

Shamanic Healing among the Amis and Contemporary Christian Healing in the Spirit

NAMOH-Siyoh

Traditionally Taiwan's indigenous people dealt with the healing of disease on the basis of a belief that illness was caused by the spirits of ancestors or of hunted animals. Sometimes they attributed illness to evil spirits and magic and thought that if these causes were eliminated sickness would disappear. Each tribe developed its own approach and methods of healing in accord with the religious outlook of the tribe, thus forming part of the tribe's intellectual heritage. In recent years Christianity has come along with modern medicine and won the trust of people. Moreover, its preaching has influenced the natural surroundings and diminished the reliance on shamans. Nonetheless the traditional world has not totally disappeared and some people retain confidence in traditional methods of healing, particularly in the Bands of Lidaw and Fansia in Hualian County.

Within different religions and cultures, each believer has his/her own way of thinking, speaking and writing. It is against the background of such subjective views that I write this paper. Firstly, we must study the cultural discourse, paying attention to the language of the people and try to understand their story. I have spent a lot of time on this, but even in the course of a whole lifetime it would not be possible to know everyone's story. Life, it must be acknowledged, is a profound mystery and culture is as broad and deep as the sea and faith is the search for the spiritual depths. When we are presenting the truth of Christianity, asking where truth is, we often present traditional religion as evil and not worth discussing. However, such an attitude lacks the spirit of dialogue and is not conducive to building an indigenous theology. In short, religious truth is a spiritual truth and Christianity needs to trust in indigenous people. Religious dialogue is an experience of learning how to trust one another and not a matter of proving which dogma is the best, which tradition is the right one. Such experience can start from the way we relate to stories we know from old, and which can reveal a hidden theological meaning.¹

In the past every Amis village would have had its shaman. Information about their healing activities, illnesses, natural phenomena and taboos is too complicated to be dealt with as a whole, hence the paper chooses the village of Tavalon and depends on a field survey of the shamans and their families. Likewise in Tavalon there is Christian spirit healing and people who have had the experience of being cured. From these two sources, this article establishes a dialogue and seek the possibility of an indigenous theology for the Amis.

Pastor Song Choan-seng's *Third Eye Theology* and his other books aroused in me an interest in indigenous theological awareness, to start from my own culture and write a theology adapted to my people, a local theology and a route for us to travel by so that theology should be closer to the history and culture of the Amis. Indeed, so that the two would be intertwined as one, gathering together our culture, history and stories to form our own theological universe. This is the work I started to do in Tavalon.

My own research is supplemented by perusal of other writings about shamanism and about Christian spirit healing. The structure of this article is as follows: Part One discusses Tavalon. Tavalon is chosen for study because it is one of the oldest bands in Amis society with its own rich tradition and history, but the contribution of the shamans to this culture has been neglected or even wholly overlooked. Part Two looks at the role of shamans in pre-Christian society. Part Three discusses the impact of modernity, modern methods of healing and

¹ Song Choan-seng, *Gushi Shenxue* (Story Theology), Tainan: Xinfu, 1994, p. 12.

the arrival of Christianity as well as its encounter with shamanism. Part Four compares shamanism and Christianity from the point of view of theology, psychological healing and worship.

1. TAVALON TODAY

Population

Tavalon is situated off route 9 near the eastern rift valley but slightly off the main road and hence somewhat shut off. Today it is an area with a mixed Amis and Han Chinese population, with the southern part being predominantly Amis (85%) and the western part having the highest concentration of Han Chinese (39%). These percentages are calculated according to the census of 1995:

Area	Amis	Han Chinese
East	78%	22%
West	61%	39%
South	85%	15%
North	74%	26%

44.37% population are involved in agriculture with the principal crops being betel nut, rice, sweet potato and other products such as fruit and vegetables. The marketing of bamboo shoots and pomelos has encountered many problems and hence is of limited value. Betel nut is the leading crop with rice in second place. Rice demands adherence to fixed schedules and so is cultivated by people living on site. Yield is good and is a principal source of employment, other jobs being difficult to find.

Cultural Resources

National Eastern China University has established its campus at Tavalon. Traditional artistic forms are encouraged including pottery and cane weaving, but these have not been fully developed. Various forms of art and craft are taught at school.

2. ACTIVITIES OF SHAMANS IN EARLY SOCIETY

Shamans and religious status

Tavalon has many traditional legends describing the creation of the world, the origin of humankind, the roles of the spirits, genealogy and the meaning of rituals. These legends bind together the heroes of the spirit world with the chief of the human world in a ladder system. The spirit *Lopalangaw* is the greatest spirit, who opened heaven and earth and named his elder sister the god of the sun and his elder brother the god of the moon and his younger siblings various nature gods. *Lopalangaw* and his relatives had many children who became *Malataw*, the spirits of priests, shamans, and also the spirits of cereals, fishing, hunting, war, head-hunting, birth.

Apart from the priest, the shamans have their own rung on the ladder. Each band has *'A'sidan* as the head of the shamans and then there is the key player *Cikawasay* with his two subordinate helpers *Cisakawihay* and *Mi'ang'angay*. *'A'sidan* is not succeeded by his immediate children but by the elevation of *Cikawasay*.

Shamans are often a bit abnormal and rely on the crazy god *Maapa* for communication but all need to learn their art from an old shaman.

In general the Amis call gods *kawas*, spirits *saló'afang* or *papa'orip* and demons *kariyahay* but for many people the most important spirit is their guardian angel *Malataw*. Priests and shamans usually call on some tens of guardian angels who can be invoked (*'ang'ang*). In the course of their rituals (*mifetik*) or rites they may often call on these angels.

The name *Cikawasay* is derived from the root '*kawas*' meaning god, with a prefix '*c*' indicating possession and a suffix '*ay*' indicating a nominal form: hence One who possess god. Hence this person is the shaman who has a similar position to the doctor today, so that as soon as someone falls ill they are immediately sent to the shaman.

The name *cikawasay* is very common throughout Amis society and hence must be of ancient origin. Indeed, according to legends it existed before the present villages came to be. The system of *cikawasay* tells us a lot about the Amis religion (*no kawasán*) and rituals (*o demak no ilising*).

Curative abilities of shamans

The ability to cure does not come from the shamans themselves but from the spirits, which want to reveal themselves. The spirit teaches the shaman to dance and how to use dance to invoke the spirit. During the dance of spirit and shaman, the shaman learns the spirit's language. Since the spirit likes to be close to human beings, the two become good friends and when someone is ill, the shaman can call on the help of the spirit. The shaman imitates the motions of the spirit and so cures the sick person. The shaman's joy endears him/her even more to the spirit who transmits the ability to cure. This was the common practice in Amis society, including in Tavalon.

The shaman can only act when possessed by the spirit. Since the spirits have different modes of conduct, so too for the shaman. Just as a doctor will prescribe different cures for different illnesses, so too when someone falls sick, they will first be sent to the shaman for diagnosis before deciding which method to use.

In traditional society all major events in life were marked by the presence of the spirits. Birth, naming, coming of age, marriage, old persons ritual, healing and burial were all marked by interaction with the spirit world and the shaman was the medium between this world and ours.

In Tavalon the *cikawasay* could be male or female, young or old. There were three main reasons for becoming a *cikawasay*: in accordance with the choice of the spirits, in order to heal a family member, one could become a *cikawasay*, one could oneself have fallen ill and become a *cikawasay* (*o sakanga'ay no adada*). In this case the spirit indicates the person chosen by the illness of that person. The third case is by choice, by worshipping the spirits and asking to be made a *cikawasay*. There are three roles that the *cikawasay* can play: *mamisair* (curing illness), *mami'ang'ang* (acting as priest in certain rituals) and *piaraaw* (observing taboos and keeping in good health).

A *mamisair* has to go through a long process of training before being allowed to heal. Such a *cikawasay* is not necessarily allowed to act as *mami'ang'ang*. A *cikawasay* may act as priest (*mami'ang'ang*) in the following rituals: 1. *Mamipacakat* (burial), 2. *Pakawih* (house warming), 3. *Pakacaw* (prayer for blessing and warding off evil), 4. *Pakawas* (choosing a successor), 5. *Pato'aya* (rite to ancestors) and 6. rite to the god of the underworld. All *cikawasay* must observe certain taboos and are then called *miaraaway*. These involve avoiding pork, pig dung, touching the genitals of the other sex with the right hand, or assisting in a birth. Failure to keep the taboos incurs punishment from the spirits, even death. Not all of those who keep these taboos are necessarily permitted to act as *mamisair* or *mami'ang'ang*.

Psychological healing ability and shamans

If a child was difficult to handle or often ill, this was thought to be due to an ancestor wanting the child to be named after him/her. Hence betel nut was used to give the child a new name. This was quite common up until the 60s. Our respondent, Koho renamed his adopted child five times for this reason. By the 80s food and health had improved so this practice died down. For a child who had ulcers the ritual involved taking the child in the early morning to a place associated with the ancestors, reading curses and dropping pigskin. The ritual was called *Mipaiyu to adada no wawa*. Dreams and dream interpretation was also used for curing illness. To dream of clear water meant that health would be restored; to dream of dirty water or dirty things implied the illness would get worse.

Demise of shamans

In Han society spirit mediums (in Taiwanese *tangk'i*) still flourish and I have seen Amis people have recourse to them as if they were Amis shamans.

The demise of the *cikawasay* is certainly a result of the arrival of Christianity. The Christians are taught that their old religion was bad and their old practices forbidden. Now most people are Christian. Whilst the provision of material help may have been one reason for the success of the churches, what posed the greatest challenge to the shamans was prayer. In the Hualian region the Presbyterian Church has often carried out fasting and prayer as a collective activity. The Church also stressed that sick people could be healed by miracles. In one instance Guangfu church held a healing prayer service, which was attended by almost all of the faithful. In the 70s the prayer mountain movement was at its peak.... Although the Catholics did not have such collective healing services nor did they have fixed times for service, the faithful and catechists would visit people at home. These forms of healing without any use of medicine were a direct challenge to the *cikawasay*. The new forms of religion replaced the *cikawasay*, who then died out.²

3. THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY AND ITS ENCOUNTER WITH SHAMANS

The Arrival of Protestant Christianity

The first to bring Christianity to Tavalon was Kacaw-Ipay. In 1938 he fell seriously ill with *malodih ko fanges* and sought help from the shamans. He was then taken to the Mackay hospital in Taipei. One day he heard a group of people coming round praying for the patients and so first met Christians. He became a Presbyterian and in 1944 returned home where he preached to his acquaintances and made three converts. With the end of the war in 1945, one man who had been in a prisoner of war camp in Hong Kong and had been baptised by an English minister, returned home. Also a certain Mr Wu had heard about Jesus while in the army. Furthermore, a Japanese doctor had allowed his house to be used as a secret church, so soon there were a number of Christians. They built a church in 1946, though it leaked whenever there was rain.

At that time there was a dispute over the annual harvest festival, where the Protestants explained to the other villagers why they would not take part.

By 1954 they had their first pastor and began to build a new church. However, the building was too expensive so it was unfinished. The pastor was also sent away so for some years there was no pastor. On 13 February 1963 Mr. Wu Qing-yun, a local missionary, returned home. That year there was a massive typhoon and the church was in severe difficulties. On 11 August 1965 Mr. Wu became the second pastor and on 23 December 1969 the new church was completed and opened for worship.

² For table of the last *cikawasay* see appendix 1.

By 1977 the Church had expanded from 31 to 50 households and a plan was made to add a second storey to the church. By the following year numbers had increased to about 70 households. In 1986 Mr Wu moved to the theological college and Tavalon was again without a pastor, this time for three years. On 28 July 1991 Mr Wu Tie-huang returned and on 10 October 1992 he was inaugurated as the third pastor.

The Church expanded by 159 members and now comprises 565 adults, 198 children and 12 catechumens: 775 in all. Attendance on Sundays is 180, for prayer meetings 90, house worship 165. There are 3 personnel, 60 students and 150 studying away. The women's group has 65 members, youth group 23, Sunday school 61, choir 42 and brothers' meeting 71.³

The Church has flourished and in recent years has been involved in local society and not as stand-offish as in the past.

The Arrival of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church began when, in 1950, Fr. Mark Wang (Wang Bu-rong) was sent as headmaster of the state school at North Fuguang, whose catchment area covered the whole of Tavalon and surrounding districts. Fr. Wang used his house as a catechetical centre and also said mass there, attracting many of the teachers both Chinese and Amis. This became the parish of Futian-Tavalon. It was also via Fr Wang that aid was distributed from Catholic Welfare, notably in the wake of a major earthquake, which struck Hualien in 1951. On 8 August 1954 the bishop of Hualien, Mgr Véreineux inaugurated the church at Futian and on 12 September of the same year at Dama, followed by another church at Daquan. The number of Catholics increased rapidly. On 12 August 1956 Fr Wang left Hualien for another appointment and he was escorted to the station with a vast crowd weeping for 'our father' (*mama no mita*). In 1957 a kindergarten was opened that functions until today.

The Catholic mission certainly gained some assistance from its role in supplying survival goods and hence was known by the Japanese term '*haykiu*' (survival goods).

Influence of Christianity on shamanic religion

Since traditional religion was passed on simply by word of mouth and the shaman's knowledge was confined to a small group of persons, it quickly died out in the face of Christianity. The scholar Wu Ming-yi has noted that one of the effects of the arrival of Christianity was to subvert the traditional role of the chief. Moreover the divisions among Christian sects resulted in divisions within Amis society.

In Tavalon the Catholics came into less of a clash with the social order as they tended to work within the government jurisdictions and also maintained different age groups within the Church, unlike the Protestants, who differentiated between those allowed to participate in worship and those not yet included. A particular source of conflict was the harvest festival, *llisin*. In the past this had been associated with head-hunting so the Presbyterians rejected participation in it and even proscribed some of the songs and music used at *llisin*. The Catholics, however, were more accommodating. One year there was such a dispute that the ritual could not be held. Protestant failure to participate also excluded them from the coming-of-age ceremony.

Rise of Christian Healing in the Spirit

Among indigenous people there were a number of influential charismatic movements in the 1970s, including the Charismatic Movement, Prayer Mountain and Fasting Prayer Movement and the prophecy movement. The rise of people who could see strange signs (*mafolosi* in Japanese) was a challenge to the established Catholic and Protestant Churches. These movements outside the churches sought spiritual signs and healing. They came to Tavalon in 1970 and went out into the forest and river valleys on the 25 of each month to

³ These figures are given in the Fiftieth Anniversary booklet of Tavalon church.

hold a service, which typically began at 11pm and ended the next morning around dawn. The service was composed of charismatic prayer, testimony and preaching and encouraged healing, speaking in tongues and prophecy.

From a certain perspective what was happening relied on the use of hypnotism through chanting of mantras and repetition of phrases, leading to participants trembling, weeping, delirious with joy or feeling full of electricity. These services have now calmed down a bit and are no longer held in river beds, having moved to a fixed spot in Hualian. The prophets of the 1970s are still largely active performing miracle cures. It is my own feeling that a lot of this serves a useful role in a society where there is a lot of social pressure and few psychologists.