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Gods of the Modekngei Religion in Belau

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A god appeared to a man named Tamadad in Chol village of Babeldaob Island, Belau, around 1914. He was a shamanistic mediator between the village god, Ngirchomkuul, and the Chol villagers, but his conduct on this particular occasion was unusual. Shortly thereafter, Ongesi, his brother-in-law, and his friend Runguul, joined Tamadad in his religious activities. They named their religion Modekngei (lit. to get together). Many Belauans began to follow them and flocked to Chol village. It is most interesting to examine the reasons why so many people suddenly switched their allegiance from traditional gods of their own to Tamadad's god. The following activities of the leaders may be cited as the main factors which attracted the general public to the new religion: a) healing the sick, b) prophecy, c) money-making, d) abolishment of food taboos and banishment of old gods, e) incorporation of various local gods and f) introduction of Christian elements.

This paper analyzes, in particular, the nature of one of these factors, "incorporation of various local gods" with reference to actual cases I collected during my field study. Although a dozen of gods appears in *keseke*s (hymns), four gods seem to be important: Ngirchomkuul (or Ngirchomkuul Eskristo), Eskristo, Chosecheluib ra Delbong and Ngirabeleliu. Ngirchomkuul had been the village god of Chol, but when he was adopted by Modekngei, his character was transformed. Often he appears in the *keseke*s in combination with Jesus Christ under the name of Ngirchomkuul Eskristo. Chosecheluib ra Delbong was the village god of Delbong village and badly injured in a war. In the *keseke*s great stress is placed on describing the breeding and death of this god. Because of his tragic character Chosecheluib ra Delbong seems to be Jesus Christ in this religion. Ngirabeleliu was the god of Peleliu Island and regarded as the oldest of all Belauan gods by Peleliu people. But neither of them had any relation with Tamadad. Modekngei is a type of religion which has neither well-defined doctrine nor a zeal of missionary work. In the process of diffusion of such a religion, gods or objects of worship may be changed according to the intentions and wishes of the people who accept it. The aim of this paper is to examine how Modekngei incorporated local gods into it on diffusion.

Keywords: Modekngei, new religion, culture change, new gods, Belau.

THE DIFFUSION OF A NEW RELIGION

If a new religion is to supersede a traditional religion, it hardly need be said that those who would adopt the new one must be prepared to accept it. New religions can be classified into two general types. One is comprised of the so-called "great" religions, such as Christianity, which are earnestly promoted by missionaries. The other type is comprised primarily of "new" religions, which, in most cases, are not accompanied by missionary efforts. The Modekngai religion, the subject of this paper, belongs to the latter type.

A religion not promoted by missionaries is almost always accepted voluntarily. Accordingly, it is usually the case that the intentions and wishes of the people are eventually incorporated into the new religion itself. Unlike the great religions which have well-defined religious doctrines and scriptures, the success of a new religion is crucially dependent on the personal qualities and charisma of the founder and his or her closest associates. Thus the doctrines and gods of new religions are often transformed over time and in the course of geographical diffusion.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the process of diversification of the god, or of the objects of worship, of the Modekngai religion which originated in Belau, in the Western Caroline Islands of Micronesia. The examination of this subject will be prefaced with a brief description of the traditional religion of Belau.

Traditional Religion in Belau

The traditional religious system of Belau was typified by the existence of supernatural beings, such as spirits of the dead (*delep*), spirits of ancestors (*bladek*) and gods (*chelid*). The spirit which leaves the human body upon death is called the spirit of the dead (*delep*). According to the belief, no matter where a person died on Belau, the *delep* travelled to the southern coast of Angaur Island (*Ngedeloch*), and then ascended to heaven from there. Among these spirits of the dead were the spirits of one's ancestors (*bladek*). In Telchalb, one of the levels of heaven, these spirits led a life resembling that of their living relatives on earth. It was thought that, since the spirits of ancestors fed on the shadow of the taro plants growing on earth, their descendants were obliged to take care of the taro patches. Babies were believed to be gifts from the ancestor spirits. As long as their descendants conducted themselves correctly, the ancestor spirits protected them. However, if a descendant angered ancestor spirits that person was likely to fall ill.

There were two types of gods in traditional Belauan religion: village gods (*chelid re beluu*) and gods related to kin groups. Each village had its own god. The latter included gods of descent group (*chelid re kebliil* or *chelid re telungalek*) and gods of family (*chelid re blai*). All were able to communicate with the living through shamanistic mediators.

There were two methods of communication between the gods and humans. One was possession. In this method the god possessed the body of the mediating shaman and talked to a client directly through the shaman's mouth. In the

other method of communication the god descended from heaven in response to a call from the mediator, and answered questions posed by a client. In these cases, the mediator never entered into a state of trance. The client could hear the voice of the god, and usually understood what was said. When he could not understand the meaning, the mediator translated it from the devine language into human language. However, since a curtain of coconut leaves was hung between the place to which the god descended and the human beings, they were not able to see the god.

In the traditional religion, people were strictly bound to observe food taboos

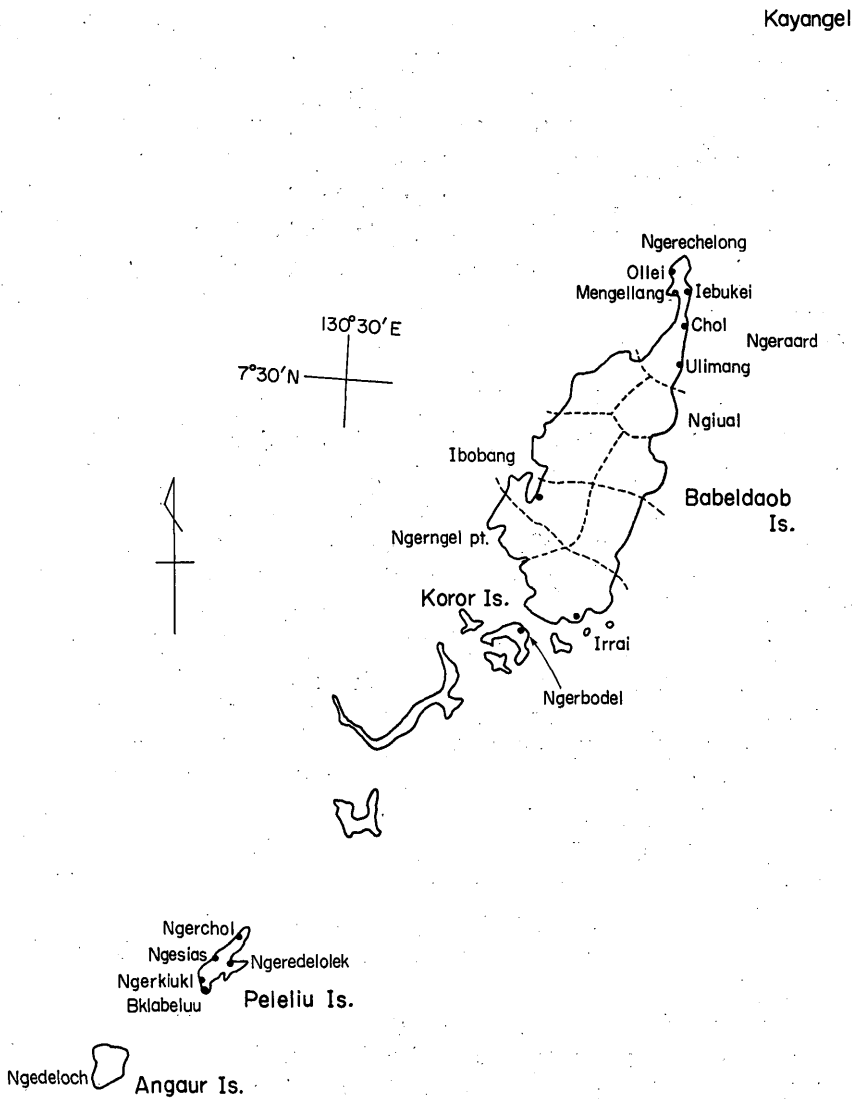


Figure 1. Map of Belau

prescribed by their respective god. If a person violated these taboos the gods could bring illness or even death. The gods also demanded money and food from the people. In return, on request, the gods would make various prophecies, predict natural calamities, and lend support to the villagers in times of warfare.

Illness and death, however, stemmed not only from the anger of the gods or ancestor spirits. Sorcery (*temall*) could also cause illness or death. A sorcerer who had a mastery of *temall* was called *pokolai*. When someone became ill, the cause was first identified by a diviner (*mengelil*). If it was revealed that the illness had been caused by a particular sorcerer white magic (*techolb*) was performed to counter the effect of the sorcery. A person proficient in *techolb* was called *melecholb*.

In the late 19th century the Caroline Islands became Spanish territory. Catholic missionary work in Belau was initiated in 1891 by the Capuchins. The major objectives of the missionaries were to put a stop to warfare and institutionalized prostitution (*mengol* or *blolobel*), and to replace the traditional religion with Christianity as rapidly as possible. In 1899, the islands of Micronesia, including the Caroline Islands, were sold to Germany by the Spanish Government. During the German period missionary work was earnestly continued by German Capuchins. The houses of the gods were destroyed in every village, and sorcery and divination were banned. Very few diviners or shamans remained by the time the Japanese Navy occupied the islands.

The History of the Modekngei Religion

The origin of the Modekngei religion can be traced back to about 1914, when a god appeared to a man named *Tamadad*, who was residing in Chol village, at the northern end of Babeldaob Island. The year 1914 was marked by Japan's entry into World War I, under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. This led to the occupation by the Japanese Navy of Micronesia, which hitherto had been German territory.

Tamadad was a *rubak* (a titled man) in Chol village, with the second-ranking title of *Kodep*. Since the *Kodep* served as the shaman who mediated with the village god, *Ngirchomkuul*, the appearance of this god to Tamadad was in itself nothing extraordinary. However, Tamadad's conduct on that particular occasion was seen to be unusual and eccentric. Shortly thereafter Tamadad's brother-in-law, Ongesi, joined him in his religious activities. They sang songs and erected a cross on Tangelbad, a nearby hill. They began to attract an increasing number of followers when they resurrected a woman who everyone thought to be dead. Later, Tamadad's friend Ruguul then joined the two brothers, and the three engaged in active religious activities. The Belauan term *Modekngei* means "to get together (*dokngei*)" or "to be together (*dmak*)".

The Japanese Navy soon began to suppress these activities. By the Japanese Navy and the South Sea Bureau which replaced the naval rule in 1922 the leaders—Tamadad, Ongesi and Rnguul—were arrested several times, interrogated on suspicion of swindling and adultery, and imprisoned. Tamadad died in Koror prison, around

1924. Ongesi was confined in a jail on Saipan during World War II, and died there immediately after his release following the War. Runguul alone survived, and he exerted great efforts to revive the Modekngei religion in the postwar years. Today, Ngirchobeketang, a grandson of Tamadad, is the leader of the religion. His activities are not limited to the religious sphere alone, but have extended into economic and educational areas through the establishment of the Belau Modekngei Cooperative Association and the Belau Modekngei School. The number of the followers, however, has decreased in comparison with the early years of the religion.

The Strategy of the Modekngei Religion

The most interesting aspect of the early Modekngei movement was why so many people suddenly switched their allegiance from traditional gods to Tamadad's god. Since the god had appeared to Tamadad, the leaders of Modekngei had engaged in various religious activities. However, it appears that they were not particularly eager to propagate their own religion. Rather the people, having heard about their remarkable acts, apparently went to visit Chol village or requested the leaders to visit their own villages.

The following six activities may be cited as the main factors which attracted the general public to the new religion:

- a) healing the sick,
- b) prophecy,
- c) money-making,
- d) abolishment of food taboos and banishment of old gods,
- e) incorporation of various local gods, and
- f) introduction of Christian elements.

Each of these activities will be discussed in detail below.

a) HEALING THE SICK

After, the Japanese Navy occupied Micronesia, the South Sea Navy Defence Unit, which now began to govern the islands, soon established clinics, where naval surgeons provided medical treatment for the islanders. In 1918, civilian doctors began practicing medicine on the islands, and, in 1922, a hospital was established by the South Sea Bureau in Koror.

Despite these efforts of the Japanese Government modern medicine was not well received by the Belauans. This was largely because the Belauans firmly believed that all diseases were caused by the spirits of ancestors, gods or by sorcery. This belief had survived even though the activities of diviners, white magicians and shamans, whose task it was to identify the cause of and cure diseases, had been prohibited during the German era, and had already diminished when the Japanese Navy arrived. Thus, at that time, there was an absence of specialists in traditional medicine.

If the Modekngei religion had been born during the period of German rule, there is little doubt that the type of supernatural healing practiced by its leaders would

have been subjected to strict control by the German Government. In contrast, the Japanese Government seemed to have little interest in religious matters, and it was not until 1917 that the Japanese Navy interrogated Tamadad and Ongesi. The interrogation was triggered by the complaint of a Belauan man named Omang. One of Omang's relatives received medical treatment from the Modekngei leaders, and paid them a fee. However, although recovery had been guaranteed, the patient died soon after returning to his village. Omang was infuriated by this, and appealed to the Japanese Navy, claiming fraud.

As a result of this incident, Tamadad and Ongesi were arrested and imprisoned in Koror jail. However, on release from prison the two leaders continued their healing activities. It appears that neither the Japanese Navy nor the South Sea Bureau found their involvement in quasimedical practices to be sufficient reason to restrict their activities. Although they were imprisoned several times, the reasons each case were either fraud or adultery with wives of followers.

Thus, Modekngei was able to fill the void that had been created in the sphere of medicine. The Belauan people, who had not been able to adapt to modern medicine but lacked specialists versed in traditional medical practices, were easily attracted by talk that there were people capable of healing illness.

b) PROPHECY

Prophets were also placed under strict control by the German Government. Throughout history, humans have often listened to the words of prophets. Thus one can easily imagine how earnestly the Belauan people sought answers through prophecy in the midst of drastic, unprecedented historical changes, beginning with the first contact with Englishmen, the periods of Spanish and German rule, and subsequent control by Japan. However, despite the Belauans' inner aspirations, they could find no prophets to listen to.

Ongesi made various prophecies, including several famous predictions such as the safe return of the crew members from the wrecked ferry steamer *Midori*, and the outbreak of World War II. One can easily visualize the intrigued islanders rushing to the village of Chol to listen to the words of the prophet.

c) MONEY-MAKING

For the Belauans, money (*udoud*) has been the sole determinant of the social status of individuals, descent groups and villages. It is not an exaggeration to say that they put the highest value on *udoud*, and that the acquisition of *udoud* is the ultimate aim of their life. However, the traditional gods did not provide any monetary assistance to the people. Rather, they demanded money from them.

The leaders of the Modekngei religion collected money from the followers to offer up to the gods. These offerings were called "blessings" (*mengedaol*). After being "blessed" the money was returned to the original owner. This was thought to bring good fortune to the person and help him or her to become rich. Runguul,

in particular, began to be recognized as an expert in money-making. He was invited to many meetings held to raise money (e.g., as in *ocheraol*). After World War II Runguul organized *mujin* (mutual financing association). The *mujin* appears to have been quite effective not only in making-money but also in tightening the bonds among the followers.

In view of the high value placed on money by the Belauans, it was only natural that a god who helped humans in their financial affairs would hold great attraction for them.

d) ABOLISHMENT OF FOOD TABOOS AND BANISHMENT OF OLD GODS

In the traditional religion, the gods of Belau had imposed stringent food taboos on the followers. It was believed that eating tabooed food would cause illness or death.

As mentioned earlier, the god of Chol village was Ngirchomkuul, and Tamadad, who had the title of *Kodep*, served as mediator between Ngirchomkuul and the Chol villagers. Foods which had been placed under taboo by Ngirchomkuul included bananas, large clams (*kim*), mangrove crabs, and red rayfish (*rrull*). In about 1922, however, Tamadad suddenly declared that the Chol villagers need not observe the food taboos. After the abolishment of food taboos in Chol he also told people in other villages that similar food taboos imposed by their gods could be ignored.

To abolish these taboos, the Modekngai leaders had to banish the gods who had imposed them. Tamadad and Ongesi had men (*doktang*) visit each house in the evening. The *doktang* would wave a red cloth shouting "Go away, devils (*diabolong*)!", to drive out the old gods. Meanwhile, the leaders ordered the villagers to bring the foods under taboo to a certain place and eat them together. The intention was to mitigate the fear of violating the taboo by having all the villagers eat together.

This was an obvious revolt against the traditional religion. It may have been that many villagers regarded the food taboos imposed by the traditional gods as a troublesome obligation. Or perhaps the traditional gods were looked upon by the villagers as dreadful beings rather than merciful gods. The general public, which had already recognized the superiority of Tamadad's god through the healing sick and prophecies of the Modekngai leaders, seems to have voluntarily requested the banishment of their traditional gods. The victory of Tamadad's god was solidified when the villagers realized that eating tabooed foods caused no harm to them at all. In other words, it was revealed to the villagers that the traditional gods who had imposed annoying food taboos and requested money were "evil gods".

The question why the Belauans had believed in such evil gods for so long can be explained by the ascension story of Chuodel, the god of Ngeredelolek village, on Peleliu Island. According to the story, Chuodel ascended to heaven after entrusting his tasks to the other gods and promising the grieving villagers that he would return. The gods to whom he had entrusted his duties, however, turned out to be evil gods, contrary to his intentions. Finally, Chuodel descended to Tamadad and expelled

the evil gods from the villagers.

e) INCORPORATION OF VARIOUS LOCAL GODS

This will be discussed in detail in the next section.

f) INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS

Tamadad and Ongesi erected a cross on a hill called Tangelbad, near Chol village. The cross was quite large, some 7 m in length and 2 m in width and was made of thick (about 15 cm × 15 cm) rectangular timber. After the death of Tamaded, Ongesi succeeded to the title of *Kodep*, and procured a small crucifix from a Catholic church in Japan. This crucifix became a sacred object which was passed from one *Kodep* to the next. Ngirchomkuul, the god of Chol village, is regarded by Modekngai followers as being identical to Jesus Christ.

Although a considerable number of Belauans discarded their traditional beliefs and converted to Christianity with the increasing influence of western culture, there must have been an equal number of people who were reluctant to let go of their traditions. In this respect the Modekngai religion, being a blend of Christian and traditional elements, seems to have created an ideal environment for many of those whose attitudes lay somewhere in between those of the reformists and the conservatives. Depending on the circumstances, the leaders presented the Modekngai religion as the indigenous religion of Belau or as identical with Catholicism.

As we have seen above, there were several factors which contributed to the diffusion of Modekngai in the early stages of its development. Some merely served to replace roles formerly played by traditional religion. Other factors contained reformative elements which attracted many people who were dissatisfied with traditional religion. Finally some factors proved attractive to people caught between the two categories.

The strategies adopted by Tamadad, Ongesi and Runguul, whether intentional or not, enabled the Modekngai religion to successfully attract many followers in its early developmental stage. In the following section, we will discuss with reference to actual cases the one remaining factor, the incorporation of various local gods.

GODS OF MODEKNGEI RELIGION

In religions with no definite doctrine, such as Modekngai, the followers usually have no clear-cut knowledge of the gods they worship. However, Ongesi and other leaders and influential members composed hymns (*keseke*s), which were customarily sung in church, and from these *keseke*s we can create a general outline of the religious doctrine of Modekngai. The gods which appear in these hymns are discussed below, through detailed analysis of 128 *keseke*s collected by the author during fieldwork.

More than a dozen of gods appear in these hymns. In addition there are nameless gods who are praised only as our "father", "mother", "lord" or "*uchel*" (god

or angel) in the hymns. Here I focus on the four major gods whose names appear frequently in the *keseke*s: Ngirchomkuul (or Ngirchomkuul Eskristo), Eskristo, Chosecheluib ra Delbong, and Ngirabelelieu.

Ngirchomkuul (or Ngirchomkuul Eskristo)

As mentioned above, Ngirchomkuul was the god of Chol village. Originally, Ngirchomkuul was feared by nearby villagers as the god of war, and issued various oracles to Chol inhabitants in response to requests by the *Kodep*. Since Tamadad served as *Kodep* at that time, it was only natural that Ngirchomkuul became the principal god of Modekngei. In fact, in 31 of 128 *keseke*s studied, Ngirchomkuul appeared either independently or in combination with the name of Eskristo (*i.e.*, Ngirchomkuul Eskristo).

The following *keseke*s describes the scene in which Ngirchomkuul appeared to the *Kodep* of Chol village.

Ngirchomkuul ngaruchei ral kot el ngara ngebard el mei, e ng mle metei ra Cheiml Choll, mle metei ra Cheiml Choll, losiik ra kodep le chad, miltik ra kodep le chad, me te mlo dmak e mor Chomkuul, me te mlo mesa tara kodep, te mlo dmak er terul kodep. Ngirchomkuul Esukristong. E dibechii a ngeklir a ngara modekngei, a ngeklir ar ngara modekngei, oldak ra rengul a beluu le chad, me kedo moba dital tekoi, ng omkuul lomkulel a beluu le chelid er kid, ng omkuul lomkulel a beluu le chelid lemei.

Ngirchomkuul, the superior, originally resided in a foreign land but came here later. When he descended to Five Chol (another name for Chol village), he looked for a human *Kodep*, and found a human *Kodep*. They went to Chomkuul (the name of the place where the house of Ngirchomkuul was built), where they met another *Kodep*. Two *Kodeps* joined together. Ngirchomkuul Eskristo. He named them Ngara-Modekngei (lit. being Modekngei). He named them Ngara-Modekngei. The heart of the world is united. Therefore, we hold only one word. This is the place where the anchor of the world is to be cast. This is the place where the anchor of the god's world to come is to be cast.

According to this hymn, the god discovered a human *Kodep*, who was probably Tamadad and went with him to a place named Chomkuul. There, they met another *Kodep*. It seems that this refers to Ongesi, although Ongesi did not become *Kodep* until after the death of Tamadad. Chomkuul, the name of the place where Ngirchomkuul's house was located, literally means a wharf stake for mooring canoes.

The following song describes the advent of Ngirchomkuul as well as the commandment which he brought with him down to earth.

Me ng Ngirchomkuul ngaruchei el keungel era kmal cheroid ra Telngatek ra Telchalb, re Chelchalb ra Cheldoech, e ng oba chedaol llach el metengel era Cheim Choll. Metengel era Cheim Choll. Ng ullabe merous meker di mlo chemur

betok lechad, di mlo chemur betok lechad. Me sel mo kedung mekedelad mo ungil ra rechel er bab, me torolii me ng mo keunger ra kadikm ra merreder ngara eanged, a merreder ngara eanged, di delad ma demad ma Ngirchomkuul ngaruchei.

Ngirchomkuul, the superior, lives in a very distant place of Telngatek in Telchalb (one of the levels in heaven). He resides in Chelchalb in Cheldoech (another level in heaven), but descends to Five Chol with a sacred commandment. Descends to Five Chol. He had the commandment and distributed it to many people. Distributed it to many people. If we are well-behaved and observe the commandment, *uchel* (gods or angels) above are content. Therefore, one is guided to the right of the heavenly rulers, and sits there. The rulers residing in heaven are our mother, father and Ngirchomkuul, the superior, and no one else.

Ngirchomkuul descended to earth and gave medicine (*kar*), the sacred commandment (*llach*), and the key to those who believed in him. There are many *keseke*s which deal with medicine, reflecting the emphasis placed on healing in the Modekngai religion. The actual substance of this medicine, however, is described only very vaguely, using terms such as "water", "blood", "wood" and "spears". It is improbable that these *keseke*s have contributed in any way to the oral tradition of medical knowledge.

The exact nature of the commandment is even more difficult to determine. In many *keseke*s the concept of *kedung* (being well-behaved and law-abiding) is stressed as the moral standard of Modekngai believers. Therefore, we may reasonably assume that the observance of this moral standard is the equivalent of observance of the commandment itself. Followers of the Modekngai religion are also to be given the key to the basket (*tet*) in Ollei, a village contiguous to Chol village. This key allows them access to the money contained in the basket.

These gifts of Ngirchomkuul to the people—medicine, the commandment, and the key—are unique to new Ngirchomkuul in the Modekngai doctrine. The old tradition of Ngirchomkuul as the village god of Chol did not contain these elements.

Eskristo

In some *keseke*s narratives from the Bible are incorporated without major modification.

A Esus Kristo a mlechell ra chereomel el ngara Betlehem, er chongolel a charm, er chongolel a charm. Me tedei rubak a mla ra ongos, e mlsang a biuch el kirel a Esukristo, me tulemdid el mo metika bedengel ngara kebliil a Dabide me tulsus e chilat er ngii, me ng omekngeltengat er tir, ng omekngeltengat er tir, misei a uchul e tengeltengat.

Eskristo was born in a manger in the forest of Betlehem, in a manger, in a manger. Three *rubak* were in a eastern land, and saw the star related to Eskristo. As they followed the star, they find that He is of the *kebliil* (descent

group) of Dabide. They bowed to Eskristo. Eskristo blesses them. Eskristo blesses them. This is why they are happy.

Another *keseke*s describes how Eskristo, after coming of age, miraculously resurrected a dead person and was killed by jealous people. Still another *keseke*s tells the story of the Resurrection: *i.e.*, how Eskristo died on the crucifix and was buried, but on the seventh day after his death arose, breaking the cement of his tomb.

Another *keseke*s describing the crucifixion of Eskristo tells us that Dirremellomes (the goddess of light) cried deeply, and that Modekngei followers must not drink alcoholic beverages because Eskristo was tortured on the crucifix by evil people who forced him to drink liquor laced with cayenne pepper.

The following *keseke*s is embellished with Christian elements, but its substance is similar to the *keseke*s on page 67. The god's name here is Ngirchomkuul Eskristo.

Ngirchomkuul Esukristong ral kot el ngara Dois el mei, e ng mle ra ked er Obichang, ng mle ra ked er Obichang, llengerull rar uchel e omiich a klungiaolel Belau, ng omiich a klungiaolel Belau, e mo misur e mer e miteklii e mer Chomkuul kingelel, me Chomkuul kingelel. Me ked milsang cholengchelel kerus el mla ra Tangelbad, kerus el ngara Tangelbad, leng kingellel a delad ma demad ma Ngirchomkuul Esukristong. Teual bulis a mlo mkelii, me ng uchula belsel Belau, ng uchula belsel Belau, me chelecha te blals ar chad, ng uchule te blals ar chad, me kera bel metel meriou e tira mo medengei kirir.

Ngirchomkuul Eskristo once lived in Germany and came here later. He came to a grassy hill (*ked*) in Obiang, came to the grassy hill in Obiang. The hill is the place where *uchel* (god) rests and shifts good things about Belau. There he makes a turn, and goes to his seat in Chomkuul. As evidence we saw the cross which was in Tangelbad, the cross which is in Tangelbad. This is the place for our mother, father and Ngirchomkuul Eskristo. Four policemen threw down the cross. It is the cause of the debt of Belau. It is the cause of the debt of Belau. This is why today people are in debt. This is the cause of the debt of the people. Therefore, when he descends to earth, people become aware of their own debt.

According to the above *keseke*s, Ngirchomkuul Eskristo came from Germany. It is presumed that this reference stems from the Belauans' many years of contact with German Catholic missionaries. Tangelbad is the hill on which Tamadad and Ongesi erected the large cross. Who, then, are the four policemen in the above *keseke*s? It is likely that "four policemen" are a symbol of the harsh suppression of the Modekngei religion by the Japanese authorities. However, there is no record of Japanese policemen having torn down the cross on Tangelbad. The term *blals*, meaning the "man's debt", appears to have been introduced from Christian teachings.

Thus far, we have analyzed several *keseke*s in reference to Ngirchomkuul (Ngirchomkuul Eskristo) and Eskristo. Figure 2 summarizes the character of these gods in a much simplified form.

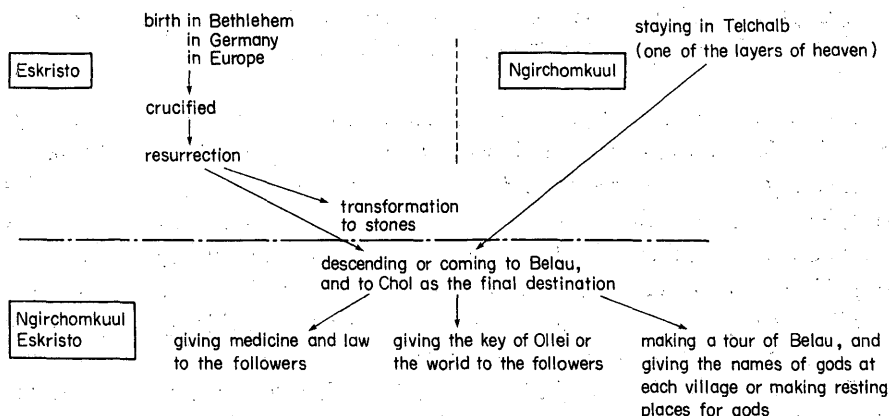


Figure 2. Ngirchomkuul Eskristo

It is noteworthy that in every *kesekes* Ngirchomkuul arrived in Chol village from some distant place, such as heaven or a foreign country (e.g., Germany), despite originally being the god of Chol village. This indicates that Modekngai followers recognize Ngirchomkuul as a deity distinct from the traditional god of Chol, and that he has undergone a character transformation through association with Eskristo. Eskristo, on the other hand, was born in a foreign land and died on a crucifix. After his resurrection he appeared in Belau, becoming Ngirchomkuul Eskristo. Although the origin of these two gods was different, their identities eventually merged on Belau.

Chosecheluib ra Delbong

The name *Chosecheluib ra Delbong* means “Chosecheluib of Delbong village”. Delbong was once a village in Ngerechelong state, but had been deserted by the time of Krämer’s arrival on the island [KRAMER 1919: 39]. Chosecheluib (lit. *cheluib* “turtle shell”) was the god of this village. As the name implies, the entire surface of Chosecheluib’s body was covered with turtle shell, which made him a most invincible god in times of war.

Once upon a time, a war broke out between Ollei and Ngeraard village. The former requested nearby Delbong village for support, while the latter requested Ngerbodel village, located on the northern coast of Koror Island, to send reinforcements. In Ngerbodel village there lived a god named Bekeungerbodel (*bekeu* means “brave”), a well-known warrior god.

Holding a large spear, Bekeungerbodel boarded a canoe of the men’s club (*cheldebechel*) of Ngeraard, and approached the coast of Ollei just as the moon came out. The warriors on both sides introduced themselves to each other in the traditional Belauan manner before commencing the battle. To counter the enemy’s attack on the coast of Ollei, Chosecheluib ra Delbong opened his mouth wide to announce his name. Bekeungerbodel, who had been waiting for such an opportunity, seized his chance and threw the spear into the mouth of Chosecheluib ra

Delbong. The spear lodged in the god's mouth, blood streaming from his tongue. It is said that Bekeungerbodel then carried away the injured Chosecheluib ra Delbong. A spear 20 cm in diameter and 9 m in length, which was said to be the spear used by Bekeungerbodel on that occasion, was stored until the period of Japanese domination in the meeting house (*bai*) of Ngerbodel village.

There are many *kesekes* concerning Chosecheluib ra Delbong, numbering second only to those about Ngirchomkuul Eskristo. Most *kesekes* about Chosecheluib ra Delbong describe his death or injury in that battle.

A Chosecheluib ra Delbong el blekeu e meterkaki, ma blekengel a ngara sils, a blekeu a ngara sils, e memetei ra Delbong el beluu, memetei ra Delbong el beluu. E dmauch a lild ra mekemad, e dmauch a lild ra mekemad. E ng mai el more rurt, a bedengel euid el Ngerechelong, kerker ra medal Ngerulloang, kerker ra medal Ngerulloang mou kirkir e moldiu. E te mrechi, me ng moldiu, e te mrechi, me nguldudk a chetechat ra ngerel, e te medelij ra Ngerbelang, e ng momisur el meche bedengel, momisur el meche bedengel, e riieda ng el mora eanged, me ng kiung er sel klou el btuch er bab.

Chosecheluib ra Delbong is very brave and careless. His courage is in the sun, courage is in the sun. He descends to Delbong village, descends to Delbong village. There he makes a spear for fighting, makes a spear for fighting, and goes to a battle with the spear. Seven bodies of Ngerechelong. In a shoal in front of Ngerulloang, in a shoal in front of Ngerulloang (a small islet in Ngerechelong state), he shouts in a shrill voice. Then, they stab him with a spear, he shouts, and they stab him with a spear, to injure his mouth. When they pull out the spear in Ngerbelang (a point of Ngaraard State), he transforms himself, leaving his body on this earth; transforms himself, leaving his body on this earth. He ascends to Heaven. He lives on that big star in heaven.

In the following *kesekes*, Chosecheluib, who died in the battle, went to a foreign country and was resurrected

Demad er Chosecheluib a mlo ra ngebard e meng di blengechel ra lidel, di blengechel ra lidel, e kollodenge ngebarde me le bol ngebengabek a bedengel, di bol ngebengabek a bedengel, e di kmedang loluut a telil, di kmedang loluut a telil, a demad a momkar rengii, melolekoi eng mlo mechas a rengir a rubak ra Choiroba rokir el meriou.

Our father, Chosecheluib, went to a foreign country with a spear in his mouth, with a spear in his mouth. If people in the foreign country should know the story, they would stroke his body. They would stroke his body. His breath will be given back soon, his breath will be given back soon, and our father will apply medicine to him. When the one treated with the medicine begins to speak, the *rubak* in entire Europe on this earth became astonished.

The following *kesekes* contains a grim description of the death of Chosecheluib.

Loburech Chosecheluib ra mekesong, me longedaol mekesong me longedaol ma ulebii ma mlo Rengrill, ma ulebid ra medala lild, ma ngilash mora btuch re bab, ngilash mora btuch re bab, e kesekesongel ra ruchel, kesekesongel ra ruchel. E di chetikol mengedecheduch, ele chural, ele chural a lengiluu ra Kerradel, me ng meketeketang lmedechel ra Ibetikla demad, Ibetikl. A demad a betik ra rengud a ngaruchei, betik ra rengud. Chural obekud el di ngara Ibetikl a lobetikle, ng mo omritela Madedengiil, e ng mo melkakla beluu, lomritele ng me melkakla beluu, lblekengela uchel re bab. Betokl diberienda bedengel albo longudla, delad ma demad e ng mo mechudle ng mengedecheduch, ng mo mechudle ng mengedecheduch, e di rasecha chural ma ngerel ng di rasecha chural ma ngerel, aike uigelel medechel ra Meteete, engii a kot er bab, maikal beluu a di budel, e diak lodenge rchelid ma rchad.

When Chosecheluib was stabbed with a spear in *mekesong* (environ of house), his body was blessed in *mekesong* and broken into pieces. Part of his body went to Rengrill, yet another part remained at the tip of the spear, and still another part goes up to a star in heaven, goes up to a star in heaven. *Uchel* praises it. *Uchel* praises it. He becomes reluctant to speak. His tongue, his tongue is pulled out in Kerradel (a place in Chelab village). It has been put aside in Ibetikl for a long time. Our father, we love him more than anybody else. We love him. The tongue of our Lord is in Ibetikl. When it is peeled from the ground, Mededengiil (ancient name of Ulimang village) quakes. The thunder will roll throughout the village. It quakes and the thunder rolls throughout the village. It is the courage of *Uchell* above. Although his body is scattered in many pieces, he is able to speak when our mother and father put them together. He is able to speak. His tongue and mouth are bloody. His tongue and mouth are bloody. His teeth are in Meteete, it is the top of the heaven. Therefore, every village is his skin. Gods and human beings do not know it.

Several geographical names are used to refer to indicate the place where Chosecheluib was injured. All of these hymns share the fact that Chosecheluib was

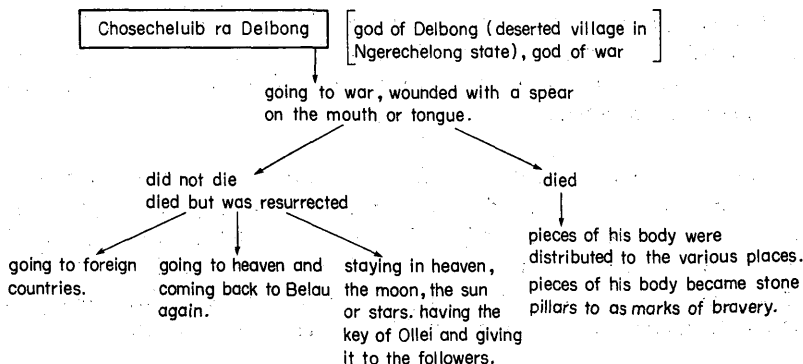


Figure 3. Chosecheluib ra Delbong

stabbed with a spear in battle. After his death he either was turned into stone pillars installed in various locations on Belau, or was resurrected and went to a foreign country, or ascended to a star in heaven. The characteristics of Chosecheluib are summarized in Fig. 3. Some have been added by Modekngai leaders to the traditional attributes of this deity.

Why, then, is Chosecheluib ra Delbong regarded as one of the main gods of the Modekngai religion? Like Chol, Delbong was a village inhabited by immigrants from Peleliu. However, the village was already deserted by the beginning of this century. Thus when the Modekngai religion came into being nobody lived in this village.

In all of the *keseke*s discussed so far, great stress is placed on describing the bleeding and death of Chosecheluib. In this respect this god seems to be an outstandingly tragic figure in Belauan mythology. In my opinion this tragic character overlaps to a degree the tragic image of Jesus Christ, who bled to death on the cross. It should also be noted that the *keseke*s do not refer to Bekeungerbodel as the killer of Chosecheluib ra Delbong. Instead the ambiguous pronoun "they" is used to indicate the killers. This leaves the impression that it was the opponents of the Modekngai religion who killed Chosecheluib. This leads to the conclusion that Chosecheluib ra Delbong became one of the important Modekngai gods precisely because of his tragic fate.

In the Modekngai doctrine Chosecheluib ra Delbong represents Jesus Christ crucified.

Gods such as Uchellechechulsiang and Uchelluchellechelid also appear in *keseke*s as tragic gods, though much less frequently. Uchellechechulsiang was the god of Iebukel village, in Ngerechelong state, and had wings that enabled him to fly. When he went to war to assist the warriors of an adjacent village, Ngial, at their request, and was stabbed in the chest with a spear by Rechesmechem, the god of the enemy. He fell in a shoal, shedding much blood. Uchelluchellechelid was also stabbed in the eye. Judging from the special emphasis given to the injury of both these gods, they might also be compared to Jesus Christ on the cross.

Ngirabeleliu

The name of this god, Ngirabeleliu, means "Mr. Peleliu". He is regarded as the god of all Peleliu Island.

The most powerful of the five villages on Peleliu was the above-mentioned Ngeredelolek village, whose god was named Chuodel (lit. "old"). The villagers of Ngeredelolek believed that this god was the oldest of all the gods in the Belau Islands. It is also said that Chuodel had a younger brother, called "the father".

These two descended from heaven to an islet and, after travelling for a while, finally came to Ngeredelolek village, where, they drove out an evil god named Ucherengebald (god of the west) whom the villagers dreaded and feared. They then declared themselves to be the gods of Ngeredelolek village. At the same time the elder brother changed his name to Ngirabeleliu, becoming the god of all Peleliu.

Shortly thereafter Ngirabeleliu married a woman named Chetilmei, who belonged to Aderuchei, the fourth-ranking descent group. The bride's name can be divided into two components, *chetil* and *mei*; the former meaning "to dislike" and the latter meaning "to come". As her name suggests, she did not welcome the coming of Ngirabeleliu from the very outset. Ngirabeleliu visited his wife's house, bringing betel nuts. However, he was not allowed into the house, but stood talking at the entrance. Although Chetilmei gave birth to Ngirabeleliu's son, she abandoned her husband and divorced him. The infuriated Ngirabeleliu then ascended to heaven. The son of Ngirabeleliu went to Ngerechelong state, in the north, where people began to call him Euidechelong (another name for Ngerechelong). They say that this boy later became the god named Ngirngerechelong, which means "Mr. Ngerechelong". The younger brother, "the father", remained single, and was rather violent. Some informants say that this god is Ngirchomkuul.

In any event, Chuodel (who later changed his name to Ngirabeleliu) left Peleliu. There are various accounts as to when and how he departed. When departing, this god bid farewell to several important persons, and promised that he would help the villagers of Peleliu, even when far away from them. He also promised to return one day.

Although the attributes of Ngirabeleliu are complex to the point of confusion, they can be summarized as follows. Originally, Chuodel was the god of Ngeredelolek village on Peleliu. However, as Ngeredelolek gradually became the strongest village on Peleliu, the status of its god, Chuodel, increased. Eventually Chuodel became known as the god of all Peleliu. Meanwhile, his name was changed to Ngirabeleliu. This transformation probably took place prior to the arrival of the Modekngai.

A younger brother, whose name was "the father", was placed in the company of Ngirabeleliu. The expression "the father" seems clearly to indicate Christian influence. Interestingly, some informants say that this god, "the father", is Ngirchomkuul. This means that Ngirchomkuul is the younger brother of Ngirabeleliu. The villagers of Chol once lived on Peleliu, but they left the island with their god Ngirchomkuul to settle in Chol. Therefore, to the Peleliu people the god of Modekngai, Ngirchomkuul, is a new god. The recognition of Ngirabeleliu and Ngirchomkuul as brothers may have been a contrivance to give the new god status.

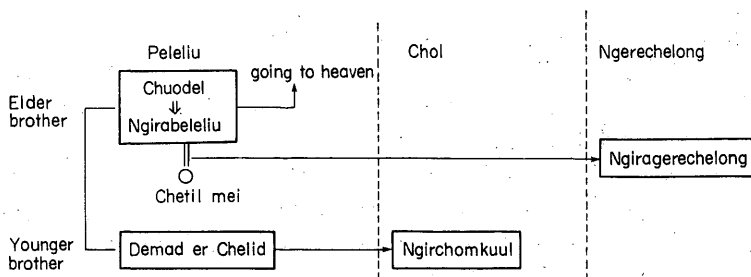


Figure 4. Ngirabeleliu and Ngirchomkuul—1

If that was the case, the fact Ngirabeleliu was designated as elder brother and Ngirchomkuul as younger brother would seem to reflect Peleliuan pride in having the oldest god on Belau. The people of Peleliu accepted the teachings of Tamadad, but would not accept his god. They thus incorporated Tamadad's god as the younger brother of their own god. They seemed determined to protect the superiority of Ngirabeleliu by any means, even going so far as to position Ngirngerechelong, god of Ngerechelong, as the son of Ngirabeleliu. Figure 4 illustrates this relationship.

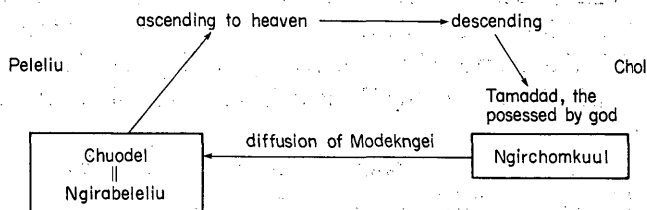


Figure 5. Ngirabeleliu and Ngirchomkuul—2

Another approach to the analysis of the relationship between Ngirabeleliu and Ngirchomkuul is to view the two gods as having merged through the ascension of Ngirabeleliu and the coming of Ngirchomkuul. Ngirabeleliu vanished, promising to return. It is not surprising, then, that when news of the god's appearance to Tamadad reached the Peleliu islanders, they automatically thought it was the second coming of Ngirabeleliu. According to this interpretation, Ngirchomkuul is Ngirabeleliu (Fig. 5). The following *keseke*s supports this account.

Odesangel a kekeriel beluu e kmal uchul a kerrekar, e di telkib, el mlocheluid, e di telkib el mlocheluid. Me ng ungil a dodakia rengud el modekngel, e deruula nglunguchel mor bab, el di kirel a delad ma demad. A delad ma demad a kmal di Imuk, el diak lolekoi. E Odesangel a cheloita llach, e Odesangel a cheloita llach, e mo chemau ar ngebard, me te metorde me te merael, me te metmuu ra chelechol ra Chol, metmuu ra chelechol ra Chol, beluu el beluu rar kedung le chad, el lilmolma llechul obekud, me te diule mekedelad el diule mekedelad el dialataml chilitii.

Odesangel (ancient name of Peleliu) is a small village. It is a true root of a tree. It engaged in a slight misconduct. It engaged in a slight misconduct. So, it is good to unite our hearts in Modekngel. And let us offer the prayer upward. It is the prayer for only our mother and father. Our mother and father are very quiet and utter no words, because Odesangel threw away the commandment, because Odesangel threw away the commandment. It is going to turn face about foreign countries. They are disappointed, and leave there. They go into the sandy beach of Chol, and go to the sandy beach of Chol, which is a village of well-behaved people. Those people observed the commandment of our Lord. And they keep the commandment very carefully, very carefully.

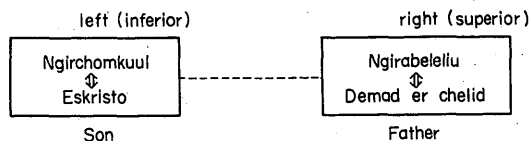


Figure 6. Ngirabeleliu and Ngirchomkuul—3

According to this *keseke*, the people of Peleliu did something wrong, did not observe the commandment of the Lord, and began looking toward foreign countries. The god went to Chol village, because the villagers there abided by the commandment which the people of Peleliu had ignored. Therefore, the god newly introduced to Peleliu from Chol, by Tamadad, was originally a god indigenous to Peleliu.

Still another interpretation recognizes Ngirabeleliu as "the father" and Ngirchomkuul as his son, "Eskristo". Seats in a Modekngai church building are divided into the right and left sides. Facing the altar, the right side is called *kadikm*, and the left side *katur*. The right side is deemed superior. Tamadad and Ongesi divided all the villages on Belau in accordance with this system. In the newly established central church, located in Ibobang village, in Ngetpang state, followers from every corner of Belau assemble on important occasions. On such occasions the important Modekngai followers from the various villages are seated in accordance with this division. Therefore, the villagers of Peleliu take their seats in the righthand section, because Peleliu Island is regarded as the father, whereas those of Chol are seated in the lefthand section, because Chol village is regarded as the son (Fig. 6).

This concludes the discussion of the four major gods: Ngirchomkuul (or Ngirchomkuul Eskristo), Eskristo, Chosecheluib ra Delbong, and Ngirabeleliu. In the following section the significance of the incorporation of these gods in the diffusion of the Modekngai religion is discussed.

INCORPORATION OF VARIOUS LOCAL GODS

As already mentioned, villages in the Belau Islands all had formerly had their own gods. The village god was deeply connected to the life of the villagers, having led them to victory in war, or forewarning them of a natural calamity. In other words, the village god extended divine favor only to the residents of a particular village.

Why, then, was the Modekngai religion, which originated in Chol village, accepted by people in so many other villages? I suspect that this wide acceptance became possible because the Modekngai god was no longer the exclusive god of Chol village. Even though the name of the major god of Modekngai, Ngirchomkuul, is identical to that of the traditional god of Chol village, his attributes are completely different (*vide supra*). As the religion diffused the Modekngai leaders did not refuse the existence of gods other than Ngirchomkuul. This was most evident on Peleliu Island

(*vide supra*). The leaders accepted the worship of Ngirabeleliu by the Peleliu islanders. The Modekngei followers then developed stories to explain the relationship between Ngirchomkuul and Ngirabeleliu.

When Tamadad and Ongesi arrived at Peleliu, *doktang*, carrying red cloth and a cane, assigned by Tamadad, visited the individual houses in the evening. The cloth and cane were inspired by Tamadad's words. The *doktang* knocked on the outside of the wall with the cane, shouting the following words and waving the red cloth.

Mtobed a mekngit le chelid el choridemi tiangel blai. E ng diak kimchedeiu lekemama chedal la Ngirabeleliu.

Evil god, go out of this house. We are not on your side. We are relatives of Ngirabeleliu.

After sweeping the old gods away Tamadad introduced Ngirabeleliu, the god acceptable to the Peleliu Islanders, without directly speaking of Ngirchomkuul. This Ngirabeleliu, also, was a new god, since the five villages on Peleliu each had their own god, as listed below:

Village	God
Ngeredelolek	Chuodel
Ngesias	Medeibelau
Ngerchol	Sachrboi
Ngerkiukl	Ucherekiukl
Bklabeluu	Ngiradedmelo

In other words, Ngirabeleliu was the god of the entire island of Peleliu. The new concept transcended and integrated the indigenous gods of the five villages. It stands to reason, then, that it would have been quite easy for the villagers on Peleliu to accept Ngirabeleliu. I am not sure if the invention of Ngirabeleliu was made by Modekngei leaders, or if the god had been recognized by Peleliu islanders before the arrival of Modekngei.

Similar contrivances were observed in Ngerechelong. Ngirchobeketang, the present leader of Modekngei, who came from Ngerechelong state, said that the god of Modekngei is Ngirngerechelong (lit. "Mr. Ngerechelong"). This god is also a newly conceived deity distinct from the village gods in Ngerechelong state. It should be recalled that the son born of Ngirabeleliu and his ex-wife became Ngirngerechelong. According to yet another account, this god was Ucherelusiang. Ucherelusiang was formerly the god of Iebukei village, in Ngerechelong state, but, when he saw his villagers gather around the Catholic missionaries, in order to obtain Western goods, he ran away to Mengellang village, in the same state. There he changed his name to Ngirngerechelong.

Indigenous gods are seldom incorporated into such religions as Christianity, during the course of propagation. A Christian missionary's first work is to expel

the traditional gods, so that the Christian god can become the sole object of worship for the converts. The syncretic combination of deities which takes place during the process of acceptance of a newly introduced religion is regarded as heresy in the eyes of true Christians.

In this respect, Modekngai was eclectic and broad-minded. It seemed to matter little which god was actually worshipped. One reason why Modekngai could magnanimously accept the gods of other villages can be found in the traditional ideology concerning the gods of Belau, which holds that the village gods, although they are given different names, are in essence one. This traditional ideology is reflected in the following *keseke*s.

Ngirchomkuul Esukristo ra kot el bel metel meriou, e ng mle metengel Ngerriabed, ra irechar ral kerremere a beluu, e ng mlo kiei Ngerutechong ngii a Mangidabrutkoel, el rirellia cherelled, rirellia a cherelled, e dibecheii a ngklel el Ngirabeleliou, e dibdibeche a ngklel betok el mo cherngel aikal beluu, a dibecheii a ngklel Belau, Ng dibecheii a ngklel Belau, e mora bad el tuich, e tuichii Belau el kmal milsang, tuichii Belau el kmal milsang, tuichii Belau el kmal milsang. Me seral bolorael e ng mlo languul ra Irrai, e dibecheii a ngklel mechir Medechii-belau, e te odesii a kingall lorengruul ra ruchel a bel metei el meriou. E ngii a kukmerael lou kiukl eou desbedall eloldingel a ngklel betok el di cherngel aikal beluu. Me Ngerechelong ulebengelel, ulebengelel Ngerechelong ulebengelel, e dibecheii a ngklel mechir, el Chosechluib ra Delbong.

E ruii a bedengel medechel bad el ngara rois ra Delbong mengelechotel a bledengel. E omakes e mora Tangelbad, iisei a Metangrengos el bad, el kot el kingellel obekud. E memtei riou el mera Chol mesal soal e dibecheii a ngklel mechir, me ng Ngirchomkuul ngara Chol.

E mo misur e miteklii e demad ra Uchelluchechelelid, demad ra Uchelluchechelelid, mesel bolliul ra Ngerngel e ng obekud ra Iechaderngel, ng obekud ra Iechaderngel. E di lsechii a sils er Ngerngel el blacheos, lo balleemesel a belulchad ng oballeemesel a belulchad. Me chelecha demeseked e dosus mo ra demad ma delad, e di chetengii Ngirabeleliou me Ngirchomkuul Esukristo.

Chelechal lemel metel meriou el mel memesumech ra kotel, e ng mora Chol el mor Chomkuul el kingellel, e dibecheii a ngekled a Ngaramodekngai. A ngekled a Ngaramodekngai oldak ra rengul a belulechad, me kedemo bo dital tekoi. Ng omekuul lomekullel a belulchelid er kid, ng omekuul lomekullel a belulchad er kid.

When "Ngirchomkuul Eskristo" descended to this earth for the first time, he descended to Ngeriabed. In olden times, the earth was still dark. He lived in Ngerutechong (a western point in Ngerechelong state). It was "Mangidabrutkoel" (the god who taught human beings the method of delivery). He gives birth to us all. He gives birth to us all, and names himself "Ngirabeleliu". Then, he names himself with different names, so that each name fits each village. And he names the islands Belau. He names the islands Belau. Next he goes to the stone of torch, and observed Belau carefully throwing the torch light onto it. He observed Belau carefully, throwing the

torch light onto it.

When he went around, rested in Irrai, and left his name "Medechibelau" there. He piled stones to make a seat so that *Uchels* can rest there on this earth. Then, he visited the east coast and the west coast in order to see his name applied to individual villages. Ngerechelong is at the end. Ngerechelong is at the end. He gives his name to it. It is "Chosecheluib ra Delbong".

Then, he makes his body with stones, and leaves it there. It is in Mt. Delbong, and reminds us of his courage. Then he moves forward step by step, and goes to Tangelbad. He becomes "Metangerengos". It is a stone. It is a supreme place where our Lord is seated. Then he comes down, and goes to Chol. He takes a liking to Chol, gives it his name and leaves it there. So it is "Ngirchomkuul" residing in Chol.

Then, he transforms himself again, and turns in the opposite direction to become our father, who is "Uchelluchelechelid". When he goes to Ngerngel Point (a point in Imeliik State), he becomes our Lord "Iechadengel", our Lord "Iechadengel." He creates the sun with a *blacheos* (*Gmelina Palanensis* H. J. Lam) tree growing in Ngerngel Point. It is light of the world. It is light of the world. Now we assemble here. We bow our heads to our father and mother, and praise "Ngirabeleliu" and "Ngirchomkuul Eskristo".

Now he descends, returns to his home land, and is at Chomkuul in Chol, where his seat is located. He names us Ngaramodekngei. Our name Ngaramodekngei unites the heart of the world. Accordingly, our heart becomes one. It is the place where the anchor of our world is to be cast. It is the place where the anchor of our world is to be cast.

In the above *keseke*s the names of gods are indicated by quotation marks. This *keseke*s shows that Ngirchomkuul, Chosecheluib ra Delbong, Ngirabeleliu, Uchelluchelechelid and all the other gods are one and the same. The story of one god visiting many villages on Belau, giving himself various names, and leaving such names in the places he visited can be found in traditional Belauan legends. This *keseke*s indicates that the idea has been inherited by the Modekngei religion.

CONCLUSION

In the process of diffusion the Modekngei religion drove out traditional village gods. However, Modekngei leaders did not immediately introduce the god of Chol, Ngirchomkuul, since it may have been resisted by the other villagers. Instead, Tamadad and Ongesi incorporated Ngirabeleliu or Ngirngerechelong, gods related to their land but not closely tied with any specific village. It is not known, however, whether they did this intentionally. When they introduced Ngirchomkuul he was no longer the traditional god of Chol village. Tamadad abolished food taboos imposed by the old Ngirchomkuul. Now Ngirchomkuul, who acquired new qualities through his association with Eskristo, was quite likely recognized by other villagers as a new god. The same is also true of Chosecheluib ra Delbong. The basis for the new religion's incorporation of the indigenous gods of various villages where it was spread seems to lie in the legends of one god travelling from village to village, as de-

scribed earlier.

Although several gods were incorporated one after another into the new religious system, the Modekngei leaders did not bother defining the genealogical relationship of these gods, or arranging their attributes in an orderly way. Since there were neither written records nor education for the followers and lay preachers, a need for such systematization was not recognised.

To date *keseke*s have been the only means of teaching the Modekngei doctrine. In general the *keseke*s have the following characteristics:

- a) They are extremely ambiguous and often incomprehensible. Since *keseke*s employ indirect, metaphoric expressions, it is possible to grasp only the meaning in outline;
- b) To make the hymn easy to sing, the lyric is composed with certain rhythms. This has resulted in many omissions as well as much repetition; and
- c) Although the contents are stereotyped and conventional, the subject matter seems to be improvised and is characterized by seemingly arbitrary additions. Since the lyrics are not polished, the stories are usually inconsistent, amounting to no more than a listing of unrelated matters.

These characteristics of the *keseke*s may have prevented any theological systematization of the Modekngei religion. In 1974, the Belau Modekngei School was established at Ibobang, in Ngatpang state. The present leader, Ngirchobeketang, the grandson of Tamadad, remarked that he was planning to provide religious education in this school. How the Modekngei doctrine will be systematized and what attempts will be made to develop religious education remain to be seen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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