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The Politics of Conversion

The Case of an Aboriginal Formosan Village

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Abstract. – This paper is about what has become known as religious conversion. Through the use of local accounts I shall attempt to reconstruct the scene in Iwan (an aboriginal village in Taiwan) when the first missionaries arrived. By relating events to the careers of particular characters I shall describe the ways in which Christianity was, and still is, being used in local political relationships. The emphasis here is very much upon local values and local dialogues and in this light entering Christianity is not so much a question of belief, psychological needs, or even religion. Rather it has always provided an idiom for describing and forming political alliances. *[Taiwan/ Formosa, Ami, aborigines, religious conversion, political event, local dialogues]*

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Christianity in Taiwan

The Dominican Order of the Roman Catholic Church sent missionaries from the Philippines to Taiwan in 1621 (Barrett 1982: 236). During the Spanish occupation of north Taiwan (1626–1642), twenty-nine missionaries, all Dominican friars, were despatched from Spain to Taiwan to take charge of Dominican missionary work. Their work ended when the Spaniards were expelled from Taiwan by the Dutch in 1642 (Wu 1978: 31–33). Spanish Dominicans returned to south Taiwan in 1859, this time led by Father Fernando Sainz and Father Angel Bofurull (Barrett 1982: 236; Cheng 1971: 583). During Japanese rule (1895–1945), despite government suppression, the Dominicans struggled to remain in Taiwan. Taiwan had been under the governance of the Fukien Apostolic Vicariate, but in 1920 it was upgraded to an independent apostolic prefecture. In 1930, the Catholic population had increased to 3,000 and by 1945 they were 8,000 Catholics (Barrett 1982: 236).

The Protestants arrived in Taiwan at about the same time as the Catholics. In 1627, the first missionary, Rev. Georgius Candidius, was sent to southern Taiwan by the Reformed Churches of Holland. By 1650, the Dutch reported that 5,900 persons had been baptised. However, this mission ended soon after the Chinese took control of the island in 1662 (Wu 1978: 30 f.). The Presbyterian Church of England broke ground in the south in 1865, pioneered by the Rev. James L. Maxwell; and the Presbyterian Church of Canada started its work in the north in 1872, pioneered by the Rev. George Leslie Mackay (Barrett 1982: 236; Cheng 1971: 583). Both mission groups carried on their evangelization alongside their introduction of Western medicine and Christian education. During Japanese rule, the Protestant Church suffered government suppression. Despite this, due to the efforts of the Western missionaries, Church membership doubled during the first decade of Japanese occupation. The first presbytery was organized in the south in 1896, and in the north in 1904. In 1912, both presbyteries united to form one synod for the whole island. "Up till 1950, the Presbyterians were almost the only Protestant denomination in Taiwan" (Cheng 1971: 583).[1]

The Presbyterian ministers showed an interest in evangelizing aborigines[2] long before the Catholics who concentrated on converting the Chinese. In 1912, a united conference of missionaries in Taiwan recommended the appointment of one ministerial and one medical missionary to work among the aborigines. Not only Western missionaries showed concern for the aborigines, but the

1 According to W. Huang (1984: 293 f.), there were seven other Christian churches in Taiwan before 1945: True Jesus Church, Holiness Church, Japanese Christian Church, Episcopal Church, Methodist Church, and the Salvation Army. The first two churches evangelized among the Taiwanese and the remaining four got their followers from the Japanese.

2 Most of the inhabitants of Taiwan are descendants of Chinese from mainland China. However, there are about 350,000 aborigines living in Taiwan (less than 1.7% of the total population).

Taiwanese churches also felt a sense of responsibility toward them. In 1909, the northern Presbytery set up a mission committee to direct the work of evangelization among the aborigines. However, the Japanese government did not look with favour upon this movement because they feared that the propagation of Christianity might disturb aboriginal social life and incite the aborigines to rebellion (Wu 1978: 39). Even Japanese missionaries were forbidden to preach among the aborigines (Cheng 1984: 207). The Foreign Mission Committee's lack of funds and staff also delayed the spread of Presbyterianism among the aborigines. In the early 1920s, first the Rev. Duncan Ferguson, and then the Rev. James L. Maxwell, appealed for a special mission among the aborigines. They suggested that a start might be made among the more accessible aborigines in eastern Taiwan, since work among them was not completely forbidden by the government. Due to its limited resources, the committee decided to concentrate on the Chinese who comprised the majority of the total population (Wu 1978).

From 1930 onward, especially after 1941 when Japan entered the World War II, the Japanese government exercised greater control over both the aboriginal and the Chinese Christians. Christians were seen as potential spies. The Japanese were particularly concerned with the Christians among the aborigines living in the central mountains because these areas were seen as potential headquarters for enemy guerrilla forces. Wherever bibles and hymnbooks were found among the aborigines, even if they were in the Japanese language, they were taken away and burned. Some Christians were beaten terribly by Japanese policemen (Dickson 1984: 365–368; Wu 1982) and the prospects for Christian evangelism were considered to be very bleak at this time.

In the 1950s, shortly after the Chinese Nationalist government took over the island from the Japanese, most of the aborigines in Taiwan converted to Christianity.[3] At the same time the majority of the Chinese remained non-Christians.[4] The growth of Christianity among the aborigines after 1945 was so rapid that it was called a "Twentieth Century Miracle" (e.g., Tong 1961; Vérineux 1980; Wu 1978).

3 According to Kuo (1985), about 73% of the aborigines were Christians in 1970.

4 According to statistics (Barrett 1982: 235), in mid-1970 51.4% of the population of Taiwan were Chinese folk-religionists and 41.0% were Buddhists. At that time, the total number of Christians in Taiwan was 943,000, only 6.7% of the total population.

Iwan, an Aboriginal Village

Iwan village, in front of the coastal mountains and facing the Pacific Ocean, is located in Chenggung Township, Taidung County. Around 1865, some Ami people founded this village.[5] Since then there has been an age-set organisation[6] and a village council[7] in the village.

About five kilometres to the north of Iwan, there is the Ami village of Ta'man and to the south, about three kilometres away, there is the Ami village of Tomi'ac. Iwan and Tomi'ac constitute an administrative unit (*li*, literally "village" in Chinese)[8] which is called Boai Li. The *li* office and the local primary school are located in Tomi'ac. In terms of administration Iwan and Ta'man belong to different units; and their relationship is not as close as that between Iwan and Tomi'ac. Inside Iwan the households are divided into eight neighbourhoods (*lin*).[9] Each neighbourhood has a *lin* head who is elected by all adults in the unit.

At the end of December 1988, according to the household registration of the local government, there were 112 households in Iwan. A hundred and three household heads were Ami and of the remaining nine household heads, three were Hakka Han Chinese[10] and the other six were Chinese war veterans who came from mainland China after 1949.

5 The aboriginal peoples of Taiwanese belong to the Malayo-Polynesian family in terms of physical features, language, and sociocultural characteristics (Mabuchi 1960). The nine aboriginal groups are: Ami, Atayal, Bunun, Paiwan, Puyuma, Rukai, Saisiyat, Tsou, and Yami. According to my Catholic informants, the founders came from some northern Ami villages, such as Makuta'ay, Kiwit, and Chukangan, to avoid attack by Atayal and Bunun aboriginal groups.

6 There are two main types of age-systems in anthropological literature: age-grading and age-setting (Gulliver 1968; Baxter and Almagor 1978: 2). The Ami age-set organisation is a good example of an age-setting system (cf. Chen 1989).

7 In order to unite different *gasaw* (clan) in the village, the village council played a critical role in addition to the age-set organisation. To keep in line with the changing political situation, however, the name of the village council and the functions of the council changed many times.

8 Two alphabetical systems other than English are employed in this study. There are different systems of Romanization for Mandarin Chinese pronunciation and in this study the Yale system is used. For reasons of brevity, however, the different tones in Chinese pronunciation will be ignored. With regard to the spellings of Ami native words please refer to Fey 1986.

9 At the initial stage, there were five neighbourhoods in Iwan, but later the number increased to eight.

10 Hakka is a dialect of the Chinese language. Its speakers are the second biggest group in Taiwan, next to the speakers of the Fukien dialect.

There are three grocery stores in the village owned by the three Hakka Han Chinese households. Although almost every household has a small patch of paddy on which it used to grow rice, rice cultivation was totally abandoned several years ago. Nowadays almost all the household income comes from the wages of the able-bodied young people working outside the village, especially in northern or western Taiwan. Except at festivals, only the elderly and minors are to be seen in the village, as is the case in most others in rural Taiwan. This is an indication of the extent to which the Ami in Iwan have been absorbed into the mainstream economic system of Taiwan.

By the end of 1946 some Ami people in Iwan had began to practise Presbyterianism. In 1955 Catholicism was introduced into the village. Today about 80% of the Ami villagers are Catholics, 15% are Presbyterians and the remaining 5% either belong to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church or practise Chinese religion. Relations between these groups, which are in fact rival political factions,[11] are often strained and leaders of these groups are extremely suspicious of each other.

Fieldwork in Iwan

My Ami study began in September 1982, when I joined a six-year project, studying "Oral Literature among the Yami and the Ami." Two native researchers joined this project. One of them was Kuei-chau Huang (Lifok is his Ami name), who worked with me collecting oral literature.

Between 1982 and 1988 Lifok and I travelled among Ami villages and recorded stories narrated by old people. Lifok transcribed the stories into romanized Ami script and I helped him to translate them into Chinese.

In 1986 I decided to go back with Lifok to his home village for a long-term study.[12] He introduced me to his own clan (*gasaw*)[13] and I moved in with Wusay (who is Lifok's cousin) and her husband Apo'. Apo' was born 1934 and originally came from Madawdaw (another Ami village). He married Wusay in 1974. Apo' appears well suited to his job as the cook for the Swiss priest Ontok. Compared with her husband, who cannot speak Chinese, Wusay was born in 1948 and is younger and more active in the village than her husband (both in her kin group [Cilagasan clan][14] and in the Catholic Church). Most of the people I got to know in Iwan on my first visit were introduced to me by Wusay and Lifok.

Since then, I have visited Iwan from time to time and tried to attend the major social events there as often as possible. When I was staying in Taipei, I contacted Lifok regularly. In 1988, Lifok showed me his diary and let me photocopy it. Because he was one of the Ami assistants to the Swiss priest in Iwan Catholic Parish between 1958 –1973, his diary provided me with an insider's perspective on the Ami's religious change.

Living with Wusay and Apo' I got to know the northern village well, but I knew little about the Presbyterian minority who mainly lived in the south. Having established close ties with many Catholics I knew it could be difficult for me to make contact with the devout Presbyterians without arousing the suspicions of my Catholic friends especially as I was treated as a member of the Cilagasan clan which is predominantly Catholic. As a compromise, in September 1992, I moved to stay with a Catholic family who lived in the south of the village. Akiyo is the head of this household and she lives with Dipon, her husband, who married into Iwan from Ta'man. In the 1970s Dipon became a voluntary apostle[15] in the Catholic Church and in 1989 he became the head of the village (*komog*). Dipon's influence in the village helped me to gain access to the workings of Iwan Credit Union and the Catholic Church.

Unfortunately my previous associations with Catholic villagers made it difficult for me to make inroads into the Presbyterian community. After several unsuccessful attempts to establish informal and friendly relations with the Presbyterians

11 In the past any adult man over 40 years could compete to be a village councillor. To be elected as a village leader (who was the chairman of the village council) a man had to be recognized by his supporters as being suitable for the position. He had to fulfil his obligations both in his natal and in his wife's kinship groups. Any one group which withdrew its full support would destroy his ambitions to be a village leader. Beyond these two kinship groups a man could extend his personal relations through a balanced reciprocity principle (cf. Sahlins 1974).

12 Apart from Iwan I have also done short-term fieldwork in Kiwit and Kinaluka to study religious conversion and human rights respectively.

13 *Gasaw* is an important kind of kin group among the coastal Ami. Many scholars translate it as matrilineal clan but I hesitate to agree with them.

14 There are eleven clans in Iwan and Cilagasan is one of them.

15 Voluntary apostle is a literal translation of a Chinese term *iushtu*. There are four voluntary apostles in Iwan but Dipon, the only man among the four, is the most important one.

I struck upon the idea of utilising Akiyo's kin relations to facilitate entry into the Presbyterian community. I began regular visits to Akiyo's cousin Kacaw who had married into a Presbyterian family. Thus I got to know Kacaw's wife Dogi who is a devout Presbyterian and is very keen to talk about her religion. Dogi is the treasurer of the church and through her I got to meet Holikawa, her brother, who is the only Presbyterian church elder. After I had cemented these contacts with the Presbyterian congregation they began to invite me to join their worship.

I knew that Dipon felt threatened by my mixing with the Presbyterians as it could be construed as evidence of his lack of authority over his household (which included me). However, I also knew that Akiyo had told Dipon, in my defence, that I was conducting research and therefore I had to socialize with the Presbyterian community. After this incident, I noticed a slight change in Dipon's attitude towards me. All these fieldwork experiences gave me a strong feeling that religion in Iwan is an important metaphor of village politics.

Another factor which made me aware of the political dimensions of a change in religion has been the markedly different attitudes to the past that are displayed by Catholics and Presbyterians. Much of the data I have collected in Iwan has been about the past and a marked difference is usually found between Catholics and Presbyterians. For example Lifok and Asala have provided me with much information about pre-Christian Ami life and they always stress the importance of unity and continuity in the history of Iwan. Generally they support the revival of tradition and see it as a means to village solidarity. Whereas Presbyterians like Holikawa and Dogi emphasize the importance of rupture and enlightenment in Iwan history. For the Presbyterians pre-Christian Ami life and its traditions are best forgotten as they represent an embarassing reminder of their pagan past before they were baptised into the Church. Consequently the Catholics are much keener to talk about the pre-Christian era than the Presbyterians with the result that the Catholics have a practical monopoly both in stories about the past and on the shape of any traditions which are revived. As a result of these differences between Catholics and Presbyterians most of the information I have about the pre-Christian period was supplied by Catholics like Asala, Lifok, and Wusay. Presbyterians, like Holikawa, are not happy talking about their life as a misguided pagan and are therefore reluctant to describe pre-Christian life.

Copay, Asala, and Holikawa

This paper will concentrate on conversion as political event. That is to say, the reasons why the Ami entered Christianity are to be found not in the tenets, or practices of that religion, but rather in the careers of local political leaders. Accordingly, I shall attempt to explain "Ami conversion" in terms of the relationships between three important leaders in Iwan village, Copay, Asala, and Holikawa. Rather than seeing conversion as a reaction to internal (psychological) needs, external forces, or god, I try to understand what it meant for individual Ami to enter the "religion of the Americans."[16]

Copay was born in 1906 into a family of Rarages clan and he married into the Cikatopay clan. As with most of his contemporaries he went to a local primary school and received four years Japanese orientated education. Not only was he good at singing, dancing, and oratory in his own language, his Japanese language, according to many villagers, was also very good. He was chosen as the village head by the Japanese in 1935. From that time until his death in 1976 he was one of the most influential people in Iwan.

Copay's influence can be seen from his invention of certain elements of Ami culture. According to some informants, Copay thought that the traditional wedding was too simple and was unfair to men,[17] and he introduced a new wedding ceremony which was widely adopted by the villagers. This ceremony (called *nicopayan*) was named after Copay, and was a mixture of the traditional ritual (*no to'asho*) and some new elements.[18] This changed style was widely accepted in the 1940s and 1950s and its basic structure remains to the present day. It shows that a leader (like Copay) could

16 After World War II, the Ami expected the Americans to govern Taiwan because in their view Japan was defeated by the United States. To their surprise, the Chinese took over Taiwan from the Japanese, and the new government practised a policy of religious freedom. This provided the Ami with a chance to adopt Christianity, the religion of the American victors. In fact, in the initial stages of evangelization, the Presbyterian mission group defined their god as the god of the Americans (*Amelika a kawas*).

17 Traditionally the Ami practised a uxorilocal-matrilocal custom which collapsed in the 1970s.

18 In the 1980s a new reading of culture, or tradition, was introduced into anthropological debates (e.g., Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983; Cohen 1985). More emphasis was placed upon creativity and manipulation in the maintenance of culture. I suggest that some of the Ami know about the relationships between tradition and invention and are fully aware of the role of certain individuals (like Copay) in the invention of Ami tradition.

make claims on positions of authority through the articulation of cultural resources.

Asala was born in Iwan in 1920 and like all his Ami peers went to the local primary school. When he left primary school he was one of the few from Iwan who attended a secondary school (in Taidung) which specialized in agriculture. Asala's parents were able to pay for their son's education with the money they made selling rice. In 1939 after leaving school, Asala went to work on a Japanese plantation. In 1941 he was able to take advantage of the Japanese plans to expand aboriginal education and became a teacher in a primary school for aborigine children. As the Japanese administration expanded, it sought the services of native speaking indigenous people, and in 1942 Asala got a job in the Chenggung office of the Japanese government as an agricultural adviser to the Ami. Through his position in the Japanese administration Asala gained a lot of knowledge of local administration and he had a deal of influence over Ami affairs. When the Japanese left Taiwan in 1945 Asala returned to Iwan as a farmer under the new Chinese rule. In 1948 Asala was elected one of the administrative heads of the five neighbourhoods (*lin*) in Iwan and shortly afterwards Asala began an association with the Presbyterian Church, which culminated in his baptism in 1953. In 1949 Asala was elected as the *li* head of the Boai Li that included Iwan and Tomi'ac. This increased his influence over Iwan affairs. In 1962, Asala left the Presbyterian Church and was baptised into the Catholic Church on December 25th, 1965. His entry into Catholicism paved the way for Asala to become the treasurer of the Iwan Credit Union in 1972.[19] Through his skills he has been able to maintain his position as the treasurer of the Iwan Credit Union for more than twenty years, and as this post is probably the most important, in terms of internal Iwan affairs, his ability to keep his job and hold off rivals is clear evidence of the status he holds.

While the majority of villagers are Catholics, there are some Presbyterians in Iwan, and Holikawa is their leader. Holikawa was born in 1921 in Iwan and had the same kind of education as Asala, until he entered the Japanese army in 1941. When he returned to Iwan after the war, he became a Presbyterian and quickly established himself himself as a very devout churchgoer. Although his wife's family still used pre-Christian religion, Holikawa followed his mother and his sisters when they entered the Presbyterian community. This caused friction between Holikawa and his wife's family which resulted in his wife's joining him as a Presbyterian and the two of them splitting from his wife's family's household. In 1950 he was elected as one of the two church elders by the Presbyterian congregation. At that time Presbyterianism was very popular but since 1957 the Presbyterian congregation has drastically decreased. Although Holikawa is well respected within the Presbyterian community he is not generally admired by the Catholic majority. When he speaks at kinship gatherings, either in his own clan (Sadipogan) or his wife's clan (Ci'okakay), many people just mock him or ignore him altogether.

Early Presbyterians

It is recorded that at the end of the war, there were fewer than two dozen Christians among the Ami (Wu 1978: 50), but immediately after the war, there developed a series of evangelistic campaigns. The Taiwanese Presbyterian Church began its evangelization among the aborigines shortly after 1945. On December 15th, 1947, the Rev. Lwo Syan-chwan was formally appointed leader of a mission group for the southern Ami areas. However, before the arrival of Rev. Lwo, there were already six households in Iwan which had adopted Christianity.

Paynac is the oldest early Christian in Iwan. When I first visited her on October 3rd, 1988, she was 79 years old. According to Paynac, she and her family (of Sadipogan clan) accepted Christianity in 1946. She said that the main reason for their adoption of Presbyterianism was "trying to change our family fortune." She explained: "For many years, every time we rebuilt our house, a member of our family would die soon after. We thought that after becoming Christians we might avoid this bad luck, receive the blessing from the new *kawas* (god) and receive a good fortune." For Paynac and her family, two things made them dissatisfied with Ami traditional healers (*cikawasay*).[20] Firstly, they doubted the efficacy of the healing rituals con-

19 This credit union was formally set up in 1967 under the sponsorship of the Swiss father.

20 Before the end of the 1950s, there were at least twenty traditional healers in Iwan. Some could only heal (i.e., *mamisair*) and some could only preside over certain rituals (e.g., *mamaagag*) while others could do both. They belonged to four groups: *tada cikawasay, misapayciay, misaiyanaay,* and *misakaramay.*

ducted by traditional healers. Paynac was one of the survivors of a cholera epidemic in 1946 but her sister, who had been treated by different traditional healers, died at that time. Paynac reached the conclusion that all pre-Christian healers were fakes. Secondly, she complained that traditional healers demanded some reward (such as food, wine, tobacco, and sometimes money) for their service. She said these payments were a heavy burden for a poor family. Correspondingly, Christianity seemed a better alternative for her.

In the early days of evangelization in Taiwan, Western medical care was an essential adjunct for the missionaries. When the Rev. Lwo preached in Ami areas, although he was not a medical doctor, he brought a great deal of medicine with him and distributed it freely, persuading the Ami not to trust their traditional healers anymore (Lwo 1984: 395). More importantly, in this early stage, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan paid the salary of the minister and his assistants. All supplies, such as bibles, hymnbooks, and medicine were provided by the General Assembly. Therefore, the Christian followers paid nothing for the minister, neither for his services nor for any materials he provided.

The first missionaries were seen as healers because they concentrated on healing the sick. For the missionaries the healing of the body through medicines was distinct from the healing of the soul through prayer but for the Ami these two were combined in a new type of ritual, in which medicines were just another type of ritual object (like bibles or crosses), which was very successful in healing the sick. Through their successes the missionaries drew the attention of, and gained some influence over the Ami. Their first task was to outlaw traditional healing methods and thereby get rid of rival healers. The Ami were told of Christianity and that traditional healing practices were evil. The introduction of a taboo on visiting traditional healers was effective because the missionaries were having such success curing minor ailments. By isolating them the missionaries forced the traditional healers to act. Under this pressure, some of the traditional doctors accepted "Iyes Kristo" as their protector (*salo'afag*) and tried to prolong their careers.[21] After a rudimentary education in Christianity and a baptism the local healers were allowed to continue their work but with Christian rituals and with access to the missionaries' medicines. Although the missionaries met with great success and were welcomed as healers, once they tried to interfere in village politics (i.e., forbid participation in non-Christian rituals) they aroused a great deal of suspicion and rejection.[22] Once the missionaries began to involve themselves in village politics the church began to entangle with the political factions which supported the various candidates for village leadership.

At the time Paynac and her family were converted, there were already five Ami households who had adopted Christianity, three from Cikatopay clan and two from Fakog clan. Paynac and her family learned about Christianity from these fellow villagers. It is widely agreed that the first person who accepted Christianity in Iwan was Koper, a man married into a household of Cikatopay clan from Kaciday, an Ami village about 40 kilometers to the south. He had been an elder in Kaciday Presbyterian Church before he moved to Iwan. There is little known about the background to his joining the church, but it is certain that all the early followers were convinced of the benefits of becoming Presbyterians by Koper. Furthermore, their acceptance of Christianity was more or less the same as Paynac's, i.e., they wished to have better luck for their households.

These early converts worshipped in each of the believer's houses in turn. Sometimes they went to Chenggung (a town about 30 kilometers to the south) for worship and listened to the preaching of the minister. In April 1949, the first Presbyterian church was set up in the northernmost part of Iwan. It showed that this church had gained enough support from the villagers to warrant the building of a church, even though its followers were still a minority in the village. At that time, there were fewer than ten households that had accepted Christianity out of a total of sixty-one households. The pressure from other villagers, especially from relatives, toward the churchgoers was severe. Paynac reported that she was under threat of divorce when she decided to convert because her husband thought that it was wrong to abandon their tradition. When Holikawa (who is Paynac's younger brother) married into a household of Ci'okakay clan, his mother-in-law asked him to give up his belief in Christianity. Holikawa refused to do so and was forced to set up a new household with his wife, who had been supporting him in his devotion to church matters. When a

21 For example Saytowan, when without clients, was drawn to the new healers and he was welcomed into the church.

22 At this stage for most of the Ami, like the Lugbara in Africa, Christianity was still regarded as in many ways "antagonistic to the traditional systems of authority" (Middleton 1960: 3).

Christian household was in need, their relatives in their clan would very often refuse to meet their obligations; their reason was that the Christians refused to worship their ancestors. In this situation, the early converts were forced to help each other in many areas of social and religious life and the church came to replace the functions of the traditional clan. For the Ami this situation changed in the 1950s when local political leaders began to convert.

Asala and His Anti-Copay Movement

After the war (1945), the Chinese government took over Taiwan from the Japanese and reorganised the administration system. Iwan was incorporated with Tomi'ac into one political unit. Since then, Iwan ceased to be an independent political unit.

In the new system the adult citizens could now vote for leaders of different political units in local elections. The leader of the *li* became known as *liciw* in Ami, and the leader of each *lin* is called *linciw*. In the first election after this change, the *liciw* of Boai Li was Copay, the former village leader of Iwan. In addition to this, Copay was the chairman of the Iwan village council, of which all the newly elected *linciw* were members.

Since October 1948, the Rev. Lwo's itinerant mission group had come to Iwan every two weeks. Two Ami ministers, Gayaw and Mayaw, were in the group.[23] Sometimes, there were some assistant ministers or members of the choir to join them. Occasionally, but importantly, some American ministers would come with them. For the Ami, the presence of the Americans made Presbyterianism look more like a religion of the Americans.

Every time that the mission group came, they stayed for two or three days. During this period, they held a large service in an open field. Singing, dancing, preaching, and telling bible stories were included in the programme. It is said that these activities attracted many Ami people, who at that time were living in a small village without radio or television. In addition to the major programme, members of the mission group paid visits to potential converts.

Like the early Ami converts, some people became Presbyterians simply to seek a better life or to avoid bad fortune. These people, most of them being old, thought that since the Japanese had gone and the ministers were zealously promoting the religion of the Americans, they should give it a try.[24] In fact, some of them were happy with the result of prayer and the medicine provided by the ministers.

However, for most of the younger generation the attraction of Presbyterianism was different to that of the elderly. Demand for modernisation was much greater among the young men than it was among the elderly. For young men, joining this new church meant catching up with the fashions of civilized societies. For example, they thought they could receive some useful information about the outside world through the Church. Furthermore, they expected they could travel around Taiwan and make new friends if they could join the church choir. Some young men even wished to become ministers or elders in the church – all of these positions were created after the arrival of Christianity. Among these young men, the most important person was Asala, the leader of one political faction in Iwan.[25]

Asala told me that his interest in the Presbyterian Church began in early 1949. He justified his entry into Presbyterianism as a means to pursue a modern life. However, according to some villagers his use of his position in the church to challenge the authority of Copay, who was an established village leader, was motivated by his extraordinary desire for personal gain.[26] For example, before he joined the church, the early converts had only abandoned the pre-Christian rituals regarding their household or clan. They still fulfilled their obligations concerning the village as a whole, such as participation in the annual *ilisin* (new year ritual)

23 They were both born in Vata'an and finished their training course at a bible school in Hwalyan on June 29th, 1948.

24 Many studies show that the selfless brotherhood (e.g., Fernandez 1982: 320) and general friendliness (e.g., Burridge 1969: 71) of the Christian missionaries had a significant effect upon the adoption of Christianity. These factors were important too for the Ami, especially when they compared the missionaries' zeal with the colonizers' self-interest.

25 In the last few years under Japanese rule, several villagers worked outside Iwan, employed by the local government, by private enterprises, while others worked as forced labourers. Almost all of these people came back to Iwan after 1945 and among them three men with secondary school educational background became leaders of the political factions. They were all under 30 at that time and therefore, according to the village tradition, they could not be elected as village councillors, let alone as the village head. Furthermore, they had to obey the orders of *mama no kapah* (the leading youth group) in the activities of the age-set organisation. However, under the new political system, they could be elected as *li* head or *lin* head. This was a new arena for these ambitious faction leaders.

26 Although as a motivation personal gain is considered quite normal in Iwan, Asala is seen by his opponents to have gone too far and to be too greedy.

on the open ground in front of the *sfi* (until 1952 the dormitory for the single young men of the age-set organisation and the meeting place for village councillors). Asala mobilized all the Presbyterian Ami as a united group and refused to comply with the orders of both Copay and the *mama no kapah*. In 1952, after being boycotted by the Presbyterian Ami, the age-set organisation collapsed. At the same time, the *sfi* was abandoned. Furthermore, the Presbyterian Ami refused to participate in the Ami's new year ritual *ilisin*. After that, the ritual often took place on the seashore or in the brook-bed.[27]

Soon after Asala's conversion, the Presbyterians became the majority in the village. Many villagers confessed that they had decided to join this church, not of their own volition but because they did not want to be isolated which might happen if they did not follow the trend. I suggest that for these people, rather than conversion resulting directly from outside influence (such as economic, religious, or political forces), social pressures within the village lead them to join Christianity. However, there were still many people who refused to join the Presbyterian Church. Among them the most important figure was Copay, a village leader whose authority was under threat. It is said that Copay, and some of his supporters, refused to join the Presbyterian Church to avoid being led by Holikawa, Asala, and other rebels. This situation persisted until the arrival of the Catholics in 1954.

The Catholic Majority

Compared with the Presbyterian Church, the Catholic Church was less localized in Taiwan before 1945. As a result of this, their evangelization among the aborigines after the end of World War II began much later than that of the Presbyterians.

In 1954, several years after the communist takeover on mainland China when all Western missionaries were forced to leave, the Catholic authorities decided to shift their mission workers in China to Taiwan. The Most Rev. André I. Vérineux, accompanied by another Swiss Father, came to Hwalyan in 1954, after he was appointed as the deputy bishop of the Hwalyan Diocese, which included Hwalyan and Taidung Counties. Vérineux paid his first visit to Taidung later that year and soon after several Western Fathers who either been evangelizing in China or had come direct from Europe joined this mission team (Vérineux 1980). The Hwalyan Diocese was then divided into two evangelizing areas: Hwalyan County was assigned to the Paris Foreign Mission Society and Taidung County to the Swiss Bethlehem Mission Society.

A Father of the Swiss Bethlehem Mission Society set up a Catholic church in Chenggung in 1955. Since he had been in the northeast part of China (Manchuria) for a long time, he could speak fluent Mandarin and some Japanese. This enabled him to communicate with the Ami people without serious difficulty. He trained several local Ami assistants and then travelled around different Ami villages. According to many informants, this Father's strategy was different from that of the Presbyterian mission group. His major targets were important political leaders in the villages, such as *li* head, *lin* heads, members of *mama no kapah* and senior *faki* (mother's brother) of each clan. He visited these people in their own houses and this made those leaders feel that the Western father did not look down on them. A few months later, the mission group used a house of Cikatopay clan as their base in Iwan and started to introduce Catholicism to the villagers. Illustrations, photographs, and slide shows were used to spread the gospel. Because most of the villagers were familiar with the basic religious concepts of Christianity through the teachings of the earlier Presbyterian missionaries, the newly arrived Catholic mission group did not need to spend time on the basic teachings; rather they emphasized the differences between the two churches, in terms of history, organisation, religious rituals, worldwide number of fellow believers, and the attitude of the church toward local culture.

The Ami in Iwan set up their first Catholic church in 1955. Between 1958 and 1959, Catholics became the majority in Iwan. The Catholic authority then established Iwan Parish in 1959 which was separate and independent from Chenggung Parish. Since then there has been a Father residing in Iwan who also takes responsibility for eight nearby villages. When a modern Western-style Catholic church, which can seat at least 200 persons, was built in 1960 the development of the Catholic majority in Iwan was consolidated.

Mass entry into Catholicism began in 1957. During this year, the most important event was Copay's entry into Catholicism. There are different reports about his conversion to Catholicism. Generally Catholics said that Copay really recognized that Christ was the saviour of mankind. While

27 Except for these two places, no other suitable place was available at that time.

the Presbyterians said that he just wanted to regain his power through the Catholic church.[28] According to his children, Copay made his first contact with Catholicism in 1955 and was baptised in April 1957.[29] The impact of his conversion on other villagers can still be seen in two important groups in contemporary Iwan: his political supporters and his colleagues in the traditional healer's group.[30] Many villagers admitted that their conversions were affected by Copay's decision.

Asala, the Catholic Church and the Credit Union

During the period of mass conversion to Catholicism, not only had those who had not entered the Presbyterian Church beforehand chose Catholicism but also many people who had been deeply involved in the Presbyterian Church converted to Catholicism. Among the latter category of persons, Asala is worth a particular mention. Asala justified his decision by emphasizing the tolerance of Catholicism towards certain Ami pre-Christian social forms. However, some criticized him as an opportunist. For example, according to Holikawa, the Ami in Tomi'ac accepted Presbyterianism much earlier than the people in Iwan did.[31] Before the evangelization of Catholicism, Asala's conversion to Presbyterianism meant that he could get support from fellow converts both from Tomi'ac and Iwan. This enabled him to easily beat Copay and he became the second term *li* head of Boai Li administration. But after Catholics became the majority in Iwan, the total number of Catholics became higher than the Presbyterians in Boai Li and Asala entered the Catholic Church.

The importance of the Presbyterian Church decreased with the development of a Catholic majority. In 1955, the owner of the land on which the Presbyterian Church was built, sold the land to someone else. The Presbyterian Ami were forced to find a new site for their church. They first tried to build the church on the open ground of the *sfi* (men's house), which had been abandoned in 1952. This attempt was stopped by other villagers. In October 1955 the Presbyterians built their church in the south end of the village on the land offered freely by Holikawa's mother. About the same time, an Ami minister from a southerly Ami village, Kaciday, was assigned by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan to serve the Protestants in Iwan. Initially, this assignment led the Ami to doubt the nature of Presbyterianism: was it really the religion of the Americans? If so, why was an Ami from another village a minister residing in Iwan? Later, after a personal sex scandal and financial misconduct with the church funds, the Ami minister was discharged. His successor was also discharged for similar reasons. For some Catholic Ami, this kind of scandal was used as a reason for their leaving the Presbyterian Church; most of the Presbyterian Ami do not like discussing these aspects of the history of their church.

In 1967, one of the aforementioned Ami ministers came back to Iwan. Having recently converted from Presbyterianism to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, he had become a minister of that church. A preaching hall was built in 1971 and seven households became his followers; most of whom were persuaded from the Presbyterian Church and only one from the Catholic Church. However, this new Church did not achieve success. Most of its followers returned to their Catholic or Presbyterian churches. In 1986, when I first arrived at Iwan for fieldwork, the number of people who went to the Saturday service[32] was between six and eight people who belonged to three different households. When I came back to Iwan for a follow-up study in 1993, this church had been abandoned. I was told that only two households still belonged to the church; one stayed in western Taiwan almost all the time and the other was contemplating a return to the Presbyterian Church.

In addition to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, there were some other churches attempting to spread their influence into Iwan, such as the True Jesus Church and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Not all these attempts were successful. Compared with other churches, the Catholic Church, which was in the majority, was more tolerant of many pre-Christian Ami customs, such as drinking wine during some ceremonies and chewing betel quids. More importantly, in 1961 the Catholic father encouraged the villagers to organize their

28 Interestingly Asala, who is now at the very heart of Catholic opinion, sides with the Presbyterians here. As Copay's enemy he views Copay's entry into the Church with suspicion.

29 The church records show that he was baptised on 21/4/1957 and confirmed on 16/10/1958.

30 Copay was the deputy leader of the *misaiyanaay* group (see footnote 20).

31 Presumably the major reason was that a cholera epidemic occurred in Chenggung township in the late 1940s and Tomi'ac was more seriously hit than Iwan.

32 In this Church congreational worship is on Saturday rather than on Sunday.

traditional new year ceremony (*ilisin*), which had been discontinued between 1957 and 1960. After the revival of the *ilisin*, the age-set organization was reorganized to arrange this once-a-year ceremony. The Catholic father himself joined the age-set organisation and participated in the whole programme. For these reasons many Ami thought that their culture and traditions were respected by the Catholic authorities.

Holikawa versus Asala

Holikawa is an elder in the Presbyterian Church and claims to have rejected the pre-Christian supernatural beings. From his long contact with the Presbyterian Church he has learnt how to read and write Ami. The majority of Iwan Presbyterians are members of Holikawa's family. Apart from Holikawa and his wife, there are Holikawa's three sisters and his niece. The other members of the Presbyterian congregation are mainly from Koper's family. Koper died in 1978 after having brought Presbyterianism to Iwan from Kaciday. Agkim and her husband Marag are the most influential of Koper's descendants being in charge of the maintenance of the church.

At kinship gatherings of Sadipogan clan where Holikawa is often obliged to speak as a *faki* (mother's brother), although he tries to impress his audience, only a few people take him seriously. Many Catholic villagers see Holikawa as a lonely figure in the village; all his children (who live northern Taiwan) have joined the Iwan Credit Union, but he himself has not because he does not want to meet Asala. I have never seen Asala and Holikawa close to each other, they always maintain a distance, and only exchange the most basic formalities.

Holikawa and Asala belong to the same age-set – this group have the nick-name *laimig* (always number one). In this group five men, including Holikawa and Asala, underwent secondary education. The competition between these five men, for leadership of the group and the village, was very intense. Since these five men joined the age-set organization they have been competing for status and support. The relationship between Holikawa and Asala began to deteriorate when Holikawa married into Asala's clan.

Holikawa was one of the first to adopt Presbyterianism in Iwan and he and his wife soon found themselves pushed out of her clan. Normally the *faki* of a clan should help the new household with all they require (land, wood, rice, utensils, etc.) to start anew; however Holikawa and his wife received nothing from her family when they set up their new household. Instead they set up a new household on Holikawa's mother's land. This kind of household division is very unusual in Iwan. This has been a major source of conflict between Holikawa and Asala because Asala is one of the most important *faki* in his (and Holikawa's wife's) clan.

In 1949 Asala joined the Presbyterian Church in Iwan. At that time Holikawa was one of the church leaders along with Koper. After joining the church Asala sought confrontation with Holikawa at every opportunity. When Catholicism arrived in Iwan, Asala waited until the Catholics were in the majority before he left the Presbyterian congregation. Holikawa maintains that Asala's switch of religion is clear evidence of his lack of faith. On the other hand Asala maintains that Holikawa is a very stubborn man. He argues that it would be better for the whole village to present a united Catholic front, but Holikawa persists with his Presbyterian ways.

Holikawa appears to live a very humble religious life with most of his social contacts being members of his family who also comprise the congregation of the Presbyterian Church. Because of his longtime dislike for Asala, Holikawa rejects Catholicism and traditional ceremonies. He never wants to put himself in a position where he might come under Asala's authority. Holikawa feels that Catholics have the wrong attitude towards god and life. For him Catholics should stop drinking, chewing betel, smoking, indulging themselves in material goods, and refrain from participation in acts that have any connection with pre-Christian *kawas* (e.g., wearing traditional costume, etc.). In a village where drinking, chewing betel, and smoking are among the most popular pastimes Holikawa chooses an abstemious life. In a village where the credit union is both a means to get money and a symbol of village solidarity Holikawa refuses to join. The only area in Ami public life that is completely free from Asala's influence is the Presbyterian Church and this is where we find Holikawa investing most of his energies.[33]

Many Catholics feel that through the revival of festivals like *ilisin* they can create a boundary to differentiate themselves from the Chinese.

33 Among the Presbyterian congregation Holikawa is the only one with a secondary education and the only one who can read the Bible in both Japanese and Ami. Consequently the Presbyterian congregation look to him as a source of knowledge about the world.

But for Presbyterians like Holikawa the only way to maintain a distinctive feeling of "Aminess" is through the use and preservation of Ami language.

Asala's public discourse (i.e., his speeches and conversation in formal gatherings) focusses on village solidarity. Like most established leaders he emphasizes consensus and unity and stresses that the way to achieve these goals is through membership of the Credit Union and the Catholic Church. In Asala's picture Ami solidarity is built upon an opposition between Chinese and Ami where the onus is upon the young people of Iwan to catch up with Chinese in terms of living standards. Asala's emphasis on money as the means for the Ami to achieve a better life leads to a situation where all the young people (including most of Asala's potential rivals) leave the village to seek employment. It also generates work for the Credit Union and this is where Asala's real interests lie. Because almost every household in Iwan has joined the Credit Union Asala has an element of control over their economic activity. The busier the Credit Union the higher is Asala's wage. Like so many other successful leaders Asala has created a discourse and promoted particular economic strategies which serve both his interests and the interests of his followers.

Although Holikawa's audiences are always far smaller than Asala's he too presents a public discourse at any gathering where people will listen to him. In contrast to Asala's history of unity in the face of colonialism Holikawa describes the past in terms of rupture and enlightenment. For Holikawa pre-Christian Ami life is not worth mentioning, it is the introduction of Presbyterian values that offers hope for the future. In Holikawa's speeches the emphasis is on morality; he feels that living a good moral Presbyterian life will bring rewards in heaven. In his eyes the Catholic majority are immoral, being too concerned with worldly pleasures, so Holikawa can be seen to be presenting a critique of Asala's discourse. As Asala's reading of the present situation has been adopted by the majority Holikawa finds himself isolated. I suggest that Holikawa remains staunchly Presbyterian in the face of a Catholic majority because he wants to oppose Asala. Here the stress is upon the two Christian faiths providing an idiom for political competition. Although Holikawa recognizes that he has lost the earthly competition with Asala his religion allows him the hope of final victory at the gates of heaven. To avoid being subsumed into the group that follow Asala (i.e., the Catholics), Holikawa associates Catholicism with Asala and therefore refuses to join the Catholic Church. Holikawa remains Presbyterian because it is the most viable and popular alternative to Catholicism.

Discussion

Previous studies of conversion in Taiwanese aboriginal contexts have been characterized by positivistic, holistic approaches, most of which do not prioritize the native point of view. Whether we read of the importance of the provision of relief goods by mission groups (e.g., Yuan 1969; Wu 1978), the correlation of conversion to Christianity and the extensiveness of local contact with foreign culture (Shih 1976 and 1986), the importance of external impacts[34] (see e.g., S. Huang 1986), resistance to colonizers through accepting Christianity (Vicedom 1967), not to mention those explanations inspired by Durkheim (Kuo 1985) and Marx (Y. Huang 1988).

I do not mean that all the factors mentioned above were unimportant. For example, along with the provision of relief goods by mission groups, it could be argued that relative deprivation was the major reason of the Ami's mass conversion to Christianity. In other words, after long contact with the Japanese and the Chinese, the Ami's lifestyle had shifted from a subsistence economy to a complex economy (cf. Burridge 1969). The marked economic inequalities between the Ami and the colonizers resulted in the Ami feeling generally dissatisfied with their material life. Heelas and Haglund-Heelas (1988) have shown the inadequacy of "deprivation" as a theory of conversion, but I fully agree with them that: "Although deprivation cannot be a complete theory, there are still good reasons for taking it into account in the study of conversion" (118). In this study I neither see actual deprivation as the direct cause of conversion nor intend to prove that the Ami people actually experienced deprivation or that deprivation caused their conversion. Instead, I stress that relative deprivation was an important factor because Ami political leaders emphasized it.

In fact I contend that all studies of conversion give too much weight to external forces and not

34 I.e., frustration after a series of military defeats by the Japanese and the Chinese and the collapse of local institutions under influences from the colonial governments.

enough to local dialogues.[35] Two typical early examples of this are Linton's research on nativistic movements (1943) and Wallace's (1956) study of revitalization movements, which are based on a form of structural functionalism. According to Peel (1968*b*), this kind of approach tells us that cultural contact or acculturation causes social and psychological frustration which provide the conditions for the acceptance of a new religion. Therefore the new religion functions as a continuum between tradition and the acculturated. In Peel's view, this approach emphasizes the sociopsychological aspects of religious conversion, but fails to help us understand religious conversion itself. We cannot understand "why men of a particular kind interpret their situation in a particular way" (141).

Later, Horton proposed another kind of hypothesis (1970, 1971, and 1975). He emphasized that there are religious implications to changes in social conditions which make an originally isolated people extend their social relations beyond the limitations of their old social boundaries. Such people are required to equip themselves with a wider worldview by means of which they can explain, predict, and control the social order in the new social situation.[36] This intellectual change provides a condition for the acceptance of world religions. In Horton's view, the impact of world religions serves as a catalyst, rather than as the motor, for accelerating religious change. As van Binsbergen suggests, the success of the world religions in Africa was "largely attributable to the fact that they had come at just the right time" (van Binsbergen 1981: 29).

Although he gets some ethnographic support from Peel's study (1968*a*), Horton's intellectualist hypothesis has been criticized for several shortcomings. For example, Skorupski (1976) criticizes this approach, stating that it stresses only the cognitive, intellectual, explanatory side of African religion, without paying systematic attention to symbolic representation and ritual. More specifically, Fernandez (1978: 222) criticized Horton for being both too intellectual and not intellectual enough. In short, the intellectualist approach tends to convert religious images in religious movements into a problem of the philosophy of science.

Another criticism comes from Ifeka-Moller (1974) who proposes a social-structural approach. In her paper, entitled "White Power," she gives several factors to explain Nigerians' conversion to Christianity and the Aladura Church. European rule was one of the factors (probably the most important one) that she describes as part of the general conditions of Nigerians' conversion to Christianity. She says that: "people probably believed that the white man's religion would give them some kind of access to the mainspring of his technical power" (65).[37] Furthermore, she also points out that competition among the various denominations and the desire for education[38] led to the rapid spread of Christianity. Burridge's (1969) study on millenarian movements could be seen as another example of this approach. This kind of studies can provide some fragmented background to our understanding of the reasons why people change religion.

Facing such criticism, more recent studies have focused on religious images. This new approach has "moved from the typological and factors analyses of the 1960s to the more historiographic and microanalytic approaches of the 1970s." It is "a movement away from the attempt to reduce the complexities of this phenomenon with molar scientific approaches to attempts to find their commonalities over space and time and at the primary level of experience" (Fernandez 1978: 229). Fernandez believes that this can bring us "closer to the understanding of the actual religious experience of movement" (229).[39] Two good examples are Fernandez's (1982) study of the Bwiti movement and Comaroff's (1985) study in South Africa. In my opinion all these writings continued to ignore native dialogues and treated conversion in a holistic fashion which did not acknowledge the importance of local political leaders in any adoption of a world religion.

In contrast to the etic bias of previous studies I emphasize the native voice above all others. From this perspective, events called conversion by academics can be seen in a very different light.

35 Compared to other accounts of conversion in Taiwanese aboriginal contexts Y. Huang (1988) provides the most detailed ethnography but I think his study is still flawed by a holistic approach which fails to take micropolitics into account.

36 For Horton, African religion is "primarily an instrument with which people try to interpret the world; it is a theory of causation" (van Binsbergen 1981: 28).

37 Fernandez (1982: 70) also observes that: "The European, in any case, was first of all the 'knowledgeable one.'"

38 Middleton (1960: 3) says that schools set up by missionaries "are the only source of education, which must be acquired by anyone who wishes to enter the new power system of the Europeans." This factor was not so important for the Taiwanese aborigines in their acceptance of Christianity, because school education was provided by the government from 1910.

39 Therefore, Droogers (1985) calls this approach "African first model."

Here we might reconsider the concept of conversion from the Ami's point of view. The Ami have different terms for worship, each one referring to a different religion. *Misalisin* is the term associated with the Ami traditional religion, *mita'og* is associated with the Japanese god, *mipaypay* is associated with the Chinese god, and *milihay* with he Christian god. Only when they mention Christianity is another word *micomod* (join in or enter) used. It is significant that when the Ami talk of entering Christianity they do not describe anything being converted or even changed they simply join in. When they mention Japanese religion they say that they were forced to worship rather than allowed to join in with free will. Nowadays if Catholics face a difficulty they may secretly go to a Chinese religious expert for help. In such cases most Catholic villagers tend to feel sympathetic and so long as Catholicism is not abandoned and the Chinese way of worship is not conducted openly then it is acceptable.[40] Clearly religion for the Ami is not only concerned with pursuing material benefits, political desire also plays a part. Conversion to Christianity is not only about using different words, objects, and rituals to achieve certain purposes but it is also a kind of political statement, both in terms of relations with the colonizers and, more importantly, with fellow villagers.

Of great importance here are the different views of society utilised by the Ami and the academics who study them. The latter presume society to be compartmentalized into areas like religion and politics, and go on to describe entry into a different religion as being a purely religious phenomena somehow divorced from politics or economics. In contrast to this peculiarly Western treatment of conversion I present a very local picture of entry into Christianity which, in local terms, has little to do with an isolate called religion and can be better described in terms of politics, economics, and kinship, which for the people of Iwan are not separate, isolated categories, but are rather all means of achieving the goals of life – good health, prestige, and material comfort. For the Ami there is no distinction between politics and religion and, consequently, for them conversion is as much a political event as it is a religious one.

Thus, similar to Baum (1990), my interpretation of religious change differs from those scholars (e.g., Horton 1971 and 1975) who have treated the conversion of traditional societies to world religions as a part of a universal historical progression. I do not see the Ami as accepting Christianity in some pure form and simply replacing their pre-Christian system of belief with this new religion. In this paper, as Baum says: "Conversion is seen as the beginning of a long process of integration into a new religious tradition rather than the sudden and dramatic change represented by the conversion of Paul in the Christian tradition. Moreover, this conversion process need not invole the renunication of one's former religious systems" (371).

In fact the meanings, functions, purposes, and aims imputed to religion by converts are arrived at through internal processes. For example Asala claims that Catholicism is more or less similar to the Ami' pre-Christian religion. The supreme God *Malataw* is presumed to be the Christian God and the Goddess *Faydogi* is presumed to be the Virgin Mary and all other pre-Christian supernatural beings have their corresponding counterparts in Catholicism. Although the Ami of Iwan appear to have converted to Christianity they actually seem to maintain a belief system that is very similar to descriptions of pre-Christian notions.[41] In Iwan conversion to Christianity has not entailed a radical change of belief, or a new cosmology, rather new words, objects, and practices have been fitted onto a much older way of doing things. The changes in the village that accompanied the adoption of Christianity were the result of political machinations and not of religious enlightenment.[42]

Throughout this paper I have stressed the interconnectedness of what we call "religion" and "politics" in Ami discourses and it seems to me that many Western writers on conversion have failed to recognize that other people do not compartmentalize society in the ways Westerners do. When dealing with religion Western writers often seem reluctant to discuss it as a practical or a profit-based phenomena. Centuries of associating Christianity with spirituality and things ethereal have lead writers to discuss anything religious in these kinds of terms, while the material side of life has continuously been associated with Satan and evil. Western writers have tried to describe

40 There are four Ami households in Iwan that openly practise Chinese religion and one man who practises Japanese religion (Tenrikyo). Like Protestants, they are treated by the majority of Catholics as enemies of village solidarity.

41 Aguilar (n.d.: 4) has observed that: "African processes of conversion are fluid, and they also include processes of reconversion to religious practices socially present in the pre-world religious historical periods."

42 Although the Presbyterians are keen to read the Bible and their knowledge about Christianity is much better than that of their Catholic fellow villagers, the political dimension of their religion is still recognized by everyone in the village.

conversion in purely religious terms because they partake of these associations – that religion must be about belief and enlightenment while politics and material gain are the concerns of the devil.

I have tried in this paper to show that, for the Ami of Iwan, at least, conversion is not about a radical and somehow instantaneous change of belief rather it is a strategy employed by people to improve the conditions of their everyday lives.

In my reading of Ami conversion in Iwan the most important factors are people, in particular Asala and Holikawa. The conflict between these two elder statesmen, which is recognized by all villagers, has played a huge part in shaping modern Iwan. Asala's importance is acknowledged by almost everyone and he is the main source of discourse about the Catholic religion, and about village, household, and Credit Union solidarity. In terms of the unified social world presented by Asala, Holikawa represents the enemy and he plays this role with a great deal of conviction. For most Catholics he is the Presbyterian Church. Relations between Asala and Holikawa have dominated Iwan politics for more than 30 years and this situation could continue until their death. Intergenerational differences in Iwan indicate that the future will bring Iwan closer to mainstream Taiwan (as more and more young people marry Chinese) and we may well see articulations, which attempt to integrate Ami and Chinese religious concepts, becoming more popular. But, for the present, religion in Iwan can still be characterized in terms of Asala and Holikawa, men who describe their differences in terms of religion and who hold their religions because of their differences. In other words, the adoption of different Christian churches is best understood from the perspective of internal political relations.

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