

Mysticism and Magic
The Role of Witchcraft in the Aftermath of Typhoon Morakot

Alissa Bell
Florida State University
Center for Disaster Risk Policy
Emergency Management Academic Program
abell@cdrp.net
(850) 512-3503

It has traditionally been accepted that the most vulnerable victims in the aftermath of disasters are women. The basis for this assertion is that women are more susceptible to rape, sexual trafficking and overall health problems.¹ Additionally, it has been understood that women and girls have suffered greater psychological and emotional distress following disasters. It has been argued that their roles as caregivers often place them in positions which drain them emotionally and leave them vulnerable to psychosomatic disorders.²

This paper argues that the opposite occurred during Typhoon Morakot. The devastation of Typhoon Morakot led to a rise in the traditional religion of the Paiwan people. Prior to Typhoon Morakot this religion had nearly died out due to the rise of Christianity. An integral part of this religion is witchcraft, a role in which women are essential. Following Typhoon Morakot, women shamans took on a role of power in their communities by acting as a source of comfort and stability.³ Rather than being victimized by this tragedy, many of these women took on leadership roles in their communities that would not have been possible without Typhoon Morakot's destruction.

¹ "Gender and Health in Natural Disasters," World Health Organization, 2002, (<http://www.who.int/gender/gwhgendernd2.pdf?ua=1>).

² "Gender and Health in Disasters," World Health Organization, July 2002, (http://www.who.int/gender/other_health/en/genderdisasters.pdf?ua=1).

³ "Taiwan Aborigines Pass on Witchcraft Tradition," BBC News, October 6, 2009, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8293363.stm>).