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# **Landscape Renewal, Multispecies Networks, and Environmental Change: Ritual Practice by the Amis as Reaction to Planetary Emergency**

Yi-tze Lee

Department of Ethnic Relations and Cultures  
National Dong Hwa University, Taiwan

## **Abstract**

Amis or “Pangcah” people who live in the Eastern Rift Valley of Taiwan have developed their practice of ritual worship led by “Sikawasay” shaman groups. Rituals represent historical memories and perform multispecies relationships, and they have continuously changed as the Amis transitioned to new subsistence strategies. During the Japanese colonial period, planting wet rice and raising domestic pigs resulted in new adaptations of the ritual activities. Environmental change of the traditional territory has resulted in the change of different ritual venues as well as means worship. These changes have also altered the contents of collective historical memories and the ritually perceived landscape. Urbanization has further accelerated the process of change by creating new spaces and new forms of commodification for ritual materials.

This paper discusses the changes of ritual landscapes and multispecies networks. My discussion focuses on the change of multispecies relationships during the ritual cycles—especially on the use of three kinds of animal-related practices: the symbolical “catching the bird in the field” cleansing ritual performed by shamans, the use of sacred boat ritual routes and fish catching rituals performed by male age-grade groups, and the “pigs for the ancestors” offering during the family funeral ritual. Furthermore, this research proposes the importance of landscape renewal, which refers to and reflects on the impact of environmental change on local habitats as well as the consequences of urbanization on the Amis’ cultural memory. This paper discusses contemporary issues such as changes of religious events, social practice, and environmental recognition as planetary emergency.

## **Keywords**

ritual landscape, multispecies networks, environmental change, renewing kinship

## Introduction

In the past, wild field was prepared by the women after the time when the sowing of millet or rice was announced. *Misatuligun* is the ritual that prays to the land deity, covers the field with spiritual power, and chases away the noxious insects and birds. Since Sikawasay are shamans who can bring over and take away animal's power in the field, *Misatuligun* is to practice and chase away birds in order to protect the rice seedlings. Leaders of *Sikawasay* will take several *teker* from the linen bag and put them together. *Teker* is a trap to catch birds, made with a bamboo stick and a long linen snare. A Sikawasay ties ginger leaves to each *teker* and lines up on a banana leaf. After these preparations, the Sikawasay walks to the eastern side of field and sticks *teker* along the southern edge of the farm. After a while, every shaman goes to gather the *teker* and worships them with rice liquor. The use of *teker* is clearer now: while chanting in the farm, the *kawas* of wild birds have been caught on the ginger leaves.<sup>1</sup>

The vignette above describes the “*Misatuligun*” ritual practice led by the shamans of the Lidaw Amis in Taiwan. It represents a tightly interwoven relationship between humans, animals, and spirits in the Amis religious world. However, such rituals are not unchanging, as they are always enacted in the network of environmental presences. This particular issue highlights the idea of transculturality, which suggests departing from the traditional yet still prevailing view of “cultures” as fixed frames neatly distanced and differentiated from one another. Transculturality also invites us to consider the intermingling of ostensibly distinct cultures and the blurry lines between them and to carefully examine the “global situation” of individuals, communities, and societies that increasingly draw from expanded, tremendously pluralized cultural repertoires. In this paper, the notion of transculturality is related to the issue of cross-cultural competence so as to incorporate the notion of an identity continuum and a plural sense of self. The plurality of self as presented in Ami rituals shows the networking of human beings and animal spirits.

Based on the ideas of transculturality and the networking of environmental actors, my argument is that, through repeated ritual practice, the cultural landscape is

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<sup>1</sup> Description from author's fieldnote, 2022/8/5.

constantly reshaped and reconstructed according to the meaning of its material components. While the traditional Ami lifestyle is irretrievable, changes in Ami human-animal relationships can shed light on how landscapes are constructed not only by indigenous memories (as conjured through ritual), but also by the animals and plants actively engaged in the condition of planetary emergency. Lastly, contemporary transitions in ritual landscapes are the consequence of capitalist infrastructural expansion, which I refer to as an “environmental change.” Such transitions operate within the colonial legacy of human-animal relationships that characterize the Anthropocene and planetary emergency. It is in view of this assumption that this paper will examine the intimate yet constantly changing relations between indigenous Amis and the culturally meaningful animals in their environment in order to extend our understanding of long-term environmental change and transculturality.

### **From Ritual to Landscape: Animal-Human Relationships in Transition**

In studies of ritual activities and landscapes, there are two general implications and meanings in the use of landscapes. First, As Catherine Bell states that landscapes are taken as historical discourses and frames of reference for collective actions; second, from Pamela Stewart and Andrew Strathern’s research, landscapes can be ways of defining boundaries between different ethnicities, and are therefore symbolic representations of identities and/or the constant reconstitution of movement. However, there is a third aspect of cultural landscapes that has not been clearly explained in previous discussions, namely how ritual landscapes are constituted by networks of multispecies interaction. Reckoning with the classic discussion of ecological and religious practices, Roy A. Rappaport argued that between ecological pressure and the ritual warfare of “kaiko,” animals (in this instance pigs) are not only the subjects of particular actions, but also the objects of meaning-investing connection. Although Rappaport’s theorization was innovative in the way that it combined the material and the symbolic, he failed to view the relationship between people, environment, as well as the infrastructure which brings all these materials together, from a wider angle such as advocated by political ecology. Environment and

animals were considered separately from the people he studied.<sup>2</sup> Scholars such as Brett Buchanan and Paul Sillitoe also proposed to reposition indigenous knowledge and focus on its relationship with environmental humanities. We find that such thinking has brought back indigenous views of consciousness in different beings. For example, Roberto González has discussed how Zapotec people in Oaxaca developed “Zapotec Science” as a defense against the challenge of the green revolution. The concept that “maize has a soul” does not disappear, even though there are various maize-derived commercial products.

Further discussion of ritual landscapes, this time from a semiotic perspective, is provided by Eduardo Kohn when he talks about the “thinking forest” which connects the symbolic world of humans and other natural beings, where multiple species become interlocutors in a process of coming-to-understand the indigenous world ontologically. Above all, Kohn offers a special degree of concern for the intersubjectivity of relationships between species. Responding to the example of the Runa people’s relationship with their dogs, Kohn presents his idea of a “multi-natural ontology” to show the collaboration of animal beings and the Runa epistemology of knowing the world. Following but not repeating Kohn, I will use three examples of bird-Amis culture to show how the entanglement in ritual gradually expands from the traditional ontological view of symbols, to unavailable land and transitions in gender roles, and finally to the conflict of cultural revitalization and legal pressure on bird consumption. This reveals that birds are speaking multiple languages to the Amis due to the various environmental changes and entanglements.

If Kohn represents an ontological turn toward nonhuman species, Paul Nadasdy provides another strategy for questioning the universality of such a turn (357-69). Tracking hunting policies in Canada, Nadasdy vigorously challenges the notion of a “multiple world thesis” or “pluriverse.” He considers the pluriverse to be insufficiently theorized and argues for an “indeterminate” world in order to incorporate anti-colonial politics. Here, what birds in the world of the Amis reveal echoes Nadasdy’s thesis: they show how ritual authenticity, conservation museum curation, and working with government-funded cultural revitalization projects all co-create an indeterminate arena for both Amis elders and youth, and indigenous ritual and public exhibitions. While we are seeing the disappearance of ritual animals, we also see efforts to “substantialize” images of ritual symbols as tokens of actual animals or plants. This provides a local mechanism for resilience and sustainability

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<sup>2</sup> See the Introduction to *Reimagining Political Ecology* by Aletta Biersack and “The Political Ecology of Fisheries in the Upper Gulf of California” by James B. Greenberg for this theoretical and structural review.

in a setting of public participation and cultural identity struggle. The Amis practice with birds' documents and record ritual activities via environmental change and entangled ecological practice, thus showing the impact of urbanization, environmental degradation, and changing subsistence strategies.

## **Environmental Change as Framework for Ritual Landscape Making**

In terms of human-animal relationships in ritual landscape, species are active constituents reflecting how the environment fosters them. Tim Ingold also argues that “making rather than being” in the affordance of the human environment provides ontological meaning in daily movements. However, the transformation of livelihood and subsistence strategies due to the long-term impacts of changes in climate, colonial policies, and infrastructure expansion also changes the making of ritual landscapes, which results in the issue of environmental change. The concept of environmental change provides a lens of viewing ritual transition through the dynamics of infrastructure connectivity and ritual networking. While climate change and species migration can result in various impacts, major environmental changes have occurred due to colonial administrative policies such as the cultivation of rice, the banning of ritual headhunting, or shamanic practices that change boat-running routes. As a result of modernization and urbanization, the city can also itself be considered as a ritual landscape, which results in the changes of ritual routes as well as in the drawing different boundaries for cultural meaning. The cases in this paper serve to demonstrate that the effects of environmental change concern not only rituals and infrastructure, but must also be viewed within the context of colonial administration bent on modernization.

Here I take ritual as the realm of symbolic representation and theatrical performance. Victor Turner proposes a powerful view of symbolic representation in his classic analysis of Ndembu rituals. I will not recapitulate Turner's arguments regarding the betwixt and between or liminality in ritual. Rather, I wish to provide a view of how ritual landscapes are transformed due to environmental change. Rituals can be viewed as a “slide show” of cultural meaning. However, the changes of the larger framework within which this slide show is performed, which is usually constituted by environmental actants in various processes such as animal migration, as well as changes of subsistence strategies or infrastructure, are not considered in the work of symbolic analysis by Turner. In order to supplement the “slide-show” view of ritual, we can take Actor Network Theory into consideration. Bruno Latour

provides an analysis of the discovery of microbes by Louis Pasteur in 19th century France. Latour not only sees human actors, such as farmers and patients, engaged in the scene of scientific practice of studying anthrax contamination, but also considers how non-human actants such as microbes, cows, experimental materials, or other utilities are mobilized, providing the infrastructure of the whole scientific practice. If we take scientific experiments as ritual performance, in which different actants present within a structure of symbolic meanings, we can see how the infrastructure of the performance is built, or how the “landscape” of ritual is made and engaged by different actants.

Anthropologist Jens Kreinath also uses Actor Network Theory (ANT) to trace the association in pilgrimage and festival, in which the idea of the network is to consider the trajectory of a person’s movement in pilgrimage to see the intersection of time and space during the process. ANT therefore can provide a progressive view of ritual transition rather than isolated slide show vignettes. Environmental change due to climate, colonial policies or infrastructure changes, are important factors for understanding how cultural meaning is progressively presented and entangled with changing environmental actants. In the case of the Amis, an environmental change is connected with developmental ideologies and modernization. Historically, it is subjected to the trajectories of colonial policies, such as militarization of the coastline, resulting for example in a decrease of bird/fish-catching locales, expropriation of land by the state or private owners (in turn leading to a change from millet to rice cultivation), and finally urbanization. As a result, tribal space was increasingly separated from nearby “wild” areas, while the boars which used to be Amis’ principal prey were domesticated. As a result, environmental change has constituted new “frameworks” of ritual, which is reflected in changes of ritual landscapes, as well as of multispecies relationships performed in the rituals.

There are also discussions of ritual and its relations with particular species in regard to the construction of meaning. Environmental changes include change of subsistence strategy, urbanization, and investment of political initiatives. Pin-Chen Liu has discussed the relationship between rice and wild deer as a representation of the gender division among Kavalan people. The species pair is the emblem of ritual compensation for reproduction dynamics—men resemble deer and women resemble rice. As the commercial hunting of deer for their hides led to their disappearance from the coastal lowlands, their place in the ritual was filled by the rooster. This is one of the reasons for environmental change, as I will discuss later in my case. Commodification of species, such as commercial farm-raising or animal trade, is also an important issue of environmental change. Jackson Hu has discussed how the

*Troides Magellanus* butterfly of Orchid Island was commercialized and became a trophy in the fetishized economy. Su-Mei Lo discusses how Atolan women used their custom of clam gathering as a means to protest the illegal construction of tourist resorts in their traditional territory. In the previously mentioned cases, actions related to ritual meanings can manifest the connection of traditional practice and contemporary networking. The relationships between nonhuman species and ritual landscapes are thus formulated through three aspects: historical discourses, symbolic boundaries, and actor networks.

In the following, I will introduce these three aspects of human-animal relationships in different ritual settings of the Ami people. Through case studies of male age-grade groups and changes of ritual routes for boating, symbolic bird release in shamanic ritual, and pigs for domestic ritual activities, I demonstrate how vital are the notions of “border-making” and “landscape-renewal” to a multispecies ethnography of the Amis. This paper shows that the meaning of engaged ritual landscapes and multispecies networks are sustained even when physical locations or materials gradually become unavailable.

## **Fieldwork Background**

The Amis constitute the largest group of indigenous peoples in Taiwan, with about 250,000 individuals living mostly in the eastern part of the island, and the Nanshi is one group of the Amis people living in northern Hualien. The Amis are famous for their seasonal rituals, which revolve around agricultural practices such as sowing millet, weeding, cleaning the field, controlling pests, harvesting, storing, and finally (at the end of the agricultural cycle) fishing. While ritual activities characterize the meaning of Ami people’s daily lives, these rituals have had to be adapted over time because of (1) the relocation of animals related to ritual activities; (2) changing Amis’ subsistence strategies; and (3) urbanization, which has limited ritual and agricultural access to traditional territories. The interconnection of these three factors has resulted in the ‘deterritorialization’ of Lidaw Amis<sup>3</sup> (See Fig. 1) in their own land, and it reshapes the Amis’ ritual landscape.

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<sup>3</sup> Lidaw Amis people are one of the five groupings of Nanshi Amis people in Eastern Taiwan. Due to the fact that their traditional territory is based on the Lidaw plain area, the term Lidaw is applied to refer to these people.



Fig. 1. Location of Taiwan and Lidaw Amis Area. From Google Map.

Nanshi Amis people live in the Northeastern part of Taiwan, with population about 12,200, and cohabit with Minnan and Hakka (both non-indigenous Han) people. Lidaw is one of the five tribes in Nanshi Amis that has about 2500 residents. The most prominent rituals of the Amis agricultural cycle include *Midiwai* (ritual for the millet-sowing announcement) at the end of December, *Misatuligun* (field-cleaning ritual) in March, *Mivahvah* (pest-control ritual) in April, *Misalilio* (bird-catching-and-eating ritual) in May—though, owing to the transition to rice cultivation, the ritual is now held in November—and *Miladis* (fishing ritual, which marks the end of the planting cycle) in June (see Table 1). These rituals reveal the significant relationships between people and non-human animals within a particular landscape. However, contemporary ritual activities have formed a new arena for cultural revitalization. The form of the rituals still follows traditional cycles, but their contents have been amalgamated with government-sponsored cultural festivals, political mobilization, and new ways of promoting community solidarity.



**Table 1** Yearly Ritual Cycle of Lidaw Amis

Month	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Season	Kasi'nawan (Cold season)			Kafalawfawan (Windy time)		Kacidalan (Dry and Sunny)			Kabaliusan (Typhoon)		Kafalian (Windy)	
Event	Midiwai	Misa- tuligun		Mi- vahvah	Misa- lilio	Mi- ladis	Miadop		Malalikit	Mirecuk		
Activity	Millet seeding	Weeding growing yams		Dispel pests and ghosts	Harvest millet and restore	Fish ritual	Hunting		Harvest festival	Shamanic rituals		

Compiled by the author.

## Amis Migration Routes and Livelihood Transition

According to oral tradition, Amis ancestors sailed from the ocean and settled in different regions of Taiwan about one thousand year ago. Various Amis tribal myths claim several different landing locations. Some claim they landed near the place they call *Aripanay* (near Taimali, Taitung area nowadays); some claim that the Amis sailed by Orchid Island and *Mafohkad* Green Island (based on the legend of the *Sanasay* Circle of oceanic migration) and landed near the outlet of the Shiukuluan river in Hualien. Yet other Amis claim that their ancestors migrated from the southwestern part of Taiwan. Regardless of which migration routes they actually took, the first group of Amis pioneers must have explored this island several times before their settlement on final location. The Amis had learned of the abundant natural resources of the land and decided to settle with their plant seeds and domestic animals. The new environment and interactions/intermarriages with other tribes or clans were bound to affect their culture and bring diversities to the group.

For a long period of time, the Ami people sustained themselves by hunting, fishing, foraging wild vegetables, and cultivating millet in horticulture as their major food sources. The traditional life style changed greatly during the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945) when the Amis were forced to learn rice cultivation in paddy fields. A planned economy was introduced, focusing on the cultivation of Japonica rice along with other cash crops such as tobacco and sugarcane. The colonial government stressed that two harvest cycles each year would provide better support to indigenous people's dietary needs. However, the Amis were mobilized to be

included into the wartime supply system which demanded plantation efficiency, forced labor to build infrastructure such as railways and harbors, and heavy taxation (Ka). Along with the impacts this had on their subsistence strategy and labor patterns, the Amis also faced the conflicts of conversion from traditional rituals to Shinto and later Christianity as well as modern education systems. Their traditional life which has evolved with a particular set of natural resources gradually dissolved, and the new generations of Amis became alienated from their forefathers' knowledge about nature, which is dying down in these modernized settings. Fortunately, the rituals continue exist, and there are elders to pass on the wisdom handed down to them. This enables us to explore the changing culture as well as their adaptations to the environment.

### **Male Age-Group and Its Environmental Challenge: Palunan Ritual Process**

Oral legend has it that the ancestors of the Lidaw Ami tribe came to this land by five sacred boats from far away. Another tale describes a legendary ancestor named *Maciuciu*, who lost his way while picking up drift firewood near the seashore and landed on an island inhabited entirely by women, where he was assumed to be a pig due to his unidentified gender. He managed to escape from incarceration but was blocked by the massive water body. While worrying by the coast, a whale-like creature (in some versions a turtle) named *Sainin* approached him and promised to take him back to *Lidaw* underwater. After *Maciuciu* had safely returned to his village, *Sainin* asked him to perform a ritual with pig sacrifice and boating activities in order to commemorate this mythical encounter. Thereafter *Lidaw* has started its *Palunan* (boat ritual) in order to honor the agreement between their ancestor and his maritime protector (Lee). The age-group initiation rite with sacred boats reenacts the landing myth in order to "follow the ancestor" on their route to fish.

Amis males form into age-grades as social groups that serve several functions including defending the *Nyaro* (tribe) and exchanging labor for various public services. The Amis concept of private to public space can be divided into *tamtaw* (individual), *loma* (house), and *niyaro* (tribe). *Niyaro* is the representative unit used for negotiating with the neighboring tribes about the arrangement of hunting territories, water resources, and issues of external relationships through a form of gerontocracy by an elder assembly and hierarchical age-grade groups. Between household and tribe, there are several different kinship groups acknowledged by Amis people, including *naloma'an* (from the same household), *malinaay* (kin), and

*ngangasawan* (clan) (Furuno). Clan members are distant relatives, who might still trace their connection after generations of migration due to plantation or post-disaster relocation. Members can still trace the common origin of ancestral legends. In larger tribes, there are mostly few clans in the whole kinship group. Nevertheless, they are all connected by blood. Different Amis tribes used to have various tensions with indigenous “others.” Even between different Amis tribes wars were ever-present due to conflicts over hunting territory. Males join the age-group and are trained to fulfill duties. Their duties to the gathering place end when they got married.

Amis males who live close to the reef coast are able to access the tidal flats, and are expected to have good swimming skills in order to retrieve food from the sea. Traditional fishing skills, such as *patnod* (fishing with a pole), *mipacing* (shooting fish), *mitafokod* (fishing by net), *nisalil* (netting by night), and *nitarih* (dragging a net by the coast), require repetitive practice and cooperation between partners. Females are mostly responsible for gathering seaweed and algae from rock surfaces and conches or other creatures from tidal pools—tasks that are relatively safer and can be performed independently. Not only have the subsistence strategies related to river and ocean changed due to modernized lifestyles, but other changes have also affected the practice of *Palunan*, the fishing boat route. *Palunan* ritual preparation starts in the third year after the last *Palunan*. Boys above the age of 10 can join the training for consecutive five years until next *Palunan*. Training takes place about a month before the harvest ritual every August. Youngsters who join the age-group-to-be need to learn many skills such as fishing as mentioned above, bird catching, finding underwater resources in the wild, picking up wild vegetables, running, weaving fishing nets, remembering boat ritual songs (in total five melodies representing five sacred boats with ancestors), and the names of the chiefs, ancestors, and deities of *Lidaw* history. All the skills will be taught by the elder brothers in the age-groups three cycles ahead of them. There are nine naming terms for the age-groups and each represents a certain meaning for the tribal activities (see Fig. 2).

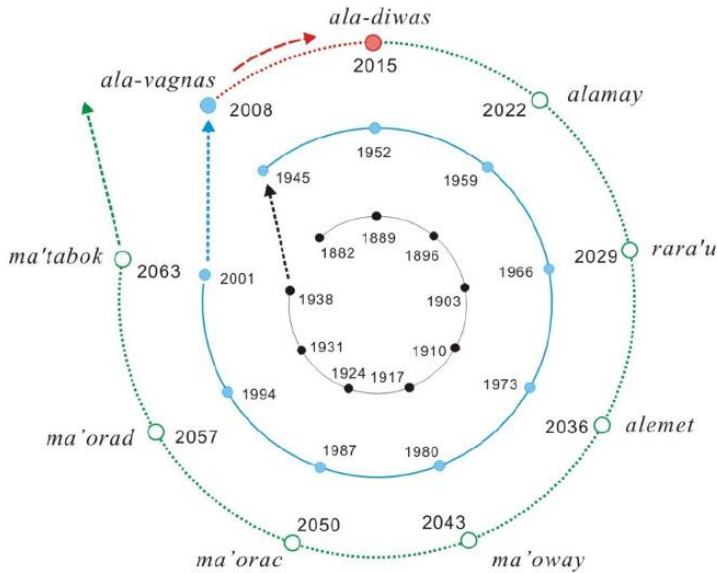


Fig. 2. Age-group naming cycle of the Lidaw Amis people (names represent age-groups, and numbers are calendrical year).

The age-group system of the Lidaw Amis is called “Circular naming system” (comparing to the Creative naming system in Southern Amis groups), which has nine naming tags circulating every seven years as shown in Fig. 2. After five years of training, the newly-formed group of young boys will participate in the final running race a week before *Palunan* ritual called *Marengreng*, which means “running in team.” All their training is targeting this event, which could be considered the “final exam” of the rite of passage. All members from the five-year training team should gather at the exit gate of the village at dawn. After the chief offers worship to the ancestors and *Maciuciu* with rice wine and a white rooster, the youngsters set out to race from the village to the seashore where *Maciuciu* was said to have embarked. Everyone should run like a flying pheasant according to the rule. An elder of the tribe will take the white rooster in worship to escort the whole running team in the end; whoever is caught by the elder with the roosters’ claw cannot “graduate” with his other teammates and has to wait for another seven years.

Due to various changes in land use such as urbanization, militarization, gentrification, and industrialization surrounding the village, the racing route of the

*Palunan* ritual for male age-group has constantly changed since Japanese colonization. This shows how urbanization, the construction of infrastructure, and seashore erosion change the way Amis people practice their sacred boat ritual. Fig. 3 shows how routes changed between 1931 and 1973, due to the impact from Japanese colonialization to the post-war industrialization; traditionally, male novices carrying boats would run the shorter routes, though these gradually shifted to lengthier routes due to seashore military construction at the end of World War II and post-war restrictions on sea resources. This is a concrete example of environmental change and the making/remaking of ritual landscape, as the city and tribal space is the landscape to be remade.



Fig. 3. Historical transition of male racing routes for 'Palunan' ritual activity. Created by the author with Google Map.

There are various changes that have been adapted by the ritual since World War II, and the ritual route has been changed four times. Three major challenges have been detouring the ritual passage. First, the colonial impact to the ritual process and landscape transition. According to some elders, *Marengreng* was said to be the route for headhunting before the Japanese came into power. Therefore, the oldest route of *Marengreng* started with *Malatawan*, which means the worship site for *Malataw*, the protector god of males (see Table 2). Next, the group needed to go by the *Fitunay*, which was the place where the skulls of beheaded enemies were set on a bamboo rack. However, the Japanese officers banned these ritual parts of the *Marengreng* and confiscated the skull rack, subsequently setting up a barrack near the village where it formerly stood. The first change is thus due to colonial policy and militarization. The next important change was a result of urbanization and the transition to a new subsistence strategy. After the Japanese colonial regime was stabilized, the Amis people were asked to settle near their village and learn to cultivate paddy rice fields in order to produce food for the war effort. The ritual route was changed again (to the green line in Fig 3) in order to make place for more rice fields and irrigation channels. Thirdly, after World War II, nationalist government built up a commercial harbor north of the village, leading to coastal erosion. Fish resources and wave directions were therefore drastically altered. On the other hand, the urbanization process also invited several factories to be established near the “open field” near the coast, including a small cement plant as well as demolition site for recycling materials. *Marengreng* was once again detoured, transitioning to a route that was even further away from the village. As shown in Table 2 and Fig. 3, we see how the colonial and modernization process literally changed the trajectory of the ritual, and left different memories for the villagers, especially male age-groups.

**Table 2** ‘*Marengreng*’ Ritual Running Points in Four Routes

Running points	Amis term	Meaning
1	Malatawan/ Pataraan	Meeting place for male age-groups
2	Fitunay bamboo/skull rack	Traditional location for disposed headhunting skulls
3	Ayawai Tuligun	Where land deity was located
4	Kenis (Maurad route)	Where the Maurad group resided in 1931 (Orange line)

5	Cipiciwan/Cikaruan	Lowland where underground water is collected
6	Cihefuan	Limit of village
7	Cihefuan/Cikumawan	Limit of village – lots of <i>kumaw</i> fruit
8	Rongkuan Bridge	Bridge built in 1940
9	Kafetuhan/Cipakaan	Meeting place with ‘giant fish’ (which saved the Amis ancestors)
10	Matafuk Route/Paatay	Where the Matafuk group resided in 1938 (Green line)
11	Aladiwas Route	Where the Aladiwas group resided in 1952 (Red line)
12	Alemet route/ Final destination	Where the Alemet group resided from 1973 to the present (Blue line)

The Age-group ritual *Palunan* reveals its meaning through ritual networking of materials and the process of “renewing kinship.” Environmental change provides a lens of viewing ritual transition through the dynamics of infrastructure connectivity and ritual networking. James Clifford reminds us that the indigenous view of history is spiral and contextualized within the contemporary situation; therefore, revitalization and cultural awareness is to recognize “traditional futures.” Kyle Whyte, in his argument about the indigenous reaction to contemporary environmental changes, including the dramatic version of climate change, highlights the notion of “renewing relatives.” Whyte argues that contemporary indigenous people need to constantly review their relationships with their material surrounding, such as landscapes or non-human beings. Non-human beings, unlike being conflated as in Actor Network Theory indicated, are constituents of relationships that should be renewed with new infrastructures or institutions. In this essay, the main argument is to show how the sustainable adaptation of ritual activities creates local memories and an appreciation of the landscape in relation to the animals that are made use of in rituals. The ritual activities are efforts to retain “collective memories” (Halbwachs) and possible “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm and Ranger). As a result, a ritual is at the same time where memories are created as well as how cultural heritage and indigenous communities can reassemble each other. In *Palunan*, the ritual landscape



is at the same time a vivid collective memory and a reenacting of an Amis future to come.

### **Shamans and Birds: Multispecies Relation in the Rice Field**

Traditional Amis people believe in animism. Various *kawas* (spirits) exist in nature, and once a person dies, she will go to the territory of *duas* (ancestral spirits), which can constantly visit back to the living. Mediating between the living and the spirit worlds, a shaman group called Sikawasay is responsible for the worship and summoning the ancestors (*duas*) back in the worship for offering. The prefix “si-” means “owning something,” and sikawasay means people with the capacity to be with or call the spirits. They generally understood as shamans. Lidaw village has the most complete traditional ritual practice among the Amis tribes. There are about 200 days in a year which are under the condition of “paising” (taboo). Other than specific ritual periods, September, every household also intermittently needs Sikawasay for dealing with illness, offerings to the ancestors, for cleaning up a newly built house, or for funeral rituals. Before the ritual is carried out, villagers need to prepare standard offerings: *toron* (sticky rice or millet cake), *icep* (betelnut), *fila* (betel pepper), *epa’* (rice wine). Depending on the purpose of the ritual, specific assistant plants have to be prepared (the shaman sometimes even specifies the location or the direction of the plant). When everything is prepared, Sikawasay will carry on by the power of these plants to ensure the effectiveness of a ritual.

The most important public ritual led by Sikawasay in Lidaw is “*misatuligun*,” or the cleansing of the rice fields. In the past, wild fields were prepared by females after the sowing of millet or rice was announced. This is the anecdote mentioned in the beginning of this paper, which Sikawasay will prays to the land deity, covers the field with spiritual power, and chases away the noxious insects and birds. Leaders of Sikawasay shamans will take a bunch of “*teker*” made with bamboo stick prepared for “bird-catching.” Every shaman goes to get the *teker* and worship them with rice liquor, and release the ginger leaves as the birds were sent back to the field for sustainable cycle (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Shamans shooting ginger leaves, representing the release of the birds caught for rejuvenating rituals and power of *omah* (land). Photo credit by the author.

All Sikawayay takes a piece of ginger leaf to “release the captured bird spirits.” Each walks to the eastern edge of the field where they stop, and throws the leaf into the air while naming a wild bird: *cirociro* (sparrow), *tatacio* (drongo), *trok* (ringnecked pheasant), *koakoa* (duck), or *cicale'* (brown shrike), etc. What Sikawayay perform in the “*misaayam*” ritual is a transitional activity from household (*loma'*) to field (*omah*), and turning ginger leaf into bird, in order to catch them before the rice seedlings mature. By throwing females (shamans) into the space of the male world (wild), the whole ritual space is transformed. It is also the time when migratory birds arrive in Taiwan’s eastern coastal valley to stay for the winter. It is followed by the end of the farming season, when males have free time to catch birds in the field. This single “*Talaomah*” beautifully connects various dyads of transition: from inner to outer space, from plant to animal, and from female to male. The exchange of environmental resources is embodied in the ritual meaning.

The prefix “*misa*” in Amis means “to prepare for worship” or to “become.” Literally, *misa-lilio* refers to the ritual exchange of labor. The elders explain the term as follows: although villagers had the habit of exchanging labor and feasting fellow helpers for their work in winter after the harvest is stored into the granary, the whole process is more like a family affair and held at the *potal* (small court for drying grains)

in front of the house. There is not much ritual practice for this event, which is more like group feast. It should be called “*malaho to lilio*” (the lunch for exchanged labor). Since the 1960s, cultivation and harvest of rice and cash crops is increasingly performed with the help of machines, and house construction uses concrete and steel. Traditional labor exchange for communal works was thus turned into money donations. Members of *lilio* (a unit of labor exchange) were relatives, but later become sworn brothers, or some just fade away. Despite this, every fall after the harvest, Amis males remain enthusiastic to bird hunting in the wild, in order to show their hospitality. As a reaction to the Wildlife Conservation Act, Nanshi Amis turn what was causal treat affair after farming (*malaho to lilio*) into official ritual of *Misa-Lilio* every fall, in order to circumvent legal restriction.

“At the time of the field ritual, every collected game or plant is designed for best combination. This is the wisdom from old times. Grilled *ayam* (birds) is accompanied with *lala* (long beans); beef from the harvest festival night is accompanied with *rokec* (pith of rattan); if cooked at home it can be more flexible, *ayam* can be cooked with *lokot* (bird’s nest fern), *rokec*, but the best is with *sama’o* (rabbit milk weed).” The aged male leader who is responsible for cooking is talking about the way of cooking in a skilled fashion. With his dipper at hand, he continues, “But the most important is to distribute fairly. It doesn’t matter how much you catch; the thing really matters is to be fair. It is also the art of a person doing *milikilac*.” *Milikilac* originally means “united together,” and here it is referring to the process of gathering and redistribution, which is the common process of the food sharing occasion, as manifested in the fish-catching festival.

Due to the decreasing number of migratory birds as well as changes of subsistence strategies, not many Amis villagers are now dependent on rice cultivation for their livelihood, with the effect that the ritual has been changed from “catching and eating pest-birds together” into worshipping the land deity only. In this way, the ritual contents reflect the transition of species dynamics. Individual hunting skills are not the focus; instead, how to fairly distribute differently-sized games is actually the most important part. The emphasis on *makomod* (cooking together in a united fashion), on the one hand takes care of the inferior member of the group, on the other hand it also unites the common eaters. Some may question the non-traditional original of *misalilio* as it is practiced today, which differs significantly from *malaho to lilio*. However, from the perspective of cultural invention, it is a collective activity agreed and shared by the members. It is an extension of cultural tradition, and the order is creatively rearranged. The environmental change factor here, i.e. the decreasing number of migratory birds, also results in the change of ritual landscape. While

shamans are still calling the spirit of birds, the actual feast on bird has changed its practice and purpose to make the occasion more likely. As a result, species reshape the framework as a factor of environmental change and reconstitute the outlook of ritual landscape.

### **Pigs Not Just for the Ancestors: Domesticate Species and Memorial Space**

The third example of the multispecies/landscape relationship concerns pigs. It also harks back to the classic classical discussion of ecological and religious practice by anthropologist Roy Rappaport. Rappaport pointed out the important relationship between ecological pressure and ritual warfare with domestic pigs in order to complete the ritual cycle of the sustainability. Species are not only the subjects of particular actions, but also the objects of a meaning-investing connection. Traditional Sikawasai (shamans) in Lidaw still keeps very detailed knowledge about deity names and directions to worship. These kawas care for different aspects of life in Lidaw. According to Sikawsay, *calay* is an invisible, transparent, and sticky string that feels like the silk produced by spiders. In order to go to the realm of kawas, Sikawasay have to ask calay as their lalan (literally means road) from the female spirit *dongi*. This will guarantee the correct way to the spiritual world. This concept is not unique to the Sikawasay: most Amis elders employ such concept in their daily lives—such as “i cowa ko lalan?” or “o’lalan ko epah” (rice wine is our road). It is only by stepping on the correct road and over and over again to the ancestral path that the inheritance of culture could be *re-membered* (as the way was see how religion works for the whole) by the Sikawasy and villagers together.

Funerals are a critical time when pigs for ancestors are gathered, as well as how the ritual landscape is substantially visualized. In Lidaw Amis funerals, pigs are prepared by the bereaved family members (especially female descendants) in order to invite all the family ancestors back to the house, and bring the newly deceased to the spiritual world with them. Traditionally, pigs were prepared by male hunters who hunt them in the nearby low hill forests. However, following the rise of commercial stock-raising and the domestication of wild pigs during Japanese colonial period, the preparation of the pigs became the sole responsibility of a male who purchased pigs from the pen, slaughtered them properly, and distributed them to all family members. Even though the pigs have become domesticated, the “wild” part of the funeral ritual is to catch fish after the funeral is concluded. While the act of acquiring pigs for the funeral has thus turned into a commercial transaction, there are two aspects which

cannot be “domesticated”: first, the symbolic action of hoeing in nearby farms after the funeral, and second, the catch of fish from the rivers which demarcate the border of the village. However, the cleansing ritual for the burial plot is still carried out with the living pig after the funeral (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. A pig representing the vehicle of the ancestors in the tomb cleansing ritual. Photo credit by the author.

The memorial walk of bereaved family after the funeral is called “Tala-Omah.” Omah is the “field”, and tala means “to go.” This activity after the funeral is literally to “go to the field” and to remember what the deceased elders experienced in his/her lifetime. The process also requires bringing raw pork in order to maintain the power of the accompanying ancestors (the pig is the vehicle for communication). As the following map of one “Tala-Omah” event of Lidaw village shows, there are three routes for “going to the field.” The first one is delineated by line A, in which route the family members walk a short distance (usually one week after the funeral) from the deceased household to the nearby field where the elder used to feed the cattle or catch fish. The second one is delineated by line B, in which route the family goes to places which the deceased elder frequented during his/her late life, such as the local Tzu-chi hospital (B1), the Mennonite hospital (B2), the fishing grounds at the mouth of the river (B3), and the rice fields in which the elder used to work (B4). Finally, about one month later, the bereaved group will do a third Tala-Omah, and this

occasion is delineated by line C, in which route bereaved members go to the location where the elders used to keep their fishing boat and prepare fishing nets (C1), and the location where he used to catch birds in the nearby field (C2). This is the embodiment of space through the symbolic vehicle of the pig and the reenactment of territorial boundaries in villagers' memories (See Fig 6).



Fig. 6. Pig offering and Bereaved Route of Tala-Omah. Remixed from Google Map.

The several routes serve as a mental map for the bereaved family to visualize the living space of the deceased, and to re-engage with the activities he/she used to do. In other words, the ritual landscape is substantially represented in embodied experiences, and also enables the family to relive the environment when the elder was still alive. Despite the very different environmental setting, however, these activities resonate with Julie Cruikshank's discussion of how Inuit people relate to the glaciers in the Yukon area (362). Glaciers are not just objects or static scenery, but also boundaries to live by, materials to remember the family lineage, and the landscapes

to allow one to know about changes to the whole environment. In the case of the Amis' rituals described above, the space that is relived and remembered is marked by pigs for the ancestors: pig parts that are evenly and hierarchically distributed after the memorial walk show the relationship strengthened by the co-memorizing members. Whereas fishes are the kind of animal which marks the end of funeral and the transition out of the state of bereavement, pigs are taken to every spot of the field and recreate the living space for the bereaved family members. In this case, even though pigs are commercially domesticated and purchased from local pig farms (albeit run by the villagers themselves), it is the symbolical dyad with fish which demarcates the end of a ritual process. Pigs are brought to different points and shown as critical elements of the lived space. Fish, by contrast, marks the geographical limits of space. No commercially purchased fish is allowed since it has to reveal natural boundaries. As pigs represent the inner household space and fish the outer wild space, Lidaw Amis people's notion of the world and human relationship is well defined by the use of pigs and fish. While the resources are gradually limited due to the change of subsistence strategies and no longer hunt from the nearby hill, pigs still lead the way for Amis to renew and reclaim their connection to the landscape and ancestral paths.

### **Conclusion: Ritual Landscapes and Environmental Change in the Planetary Emergency**

In the preceding cases and discussions, I have shown how Indigenous Amis people changed their ritual practice in response to several environmental changes. Routes for the boat ritual were affected by urbanization and colonial policies, the decreasing number of birds resulted in changes to the bird feast and the shamanic calling of bird spirits, and finally the pigs presented in domestic rituals redress the boundary of city and tribal space as new ritual landscapes. In the case of animals and their relation to Amis practices, I consider the changes of urban infrastructure and species availability of environmental change in ritual landscapes as part of an extensive understanding of human-species-space networking. Birds are persistent and protective actors in the environment which youngsters want to imitate, emulate, and embody. The feather crown that Amis male age-group members wear is the epitome of this aspiration. The second example is the transformation of shamanic power and crop growth. In this case, birds are both the competitors and the feeding agents for a harvest of spiritual power and for cultivating the harvest. Thirdly, pigs serve as the vehicle for communication with the ancestors and for the definition of boundaries. In these cases, the fish-bird-pig connection is the key to the Lidaw Amis,

showing the renewal of relationships based on the changing surroundings. The Anthropocene reveals the critical issue of human survival, from both historical and philosophical perspectives. Indigenous philosopher Kyle Whyte has been turning the challenge of climate change and its impacts on the environment into the notion of “renewing relatives,” considering different species and non-human actors in Indigenous surroundings as meaningful “relatives” to provide survival needs and networking support (206-15). What species can tell us about the Amis has been shown in the work of the male age groups, sworn siblings, and shaman ritual holders. We thus can see multispecies networks in this entangled presence with catching/releasing rituals, urban construction of infrastructure, and public walking of kinship commemorations; it has created a discursive realm for the Amis to re-enact their lives.

Drawing from these cases, we see how contemporary Amis people engage with ritual processes differently from their ancestors, but still connect deeply with certain ritual species that provide meaning for them. While the environmental changes affecting the Amis are not necessarily instances of “planetary emergency,” they are illustrative of the mobilized frameworks to which the ritual landscapes of indigenous peoples all over the world are forced to adjust in the Anthropocene.

Marlene Brant Castellano has explained indigenous ethics and traditional knowledge by an “arboreal structure” (100): the whole canopy is individual behaviors, branches are traditional customs, leaves and sticks are ethical conducts, and the trunk is value and behavioral norms. At the very bottom it is the root that supports the whole tree which represents multispecies and spiritual world for the cycle of sustainable livelihood. Following such a model, the structure also represents multispecies relationships in the era of Anthropocene: when human beings change the infrastructure at the root, the canopy of kinship relationship with species will be greatly affected. Due to the shift of subsistence strategies and living environments, the role of animals in the rituals has been greatly changed. The symbol for collective work of male age-grade groups is the fish in the sea. When public access to the sea was restricted by the government, Amis males turned to fishing in the river estuary or even in the pond of a tourist park where their traditional territory is privatized. Birds traditionally caught as treats for exchange laborers during the harvest season are now commercially taken from areas in the South. Pigs for domestic rituals were originally hunted in the lower hill forest; now they are purchased from local Amis farmers who raise them for commercial purposes. As we can see, these changes exemplify the kinds of environmental change which marked different settings and reactions to the colonial, and consequently reconstituted Amis-animals relationships in ritual activities.



Regarding the notion of environmental change discussed in the beginning of this paper, it is further demonstrated in its varieties here. We see how environmental change is revealed by the change of actants (as suggested by ANT). With the alteration of animal availability and the embodied meaning brought by them, the making of networks is changed. However, it is not only the transition of animal migration or domestication that redefine the boundaries of ritual landscapes, but also the colonial legacies and state policies that change the discourse within the ritual framework. The reflexive awareness about the colonial impact which changed the animal-human relationship is the frame of our planetary emergency here. While the Amis accepted the policy of banning certain rituals and also engaged with wage labor as enforced by the Japanese colonial government or the post-war settler nation-state of Han people, the embodiment of environmental change speaks not only to the ontological challenges which Eduardo Kohn proposed. It also illustrates Paul Nadasdy's discussion of the colonial impacts, where he argues that both the presumed ontological universality of actor-networks proposed by ANT and the static conception of rituals are equally flawed. Seeing Amis ritual practice as a cultural adaptation to transculturality and the issue of planetary emergency enables us to understand that the concept of an "indeterminate" world is a better tool for anti-colonial politics, and may enable a transitional evaluation from the ritual landscapes to contemporary infrastructures. The ritual landscapes here reflect the history of Amis access to the environment, and therefore the constitution of subjectivity under such circumstances. What I have called "environmental change," along with indigenous subjectivity, shows how ritual authenticity—presented in shamanic practice, working with government-funded cultural festival of bird feast, and boundary crossing from tribal space to the city—all co-create an indeterminate arena for both Amis elders and youth, and indigenous ritual and public recognition. In the company of their multispecies interlocutors facing transculturality and the planetary emergency revealed in ritual landscapes, the Amis are now living in the world that encounters more challenges and create further meaning than their ancestors.

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### About the Author

Yi-tze Lee is an anthropologist by training. He is currently an Associate Professor at the Department of Ethnic Relations and Cultures, National Dong Hwa University, Taiwan. His research interests cover contemporary Amis culture, ritual performance, indigenous knowledge systems, and STS. He is currently working on two projects: one is on the relationship between infrastructure and multispecies networks, and another is on the transition of Amis livelihood due to urbanization and environmental changes.

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