvention of their ‘traditions’. Such clarification matters, as it is not the signifier itself that reveals an individual’s belonging, but the culture it contains that expresses who we really are (Huntington, 2005, 2011).

In the previous chapters, I have demonstrated, drawing on ethnography, what a ‘person of Atayal’ means to Bienjing villagers in both the pre-Christian and modern Atayal societies, and how that idea changes along with their encounters with modernity and Christianity – or Christianity in modernity. Converting to Christianity is, to the Atayals, perceived as adapting the Atayal belief to a ‘better’, modern ‘version’ that fits what the villagers were taught about the *gaga*. Christianity, therefore, is now claimed as the Atayals’ religious tradition, which is separated from their ‘cultural’ traditions. Following that, the concept of ‘an *Atayal* person’ has also experienced a rather radical change in terms of adapting the whole set of ideologies to the context of modern society. This not only influenced their cognition of ethnic identity by integrating Christianity with the *gaga*, but also brought a new connotation of *tayan* that is distant from its original reference.<sup>51</sup> The changes in the idea and meaning of ‘*tayan*’ revealed what Keane (2007) describes in his influential book *Christian Moderns* as the tendency of separating religion from culture in modern Christianity (and especially Protestantism). That separation has led the term *tayan* to face a somewhat ‘schizophrenic’ state today. On the one hand, *tayan* is no longer a reference for the ‘religious’ social actor in the traditional Atayal sense, in which one could only bear the title by the daily practices of *gaga*. It is now a ‘genetic’ indication of those who share Atayal blood, or who share a similar cultural origin, in the same way that the villagers identify the Seediq people without the acquirement of religious

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<sup>51</sup> Or, we can say that the *tayan* the Atayal people use today has become a simulacrum – in Baudrillard’s sense – of the ‘*tayan*’ in the pre-Christian Atayal society. Although the focus of this study does not allow me to further develop the arguments of how this term and other cultural signifiers are reconstructed with the conversion to Christianity, as a form of cultural appropriation, the two positions of simulation from Deleuze (1994) and Baudrillard (1994) might serve as the opposite angles towards religious syncretism in different cases.

(and daily) practice, as outlined in chapter three. On the other hand, to be **the** *tayan* that is more socially recognised and accepted in the modern Atayal society, one is also expected to be a Christian rather than just sharing cultural or blood ties. This radical change in the perception of the term *tayan*, in other words, is what Fredric Jameson (2001:34) calls the ‘breaking down of the signifying chain’ that reveals the disunity of time, the failure to experience a coherent sequence of memory (Jameson, 1983), and that resulted in the ‘schizophrenia’ of the Atayal people’s reference of identity.

This rupture of the memory sequence and its consequences are what this chapter is looking into. As memory is constructed during interactions with others, it has been seen as critical in shaping our identity (Bartlett, 1995; Halbwachs, 1992; Marques, Paez, & Serra, 1997). When speaking about culture, the memory of the majority becomes the source of how they recognise themselves from others (Assmann, 2006, 2009; Halbwachs, 1992). Whether it is to remember this collective memory, to construct a new memory, or to forget certain parts of memory, such framing of ‘history’ not only defines ‘who we are’, but also reveals ‘what we are becoming’ (S. Hall, 1990). The changes in how the Atayals restore, remember and recognise their cultural memory can therefore reveal the factors influencing how their identities varied, and can sketch the image of their cultural identity.

## **7.1 The Atayals’ cultural memory: what is ‘of us’?**

In 2011, the film ‘Seediq Bale’ (Warriors of the Rainbow) was released in Taiwan. It was based on the historical event known as the ‘Wushe Incident’, and told the story of how the chieftain of Mahebu (a Seediq community), Mona Rudao, led his people to fight against the Japanese rule in Taiwan. This epic film illustrates the social and cultural conflicts around the Mahebu Seediqs under the Japanese rule, as well as depicting how they practised to be a ‘true man’ (as ‘Seediq Bale’ translates directly) in fighting for their belief, autonomy and way of life. To promote this Taiwanese aboriginal film, many Bienjing villagers received free tickets for the screening, and that became a hot topic in the village during my first month there. The kids would imitate the dance the actors did in the movie, or repeat together the lines they had learnt from it. Some older villagers, though, found it overly long and thought it contained ‘too much blood’ (participant ZMC), and would ask me if I had seen the

film when they found out I was there to do some research.

Though they use a different language and are now classed as an independent aboriginal ethnic group from the Atayals, the Seediqs are still seen by most of the Bienjing villagers as ‘one of our own’ (participant ZCL), which is understood to mean sharing similarities in culture, traditional religious views and bloodline. While the Seediq independence movement claimed that its aim was to ‘restore’ what the Seediqs had always thought themselves to be – not ‘*tayan*’, but ‘*Seediq*’ – the participants believed that being independent from the Atayal family was a political operation designed to obtain better resources and government allowances, for this was ‘the only thing to gain out of being an independent indigenous group’ (participant GC).<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, even though that was the common consensus amongst the Bienjing Atayals, their views of the film seemed to differ in relation to the cultural similarities between the Seediqs and the Atayals. To the older villagers, many scenes in the film brought up memories from their childhoods. While the scenes were not exactly the same as what they had experienced or heard, they did find connections in terms of the traditional lifestyle, the *gaga* that their parents’ or grandparents’ generation used to follow. Some would even claim that the film was just the Seediq version of ‘their story’. Many of the younger generations, aged 50 and under, saw the film as having little or nothing to do with the Atayals. While agreeing that some cultural symbols in the film (such as the patterns of facial tattoos and clothes, and the image of the ‘warriors’) were similar to the Atayal tradition, these participants either denied that the behaviour (especially the beheading actions) in the film had been part of their culture, or saw those actions as false ‘superstitions’ in Atayal history. The most significant difference in perception between these younger participants and the older ones was that the former did not see themselves as sharing the belief in *utux* and *gaga* that the Seediqs had in their *utux* and *gaya*.

These two different attitudes held by Bienjing villagers towards the cultural presentation in the film suggest two different frames of cultural memory. To address this issue, it is necessary first to clarify the differences between the idea of ‘cultural

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<sup>52</sup> In the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law, as the budget for indigenous peoples’ welfare is fixed each year and assigned to ‘each’ indigenous group by the proportion of the population, the Atayals have suffered from unbalanced distribution of the resources, as they are the second largest and one of the most scattered indigenous groups in Taiwan. Politically speaking, for a small, geographically concentrated group such as the Seediq, being independent means that they can make more effective use of the resources.

memory’ and ‘communicative/collective memory’. Collective memory, as Halbwachs (1992) calls it, is a continuous current of thought that stays in the people’s consciousness within their group, and that is only relevant to the group. This collective memory is socially constructed (Halbwachs, 1992). Every individual of a certain group – for example, families or political parties – communicates their personal memories with each other in formless, wilful and disorganised ways, and through the process of retelling and re-forming their memories they share a set of common images of the group (Assmann, 2009). The preservation of collective memory is vital in the development of social identity (Connerton, 2003). However, most orally transmitted communicative collective memories last only for three or four generations, and their horizon also narrows with time (Assmann, 2009; Dodd & Boytner, 2010). This is why communicative memory cannot offer a ‘fix point’ to, in Assmann’s words (2009:127), connect ‘the ever expanding past in the passing time’ to create ‘history’. Meanwhile, if this living communication is ‘crystallised in the forms of objectivised culture’ – be it a text, ritual, or even a sacred place – the group relationship and its ‘contemporary reference’ would therefore be disengaged, and thus would cease to have the fundamental character of collective memory – the ‘contemporary’ collective knowledge (Assmann, 2009).

While also being framed in groups, cultural memory, unlike collective memory – which is based on the contemporary, daily communication of individuals – can be fixed over time by being stored in cultural symbols. Cultural memory is characterised by its distance from people’s daily lives, objectivised cultural formation and institutional communications (Assmann, 2009). Through objectivised cultural formations and institutional communications (recitation, practice, observance), the ‘fix point’ could therefore be built to connect the passing and the coming times, and certain experiences and meanings could thus be repeatedly gained in organised, specific ways without being attached to daily communicative practices (Assmann, 2009). These long-lasting cultural formations and institutional communications are what Assmann (2009:129) called the ‘figures of memory’ that provide the ‘concretion of identity’ and the relation to the group. To him, cultural memory is the ‘collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society’ (Assmann, 2009: 126). This knowledge is not only obtained ‘through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation’ (Assmann, 2009: 126), but also establishes the awareness of unity in the group, as in ‘we are this’, or

‘that’s our opposite’. The storage and circulation of this knowledge that derives from such ‘societal practice and initiation’, to a great extent, would therefore be manipulated by the institutionalisation of culture, authoritative power and value structure in the group (Assmann, 2009). Through the cooperation of these factors, the self-image could be conveyed and stabilised by ‘cultivation’ of the cultural memory, thereby revealing the society itself to its members and others (Assmann, 2006, 2009). ‘Which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society’ (Assmann, 2009: 133).

Therefore, the discrepancies in the Bienjing Atayals’ views of the cultural presentation in ‘Seediq Bale’ are not just different ‘opinions’ of the film; they actually proclaim the inconsistency of cultural memory between the younger and the older villagers, and thus the variance of cultural identity between – to be more contextually specific – those who grew up with Christianity and those who ‘converted’ to Christianity. This rupture of the cultural memory indicates the change of cultural knowledge. To Assmann, cultural knowledge has two perspectives: normative texts and formative texts (Assmann, 2006, 2009). Normative texts are guidelines of social conduct. Assmann (2006:38) takes the *tao* in Chinese culture and the Jewish *halakhah* to indicate the function of normative texts. They are, in short, the answer to the question ‘what shall we do’ (Assmann, 2006:38). Formative texts, on the other hand, are the source of self-image and help to create social identity. Tribal myths and heroic stories are such texts of the knowledge that confirm the identity in cultural memory, as well as answer who we are (Assmann, 2006:38). From this point of view, the normative texts of the Atayal culture would therefore, as I have shown in the previous chapters, be the *gaga*, their religious reference for their ‘way of life’. Even though *gaga* was studied through the daily and communicative practices, as the whole set of behavioural guidelines, it was also the ‘islands of time’ (Assmann, 2009) that objectivised ideas to practices, and provided the ‘fix point’ of the Atayal culture. From the discussions of the Christianised *gaga* in the last chapter we can come to a conclusion about how the normative texts of the Atayals’ cultural knowledge were altered. This leaves the changes of the formative texts to be the focus of this chapter. Therefore, in order to have a better picture of the ‘formative texts’ of the Atayal people, I’d like to start from the transitions of the role of *tumux* and the heroic ideas in Bienjing village. I will look at how they revealed the presentation of traditional

Atayal culture, embodying the Atayals' cultural values and carrying the function of storing and 'orienting' cultural memories, and how that changed after the villagers converted to Christianity.

## 7.2 The power hierarchy and the cultural values of

### the Atayals

Before the Japanese came to 'rule' the Atayals, an Atayal '*alang/qalang*' (tribe) was traditionally led by the '*nbkis*' (elder) – or *maraho* (leader) or *pasapung* (pacifier) in different dialects – a male position which was firstly elected and then inherited. The *nbkis* would decide the common practices of the tribe. '*Nbkis*' was replaced by the term '*tumux*' during the Japanese rule.<sup>53</sup> As a tribe was formed by one or more clans, and each clan had their own *tumux*, a chief *tumux* would be elected from all the *tumux* of the clans.<sup>54</sup> The *tumux* from the most powerful clan would normally lead the rest of the '*nbkis*'; anyone who was unwilling to obey the *tumux* could also choose to leave and establish his own tribe with his followers. The system of *tumux* was also applied by the Japanese government in making the ruling policies. During Japanese rule, the role of the chief *tumux* often involved a certain political alliance with the authorities, as it needed not only to lead its people, but also to assist the Japanese in carrying orders and coordinating issues between the two parties (Ishimaru, 2011). In 1932, two years after the Wushe Incident, the Japanese government drew up the 'regulation of the tomoku medal' (頭目章授與規程), which stated that the *tumux* of each *niquan* were only officially recognised with the tomoku medal (see figure 14), and made *tumux* a position that needed to be 'authorised' to better control the aborigines (Hung, 2009; Ishimaru, 2011). Meanwhile, the Japanese also started to

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<sup>53</sup> In the Qing Dynasty there had already been a set of similar positions carried by the chief, called 'tomu' (頭目) or 'tumu' (土目). These positions functioned as the bridge between the aboriginal people and the government, but most of the Atayals were not included in such a system, as they were deemed to be 'savages' and not appropriate for such management at the time. The Japanese inherited this name for the chieftainship, and decided to unite the term 'tomu' in written character, whereas in Japanese it is pronounced as 'tomoku' (Ishimura, 2010). Why the Bienjing Atayals pronounce such a position as '*tumux*' is unknown, but it possibly originated from the 'tumu' in the Qing Dynasty.

<sup>54</sup> However, in the Japanese anthropologist Mori Ushinosuke's (1996) study, not every Atayal community would have the position of chief *tumux*, in which case the chief *tumux* would be chosen by the Japanese.



intervene in the appointment of *tumux*; they would favour the ones who were, for them, ‘good looking’, more ‘intelligent’ or politically friendly, and give them the ‘medal of tomoku’ as a token of official authentication. The issue of medals caused fights over power in some tribes, particularly where the Japanese decided to choose a different *tumux* from the original one. Though, traditionally, one who was unwilling to follow the *tumux* could choose to leave and establish his own group, the Japanese strictly monitored the movement of aborigines, which made independence from one’s original community virtually impossible.



Figure 14, a medal of *tumux* issued by the Japanese government in 1935. The front says ‘*tumux* medal’, and the back says ‘Governor-General of Taiwan’ with the issue number. (Provided by the *tumux* of Da-Xing village, Yu Han-Zhang)

In the Atayal culture, a *tumux* traditionally required the following characteristics: bravery, kindness, fairness and skill in rhetoric. Being kind, fair and articulate were skills that were considered necessary in presiding over contentious matters within or outside the tribe, and in organising ceremonies or praying for blessings; but being brave was the necessary quality of a great male *tayan*. Being brave, in traditional Atayal culture, means to be skilful in hunting and fighting, and to have ‘a fearless heart’. Bravery in this sense was also the most valued virtue for Atayal men. Traditionally, men would hang the skulls of their retrieved game outside the house to indicate the householder’s braveness,<sup>55</sup> whilst others would also judge the householder’s success by the number of skulls. The highest practice of braveness was

<sup>55</sup> Hanging the skulls was also said to bring luck during later hunting activities.

the action of beheading (*m'gaga*), which was also the test of a young man's initiation ceremony – only by passing this test could a 'boy' become a 'man' and be tattooed on the face to symbolise his status as a 'true' *tayan* (see Figure 8 in chapter three).<sup>56</sup> The more 'brave' a *tayan* was, the more respect he would receive from others. Although a *tumux* was supposed to be produced hereditarily, they could also be unseated by the members of the tribe if they did not show enough 'braveness', making the *tumux* a position that was both ascribed and achieved. Sometimes even if a *tayan* did not hold the title of *tumux*, and was not yet old enough to be consulted, he could still be involved in the decision-making meetings if he had been seen to be brave enough by carrying out many successful beheadings.

Here I need to bring in the value theory of Louis Dumont (1980, 1986) and how Joel Robbins (2009) applied that to his study on the conversion of the Urapmin people. To put it simply, Dumont believes that the more valuable an idea is, the more 'rationalised' – in a Weberian sense – the term will be (Robbins, 2009). That means the more valuable ideas will be more discussed and practised in their social context (Dumont, 1980). It is these super- and subordinated relationships of hierarchy between different cultural values that determine the framework of a culture (Dumont, 1980). Based on such a theoretical context, Robbins (2009) observes how the change of values could be seen in the Urapmin people's conversion to Christianity. He argues that the change of the cosmological view echoes the changes of the hierarchy of values, which would also cause the redistribution of social power (only those who adapt to the new values can re/gain the new social power) that further influences the transition of history and culture. In the previous chapters, we have found that the Atayals' conversion to Christianity was based on the 'sameness' between Christianity and their traditional religious belief. This is different to Robbins' (2009) conclusion that the Urapmin people chose the more 'valuable' one when facing contrasting ideas in their conversion. However, that does not mean that the Atayals' conversion did not experience a similar rupture of continuity in values and religious ideas, as, in fact, if we agree with Dumont that cultural values frame the character of a society, we can see how today the Atayals' cultural values have moved far away from those of 60 years ago. Hence, Robbins' value approach to the Urapmin people still provides a

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<sup>56</sup> When an Atayal man reached the age of 12, he would usually be tattooed on the forehead and chin as his initiation ceremony; but, strictly speaking, a man could not be facially tattooed if he did not get his first human skull (in other words, perform his first beheading) by himself, and hence his father or brother would usually act for him.

reference for how we see such bravery played out in the traditional Atayal lives, as well as providing the key to understanding the orientation of social changes.

Bravery was shown to be an important value in the fact that ‘brave’ ones were included in the decision-making meetings, and it was also considered the key characteristic of a traditional Atayal ‘hero’ – especially in relation to beheadings.<sup>57</sup> Bravery and successful beheadings were believed to have been brought about by strictly following the *gaga* and thus the blessing of the *utux*. This was also why a traditional *tumux* of the Atayals, though not necessarily needing to be a ‘hero’, had to be ‘heroic’ to deserve his title (participants ZCL, YHP, YHZ, HSF) and to serve as a role model. The elders of Narima called such a figure ‘*kazahou na tsokoliag*’ – meaning ‘the person who is brave and flawless in morality’, who usually ‘required at least thirty heads’ to be able to be called so – or ‘*luax na tsokoliag*’, which means ‘real man’. ‘*Tsokoliag*’ means ‘man’, whilst ‘*kazahou*’ refers to ‘sinless’, and ‘*luax*’ to ‘the core of stone or wood’.<sup>58</sup> The *kilhaku* people in Sawig and Valus called this kind of heroic figure ‘*maotox*’, meaning ‘fearless fighter’. In order to represent the practices of the ‘braveness’ – meaning the number of people one had beheaded – the Atayal men would tattoo small stripes on their chest to manifest their deeds, gain their reputation and attract a future spouse (see Figure 15).

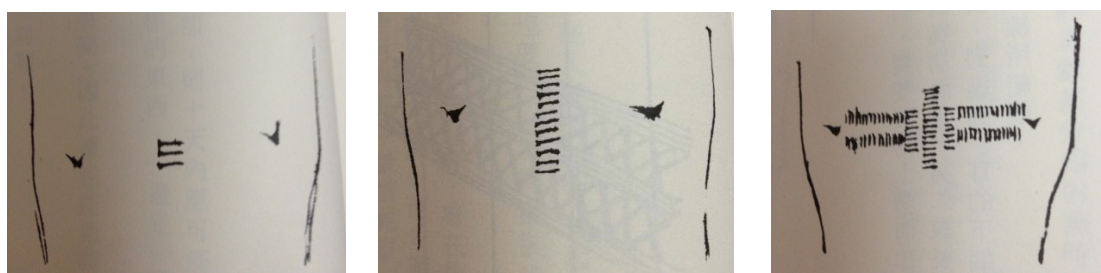


Figure 15, drawings of chest tattoos of Atayal men from the Japanese period. From left to right are the tattoos of an elder, a *tumux* and the chief *tumux* Maay Gahu. (Source: S.-H. Wang, *Historical literature and studies of the aboriginal groups in*

<sup>57</sup> The word ‘hero’ here means a man (or woman) who practised their cultural values and received respect for doing so, and who may even have served as the moral standard and as a role model.

<sup>58</sup> These terms of the heroic vary in different dialect groups.

The horizontal stripes in the pictures above represent heads – one stripe means one head. Figure 16 depicts the chief *tumux* of the P'qwalic tribe in 1906, Maay Gahu, who claimed to have beheaded 30 men, and decorated his tattoo with vertical stripes (S.-H. Wang, 2003). From the elder to the chief *tumux*, these marks of 'braveness', as in Dumont and Robbins, not only functioned as a manifestation of bravery, but also represented the hierarchy of power and values in the traditional Atayal societies. In other words, when this 'bravery' was considered the standard of a hero, then the more 'heroic' one was, the more influential he became in deciding the *gaga* of the Atayals. This not only served as the cultural formation of the Atayals, but also provided the basis for the Atayals' institutional communication, both of which are critical in shaping cultural memory.

Even after the custom of beheading was strictly forbidden and gradually abandoned during the Japanese rule, this performance of bravery was still often the way the Atayals attempted to gain power in the villagers' memory of their culture:

Participant JWS: Before (converting to Christianity), people in the village fought a lot. They thought the one who won must be stronger, and so he should have a bigger say in the matters of the village. That was how (the Atayal) people were before.

However, the terms used to describe the heroic figures – *maotox* and *kazahou* – are no longer indications of fearless, 'brave' ones. They are now given new interpretations in the modern context, and are both absorbed by local missionary usage. On a Sunday morning, the Atayal priest in the Presbyterian Church of Sawig passionately stated what *maotox* means in their modern, Christian traditions: “*maotox*” is not someone who fights, but he fights for God and faith’.<sup>59</sup> A ‘*maotox*’ is a ‘fighter for God’, he said. ‘*Kazahou*’, a word originally used by the Narima people to refer to sinlessness, is now being translated as “the Saints of Catholicism”. Here, we can see that the value of these signifiers has changed due to the shift in what they signify. Though the ideas of the two terms still remain – *maotox* for a ‘fighter’ and *kazahou* for a ‘sinless person’ – the value underlying the two ‘heroic’ references has been reoriented from

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<sup>59</sup> The original words were used in both the Atayal language and Mandarin, and in Chinese the sentence was: ‘（現在）*maotox* 不是那些用蠻力取勝的人，而是要為了上帝和信仰征戰的人’.

the Atayal 'bravery' to a Christian context. The word '*maotox*' is the best example here. With '*maotox*', 'bravery' is no longer the focus of the term, as this 'bravery' is only valuable by serving God. This change of value in the modern Atayal culture can also be spotted by comparing the church's usage of the term with the following statement:

Participant SYK: We used to call the heroes '*maotox*', meaning that they were afraid of nothing and were good in a fight. But now we also call those who only know how to use muscles and fight a lot '*maotox*'. Now '*maotox*' also means pariah.

From the two modern contexts, we can see how 'fighting' itself has been transformed from physical force to the abstract idea of faithful, determined actions for God. It is also no longer the testimony of whether one follows the *gaga* or not, but a merit, and can only be a merit when such actions are taken on behalf of God. Here we can see how the Christian cosmology, the Christianised *gaga*, operates in shaping the modern Atayals' cultural values. It not only shifted the religious subject from the *utux* to the Christian God, but also revealed the fracture of cultural values even when the Bienjing villagers claimed their adoption of Christianity was out of the 'sameness' between the traditional and this modern 'way of life'. By the same token, the term '*kazahou*' further unveiled the transition of values due to the Christianised *gaga*. In the traditional Atayal society, the idea of the moral purity of '*kazahou*' was manifested through fighting actions, and only by winning (surviving) could a man prove that he had followed the *gaga* and thus was 'pure' in the moral standards set by the *utux*. However, this moral purity of *kazahou* in the modern Catholic context is entirely based on following the Christian 'way of life', which has been clearly stated in the Bible: that the Lord cannot be 'tested' (Matthew, 4:7), but would put 'sufferings' to men 'in all kinds of trials' (1 Peter, 1:6) even if they are 'doing good' (1 Peter, 3: 8–22). In other words, the Christianised *gaga* would not promise 'living' and a smooth life as 'winning'; on the contrary, it values death not only because one must suffer for one's faith in Christianity, but also because death means that a Christian can finally 'meet his maker'. Most of all, death is also the only way a Saint can be canonised. These differences in the connotations of the 'heroic' and the view of death often appeared in the Sunday church services. In short, these differences marked the reorientation of the principal cultural value of the villagers from 'bravery' to 'piety', since actions now are only valuable **with** faith, and not **as** faith, as in the

pre-Christian Atayal society. On the one hand, we can say that this turn to piety in the cultural hero models echoes what Johnstone (2006) describes as the ‘internalisation’ of a series of knowledge and values in religious conversion, though this change of core values is contrary to what the villagers thought, in other words that Christianity was ‘the same’ as their traditional belief. On the other hand, we can also have a clearer picture of not only how, as I have demonstrated in the last chapter, the Atayals’ identity is deeply influenced by their religious character in the society, but also what their ideal character of a person and culture has become after their conversion to Christianity.

## 7.3 The reorientation of value and the redistribution of power

As the *gaga* determined the character of the Atayal culture, those who were in control of the *gaga* would therefore be in control of the cultural presentation. In the last chapter, I demonstrated how the *gaga* has been replaced with the Christian way of life, and that the clergy in the church are now in possession of the authority of the *gaga*. Although in Robbins’ (2004, 2009) study of the Urapmin people, this kind of turn of the social power was deemed to be brought about mainly by the prior changes of values, in the following section I will demonstrate how this change of the Atayals was firstly based on the differentiation of the power of *tumux*, and **then** further promoted the transition of cultural values.

We know that the decision-making meetings were no longer politically effective to the Atayals from the 1950s onwards, but the mindset of such a process still remained amongst the villagers when it came to the decision to adopt Christianity as the better and modern version of their religious belief (see the last chapter). The *tumux*, especially, had no actual power to decide the critical matters relating to their lands and economy, but was still able to exercise his social power in things that were less political, but were of immediate concern for their everyday life. Before converting to Christianity, or even during the early stage of their conversion, the *tumux* of each tribe in the village were still often being consulted on matters such as

marriage and fights between their own people or with other villages, or even when someone was sick. These matters were brought to the *tumux* to seek approval, a just settlement or a prayer for the unwell. This kind of prayer did not serve as ‘healing’, as the *mahuni* did to reconcile conflicts between the person and the *utux*, but was more like ‘saying good words for the person to the *utux*’ (participants YHF, YHP) with the authority of a *tumux*. The praying to *tumux* could also be seen in relation to other important matters such as moving or finding jobs, and of course on those occasions when tribal rituals had to be held. The *tumux* was said to be able to do such praying because he had a ‘stronger mind’, meaning that he was ‘better than normal people in every way’ and strictly followed the *gaga*, so that his words of blessing were more effective than others.<sup>60</sup> When a *tumux* was not available for such activity, his place would be taken by the next reputable man in the tribe.

The phrase ‘stronger mind’ was also used to describe heroic figures in the traditional Atayal society (participant HSF, TYF), especially in the term ‘*luax na tsokoliag*’. Referring to the ‘core of stone or wood’, the ‘*luax*’ in this sense was also perceived as representing the character of the ‘stronger mind’. This connection not only revealed, again, the operation of ‘bravery’ in the pre-Christian Atayal culture, but also showed a deeper mechanism between power and value. In traditional Atayal society, the hierarchy of the prayer ‘effectiveness’ of the ‘brave ones’ was arranged according to the level of their ‘stronger minds’, which was determined by their practices of bravery. This was why, when it came to choosing someone to temporarily take the place of the *tumux* in praying, the ‘next reputable man’ would be the exceptionally ‘brave’, ‘heroic’ one, if there were any. This ‘stronger mind’ gave one the quality of being included in the group of power, and of being more ‘effective’ in praying. The status of social power of the pre-Christian Atayals could therefore be said to be positively related to the status of religious power, as the participant TMC stated:

They (the pre-Christian Atayal people) believed that the more powerful people were stronger in praying. The older people in the tribe would know about the difficult language used in praying, but only the powerful ones like *tumux* could make the words be more effective than others.

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<sup>60</sup> The original words for ‘stronger mind’ were ‘心比較強’.

Here, this mechanism between power and religion did not operate as a kind of divine-right kingship; rather, the position of power empowered the person's religious effectiveness. We have learnt that the Atayals did not have distinctive political organisations, social classes or fixed power structures, and that reputations and authority were built on the personal characteristics and especially the practices of *gaga*. It was the practices of *gaga* and one's cultural values that decided one's power position in Atayal society, and thus that endowed a person with 'sacred' ability, which meant that his prayers received the blessing of the *utux*. In other words, it was the practices of *gaga* – which more or less involved the personal qualities to be able to follow it persistently – that enabled one to become a role model, gain a social position, and then obtain religious power. However, 'those who made serious mistakes (in other words, violated the fundamental regulations of the *gaga*), even those who shared the authorities in deciding the tribal matters', would also be regarded as 'having lost the trust of the *utux*' (participant HSF). That loss of trust would not only result in adversities to one's people or family, but would also mean that the individual would lose the efficacy of his praying. Therefore, practising the *gaga*, the 'stronger mind', was what empowered *tumux* with more 'sacred' missions, such as waiting for signs when making new *gaga* (see chapter 3), leading rituals and saying prayers for the Atayal people. That is, in traditional Atayal society, the practice of values could not only decide the hierarchy of power, but also determine the hierarchy of sacredness.

The religious power of *tumux* was challenged by the conversion to Christianity. Although the early Presbyterian missionary work was rejected, as detailed in the last chapter, in the 1950s Catholicism was shown to be the solution to the economical, cultural and identity-related problems of the Atayals in the modern state society. Christianity could not only reconcile the conflicts between the villagers and the state society, but also offered explanations of the 'superstitions' in the traditional Atayal beliefs, thus revealing itself as a superior, 'better version' of Atayal traditions. This Christianised *gaga* was believed to be 'the same' as in the villagers' memories; however, Christianity also proved that many of the old beliefs were wrong, and this directly shattered the authenticity of the traditional Atayal 'way of life', and thereby the people who held such knowledge of it. This lopsided relationship between the traditional and the modern Atayal belief meant that any religious power that the *tumux* had left shifted to the Christian clergies. This transition of the power subordination in



religious matters was perceived by participant SYK as follows:

... after that (believing in Christianity), we all went to the priests for the bigger matters of life, like weddings ... in the Atayal traditions these customs were held by the *tumux*. He would pray for good luck for the newlyweds, but he did not know the *gaga* of the church as well as the priests ... How to put it? Because you have to practise the *gaga*, you have to know and follow what is taught in the Bible in order to be heard by God. The *tumux* is of course a respectable position, but he knows our traditional culture better. Whereas in terms of belief, the priest knows better, his words would be stronger.

Since the *tumux* no longer commanded the authority of this modern *gaga*, his lack of knowledge meant that he could not function as an exemplar and role model in practising the *gaga* anymore. This transition of the knowledge paradigm of the *gaga* not only brought a shift of religious power in setting the role models for morality, but also revealed the reason for the shift in religious authority from *tumux* to the church, as stated in the previous chapter.<sup>61</sup> That is, not knowing the *gaga* (and hence practising) as well as the priest, to the Atayals, represents the fact that the *tumux* could not speak for his people to God as ‘effectively’ as he used to in the old tradition. In this sense it seems to echo back to what the philosopher Francis Bacon states as early as the sixteenth century: that ‘knowledge is power’ (*Religious Meditations, Of Heresies*, 1597). On the other hand, we could even say that the transition of religious authority in the Atayals’ conversion, which established the knowledge–power paradigm, also manifests how ‘power is knowledge’ (Foucault, 1980, 1995) in a Foucauldian perspective. The transition not only changed the interpretation of the world and the social status of the group’s members, but also reaffirmed the new

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<sup>61</sup> The influences of the shifting of the religious authority from *tumux* to the clergies are perhaps greater than the reconstruction of power in the tribes. In some Atayal tribes in Miaoli, the position of *tumux* has been suspended for years, which is usually the result of the successors refusing to give up their jobs in the city and go back to the village, whilst the rest of the tribal members don’t think it’s necessary to elect another, since the functions of *tumux* have all been replaced by the government and the church. Meanwhile, the lack of specific responsibilities the *tumux* has to take in modern Atayal societies also made some of them feel less valued and made them question the meaning of being one. One participant showed such depression while I was in the field, and later he was charged with conversion of lands, extortion and bodily harm by the local court. This would have been unthinkable in the past for someone in his position, who used to serve as a ‘role model’ for the rest of the community.

structure of power and knowledge in the modern *gaga*.

To a certain extent, this is also similar to Eva Keller's (2006) study of how the Seventh Day Adventists in Madagascar saw the study of the Bible as a way to manifest the power of those words from God. As a consequence, the 'stronger mind', that characteristic which enabled an Atayal to best follow the *gaga* and resulted in the 'effectiveness' of saying prayer, has also shifted from the *tumux* to the priests. The Atayals' idea of the relation between knowing/practising *gaga* and religious 'effectiveness' also led to the redistribution of social power in each tribe of the village when facing the transition of religious knowledge. Though, at first, many of the villagers did not really understand the theological meaning of 'converting' to Christianity, but simply went to church on Sundays, they soon found out that this new place for learning the *gaga* was run not by the *tumux*, nor by the elders who had the 'wisdom' and the '*maotox*' that had the 'bigger say' before, but by the priest and those early converts who knew more about this modern *gaga*. The positions in the church were also hierarchically divided, into the leading priest, the 'elders', the ministers and the laity, to take the Presbyterian Church as an example. These positions are usually assigned based on how good one's knowledge of the doctrines and one's devotion to the church are. To the Atayals, this means not only that the 'powerful' ones in the traditional Atayal societies were replaced by these church elders, but also that the approach to obtaining social reputation was institutionalised into these positions, rather than the practice of 'bravery' (K. C. Huang, 2000).<sup>62</sup> This, again, not only showed the transition of the cultural value from the practice of bravery to piety, but also revealed the relation between power, cultural values and religious ideas in the modern Atayal society.

The knowledge of the *gaga* that the *tumux* possesses has become what the villagers called the 'traditional culture' – note that it is not 'cultural tradition' – which is separated from the church's *gaga*, from their modern 'way of life'. This is not to say that all traditional customs have disappeared from the Atayals' modern lives, since we can see from the discussion in chapters 5 and 6 that the villagers still keep some rituals and some minor 'superstitions' without acknowledging it. However,

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<sup>62</sup> Reputation can also be gained by wealth, but such a reputation in the village is only seen as having 'a good business brain' and does not relate to leadership. These people with good business brains would usually be asked for economical investment in the development of the village, whereas only those who are both wealthy **and** religious would be respected by the villagers, and would be invited to the communal meetings to take part in communal matters.

compared to the pre-Christian Atayals, who saw these rituals as the sacred practice of identity – that is, the practice of the *gaga* that constructed the group consciousness – the rituals are now held more as a part of the Atayals’ cultural heritage, which belongs to a different category from their current religious belief. This shall be further addressed in the following discussion.

## 7.4 ‘Modern’ Atayal traditions and ‘old culture’

As knowledge is always defined and controlled by the people who are in power (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Telban, 2001), *gaga* as the cultural knowledge of the Atayals was also redefined and reframed when the religious power of the *tumux* shifted to the hands of the Christian church. In the last chapter I illustrated how the *gaga* was ‘emplaced’ to the church by the embodiment of the Atayals’ modern identity in Christianity. During this process, the Christianised *gaga* not only continued and reframed the Atayals’ identity, but also gave them experiences of the ‘now time’ (Stewart & Strathern, 2009). This ‘now time’ is often revealed, if we look back at the statements of the villagers in the last chapters, through their referencing of the traditional culture as the ‘old times’ or ‘before’. They also distinguish between ‘old’ and ‘now’ *gaga*. In other words, rather than being divided purely by the sense of time or economic styles, the Atayals’ sense of history and ‘traditions’ is more likely to be divided by the change of cosmology.

In many cases, the ‘now time’ experiences following a religious conversion have appeared in the form of syncretism (Cannell, 2006; C. Stewart & Shaw, 1994; P. J. Stewart & Strathern, 2000, 2005; Toren, 2006). They are usually derived from the constant interaction between the current converting belief and the unconverted past (Stewart & Strathern, 2009; Whitehouse, 2006), which in a way can also be said to be the factor of reinventing traditions to adapt the change of time (Hobsbawm, 2003). However, ‘now time’ is often revealed during periods of obvious rupture from the past and from ‘traditions’, such as how the Samoan people saw their past rituals and behaviours as ‘meaningless’ when they converted to different sects of Christianity (Gershon, 2006), or how the Asabano people discontinued their previous relationships with the local, traditional supernatural beings ‘in favor of others’ during their conversion to Christianity (Lohmann, 2003:109). Such a rupture from the traditions in the past of the ‘now time’ can also be spotted in the modern Atayals’ view of the

‘traditions’. In 2011, the Maioli government organised the ‘Competition of the Traditional Songs and Dances of the Atayals’ with assistance from the Taiwanese Presbyterian Church. This competition included almost all Atayal villages throughout Taiwan. What was notable was the fact that in this competition of ‘traditional songs’, competing villages sang only hymns: the only trace of the ‘traditions’ was in the Atayal costumes. In the middle of the competition, I couldn’t help but ask my middle-aged participant friend – who, like most of the other middle-aged Atayals in the village, has been going regularly to church on Sundays since childhood under the influence of her parents – how these obviously modern church songs are seen as their ‘traditional’ ones. Her answer was quite straightforward: ‘this is our tradition now’. The ‘traditions’ before the conversion to Christianity, she further added, were ‘the culture of before’. Although such reconceptualisation of cultural or religious ‘traditions’ in the act of conversion are not rare – such as how the Bene Ephraim in India claimed the Jewish practices as their own in the conversion to Judaism (Egorova & Perwez, 2013) – my participant friend’s statement pointed out a sense of rupture of time rather than a reinterpretation of history.



Figure 16, hymn singing in the Atayals’ traditional song competition.

A similar division of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’ can also be seen in the Sumbanese conversion to Christianity, observed by Webb Keane (2007): that the missionary work created a unique sense of linear history by putting the unconverted time into the past, making it an anachronism, and putting the Christian faith in the present. The traditions of the ‘now time’ to the Atayals are what they are exercising in their daily lives, the Christianised *gaga*, throughout the year: they go to church on Sundays, celebrate the

birth of Jesus and support basically anything that is coming from the church. Amongst these new ‘traditions’, Christmas is especially remarkable in relation to the ‘now time’. Being the biggest activity in Bienjing village, the significance of Christmas lies not only in the fact that all age groups participate in it (unlike the adult-only *zhulingji*), but also in the villagers’ understanding of it being the ‘new tradition’. When asked how they see Christmas and *zhulingji*, and whether they perceive any conflicts between the two events, most of the participants gave similar answers to the following:

Participant ZJW: *zhulingji* is our cultural tradition, which we now practise to preserve our traditions of the past ... and, since now we all believe in Christianity, we should follow their traditions as well ... we did not have Christmas in the past for we did not know there is such a thing as ‘Christmas’, but now that we do, it shall be our tradition, too.

Whether those practices and beliefs of the old *gaga* from the *utux* are perceived as superstitions or part of the ‘culture’, they are all included in the anachronism that belongs to the past, ‘of before’. This division of history to the Atayals not only sets a distinction between the time before and after the conversion, but also implies a division between religious faith and ‘culture’. Such a division entails a twofold meaning. One is that it categorises the faith of *utux* as the ‘old culture’, and the Christian faith as the ongoing ‘traditions’ of ‘now’. The other – similar to Peel’s (1968) observations of the Yoruba people experiencing the African characteristics when confronting Christianity – is to see the conflicts between their traditional customs and Christian belief as conflicts between different ‘cultures’ rather than different religious faiths.

Though many Bienjing villagers could consciously state the first aspect by distinguishing which customs are from their (pre-conversion) ‘culture’ and which are from the church, the second aspect is now usually only pertinent to Atayal clergies and a small number of devoted churchgoers. As most Bienjing Atayals did not fully understand the theological meaning of converting to Christianity and were simply following what they were taught was the ‘way of life’, those who owned the knowledge of the modern *gaga* thus became the new elites of the Atayals. By mastering the modern ‘way of life’, as I have depicted in the last chapter, these elites

not only obtained the social power in the communities, but also became aware of the conflicts between the Christian faith and the traditional customs. Such a phenomenon is especially obvious to members of the Presbyterian churches, which have become the mainstream Christian sect of the Atayals both in Bienjing village and across Taiwan. This is largely due to the fact that, as the first Taiwanese Christian sector to train native aboriginal clergy (and the only church that has Atayal clergy in the village), the Presbyterian Church became more sensitive to the conflicts with the traditional beliefs of the Taiwanese aborigines than the Catholic Church. For example, the native Atayal priests were often referred to by the Bienjing participants as the reason they made the choice to be in the Presbyterian Church over the Catholic one, since the assigned Catholic priests – at least in the village – were either the Han Taiwanese or from different nations that could only speak Mandarin, and were less able to fit into the local culture and language. These Presbyterian Atayal priests, including the current priests of the Presbyterian churches in the village, therefore often see ‘passing on the *gaga*’ as one of their main duties along with missionary work. The Atayal traditional singing and dancing competition, which was held by the Presbyterian Church, was thus a product of such a sense of responsibility. This sense of responsibility was also why, at the end of the competition, one of the judges – who is also a Presbyterian Atayal – urged the entrants to ‘put the traditional culture into the belief of the Atayals’ and to develop ‘Christianity with Atayal characteristics’, since these two ‘share the same spirit of Jesus’. From here we can see how much the church’s attitude would shape the majority of the Atayals’ identification with culture and religion, making theological training of these future religious leaders crucial in the discourse of modern Atayal identity.

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan currently has four institutes for training in the ministry: Presbyterian Bible College, Taiwan Theological College and Seminary, Yu-Shan Theological College, and Tainan Theological College and Seminary. The Yu-Shan Theological College (hereinafter referred to as YSTC) was established in 1946 to train Taiwanese aboriginal preachers. At first most of the teachers in the YSTC were foreign or Han pastors, which to a great extent determined the fundamentalist attitudes of the early aboriginal preachers. Not until the 1980s did its theological orientation begin to turn to the development of inculturation, heavily influenced by the thriving contextual theology in Asia (Ku, 2002), through valuing and reinterpreting the importance of the idea of ‘incarnation’ in the Bible (K. -C.

Huang, 2000).<sup>63</sup> Led by the Taiwanese theologian Shoki Coe (C. H. Hwang), whose theological concept was deeply influenced by the theologians Rudolf Karl Bultmann and Paul Tillich, the incarnation of Jesus in the Taiwan Presbyterian Church came to be understood not merely as how Christ ‘became flesh’ and is ‘dwelling among us’ (John, 1: 14) as a human, but how God’s word (logos) is incarnated as historical existence, the ultimate hope of which is salvation itself, not the flesh he becomes (B. H. Huang, 1990; K.-C. Huang, 2000). Bultmann’s (2000) idea of ‘de-mythologising’ the stories in the Bible suggested that the gospel can only be truly delivered with the readers’ own experiences, whilst Tillich’s (1951) theological ‘method of correlation’ also pointed out that the true understanding of the messages in the Bible has to be based on uniting one’s personal situation with the text (Tillich, 1951:8). In the Taiwan Presbyterian Church led by Shoki Coe, the truth of Christianity is thus to be revealed by first being ‘de-contextualised’ from the European traditions, and then being ‘re-contextualised’ in local histories and experiences (Coe, 1993; Pobee, 1995). The ‘incarnation’ of Christ was hence interpreted on such a level, establishing the discourse of the ‘cultural’ reconciliation between the Christian belief and different ethnic cultures (B. H. Huang, 1990).

This interpretation of the Christian faith and local culture explains how the church faces the significance of *zhulingji* (see chapter six) in Bienjing village now. The Atayal pastor RT, who was assigned to the Narima Presbyterian Church in 2010, stated his view (which means the statement can be read as being made on behalf of the church) to the members in a Sunday service:

The foundation of us Atayal Christians is our culture. We can’t learn how to ‘become’ Christians without our culture, because God has always been in there. Some might say that *zhulingji* is to make deals with the devil, because the Bible says so; but it is not, that (argument) is a false understanding of the Bible.<sup>64</sup> The meaning of these rituals is to remember our ancestors, not worship them; to be thankful to God in the way of *tayan*, not to

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<sup>63</sup> Contextual theology here is defined as ‘a way of doing theology in which one takes into account: the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is theologising; and social change in that culture’ (Bevans, 1992).

<sup>64</sup> This statement resulted from RT being approached by some church members, asking whether it is okay to attend *Zhulingji*, as some of the members’ relatives in the True Jesus Church in neighbouring tribes were forbidden from taking part in *Zhulingji*.

make a sacrifice with the past superstitions. *Zhulingji* has always been a part of our culture, and so is our faith in God.

Very few people responded to RT's speech, and some of the members told me later that they didn't really understand what the pastor was trying to say but only got the message that 'it's okay to have *zhulingji*'. However, after the service, the pastor further explained his idea to me:

The stories in the Bible were written in a different historical context, so many concepts have to adapt to the change in time and places. After all, Christian faith is about love, justice and truth, not about history ... many customs in our traditional culture actually had the same principles as Christianity, such as be in awe of and thankful to God. It was these principles that mattered, that shaped who we were, so that we can say that we have always been the children of Jesus, not just after we believed in Christianity. Therefore, the problems we are facing are not problems between faith and culture, but are between the cultures of our time here, and of when and where the Bible was written.

This kind of acceptance of Christianity raises the problem of distinguishing the elements of Christianity and the converting culture in the modern Atayal syncretic religious practices. Whitehouse's study (2006) of the Baining people's conversion to Christianity in Papua New Guinea identified a similar issue with the pervasive Christian symbols shown in their traditional fire dance. Quoting Barker (1999:98), Whitehouse referred to such settlements of the conflicts between the indigenous culture and Christianity as the 'appropriated Christianity' (Whitehouse, 2006: 305) that guides us to understand how different groups recognise Christianity (Stewart & Strathern, 2009). From here, we can review the relation between Atayal culture and religious beliefs in terms of their cultural memory. Though the new religious experiences brought by Christianity, such as going to church on Sundays and the 'renewed' *zhulingji*, may look different, in both process and in terms of the religious object, from the traditional religious practices, to the Atayals they actually shared similar cosmological and ethical principles. At the end of the song competition, for instance, the hostess made her closing speech by proudly stating 'we Atayals have always been the ethnic group dedicated to God'. However, notwithstanding that they share similarities in principle that connected the Atayals' indigenous and Christian



beliefs, the contradiction of the forms and the perceptions derived from the changes still require theological explanations to reconcile these ruptures (Stewart & Strathern, 2009). In the Bienjing Atayals' case, the two aspects of such an explanation – on the one hand creating a sense of linear history by making the non-Christian practices an anachronism and the Christian customs the 'now time', and on the other treating the conflicts as one 'culture' against another – represent precisely the 'schizophrenic state' of their cultural identity.

The Christian intervention in their sense of history, which caused Bienjing villagers to fail to experience the continuity of the past into the present, was the first schizophrenic symptom of the Atayals' cultural identity. Fredric Jameson sees identity as 'the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one's present' (Jameson, 2001:34), and a 'schizophrenic' loss of identity is a loss of the continuous past (Jameson, 1983, 2001). This leads the schizophrenic to perceive themselves as disconnected from the past and only living in the contemporary moment (Jameson, 1983, 2001) – isn't that similar to how the Atayals disconnect themselves from the 'culture of before' and see themselves living in the Christian 'traditions', which are expected to last eternally? Doesn't the Atayals' struggle to attend to traditional religious practices, and their eagerness to solve the contradictions between their religious faith and culture, reveal their anxiety about that historical discontinuity? This schizophrenic state was discernible to the Atayal clergy elites, who attempted to mend the rupture by giving renewed theological interpretations, which aimed to create 'cultural' syncretism in order to avoid the question of the gap between the Atayal culture and Christianity. Yet this only made the schizophrenic state worse. On the one hand, such an interpretation is still only recognised by the church elites, which created the entirely different discourses of identity between the elites and the masses. On the other, even with the renewed theology that unites the cultural context and Christian beliefs, failing to identify the discontinuity between the signifier (traditional rituals) and the subject of the signified (*utux* or Christ), as most of the participants did, would still leave the actions exposed to 'total instantaneity' (Baudrillard, 1983:133), thus, again, returning them to the context-less status of schizophrenia. The schizophrenic experiences in the present Christian moment of the Atayals, therefore, revealed how the cultural memories of modern Bienjing villagers are of an anachronistic, discontinuous status, due primarily to their conversion to Christianity.

## 7.5 Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, we saw how different Atayal age groups connected themselves with the cultural presentation in the film ‘Seediq Bale’ quite differently. The two sets of attitudes towards the film within the same tribe raise the issue of a rupture of cultural memory. I examined the relationship between cultural values and the power structure of the Atayals to understand better how these changed after their conversion to Christianity, and how that affected the cultural memories of those who ‘converted’ compared with those who grew up with the churches. By attending to the Atayals’ ideas in relation to the term ‘heroic’, I have demonstrated how pre-Christian Atayals – that is, the Atayals before their conversion to Christianity – gained their social positions and were able to achieve influence in decision-making meetings by practising their foremost cultural value, bravery, embodied in the classical action of beheading (*m’gaga*). Such a practice of cultural value was vital for the Atayals’ cultural memory, as, first of all, it could buy a ticket to the power system, which, though less likely to control the *gaga* of the people, determined how the *gaga* was practised. In other words, the power system oriented what Jan Assmann (Assmann, 2009:129) called the ‘figures of memory’, which not only concretised the formation of culture, but also embodied how one culture is identified. Secondly, for traditional Atayals, the strict practices of the *gaga* also meant that one would be singularly blessed by the *utux* while entering the power position and being given religious power. The ‘effectiveness’ of saying prayers was therefore almost the same as in the hierarchy of the social power structure. Therefore, we might say that social power, religious power and the practice of cultural values were in a dialectic relation that formed the deeper mechanism driving the relationship between religion and cultural memory.

Although Christianity was generally believed by my research participants to be ‘the same’ as the traditional Atayal belief system, their conversion has indeed changed this relationship and ergo altered the cultural horizon of modern Atayals. With the acceptance of the Bible as their written, renewed ‘way of life’, the master of this knowledge of the modern *gaga* could no longer be the *tumux* but had to be the preachers who had received the right theological training. This heralded the fact that the cultural knowledge had turned to a more Christian-oriented base, and, more importantly, led to a redistribution of power, since the power structure was based on

the mastering and practising of *gaga*. Other influences on the transferring of cultural knowledge were that, without knowledge, one would not be able to act in the will of the high God, and thus would not be able to be blessed or heard by the God. The consequence of that was the marginalisation of the authority of the *tumux* and the old power system, for religious efficacy was the last power the *tumux* had of leading his people in the modern state society. The traditional power centre was replaced by the church, both physically and spiritually, which led to the deeper change of cultural values from 'bravery' to piety. Following that, the cultural horizon of the Atayals was then reshaped into the more Christianised scenery: the biggest 'traditional' event of the year for the Atayals became Christmas, and the interpretation and the decisive power of 'traditions' also shifted from the decision-making meeting led by the *tumux* to the church led by the priests.

Similar to what Hefner (1993) observed in the Javanese conversion to Christianity, I have also demonstrated in this chapter how Atayals have experienced a gradual, irreversible alteration of cultural transition that countered the fact that they had expected to 'pass on' their 'original' tradition during the conversion. This irreversible change in Bienjing village is exhibited firstly in the division of the sense of history: the Atayals refer to the Christianised time as 'now' and the non-Christianised time as the past. Many Atayals perceive this division as the separation of their 'modern religion' and 'traditional culture'. In most cases, the principles of Christianity are now seen as more important and more 'sacred' than traditional customs, which we can say have descended to the secular realm. We can further suggest that the differences in the villagers' perception of cultural memories, rather than being due to the change of time and the confrontation that they described as between 'before' and 'now', are actually a confrontation between 'religion' and 'culture', the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. Though the villagers claimed that this modern belief is 'the same' as their previous one, such a perception of temporal differences reveals the rupture of cultural memory. To borrow Fredric Jameson's term, such a contradiction and struggle between the culture and faith(s) in that historical division revealed the 'schizophrenic' state of the Atayals' cultural identity, and exemplified how they failed to experience a continuity of time, culture and religion after their conversion to Christianity.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Producing A New Boundary of Identity**

In chapters six and seven I discussed in some detail the changes of the idea of the Atayal 'self' from religious and cultural experiences. From these experiences, we saw how the *gaga* – the foundation of Atayal culture, the Atayal people's 'way of life' – signified a tension between the old/traditional and the new/Christian belief systems, while facing the radical social changes brought about by the modern nation state. The transition of the content and idea of the *gaga* resulted in the redistribution of orders in the village: of social power, cultural values, rituals, the sense of time, and ideas about the sacred and profane. The transition also altered not just the geographical boundaries between the Atayal tribes, or between the Atayals and the Han Taiwanese, but also the symbolic boundaries that 'encapsulate[d] the identity of the community' (Cohen, 2001:12). During this process of transition, we have seen how the Atayal people stressed their 'Atayalness' by asserting their Christian 'nature', which, in the context of their conversion to Christianity, shows how, in Cohen's words, 'the symbolic expression of community and its boundaries increases in importance as the actual geo-social boundaries of the community are undermined, blurred or otherwise weakened' (Cohen, 2001:50). This means that rapid social changes experienced by a community can lead to some reactions which reflect the commitment of its members to reconstructing the integration and boundaries of that community (H.-H. Lin, 2007).

This kind of reaction is based on the two perspectives of belonging. By confirming their belonging to a certain ethnicity, a person can paint him/herself in a 'much fuller portrait' (Cohen, 2001:107) compared to the 'others'. Whilst by establishing their belonging to a certain local 'community', a person is able to experience his/her social significance in matters such as kinship, friendship, domicile, modes of life, and love and death, which give him/her meaning as a 'whole person' (Cohen, 2001:107). The pursuit of identity through the connection between the individual and the community, in Cohen's words, happens precisely because community is 'the most adequate medium for the expression of their whole selves' (Cohen, 2001:108). This not only provides the individual with a sense of belonging, but also allows them to be socialised within that culture of the community. 'Community' is, therefore, the collection of the shared cultural experiences, the 'bounded symbolic whole' (Cohen, 2001:9) that, in addition to geography, constructs the virtual boundaries of a group.

In the previous chapters, I have attempted to disclose those shared cultural experiences of the Atayals and demonstrate how they were ‘reactions’ to the changes brought about by their modern cultural context. These experiences revealed how Bienjing villagers experienced a sense of belonging, that is, identity, while the idea of community, whether in the form of ethnicity or locality, was changing during a period of religious conversion. These experiences also, as I pointed out earlier, illustrate how the Atayals relate themselves to others, and become ‘whole persons’ under the guidelines (*gaga*) provided by their original religious beliefs and the localised Christianity. These experiences were critical in forming Atayal identity, not just in the way that the Atayals practised sacredness or created a sense of history that fitted their cosmology, but also in how the experiences were used and shared as a kind of language that could be understood by its social members. In other words, these experiences became the symbols that triggered the same attitude to certain matters amongst members of the same community, and thereby also constructed the sense of the group ‘self’ that distinguished them from ‘others’ (Mead, 1934a).

It is, then, the mechanism that transformed these experiences into symbolic power and influenced the Atayals’ identity boundary that I want to investigate in this chapter. I hope to give a broader and more thorough analysis of the reconstruction of Atayal identity along with their conversion process. I will, furthermore, discuss the consequences of this process based on the discussions presented in the previous chapters. Finally, I will conclude by providing a theoretical insight into not only the Atayals’ identity change, but also that of the Taiwanese aboriginal population more generally following the conversion to Christianity.

## **8.1 The Atayals’ identity boundary: *gaga***

An identity ‘boundary’ is not a concept to ‘categorise’ different groups or cultures ethnically, but one that helps to clarify a group’s notion of ‘self’ through the members’ social practices and how they experience social relations (A. P. Cohen, 2000). This kind of boundary does not ‘necessarily entail the distancing of a group from its neighbour or interlocutor but, rather, may connect them and may thereby provide opportunities for social engagement “across” the boundary’ (Cohen, 2000:7). The cultural boundary is, therefore, the shared experiences that operate as the foundation

not only to bring together the members of the same group in terms of their sense of 'self' as distinct from 'others', but also to create the space for communications between different ways of 'seeing' and 'knowing' by sensing the gap between boundaries (Fernandez, 2000). The ways of constructing such a mindset vary in different cultures or social contexts. The Lappish people in Norway, for example, see 'actual behaviours' as the criteria to identify their cultural members (Eidheim, 1969), whereas the boundaries between the peoples of the Fur and the Baggara in Western Sudan are based on economical resource distribution (Haaland, 1969). Such 'boundary' concepts, from the perspective of subjective agency, explain the conflicts of 'identity' between the Atayals and the Seediq people, as well as illustrating the relationships between the three Atayal tribes in Bienjing village. On the one hand, even though the early anthropologists put the two groups (Seediq and Atayal) into one ethnic category that influenced the Atayals' idea of their 'ethnicity', it is still the Seediqs' 'way of life' (*gaya/waya*) which determined their sense of belonging and drew the boundaries between them and the Atayals, whilst most of the outsiders would see them both as sharing similar culture and religious cosmology and thus as belonging together. On the other hand, this *gaga*-centric form of identification has also been the Atayal people's conception of community. Whether it was the traditional *gaga* that was based on kinship and shared rules of practice within a tribe, or the 'modern' *gaga* that is established through the churches inter-tribally, the Atayals' sense of community has always been bounded by the coverage of the *gaga*.

As I stated in chapter three, the traditional boundaries of the Atayals were set by the *gaga*, which was deemed to be the sacred contract made between the Atayals and the *utux* and was believed to affect the bounded community, which before the conversion to Christianity usually coincided with the territory of a tribe (*qalang*). Though the working groups within a tribe also set the sub-boundaries of the secondary communities of the tribal members and gave the individuals multiple 'identities' in different contexts, the foremost means of identifying 'themselves' as distinct from 'others' was still each tribe's sacred recognition of the *gaga*. The fundamental distinction between the tribes of Narima, Valus and Sawig, traditionally, as the locals said, was that 'the *gaga* was different, and each tribe has its own *gaga*'. This was best exemplified by how the women, if they came from different tribes, saw their marriages: 'marrying into another tribe means that you have to follow their *gaga*, and you become the person of this *gaga*' (participant CT). This kind of conception of

identity still remains in the village today, and explains why, as discussed in chapter four, the wife would follow the husband's religious choice regardless of the religion of her family of origin. However, the continuity of that idea reveals the discontinuity of the Atayals' identity boundaries, since the *gaga* today is conceptualised as both the church's physical location and its ideological denomination, rather than the domain of the tribe. This modern context of the *gaga* complicated the idea of identity among the Atayals. Where once identity was circumscribed by the geographical range of the tribe, the modern context created an identity that was split into two: one referring to the secular tribe, and the other belonging to the sacred, physical church and the individual's religious denomination.

This modern *gaga*, therefore, is operated by what Timothy Jenkins (2004) called the 'local particularity', the 'ways of life that create a sense of identity that relates to a particular place' (Jenkins 2004:113), which forms the physical boundaries between the included and the excluded. Compared with the traditional *gaga* that was bound by the 'sacred contract' and embodied in the daily practices, the materialisation of the new *gaga* becomes responsible for the current discrepancy (and fluidity) of the Atayals' idea of 'self' both personally and collectively, even within the same tribe. Although today all the tribal members can still clearly claim that their ethnic identity is linked to the tribes, in many cases there are also families or individuals who, voluntarily or involuntarily, find that they 'belong' to another '*gaga*' (church) that is different from the majority in the village, and are thus often excluded from the mainstream church activities in the tribe. In chapter six we saw how in Atayal society this kind of 'exclusion' of tribal members in relation to different denominations, or different religious beliefs, is founded on the differentiation of the *gaga*, which is reflected in the changes in the villagers' perceptions of a '*tayan*'. We also see how much religious transition has determined the Atayals' self-identification in this supposed secularised world under the influences of the modern nation-state social structure. We cannot, of course, deny the influences of economic and political factors resulting from engagement with Han society in shifting the villagers' boundaries, as they were critical in providing the social conditions for the Atayals' conversion to Christianity. However, we should also distinguish between the conditions that provided the background to the changes, and the direct cause that led to the changes. This is why I focus on discussing the relations between Atayal identity and traditions. In the pre-Christian tradition, *gaga* was considered as the 'way of life', whilst being a



*tayan* was a sacred process of practising that way of life. In the modern, Christian tradition, *gaga* has become a term to index religion and its doctrines that not only separated themselves from the ‘secular’ domain, but could also be contrary to the ‘Atayal culture’, which complicated and ‘secularised’ the meaning of the term *tayan*.

What I want to stress here, however, is not just the religious influences that shape Atayal identities, but that in a society which had basically been constructed on religious principles, the choice of religious conversion should not be seen as a purely functional act, through which communities and individuals are seeking religious support (and the material aid brought by it) in difficult times. Rather, I think ‘religion’ (if we need such a category) itself is the social foundation, the social mechanism of the Atayals. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the religious transition of the Atayals not only influenced their view of the world, but was also the driving force behind the transformation of the Atayal social structure, leading the Atayal society to experience a redistribution of social power, a change in the social hierarchy and changes in cultural values. To modern Atayals, ‘religion’ is the base that supports the community ethos and ethics and serves as a means of adjustment between the Atayal and the nation-state societies, which maintains their own distinct identity whilst enabling them to link up with each other. This reflects how Barth (2000) sees the boundary of identity as posing the characteristics of both connection and distinction in ‘connecting’ the people inside and ‘separating’ the people from outside. *Gaga*, which is now understood more as an indication of religious belief, therefore becomes vital in discussing the Atayals’ identities. Further, borrowing from Barth (1969), who sees the boundaries of identity as drawn by social process, I think here we should take the Atayals’ religious transition *not* as part of their communal, social progress, but *as* their social transition, to discuss their changes and views of identity, given the inseparable nature of religious belief and society in the idea of the *gaga*.

To address what I mean by taking the Atayals’ religious transition as their social process, I must first elaborate on Fredrik Barth’s notion of the boundary of identity. For Barth (1969), ethnic groups are the culture-bearer units, whilst the communications and connections between the identity boundaries are established through the changes of social process, rather than being primarily defined by what is called the ‘nature’ of them. This is why a researcher should include a cognitive approach in order to consider more fully how the members of one ethnic group

experienced and defined the boundaries through their social practices (Barth, 1969, 2000). This cognitive approach, however, should be applied discreetly. Echoing Bloch (1992), Barth further clarifies that human lives are constructed by social interactions, not just ‘cognitive representations’ – as in one society: ‘[E]very event has its precipitate in experience; each move made by someone will affect the nature of the connections that arise along the boundary, and thereby affect the “rich image” of the boundary that is retrieved’ (Barth, 2000:31). Through human interactions, social processes would ‘determine cognitive models, as much as cognitive models determine social processes – but with a degree of complexity in the connections so the two never become mirror images of each other’ (Barth, 2000:31). Barth (2000) then took the example of the ethnic relations in the former Yugoslavia to explain how he sees cognitive categories and lived experience playing into the formation of the identities in different groups. Only by putting both the social and cognitive processes into the historical context can we have a fuller picture of the groups’ changes of identity. George Lakoff (1987) argues persuasively that people ‘are not merely playing out a structure, they are *each* a locus of reason and construction, using complex embodied imagery that they are trying to fit to what they perceive and experience’ (Barth, 2000:33). Analogy, metaphor and mental imagery in life events, therefore, are critical in influencing how we ‘perceive’ the world, whilst the experiences we have would result in the actions we perform and the connections we make (Barth, 2000).

In short, by absorbing the schema concept presented by George Lakoff (1987), Barth values how mental imagery interacts with social practices and forms the various ideas of ‘boundary’ in different societies; and only by aligning that with the historical context can we understand how individuals internalise their culture through social practices, whilst culture is also simultaneously becoming the reference for social practices. The *gaga*, as I have pointed out in previous chapters, therefore drew its social and cultural significance from how the Bienjing Atayals used it as the cannon of actions to different changes of circumstances, since the Atayals’ references of social practices were based on the religious principles in the pre-Christian societies. Thus, when the Atayals took Christianity as the modern, upgraded *gaga*, their society was also altered to better fit the characteristics of the church. That alteration includes the redistribution of the power hierarchy, religious practices and cultural values, which, if they are not the essence of a society, are at least vital to the formation of cultural knowledge and cultural memory (Assmann, 2009). These alterations, on the

other hand, have been revealed as a series of negotiations and struggles of different customs and rituals between the native Atayal and the Christian traditions. The negotiations and struggles thus unavoidably broke, as well as modified, the ‘chain of memory’ (Hervieu-Léger & Lee, 2000) of the Atayal society, since these rituals and customs are the foundation, the structure, the ‘normative texts’ and the ‘formative texts’ of their culture. Therefore, although *gaga* is now being used mostly as the signifier of religion/religious practices, it still serves as more than just another system that distinguishes itself from the secular realm. It creates the sense of time, marks the community of social belonging, shapes the interpretation of the world and defines the power structure. This goes beyond Clifford Geertz’s (1993: 90) view of religion ‘as a cultural system’; rather, I argue, *gaga* ‘is THE cultural system’ of the Atayals.

## **8.2 The struggle of capitals in the transformation of**

### ***gaga***

In relation to the above account, it is useful to draw on Bourdieu’s (1977, 1979, 1986, 1989) concept of cultural and symbolic ‘capital’ to explain how the Atayals’ mental imageries and their perception of events were transformed during their conversion to Christianity, and how the missionaries and clergy rose and changed the traditional power hierarchy, thereby influencing the villagers’ conception of identity, culture and society. In the previous chapters, I have depicted how the Bienjing villagers gradually accepted Christianity after the missionaries took ‘contextual theology’ as the approach to cope with the conflicts between the two belief systems, and how they inter-translated the two systems in order to legitimise the inheritableness of Christianity as the modern *gaga*. The villagers believed that following the *gaga* would bring blessings to them and would also give them the opportunity to access the resources held by the church, although that was ‘misrecognised’ as reward for their continued participation. In these social structural changes, we see how different aspects – be they economic, cultural or social – were involved during the process of the Atayals converting to Christianity. From a more materialist angle, we can also say that these aspects represent the exchange and redistribution of economic, cultural and social resources; or, in Bourdieu’s (1986) terms, of economic, cultural and social capitals.

Drawing on classical economics and Karl Marx, Bourdieu extends the forms of capital from the economic scope and further defines it as ‘accumulated labour (in its materialised form or its “incorporated”, embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, that is exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour’ (Bourdieu, 1986:241). The idea of ‘capital’ here, in a way, becomes an exclusive productive ‘resource’ in different forms of labour that serves as the agents’ reference of actions. To address further how such a social mechanism works, Bourdieu distinguished the idea of capital into four different forms: economic, cultural, social and symbolic. In addition to the Marxist use of capital to refer to economic resources, Bourdieu defines social capital as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (Bourdieu, 1986:248). These relationships are ‘made up of social obligations (“connections”), which are convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility’ (Bourdieu, 1986:243). Within the context of such social connections one also inherits, from the family, ‘cultural capital’ – the ‘forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society’ (C. Barker, 2004) – which is also convertible to economic capital and can be institutionalised as education (Bourdieu, 1986). To obtain a better social position, individuals would have to perform and also accumulate these capitals in different forms so as to exert influence either on themselves or others, not only making ‘capital’ a form of ‘power’ – the dominant power that the social agent possesses to struggle for certain interest – but also framing the differences of capitals between different agents as differences of power (Grenfell & James, 1998; Swartz, 1997). Capital, in Bourdieu’s sense, therefore decides the dynamic relations in a field and forms the foundation of locus in the social structures. The ways of accumulating, transmitting and converting capitals also becomes the mechanism of social and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986).

### 8.2.1 *Gaga* as the social capital

Bourdieu’s notion of capital helps us primarily to understand how the act of conversion in the Atayal communities would lead to the overall ‘reproduction’ of

their cultures. On one hand, we see how the social capitals (the ‘connections’, as Bourdieu sometimes calls them) amongst the Atayal tribes in Bienjing village were ‘re-formed’ from the tribal-centred *gaga* to the church-centred *gaga*, which not only reset and complicated the very idea of ‘community’, but also changed the way tribe members were supported materially and spiritually:

YHS (age 62): Although we are in the same tribe ... the families of my brothers and mine belong to different churches ... the people of his (one of the brothers) church (True Jesus) are rather ... strange, they shake their bodies together (while doing the service), and they feel like by shaking together they can have a kind of connection to each other, but I couldn’t shake like them so I guess I still belong to my church ... Different churches have different activities, so usually they (his brothers) would attend their churches and I go to mine.

TH (age 41): All my family and relatives are in the Catholic church, but I am with the Presbyterian one, I like that church better ... and you would feel the pressure coming from them because you didn’t join them (in the church). They didn’t say that out loud, but you can feel they just don’t support me as they support others, and you would feel like you are an alien in this family and in the tribe.

The ‘different activities’ range from the weekly meals cooked by the church members after the service on Sunday morning, to the *zhulingji*, Christmas celebrations and other group outing events. These activities take up church members’ time outside of working hours if they are active in participating and therefore frame their social network in the village. The frequent communications between the tribes in Bienjing village, in fact, were also mostly the church members visiting each other. Even within the same tribe, groups of people who spent time together were also usually divided by the churches to which they belonged. Such patterns in church-oriented social networking were not only revealed through the leisure times when the villagers hang out with ‘their people’, but also in the ways that contemporary ‘working groups’ are currently formed. For example, if we look at how the ‘hunting groups’ are currently formed in Bienjing village, we can see that their members are usually formed on the premise of being in the same church (whether one is a churchgoer or not) rather than the traditional bond of kinship, and so sometimes we may find that different family

members would go hunting separately as they are with different *gaga*.<sup>65</sup> The same tendency emerged during the season of fruit harvesting when people would help those belonging to the same church, if they were not close to their family members.

Furthermore, as the majority of the church's funding comes from members' donations, the economic structure of church membership also affects the scale and quality of church events, as well as the resources or facilities that members can receive from the church. For instance, some 'richer' churches have a larger budget for the purchase of 'nicer' food and gifts for their members for Christmas celebration activities and to plan group trips or holidays, and they have more funding to help their members when sick or during difficult situations. On the other hand, in the village we also found that the populations of church members could be related to the church equipment. For example, one that has musical instruments would attract younger villagers, whilst another that has a karaoke machine has a larger mid-age population that enjoys singing. These observations indicate that the investment in church facilities also influences the composition of the congregation, though as shown in chapters five and six, the main factor for the majority of the villagers in choosing their churches was a person's allegiance to tribal or family leaders. Younger generations manifest a tendency to join the churches that have a better 'fit' with their own interests or pursuits. Meanwhile, let us not forget that the churches often operated as a major local resource centre to promote welfare and governmental policies and that it was usually the 'faithful' members who would have first-hand information and access to those resources. This shows that even though the social capital gained from the church operates in rather different ways for the younger and older generations, the connections between each other, and the social, material and spiritual supports, have indeed changed. Whether it was the younger or the older generation, these changes were triggered due to the 'transformation' of the *gaga* from the invisible ties to the tangible church, and from a tribe-centred to a church-centred sense of community.

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<sup>65</sup> Hunting activities, like most of the other traditional economic activities, are no longer as critical as they used to be in the lives of Atayal people. Although hunters are no longer required to follow the traditional strict rules, hunting groups still exist on a small scale, mostly as a result of the needs of the local restaurants, and sometimes are formed just for fun.

### 8.2.2 *Gaga* as cultural capital

The re-formation of social networks (which, as discussed above, connotes changes in the *gaga*) not only brought about a structural shift in social resources and connections, but also changed the distribution and pattern of the cultural capital in the village, and influenced the generation of the Atayals' habitus. In the past, *gaga*, as the 'way of life', was embodied and learned in the daily practices and, as Bourdieu (1986) pointed out, this cultural capital was also convertible to other forms of capital. The proficiency of the old *gaga*, manifested through the success of beheadings and age status, were the key to being involved in the power system that not only enabled the ones who had much cultural capital to enter the higher hierarchy of the society, but also allowed them to receive more respect for abiding by the sacred contract with *utux*. How much respect one received reflected one's education and practice of the *gaga*, which, as the early Atayals believed, would result in how 'effective' one's prayers were. An individual who had more cultural capital, such as the *tumux* and his family, would sometimes also be given raw or preserved meat, rice or wine as a gesture of thanks for praying for others. Such phenomena could be seen clearly in the family of the hereditary facial tattooist:

ZSF (age 73): We Atayals' facial tattoos had to be applied by the professional facial tattooist, who had to be female. The facial tattooist was a hereditary profession, and the *gaga* was usually only imparted from mother to daughter. Since facial tattooing was a specialised skill, and everyone in the tribe had to be tattooed, the facial tattooist took quite a high position in the early days, and almost everyone in the tribe needed to ingratiate themselves with her, otherwise you might get a very bad-looking tattoo on the face, or she might make the tattooing process more painful ... The remuneration for facial tattooing was quite generous, so the facial tattooist's family was usually the richest one in a tribe; and most of the remunerations were stuff like meats of different animals, rice wine, rice cakes or fabrics.

The payment for services such as facial tattooing later also included shell beads, which could be used as a kind of currency. But in those early days, when there was no currency to use as the economic unit for the exchange of goods and services, and for

the people who could not obtain shell beads, those gifts were actually equal to economic capital. Notwithstanding the fact that in practice, the *gaga* could be further subdivided into different sets of specialised working regulations and thus generate different types of cultural capital (for example, the facial tattooist and the *mahuni* would have their own professional skills and knowledge), the idea of *gaga* for the villagers was still based on the concept of ‘the words left by the ancestors’. In whichever walk of life and whatever social context, the *gaga* was always about the practice of those words, and each kind of *gaga* was always the sacred knowledge – the sacred cultural capital – that could be converted into certain ‘profits’. However, with the conversion to Christianity, I must reiterate the distinction made between the ‘culture’ of the ‘old’ and the ‘life’ of the ‘present’ to depict the transition of the cultural capital in Bienjing village today. Although in the process of social reproduction we may find that the valued cultural capital in a field changes with time (Bourdieu, 1986; Nash, 1990; Swartz, 1997), we have to be aware that the villagers do not consider themselves culturally ‘changed’ but rather ‘advanced’, despite the conflicts between the church and the old traditions that are still happening every day.

The distinction that marks off the villagers’ sense of ‘culture’ and ‘living’ divides the cultural capital, the *gaga*, in two. As I have previously shown (in chapters three and seven), the success of a *tumux* nowadays lies in the proficiency of the old *gaga*; a *tumux*’s family is usually assumed to possess more knowledge of the old, ‘traditional’ way of life, whilst one who has a better grasp of the old *gaga* – such as the local cultural and historical researcher – would also be respected as the authority of the ‘culture’ and be consulted on occasions. Most of the cultural capital of the old *gaga*, however, has lost its sacredness and become the mere secular knowledge of the past, which, at the same time, also forfeited its ability of converting such capital to economic profits. This, of course, was mainly due to the transformation of economic patterns during the Atayals’ adaption to modern society, yet we also have to take the role of the church into account in their process of modernisation. In chapter five, I addressed how the church was accepted as the ‘advanced’ *gaga* at first for its material support, and later for its resource connections between the government, the social organisations and church members. As this helped the followers to gain better economic positions, mastering the new *gaga* – meaning being a ‘good’ Christian – became vital in connecting their cosmology to the modern world. Although faith in Christianity represents the continuation of the ethos to the Atayals, the distinction



between 'religious' and 'cultural' traditions, as well as essential changes in the conception and practices of rituals, indicates the 'otherness' of Christianity, making the *gaga* 'of the church' 'another' category of cultural capital.

The otherness of Christianity manifests itself in the three states of cultural capital: the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state (Bourdieu, 1986). As Bourdieu argues, the embodied state of cultural capital is 'the form of what is called culture, cultivation, *Bildung*' (1986:48). The very first distinction between the old and the new *gaga* in the process of the Atayals' social reproduction lies not only in the separation of the 'old culture' and the 'new tradition', but also in the processes of acquisition and accumulation of the two. We have come to know how the education of the *gaga* differed in the traditional and the modern ways: the former, through the oral stories and daily practices, took 'bravery' as the most valuable cultural trait, while the latter, through the Bible, Sunday services and house churches, valued 'piety' above other qualities. This resulted in the fundamental differences in the sacred experience and the habitus. This differentiation in education also reflects the differentiation of the objectified state of the cultural capital. With the old *gaga*, its objectified state of cultural capital was not only in the form of the 'cultural goods' (Bourdieu, 1986:50), such as the delicacy of fabrics (for a good marriage), the strength of bows (for hunting) or the number of shell beads (the symbol of nobility), but, most of all, in the form of the living *hei* (body) – that is, an Atayal person. Let us make no mistake with the *gaga* in the embodied state: in the embodied state, the accumulated cultural capital was revealed through the habitus, the behaviours of each agent; whereas in the objectified state, the habitus would determine the blessings brought by the *utux* and thus decide the success, wellbeing or fate of an Atayal person, making the person him or herself the product of the accumulation of the *gaga*. Any defects of the body – be they physical or psychological disease, or any hypoplasia of the body parts – were also considered to be the result of one's (or one's family's) lack (or violation) of the *gaga*. This state of cultural capital illustrated the Atayals' view of a person as being constituted by the *hei* (body) and *utux* (spirit, soul). Under this view, the former was only the instrument for the latter to bring life into the world, the instrument for actions to become a true *tayan* and join the lines of the 'utux' with the last breath of the body, and the instrument that bore the different *gaga* in their tribes.

The objectified cultural capital in the modern Bienjing village, however, presents

a rather different picture. The foremost change of the embodied cultural capital encountered by the Bienjing Atayals was the coming of the Bible. Introduced as the written (not ‘foreign’) *gaga*, the Bible was the first concrete object of their ‘cultural capital’, records of the once untraceable ‘way of life’. This embodiment of the *gaga* gave the Atayals an investigable ground of their belief but also brought the variety of the *gaga* to an end. As I have noted in chapters six and seven, the *gaga* can no longer be ‘made’ by the decision meetings in the tribe, and *gaga* only varies by its ‘interpretation’, by the form of ‘worship’ of different churches. Though the villagers still believe that following this modern *gaga* will bring them a ‘better life’, their success today – that is, economically speaking – does not always follow their piety in God. In fact, although most of the churchgoers do acquire a relatively stable life through the church’s connections, support and doctrines (such as being diligent and honest, and not abusing alcohol, which has been one of the main social problems for the Atayals), the few most ‘successful’ figures in the modern Bienjing village are either non-Christians or Christians who are not considered ‘good’ Christians. We could even say that this separation between economic status – or the secular life – and the *gaga* was derived not just from the adaption and connection to the modern society, but also from the objectification of the *gaga* in the Bible. Such fixed doctrines restricted the flexibility of this new *gaga* to react to the change of circumstances, which led to the fundamental turn of the objectified cultural capital from the person him/herself, to the more materialist presentation. Most of the believers would have a portrait of Jesus, the holy cross or even a shrine, to manifest the piety of their faith, of the *gaga*. These objects are also often used as part of the family education, to give the children ‘the Christian environment’. Yet here we can also notice what Bourdieu (1986) identified of the character of the objectified cultural capital: that one must first have sufficient embodied capital to be able to appropriate the objectified state for a certain purpose. In the houses of those who do not consider themselves to be ‘good’ Christians (who are usually the lower class of the society), such portraits and shrines are usually less likely to be seen, for these villagers would feel ‘embarrassed’ when aware that they are not properly following the *gaga*.



Figure 17, a private shrine in the Bienjing Catholic deacon's house. As Catholicism in Taiwan was first rooted amongst the Han people, such Chinese-style shrines have become a common tradition in the Catholic Church in Taiwan, even in the aboriginal communities.

The institutionalised state of the *gaga* reveals the deeper impact of the changes of the previous two states of the cultural capital. The institutionalised state indicates the institutional recognition of the embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). As we have seen earlier in chapters three, four and seven, in the old Atayal culture, the only form of recognising one's possession of the *gaga* was through the success in hunting and, most of all, the well-being of the individual; the institutionalised state of the cultural capital in the pre-Christian Atayal society was revealed through the *hei*, whilst the only extrinsic (and sacred) mark of such recognition was inscribed on the body – i.e., the facial and chest tattoos – to indicate the amount of cultural capital a person possessed. The body was literally their temple for such recognition. The form

of recognising the *gaga* in Christianity, however, is rather complicated and secular-oriented. Just as the early converters perceived that the missionaries held more genuine *gaga* than they did, with the Christianised society, one's amount of *gaga* is not only recognised by the church, but, more importantly, is evaluated by the **knowledge** of the church rather than the actions relating to it. This is why when talking about the content of the modern *gaga*, the villagers would first recommend the preachers, then other clergies, according to their positions in the church. Even though one can act perfectly, just as the church taught them to and like most of the churchgoers do, one's status of the *gaga* would only be recognisable – and thus be influential in the community – when they have 'studied in the theological college' (participant TSQ) or been 'given a position in the church (participant CG)'.

This transformation of the institutionalised state of cultural capital, manifested through the set-up of the church and the hierarchy of rank in it, not only changed the Atayals' way of recognising an individual's *gaga*, but also later led to the redistribution of power in the village. The appointment and election system of clergy in both Catholic and Protestant churches played a critical role in this transition. Though the clergy is designated by evaluating their possession of the *gaga*, which, as the Atayal people claimed, is 'exactly the same' as how the traditional Atayals elected and appointed their leading figures, the process itself is rather secular. 'Secular' here means that, today, one's possession of the *gaga* is no longer measured by the success of one's actions due to the sacred blessing, but by how much one is familiar with the Bible. Of course, this is not to suggest that one can still be highly respected simply by knowing (but not practising) the *gaga*. However, it is exactly such a separation of knowing and practising in the recognition of the modern *gaga* that deepened the opposition between the secular and the sacred aspects in the modern Atayal society.

### 8.2.3 *Gaga* as symbolic capital

In the above sections, I illustrated how the transition of the *gaga* changed the production and reproduction of Atayal culture due to its vitality in the Atayals' social and cultural capitals, which were deeply connected to forming the Atayals' habitus. I also showed how, by putting them on the social axis, these factors determined the locus of each person in Atayal society before and after religious conversion, in which

the change of these social positions, or loci, would therefore indicate the redistribution of capital. Changes in the distribution of capital due to the growth of Christianity did not simply happen spontaneously along with the introduction of this modern *gaga*. They were, as the negotiations between the old and new traditions of the Atayals revealed in previous discussions (chapters five to seven), the result of a series of struggles of the agents in an attempt to maintain, or change, the balance of orders, or, in Bourdieu's words (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; see also Swartz, 1997), the balance of power (between social positions, to fit the desired world view). In all those processes involved in the transition of capital in the Christianising Atayal society, we see how the changes were contingent upon the idea of the *gaga*. *Gaga*, therefore, could be said as generating its own symbolic power that legitimises the regulations deriving from it – that is, the symbolic capital that makes the *gaga* 'true' and 'known and recognised as self-evident' (Bourdieu, 1991:238) to the Atayal people.

'Recognising' the *gaga* as the only supposed 'way of life' – be it the 'traditional' or the 'modern' version – is what Bourdieu (2000) sees as 'misrecognising' a subjective matter as objectively genuine. In his fieldwork in Algeria, Bourdieu (1977) referred to such misrecognition of the surroundings – that is, seeing the logic of their cultural system as natural and right – as 'doxa'. Although some also recognise 'doxa' as similar in meaning to the concept of 'ideology' (Dickerson, Flanagan & O'Neill, 2010; Eagleton, 1991; Žižek, 2012), Bourdieu argues that it stresses the 'natural', 'unconscious' experience of life that is beyond the capacity of 'ideology' (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 2012). 'Doxa', as we have seen with the *gaga* and the Atayals, therefore, is the foundation for the agents to perceive and act on the given contexts, as well as the necessary condition to maintain the integration of society, reproducing social and power relations (Bourdieu, 1977). Contemporary Bienjing villagers, in seeing themselves enjoying a better life than those who do not follow the *gaga*, indicate how the Lacanian 'fantasy screen' of the 'better life' actually confirms and reinforces the disposition of the doxa through their daily practice. They believe it was the power of religious belief that led to a complete, abundant and righteous Atayal life without recognising the mechanism of resource distribution behind the power structure in the community. They go to church, give their tithes and participate in church activities, and in return they have better access to organised resources and information, and even share the power of the community. In exercising their given 'duties', therefore,

individuals further reduplicated the world's misrecognised self-evidence of the doxa by the actions grounded in their beliefs, by the 'instituted discourse about the world' (Bourdieu, 1977:167). This cycle of *gaga* and Atayal practices shows that doxa not only functions as the unconscious consensus of a group, but would also lead the collective practice to 'appear as "realized myth"' (Bourdieu, 1977:163) by reconciling the 'subjective demand and objective, or collective, necessity which grounds the *belief* of a whole group in what the group believes' (Bourdieu, 1977:164). This is especially true in a group or society, like the Atayals, that is founded on religious belief. Based on such misrecognition, we may thus understand the mechanism behind the Atayals' almost instinctual drive in following the *gaga* as the primary principle of life. The Atayals' doxa of living by the *gaga* was often described as 'how the Atayals ought to be, as it has been what the ancestors taught us'. This not only echoes what Bourdieu argues regarding the doxa's role in the reproduction of society (that it makes the world of the agents a 'realized ought-to-be' (Bourdieu, 1977:166)), but also reveals how a society interacts with its members, becoming a 'bounded symbolic whole' (Cohen (2001:9) in constructing identities.

Such doxa come to light via the collective consciousness and the person's sense of arbitrariness by culture contact, and through political and economic crises (Bourdieu, 1977). That is, 'when social classifications become the object and instrument of class struggle, ... the arbitrary principles of the prevailing classification can appear as such and it therefore becomes necessary to undertake the work of conscious systematisation and express rationalisation which marks the passage from doxa to orthodoxy' (Bourdieu, 1977:169). Only by being aware of the potential arbitrariness (arising out of the change of circumstances) of the doxa can an orthodox way of viewing the world be built and accepted, and 'heterodoxy' be denied and rejected. How the villagers see their 'old ways of life' as incompatible with Christian doctrines and thus as heterodox 'superstitions', therefore, marks the movement from doxa to orthodoxy. By providing the contrast, as well as the similarity, to systemised Christian theology and the material advantage, the coming of Christianity not only revealed the prominence of the old *gaga*'s arbitrariness, but also made it the major candidate for orthodoxy with its solutions for political and economical issues generated by the modernisation of Atayal society.

We should further note here that political and economic crises had also posed

major problems during the Japanese rule due largely to the Japanese government's interference in Atayal society by including the Atayals in the nation state. Even though the Japanese significantly influenced Atayal lifestyles, the authenticity of the old *gaga* was never in doubt, and the Japanese attempts to 'reform' the Atayal culture did not alter the *gaga*. For that, we have to first understand the preconditions for the 'passage from doxa to orthodoxy'. As Bourdieu states, to become the orthodoxy, the 'competing possibles' have to be able to 'restore the primal state of innocence of doxa' (Bourdieu, 1977:169) to make it not only a conscious discourse, but also the 'right' opinion within the group that meets the group members' idea of the world. Such competing possibles, therefore, have to be contained within the universe of the doxa in order to restore its 'primal state of innocence' (see Bourdieu's diagram below), to claim the legitimacy of the interpretation of doxa. This is why simply attributing the conversion to political, economical and cultural causes, and even 'rational' interest, is not sufficient in explaining the phenomenon of religious transition. In the case of the Bienjing Atayals, even when the traditional *gaga*'s arbitrariness was raised in the Japanese period through the change of circumstances resulting from 'culture contact' and economic and political oppression, the Atayals still chose to maintain their traditional belief rather than embrace Shintoism for the purpose of social advantage. Instead, the Atayals started to treat the traditional *gaga* as 'hetero superstitions' after a few years of missionary work in the early 1950s rather than during the previous 50 years of 'modern' education under the Japanese government. The condition of the doxa thus provides an angle to understand such difference in religious choice, and is also why we have to go back to the sacred, religious nature of the *gaga* and Atayal society in order to grasp the essential element of their conversion.

As I have pointed out, the Atayals' sense of community and doxa were based on religious premises rather than political or economical principles. The 'competing possibles' thus had to share that religious nature, that universe of their doxa. Therefore, the economic and political dilemmas and the denial of their religious belief during the time of Japanese modernisation were seen by the Atayals as alien 'challenges' and 'repressions' of their lifestyle and not as 'competing possibles'. This was why, together with the material help being offered in difficult times, Christianity – the 'infinitely translatable' (Jenkins, 2002; Tennent, 2007; Walls, 2001) religious system – was able to break into Atayal society by 'converting' its cultural, ethical and theological terms to Atayal usage. It worked not only as a manifestation of

the arbitrariness of the ‘old’ *gaga* by contrasting it with the success of the ‘new’ one, but also as the means to restore the primal state of the innocence of the *gaga* in dealing with the adaption to modernisation.

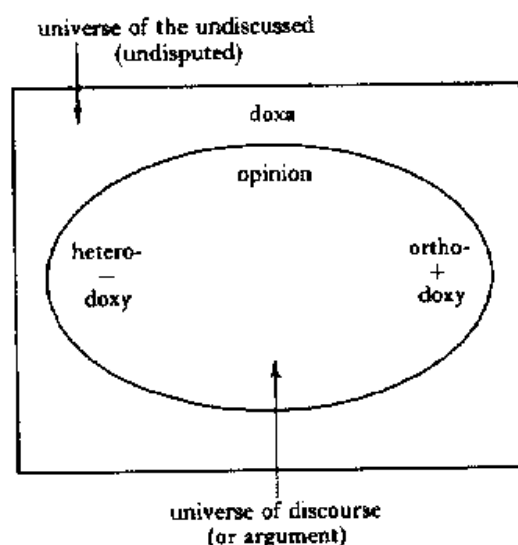


Figure 18, Bourdieu’s diagram of doxa, orthodoxy and heterodoxy in the *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977:168)

Whilst the act of religious conversion is to transform one’s religious identity symbolised by special rituals (Meintel, 2007), and religious identity and rituals were the foundation of pre-Christian Atayal society, the ‘competing possible’ of Christianity here represents the transformation of the Atayals’ world view. This is why acquiring the position of orthodoxy is vital in the act of the Atayals’ religious conversion. From the recognition of ‘our *gaga*’ and ‘their *gaga*’ in different churches or amongst the tribes in the pre-Christian ages, we see how orthodoxy is distinguished as the ‘acceptable ways of thinking and speaking the natural and social world’ (Bourdieu, 1977:168) in different groups, whilst the ‘other’ is always the heterodoxy. Being in the orthodox position, therefore, indicates the possession of symbolic power – the ‘world-making’ (Bourdieu, 1989:22) power that can impose the legitimate vision of the social world onto the people (Bourdieu, 1989).

Bourdieu (1989) further states that to establish such ‘constitutional’ symbolic power, the power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital, which is generated from the symbolic system (religion, language, art, etc.). The symbolic system comprises both the ‘structuring structures’ (the symbolic forms that frame the



social world) and the ‘structured structure’ (the symbolic objectives that are embedded in the ways the agents perceive the world) (Bourdieu, 1979). In short, the symbolic system constructs, and is constructed by, the doxa – and the habitus corresponds to it. When one wins the power of discourse of the doxa, one is influential in forming the symbolic system. The translated, contextualised missionary work, therefore, not only functioned as the competing possibility of the doxa of the Atayals, but also as the means of acquiring the symbolic capital to establish its power of discourse, to shape its legitimate representation of the world. This opposition of the two forces of orthodoxy and heterodoxy is also what Bourdieu calls the ‘symbolic struggle’ (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 1994), which begins to contest the legitimate perception of the social world (Bourdieu, 1989). Such fighting over the symbolic capital within what I call ‘translated Christianity’ reflects what Bourdieu sees as the two forms taken in the symbolic struggle. The subjective form ‘transform[s] categories of perception and appreciation of the social world’ – the words and names referring to social realities – while the objective form takes actions of representation to bring into relief ‘certain realities’ (Bourdieu, 1989:20-21).

On the one hand, the series of concept transformations, such as the idea of *utux kayal* to the Christian God, *utux* to souls, and *kazahou* to Saints, as well as the fundamental Atayal ethics to the Ten Commandments, gave Christianity legitimacy in inheriting the Atayals’ *gaga*. On the other hand, the economic advantage brought by church aid and their cooperation with the government further reflected the ways in which being a Christian, while fitting the domain of the Atayal doxa, could symbolise ‘relief’ from the Atayals’ social dilemmas. This included the economic situation and the discrimination the Atayals suffered from the majority Han people, as well as the failure of the old *gaga* to offer the community a mechanism of coping with the modern society. Relieving the pains of the social gaze through material support not only gave the villagers the concrete hope of a viable economic future, but also symbolised the ‘disenchantment’ with the doxa of the *gaga*. A ‘disenchantment’ that restored the ‘primal state of innocence’ of the contract made with god, and thereby restored the blessing from god.

Nonetheless, we should note that these symbolic influences occurred mainly among the early converters – that is, the leading figures in Bienjing village. Most Atayal people did not actively choose their religious belief and did not have a complete comprehension of what this conversion meant, but simply followed their

family leaders. However, from the leading figures' wishes of 'preserving' and 'protecting' the traditional culture by converting to Christianity, which was seen as 'the same' as but 'better' than the traditional *gaga*, we can still see how the doxa was imposed by the agents as an objective principle to defend their symbolic capital – and that symbolic capital is, as Bourdieu (1977:183) puts it, 'a transformed and thereby *disguised* form of physical "economic" capital'. This is why the participants of this study deny the importance of material support in their act of conversion but reiterate the ethical universality between Christianity and the traditional *gaga*, as the economic interest in Atayal society had never been revealed in its purest materialist form, but was transformed as the blessing for obeying the *gaga*. Yet it was exactly this materialist judgment of the faultiness of the old *gaga* that reflected the essence of secularity in the Atayal people's conversion to Christianity. Even though in traditional Atayal culture one's success or failure would be taken as mirroring one's obedience to the *gaga*, and *gaga* would sometimes be added or adapted to the changing circumstances, the *gaga* had never been taken as false or erroneous when facing other financially superior groups, nor would any change of the *gaga* be practised without a sign of approval from the *utux*. The utterly rational choice of acknowledging Christianity as the genuine *gaga*, therefore, marked the fundamental rupture of the previous pattern of connection between the divine and secular worlds. It not only put secular, or economic, success before the practice of the *gaga*, but also created room for the Atayals to disengage and re-engage themselves from one *gaga* to another out of secular practice, and thereby multiplied the relations between the Atayals and the *gaga*.

The rational decisions to convert based on symbolic struggle can only be applied to the few leading people in the village. However, the way most villagers followed them, similarly adjusting their self-identities, suggests exactly that which Bourdieu thinks is the most vital social function of the symbolic system: domination (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 1991). Functioning so as to ensure 'the reproduction of the established order' (Bourdieu, 1977:190), domination is operated by each individual as 'the condition of the appropriation of the material and symbolic profits of labour' (Bourdieu, 1977:184) as the recognised social mechanism. For an established group to exercise domination, 'the dominant class have only to let the system they dominate take its own course' (Bourdieu, 1977:190), just as most of the Atayals would feel obligated to follow the decisions made by the ruling class (the *tumux*, elders and other

reputable people), since the hierarchical obedience to the decision-making group by age rank in each family was recognised as the natural social order in Atayal society. It was these mechanisms of domination, deriving from the belief in the *gaga*, that resulted in the early distribution of the church members. That is to say, rather than being a personal choice of religious affiliation, most of the villagers' decisions about which church they converted to were a result of the power struggle between the different leading families. However, as relations of domination are required to be produced and reproduced by the interactions between persons through institutionalised mechanisms (Bourdieu, 1977), the social mechanisms that inevitably came with Christianity altered the goals that early converters wanted to achieve. Though failing to faithfully reproduce the old *gaga*, that alteration, hidden under its symbolic power and exercised by the operation of the social and cultural capitals of the Christian cosmology, still produced and reproduced the Atayals' relations with others, and was perceived as legitimate progression in Atayal life.

### 8.3 Conclusion

Beginning with Fredrik Barth and Anthony P. Cohen's idea of the 'identity boundary', in this chapter I have applied Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power and his forms of capital to address the ways in which the Atayals' identity of self is constructed through the social process of interactions between individuals and the social structure, and how that identity changed through the supposed reproduction of the traditional culture with Christianity. First, I discussed the ways in which the *gaga* operated as the source of 'power' in the Atayal society and how this power could be treated as different forms of 'capital' that were possessed by individuals and determined their social positions. Based on this premise, I discussed the functions of the *gaga* as the social, cultural and symbolic capitals formulating the Atayal villagers' social experiences, and demonstrated how, for each form of capital, converting to Christianity changed the meaning and forms of being Atayal, both as individuals and as a community.

As social capital, the greatest change in the *gaga* has been from one that refers to a tribe sharing the same sacred regulations, to one referring to a church to which one belongs. Since the modern way of life no longer requires sacred knowledge as the religious life has been separated from the secular one, the 'private' time of the Atayals

in Bienjing village has become the field of sacred practice supporting the villagers' idea of identity. Instead of contributing in tribal matters, participating in church activities helps the villagers to form connections with other group members not only in terms of social support, which defines an individual's sense of belonging, but also in terms of the material support that is combined with the resources held by the church in contemporary Atayal society. The different resources acquired by different churches, meanwhile, also attract different types of members to the churches. Such a way of acquiring social capital from the church fostered network and cross-regional identity, especially among Atayal youth. It further suggested a substantial change in the idea of community, from a means through which to carry out sacred practice to a way of sharing an interest in more secular matters.

However, the key to the reproduction of Atayal social structure lies in the *gaga* being exercised as cultural capital. With the examples of the *tumux* and the facial tattooist, I illustrated how the mode of cultural capital in the pre-Christian Atayal society operates: one's knowledge and practice of the *gaga* is reflected in the received respect, and different types of knowledge of the old *gaga* are transformed into economic capital. And it was the sacredness inherent in the old *gaga* that chiefly supported this social reproduction. Now, despite the fact that most of the Christian villagers consider themselves to be continuing their 'way of life', from the distinction generated by cultural capital between the 'old' and the 'new' *gaga* (that is, the *gaga* of the culture and the *gaga* of their current life), we can see how the operation of cultural reproduction has been changed into the sacred and the secular – a process which might as well have been unimaginable to pre-Christian Atayals. In this new mode, those who have knowledge of the old *gaga* would still be respected and honoured, but it is out of the people's respect for tradition rather than for the sacredness one possesses. The practice of the old *gaga*, furthermore, would no longer gain direct profits. On the other hand, those who 'practise' the new sacred *gaga*, which to most of the villagers is simply a matter of church attendance and contributing to church activities, benefit in the less direct way of accessing information and connections.

In order to deepen the analysis of how the distinction between the secular and the sacred realms of modern Atayal life impacted upon the reproduction of Atayal culture and identity, I went on to examine the functions of the *gaga* by means of Bourdieu's three states of cultural capital: embodied state, objectified state and institutionalised

state. In terms of education, the embodied state of the *gaga* changed from the delivery of oral stories along with daily practice, to Bible references and attending Sunday services. These differences in the embodiment of the *gaga* indicate the changes in both the spatial character and personal experience of the sacred, from body to church. This change was further reflected in the objectified state of the *gaga*. In the pre-Christian Atayal life, in addition to the ‘cultural goods’ such as fabrics and shell beads used to manifest their possession of cultural capital, the objectified state, the instrument of the *gaga*, was the human body – the *hei*. How much one possessed the cultural capital – that is, how much one had followed the *gaga*, as the villagers believed – would therefore be reflected in the conditions of the body. However, as the *gaga* is now ‘objectified’ as Biblical text, it not only lost the ability to adapt to the various conditions between the body’s practice and the environment, but also, as a consequence of that, cancelled the sacred interaction between the body and the environment. The detachment of one’s success and well-being from that sacred guidance reaffirmed the distinction between the sacred and the secular realms. Meanwhile, as the body is no longer the bearer of the *gaga*, presenting the objects of the religious belief thus became the way the villagers reveal their piety in the *gaga*, marking yet another critical turn of sacredness to material objectification in the Atayals’ religious experiences. In the meantime, this oppositional relation between substance and spirit is reflected and deepened through the institutionalised state of the *gaga*. That is to say, operated by the power of institutional recognition, the distinction between secular substance and sacred spirit is not only a result of the change in how the *gaga* is gained: in other words, that it is gained through knowledge of it, rather than by practising it. The change in the *gaga*’s recognition from the bodily to the churchly also resulted in the shift of power in the village, thereby reproducing such patterns of the sacred–secular relation, deconstructing and reconstructing the sacredness of the Atayal people’s identity.

Finally, in an attempt to explain further how these changes are accepted as ‘new traditions’ for the Atayals, I adopted Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power in order to analyse how Atayal social structure and individuals’ mental imageries interact to construct their boundary of identity. By elaborating on the operation of the ‘doxa’, I analysed how Atayal daily practices are integrated and dialectically related to their belief in the *gaga* and how, by not recognising that relationship between the actions and belief, the villagers recognised the *gaga* as their natural way of life. The exercise

of symbolic power, as Bourdieu points out, is dependent on the ‘belief’ of agents to naturalise once arbitrary social relations. This was the reason why Bienjing Atayals would only take Christianity as the orthodox *gaga* after the missionaries started to ‘contextualise’ their approach – that is, to convert their missionary work as well as their material resources to symbolic capital – since this strategy provided the solution for the Atayals’ problems in reality, while fitting the universe of the doxa. The process of Christianity’s struggle against orthodoxy thus revealed the mechanism and the root of secularisation and of the Atayal people’s change of identity during their conversion. The recognition of an orthodox *gaga* by Christianity helps us understand the apparently paradoxical process that involves the Atayals believing that they are continuing their traditions when the adoption and practice of different capitals suggest otherwise.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conclusion: an Alternate Understanding of Secularisation**

The traditional Atayal life was based on the ideas of *gaga* and *utux*, which formed almost every principle of the ways of living, including the rules of hunting, worshipping, ethics and even talking. In other words, it was impossible to separate the traditional Atayal life into the ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ domains, since the ideas of a traditional Atayal society were completely based on its religious beliefs. Even ideas that we view as secular technological knowledge today – such as how and when to plant crops – were part of the sacred practices, as they were practised in a religious way. They were all *gaga*; they all formed ‘the way of life’. The whole point of being a *tayan*, in tradition, was therefore to follow the *gaga* left by the ancestors, so as not to offend the *bisani* nor be punished by the *utux*, and become a ‘real man’ to face one’s ancestors after death, at the other side of the *hongu utux*. This ‘doxa’ explains why the Atayal people would not say what they ‘believed’ in the past – for them, it was just the right and wrong ways for living in the world with the rules left by their ancestors. However, together with the influences of modernisation in education, politics and economy, and the pervasion of Christianity, the ‘belief’ in Jesus made them aware of the existence of a more ‘secular’ world – a world where some laggard Atayal people have no faith, and where the growth of fruit does not depend on the will of God, but rather on the knowledge of farming. Hence, there exists a religious life separate from this secular livelihood: they go to church on Sundays, pray to God when ill, and seek answers from the priest when the knowledge of the secular world can no longer satisfy their curiosity.

In the progress of this ‘disenchantment’ of the Atayal people’s religious belief, we see how different factors are played out in driving them to embrace Christianity, which inevitably, to a culture and living style that were centred on religious principles like the Atayals, changed not just their ‘way of life’ but also how they viewed themselves. As I pointed out in Chapter One, the construction of ‘identity’ itself is never determined solely by social conditions, nor can it be built on subjective recognitions without the input of social contexts. The construction of identity is, again, a series of interactions between individuals and their surroundings, in terms of both the subjective and the objective conditions of the surroundings. The question I adopted from Alan and Irwin Howard (1977) at the beginning of this study, which seeks to understand the conditions of the ‘superordinate symbol of identification’ of the Atayal people, has thus been addressed in both social and psychological ways. Though most of the past studies chose only one of the two approaches (and most



likely the sociological one) to deal with the subjective and objective formations of self-identity, I believe that the combined use of Lacanian psychological ideas and the social theories of Bourdieu throughout this study should have justified the value of such an analytical style. While Bourdieu's theory of practice provided a framework to examine the social reproduction of identity, it was only through psychological analysis that we could understand the workings of such a process and how it could actually be a valid mode to be applied to the issue. Psychoanalysis helps us to identify, as Ying-kuei Huang (1991) and Yi-hong Chang (2001) suggested (see chapter one), the critical factors in religious and cultural transitions that are considered subjectively as problems by the locals. In other words, by cognitive analysis, we can better understand the mechanisms of how and why certain events could serve as the 'conditions', the 'capitals', in the cultural and religious transitions of one society, while having little effect in another.

While the changes in economic patterns and nationalism brought by modernity, for example, have been recognised as common factors in religious conversion (Buckser & Glazier, 2003; Veer, 1994) and were deemed in past studies to be the main elements influencing Taiwanese indigenous peoples' modern identities (Ma, 2002), they did not provide a satisfactory explanation of how they were linked to the peoples' perception of their surroundings. However, with the introduction of psychoanalysis, we can now understand that in the case of the Atayals in this research, the changes of economic patterns and social environment not only triggered the antagonism between the Atayals and the Han (the major societies), but also resulted in the anxiety of the Atayal people toward the insufficiency of the *gaga* and their marginalised socio-economic status in the modern society. The Christian missionary with material aids, as another instance, thus came as the 'fantasmatic supplement' to sooth the trauma of that social dilemma. This 'fantasmatic supplement' not only represented the Atayals' vision of having a 'better life', but also stood for the cultural boundary between the Atayal and the Han societies, while at the same time trying to fill that socio-economic gap. Converting to Christianity, while claimed by the Atayals to be out of the pursuit of ethical consistency in the modern world, is therefore also an act of social and political strategy. This understanding of the Atayals' conversion is crucial. Although the political and socio-economical dimensions of their turn to Christianity have been brought up long ago, we should not, as many of the Jinshuei villagers accused some previous studies of doing, treat the Church's material aid as

the blunt political and social inducement of their acceptance of Christianity. It was not the material aid that drove the Atayals into the arms of Christianity and became the political and economical agenda of their conversion, but the vision of a ‘better life’ and the cultural distinction from the Han society. This not only served as the missing piece, as I stated in the first chapter, between the transition and production of identities in Atayal studies, but, moreover, provided an insight into the uniqueness of Taiwanese indigenous groups’ mass religious conversions – as it was one rare instance of a group collectively embracing Christianity without the influence of ‘white power’.

There were, of course, certain social and cultural conditions that established Christianity as the solution to the Atayals’ dilemma in modernity, and I have highlighted these conditions by using Bourdieu’s theory to deconstruct the ideologies and constructions of the Atayal society. First of all, from the traditional worldview of the Atayals we see how *gaga* was one ethical system based on the religious belief in *utux*. The anxiety of the *gaga* being insufficient in the modern world, therefore, could be viewed as the anxiety of both the religious practice and ethics for the Atayals. Under such circumstances, the Catholic Church, the missionary approach of which focused on the moral view and the monotheist structure, thus quickly provided the ‘orthodoxy’ of the modern *gaga* through theological translation. In addition to that, the commonness of ethical values between Christianity and Atayal further reaffirmed the Atayals’ intuitive belief in the *doxa* – the need for being a ‘moral person’. The material aid brought by the Catholic Church and its coordination with the government, on the other hand, also helped to confirm this connection between the moral orthodoxy and the Christian Church, as in the traditional Atayal world the material abundance was deemed as the reward for righteous deeds. These factors of Christianity formed the modern orthodox *gaga*: which allowed the traditional ‘way of life’ to continue in a ‘disenchanted’ manner, but deeply influenced the Atayal culture in two ways, both of which suggest the introduction of a different mode of secularisation that does not conform to the public character of Western secularisation.

## 9.1 Secularisation as fetishism

The first sign of the secularisation of the Atayal culture lies in Christianity being the ‘fantasmatic supplement’ of the Atayals’ social dilemma. Although the traditional

Atayal culture believed in the *utux* controlling the wellbeing of the *tayan*, the adversity of the people was also considered to be punishment from *utux*. Instead, turning to Christianity was a ‘rational’ decision. This means that this change of *gaga* did not pass through the traditional religious process, but resulted from a consensus opinion. This conversion thus showed the very secular reference in the Atayal people’s acknowledgement of their tradition’s ‘superstitions’ and the false belief in the *utux*. We might even say that this secular reference not only was based on the ideology of an ideal ego, but also served as a ‘fetish’ construction of the Atayals’ belief in Christianity. The fetishism here is not a bodily and sexually triggered trauma as in Sigmund Freud’s (2001)[1913] terms, which ‘the mother lacks a penis and the ensuing fear of castration that pathologically leads to the substitution of a sexual object with an Other.’ (Böhm, 2010: 350) Rather, we should understand this drive in terms of the fetishistic relation between the subject’s cause of desire and the object of desire in a Lacanian way, which is ‘not the real family father and his penis... but the Name-of-the-Father and the phallus, both of which are symbolic, mythical signifiers that mark the formation of society.’ (Böhm, 2010: 352) The Name-of-the-Father, according to Lacan (1977, 1978), signifies the lack and repression resulting from the gaze of the Other. It is because the phallus, as Lacan puts it, ‘is in the place of the Other that the subject has access to it. But since this signifier is only veiled... it is this desire of the Other as such that the subject must recognise.’ (Lacan, 1977: 288) The phallus, in other words, represents what is lacked by, as well as what is desired of the subject for the society. In the Atayals’ case, we found out how the need for better material life resulted from the ‘gaze’ of the Other, while such need became not only the ‘trauma’ of the Atayals for being in the marginalised social status, but also the ‘desire’ for the Other, the modern society. Yet it was also, because the Other can never be fully obtained, that fetishism in this case operated as the substitution for the desire of the Other by transforming the desire/lack to the obsession with a certain object. (Lacan, 1977) I thus argue that the Atayals’ secular reference in their conversion to Christianity reveals the transformation of the trauma/desire from the Other to the ‘obsession’ with the ‘better life’ (that could possibly be) provided by Christianity.

When Christianity is recognised as the fetishistic image of the Atayals, this imagination of a better life represented by Christianity also became its symbolic capital that further shaped the modern world of the Atayals. In Bourdieu’s (2007)

theory of capital, symbolic capital is usually obtained through people's economic capital, social status and reputation, making a 'person' as the bearer for symbolic capital. Yet in practical life, symbolic capital is not necessarily attached to human bodies, but can first be endowed to objects, and then circulate back to the body through the connection between the two physical ends. The Church, as representing the material abundance that is compatible with mainstream Han society, thus provided such symbolic capital to the Atayal converts, so that their believing in Christianity became symbolic of the promise of the material future. This promise, as we have seen in chapter eight, was what helped Christianity gain the position of orthodox *gaga* while sharing the Atayal ethical values. By legitimising Christianity itself as the modern orthodox way of life, the subsequent symbolic struggle against the premodern Atayal traditions further influenced the modern Atayals' understanding of the world.

To the Atayals, such understanding of the world is never merely a 'religious' interpretation of the way the world is. Being a society founded on religious principles, this Christianised understanding of their history – the 'now time' of the conversion and the 'past' of the 'culture' – and rituals changed not only the perception of the symbolic meaning of these customs, but further reshaped the episteme (Foucault, 2005), or the schemes of analogy and classification (Durkheim and Mauss, 1970) of the Atayal society. In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault (2005) had argued that how we 'know' and perceive the surroundings is related to the construction of social classification, and this episteme served as the reference for people to imagine the way that the world operates and the 'order' of everything within it. This is why, with the transformation of the content and practice of *gaga* to the Bible and Christian rituals, we witnessed in this study how the power structure, along with the subsequent cultural and social capitals, were redistributed in the process of the Atayals' conversion to Christianity, thus further changing the villager's idea of community.

What this new episteme of the world also brought to the Atayals, however, is the unsymmetrical relation between the knowledge and the faith of the religious subject. As I have discussed in chapters three through five, the pre-Christian Atayal people's life was constituted by a series of sacred practices that involved both knowing and doing. Such actions also embodied the faith in *utux*. Yet as we have seen with the Bienjing villagers, the incomplete translation and transformation between the Christian and traditional customs, as well as the rather fixed doctrines, detached the practices of life from the belief itself. Meanwhile, the lack of reading ability among

the older generations, the pervasive Christian value of ‘piety’ in worshipping among the younger generations, and the church’s demand of biblical authority, also caused the disinterest of the villagers in pursuing theological knowledge. These factors, as I discussed in chapters seven and eight, not only were the result of the symbolic struggle between the Christian and traditional Atayal belief systems, as well as of the power struggle between different families, but also became the new doxa that dominated the attitude of the villagers towards Christianity, where the Atayal people are not even aware of such rupture between the faith and its knowledge.

The danger of this asymmetrical relation between faith and knowledge is that it further reproduces the fetishistic ideology of Christianity, and in a way that is different from that of the Atayals’ conversion. In earlier discussions, I presented how the Atayals believe Christianity provides them a ‘better life’ while ignoring the evidence that the most ‘successful’ figures in the village are not ‘good’ Christians – or even Christians at all. However, we should not understand such phenomenon as the evidence of the Atayals’ dematerialisation of Christianity. What we have to notice is how the Bienjing villagers failed to see that becoming less socio-economically vulnerable was not the direct result of believing in Christianity, but the consequence of the facilities and policies bridged through the Church. This logic of ‘faith’ in Christianity, as Slavoj Žižek (1997: 137) stated about the logic of religious fetishism in *The Plague of Fantasies*, is where the Atayal people ‘first believed in God and then, on the grounds of their [my] belief, become susceptible to the proof of their [my] belief.’ Unlike the rather empiricist tradition in the old *gaga*, which saw every action and consequence as the reflection of the belief of the *utux* (and vice versa), the modern Christian Atayals no longer connect the adversity to the anger of the god, but only see the ‘successful’ cases – such as the priests – as the reward for the faith in God. Fetishism thus works not as the belief in the direct promise of a better material life (the reason the Atayal people converted to Christianity in the first place), but as the distant, delayed driving power that makes them believe it would eventually lead to a better life, which, again, reproduced the secular reference in the belief of Christianity.

## **9.2 Secularisation as the ideology of the secular**

This fetishistic doxa, therefore, takes us back to the discussion of the Atayal’s modern

episteme, and points to the second sign of secularisation by distinguishing the ‘secular’ practices from the ‘sacred’ ones. Throughout this study, I have demonstrated how the knowledge paradigm has shifted from oral stories to the written doctrines, as well as from the bodily practices to the teaching of the Bible in churches. Such transition not only brought, as I stated before, the rupture between the knowledge and the faith of the Atayals, but also changed their experience and the idea of the sacred. In chapters four and six, I illustrated how this transition of knowledge paradigm (*gaga*) influenced the Atayal people’s understanding of the way of life, and thereby separated the ‘religious’ traditions from the domain of ‘culture’. As the traditional Atayal world was formed by the daily practices, which were not just the practices of life, but the practices of the religious belief in *utux*, so this separation further marked the division of the ‘secular’ and the ‘culture’ from what used to be deemed as ‘sacred’.

The after effect of this division between the sacred and secular aspects of life is tremendous to the Atayals. The most distinctive influence of this is the Atayals’ idea of the self. In the traditional Atayal world, a *tayan* was composed of a lifetime of sacred practices, so as to ‘become’ the ‘true person’ – as *tayan* literally meant – of Atayal. Yet along with the division among faith, practices and knowledge that came with conversion, the idea of ‘the person of Atayal’ also differentiated into that of the secular (the sharing of the blood), and that of the religious (the sharing of the belief in Christianity). In the meantime, even among those who claim to be Christian Atayals, the affiliation to different sects also altered the connections tying the Atayals to the communities of which they belonged. As Christianity has taken over the orthodoxy of *gaga*, the affiliation to different sectarian churches thus replaced the old *gaga* and became the new centre of collective identity. However, unlike the traditional *gaga* that required communal practises in daily life and collateral religious responsibility, this modern belief creates yet another community that is independent from the premodern social groups such as *niqan* or *qalan*, resulting in the transformation and multiplication of the boundary of identity to a church-centred model. In other words, the modern Atayals no longer hold their social identity as did their predecessors, who formed their social and geographical boundaries through sharing the same *gaga*, both of which were united in this sacred practise. The Atayals today not only have the tribes as their secular social community, but also the churches as the sacred social community. The result of this is what we see in the Bienjing village, that one tribe would have several *gaga* (church affiliation), and in many cases one family (the old

*qalan*) would have different *gaga* as well.

However, though the Atayals' idea of the social identity is complicated by the establishment of the Church, the 'ethnic' and cultural identities are simplified. As I stated earlier, the transformation of the *gaga* from oral stories and bodily practises to the Biblical doctrines limited the development and the particularity of 'the way of life' in different Atayal groups. Such reference of this modern *gaga* became the 'common origin' for the Atayal people to understand their ethnicity. Here, I'm not suggesting that the modern Atayals believe Christianity has been their tradition all along, although many of the participants do see the history before conversion as sharing 'the same principle' as that of Christianity. Rather, it is the episteme of the Christianised *gaga* that changed the way the Atayals understand their 'ethnicity': *gaga* no longer stands for what separates one Atayal group from another; it becomes what unites the Atayals as a whole. Of course, we cannot overlook the influence of the construction of the Atayal 'ethnic' from the national education based on previous, rather biased anthropological understandings, which categorised those communities sharing similar customs as one 'ethnic group'. However, it is also such transformation of the *gaga* that replaced the traditional idea of the cultural and collective self-identification, which used to be in the form of the sacred practices, with the form of the belief in Christianity, and further established, or confirmed, this secular imagination of the Atayal ethnicity.

### **9.3 Further reflections of the study**

By now, I hope I have demonstrated clearly the idea of secularisation of the Bienjing Atayals' conversion to Christianity and how it affected the Atayals' self-identification. Although the active religious lives of the Atayals seemed not to fit what we normally understand of the idea of 'secularisation', however, dividing a once sacred world into the secular and sacred realms has indicating a 'secularised' Atayal world. Meanwhile, I also want to point out the historical and economical contexts in the Atayals' conversion, in which their marginalised economic and social status in modern civilisation created the conditions for this turn to Christianity. On these grounds, we could even say that many modern religious conversions – such as the examples I gave in the introduction – are, to a certain level, fetishistic. This kind of 'secularisation', originating from the separation of 'culture' and 'religion', may provide an explanation

of various religious transitions, including the decay of religious power and the rise of new religions, in the modern world. That is, if we don't treat the idea of secularisation as the death of religion, the 'privatisation' or 'pluralisation' of religion, but the division and rupture of the 'religious' and 'secular' lives, we may further understand those diversified religious transitions in the post/modern world. With this division becomes deeper and greater, one might find the scope of religious life growing smaller, where one can only search for the 'sacred canopy' (Berger, 1967) in secular experiences, and replace it with the 'faith' in culture or science (Eagleton, 2014). Alternatively, one could also be like the Atayals in this study, who are 'religious' in their belief in Christianity, still being 'secularised' by contrasting the life on earth to the life in heaven.

Nevertheless, we should notice as well that even in a 'smooth' processes of conversion, in which the converts claim to experience a 'continuation' from their past, the disruptions between the 'now time' and 'before', and between 'culture' and 'religion', are often being ignored or deemed as a legitimate innovation of the tradition. Therefore, I argue that, to better understand the influence brought by religious transition, we should not focus on the category of 'religion', but focus on the experience of 'the sacred' in order to grasp how, spatially and temporally, people 'position' (Chua, 2012) themselves during the conversion. This also brings up my final reflection of this study – that while analysing the identity of the self of the Austronesian groups such as the Atayal (or even identity in general), we shall also take into consideration the religious transition. For, religion, as we have seen with the Atayals, not only is the foundation of culture, but also provides the 'chain of memory' (Hervieu-Léger and Lee, 2000) that shapes the concept of who we are.



# Glossary

(In alphabetic order)

*Bazi*: a small ritual to offer a small share of food or wine to utux before meal.

*Blaq utux*: Good spirit.

*Gaga*: Literally ‘the words of ancestors’, then extended as the ‘way of life’. It could also be understood as manner, custom, tradition, or the church sectors.

*Hei*: Body.

*Hmagup*: Sorcery.

*Hongu utux*: Literally the ‘bridge of utux’, referring to the bridge that connects between the worlds of human and utux.

*Kazahou na tsokoliag*: The person who is brave and flawless in morality.

*Kilhaku*: Borrowed from Japanese language, literally meaning ‘leaf’, then used to refer to the group emigrated from certain area in Hsinchu.

*Luax na tsokoliag*: Real man with bravery and impeccable morality.

*Maho/Pslkotas*: An annual ritual to thank utux for blessings.

*Mahuni*: Femal shaman.

*Mai yurak*: Make offerings.

*Mama*: Respectful term to address a male who is as old as the parents’ generation.

*Maotox*: Warrior, brave man, fearless fighter, sometimes can also mean a man with only strength.

*Maraho*: Leader.

*Nabkis*: Elderly person who has a seat in the decision meeting.

*Niqan*: A group of people who shared the same gaga. Now understood as a family or clan.

*Pasapung*: Pacifier.

*Psani*: Taboo.

*Qalang/Alang*: The ally of different niqan, and is now understood as a ‘tribe’.

*Smyus*: A ritual that make offering to utux to heal disease and atone for sins.

*Utux/Lyutux*: Spirit of human, in its pure form is the object of the Atayal’s religious belief.

*Utuxan*: The world of utux.

*Utux kayal*: Creator of the Universe, now also understood as Christian God.

*Tminu utux*: Literally the 'spirit of weaving', meaning the utux who created the world and the fate of people.

*Tumux*: Chieftain of a qalan.

*Yagi*: Respectful term to address a female who is as old as the grandparents' generation.

*Yata*: Respectful term to address a female who is as old as the grandparents' generation.

*Yaqil utux*: Evil spirit

*Yutas*: Respectful term to address a male who is as old as the grandparents' generation.

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