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LIVING A NEW LIFE AS
“CHRISTIAN BAJAU”?

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Living a New Life as “Christian Bajau”?

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Acknowledgment

This manuscript is a direct self-translation of Chapter Ten from my Japanese book, *An Ethnography of Poverty: Socioeconomic Life of Five Sama Families in Davao City, Philippines*, published by the University of Tokyo Press in 2006. I am very grateful to the University of Tokyo Press for permitting this translation to be included in Harvard-Yenching Institute working paper series.

Abstract

This manuscript is a direct self-translation of Chapter Ten from my Japanese book, *An Ethnography of Poverty: Socioeconomic Life of Five Sama Families in Davao City, Philippines*, published by the University of Tokyo Press in 2006. A few parts have been modified, however, to fit in the given space with careful effort to retain the original contents.

This chapter is intended to update the reader on the situation of the third group (represented by Papa Melcito’s family in a previous chapter, Harvard-Yenching Working Paper series, January 5, 2016), or the groups of lower social status among the Sama in the research site. They have dramatically accepted Christianity since missionaries (mainly Pentecostal pastors from local fellowships and pastors from non-denominational independent churches of North America) came to spread the Gospel with passion and enthusiasm around the year 2000. This shift in belief systems and its concomitant inflow of resources as offerings from outside have resulted in a significant reconfiguration of their self-identification as “Christian Bajau.” The power structure within the community has also been changed with the rise of a Sama Dilaut pastor as a new type of leader who receives donations from outside and distributes them among his members. No significant upward social mobility or empowerment of the “Bajaus” in larger society has occurred so far.

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Living a new life as “Christian Bajau”?

1. “New creation in Christ”

According to previous literature in the 1960s and 1970s, the word “Bajau” was a derogatory term used by other dominant ethnic groups to refer to a subgroup of Sinama speaking people, the Sama Dilaut, who actually lived in their boats on the sea in the Sulu and Zamboanga peninsula areas in the Southern Philippines. In the multi-ethnic urban setting of Davao City in the late 1990s, however, as we revealed in previous chapters, “Bajau” was widely used as an identity not only by the original Sama Dilaut but by other land-based Sinama speaking people as well. The stories of five Sinama speaking families, migrants from Sulu and Zamboanga, bear this out. In this regard, we may say that economic survival did not necessarily force them to lose their ethnic consciousness. When faced with life-style changing challenges, their ethnic consciousness explicitly emerged and continued to adapt in relation to other dominant ethnic groups in the surrounding society.

As a concrete example, this chapter deals with the case of the Christianization of the Sama-Bajau migrants in our research site, particularly in the area known as *Hong Kong*¹ in Isla Bella, Davao City. We collected the data we used for this chapter mostly in 2002, two years after we completed our first three-year period of fieldwork. The Christianization of the Sama-Bajau migrants started with Papa Melcito’s group (Group 3), and then gradually involved Magsahaya’s group (Group 5 – the lowest in community status). The latter suffered more financial hardship and a concomitant deterioration of other stress-coping resources. The Christian conversion of the Sama-Bajau necessitated the renouncement abandonment of their “traditional” practice of ancestor-worship and belief in “spirits.”² Nevertheless, even as they embraced Christianity, the members seemed to become more aware of their cultural identify as “Bajau” through various activities in the church.

My research interests in this chapter are not concerned with the theological or religious aspect of their conversion but rather with the social aspect. In general, a

change in religion involves a restructuring of one's relationships with the supernatural, reflected in modifications in one's daily life, as well as the reorganization of the community one belongs to, which overall indicates a personal attempt to create a new order [Hayami 2002].

It is important for us fieldworkers (anthropologists and non-anthropologists) in area studies to carefully try to view the world from the ethnic view (the view of the insiders) in the local context. More than anything, we should shed light on the "subjective responses," such as resistance, articulation etc. that the locals take, based on their "local logic/knowledge." [Tokoro 1992; Nagatsu 2004b; Nobuta 2004]. The author agrees to their points, but I would rather argue such topics later in other writings simply because I am not ready to interpret the processes and the results of the Christian conversion in my research site. In this chapter, instead, I would rather narrow my research to two questions:

1. What was the gap in the perception of the needs of the Bajau between the outsider (missionaries) and the Sama-Bajau leaders in the process of conversion?
2. How have the resources the outsider brought in for the Bajau followers, both converts and potential converts, changed the Sama-Bajau's way of life in *Hong Kong*?

What I found particularly interesting was my impression that the Christianization of the Sama-Bajau in my research site led to their group's positive reinterpretation of "being Bajau." During my first fieldwork from 1997 to 1999 in Davao City before their mass conversion, the word "Bajau" then carried more negative and derogatory connotations among the non-Sama-Bajau people. The Sama-Bajau themselves used it to refer to themselves when they engaged in mendicancy in a bid to evoke pity. In 2002, however, I came to hear the converts call themselves "Bajau" with more pride and positive feelings. The converts themselves did not initiate such a transformation. The process began when non-Sama-Bajau Christian missionaries found them "socially vulnerable" and tried to save them through conversion.

Presumably, most of the missionaries who visited the Sama Bajau in *Hong Kong* were people of good will. They looked for the socially excluded and preached the Gospel³ to them, showing them the right direction in the love of Christ. By spreading the Gospel, the missionaries sought to increase the number of their followers. They eventually succeeded in doing so. The Christian conversion was a major agent of change in the way of life among the Sama-Bajau, both converted and non-converted. Some of the changes were easily predictable as part of the conversion process, yet others were rather unexpected for both the missionaries and the Sama-Bajau. In this chapter, I will focus on the latter.

Their Christianization apparently brought the Sama a more positive self-identification as the “Bajau.” Nevertheless, it did not immediately lead to visible social changes: at least by the time of our observation in the early 2000s, there was no evidence that it helped strengthen the unity of the community or offered a vehicle for every one of them to achieve upward social mobility. The resources that the missionaries brought in for the community brought about the emergence of a Sama Dilaut pastor as a new leader. This eventually precipitated a shift in the power structure within the community. However, at that time, during our three-year observation up to early 2005, this had yet not made any clear contribution to improve the inter-ethnic relations between the Sama-Bajau and non-Sama-Bajau populations in the surrounding society.

We collected the bulk of the data used for this chapter through seven fieldworks we conducted over three years as follows:

- 1) From July 25 to September 8, 2002, we updated the map and the list of the residents in *Hong Kong*;
- 2) From November 23 to December 13, 2002, we interviewed Sama Dilaut and Visayan pastors and collected their oral life histories;
- 3) From March 7 to March 26, 2003, we did participant observation⁴ as well as collected oral life histories from church members⁵ in *Hong Kong*;
- 4) From July 20 to September 7, we did participant observation and took interviews from a Sama Dilaut pastor and his family members, and church members;
- 5) From January 30 to February 15, 2004, we visited Zamboanga City and its

neighboring areas as the place of the origin of the Sama Dilaut Christian converts;

6) From August 1 to September 19, 2004, we validated the data collected from the previous years⁶; and

7) From December 22, 2004 to January 6, 2005, we interviewed an evangelical missionary from North America while doing participant observation in *Hong Kong* during the Christmas season.

2. Touched by the Holy Spirit: the process of Christian conversion

2.1 The process of Christian conversion

When we conducted the first household survey in March, 1998, 80.3% of the residents (respondents) in our research site⁷ reported practicing “*pag-mboq*,” their indigenous and “traditional” beliefs in ancestral spirits. 4.8% of the total respondents, not including the Catholic Cebuanos who were married to Sama-Bajau, claimed to be Christian. Most of them specifically answered that they were “born-again⁸ Christians.” In August 2002, however, two thirds of the residents (108 households out of the 180 households) in *Hong Kong* reported being Christians.

There were two Christian churches in *Hong Kong* in 2002. Both of them were Protestant. One was Pentecostal⁹, and the other, Southern Baptist. Most of the members in the latter were land-based Sama (Kaluman’s group in the previous chapter). In this chapter, I would like to focus on the former for two reasons: 1) the church was established earlier and it had more members than the Southern Baptist church; and 2) most of the members were Sama Dilaut in lower community statuses among the Sama-Bajau in *Hong Kong*. The earlier converts of the Pentecostal church came from Papa Melcito’s group, which ranked third out of the five groups in our 1999 survey. Those who joined the church later were mostly from Magsahaya’s group, the lowest in community status. These two groups were both Sama Dilaut from Zamboanga City, though they came from different villages.

One of the earliest Christian converts is John Conan, a Sama Dilaut pastor who served the church¹⁰ in *Hong Kong*. In the following sections, I will review the

conversion process, using his personal experience to divide the conversion process into three phases. I will also refer to narratives of non-Sama-Bajau pastors, whose perspectives could be different from that of Pastor John's¹¹.

2.2 Before migrating to Davao City

Pastor John, whose originally name was Tubian, was born in December, 1966. His birth date is estimated because it was rare for the Sama Dilaut to register births in the civil registry. However, it is quite certain that he was born in Rio Hondo, Zamboanga City. It was in late 1980s when he met the Christian missionaries. He was in his late 20s. At that time, he was doing multiple jobs: he sold pearls and shell products to the crews of cargo ships; he guided tourists in beach resorts; and sometimes, he dove for fish and other marine products in the neighboring waters.

Pastor John (Tubian before his conversion) lived with his wife and children in a "*bangka*" (small boat) with outriggers. Most of the time, his family moored in Rio Hondo, and most of their daily activities took place around there. In Rio Hondo, the Sama Dilaut lived on the sea, around the shore where the land-based Sama, the majority of the population in Rio Hondo, built their houses. There were few other dominant ethnic groups such as the Muslim Tausugs in the village itself; but Pastor John, like other Sama-Bajau living in Rio Hondo, often encountered them outside the community, often at sea. Looking back, he recounted that the socioeconomic condition of the Bajau, (he meant both Sama Dilaut and other Sama populations) in Rio Hondo in the late 1980s was clearly "*luoy*" (pitiful in the eyes of others).

Pastor John became Christian when he fell severely ill and believed that was healed by God through the Holy Spirit. He narrated this episode in form of the following "testimony"¹²:

(Pastor John, recorded on December 15, 2002 and March 18, 2003, originally in Cebuano and translated into English by the author)¹³

A Bajau man laid a curse on me¹⁴. My body ached all over, and my arms

became numb. It was like I could die at any time. My illness was so grave that a Muslim Kalagan quack doctor was called, but to no avail. Many “djins” (spiritual mediums) from various places were called, but none of them were effective. I spent a lot of money looking for a cure...I had not received God yet. Then, Pastor Albert, a land-based Sama pastor, visited me, and prayed for me to God in the Alliance¹⁵ church in Zambowood. And, God healed me.

The Holy Spirit through the prayer of the Sama pastor took away the curse put on Tubian by “saitan” (spirit). The pastor refused to receive any money, unlike the traditional healers who accepted small amounts of cash as tokens of gratitude. Here, I do not deny the possibility that Tubian was also treated with western medicine aside from faith healing, with the support of the pastor. Whichever was true, however, it did not matter much to Tubian. Any form of assistance given to him, spiritual or material, was a gift from the Lord in his testimony once he embraced Christianity.

About three months after he recovered, Tubian met Pastor Bobong, an Illongo¹⁶ missionary. He then started going to the Alliance church with his family every Sunday morning. Many missionaries also visited him at home (his houseboat) every Sunday afternoon. Soon he received baptism from Pastor Albert in the form of total immersion in the sea. They gave him a new name as a Christian: John.

Back then, most of the Sama Dilaut in Rio Hondo and Taluksangay persisted with their own indigenous religious practices called “*mboq*” (ancestor worship). They also believed that spirits dwelt in places like rocks and trees. When John became Christian, his Sama Dilaut neighbors did not follow suit but they accepted his conversion favorably. Perhaps they did not perceive Christian conversion as incurring any socioeconomic dislocation. It could have been an opportunity to benefit them one way or another.

Embracing Islam was not a realistic option for the Sama Dilaut. Their Muslim neighbors, especially the Tausug, banned them from going to mosques. So the Sama Dilaut were not eager to embrace the faith of the ethnic groups¹⁷ that looked

down on them. Many of the land-based Sama around them converted to Islam; but the relations between the Sama Dilaut and the Islamized land-based Sama were peaceful. In general, their Muslim neighbors had no violent reactions to the Christianization of the despised Sama Dilaut.

2.3 After migrating to Davao (early days)

John and his family kept moving from one moorage to another in Zamboanga City until they transferred to Davao City toward the end of the 1980s. Pastor Bobong invited them to come along when he decided to return to his home in the Province of Davao del Sur. After they arrived in Davao, John and his family remained mobile for a while. In the early 1990s, they finally settled in *Hong Kong*. In 1993, they built a house, where they still lived during my fieldwork in the 2000s. In those days, his house also served as a place for prayer meetings. There were only three Sama Dilaut Christian families (John's own, his brother's, and his in-law's¹⁸) who gathered in his house.

(Pastor John, recorded on December 15, 2002 and March 18, 2003)
We started the construction of this house in 1993, using 20,000 pesos from Pastor Bobong. Since then, we have continued to renovate and repair the house. The total cost so far is recorded to be as much as 197,000 pesos. Where did we get the money? I am good at bringing ("magdala") people who bring things [assistance and other resources] for my [church] members. Since we put up this house, many missionaries have visited us: Baptist, Four Square, and Pentecostals. They were surprised to see Bajau who are Christian. Some of them even wept upon seeing the pitiful state of the Christian Bajau. They gave us money.

The outsiders continued to bring "respect and money" ("rispeto ug kwarta") to the "Christian Bajau" in *Hong Kong* and it naturally brought changes to the lives of the Sama Dilaut. Obviously, the income and expenditures in the newly developed "Christian community" of the Sama Dilaut congregation altered. The Sama Dilaut converts received more resources from the missionaries than from the market

economy and the government. Even if the flow of goods and services was rather sporadic, once missionary assistance came, it often included cash, and the amounts were comparatively huge for their standard of living. Such resources, given as gifts, came normally through Pastor John and Pastor Bobong. The two, as leaders, were also in the position to decide how to use and distribute the resources among the church members (and sometimes non-church members as well). They used the resources for the maintenance and extension of the church and the walkways, and the improvement of the infrastructure such as electricity and water supply¹⁹. The donations helped the church members uplift their standard of living.

Since Pastor Bobong trained him every day, John grew to be a leader to represent his church community. He was the first to welcome the missionaries who came to visit the congregation. In the sense of development aid projects, he became something like a “social organizer,” who forms the residents in the target area into a “community” as part of the preparations for the aid workers and donors to come in. John, supported by Pastor Bobong, used the Sinama language, their mother tongue, to establish the church among the Sama Dilaut. Then, he gradually opened the church to non-Sinama speaking missionaries, including Cebuano missionaries and English-speaking missionaries from North America.

(Pastor Bobong, recorded on February 7 and February 8, 2004)

Bajau people easily get scared and hurt. Once they get scared, they will go away. That is why they need the Gospel. Those who are afraid, have no confidence. They need love. Love comes from God. So, once they get to know God, they will become less afraid. If they are not afraid, they will become less prone to illness. Becoming Christian will heal one's illness because once one knows the direction, one gets to feel more secure. ...In evangelizing, first, I identify a man with a potential to become a leader, then I improve him and his family's life. [Not only materially but] also spiritually. Then, he will become a “pillar,” around which other neighboring families seek support. What is important here is to involve the “panglima,” which means the leader of a small group [mostly related by blood and marriage]. When the “panglima” acknowledges a new leader, the rest of his kinship group follows. Moreover, it should not be

forced upon them. Just show a model, and wait for followers to increase.Only when they understand that it is meant for them that they will accept the Gospel and begin to struggle [to improve their lives].It took me seven years to achieve this “development.” I lived with them and spent much money as well.But what makes it difficult is that the improvement of economic living standard [as we, non-Sama-Bajau define] may not be what they wish. After having been exploited, they worry that the Muslims will set upon them again if their life gets better. Such concern explains why they keep their looks rather shabby [houses and clothes]. Instead, they invest their wealth in the form of rings and other jewelry. I call it wealth, because it easily converts into small amounts that they use immediately if they get sick [to purchase medicine or seek medical attention].

The number of the followers grew to fifteen families in 1995. As they agreed, John became the first Sama Dilaut pastor²⁰ in Isla Bella. Just around the same time, their church affiliated with God People’s Christian Fellowship (GPCF)²¹, an indigenous independent Pentecostal church downtown. GPCF, headed by Pastor Samuel and his wife Ariel, was actively engaged in missionary work with upland populations and squatters around Davao City. Pastor Bobong, as an evangelical missionary, agreed to Pastor John’s new affiliation.

(Pastor Samuel, recorded on December 3, 2002)

[Asked what made him engage in missionary work with the Bajau] Because they are neglected in our society. Nobody wants to take care of them. Large churches in downtown focus on professionals [middle class].When we started missionary work, we taught them [the Sama Dilaut] how to teach. They did not know how to cook properly, and they boiled fish in water that did not even have salt in it. Thinking that they needed a model, we let some of their children stay with us and taught them a better way of life. We sent them to school, too. We inculcated the Visayan [Cebuano]’s attitude and way of life on them. We used the Cebuano language to talk to them. I think, perhaps 90% of their traditions [culture and trait] has changed, but things like early marriage are yet to be improved.[Asked about the means of support of the Bajau

fellowship] We will give them in kind what they need when they need it. It is not good to give cash. That could work against us. They could abuse this privilege. I always say to them, "We will help you when you are in trouble, but not in the form of cash." [They provided the Sama Dilaut converts with medication and assistance for the education of their children] They should be responsible for their own lives. Otherwise, we will spoil them.Education is important. So, I want encourage them to educate themselves. I want them to know the real way of life.

Whether he fully shared Pastor Samuel's thoughts or not, Pastor John continued to extend his own connections with the outsiders as a source of "respect and finance." In 1996, he quit being a pearl vendor²² and became a "full-time" pastor. In 1998, when Pastor Bobong left *Hong Kong*, Pastor John fully became the leader of the "Christian Bajau" in Isla Bella.

2.4 After migrating to Davao (up to the year 2005)

From Pastor John's narratives and our interviews with individual congregants²³, it is reasonable to think that the mass influx of the Sama Dilaut to the Pentecostal church happened between the years 2000 and 2001. That was when Pastor John further extended his connections with the outsiders on his own.

With Pastor Bobong's recommendation, Pastor John and his wife Dorothea invited missionaries from the Calvary Bible Institute (CBI) in Davao City to their home and learned Bible studies²⁴. The training enabled them not only to understand the Bible in depth but also to establish themselves as religious leaders in Isla Bella. At the same time, Pastor John met a wealthy Illongo woman, married to a Canadian, who represented the CBI. From her, he received regular assistance for the education of his children.

In 2000, Pastor John and his family were invited to Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental where he met Americans from the Pastoral Training of Asia (PTA), an interdenominational mission organization based in California. He cultivated his

connections with them. After he returned to Davao City, Pastor John continued to communicate with them: he called them by cellular phone and sometimes visited them in Dumaguete and Cebu. At other times, the missionaries themselves visited Pastor John in Isla Bella.

Pastor John chose (“gipili”) his contacts carefully. He selected and controlled the visitors he needed to establish his leadership in his church. With the exception of a few Cebuano missionaries, he generally preferred missionaries who were “puti” (literally means white), or Caucasians because they made generous contributions and treated Pastor John and his church members with more respect.

A significant event happened in the Sama Dilaut community in *Hong Kong* in 2001: Papa Melcito embraced the Christian faith. Before his conversion, he was the “djin” (spiritual medium) who performed religious rites and presided over social events for his kinship group and neighbors among the Sama Dilaut in *Hong Kong*. Once he became Christian, he earnestly attended worship in the church until he died in 2003. As the new leader, Pastor John, together with his church members, buried the old leader.

In 2003, Pastor John sought further “autonomy” in running the Sama Dilaut church. I use the term autonomy to refer to his orientation to make his own decisions for his church in utilizing the resources he collected, through his own connections, from foreign missionaries. At one time, he thought of disaffiliating his church from Pastor Samuel’s GPCF and registering it as an independent religious institution at the SEC. However, his plan did not materialize.

In November 2003, Pastor John met new patrons, Pastor Peter and his wife Shari from California. The couple had long wanted to do missionary work with the Bajau. Pastor Peter categorized himself as an evangelical missionary while Shari was a registered nurse. They were initially based in PTA in Dumaguete but since they regularly visited *Hong Kong* for their medical evangelism, they finally moved to Davao City in December, 2004.

(Pastor Peter, recorded on January 3, 2005, originally in English)

On the first week of February [2002]... we met a pastor from California and he was going to Davao to teach seminars. He told me about the Bajau. I researched them on the Internet, and got very interested. My wife, who decided to come to the Philippines, said I should work with the Bajau. And so, it just became my desire to work with the Bajau..... Well, I think there is some logical reason, but some reason I cannot explain; in other words the Lord told me this is my purpose. I always had special places in my heart for those who have the least, and who are discriminated against the most. My desire has been always that. When I found out that they are not only an indigenous group but also are the most discriminated group, and the poorest of the poor, nobody likes them. [Pastor Peter and his wife were working in at least 22 churches in different sites at the time of the interview] Well, now we have changed a little. We are trying to help the Bajau..... So we decided to talk to the ministry and said we want to be excused from doing teaching seminars so I can focus on the Bajau. the Bajau ministry is basically many different things. That means that there is more than one part, I guess the better word is multi-faceted: many parts, like departments. So, not only do I teach the Bible Study, I also preach on Sunday, hold literacy classes, and provide the church members with rice. So every Sunday, they get rice, not enough to feed everybody, but it helps, a feeding program. Then we also have a project for humanitarian needs. We are rebuilding the church. We are building more walks..... We are only doing that with the Bajau. We are supplying them with vitamins so that the teachers [of the Bible School] could give vitamins to the children who come to the school. Also, when we provide them something, it is a way to encourage them to come to church. We hired a full-time literacy teacher, but [no funding]. So we hired [instead] Wilson [Pastor John's son], starting next week: literacy for adults. Adult literacy is difficult because during the day, they do their normal activities, it has to be done at night. They have to be motivated, because they can be extra tired. [asked if they are interested in sending Bajau children to formal school outside] We always encourage them to go to school. I know Pastor John's kids all go to school. Well, it will be the best if the kids are in school. Since we just arrived September [2003], we have to get to know more about them..... Now I

heard from Pastor Bobong that the Korean group is trying to build a school. [since the space is limited in Hong Kong] So, theoretically, they can use the church as a big classroom for the Bajau.

We have to look at the long-term goals. How do we help them to become self-sufficient? Without begging, you know they did not beg before. I met the man who translated this book [the Sinama Bible] Pallesen [a linguist] some time ago. He moved to Siasi and lived there for ten years.....He said there was plenty of fish in 1960s. The water was clean. Now it is not. The fish have gone away, mostly because international fishing companies bring in nets. Some also use dynamite that destroys the fishing grounds. The other thing is, Tausug pirates also take away the fish they catch. You know, Sama-Bajau are very peace-loving people. For years, there were very few Bajau beggars. Fishing was wonderful. Life was good. And they went farming and harvesting. But now, things have changed. So how do we make them more self-sufficient? How do we integrate them into modern society so that they can make a living and still obviously keep their culture [the language].[asked about plans to help the Sama Dilaut with business] What we're going to do is make micro business. We will be the bank, and we will buy the clothes, we will let them sell the clothes, and Pastor John will be the one to select the people he can trust. And we will not ask for [interest so they can save it] . Only this way, they have enough money to buy their own supplies.....

[As to health services] We have a doctor who treats them for free. But we have to provide medicine if we have it, we need a health-worker, we also need to work on birthing..... [Also about the hygiene in the area] It needs the government's help. [Pastor Peter and the author talked about the government's construction of a coastal road that blocked the exit of the channel from the Sama-Bajau area and resulted in accumulated garbage.].....Mayor [City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte] puts emphasis on security, I think it is a good idea, but I think they mean to clean it. They [the Bajau] will clean it [he referred to other Bajau settlements, which were rather clean, such as Alaska, Mambaling, in Cebu City]. It takes people in the government to work. [Asked how long he would be working with the Bajau] Probably for the rest of life. [Asked if he will never go back to the United States] We go back to get supplies of medicine.....what

happens is there are big pharmaceutical companies that clean up their shelves when the medicine falls within six months of expiration date. Literally, everything is mixed together and put in a box. So the ministry gets these boxes.... we buy the boxes cheap.....

[About the church he belongs to] It is actually a kind of denomination, each church is independent, we follow the same statement of faith in the Bible. And we have our own Bible colleges, well, it's similar to the Baptist. Not the same, but similar, probably the biggest difference is the way to teach the Bible....In [our] way you will get the knowledge of whole book, now, when you are teaching a book, a chapter or half a chapter, you can refer to other verses, but many churches nowadays don't teach that way. They pick up the topic and they teach on that. The problem is that the hard lessons of the Bible are not taught. The difficult passages are not taught. The Pastor only teaches what he likes. So, many times, a church that follows this has difficulty in interpreting the Bible after five to ten years.....I'm not here to plant a church, I'm here to spread the Gospel. So, I work with Pastor John.

In the Bajau village, entire families join the church, which means that.....to influence them, you have to go to clan leaders, that could be one family, or four, five families. In the Visayan area, to influence the people who come to the church, I could simply go from door to door. In the Bajau village, it is different. If you go from door to door, [that could be a problem]..... To influence the people to come to the house church, you have to first go to the clan leader. If you do not do that, the leader will tell them to stop [going to church].

In January 2005, Pastor John, supported by Pastor Peter, continued to renovate his house and the church. Pastor John said that although Peter suggested a plan to build a two-story church of cement, he decided to keep it rather modest, a simple one-story structure after consulting with Pastor Samuel and his wife Ariel.

3. Pastor as a new type of leader: Can everybody become rich?

3.1 Pastor's socioeconomic role and selection of visitors

The expansion of Pastor John's church led to the reorganization of the Sama Dilaut community in *Hong Kong*. Prior to the mass conversion of the Sama Dilaut from the kinship group of the lowest community status to Christianity, there was no leader who could politically integrate the Sama Dilaut and other Sama residents into a "community" visible to the outsiders. Instead, there were several heads/chiefs of kinship cluster ("kampong"), down to even smaller levels like the households. These clusters categorized their leaders usually by the activities they led such as religious events, fishing operations, medical and healing treatments including attendance to deliveries.

The outsiders gradually acknowledged Pastor John as an overall leader, who led most of the Sama Dilaut, if not the entire Bajau population including the land-based Sama, in *Hong Kong*. The emergence of a visible leader identified the entry point to the community and made it easy for missionaries and others who were willing to help the "poor" Bajau. It also cost them less to deliver whatever projects they wanted to undertake. To put it another way, the Christianization of the Sama Dilaut resulted in community organization, which gradually developed social capital and eventually reduced the transaction cost for the outsiders to come in. Pastor John had the best command of the Cebuano language among the Sama Dilaut in *Hong Kong*. He did not speak English much, but he was not afraid to communicate with English speakers. His children were educated in formal school, and they served as Cebuano/Tagalog/English-Sinama interpreters for their father and other church members. Pastor John also considered himself the most knowledgeable about the life style of the Cebuano²⁵ among the Sama Dilaut, having lived with Pastor Bobong and his family for years.

Compared with Sama Dilaut leaders of the previous generation, Pastor John had a distinct new role: he served as a religious and spiritual leader as well as the intermediary between the church members and the outsiders. The latter role cannot be separated from the former. As a religious leader, Pastor John was now in a position to collect resources from outside and distribute them to his followers (and occasionally to other residents in *Hong Kong* as well). To put it another way, a distribution system of resources from the missionaries to the Sama Dilaut Christian

community was established. As the center of the system, Pastor John was not obliged to consult with other pastors or congregants about his decisions²⁶. Normally, Pastor Bobby (Pastor John's elder brother) and Pastor Laniel helped in the distribution of rice and other foodstuff to the church members in the kinship groups of their status, or the kinship group in the middle community status. As to the distribution to other church members from the kinship group in the lowest community status, Pastor Aman, whose formal title in the church was Deacon (lower than Pastor Bobby and Pastor Laniel), was in charge.

Pastor John carefully selected the missionaries who visited his church. His criteria were, according to his own words, "those who respect the Bajau, and those who do not 'sell out the Bajau' ('ibaligya ang mga Bajau')." He learned these standards from the Visayan pastors, Pastor Bobong and Pastor Samuel. What he meant by such criteria could be interpreted, based on our own observation and experience as, "those who are willing to cherish relationships with the Bajau," and "those who will benefit the Bajau in exchange for being accepted as visitors." In short, it was important that the missionaries paid their respect to Pastor John as the leader by offering gifts in cash and/or in kind.

The evangelical missionaries provided the Bajau Christians with basic social services which the government was supposed to provide, such as the construction and maintenance of the infrastructure, health and hygiene, educational assistance – all of these, aside from religious services and spiritual support, which were their main concerns. Such activities included individual and collective prayers, faith healing by the laying on of hands, worship, praises and thanksgiving to God. They all involved considerable body language and verbal expressions. Physical and emotional excitement reverberated in the ritual space, which emerged among the Christian Bajau in *Hong Kong*. In a sense, their stress-coping ability, which used to be maintained through their indigenous rituals but was lost due to their economic predicament in the urban center, was somewhat regained in a different form as their new church started collecting resources from outside. Moreover, the attention and respect the foreign missionaries paid them helped restore and boost the Christian Bajau's sense of dignity.

3.2 The concentration of power in Pastor John

As we have seen above, Pastor John served as a new type of leader. He worked to improve the local infrastructure while organizing the Bajau congregants into a religious community. At the same time, one could see signs of a new type of “power struggle²⁷” in the Sama Dilaut community in *Hong Kong*. The penetration of Christianity resulted in two contradicting phenomena, namely the integration of the community and its disintegration.

Such phenomenon could be associated with the nature of Pentecostal Christianity they embraced. Scotchmer, who studied the types of Protestant churches and their leaderships in the Maya society in Guatemala, pointed out that many Pentecostal churches were “authoritarian.” (Scotchmer 2001)²⁸. The authoritarian church was more commonly found among the indigenous peoples who preferred to establish their own leadership. In other words, to be supported by church members, the leader must have “charisma,” meaning personal and spiritual power given by God as a gift. How powerful the leader is, could be measured by the number of those who are willing to support him through donation and offerings, regular payment of tithes, and other special gifts (Schotchmer 2001: 243).

Kamsteeg studied the relationship between the pastor and the followers in a Pentecostal church in Arequipa in Peru, and pointed out the contradictory nature of the position of the pastor²⁹. Unlike Catholic and mainstream Protestants, anybody could become a pastor once his followers acknowledge him as a leader. He does not necessarily have to acquire special religious training, acknowledgment by the “official” authority, or professional knowledge to deserve the position. However, once he becomes a leader, he holds religious and symbolic power over his group. Anybody in the community could be a pastor, but once he becomes one, he enjoys a special status in the church (Kamsteeg 1998).

In the case of the Sama Dilaut church in *Hong Kong*, when Pastor John built and maintained a church and its related facilities, he decided the content of worship and

prayer meetings, and he often advised each individual congregant about his or her private life. In doing so, he continued to renew and strengthen his power as a leader. The organization of the church was rather loose, and it was allowed much autonomy by its mother church (Pastor Samuel's GPCF) with few regulations. The duties and functions of the pastor were at least clearly defined³⁰. Aside from the socioeconomic function that he played, as we have seen earlier, he was of course a "religious specialist" (Kamsteeg 1998: 85), who had the rights and privileges in the religious realms of everyday life among the Sama Dilaut in *Hong Kong*. For example, he enjoyed the privilege of delivering sermons to the congregants in Sunday services.

Theoretically, such rights and privileges were open to any of the congregants, but very few dared to practice them in front of Pastor John. One of the reasons why there was not much conflict over the power between the pastor and the followers was perhaps the fact that Pastor John depended very little on the followers' financial contributions to run the church. Most of the church members were financially distressed with little cash surplus, and their offering at Sunday worship ranged merely from one to five pesos per head. There was a remarkable gap in the amount between the donations Pastor John collected from outsiders (mainly missionaries from North America) and those that the congregants contributed. This discrepancy perhaps made it difficult for the congregants to have a say against, or control, the decisions and behavior of the pastor³¹.

Pastor John's "power" was strengthened by the fact that he was one of the few Sama-Bajau who had studied the Bible in *Hong Kong*. Illiterate, most of the church members had little access to the content of the Bible, even if they had copies of the New Testament in the Sinama language at home. Pastor John learned the Bible through Pastor Bobong's private tutoring every day and then later took the GBI seminar with his wife. He understood the content of the Bible and the meaning of its passages. In his Sunday sermons, he regarded his ability to understand the Bible, like his ability to communicate with non-Sinama speakers in different languages, as a special gift given to him by God. Once we heard him narrating to the congregants, "God has given me 'wise' (wisdom). The Holy Spirit always talks to me," in

explaining why he became the leader of the Sama Dilaut church. He often stressed that he had direct access to the Lord.

Pastor John's power as the leader was best performed, confirmed and strengthened when he delivered his sermon at Sunday worship³². While he identified himself as a leader who served his followers because of his "love" and "vision" for the Bajau community, he also reminded them to hear and follow what he said as their leader.

Most of his church members attended Sunday worship regularly. In many cases, people came to the worship as a family, which was typically composed of a husband, his wife, their children, and sometimes grandchildren. Devotions at the church usually started around 8:00 a.m. Then, worship followed around 9:00 a.m. and lasted until midday. There were no pews or divisions in the church; there was only a raised platform at one end and a spacious floor in front. Pastors and assistants performed their roles on the platform, while the congregation stood or sat on the floor and participated.

The worship involved plenty of emotional verbal and physical expressions. First, they sang many hymns, translated into the Sinama language. The songs were usually accompanied by an electric keyboard and "kulingtan" (gongs) and the congregations sang and danced their praises to the Lord. As more members came to join and excitement filled the church, individual followers stood up one by one, and passionately shared his or her "testimony" to the gathered community. Their testimonies often took forms of narratives on how their faith in God brought them blessings, solved their problems, mitigated anxieties, met financial or material needs, and so on. Such individual testimonies comprised a significant part of the entire Sunday worship. Then, the congregation stood up all together, and expressed its praise and thanksgiving to God through individual free and spontaneous prayers. As the animation mounted, the congregation was invited to place individual offerings in a basket in front of the platform. They continued to sing and dance together³³ until Pastor John finally appeared on stage and the Bible study began. He would let his son or daughter read the Bible passage he selected

according to how the Holy Spirit guided him before the worship. Following the Bible reading, he then delivered a very passionate sermon using much body language and emotional facial expressions. The contents of his sermons were meant to meet the needs of the congregation, and he used many episodes and examples to make it easier for the followers to understand.

For example, Pastor John read from Romans 12:1-8 (The New Life in Christ) during his sermon at a Sunday service. He told the followers that each one of them had a different gift according to the grace given to them, and that he was given a gift as the leader. He articulated that he was an example of a believer who decided to offer his body and soul as a living sacrifice. He listed up what he had done for the church in attempt to be a good leader (such as building and repairing walks, etc.) At the same time, he also mentioned a few cases regarding the Sama Dilaut followers and pastors from other churches who experienced misfortune because “they failed to listen to what the Lord said to them.” He stressed how important it is for them to follow the Lord as well as him as their leader if they wished to pursue their new life in Christ.

Pastor John’s testimony included many specific episodes on the assistance he gathered from the outsiders and the sick persons he healed by the laying of hands. He stressed to the followers that he served as an intermediary between God and church members, and that was why he always considered their needs in daily life. He often said to them, “We cannot trust the government, but we can trust the Lord,” and “So, it is a good thing to receive assistance from the missionaries (Caucasians in particular) who were used and sent to us by the Lord.” His ability to negotiate directly with those missionaries made Pastor John’s status even higher in the Sama Dilaut religious community.

Pastor John never forgot to mention the egalitarian relationship between him and the rest of the church members, according to the teaching in the Bible that all human beings are equal before God. Then, he would remind them of the importance of their individual contributions and mutual assistance. Here again, his teaching was supported by verses from the Bible. For example, once in every two to

three months, Pastor John read from Malachi 3: 6-12 (Breaking Covenant by Withholding Tithes/Call to Repentance). He repeatedly read to the followers the part on tithes and blessing of the Lord so that they could become familiar with its meaning³⁴.

The worship often concluded with faith healing, which gave much solace to any church member suffering from illness and other misfortunes. Pastor John, and missionaries from other cultures/countries who were present, prayed for the suffering person, then other members of the church eventually joined the prayer in a very sympathetic and earnest way. Such healing sessions marked the climax of the worship that lasted for hours and it was not unusual, with intense emotional and physical expressions involved, for some of the followers to fall into a faint, spiritually overwhelmed.

3.3 Conflicts between Pastor John and the congregation

In the church, the belief that its members, including the pastor, are all equal before God was established. In the reality, however, there was a disparity in community status not only among the members but also between the pastor and the followers. As we have seen above, Pastor John had gained “power” over his church members in the course of Christianization. Considering that anybody could become a pastor,³⁵ at least theoretically in this fellowship, it was natural that some of the church members were sometimes heard complaining about such “inequality.”

Very few of the complaints from the church members were about the concentration of the “religious power” on Pastor John. Instead, most of them were concerned about his “economic power.” Although he stressed his egalitarian distribution of the resources he collected to the church members, many of the members had the impression that he tended to allot unequally and gave more to his own family and close relatives. To a certain degree, our observation confirmed their claim³⁶.

As Scotchmer (2001: 248) wrote, such conflict between the pastor and his followers was not uncommon in Pentecostal churches, especially when their organizations

were authoritarian. This type of church did not grow in terms of the number of its followers. Instead, those who became dissatisfied spun out and established their own churches. Then, the new church community (congregation) organized around the individual believed to have strong mental and spiritual quality, as well as the capacity to gather resources to meet the material needs of the members. In other words, his family and friends often supported the pastor's authority.

In the present case, it was true that scholarships from missionaries went to the children of the pastor, though it could be quite understandable because there were very few children who survived grade one in elementary school. The construction and repair of the walks and houses usually started at the corner near the pastor's and his relatives' houses. Besides, important information, such as the notice on business assistance by the government, normally reached the pastor and his relatives first before it was disseminated to other members. The followers who recently joined from the kinship group in the lowest community status often expressed complaints about such situations. Some of them did not hide their negative feelings, and told us they believed the pastor used the church to keep all the assistance from the outside for himself and his relatives.

Christian converts from the kinship group in the lowest community status did not enjoy immediate improvement in their daily economic life. In some cases, they told us that they wished to go back to begging. In his sermons, Pastor John clearly prohibited begging. This embarrassed some female members who found it financially difficult to give up begging. One of such woman said, "He does not give us enough assistance, yet he insults us for begging. I feel angry and jealous.....". In addition, not everyone from this kinship group chose to become Christian. Some of the elders overtly expressed their doubts about Pastor John, saying "Pastor John is rich [not because of Christian faith but] because he had "Merikan" (American) pastors with him(who give him financial assistance); and he does not share it with us at all."

What was going on then was that while the poorest kinship group continued to join the church rapidly, some new members did not fully accept the legitimacy of Pastor

John's leadership. Indeed, Pastor Aman, the leader of this kinship group, overtly negotiated with Pastor Peter and his wife for support and resources so that he could have his own house church in his neighborhood, where he could separately hold prayer meetings and at least one worship service a week. Nevertheless, he had no intention to leave Pastor John's church and put up an independent one, due to his limited financial capacity.

As to the kinship group in the middle community status, there was no apparent frustration about Pastor John's leadership. They belonged to the same kinship group, and they joined his church at an earlier stage of its development. However, some male members who served as his assistants in the church, and therefore, who to a certain degree shared the "religious power" with him, experienced a different type of reaction from what the rest of the church members had. It was not dissatisfaction. It was frustration.

Pastor John was aware that the feeling among the male church assistants was not dissatisfaction but a "desire" to be leaders of their own churches. Like Pastor John, they also received Bible studies training offered by the CBI, and they had been playing various roles in the church services. Even if they did not go as far as spinning out to put up their own independent fellowship, they wished more autonomy and recognition by the missionaries from outside. They wanted to be capable of holding religious activities for their families and close relatives, separate from the main church.

Most of Pastor John's assistants were his close relatives. If the frustration continued to escalate, it could result in power struggles within his own kin. To prevent such situations, he assigned Pastor Bobby to minister in a Sama Dilaut church in Matina Aplaya (another area in Davao City), granting him total freedom to handle Sunday and Wednesday worships. Pastor Bobby is his brother, and he was most eager to have his own fellowship. Since then, Pastor Bobby's close relatives moved to Matina Aplaya. When I had a chance to attend Sunday worship there, I heard Pastor Bobby express his dissatisfaction about Pastor John's services and his wish to gain more direct assistance from outside. I also heard the congregation

sympathizing with him, crying hard and asking God to support him. Nonetheless, there was no serious move on Pastor Bobby's part to leave Pastor John's church back them, given that they did not have sufficient resources to be independent.

Pastor John did not stop his church members from leaving to put up their own churches. In Pentecostalism, at least theoretically, anybody could become a pastor. As he said in his sermon, "all human beings are equal before God." He kept his word.

4. Are all human beings equal? : before God and before one's neighbors

When he stressed his leadership in his sermons, he presented himself not only as the leader of the Bajau, but also as one of the leaders in Isla Bella. In doing so, he placed himself on the same level as the leaders of other dominant ethnic groups in the surrounding society. He accentuated that he would be a leader who gave his love to everyone regardless of ethnic groups ("tribo"). He said to his church members, "While hostility comes from devil ("yawa"), love comes from God. That's why it is love that will win," and "Muslims are our friends. We should not speak ill of them. What is important is love, and relations ("relasyon)". Then, he invited the congregation to pray together for the entire population in Isla Bella, especially for their Muslim neighbors (the Maranao and the Tausug).

Here, we can see an inverted ethnic relationship in the discourse of Pastor John. In reality, the Bajau were not considered in a position to pray for other dominant ethnic groups: it was still undeniable that the Bajau, even after their Christian conversion, continued to be both economically and politically vulnerable, and remained at the bottom in the social stratification existing among the ethnic groups in Isla Bella. As we will see in the following section, it was true that when the Sama Dilaut became organized under the church, they began to be recognized as potential constituents by Muslim politicians, and in this sense, their bargaining position slightly improved in local politics. Yet, it is too hasty to write that their Christianization led them to develop a collegial relationship with other ethnic groups, especially with the Muslims.

Facing the stark reality, Pastor John repeatedly said to his church members, “all human beings are equal before God.” He meant it based on the Bible. He meant that the reality was not what God says, but in principle it should be so, and so he should be respected by the others, as Bajau. He encouraged his church members saying, “We should not be ashamed of ourselves just because we are poor.” At the same time, he did not forget to return to the reality of the Bajau who were very much aware of the pejorative attitude other ethnic groups in general cast upon them. To show his empathy, Pastor John added the phrases like the following:

(Pastor John, recorded on March 18, 2003)

I know sometimes the Muslim and Visayan (Cebuano) look down upon you. Now, look at me. I have been struggling to be a better person so that such people would even envy me. That is how we should struggle. Even though we have become Christians, it does not mean that we are no longer what they call the “Bajau.” Of course, I am not putting us down. God tells us not to let ourselves down. Indeed, God has raised us.

To place the Sama Dilaut church members on the same level as other ethnic groups, Pastor John referred to the Cebuano rather than to the Muslim. Once he told us the following:

(Pastor John, recorded on March 13, 2003)

In fact, I want to be like Bisaya [Cebuano] in my thought, feelings and hope. Of course, I do not envy [other ethnic groups]. If I changed my looks [to the way a Cebuano man would look], I would become Bisaya. However, it's OK. [One of his daughters interrupted and added, “We are Sama Dilaut.”] Bajau's traits (“kinaiya”) are bad. But there are also good things [about the Bajau].

Given the fact that the majority of Davao City's population was Christian, the Cebuano in general were seen to be enjoying more advantage in political and economic spheres over the Muslim groups. Such local political context differed from the one in Muslim-dominated villages in Zamboaga City where Pastor John and his

followers were originally from.

4.2 Reorganization of inter-ethnic group relations in reality

The majority of the population in Isla Bella was Muslim, and it was not possible for the Sama Dilaut to improve their political bargaining position instantly, just because they became Christian. Nonetheless, it was undeniable that Christianization gradually began to change the inter-ethnic group relations in the area.

In principle, Pastor John's church was open to all. Anyone who wished to could join its services, regardless of one's ethnicity. Indeed, a few non-Sama people, who were not missionaries, began to come to the church. They said they simply wanted to become church members. For example, a Cebuano family that lived adjacent to *Hong Kong* participated in its Sunday worship. They developed a close relationship with Pastor John's family and other Sama Dilaut followers. They even acquired a little proficiency of the Sinama language.

While the Muslims within Isla Bella did not easily acknowledge him as such, Pastor John increased his social capital as the Cebuanos outside Isla Bella began to acknowledge him as a leader of the Bajau. The opportunities given to him included a speech engagement at Rotary Club in Davao City, and another one at a rally of the Protestant clergy held by the City Mayor and his political allies as part of a local election campaign. Pastor John kept the certificates of appreciation given to him on those occasions, and showed them to visitors to prove and bolster the legitimacy of his leadership. Sometimes, he took the initiative in participating in "Araw ng Dabaw" (literally means Davao's Day, a local cultural festival celebrated once a year) with permission from the city government. Then, his church members paraded as the Bajau in the festival, waving a banner for more public recognition.

Acknowledged by the Cebuano in the wider political context of Davao City, Pastor John and his church were gradually recognized within Isla Bella as well. Emergence of the church community made it easier for local political aspirants to mobilize the Sama Dilaut as voters in elections. Pastor John himself also began to approach

Maranao politicians in the barangay when he needed to ask permission to offer free medical missions in his church. He welcomed the local politicians as well as non-Sama-Bajau residents to join such events. Indeed, we saw Maranao mothers and children taking free medical consultations there.

The Sama Dilaut church played cassette tapes and CDs of the Gospel and praise songs in the morning and in the evening. Amplified by the sound system, the sound was loud enough to reach all the households of Sama Dilaut converts and beyond. *Hong Kong* was surrounded by Muslim Maranao inhabited areas, where azan, the Islamic call to prayer, was called out five times a day from their mosques. When I asked some Muslim neighbors what they thought about the Christian conversion of the Bajau, most of them answered positively. They commented, "It is a good thing that they have come to believe in God," "Now that they have religion, they also have discipline," and "They have become 'tawo' (human)," etc.

As we have seen above, the Christianization of the Sama Dilaut began to gradually reorganize their social relationships with other ethnic groups. Nonetheless, Pastor John never expressed his intentions to be directly involved in social movements to alter the structure of the society and improve the status of the Sama Dilaut. Rather, he urged his church members to embrace the reality in which they were discriminated against as the Bajau; because the Gospel guarantees, "all human beings are equal before God (no matter what the reality may be)." From this ground, Pastor John encouraged each one of them to pursue a better quality of life. This non-political orientation in real life is found in other cases of Pentecostal churches (cf. Takahashi 1995).

5. The wall of empowerment

In this chapter, we revealed that the Sama Dilaut under the leadership of Pastor John encountered missionaries from outside, and consequently chose to become Christian. The mass influx of the Sama Dilaut to Christianity in the early 21st century resulted in their new identity as the "Christian Bajau," and brought changes in many dimensions of their daily life. However, it is not clear whether their living standard

was essentially uplifted, despite development of the infrastructure in the area. First, the disparity in social status among the Sama Dilaut began to widen. Second, the social relationships between the Bajau and other ethnic groups in the surrounding society did not change much. In this section, I will argue these two findings by applying an analytical framework to discuss the relationship between the transfers of resources and the distribution of power.

The term “power” is taken from the concept of “empowerment” in the studies of development aid. According to Sato, while empowerment is defined as “to give power,” what is more important is how the recipient of aid could gain such power to be able to “change the existing social relationships.” The term “power” here does not refer to the abilities that the individual acquires through his or her own personal effort. Instead, it refers to the “authority to decide, act and achieve what he or she desires.” Given inequality in the recipient society, such authority could sometimes be obtained only through the change in social relationships with others (Sato ed. 2005: 211-212). To change the social relationships, individual intrinsic motivation is necessary but not sufficient. It requires “transfer of resources from outside the society where they belong,” and/or “redistribution of the resources within the society” (Sato ed. 212-213).

First, I will argue the impact of the “transfer of resources” from “outside” on the Sama Dilaut Christian community. The evangelical missionaries brought in the resources from outside. The Sama Dilaut community used to be more egalitarian when they were still in their places of origin before migrating to Davao City. However, the household survey I conducted in 1998 revealed that socioeconomic disparity emerged in the process of their adaptation to the urban market economy. The massive influx to Christianity among the Sama Dilaut happened after the year 2000 when Pastor John extended his connections with some evangelical missionary groups. In this process, Pastor John became an intermediary who received the resources given to him as offerings by the missionaries. He had the authority to redistribute such resources to the members of his church. Since his church started based on the existing kinship network, it was natural for him to distribute more resources to his own family and close relatives, who mostly belonged to the kinship

group I dealt with in a previous chapter (Aoyama 2016). Those who joined the church later, mostly from the kinship group in the lowest community status tended to receive less.

As the distribution system of the resources became established, the status of Pastor John as their leader consolidated. This did not lead to a hierarchical reformation of the Sama Dilaut community. However, the socioeconomic disparity between the pastors (Pastor John and his assistants) and the followers, and that between the followers from the middle community status (Group Three) and the followers from the lowest community status (Group Five) widened. For example, scholarship for secondary education, meant to increase chances to gain better employment in the future, was preferentially given to family members of the pastors. The ordinary members, especially those from the lowest community status, lacked such educational opportunities. During the period of our observation, the lowest group neither shifted to more productive businesses, nor invested more in their children's education.

In short, the Christianization resulted in a concentration of power favoring the pastors, especially Pastor John. His authority was related both to his spiritual leadership and to his material collection. The distribution of resources brought in from outside under his leadership led to the reorganization of the Sama Dilaut community with a wider inequality gap. The sense of inequality provoked jealousy among some followers, and sometimes eventually caused the emergence of power struggles among those who sought better positions in the church. Such phenomena, while not unexpected, are beyond the intentions of both the missionaries and the pastor himself.

It is also noted here that Pastor John was rather indifferent to local and national development policies for the ethnic minorities. He rarely mentioned the government concerns on the improvement of the literacy rate, development projects to uplift the standard of living, and other assistance potentially available for the Sama Dilaut as an ethnic minority, or even as part of the urban poor population regardless of ethnicity. This fact resembles Schotchmer's argument that ethnic minority Maya

leaders of Pentecostal churches in Latin America seldom expressed their intentions in their sermons to pursue direct involvement in politics in order to directly improve their status as ethnic communities (Scotchmer 2001: 249). In the presented case, it is added that the pastor's indifference to local politics might be related to his less established relationship with the local politicians, while his legitimacy as a pastor and leader had very little to do with them. In those days, it depended on his capacity to constantly collect resources from outside and distribute them to his Sama Dilaut church members for their basic survival. Most of the resources distributed were consumed for basic needs rather than invested for the future.

Second, I will argue the impact of the "redistribution of power within the society." The society here refers specifically to the local society including both Sama-Bajau and non-Sama-Bajau populations in Isla Bella, or the Barangay that Isla Bella belongs to. The intervention by the evangelical missionaries and the resources they brought for the Christian Bajau community did not dramatically change the existing power relationship between the Sama Dilaut and their non-Sama Dilaut neighbors, at least during our observation. As I mentioned earlier, the reformation of social relationships, or transfer of power, requires the transfer of certain amount of the resources from the socially advantaged (the non-Sama-Bajau populations) to the socially disadvantaged (the Sama-Bajau). Yet, given the local power relationships, such a scenario was too unrealistic. Although it is undeniable that the intervention of the missionaries increased the availability of the resources for the Sama-Bajau to use in their daily life, it did not immediately change the power distribution between the Sama-Bajau and the non-Sama-Bajau in Isla Bella. Perhaps, the primary concern of the missionaries was the improvement of the living standard of the Sama-Bajau, not that of the Sama-Bajau's socioeconomic relationships with other dominant ethnic populations. In this sense, the transfer of the resources, at least during the period of our observation, was not necessarily meant to politically empower the Sama-Bajau in the existing social structure.

It should be also pointed out that the non-Sama Bajau also received various resources as assistance from the outsiders. We were not able to collect sufficient data to support this argument, but we often observed that the "urban poor" in Isla

Bella enjoyed much wider access to assistance and aid programs provided by the government and NGOs. Although there must be differences in the level of the situated access to such services among the subgroups (by age, gender, ethnicity, etc.), it could be safely said that the non-Bajau in general had more information and opportunities to receive such assistance. Moreover, because the non-Bajau had better proficiency in the local languages commonly used in the Barangay (such as Cebuano, Tagalog and Maranao), it is possible that they had a higher capacity to draw what they wished receive according to their daily needs; and consequently, they used the resources given to them more effectively. Based on these presumptions, it remained difficult for the Sama-Bajau to produce substantial changes in their political relationship with other ethnic groups. In other words, the non-Sama-Bajau populations viewed the gifts from the missionaries as sporadic “dole-outs” for the marginalized ethnic minority who were not equal “citizens” yet in the sense that the Sama Dilaut did not count as voting constituents at that time. Indeed, they expressed few objections against the missionary work for their Sama-Bajau neighbors.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to compare this case to the case of the Sama Dilaut experience with official Islam in Sabah, Malaysia, studied by Nagatsu (2004). In Malaysia, Islam is the state religion even while its constitution guarantees the freedom of religion. Nagatsu wrote that the Sama Dilaut in Semporna became gradually recognized as Muslim, and nowadays are widely accepted as members of the local Muslim society. Accordingly, their standard of living showed much improvement. In the case of the Sama Dilaut in Davao City, Philippines, such social change did not happen. The Philippines is a secular nation, and its constitution stipulates the separation of church and state. Although majority of the population are Christian, the Pentecostals do not form the mainstream among them. In other words, the Sama Dilaut’s acceptance of Pentecostal Christianity did not automatically promise them opportunities to achieve upward social mobility whether supported by the government or not. In fact, it took the Sama-Bajau Christians some time before they gained full recognition by the local government, both at the Barangay level and city level, as evidenced in the early 2010s when a fire burned down their houses in Isla Bella.

Against the political and social background and the availability of opportunities in the host society, the acceptance of Christianity by the Sama Dilaut, at least as far as the first generation of converts are concerned, did not immediately serve as a vehicle for them to pursue upward social mobility. No substantial change happened in the local social structure. And paradoxically, that is why “being the weak” itself became a weapon for them to survive in the harsh reality of the urban market economy. More precisely, being “most disadvantaged/marginalized” and “abandoned by the government” among the urban poor attracted outsiders such as evangelical missionaries and NGOs who were willing to help the Sama Dilaut improve their standard of living. Such assistance from the outside as “dole-outs” or charity did not automatically guarantee the uplift of the well-being of individual members of the community, given the fact that such resources were not always evenly distributed among the members. Such distribution could widen socioeconomic inequality among the members in the long run. Moreover, it was uncertain at the time of our observation how long the legitimacy of the Sama Dilaut’s pastor could stand with little support from the local politicians of ethnic Muslims. It was also hard to predict the continuity of the “charity” from the outsiders in the future. However, at least, one thing can be safely said: back then, the Christian Sama Dilaut, supported by the foreign and local Christian missionaries and the resources they brought in, strove to create a space to live in an urban center without being further marginalized by other dominant ethnic groups.

¹There are two communities in Isla Bella that I refer to frequently in my narrative: *Hong Kong* and *Japan Pikas*. In order to avoid any confusion with Hong Kong, the city-state in the People’s Republic of China, I write the names of these two communities in italics.

²Formally, the followers were not allowed to practice or participate in religious rites related to their ancestral spirits and other spirits, but there was no system to observe such practice in the research site anyway [I think it reads better as “...other spirits, even though there was no system to observe such practice in the research site.”. (it’s the “anyway” at the end that is awkward). Since many of the elders had not been converted to Christianity at the time of our research in early 2000s, we often observed quite a few households perform “*pag-mbog*” and other small-scale religious rites within the household, especially among those in Magsahaya’s group (Group Five, to be published soon).

³“Gospel” is first defined as the teachings of Jesus Christ and his apostles. In this chapter, the term “evangelists” refers to preachers of the Gospel, especially Protestant ministries and laypersons who bring the Gospel to specific areas through their missionary work.

⁴I stayed with *Sama Dilaut* senior pastor and his family in their house for the participant

observation.

⁵In this chapter, the followers are those who belong to one or more categories as follows: 1) those who call themselves Christians; 2) who claimed to have been baptized, or whose baptism is reported to us by pastors; and 3) who regularly attend prayer meetings and/or worship in the church. In the following section of this chapter, “followers,” “members” and “believers” are used interchangeably according to the context.

⁶The validated data included the data we had collected from our first fieldwork from 1997 to 1999.

⁷Both *Hong Kong* and *Japan Pikas* in *Isla Bella*.

⁸In general, “born-again” refers to those who are committed or recommitted to religious faith through intense religious experience. At that time, though, we did not ask our respondents what the “born-again” meant to them personally. Yet, this was the term most frequently used to claim their religious affiliation by the Christian converts, especially those who had been converted earlier, in our research site. As the conversion progressed later, though, the term ceased to be used, and converts rather called themselves simply “Christians.”

⁹At the time, we referred to a limited number of papers and books on Pentecostalism (Sunquist ed. 2001; Takahashi 1995, Martiz 1994, Chestnut 1997, Bomann 1999, Boudequjnse, Droogers and Kamsteeg eds. 1998, Dow and Sandstrom eds. 2001, Shiota 2006). By now in the early 2010s, studies on Pentecostalism in the globalized world have been pursued by many scholars across different academic fields. For the literature review, see Robbins (2004), Anderson et al. eds. (2010), Hefner ed. (2013). The roots are said to be multiple, though a “popular theory locates the origin of Pentecostalism in a 1906 revival meeting at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles” (Anderson et. al eds. 2010, 1).

¹⁰ The term “church” here is a translation from “*shimbahan*” in the Cebuano language. It is defined as an organization of people who share the same faith. In this chapter, unless noted otherwise, it refers to individual local churches.

¹¹We also collected conversion narratives from ordinary members of the Pentecostal church. Since the space is limited, however, I have decided not to include them in this chapter. See Aoyama (2004).

¹² In the practice in his church, “testimony” refers to the verbal statement of the evidence to prove to others the blessing of God through one’s faith as a Christian. The testimony is naturally given religious codes when told to other followers in the congregation. Sharing one’s testimony reinforces his or her faith as well as strengthens the sense of community among the church members who are united by faith.

¹³Most of the interviews cited in this chapter were conducted in the Cebuano language with some Sinama language mixed, unless noted otherwise.

¹⁴Pastor John explained after the interviews that one day he quarreled with his rival *Sama Dilaut* vendor about the customers while he was selling shells to the crew of a cargo ship. The *Sama Dilaut* vendor cursed him to retaliate.

¹⁵ Zambowood Alliance Evangelical Church. Pastor John did not remember the formal name of the church, but he characterized the style of worship he experienced at the church was “charismatic”: the followers received the Holy Spirit; and the worship involved intensive emotional and physical expressions of faith.

¹⁶ A speaker of the Illongo/Hiligayon language, which is one of the Visayan languages spoken in the areas around Panay Island.

¹⁷ In this particular context, the term “Muslim” refers not only to being Muslim as one’s religious affiliation, but also to being a member of particular ethno-linguistic groups with Islamic faith. The *Sama Dilaut* pastor and his fellows generally used this term to refer to the Tausug and the Islamized land-based *Sama*.

¹⁸A couple that consists of a sister of the wife of Pastor Bobby and her husband. The wife is the second daughter of Papa Melcito in the published chapter (Aoyama 2016). Pastor Bobby is one of Pastor John's elder brothers, who became pastor following John.

¹⁹As to the water supply, Pastor John had a contract with the Water District of Davao City to install a meter and faucet in front of his house. The faucet was open to the church members. The payment was collected every time they fetched water. Pastor John also had a meter for electricity installed at home, and allowed the church members to tap electricity from the main line. The payment was collected from the individual households every month.

²⁰According to Pastor John, Pastor Bobong taught him the Bible reading and sermons every day. No particular ceremony took place on the day he was acknowledged as pastor by the Sama Dilaut followers.

²¹GPCF was registered at Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in Davao City in 1996. According to its registry, its purposes included its missionary work with the "Bajau."

²²Although he stopped selling pearls in streets, he continued to sell his pearls to the missionaries. The missionaries did not mind paying much higher prices than such products normally cost in town, maybe because they implicitly understood the deal was part of their donation or love offering to the church.

²³See Aoyama (2004). In most of our interviewees they told us they accepted Christianity when their hardships were taken away by the Holy Spirit. Typical conversion narratives include "healing experience," in which illnesses the congregant or his/her family member suffered due to the misfortune they believed brought by the "saitan" (spirit) or the "mboq" (ancestors) were miraculously healed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

²⁴They took a seminar named "Calvary Tribal Leadership Training." Two more members from the church joined the training, namely Bobby (Pastor John's elder brother) and Laniel, who both became pastors later in the *Hong Kong* area to support John as their senior Pastor.

²⁵In terms of the proper material life, the house should be made of lumber or cement, and it should have a living room with jalousie windows and lace curtains, a table and chairs, a television set and CD/DVD player. As to meals, they should eat three times a day aside from snacks ("meryenda"). The food should include eggs and poultry other than fish as source of protein, and it should be cooked with proper combination of spices ("lomas") such as native tomatoes, native onions, garlic, salt and pepper. The Cebuano lifestyle that Pastor John mentioned covered other aspects such as education, attire and health and hygiene.

²⁶Such style of his leadership was associated with the organization of Pentecostal churches. We will detail it later in this chapter.

²⁷This English term was used not by the missionaries, but by some workers from the City Social Services and Development Office (CSSDO) and those from NGOs due to the conflicts they experienced when they attempted to intervene the community. From their perspectives, other potential "Bajau" leaders in the *Hong Kong* tended to tell Pastor John about his control over the resources from the outside and the "unfair" distribution of such resources. They tried to gain their favor for their own groups.

²⁸The other two types he listed are "democratic" and "hierarchical." (Scotchmer 2001: 237-243).

²⁹Kamsteeg also observed that the number of Pentecostal Christian believers increased as members span out of the existing Pentecostal churches and put up their own churches, rather than the members of the existing churches merely increasing in number (Kamsteeg 1998).

³⁰This type of organization also characterizes Pentecostal churches. In contrast to Roman Catholic, with its clergy system with the Curia at its top, its congregationalism tends to produce independent Pentecostal churches in which members have rather egalitarian relations.

³¹For example, they could have negotiated with their pastor to increase or decrease the monetary offering or labor service they contributed to the church; if they had resources to

depend on other than those distributed to them through the church (Scotchmer 2001: 248).

³²Other regular religious activities directly related to the church include evening worship on Sundays and Wednesdays, and women's prayer meetings on Tuesday mornings. At the end of every month, "thanksgiving" to the Lord and "communion" were celebrated during the Sunday service.

³³"Speaking in tongues," which is often counted as a characteristic of Pentecostalism, was not quite prevailing in this church. Most of the free prayers that the followers uttered individually during the service were in their own language, or Sinama. However, faith in the power of the Holy Spirit was considered essential in their religious life as Christians.

³⁴Nonetheless, Pastor John did not expect the followers to make monetary contributions to the church. Actually, he never forced them to, knowing most of them had very little spare money to spend. Instead, this part from Malachi was sometimes read when missionaries from other countries attended Sunday worship. It remained vague though, if he intended to use the verse to gain more offerings from them strategically or not.

³⁵Like in many Pentecostal churches, only male members can become pastors in this fellowship. Pastor John once explained the reason to me by referring to Pauline Epistles (e.g. First Corinthian, 11: 4-8).

³⁶The Cebuano pastor and his wife were also aware of their claim, but they did not intend to intervene. They wanted to respect Pastor John's leadership.

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