CHAPTER V

Ritual specialists

While everyone has a role to play in religion, the contrast between laity and ritual specialists is central to Kayan religion and specialists serve as intermediaries to the supernatural realm. The Kayan explanation of ritual specialization is straightforward: people become ritual specialists because spirits have so decided. Specialists are also set apart from the laity by their use of liturgical languages.[1] Kayan religion is not the preserve of ritual specialists, but it cannot be understood without reference to them. The Baluy Kayan have two major categories of religious specialists, priests and shamans. Priests are experts trained in the performance of established ritual procedures, while shamans are religious practitioners whose efficacy derives directly from possession by spirit helpers. Priests share a common ritual language whose utterances can be translated into the vernacular. Shamans have their own idiosyncratic utterances which are largely incomprehensible.

With regard to religious knowledge, the laity is not an undifferentiated mass. They receive no formal religious instruction: the young learn by attending rituals and listening to adults' conversations. Children and young adults take a passive attitude towards religion and simply follow their elders' instructions, although they are not uninterested in the subject. Aristocrats tend to be more knowledgeable about religion than commoners: Kayan religion validates the stratification system and there are different sets of rituals for commoners and aristocrats. Men and women are equally knowledgeable about religion.

Dayong: a terminological note

The Kayan word '*dayong*' has several distinct but related meanings: 1. a category of spirit helpers, some of whom are the familiars of ritual specialists; 2. ritual specialists; 3. a specific ceremony performed by a priest.

1. Spirit helpers. At some point in their life, most people acquire *dayong* spirit

[1] With reference to literacy in agrarian societies, Gellner (1983:11) points out that 'The tendency of liturgical languages to become distinct from the vernacular is very strong: it is as if literacy alone did not create enough of a barrier between cleric and layman, as if the chasm between them had to be deepened, by making the language not merely recorded on an inaccessible script, but also incomprehensible when articulated'. The Kayan are one of the many examples where the presence of a liturgical, hermetic, language precedes literacy.

helpers, described as the 'spirit counterparts' (*hnda' dayong*) of the human being they protect. They manifest themselves by causing illness or bringing disturbing dreams to the person with whom they wish to be associated; they are identified through divination and the link between spirit and human is formally recognized (in a *dayong* ceremony). The human being is described as 'having been entered by a *dayong* spirit' (*putam dayong*): the spirit dwells within the person. In *adat Dipuy*, spirit helpers served as intermediaries between humans and the spirit country. They have lost some of their importance in *adat Bungan*, because most prayers are addressed directly to Bungan.

Most people have at least one *dayong* helper. A ritual name (*aran dayong*) is bestowed on every individual who acquires a *dayong* helper. The name is revealed in a dream or through divination. If the name is revealed in a dream, its validity is verified through divination. People with several spirit helpers have several ritual names. For lay people, such names are used only in ritual contexts. Priests, on the other hand, are usually known by a ritual name.

In *adat Dipuy*, people with *dayong* spirit helpers had to observe specific taboos. They were not allowed to eat sambhur deer, the common monkey (*brok*), wild cattle[2], snakes, the *dungan* fish, or the *hlan* (a scaleless fish). The edible caladium[3] was forbidden because it was thought to cause itching and breathlessness (*lama*). Chilli and ginger were also tabooed. Some of these foods had to be avoided only for the ten-day period of the *dayong* ceremony, others were tabooed for longer periods or on a permanent basis. Because household members eat together, all of them had to avoid tabooed foods during the period of the taboo. The prohibition on sambhur deer was permanent; those who could eat it cooked it outside the longhouse in order not to affect the others with its smell. Even in *adat Bungan*, some prohibitions remain. Specific taboos are linked to each spirit; when my neighbour Avun Imang ate some shrimps by mistake, he vomited throughout the night. Because of his link to a particular spirit, he should avoid eating monitor lizards or shrimps. On another occasion, he attributed a backache to an inadvertent transgression of this taboo. Priests who have *dayong* spirits from under the river (*hida hunge*) avoid the meat of the soft-shelled turtle.

2. Religious specialists. In its first meaning, '*dayong*' refers to spirit helpers and to their human counterparts. A more common meaning of *dayong* can be glossed as 'ritual specialist'. This can be seen in the expression *dayong tua*, which refers to those people who have *dayong* helpers but are not ritual specialists. '*Tua*' means 'only', 'merely', 'empty-handed'. An approximate translation of *dayong tua* is 'incomplete *dayong*'. A ritual specialist is a 'real *dayong*' (*dayong lan*).

2 *Keliho*, also called *temdoh talun*, 'the rhinoceros of the secondary jungle'.
3 *Keladi* in Malay, *lu'e* in Kayan.

Table 9. Priests and shamans

Priests (*dayong*)	Shamans (*dayong na'ah*)
Linked to priestly spirit helpers	Linked to shamanistic spirit helpers
Priests have a 'pole of priesthood' in the spirit country	Shamans have a 'pole of shamanism' in the spirit country
Priests learn from a senior priest the correct performance of standard rituals	Shamans learn from a senior shaman how to be possessed by their spirit helpers; then spirits manifest themselves in trances in idiosyncratic ways
Priests share a special ritual language	Shamans have idiosyncratic 'languages' which are largely incomprensible
Priests are repositories of religious and cultural knowledge	Shamans are mediums
Priests perform dayongs and rituals of the annual and life cycles	
Priests cure sick people by interceding with spirits in *dayong* rituals	Shamans perform cures by extracting the illness from the patient's body
Priests sacrifice chickens and pigs	
Priests receive sizeable fees	Shamans receive modest fees
In a *dayong* rituals, priests cure only the domestic unit which sponsors it	Shamans cure all those who attend a shamanistic cure
Priesthood confers a higher status	Shamans do not have a higher status

There are two major categories of ritual specialists; the first and most important kind are the *dayong duan* ('*dayong* who speak') or *dayong nevek uting* ('*dayong* who sacrifice domesticated pigs'); in general parlance, they are simply called '*dayong*'. The other category are the *dayong na'ah* or *dayong ngujut*.[4] Given the confusing polysemy of '*dayong*', I will refer to the first category as 'priests' and to the second one as 'shamans' (Table 9).[5]

3. Dayong ceremony. Finally, the single most important ritual of Kayan religion

4 These specialists are not referred to by the single word '*dayong*', unless the context leaves no doubt as to their identity. This suggests their subordinate position in relation to the *dayong duan*. *Na'ah* and *ngujut* refer to the action of picking something with the fingers. We will see that this corresponds to a crucial activity of the *dayong na'ah*. Another name for them is *dayong Kajang*, 'Kajang ritual specialist'. The Baluy Kayan say their Kajang neighbours lack priests (*dayong duan*); if they need them, they hire Kayan priests.

5 Nieuwenhuis (1904-07) does not differentiate priests and shamans; his descriptions imply that the same individuals perform all the rituals which in the Baluy are divided between two kinds of specialists (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:110). Other stratified societies of Borneo have several categories of priests, such as the Ngaju, with three ranks of priests (Mallinckrodt 1924-25: 537-8). In Kenyah, *dayong* also refers both to the ritual specialist and the spirit helper (Whittier 1978:105; see also Elshout 1926:23 on *bali dayong*).

called *dayong* (Chapter VII). It is celebrated by a priest (*dayong*) who has ceived his religious calling from spirit helpers (*dayong*). The *dayong* ritual is an l-purpose ceremony for the well-being of a household and is held at specific eriods of the ritual calendar. As a critical ceremony, it serves to cure illnesses spirit intrusions. Except in this chapter, I use '*dayong*' exclusively to refer to e *dayong* ritual.[6]

ie religious calling

> The link between affliction and its cure as the royal road to the assumption of the shamanistic vocation is [...] plain enough in those societies where shamans play the main or major role in religion and where possession is highly valued as a religious experience (Lewis 1971:70-1).

ne Kayan do not follow this model. We have seen that many people gain spirit lpers at the occasion of illnesses or disturbing dreams; they are not expected become priests or shamans. People become priests because they have been lled to do so by priestly *dayong* spirits; they become shamans if they have en possessed by shamanic *dayong* spirits. Priestly and shamanic spirits ovide their human counterparts with the abilities needed to perform their sks effectively. Every ritual specialist has several *dayong* spirits: priests and amans have so many duties that a single spirit helper would be insufficient. iests and shamans are efficacious because spirits dwell within them while ey carry out their religious duties. Spirit possession is immediately evident in amanic performances: shamans are in trance and spirits act through them. By ntrast, priests are not in trance during rituals. One incident illustrates the sence of altered states of consciousness among priests. During a *dayong* ritual, e senior priest Avun was singing his way to the spirit country. He overheard conversation behind him: someone was marvelling at my ability to take notes the dark; Avun stopped in mid-song and joined the conversation: 'This is thing', he said. 'If you want to see something remarkable, go to Lirong's R.'s] apartment and watch him using his typewriter without looking at it, lking to you at the same time!' An animated conversation ensued about my oficiency as a touch-typist, after which Avun resumed his song and his trip to e spirit country.

The spirit helpers of male priests are all male, while women priests have

At the risk of demoralizing the hardy reader who has followed this far my exegesis of *yong*', I might add that, while it is used as a noun to refer to spirit helpers and ritual ecialists, in other contexts it is a verb. If we say of someone '*Iha' dayong*', this might be trans-ed as 'he/she is a *dayong*', but also 'he/she performs *dayong*'. In the same way, the common pression '*kelunan aleng dayong*' could be translated as 'a person who is a *dayong*', but it seems ore correct to translate it literally as 'a person who performs *dayong*'. The Ngaju demonstrate a nilar kind of polysemy as the Kayan: '*balian*' refers both to a ritual specialist and to a ritual lallinckrodt 1924-25:538).

both male and female spirits; male and female shamans have *dayong* spirits of both genders. Neither in theory nor in practice is priestly or shamanic status transferred from parent to child; children of religious specialists are not expected to follow in their parents' footsteps.

Given the justification of ritual specialization through a spiritual calling, Kayan religion retains an element of egalitarian religions which has been modified for a society in which priesthood is a valued status which only a few people can attain. An automatic link between possession and religious authority would go against attempts to limit access to positions of power (Rousseau 1990:163-215); hence, it is not surprising that spirit possession has become only one factor in priesthood.

Priests

While all forms of ritual specialization are a result of a spiritual calling, this is where the similarity ends; we must consider priests and shamans separately. Unlike shamans, the priests' religious efficacy is not justified exclusively by the presence of spirit helpers, but by their correct performance of formally-established rituals. This can be contrasted with the inherent egalitarianism of shamanism, in which direct contact with the supernatural is the only qualification. Priests celebrate the rituals of the annual cycle and other communal rituals under the authority of the chief. They are often coopted into the power structure by joining the select group of people who advise the chief. As we will see, the revelatory aspects of religious specialization are still relevant to priesthood, but they are encapsulated in a more formal structure, while shamans, for whom direct contact with spirits remains fundamental, are marginalized within the religious system.

Avun's calling to the priesthood is typical of those priests who clearly desired to become ritual specialists. In his youth, he had recurring dreams in which he travelled with spirits; he became interested in priesthood and approached the senior priest of the time, Lake' Lirong, who became his mentor. Every time Lake' Lirong performed a ritual, Avun sat beside him to learn. It took him four or five years to become a priest; at first, he sang the easy parts and Lake' Lirong corrected his mistakes. In his passion for all things religious, Avun also memorized the myths of origin which Lake' Lirong had learnt from Lake' Bit, an aristocrat who spent much of his life travelling through central Borneo to learn about religious practices and beliefs.[7]

By contrast, Huring is typical of those who become ritual specialists after an illness. When young, she had manifested no particular interest in a religious

7 According to Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:110), candidates to the priesthood had to undergo trials, such as eating dirt, but I have not heard of this.

calling until an ailment was diagnosed as a consequence of a *dayong* spirit's wish that she become a priest. Huring initially resisted the spiritual summons but submitted to it when the illness persisted. She performed her trade as rarely as possible, just enough to satisfy her familiar, because she was shy and disliked being the centre of attention. People in her situation may stop practising their priestly role if they remain healthy; a subsequent illness will be interpreted as an injunction for them to exercise their priestly duties.

Avun explained the fundamental importance of a supernatural calling. He knew of people who wanted to become priests; because of their melodious voice, they would have been in great demand for *dayong* rituals, but without the support of spirits, they were frustrated in their wish. By contrast, he pointed out one of his colleagues, who was thought to be stupid[8] and a bad singer, but nonetheless an effective priest, indeed a powerful one, because the Thunder was one of his spirit helpers. During prayers, Avun sometimes emphasized that the religious vocation does not depend on personal characteristics:

> So many people want to become priests, so many are wise and clever, Bungan Malan, Penyelong Luan, but if you do not provide them with *dayong* spirits, they do not become priests. There are so many priests whom we find stupid, but if you give them *dayong* spirits, they can perform *dayong* rituals. We simply follow your will.

A few priests are flamboyantly unusual. In the Kayan village of Uma Daro', Lirong Apo Token went mad (*buling*) for a year, after which he recovered. He stated that, during his illness, he had visited Doh Tenangan (Bungan) and studied alongside her children. One of his characteristics was his avoidance of rice, except for rice beer (throughout Borneo, rice is the staple. Refusing it is a very strong statement about one's separateness).[9] People made fun of him – though not to his face – but recognized him as a powerful priest. He played a role in reinstating priesthood after the initial phases of the Bungan reform when priests (*dayong*) had been replaced with lay prayer leaders (*guru Bungan*). He convinced the priests of *adat Dipuy* they still had a role to play in *adat Bungan*. In Uma Bawang, Avun was encouraged to resume priestly activities because of him.

Candidates to the priesthood must spend several years learning the rituals; they participate in *dayong* under the direction of their mentor. In private sessions, the young priests memorize long orations. Postulants are recognized as priests in a ritual of investiture. In the same way that each individual has a 'pole of life' (*tuken urip*) in the spirit country, whose fate affects one's health and survival, priests have a 'priestly pole' (*tuken dayong*) which is erected during the

8 He was hard of hearing. The Kayan treat deaf people as idiots; indeed, anyone who cannot communicate fluently in Kayan is considered dim-witted. A few Westerners visited me in Uma Bawang from time to time. When people found out they spoke no Kayan, they laughed derisively and ignored them.

9 Tsing (1987:270) describes a South Kalimantan prophet who avoided rice altogether.

harvest festival by a senior priest.[10] Every few years, during the harvest festival, each priest undergoes an almost identical ceremony in order to 'repair the pole of the *dayong*' (*neme tuken dayong*). Priests who are much in demand repair their 'pole of priesthood' frequently (maybe every other year) in order to maintain their efficacy and to protect themselves against supernatural danger.[11]

The number of priests per village varies. At the time of fieldwork, Uma Bawang and Uma Belun each had four active priests. Uma Lesong (Bato' Keling) and Uma Baluy Ukap had three each, Uma Daro', Uma Nyaving (Long Lino), and Uma Juman had two each, while there were none in Uma Baluy Long Liko, whose inhabitants had to hire priests from other villages.

Accomplished priests are called *dayong aya'*. This status depends on seniority and religious knowledge; it is not an office. Some villages have no *dayong aya'* and it is possible, though rare, for two *dayong aya'* to coexist in the same community. In Uma Bawang, Avun was the *dayong aya'*; his predecessor was his mentor Lirong Jok. Only a *dayong aya'* has the power to treat a mad person (*buling*). In *adat Dipuy*, only the *dayong aya'* practised divination with bamboos (*neng'ap bulu*), because bamboo is used for curses and is thus dangerous; ordinary priests used banana leaves for divination (see Chapter VII).

Priests are in charge of all communal rituals, such as the rituals of the agricultural cycle and some curing ceremonies. They also celebrate most rites of passages (naming rituals, weddings, and funerals). Finally, they officiate at *dayong* ceremonies on behalf of individual households. Part of this ritual is sung; priests who are good singers are particularly sought after. In this sense, a *dayong* is an artistic performance as well as a religious event. After the end of the ritual, the priest may be asked to sing extracts from epic poems.[12] I was always impressed by the stamina of ritual specialists who, after a ten-hour

10 This ritual takes place during a *dayong lebo duman* (Chapter VI). This ritual is called *negreng kayo'/tuken/jok dayong*, 'to erect the tree/pole/altar of priesthood'. In *adat Dipuy*, upon becoming a *dayong*, one received a pillow (*hlen lali*), which was brought out at the sowing ritual. An armband (*leku dayong*) was placed on the pillow of the senior priest (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I: 124). Sombroek (n.d.1:2.2-3) notes that, upon acceding to the priesthood, priests received a staff (*tawei*) which they kept for their whole life. This staff was made of bamboo in some villages, of ironwood elsewhere. Senior priests (*dayong aya'*) had two staffs.

11 This is essentially the same ceremony as the curing ritual which restores the pole of life (*neme tuken urip*, Chapter VIII), but it may be celebrated only by a senior priest (*dayong aya'*). Another name for this ceremony is *meju yong kayo' dayong*, 'to lift the pole of the priest'. The officiating priest must wear a bead wristband (*leku dayong*) which covers the whole wrist. I never observed this ceremony, either because it was deemed unnecessary at the time or because no one was available to perform it (both reasons were given to me at different times by the same people).

12 The Belawan epic is a particular favourite. A version of it has been published (Lii' Long and Ding Ngo 1984-85). Belawan is a major culture hero of the Baluy and Mendalam Kayan. He was a brave warrior and visited all the villages of spirits in the spirit country: he either found spouses there, or he attacked them. He also wished to visit every human village; this is why he became the culture hero Lake' Dian.

itual, graciously agreed to go on singing for an hour or two. Some priests, who vere hired in sequence by several households, were able to do so night after ight. For all these rituals, officiants wear a bead bracelet on their right wrist, nade of eight large cylindrical beads with longitudinal stripes of various olours (Plate 7).

Each domestic unit is expected to sponsor three *dayong* every year as part of he ritual cycle. When needed, additional *dayong* are performed as curing rituals r to provide other supernatural blessings to the household. The structure of alendrical and critical *dayong* is the same. They are intercessions to the spirits; riests seek their goodwill through prayers, flattery, and offerings. People com-nonly hire two priests for a *dayong*, although this is not a ritual requirement. When there are two priests, one is in charge, the other is the assistant. In the fternoon, the ritual starts in the apartment where offerings are laid out. The riest puts on a bead wristband; household members touch the offerings to ndicate their participation, then the priest utters some introductory prayers. Household members report their dreams, the significance of which is tested hrough divination. The second phase takes place on the gallery where the altar *jok*; Plate 14) is set up; the sacrificial animal is placed beside it. The priest talks o the animal for about an hour, giving it messages to convey to the spirit country. The animal is killed; household members are purified and protected with its blood and other ritual implements. There is a break in the ritual, during which the offerings are stored in the apartment and a meal is prepared, the *pièce de résistance* of which is the sacrificial pig or chicken; it is served to the priest and the household members, sometimes to guests as well. The ritual resumes on the gallery. The priest calls his/her *dayong* spirits and, with their help, travels to the spirit country to carry the offerings to Bungan and other spirits. Towards the end, the priest catches the household members' souls and returns hem to their bodies. The third phase of the *dayong* ritual lasts until 2 or even 5 am, during which the priest sings almost constantly, with men in the audience singing responses at the appropriate moments.

The lengthy apprenticeship of priesthood is a consequence of the number and complexity of rituals. Except for minor variations, there is essentially a canon.[13] Few priests master all rituals and it is sometimes necessary to seek a religious specialist in another community, especially for unusual or dangerous procedures such as counter-sorcery, rituals which strengthen the efficacy of priests, and some curing rituals. Priests who are unsure about a ritual seek advice from a knowledgeable person – who may not be a priest. Some Uma Bawang priests even consulted a woman who not only had never been a priest,

[13] While I was attending a *dayong* in another village, an elderly priest described a heterodox way to the spirit country (*alan tekna'*); his fellow officiant told me this was erroneous. The mistake did not invalidate the ceremony, because the younger priest set matters right when he took over the chanting.

but had become a Christian, because she was a font of knowledge about rituals. When called upon to do so, priests may not refuse to officiate, otherwise their spirit helpers will punish them with illnesses which can be cured only by an experienced priest. This is one reason why priests agree to officiate in other villages, despite the inconvenience. In one case, Avun refused to officiate, but then relented; however, the person who had approached him was upset and obtained the services of another priest. There is danger involved in being a priest, because of the contact with the supernatural, and the priest asks for protection in virtually every ritual. It is wise to be self-deprecating, so that spirits may be less likely to take offence at ritual errors. The following passage from a prayer is typical:

> If you [spirits] are paying attention to me, [take note that] I am a scattered person, who doesn't know what's what; I don't know what is high, I don't know what is low, I don't know what is sticky from what is slippery. This is why we look up to you, Bungan Malan, Penyelong Luan. We priests don't understand things.

Later on, the priest continued in the same vein:

> While I am pleased you [Bungan] are visiting my apartment, it is a fact that I do not know how to speak to you properly. I ask you to keep this in mind and to look after the members of my household and my children, so they will be protected from illness.[14]

In some villages, the date of communal ceremonies is set by the senior priest, in other villages by the village chief; they usually consult each other. The relative influence of either individual in this process depends on their experience and personalities. Familial rituals – *dayong* and rites of passage – are initiated by the household which benefits from them: a family member goes to the priest's apartment (or farm house, as the case may be) to request his or her services. The priest obtains preliminary information about the purpose of the ceremony; he may specify some ritual requirements and name a fee. When a priest is hired from another village, the sponsoring household is responsible for transportation in both directions. If the priest is not ready to travel immediately, it may be necessary to return for this purpose. Though outboard motors are now available, several hours can be spent travelling back and forth to hire and convey celebrants. For a *dayong* ritual, one may hire two priests if one wants to emphasize the importance of the occasion. Priests may not celebrate *dayong* rituals for their own household; they must hire a fellow priest who is in charge of the ritual. However, they may participate in it.

While people commonly hire priests from other villages, they do not seek

[14] Later on, a senior layman and another priest explained to Bungan that the ritual was taking place in Avun's room because he was the senior *dayong* of this village and thus in charge of the rituals (*adat*) of the village. Both of them operated under the assumption that Bungan would be more likely to protect Avun properly if she understood all aspects of the situation.

priests from other linguistic groups because their rituals are different. Thus, a Kayan from Uma Nyaving or Uma Belun will not hire a Kenyah priest from Uma Kelap, despite their proximity, their friendly interaction, or the latter's fluency in Kayan. The Kayan have no hesitation in recognizing that the Uma Kelap *dayong* is as efficacious as theirs, but they want their own rituals.

In *adat Dipuy*, priesthood could provide significant material rewards (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, II:110-1). Fees (*tibah*, see Chapter VII) are now more modest, though still a bone of contention: it is said that priests have become mercenary and see their calling as a source of profit. All ritual specialists must receive fees when they officiate on behalf of an individual or a household, otherwise their spirit helpers would be offended. In some villages, priests are paid by the whole village for communal rituals (the chief collects payment from every household); elsewhere, such as in Uma Bawang, priests receive no fees for communal rituals, which do not require the participation of spirit helpers. The link between fees and priesthood is not limited to humans. Fish have their own priests, a very bony fish species called *masik dayong*, 'priestly fish'. Other fish give some of their own bones to the *masik dayong* as a payment for protection against hooks, nets, and similar dangers. The *masik dayong* are said to have several hooks in their mouths, which they swallow in order to protect other fish.

Shamans

Kayan shamans (*dayong na'ah* or *dayong ngujut*) are curers; their services are used primarily for curing children. The distinction between priest and shaman may be peculiar to the Baluy Kayan. Ethnographic sources on other Kayan groups do not unambiguously confirm the presence of this contrast; this is a matter for further fieldwork. I surmise a differentiation took place under the influence of the stratification system, because priestly rituals justify the contrast between aristocrats and commoners.

We have seen that Kayan theology emphasizes the similarity between priest and shaman: they are both called *dayong* and both forms of ritual specialization are the result of a supernatural calling. When I asked whether it was possible for someone to be both a priest and a shaman, informants agreed this was indeed possible: spirits can do what they want and there is no reason why priestly and shamanic spirits might not want to form an association with the same individual. However, this seems never to happen; at least, my informants could adduce no example. As with priests, the shamanic calling originates with a *dayong* spirit. Shamanic *dayong* spirits induce a trance in the candidate they have selected and often make him or her swoon. At first, trances are violent and their outcome uncertain. The person is brought out of trance as people fear it might result in death. Later on, the trance becomes a controlled shift in state of

consciousness and shamans remain in control of their faculties while possessed by their familiars.

In the village of Uma Lesong, I attended a ritual which establishes a harmonious relationship between shaman and spirits. It is called *masok dayong*, 'to insert the *dayong* spirits'. The spirits were asked to possess the fledgling shaman. While she danced, she was supported by two persons; the helpers were replaced as they tired of holding her. The shaman's eyes were closed and she looked as if she was about to faint. Her helpers made it possible for her to lose physical control without hurting herself so she could receive the spirits. Little by little, she danced more independently; eventually her attendants moved away. Now in trance, she asked for a hornbill-feather head-dress and a sword, and danced for a long period. She sang; men made responses. As people feared she might want to go outside the house where she could get hurt, they blocked the stairs for her protection. She indeed attempted a few times to leave the gallery. Afterwards, she treated patients, thus performing her first shamanic cures. The behaviour of participants suggested she was following a loose script; they knew more or less which spirits were likely to manifest themselves through her and what the spirits would do when they possessed her.

In theory, the efficacy of a shaman derives entirely from spirit helpers; there are no standard procedures. In practice, all shamans engage in similar activities with minor variations. Apprentice shamans learn their trade by imitating established colleagues who help them control their spirits and act as guides: in the middle of a séance, a shaman expressed herself unable to treat a particular patient; the experienced shaman who was monitoring her egged her on, saying 'If you cannot, who will?'

Trances[15] are an intrinsic part of the shamanic cure, but they also affect lay people. In other words, shamanic *dayong* spirits are not the only spirits who induce trances. Women are more likely to undergo trances, but some men are subject to them: when he was young, Lake' Kebing (the retired chief of Uma Bawang) was subject to trances, but he was eventually freed of what he saw as an affliction. In olden times, many people had trances; some fainted, others wanted to eat the excrement under the house because they were possessed by pig spirits, others ate raw meat because they had become dogs, others jumped in the river because they had become tigers, others wanted to swim because they had become crocodiles. Someone mentioned seeing a La'anan (Kajang) shaman drink pig's blood; he also heard of ritual specialists who in a frenzy bit a live fowl; they would eat it raw if not restrained. Others wanted to throw themselves in the river. When people faint while in trance, they are described as having 'died' (*mate*). 'However,' I was told, 'only their *dayong* dies, their body

[15] The Kayan expression is *dayong nesun*, 'the spirit(s) come to visit'. '*Nesun*' refers to visits which have been arranged ahead of time.

Plate 2. The shaman Doh Imut Jalong is in a trance. She is dancing at the behest of her spirit helpers. Smoke rises from a cigarette in her right hand.

is alive'. When the person is sprinkled with water, his/her *dayong* spirit eventually revives. While in a faint, the person is held in a standing position until the return of the spirit. If the loss of consciousness continues, they strike gongs to call it back. The Kajang are thought to be particularly liable to spectacular possessions. Kayan people who undergo trances are sometimes described as '*dayong Kajang*', and it is assumed that the spirits causing the trance are Kajang.

There may be several shamans in a village. In 1970, Uma Bawang had two active shamans, both elderly women. People do not give the same respect to shamans which is awarded to priests. At the same time, shamans who behave histrionically during séances – or shamans whose daily behaviour (outside of séances) is non-standard – are recognized as being particularly effective (*bisa*). Their erratic behaviour is proof of their ability to let their spirit helpers work through them. In the 1970s, Lake' Luyang was an example of a flamboyant shaman. A Punan Bah (Kajang) who had married into the Kayan village of Uma Juman, he had a wide reputation in the Baluy; he was intelligent, quick-witted, self-important, and unstable. By his own account, he could actually see spirits when they came to visit, a claim other shamans rarely make. To bolster his image, he tried, by manipulating genealogies, to demonstrate he was a high aristocrat (*maren*), an assertion which was widely ridiculed. At the time of my fieldwork, Lake' Luyang had become Christian, but continued to carry out shamanic séances in which he included prayers to God (Tuhan).

While in trance, shamans extract a disease-causing object from the patient by sucking it out or pulling it out with the fingers. While a shamanic séance is set up in order to treat one person in particular, the shaman also attends to other patients who may or may not belong to the same domestic unit. However, the shaman gives particular attention to the person for whom the séance was requested and returns to him/her several times. When the patient is a child, mother and child are treated as a unit. Shamans usually treat intestinal problems, sore throats, and general aches and pains. While it is common to hire two priests for a *dayong* ritual, people only require the services of a single shaman.

Séances take place at night in an apartment or on the gallery. The shaman first goes into trance so that spirits will come to dwell inside her (Plate 2). The first evidence of their presence is the shaman's stumbling and her inner-directed look. Spirits speak through the shaman's mouth, their identity being made evident by their voice or by self-introduction. Within the course of the evening, the shaman is likely to be possessed by a number of spirits. Her voice and demeanour will change several times; at one moment she speaks in a high falsetto, at another in a gravelly voice. Spirits sometimes engage in a dialogue with each other through the shaman's mouth.

Some shamans speak unknown languages, others are mute (*amang*); they

Plate 3. The shaman cures a patient. Having extracted the illness with her fingers, she now blows on the affected part to remove the remains of the illness. In the forefront is a *sape'*, a three-string instrument used during the séance. To the left of the shaman, a man is putting away a sarong with which the shaman covered her face when getting into a trance. As usual, this séance takes place at night; a household member is sleeping behind the patient.

grunt and gesture. Some spirits request a specific item of clothing during their visit, such as a cloth headband or a war-hat. The audience converses with spirits; people gesture to interact with mute spirits, as they would do with a mute human. While in trance, some shamans claim to see spirits; conversely, spirits see through clothes and some women cover their vagina with a tobacco leaf to avoid embarrassment (the covering power of tobacco is not explained, but dried tobacco leaves are dark, thick, and solid). Children observe the proceedings with wonder. Séances are relaxed affairs; people keep on talking while it goes on, including the patients themselves.

While in trance, the shaman is ready to extract the illness with her fingers or by sucking it out of the afflicted part which she spits out into a container (Plate 3). An attendant scrutinizes the sputum to find out whether the illness has been extracted; if nothing is visible, the shaman repeats the performance. With some shamans, the disease-causing object is invisible; others produce pieces of string, cloth, wood, or stone. These are sometimes accepted to be the cause of the ailment; in other cases, fraud is suspected, as some dishonest shamans are known to put bits of stone or wood in their mouth before the ceremony. One shaman systematically rolled the disease-causing objects in ashes, making them unidentifiable. The disease is sometimes referred to as a worm (*ulen*). Some shamans put bits of tobacco in their mouth, on which the disease can settle (as far as I can tell, tobacco is used because it is readily available rather than for any intrinsic properties). Others make retching sounds after sucking at the afflicted part; they are vomiting the disease. In one séance, the disease-causing object was identified as the faeces of the rainbow (*ta'in langa' tu*). Shamans also remove the illness by blowing on the patient's head; this conveys the power of the spirit helper who takes away the ailment. All shamans share the same basic procedures, but they each have their idiosyncrasies, dictated by their spirit helpers.

Spirits act out their desires: they ask for rice beer and cigarettes, which the shaman consumes. Some spirits seem to have sex on their mind, which the shaman manifests with obscene gestures, as when a woman shaman mimicked a man copulating, to uproarious laughter. Spirits are encouraged to dance to the accompaniment of a repetitive tune played on a three stringed-instrument (*sape' dayong*) (Plate 3). The spirits' antics are an opportunity for men to make jokes about the shaman's behaviour, but this does not mean they doubt her efficacy or the reality of the trance. Men's jokes express a discomfort with shamanic performances. Women are much more likely than men or boys to seek the help of a shaman; young boys are shy when they are treated, while little girls take the treatment matter-of-factly. The Kayan do not consciously associate shamanism with women – indeed a few shamans are men – but the link is there.

I heard of one instance of a transvestite priest who was active some time

before the second World War. Lake' La'ing Jok Doh[16] of Uma Nyaving dressed like a woman and had a husband. Lake' La'ing kept an eye on his husband to prevent him from straying with women. He was already an adult when he took on a female social identity. He had long hair like a woman and did women's work. However, he was not tattooed on arms and legs as women normally are. When he officiated, fees were given to his husband. He was deemed to have great supernatural power and could cure epileptic fits; he received accordingly high fees. In olden times, it was apparently not unusual for men to take on a female social identity (without taking on a priestly role). I was told of several examples; most longhouses had at least one berdache. Most men considered such behaviour a trick (*aken*) in order to shirk men's work, which is harder. Some transvestites were homosexuals, others attempted to have heterosexual relations, but they were not in great favour with women.

An attraction of shamanic séances is their affordability compared to a *dayong* ritual, although there may be exceptions in the case of renowned shamans. It is not uncommon for people to hire a shaman first, then turn to a priest for a *dayong* cure if the patient does not improve. While priests may not carry out a *dayong* on behalf of their own domestic unit, shamans routinely cure family members. Like priests, shamans may be hired from other villages; travellers who happen to be shamans may be asked to cure patients. Low (1882:95) describes a séance performed by a Long Glat shaman from the Mahakam who visited Uma Bawang during a trading expedition. While the Kayan do not hire non-Kayan priests, there is no problem in calling on the services of non-Kayan shamans. This may be related to the fact that shamanic performances are efficacious because of the direct intervention of spirits. If a shaman behaves strangely or speaks an incomprehensible language, this is not a drawback. In the past, it was not uncommon for swidden agriculturalists to hire nomadic shamans. I heard of several instances of this during my fieldwork; Hose also mentions the practice:

> The medicine men or Dayongs of the Punans are distinguished for their knowledge and skill, and are in much request among the other tribes for the catching of souls and the extraction of pains and disease. They are therefore fairly numerous [...]. Their methods do not differ widely from those of the Kayan and Kenyah Dayongs. (Hose and McDougall 1912, II:190.)

Similarly, the Bulungan Kenyah considered Punan shamans to be more powerful than their own; nomadic curers were much in demand (Pauwels 1935:350; Sellato 1989:200).

16 *Lake'* is the gerontonym which applies to men of grand-parental generation; *doh* means 'woman'. His name translates as 'Senior-man La'ing Jok the Woman'.

Other specialists

While priests and shamans are the foremost ritual specialists, herbalists and magicians also derive their efficacy from the assistance of spirit helpers. Herbal medicine is considered to be a ritual specialization because, while it is recognized that medicinal plants have an intrinsic effect, their potency is activated by spirits. For a cure, herbalists summon their spirit helpers. Herbalism is not highly valued and herbalists are in little demand. They often find it difficult to be paid by their patients; this in turn makes them reluctant to cure people, because they are afraid of their spirits' anger if they fail to collect fees. In Uma Bawang, an extremely old man, Lake' Ivak, was a herbalist. He expected a payment of M$3 to M$5 or a sword. As his main clientele consisted of himself and his wife, the issue of payment did not arise often because Kayan economic theory does not allow members of the same household to ask any kind of payment from each other. Lake' Ivak learnt his trade from a Kejaman (Kajang) to whom he paid a fee for the instruction. As he had spirit helpers and was expected to collect fees for his cures, Lake' Ivak considered himself a kind of *dayong*. This view was not shared by his co-villagers.

The shaman Lake' Luyang was also a herbalist. He was willing to teach his craft when he visited Uma Bawang: he lived far away and potential pupils would not be competitors. 'I am ready to teach their use for a moderate fee; do not be deterred by the expense', he told us in his entrepreneurial way. If Lake' Luyang failed to effect a cure through a shamanic rite, he could resort to herbs or magic (*musoh*). Not one to hide his light under a bushel, he mentioned offhandedly that he refused to kill people with magic only because he was such a nice person.

Magicians (*pusoh*) are rare; some have gained their efficacy from spirits, others have learnt magic from the Malays. Except for Lake' Luyang (who was evasive about the subject), I never met anyone who claimed to be a magician; this kind of activity was only of incidental interest to the Kayan. Sorcery is not a ritual specialization, although, as we saw (Chapter III), it exists and some individuals are known to resort to sorcery to redress perceived wrongs. Most people think sorcery should not be practised because its effects are unpredictable.

Proficiency in other ritual activities does not confer a distinct social status because they do not require the assistance of spirit helpers. In *adat Dipuy*, omens were sought at specific periods of the ritual cycle, before travelling or headhunting and at other occasions. While several men participated in the activity, a few of them were known to be skilled in interpreting bird sightings.[17]

17 According to Richards (1961:27), the position, called *lakei niho'* (i.e. *lake' nyeho'*, lit. 'augury man'), was hereditary. This is a misunderstanding. Richards had extensive knowledge of the Iban, where the *tuai burong*, the interpreter of omens, is the foremost ritual specialist. Richards

Both in *adat Dipuy* and *adat Bungan*, a gnomon sets the time of the ceremonial sowing (Chapter VI). Only a few people know how to use it. The chief has the authority over the gnomon, but he can delegate its observation to a knowledgeable person. In *adat Dipuy*, one person was in charge of looking after the dead before they were buried (Chapter IX); other people were skilled in selecting the names of infants. In both cases, this ability was inherited.

In the very first years of the Bungan religion, the *guru Bungan* were prayer leaders; they were not religious specialists, but something closer to a lay reader (*guru*, 'teacher', connotes modernity). In its initial form, the Bungan reform did not require priests: the only ritual consisted in holding an egg in the hand, raising it towards the sky and praying to Bungan. As there were no standard prayers, anybody could pray directly to Bungan, but some people were more willing than others to do so.[18] As the priests of the old religion managed to reinstate new versions of the old rituals, the role of *guru Bungan* became obsolete.

Social aspects of religious specialization

The Kayan explain ritual specialization as a spiritual calling. The social concomitants are more complex. Outside religious contexts, ritual specialists are not markedly set apart from other people. Even during ceremonies, they wear no ceremonial dress (except for a bead wristband); indeed they commonly wear their ordinary clothes when they officiate. (When shamans dress up during a séance – which they often do – they are acting on the desires of their spirits helpers.) In daily life, the only marker which differentiates priests from others is their personal name. While most people have a ritual name used in the context of the *dayong*, many priests are commonly known by their ritual name. Someone who is called Avun ('white cloud'), Lirong ('bay'), or Tening ('limpid') is almost certain to be a priest (Rousseau 1983:253). To my knowledge, shamans are not called by ritual names.

Sections of the *dayong* ritual call for sung responses (*nyabe*) to the priest's chant; only adult men participate in this activity. Nonetheless, both men and women may become priests and shamans. Men and women priests are equally efficacious, but some tasks, such as the journey to Ujet Bato' – the area of the spirit country where the souls of powerful people are sometimes found – are reserved to male priests, because their souls are stronger.

Women priests have a somewhat lower status than male priests. It is often

erroneously assumes the same is the case in Kayan religion. In fact, any Kayan could interpret spontaneous omens; calendrical omens were observed by several men at once.

18 The *guru Bungan* were also called *guru meju* (*meju*, 'to lift', because they lifted an egg towards Bungan); yet another name for them was *dayong Bungan*. Apparently, some of them not only prayed with eggs, but also used pigs (*mara uting*) as the conduit of their prayers.

stated that some 'weighty' (*bahat*) rituals may be carried out only by their male counterparts, although women can become senior priests (*dayong aya'*). In men's eyes at least, priesthood improves a woman's public status beyond what other commoner women of the same age would be likely to attain. For instance, female priests are more likely than other women to participate actively in public discussions. Most of the female priests I met had strong personalities.

In the Kayan villages of the middle Baluy area, I counted fourteen male and eight female priests (Rousseau 1974:430). While it may be rather audacious to speculate on the basis of such a small sample, one gets the impression of a preference for male priests; by contrast, there are many more female than male shamans.[19] The predominance of male priests is not a pan-Kayan phenomenon, because Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:110) says that ritual specialists usually are women. In Tanjong Karang, a Mendalam Kayan village with fifty apartments, there were twelve female and two male priests (Nieuwenhuis 1900, I:150).[20]

In a number of small-scale religions described by anthropologists, ritual specialists often demonstrate unusual or even deviant personality characteristics. We have seen that this is not usually the case for Kayan priests (The cases of Lake' La'ing Jok Doh and Lirong Apo Token – see above – are rare exceptions). In contrast with other Borneo groups (Mallinckrodt 1924-25:535; Jensen 1974:63, 143; Sutlive 1976), Kayan ritual specialists are not recruited from among those who suffer physical, psychological, or social handicaps; Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:111) specifically notes that priests are staid community members; those who are afflicted by nervous disorders – which he reports as being common – do not become ritual specialists.[21]

Kayan priests are not markedly different from the population of which they are part, but I derived the impression that priesthood tends to attract people who are intelligent, who are knowledgeable about and interested in their culture, including non-religious matters. People who have a good voice are particularly well-received as priests, because part of the *dayong* ceremony is sung and the Kayan appreciate a good performance.[22] Avun was a good

19 I did not make an adequate list of shamans in the middle Baluy because, when I asked about ritual specialists during my brief visits to other villages, people had no problem in identifying priests, but usually ignored shamans. At the time of fieldwork, Lake' Luyang was the only contemporary male shaman whom I met or heard of.

20 Nonetheless, in the Mendalam as in other Kayan areas, male priests may have played an important role in some ceremonies: a Mendalam Kayan who made drawings for Römer (1913a: 146) specifically identified a male *dayong* (*dajoeng lakei*) in relation to the *dangei* ritual.

21 Kayan priests do not play the sexual role of Barito priests (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:111). Chapter 2 of Hoek (1949) deals with ritual specialists in Central Borneo. It is based almost entirely on Nieuwenhuis (1900, 1904-07) and Hose and McDougall (1912). For an early account of Bahau priests ('*behabei*'), see Tromp (1888:89-90). '*Habai*' is the Aoheng word for a complex shamanic cure (Sellato, pers. comm.).

22 Et Hanyi', one of the most renowned priests in the Baluy, rested and avoided conversation before a *dayong* ritual; he also avoided rice beer. These factors helped in the quality of his singing and his ability to perform for several days in a row.

example of a priest who had devoted his life to religion. Myths of origin had a fundamental importance for him and he often pondered their relevance. He was also interested in traditional arts: for years, he tried to make a nice-sounding reed organ (*keledi*). Though a good voice and an interest in traditional songs are valued, they are not necessary requirements for priesthood. Like priests, most shamans are not markedly different from the population at large, but a few of them are socially marginal, like Lake' Luyang. In those cases, shamanism may be an 'alternate route to normality' (Sutlive 1976). Shamans are usually women, mostly post-menopausal women. The shamans I met tended to be less orally gifted than most Kayan (in a society which values verbal communication). According to the principles of Kayan religion, the stratum ascription of a ritual specialist is irrelevant, because ritual specialization is based on a supernatural calling. However, I did not meet or hear of a shaman who was a high aristocrat (*maren*), nor a priest who was a slave (*dipen*). When I pointed this out, informants did not find it significant, and they stated categorically that a slave could become a priest.

Among the Kayan, priests have a higher status than shamans. I knew only one shaman who gained social prestige from his religious role. Priesthood is an enviable position; priests are treated with respect and are seen as repositories of culture and art. As they carry out communal rituals, *dayong*, and rites of passage, they play a major role in the community's well-being. One has to study to become a priest and the position is an achievement. Not surprisingly, the prestige of priests is related to the frequency with which their services are required. Priests may be asked to officiate in neighbouring longhouses; this is indeed inescapable in those villages which have few or no priests. Even in Uma Bawang, with its many priests, some households hire priests from other communities; they do so for variety or because they wish to impress their fellow villagers by bringing a well-known priest. (There might also be a religious motivation; I was told that an outsider priest is more efficacious (*bisa*), possibly because he or she is different, hence more interesting to spirits.) The chief of Uma Bawang usually hired either Avun – a fellow-aristocrat – or well-established priests of other villages; he rarely called upon the commoner priests of Uma Bawang. The highest accolade for a priest is to have officiated in all the longhouses of the area. Indeed, to fully deserve the title of *dayong aya'*, one should officiate frequently in several communities. Avun, the *dayong aya'* of Uma Bawang, rarely carried out *dayong* in other villages, because he disliked travelling and was shy about meeting people. For this reason, he did not consider himself to be a real *dayong aya'*; some of his fellow-villagers considered that his modesty was indeed justified. Priests from other villages are generally hired at the end-of-year festival, as this is a time for display, but they may be invited at any time.

Experienced priests usually belong to the category of *kelunan aya'*. The *kelunan aya'* are those who play a prominent role in decision-making.[23] All adult members of the ruling estate (*maren*) belong to this elite, as do a few commoners who establish a reputation by their economic success, their knowledge of customary law and precedents and their participation in public discussions (Rousseau 1990:194-6). The pre-eminence of the *kelunan aya'* is justified in religious terms: they are powerful and worthy because they have strong souls and powerful spirit helpers. There is a further link between priesthood and political power, insofar as communal rituals performed by priests are under the chief's authority. The role of shaman is not an avenue to membership in this political circle.

Relationship between priesthood and shamanism

Priesthood and shamanism are distinct but not competing systems. The effectiveness of *dayong* cures is based on a complex causal sequence: a priest conveys the patients' prayers and offerings to their spirit helpers, who pass them on to the spirits responsible for the misfortune. The latter then choose to cure the patient. The shamanic cure is immediate: the spirit enters the shaman through whom it directly extracts illnesses from the patients.

Priestly and shamanic rituals sometimes meet in the same ritual setting. During a *dayong*, a shaman may offer eggs to his or her spirit counterparts (*hnda' dayong*). On a few rare occasions, I have observed a shamanic cure during a lull in a *dayong* ritual, but the cure did not form part of it. Shamanic spirits sometimes possess women during the end-of-year *dayong* ritual. These trances are expected and take place at a specific moment of the ritual (see Chapter VII), although they show the tension between priesthood and shamanism. These trances are resented by priests and by men in general; if they last too long, men intervene, first verbally, then by gently constraining the movements of women who are flailing in an apparently uncontrolled fashion so as to go on with the *dayong* ritual.[24]

I sometimes sat with priests while they watched a shamanic cure; they did not deny its validity, but considered it an inferior and rather ridiculous procedure. They plainly indicated their lack of interest in the ritual and were present only out of sociability. I never saw or heard of a priest being treated by a shaman, although the reverse is common.

[23] *Kelunan aya'* could be translated as 'elders' or 'people of importance', because *aya'* means both 'old' and 'big'. The reference to age is metaphorical because age is neither necessary nor sufficient for political prominence.

[24] In *adat Dipuy*, trances used to be frequent and dramatic, involving loss of consciousness, but this is rarer now. The lower incidence of dramatic trances is probably linked to the Bungan reform, which has reduced significantly the number of religious prohibitions. The general improvement in life style has also reduced heavy psychological pressures which may have found their release in trances.

We saw in Chapter III that religion forms part of the daily life of the laity. At the same time, the presence of ritual specialists is a fundamental feature of Kayan religion. In the Kayan world, humans and spirits live side by side and interact on a daily basis; however, this direct relationship is eroded by other beliefs and practices. As the spirit world is considered dangerous and incomprehensible, people must use religious specialists as intermediaries. This parallels a fundamental feature of Kayan society: commoners feel unable to manage political relations between communities, so they rely on their chiefs to play this role (Rousseau 1990:188-91). This social reality provides a model for the relationship with the spiritual world, because the relationship between humans and spirits echoes that between commoners and aristocrats. In Kayan religion, the supernatural is immanent but outside the control of ordinary human beings. A feeling of helplessness was particularly evident in *adat Dipuy*, under which humans were burdened by hundreds of taboos and thwarted in their endeavours by capricious omens. The Bungan religious reform provided a more cheerful alternative when it toppled Dipuy, the deity responsible for the burdensome taboos, omens, and long periods of religious inactivity. Dipuy was replaced by a benevolent goddess, but, like her predecessor, Bungan is all-powerful and she must be approached through the proper channels. More evidence of the distance between humans and spirits is provided by the proliferation of specialists, not only priests and shamans, but also herbalists, funeral specialists, and so on. Even among priests, there is a division of labour: there are too many rituals for a single priest to master. From this follows a priestly hierarchy which further narrows the access to the supernatural. Religious specialization also entails different categories of time. Rituals which are practised by everybody are part of daily life, hence of normal time. Rituals under the purview of specialists are set apart in a bubble of sacred time, insulated from daily activities.

The Kayan are an example of a simple kind of class society (Rousseau 1979); their religion shows the first stages of a substantive differentiation between clergy and laity, with a knowledge of rituals being reserved to a small group of priests. As we saw in Chapter III, chiefs have paramount authority over the ritual cycle and religion legitimates their position in a number of ways. In Kayan religion, the basic contrast is between priests and chiefs on one side, and laity and shamans on the other. The important aspects of religion are under the control of the chief and priests; the rest of the population, including shamans, are dependent on them for adequate access to the supernatural.