

**Christianity, local knowledge and the development of organic  
agriculture:  
a case study from one Atayal village in northern Taiwan**

**Abstract**

Organic agriculture has been becoming a new way of social reproduction in Taiwan since the early 1990s. As the need of organic food increases over the past decade, more and more indigenous farmers engage in organic farming. Notably, several previous studies have found that Christianity and local knowledge play important roles in facilitating the development of organic agriculture in the indigenous communities of Taiwan. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships among Christianity, local knowledge and the development of organic agriculture in one Atayal village in northern Taiwan. The village is chosen for this study because it is the first indigenous village to conduct organic farming and has become a model of developing organic agriculture for many other indigenous communities. One-year of ethnographic fieldwork was carried out between August 2010 and July 2011. In-depth interviews and participant observations were taken place with the Atayal farmers who were engaging in organic farming for studying their cognitive processes, human behaviors and material creations related to the produce of organic foods. Several factors related to the development of organic agriculture are identified. Firstly, Christianity has a great influence on the Atayal farmers' everyday lives. All the organic farmers of the Atayal submit themselves to God's teaching, and believe that practicing organic farming is a way of following God. Notably, the Atayal farmers attribute their strong Christian faith back to the Charismatic Movement took place between the 1970s and 1990s. As many of them claim themselves as the witnesses of the miracles during the movement, they believe that practicing organic agriculture is a solution of environmental, health and economic crisis that the community is facing. Secondly, the local knowledge, coupled with new introduced agricultural techniques, has led to a peculiar way to produce organic foods. With the Korean missionaries' help, several the Atayal farmers visited an organic farm and learned new techniques for conducting organic agriculture in Korea in the early 2000s. Instead of standing with the Korean techniques, the Atayal farmers take a step further to integrate their local knowledge to create new farming crafts for cultivating organic crops in the ecosystem. For instance, the fungicides and pesticides used by the Atayal farmers to prevent plant diseases consist of several native plant species. As a result, the Atayal

creativity leads to a cultural reproduction and results in a localized organic agriculture. Since practicing organic farming continues a trend in many indigenous communities in Taiwan, this study provides insight into the current development of organic agriculture in an Atayal village. It may become a model for indigenous people who are residing in a similar ecosystem as well as the Atayal farmers do and would like to pursue sustainable agriculture.