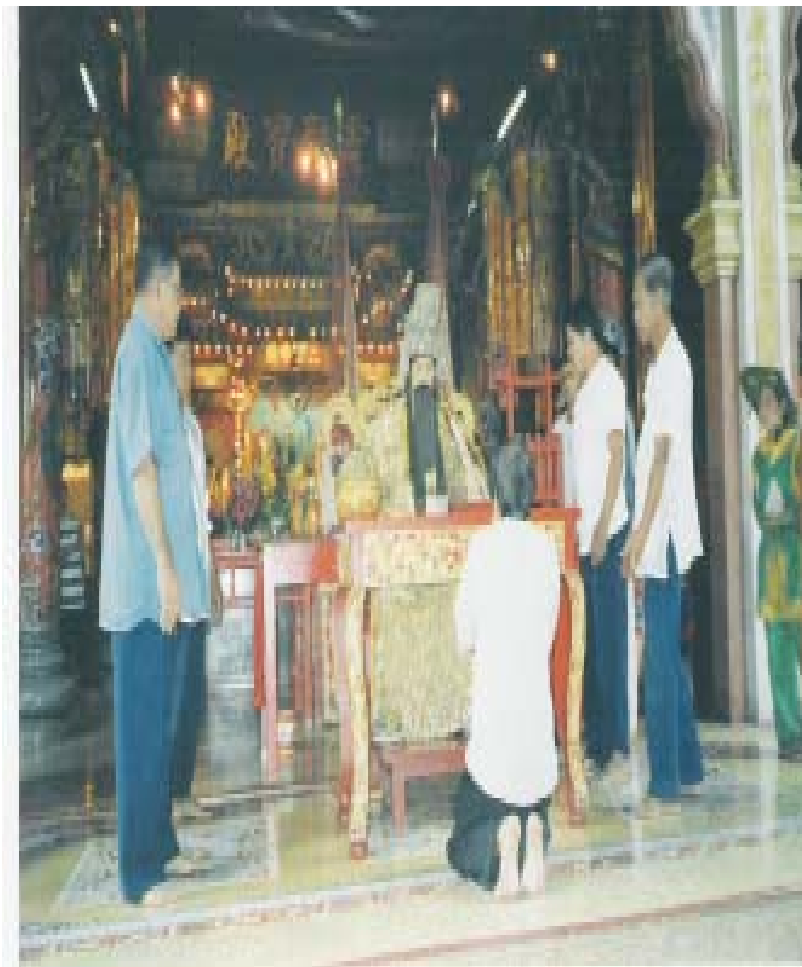


Spirit Mediumship in Thailand

A Performance Theory Approach



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Preface

As in a great theater where everybody is an actor, all of them presenting various types of performance, a chosen group acts as if they were gods or goddesses, following the traditions of various cultures. Their performances are very popular and have been demanded by audiences over many years. The audiences are made up of people who are clients and devotees and the special actors, or spirit media, have performed for them time and again. The intention of these performances is not for entertainment like other dramas where actors play a comedy or tragedy organized by the director of the presentation.

Although sometimes these miraculous performances excite the audiences, the actors' main purpose is to convince them that they have sacred gods in their bodies, are truly possessed and it is not deception. It seems that spirit media attempt to repudiate the fact that their actions are not drama, however the transformations that take place in their visages, movements and tone of voice are different from conventional acting and these changes are the influence of the gods who inhabit them. However, as long as scientific method is unable to substantiate the reality of soul and spirit, I still contemplate spirit mediumship from the viewpoint of performance through the human body, which is full of colour and action and depends on the interaction between the possession practitioner and others around them.

Under the influence of Buddhism in Thai society, spirit media cite the maxims of Buddhism for their actions. On some occasions monks are invited to participate in their rituals. This implies that spirit media do not reject the main religion, but they accept the Buddhists and have borrowed their principles. Opinions on the main pattern of the spirit mediumship phenomena, from research articles, show that in many societies people go through a similar transformation or "turning point" to become spirit media. Women are the most popular possession practitioners. However, the details are different in each cultural context. As performers "spirit media" are exactly in the subjectivity corner. Their performance as gods has consequences for them and at the same time they are within a social construction. It has been helpful to compare the distinction between male and female spirit media.

Through the eyes of the ethnologist, all the movements of my performers and their audiences have been observed and discussed both when they were performing on stage and also after the performance was over. There was close interaction between the researcher and the spirit media, their clients, entourages, family and other people in the community. Long term studies have contributed to the perception of the whole picture of change and development of the spirit media studied. I am most grateful to have been allowed to take photos and videos. Although in some cases they did not allow me to do so, nevertheless they gave me the opportunity to observe and interview spirit media.

Besides wishing to thank the spirit media and all other informants that I met, from whom my research on the topic of spirit mediumship in Thailand developed, as mentioned above, I should also like to thank Dr. Kowit Pimpuang, whose sincere discussions about the present Buddhist situation in Thailand that have been very helpful for me in delineating possession in the context of the main religion. I further

would like to thank Mrs. Mary Holmes who helped to edit the English in the manuscript for publication.

I will always remember Associate Professor Dr. Preecha Kuwinpant and Professor Dr. Amara Pongsapich for the continuous encouragement they have given me during the time I have been studying with them. I am also thankful to Prince of Songkla University for granting me financial support during my studies. As a student, I express my deepest gratitude to the greatest Ethnologist in my life, Professor Dr. Klaus Peter Köpping who has provided me with valuable advice and encouragement during my time of study in Germany. Without his sincere guidance and co-operation, my research work could not have been accomplished.

Moreover, this has been a very valuable time of my life. I have had the opportunity to catch the absolute dream in the field of Ethnology, to do research and then propagate the life style of the group of spirit media I studied. Not only that, it has also enabled me to develop my knowledge in the field of Ethnology. Last but not the least, I would like to dedicate all the advantages from this research work to my revered mother, who constantly inspired, provided valuable opportunities and affection to me in building up my career in the educational field. Unfortunately she passed away during the time I was carrying out this research.

R. Patamajorn
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INTRODUCTION

The Statement and Background of this Study

It is normal for ethnographers of Siam¹ or Thai society to be influenced by the ancient spiritual belief. This region particularly has provided the fertile environment and circumstances for making and moulding the Thai way of belief and thinking about the spirit medium. It is generally known that the spirit medium constitutes an important element in religious life and plays a significant role in the spiritual belief system of people in Thai society from former times till the present day.

As observed generally, spirit media's offices are located almost everywhere and have proliferated throughout the urban and rural areas of Thailand to offer consultations and healing, as an alternative way of treatment for Thai people who suffer from physical and mental problems. Moreover it can be said that some men and women take on the role of messengers and pass on the voices of gods or goddesses to other humans in this world. After observation and participation in the rituals of many spirit media, it can be remarked that there obviously seems to be some significance regarding the phenomena of spirits that have been hidden.

Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to investigate and to study analytically and in depth the phenomena of spirit mediumship within the area of Amphoe Muang of Nakhon Pathom province, the central part of Thailand. The area of *Amphoe Muang*, a small sub-District of Nakhon Pathom province is particularly considered. This is an area dense with service offices of spirit media. It is important that it is not too complex to organize and follow the case studies concerned. Moreover, to follow the specific case studies and get more details, it is necessary to participate closely in the different activities of the spirit media and their spirit possession rituals in order to understand clearly.

However, before dealing with the theme of my research in this area, it is important to examine the general features of Amphoe Muang, Nakhon Pathom province, with the location and population details. The socio-economic position of the

¹ The word "Thai" means free, and therefore Thailand means "the land of the free". Previously the country was well-known to the world as "Siam" and on May 11, 1949 the name of the country was changed by official proclamation to "Thai" or "Thailand" by which it has since come to be known throughout the world.

people who live in the above mentioned area has also been described as follows;

Location and Socio-Economic Status

Nakhon Pathom province has a long history which may be traced back as far as 300 B.C. when the King Asoka of India sent his Buddhist missionary, Dharmaduta, to the Golden Land, Suwannabhumi, which is believed to be the Nakhon Pathom province today. Nakhon Pathom province is located not far from Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, about 56 kilometers along the Petchakasem Road or 51 kilometers along the Pinklao-Nakhonchaisi Road near a Basin of the Tachin River in the central part of Thailand. Geographically, it is surrounded by the central provinces of Suphanburi, Ayutthaya, Nonthaburi, Samutsakhon, Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi and Bangkok. It is 2,168,327 square kilometers and Amphoe Muang is 417,440 square kilometers. As observed generally, it is regarded as a densely populated area. The density of population from survey data given in 1994² is 4,535.62 persons per 1 kilometer and it is especially regarded as the economic and educational as well as the government administrative centre at the present time.

The settlement of the community relates to the line of a river, canals and the main streets. Historically, the original community settled beside the Tachin River and the natural canals, which have been held as important water resources for agriculture. The new community at the present time is settling along the main street that connects Bangkok and Amphoe Muang, Nakhon Pathom.

Due to being situated in the central plain, Nakhon Pathom is ideal for rice-cultivation. It has 900,000 Rais as paddy-fields and in certain areas their farmers grow rice twice a year. Rice grown in this area is famous for its excellent quality. Those who farm on higher plains grow sugar cane, cotton and maize. In Sampran and Nakhonchaisi districts, which have rich black soil, popular local fruits are pomeloes, grapes, mangoes and varieties of coconuts. The people of Nakhon Pathom Province have their livelihoods not only in agriculture, growing fruit, vegetables and flowers or pig and chicken farming, but also in industrial occupations. As observed at the present time, there are many food canning factories, weaving and rice mills open in this area. The provision of hotels and tourist information for the tourist trade is also important at the present time. In addition, three big supermarkets have been established, which

² Population census in Thailand is surveyed every ten years.

were opened in Amphoe Muang, Nakhon Pathom province in 2000. The establishment of these supermarkets has effected the small groceries in that area which now have fewer customers than previously and today they find it difficult to survive. As observed, the economic and political foundations of Nakhon Pathom province have been established and it has grown rapidly in the process of urbanization.

The Population Background

The ethnic groups of this area comprise three major groups, namely; Thai Origin, Sino-Thai (Chinese) and Mon. At the current time, the socio-economic and local political developments are dominated by groups of Sino-Thai. According to ancient history, their forefathers emigrated to settle and found a community in Nakhon Pathom province between the reign of King Rama II (Phra Buddha Loetla Naphalai) and King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn) in the Bangkok Period. They migrated from China to Nakhon Pathom province by one of two ways; either they entered into the Gulf of Thailand and Samutsakhon province or they entered into Nakhon Pathom province via Bangkok. The following four vital factors attracted the Chinese into immigrating and settling their communities in this area:

1. Nakhon Pathom province is located beside the Tachin River. Therefore, the geographical features of the land are that it is low-lying land and a fertile location for agriculture.
2. This province is not far from the sea and it is also located near Bangkok in the central part of Thailand.
3. It is convenient for overseas travellers to emigrate and settle communities in this area.
4. And lastly, Nakhon Pathom province was regarded as an important source of rice and sugar production.

Nakhon Pathom province was economically important for its production of rice and sugar. In the reign of King Rama II in the Bangkok period, the Chinese became the important labourers working in the rice and sugar fields, because Chinese labourers were independent of the ties of the labour conscription system between

lords and commoners in former times. It can be said that the Chinese had a vital role to play in the production of sugar cane to supply sugar factories. They also had a vital role in the rice production to supply the rice mills. The Chinese in Nakhon Pathom originally came from Powleng, Shanghai, Nanking, Peking, Szuchuan, Yu-nan, and Kwang-tung. Most of them speak Shu-chao with many family names like Tang, Tae, Lim, Li, Heng, Ku, Lao, An etc., some other names are also found but they are in the minority.

In the memorandum of the Catholic priest “Pallegoix, Jean-Baptiste” at the beginning of the reign of King Rama IV (King Mongkut), it is said that there were approximately 30 sugar factories and each factory admitted 200-300 Chinese as labourers. Accordingly at that period, 6,000-9,000 Chinese settled as a community in this area. Furthermore the Chedi Puja canal was excavated, becoming the important route for communication by water and the railways were also built up to provide an overland connection between Bangkok and Nakhon Pathom province. Consequently, the markets which were located beside the Tachin River grew rapidly. After beginning as labourers, the Chinese amassed capital and became merchants and earned a living by starting small business such as coffee shops, Chinese noodle stands and selling dried goods etc. However, after amassing more capital, they began to occupy the bigger business, namely rice mills and sugar factories etc. At the present time, they are the owners of many kinds of businesses such as hotels and filling stations and they have become retailers, wholesalers, chicken, pig and duck farmers etc. It is very important to observe how, at the present time, the Chinese descendants who took over businesses from their own ancestors or parents have used the success of the businesses in order to take part and play important roles in the local political developments, and also to dominate the economic and political developments in that part of society and culture.

The Emergence of suspicions

The first investigations of the ritual of spirit possession were stimulated by interest in the phenomena of spirit mediumship that has prevailed in Amphoe Muang, Nakhon Pathom province since 1998. Since then this activity has been being observed. The initial questions about how to become the spirit medium of the ordinary individual man have already been answered by studying three different

model processes.³ When examining the activity of spirit media it was found that there were big differences in the numbers of their clients. It was difficult to discover the secret of a successful spirit medium. Therefore we will seek to explain the factors which make a successful spirit medium. In the meantime, it has been found that the gender of a spirit medium does not always correlate with the gender of his or her god. Most of the spirit media were female but they were possessed by male gods, while most of the male spirit media were possessed by male gods. Therefore the significance of the correlation between gender of spirit media and their gods in the possession ritual will be investigated. People go to visit spirit media when they have a problem or a need that they wish to be fulfilled. From my observation it clearly appeared that most of the clients of spirit media were female. The examination of the correlation between the gender of spirit media and their clients and of the question of whether the clients of matching gender bring similar problems will be discussed. Examinations of the problems troubling clients can be classified under different headings namely: business, occupation, illness, family, love, misfortunes, studies and lottery number. From these items as specified, spirit media have developed their own form of service to offer to their clients from time to time. At the same time, they also have manifested their distinctive characters in order to persuade clients to use their services. So, it can be observed that clients have many alternatives ways to select the services offered by spirit media.

Accordingly the suspicions, which have occurred in the field work above, are intended to expand the theme of ritual performance and to explain the means that spirit media use to manage and continue their performance of the possession ritual so that they can gain the faith of clients and become successful spirit media. Furthermore, I have found one spirit medium, who no longer has time to do household chores because of her spirit medium status. Thus the significance of the spirit medium's gender will be discussed in order to understand the consequences of the performance as gods to their status, male and female.

³ The concept of "self" is used to explain the transformation of an ordinary individual to a spirit medium. See Part II, Chapter 4.

Research Questions

There were many suspicions about spirit mediumship, which have been elucidated by researchers from various branches, especially for instance psychology, theology, sociology and anthropology. For my research, based on the point of view of the anthropologist, the possession ritual is not only indicating a particular feature of the belief system in Thai society, but here this ritual will be examined in the theme of how it is performed. It is also necessary to explore the significance of the performance and the consequences for the spirit medium.

To emphasize the purposes of this exploration, important questions are listed as follows;

1. How can males and females become successful spirit media and how can they manage relations with their clients smoothly?
2. Comparing Buddhism and belief in spirit possession, what are the differences between the status of male and female?
3. How about the co-relations of gender of spirit media, gods and clients?
4. When taking on the roles of gods or goddesses, what are the consequences of gender to spirit media?
5. Is there unequal manifestation between male and female in the possession ritual?
6. If there is unequal manifestation, what is its main cause?

While investigating spirit mediumship phenomena, I will be offering answers to the questions above. In the context of multi belief systems, male and female spirit media use this chance to perform as gods to serve clients and to fulfill mundane needs. In addition their ritual performance can lead to change in gender and social prestige. To answer my research questions, it will be necessary to explain many theories, thus theoretical discussions will be expressed in the following chapter.

The Objectives of the Study

1. To observe faith as a vital part of the belief system in Thai society.
2. To recognize the spirit possession ritual as a performance that created faith and responded to the needs of the members of society.

3. To understand the implications of being practitioners of the spirit possession ritual composed of males and females.

Details of fieldwork

After examining documents about spirit media in various forms and in many cultures, before starting to collect data, it was profitable to understand the general phenomena that weld various doctrines in many fields namely; psychology, sociology and anthropology. Then the researcher proceeded to consider the purpose and the questions to be asked and to set up the structure and stipulate the confines of the research. In order to obtain data during the field work, attempts were made to establish the relationship of other disciplines with spirit media but similar obstacles appeared as in anthropological fieldwork. The problems can be divided in two parts namely the difficulty of finding spirit media to be samples and the problem of the interaction with spirit media and their entourages. I will elucidate below how to manage these problems in fieldwork.

Initially, fieldwork has been started in order to follow and observe spirit media during the period of Buddhist Lent⁴. In Buddhism, most Buddhist people regard the beginning of Buddhist Lent as a time for making resolutions to observe five moral precepts (*Seen Ha*) throughout the three-month Rain Retreat. Due to the fact that most spirit media still continue their own services without advertisements, thus, at first it is difficult to seek the spirit media at this time. However, during a conversation one day with monks and committees of a small temple, they suggested that many spirit media would come to gain merit by offering food and candles to the monks during the three-month Rain Retreat. Particularly, they would keep the Buddhist precepts regularly, practice meditation and stay at the temple on every Buddhist Sabbath during Buddhist Lent. Therefore, it is a good opportunity to get more information at that time.

⁴ The tradition of Buddhist Lent or the annual three-month Rain Retreat known in Thai as “Phansa” dates back to the time of early Buddhism in ancient India, all holy men, mendicants and sages spent three months of the annual rainy season in permanent dwellings. They avoided unnecessary travel during the period when crops were still new for fear they might accidentally step on young plants. In deference to popular opinion, Lord Buddha decreed that his followers should also abide by this ancient tradition, and thus began to gather in groups of simple dwellings. Buddhist Lent covers a good part of the rainy season and lasts three lunar months. In Thailand, Buddhist monks resolve to stay in a temple of their choice and will not take an abode in another temple until the Lent is over. The celebration of the beginning of Buddhist Lent is marked by the ceremony of presenting candles to the monks. The people will organize a colorful candle procession leading to temple where the offering of the candles will be made.

Moreover, useful suggestions were given by some local people and especially the spirit media helped the researcher to become acquainted with other spirit media. In fact, spirit media always contact each other in their sub-culture. By this means, the range of samples of spirit media has been extended and it has been possible to look at the whole situation before selecting 5 cases for specific study from all of the 38 cases encountered

Much time has been spent following all cases concerned, because observation and participation in the places where spirit media work and see their clients must be done continually in order to get the facts. As observed generally, some cases were perfectly satisfied to collaborate, while some cases were not, because many spirit media always think that they are treated as pretenders, taking possession of gods to make money or for other benefits. In fact if the people inform the police they will be investigated on the allegation of deceitfulness. Therefore spirit media are careful in their contact with people or with anyone who may come from the government to investigate them. Consequently, this negative view forced them to be distrustful and especially they were careful during interaction with others. To take the role of a researcher in such sensitive circumstances as this, it was necessary to reassure and collaborate with the sample media so that they would be confident and trusting, because while observing their ritual, it was necessary to conceal the status of researcher. Thus, the researcher has come to the medium in the role of a client asking for a consultation so that he or she can participate and observe what happens in the spirit medium's service office. The collection of data about the physical features of their offices, the rituals including the form of service for clients has also been started at the same time. The behaviour of the sample media and the content of their rituals in their natural surroundings could be observed continually by participant observation. After collecting the field data, sketch diagrams of inside and outside, the physical features of the places where spirit media carry out their consultations and rituals and descriptions the complete sessions have been recorded. In the course of the rituals that were attended much attention was paid to remembering the sequence of events and to making good contacts with vital key informants of the spirit media such as their wives, husbands, children, relatives, followers etc. in order to augment information later.

In some cases after collecting data by concealing the researcher's identity, finally, the decision to reveal the researcher's status was taken when the spirit media and key informants had a close acquaintance with the researcher and thereafter he or she was allowed to collect data at a deeper level. During interviews, the kinds of question have been considered and given carefully in order to avoid the subjects that could be harmful and offensive to whatever they are doing.

Methodology

In fieldwork where it is necessary to collect data to answer questions, especially in specific case studies, participant observation was the method used to access data. Participant observation is a set of research strategies which aim to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals (such as a religious, occupational, or sub-cultural group, or a particular community) and their practices through an intensive involvement with people in their natural environment, often though not always over an extended period of time. The method originated in the fieldwork of social anthropologists, especially Bronisław Malinowski. It advocates the experience of living in another culture and sharing in the everyday practices, rituals and activities of that culture. During his expeditions to the Trobriand Islands in 1915-1918 he created a revolutionary new style and modern standards for ethnographic fieldwork through his 'participant observation', a process by which he involved himself in the lives of those he studied by living in their community and learning their language and culture. He sought to understand the islanders' ways of life in functional terms, of how they created and maintained their society. It marked a radical departure from previous methods of fieldwork and it enabled new insight into the culture under study. Cultural anthropology focuses on factors including ethnicity, ritual, functionalism, and kinship. It studies them via fieldwork, structural analysis, and language. Moreover participant observation has its roots in anthropology and as a methodology can be attributed to Edward Evans-Pritchard and Margaret Mead in the first half of the twentieth century. It emerged as the principal approach to ethnographic research by anthropologists and relied on the cultivation of personal relationships with local informants as a way of learning about a culture, involving both observing and participating in the social life of a group. Such research usually involves a range of methods: informal interviews, direct observation, participation in

the life of the group, collective discussions, analyses of personal documents produced within the group, self-analysis, and life-histories. Participant observation is usually undertaken over an extended period of time, ranging from several months to many years.

This same method of study has also been applied to groups, besides traditional and primitive society, within urban and modern society and is especially successful in the study of sub-cultures or groups sharing a strong sense of identity, where only by taking part might the observer truly get access to the lives of those being studied. Here participant observation is the method to study spirit mediumship in the dimension of ritual performance. The situation of participant observation in each specific case study will be elucidated to represent the similarity and difference.

Case 1. “Lui”: A Female with a Hindu God in her body

My acquaintance who had been a client of *Lui* gave her telephone number to me. Therefore before I approached her I called to ask about where her place was and which day she would have a possession ritual to serve clients. At the first visit I was presented as her client. As we (me and others clients) waited to see *Lui* for the possession ritual I had the opportunity to talk with her parents. They help *Lui* to receive clients and manage the ritual. Therefore I could access information of *Lui*'s life before I interviewed her later. When I asked her for an interview she did not hesitate to talk with me. However she did not allow me to take a photo. While the informal interview was continuing I recorded it. I also recorded her possession ritual proceedings.

Case 2. “Kaew”: A Female Possessed by Three Male Gods

Pai the spirit medium of *Narai* brought me to her friend *Kaew*. *Pai* introduced me to *Kaew*, therefore *Kaew* was rather friendly. When I participated and helped her to prepare the annual ceremony I had the opportunity to converse with many spirit media who came to participate and take photos of the ritual. That day while I was sitting together with spirit media, preparing flowers and talking with them, *Kaew*'s daughter seemed interested in my camera. She asked me to take her photo. From my participant observation in this case besides gaining the data of the ritual, I could see the relationship among spirit media in the dimension of cooperation.

Case 3. “Sri”: The Blind Female Spirit Medium

In case of *Sri*, she was suggested to me by a monk at the local temple who had been a spirit medium in the past before ordination. At the beginning after I made an appointment with her by telephone I went to interview her on the day that she was free from routine possession to serve her clients. The informal interview continued rather smoothly and her husband participated in our conversation. They were willing to give information and allowed me to take photos during the possession ritual. Nevertheless her daughter seemed suspicious and asked me some questions such as: “where do you come from?; what do you want and why do you have an interest in visiting here?”. Moreover when I participated in the annual ceremony, although the spirit medium allowed me to take a video her son-in-law asked me to make sure that I did it only for my study.

Case 4. “Tong”: How I became a Horse of *Por Poo Yai*

For this case the acquaintance in this area suggested that I visit *Tong* and his wife who were willing to give information. However they did not allow me to take photos. Nevertheless they allowed me to record the sound in the possession ritual. Furthermore *Tong* showed and explained to me the properties of the magic things which he created to sell.

Case 5. “Boon”: A Male Performs Chinese Gods

Initially, in the case of *Boon*, I knew him from a big billboard beside the street which advertised and persuaded the people to participate in his annual ceremony. On the first visit I participated in his possession ritual as a general client. For the second visit before the beginning of possession I had interviewed him and asked for the permission to take a photo during his possession ritual. He allowed me to do so, at that moment he looked friendly and willing. Then in his possession ritual when his deity arrived, *Boon* behaved in a superior manner, sitting on a knife chair. Twelve followers stood behind him. While the deity was speaking through him and was the sole authority during sessions, he ordered me to kneel in front of him and his followers.

They started to investigate me by asking many kinds of questions namely; why did I come to collect data and take a photo here? And did I believe in their god or not?

Then the deity in the body of *Boon* said to me as follows;

“Do you want to try to possess, if you want to, I will invite a deity to possess you”

Then I answered

“I am not ready to possess”

Suddenly the spirit medium said

“I (deity) will go to appear in your house within 7 days at night and you will believe in me finally.”

However, I have never seen *Boon*'s deity appear in my living quarters from that time till the present. So that, I think he only wanted to play a psychological game with me. This situation showed that actually *Boon* and his entourage rather distrusted me and had suspicions that I wanted to find out that they had been deceitful in their claims of being a deity. After many visits they became better acquainted with me and trusted me more, therefore I could access more data and take photographs in the possession ritual.

For many years, from 1996 to 2005, I decided to examine my case studies. Although I spoke the same language as them, especially in the cases of *Sri* and *Boon*, at the beginning of collecting data I encountered mistrust from them. In spite of this sensitive situation, after I had visited them during their ritual many times, they had an intimate acquaintance with me, therefore they disclosed more information. Having good encounters with relations, husband or wife and children was also important to obtain information. Recorder, camera and video tape were used for recording the proceeding of rituals and conversation during informal interviews. Nevertheless in the cases of *Tong* and *Lui*, they did not allow me to take videos and photos.

The data collected from participant observation and informal interviews can be divided into 4 sections as follows;

1. Data of spirit media dealing mainly with spirit media, their life histories, activities in everyday life and interaction with clients.

2. Data of organization dealing with the features of places, organization and organization development.
3. Data from rituals dealing with the performance of the spirit media in rituals. Here, rituals have been divided into three types as follows;⁵
 - a. The ritual for becoming a new spirit medium namely; receiving bowl and examination ritual.
 - b. Likewise spirit media have an annual vital ritual called the annual ceremony or *Wai Khru* ritual.
 - c. In routine possession, there were service forms for rituals such as prediction, healing, getting rid of bad luck, protection from accident etc.
4. Finally to complete the research, data was collected about clients to understand more about the relationships between spirit media and clients, including the attitudes of the clients and their reasons for selecting specific services offered by the spirit medium.

In the fieldwork, the researcher embarked on this research with an unbiased mind, especially at the beginning of this fieldwork. No hypothesis was drawn up beforehand to avoid being “blinkered” and not receptive to unexpected data, which could prevent the discovery of unforeseen factors.

The Chapter Schemes

The monograph comprises three parts, eight chapters including the conclusion. In the first part of this book, theories which are frames of my analysis are recounted. Likewise the ideas of several other researchers and other literature about spirit media in Thai society and other regions will be explored and argued. The discussion of the actual field data is in Part 2. The thirty eight cases from the fieldwork have demonstrated the phenomena of spirit mediumship in Amphoe Muang, Nakhon Pathom province in general, while from these 38 five cases have been selected for more specific and detailed case studies. All of them have been discussed in Part3. Therefore this part contains the predominant discussion of the significance of

⁵ It will be discussed later in Part 2, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

performance to persons who occupy spirit medium status. For clear explanation, female spirit media will be compared with male spirit media. In the final chapter, conclusions have been drawn and considered. Finally the appendix of Thai terms used in the text and the bibliography has been placed in an annex in the end of this book.

Part I

Theoretical Considerations

In this part, the phenomena of spirit mediumship, the concepts of performance, which is the main subject of my study, and other supporting theories will be explained. Complete analysis will follow. There is a chapter in which the theories are discussed, in this part, to elucidate the following chapters of explanations. Furthermore this chapter comprises general arguments about spirit mediumship, followed by general theoretical discussions to illustrate the previous speculations about spirit mediumship from many research studies, which appear in general studies of various cultures. Finally comes a discussion about literature covering Thai possession studies.

In this part the studies of spirit mediumship from many cultural settings lead to an understanding of the basic circumstances of the possession ritual and it is useful to compare the latter with my research. Yet the theories which support my research are based on the cultural setting in Thai society.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Issues

Before describing and analyzing data, it is necessary to elucidate and discuss the concepts which are frames of explanation. The present study is a monograph which conceptualizes the body that emphasizes the dimension of performance that has been explored. Therefore here, besides the discussion about the theories which help to explain the strategy of presentation through the body in social space, the theories which support the analysis of the consequences of performance as an aspect of social prestige, power, ethnicity, and gender will also be presented.

Thus, this chapter is composed of four theories which will help in the analysis of my data are presented. First, theories of performance, explaining the performance of becoming a god and its ensuing consequences, especially the importance of the gender of spirit media including the differences between male and female in the possession ritual. The changes occur to the individual after he or she possesses spirit medium status, which obviously effects their relationship with the people around them. The second issue concerns theories of gender, the third is the concept of spirit possession and the fourth is the issue of ethnicity.

1.1 Performance Theories

The spirit medium carries the important role of spirit possession. Actually, when the conception of body has been brought into the discussion, it can be said that obviously the whole phenomenon of human society could also be explained by this formulation. From various branches of knowledge, such as law, political science, history, sociology and anthropology etc. there are various theories of the body to be considered. However the primary one is about the meaning of body and the correlation between body and social construction to explain how the human body, is held as a social product. In social science, social Darwinism and Functionalism of Talcott Parsons, the body is seen as a biological organism; each person or body has an important role in the social system. In the doctrine of Marxism, the body is identified in the theme of need and nature, the wealth of material proceeds to beatification, and thus responding to material need is significant to this theory as well. Moreover, to Freud human embodiment is seen as a field of energy in the form of desire.

Anthropologists analyze tradition and carry out research on body rituals.

To understand spirit mediumship, it is necessary to comprehend this ritual performance which deals with the presentation of a god through the human body who is the main actor. In cultural behaviour at any level, performance has been offered as a metaphor for social interpretation for at least two decades. Victor Turner defined performance as social or cultural drama, in which he included such mundane communicative phenomena as “speech behaviour” and “the presentation of self in everyday life,” as well as the more grandiose “state drama or social drama” (1986:77,81). Stanley Tambiah has suggested that ritual acts are performative, first “in the Austinian sense” by analogy to speech acts, second as staged performances using multiple media, or third as “indexical values” attached to and inferred by actors (1985:128). Goffman defined the term “performance” as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Therefore Goffman has been using the term “performance” to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period of observation and which has some influence on the observers (1959: 15-22). Richard Schechner claims: (1) there is a unifiable realm of performance that includes ritual, theatre, dance, music, sport, play, social drama, and various popular entertainments ; (2) certain patterns can be detected among these examples; (3) from these patterns theorists can develop consistent broad-based models that respect the immediacy, ephemerality, peculiarity and ever-changingness of individual performances, runs, and genres (1988:257). For Schechner (1985) the key queries in the analysis of performances are namely who performers are, how they achieve their temporary or permanent transformations, and what role the audience plays.

Accordingly as anthropologist and sociologist, Turner and Goffman are known for using a theatre or performance paradigm to view social and individual actions, recognizing the dramatic and staged performance quality in everyday as well as in special behaviour. Schechner came to the subject of behaviour as performance from the perspective of a theatre director and actor. Turner’s close associate Schechner has called attention to the interplay between ordinary consciousness as “the world of contingent existence as ordinary objects and persons” and performance consciousness in “the world of transcendent existence as magical implements, gods, demons, characters”; there is a parallel tension experienced by a performer as simultaneously

“himself” and “not himself” (1985:4,6). The distinction between ordinary consciousness and performance consciousness is actually a distinction between levels of performance consciousness.

For Goffman, in performance doctrine it is explicit that the body formed an implicit foundation of his theories of stigma, face-work, embarrassment and social self, although it was characteristic of Goffman’s work as an ethnographer of social life that a specific theory of embodiment was never produced. However, there is clearly a Goffman legacy in modern symbolic interactionism which has, more than most other theoretical traditions in sociology, regularly produced a sociological awareness of the symbolic significance of the body to the interactional order (Turner 1991:11). In his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1969), the body appears as the presentational self in social space that social relations constitute a stage, upon which the social actor presents a performance and performance is embodied in the performing of everyday life, here body is held as a vehicle of self. In regarding the spirit medium, the self clearly involves a continuity of the body and one of the souls, but not a continuity of personal identity, memory or responsibility for actions carried out by one’s body, when it becomes the temporary vehicle and residence of another, more powerful spirit. It is even expected that there will be no continuity in the body’s physiological response, since that response is an attribute of the possessing spirit, rather than of its vehicle. In Goffman’s perspective of the theatrical performance, the principles derived are dramaturgical that consider the way in which the individual presents himself and his activity to others and the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him. The stage presents things that are make-believe; presumably life presents things that are real and sometimes not well enumerated. Goffman (1959:22-24) has offered and distinguished the standard parts of performance on front stage in three parts namely (1) the “setting,” involves furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it. A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it; (2) as part of “Appearance”, insignia of office or rank; clothing, sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks, may be

taken to refer to those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social status. These stimuli also tell us of the individual's temporary ritual state, that is, whether he is engaging in formal social activity, work, or informal recreation, whether or not he is celebrating a new phase in the season cycle or in his life-cycle; (3) "Manner", posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gesture; and the like, may be taken to refer to those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation. Thus a haughty, aggressive manner may give the impression that the performer expects to be the one who will initiate the verbal interaction and direct its course. The performance criteria of Goffman give the line to analyze possession ritual that contains the interaction between spirit medium and participants.

For Schieffelin (1985: 721-722)'s view of performance, the reality evoked in the performance does not derive directly from its following a coherent ritual structure, but from the process of dialogic interaction between the medium and the participants. What renders the performance compelling is not primarily the meanings embodied in symbolic materials themselves but the way the symbolic material emerges in the interaction, starting with the people's expectations and anxieties over problems in everyday life. In the séance the performance is gripping not because of the vivid display of symbolic materials but because the symbolic material is incomplete. Reality and conviction reside not in the spirit's message but in the tension produced when some important communication seems at once clear and ambiguous. This experience of inconclusiveness and imbalance gives people little choice but to make their own moves of creative imagination if they are to make sense of the performance and arrive at a meaningful account of what is happening. In so doing however, they complete the construction of its reality. In this way the people reach fundamental symbolic understandings and arrive at solutions to their problems, not in a cognitive or intellectual way so much as in a participant one whose cognitive shape may not be well worked out for a given individual, but which is assumed to make sense because the realities it represents are so vivid. Once this séance reality is constructed, it may spill over into everyday life. The performance, in effect, becomes life, no less than life is reflected in the performance, and the vehicle for constructing social reality and personal conviction appears more as drama than as rational thought. It is evident that it is impossible to separate the dramatic aspects of ritual symbols from their meanings

if we want to know their significance or why they are compelling. This is not just a matter of presentation: many things are cognitively accepted in performance precisely because they are dramatic, impressive, or mysterious rather than because their rational significance is understood, provided, of course, they do not stray too far beyond the limits of cultural common sense. The socially emergent dimension of performance constructed through the interaction of the performers and participants but not reducible to them, constitutes the reality in which the actual work of the séance gets done. This emergent dimension stands beyond the text or structure of the performance itself (while at the same time embodying it) so that the séance confronts the participants as an event in which they are involved and that can have consequences for them and their particular situation. This being so, the work of a performance, what it does, and how it does it, can never be discovered only by examining the text, or the script, or the symbolic meanings embodied in the ritual alone. It must be sought further in the emerging relation between the performer and the other participants while the performance is in progress. Because ritual in performance is a reality apart from its participants, the participants may not all experience the same significance or efficacy. Indeed, unless there is some kind of exegetical supervision of both performance and interpretation by guardians of orthodoxy, the performance is bound to mean different things to different people. The performance is objectively and socially validated by the participants when they share its action and intensity no matter what each person may individually think about it. It follows that the meaning of ritual performance is only partly resident in the symbols and symbolic structures of which it is constructed. To a large degree the meanings of the symbols and of the rite itself are created during the performance, evoked in the participants' imagination in the negotiation between the principal performers and the participants. Here the viewpoint of Schieffelin guides the line to comprehend the reality of performance that it resides in the interaction between spirit medium and participants and the context of cultural, expectation, interpretation and cognition of participants are contemplated.

In Kendall's work "Initiating Performance: The Story of Chini, a Korean Shaman" (1996), is the illustration of her notion that emphasizes the performer's knowledge and skill of ritual performance. Kendall (1996:20) remarked that it remained for avant-garde theatre to insist the elemental drama was something more than the imitation of a reality that existed elsewhere and to seek in ritual and in ritual

dramas a revitalized knowledge of compelling performance. Thus, rituals are viewed as more than the sum of their structure and symbols, as an enacted realization of personal and collective knowledge. Enactment implied a broad range of knowledge and skill. If music, song, dance, drama, and mime are inextricable from the texts of ritual, it follows that the skilled performances of shamans, media, and accompanying musicians are also intrinsic to the efficacy of the event, however “efficacy” might be emically rendered. Also Boddy (1989:134) has alluded to skill in ritual performance illustration of spirit possession that it must conform to prescribed patterns of “spiritness,” trance performance requires skill and considerable control.

1.2 Spirit Possession

The discussion and elaboration of the meaning of the word “spirit medium” and the illustrations will be important in order to understand particularly the character of spirit media. Consequently the examination of the definition of the spirit medium from a culture approach has been emphasized.

While in modern medicine and psychology, a spirit medium is defined as a person who has mental illness, hysteria or madness. Many cultures, even in non-literate societies, have the words to identify spirit possession and spirit media, so that the people understand from this abnormal behaviour that a person is inhabited and controlled by a spirit. Initially, in their studies of spirit possession, anthropologists interpreted the causes of this abnormal behaviour and most studies concluded that spirit possession is the reflection of unusual symptoms of human bodies and minds.

In consideration of the word “spirit medium” the behaviour relates to the term possession and trance, Walker (1972:3-4) elucidated that “trance” is the scientific description of a psychological and physiological state in western terminology, whereas possession is the folk explanation for the same thing. Typical of the state of possession is any native theory which explains any event of human behaviour as being the result of the physical presence in a human body of an alien spirit which takes control of the host’s executive functions, most frequently speech and control of the skeletal musculature (Wallace 1959: 59). Thus, the individual’s state of dissociation or autohypnosis, or claim to illness, which is society’s explanation of what it recognizes as unusual behaviour is due to the control of an outside agent who either inspires the individual to act in a particular manner, or displaces the individual’s

personality and acts in its stead.

Given this distinction, trance can exist without being explained as possession, but in the societies being considered some degree of trance usually does exist, barring faking, when the term possession is used, and most states of trance and altered states of consciousness are explained as possession. Even some pathological altered states of consciousness, recognized as insanity by the society in question, are looked upon as possession by demons or spirits which are in some way evil or harmful. In many societies, it is important that the agent of possession, in the terms of folk theory, caused by the same mechanism, usually displacement of a soul and possession, indicates communication with the supernatural. The communication may be considered good or bad depending upon the nature of the possessing agent and the content of the possession, and these factors determine the response of the individual and of the community (Walker 1972:4). The state of possession is manifested by alterations in behaviour, speech, voice, facial expression and motor behaviour as well as by changes in clothing and in the manner in which the individual responds to others (Bourguignon 1965:45).

Firth explains “spirit meiumship” as “the use of such behaviour by members of the society as a means of communication with what they understand to be entities in the spirit world” (Crapanzano 1977:9). Furthermore, the behaviour of the person possessed by the spirit must be intelligible or able to be interpreted; this implies that it must follow some fairly regular, predictable pattern, usually of speech.

Lawrence A. Babb (1974b:31) gave the definition of a spirit medium, who is a person, acting as an agency of communication between the people of this world and the denizens of another. For the role of the spirit medium that Babb referred to in this recounts that the medium’s original encounter with the deity is often linked with what may be termed a paradigmatic cure, a cure which provides a pattern for the hoped thing, for a relationship between the spirit medium’s clients and his possessing deities. However he may present himself to clients, the spirit medium’s practice must ultimately stand or fall on the claim that through him his clients have uniquely direct access to supernatural beings. Elliott (1955:15), who studied Chinese spirit media in Singapore, stated; “The undefined power possesses the body of a human medium and enables him to inflict injury upon himself without feeling pain and to speak with divine wisdom, giving advice to worshippers and curing their illnesses.”

From the discussion about spirit mediumship, this phenomenon can be interpreted as an altered state of consciousness or a state of unconsciousness in order to understand the spirit possession of a human body and the influence on his behaviour. In many cultures this is positively acknowledged by the population and becomes the significant ritual.

However the spirit media can be divided into two groups according to the frequency of possession; the first group enters into possessed states on certain festival occasions. In Singapore many Indian people become possessed by Hindu gods only in the context of the south Indian festival calendar (see Babb 1974b). In northern Thailand it takes place in the *Phi Meng* ritual (see Tanabe 1991), to sacrifice the ancestor spirits. In this ritual period, matrilineal spirits possessed many women. Moreover in the Chinese Vegetarian Festival⁶ in *Puket* Province in Southern Thailand many spirit media are possessed by Chinese deities to perform miracles. Almost all spirit media in this festival enter into possession merely during this festival. The second group is the routine spirit medium. They will enter into the possession state and offer services to their clients at any time.

In central of Thailand most of the spirit media were routine spirit media, only very few of them entered into possession occasionally during important rituals such as the annual ceremony or the *Wai Khru* ritual of their gods or of other spirit media. In these cases I found that most of them were new spirit media and were not ready to offer a service to clients, as they were still reticent to present themselves as gods. Furthermore from my experience in Prachuap Khirikhan province, there is the ritual of *Phi Kalok Phi Kala*, an annual play during the Songkran Festival⁶, during which the people sing a song together and hit coconut shells or *Kala*. The intensive rhythm of music motivates the spirit medium to possess the spirit of *Kala*. After that the spirit medium chases the participants who run away. In this situation the possession ritual provides entertainment in the community.

⁶ “Songkran” is the Thai traditional New Year, the festival falls on April 13. It is also known as the “Water Festival” as people believe that water will wash away bad luck. This Thai traditional New Year begins with early morning “merit-making”, offering food to Buddhist monks and releasing caged birds to fly freely into the sky. During this auspicious occasion, any animals kept will be set free. Paying homage to one’s ancestors is an important part of the day. People will respect the elders by pouring scented water over the palms of their hands. The elders in return wish the youngsters good luck and prosperity. In the afternoon, after performing a bathing rite for Buddha images and the monks, the celebrants both young and old, joyfully splash water on each other.

Therefore, generally in every part of Thailand, the routine spirit media are more widespread than occasional spirit media. However these two groups of spirit media both have vital roles. If we compare their roles, routine and occasional spirit media are agents who maintain and continue the belief system of communities. Yet routine spirit media play a more intensive role in solving daily life problems than occasional spirit media. Thus a routine spirit medium can make a living from the performance of the possession ritual.

Nevertheless, for this study, it is proposed to give the definition of spirit medium as below:

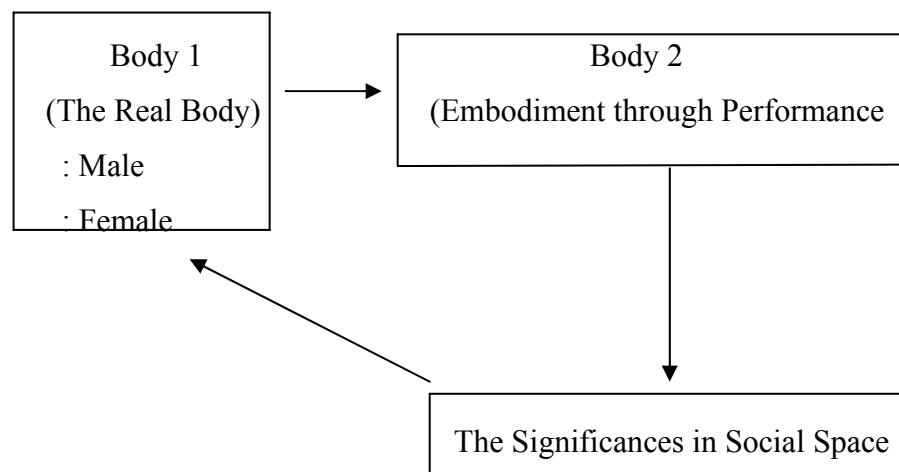
1. As an agent that mediates between humans and spirits, they perform as gods when entering into an altered state of consciousness.
2. Performing rituals to fulfil the needs of their community.

The definitions given above did not include individuals who occasionally enter into the possession state at certain festivals to perform miracles, such as fire walking, climbing knife-blade ladders, piercing their cheeks and bodies with sharp objects. These individuals take a vow so that they don't need to be routinely possessed. They enter into a possession state only for a special occasion. Therefore they are not available to the public on a regular basis.

However when dissociation from their own personality occurs and the gods are assigned the responsibility for their behaviour, the social significance of the behaviour is changed. Thus, disguise may make the behaviour excusable, "possession" and its attendant dissociation will give it prestige and authority. Since the actions were carried out by gods, by entities not only other than the self but more powerful than the self, no fear or guilt or shame or social censure attaches to them. Turner (1984:8) wrote in his book entitled "The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory" that there are also immaterial bodies which are possessed by ghosts, spirits, demons and angels. In some cultures, such immaterial bodies may play the major social roles and have important social locations within the system of stratification. There are also persons with two bodies, such as mediaeval kings, who occupied simultaneously their human body and their sovereign body. Then the spirit medium is a precedent of the person, who has two bodies; one is the real body and

another is the body occupied by god. The second body involves the process of embodiment through the form of performance. While, every society regulates and restrains bodies in space by laws, in this theme, the body seems to be an object. However, the representation of the body in social space can also fail. So, to respect the body as subjective, the movement of the body can be used to understand how it inhabits social space. According to the topic of the self and behavioural environment, the identity of god has significance in the social structure. Therefore, spirit media as social actors continually display their identity through their engagements with others and the world, constantly interfere and negotiate the distinction. As well as fractured bodies and identities, the spirit medium involves many femininities and masculinities that are tempered by ethnicity, class and histories.

Diagram 1: Spirit Medium's Body



1.3 Gender Theories

Taking into consideration performance and gender one can comprehend how people in identifying with their role can change their gender when they perform as representatives of gods. This changes the interactions between the persons now representing gods and the people around them and additionally clarifies the inequality between male and female in the possession ritual performance.

For Thai society the main religion, Hinayan Buddhism or Theravada, can determine the role of male and female. Keyes (1984: 223) states that in Thai society, like other Theravada Buddhist societies (Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Cambodia),

fundamental understandings of the world have been constructed on the basis of Buddhist dogmas communicated through ritual, instruction in the *dhamma*, the teachings of the Buddha, and practice of the *dhamma*, most notably by members of the order of monks. In Thai society the culture of gender has also been shaped by Buddhist assumptions regarding the fundamental nature of reality. In other words the Buddhist worldview adopted by Thai people shaped their orientation toward society. Fundamental to this order was the division between the sexes.

According to the rules of the main religion of Thai society only males can become monks. In other words only males can assume the roles in which the teachings of the Buddha are both practiced and perpetuated. The Buddhist culture of Thai society differentiates males and females according to attributes that are fundamentally given and thus natural within the terms of the Buddhist worldview. Therefore in the context of Buddhism women's roles are poorly developed and not highly regarded and women are incapable of tearing themselves away from their worldly interests and responsibilities. Secondly, women tend to specialize in "merit making" activities, because women need more merit than men and therefore women engage in types of activity which might pose threats for men in their merit accumulation, if women sin, it is only to be expected and the consequences are less. According to this argument, in Buddhism in Thai society there is no equivalent role for women to that of men. However, a connection was made between the secular role of woman as mother and woman as nurturer for the religion.

Regarding the roles of male and female in the family Preecha Kuwinpant (2002: 6-7) explains that "expectations upon the roles of men and women or boys and girls are also different. Actually, men occupy a higher status than that of women in almost all activities. It is men who lead the family, the community and even the country. Women are restricted by many rules and norms. Her life is centred on the house, looking after her family along with her mother. Her husband is head of the family and the one who makes decisions on important matters concerning the family. In general, however, especially in rural areas a wife is still subordinate to her husband and women are still following the lead of men. But there is no longer a serious barrier against women in participating in any kind of activities."

Concerning the significance of the possession ritual performance and gender, becoming a spirit medium can be used as a strategy to alter a person's gender in the

eyes of the family and in the context of Theravada Buddhism, which is an advantage for an oppressed female. For spirit mediumship in Thailand, the spirits which appear in the possession ritual might be the same sex or a different sex from the people possessed.

The theory of performativity helps in understanding a system in which geniality and gender are not only independent of each other, but shift constantly depending on the performative, which is to say social and political, context of the body. The Transgender questions are obviously presented in discussions of spirit possession. Several accounts attempt to explain possession rituals as kinds of cross-dressing in which the assumption of costume and new bodily postures signifies and effects the vehicle's transformation from one gender state to another. In many cases, possession rituals seem to permit women to take on the attire and gestures as well as many of the privileges normally denied them in everyday life. On the surface, this seems to entail the spirit medium's transformation from female to male and often from lower status female to higher status male, although movement is often along the vector of class only, thus common women and men appear to assume the personae of similar or different gender monarchs. In case of differences, possession is seen as evidence of a disjuncture between body and subject and distinction between spirit medium and spirit.

The spirit which appears in possession may be of the same sex or of a different sex from the person it possesses. In many ways the female spirit medium and her spirit are opposites. She is frequently lower class and under-educated while her male spirit is usually a wealthy, sophisticated royal or religious figure. Male spirits are masculine, authoritative, wise, capable of violence but generally kind and helpful to humankind, as they have come to earth to make more merit for themselves. A female spirit medium possessed by a warrior might behave stridently, chewing tobacco, drinking alcohol and sometimes womanizing with audience members.

For complete explanation, if we consider the underlying physical differences between male and female spirit media, menstrual blood is held as the cause of inequality and restriction of ritual practice. In a book "Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation" Buckley and Gottlieb (1988: 3) referred to the conduct of menstruating women who have placed menstruation in the foreground of anthropological studies of "taboo" and, more recently, of symbolic "pollution."

Menstrual taboos have been seen in turn as evidence of primitive irrationality and the supposed universal dominance of men over women in society. The widespread occurrence of menstrual taboos and their cross-cultural similarities have spurred a search for their universal origins, once identified with the very wellsprings of social organization (Durkheim 1897:50) and, more recently, of religious thought (Douglas 1966:6). The majority of ethnographic reports of menstrual customs and beliefs have been restricted to terse statements on the meaning of menstrual blood that is seen always as symbolically dangerous or otherwise defiling and to normative accounts of the practices instituted to contain the perceived negative potency of the substance. These analyses have great predictability, for again and again they centre on the concepts of taboo (supernaturally sanctioned law) and pollution (symbolic contamination). In the work of Young and Bacdayam (1965) "Menstrual Taboos and Social Rigidity" some taboos restrict the behaviour of menstruating women themselves, whereas others restrict the behaviour of other people in relation to such women. The threats that are culturally attributed to menstruation must likewise be analytically separated. Moreover, if the taboo is violated, will the menstruating woman harm someone else or herself? Frazer pointed out long ago (1950-1963:260) that these two kinds of danger associated with taboos are quite separate, and we urge that they are treated as such (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988:10).

Mary Douglas (1966) has written on the topic of menstrual pollution. Her broader investigations of pollution and of body symbolism place her foremost among theoretical contributors to the comparative cultural-anthropological study of menstruation. She proposes that the cultural coding of a substance as a pollutant is based in a shared perception of that substance as anomalous to general symbolic, or cultural, order. Pollutants are coded as "dirt", symbolic "matter out of place". As such, pollutants are at once a product of a specific symbolic order and a danger to it. As dangers to symbolic order, pollutants are also perceived as dangers to social order given that for Douglas-following-Durkheim-the symbolic system has functional goals in the maintenance of society. Hence the acknowledgement of pollutants in cultural systems is accompanied by prohibitions the intent of which is the protection of social order from disruptive forces symbolized by culturally defined anomalous substances. Therefore in terms of Douglas's concept, menstrual blood is perceived as a dire pollutant whose effects must be contained through stringent taboos. However,

according to Douglas, anomalies are simply powerful, their power being granted a negative or positive valence to be determined through specific cultural analysis.

In my cultural setting, menstrual blood is evaluated from a negative viewpoint as pollution, hence the body of a female spirit medium who is in the period of monthly bleeding is not pure enough if she possesses and will affect the power of god in ritual and may harm herself. From this topic of pollution, the taboo of female possession is constructed to prohibit female spirit media from performing possession rituals between during their monthly periods. Beyond menstrual blood being harmful to female spirit media, for male spirit media, menstruating women are dangerous for his possession ritual. Thus they are prohibited from participating in the possession of male spirit media, also of female spirit media and other females. Here, the inequality between male and female, in the possession ritual, is confirmed by the idea of the female body being restricted and oppressed that is brought about by the negative meaning of the symbol which is menstrual blood which indicates that the category of woman is socially constructed in such a way that to be a woman is, by definition, to be in an oppressed situation.

1.4 Ethnicity

In Thai society, there are many ethnic groups that have lived together for a long time under the domination of Thai culture. Nevertheless one sees the phenomena of mixing, borrowing and adoption of culture among ethnic groups.

One of the most disputed terms in postcolonial studies, “Hybridity” commonly refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization.” Hybridity had become part of a colonialist discourse on ethnicity. Hybridity refers in its most basic sense to mix, to the occurrence of mixture. Hybridisation is understood as the process by which hybridity occurs and a hybrid is formed. The term originates from biology and was subsequently employed in linguistics and in racial theory in the nineteenth century. Its contemporary uses are scattered across numerous academic disciplines and is salient in culture. A hybrid is something that is mixed, hybridity is simply mixture.

Hybridity as a concern for racial purity responds clearly to the “zeitgeist” of colonialism where, despite the backdrop of the humanitarian age of enlightenment, social hierarchy was beyond contention as was the position of Europeans at its

summit. The social transformations that followed the ending of colonial mandates, rising immigration, and economic liberalisation profoundly altered the use and understanding of the term hybridity.

Hybridity is not confined to a cataloguing of difference. Its ‘unity’ is not found in the sum of its parts, but emerges from the process of opening what Homi Bhabha has called, “a third space”, within which other elements encounter and transform each other. Hybridity is both the assemblage that occurs whenever two or more elements meet, and the initiation of a process of change (Papastergiadis 2000: 170).

The phenomenon of “Hybridity of Culture” is not explicit only in Western society, it also occurs in traditional society. In regarding Thai society, its social context and political structure permit the opportunity of cultural exchange, therefore hybridity clearly appears in the dimension of a belief system, especially among Thai, Chinese and the Hindu religion.

The Chinese immigrated to settle in Thai society. Simultaneously they brought the Greater Vehicle or the Mahayana Buddhism and worship ritual of gods into Thai society. On this theme, Landon (1946:149), in a book *The Chinese in Thailand* states that the religions of the Chinese in Thailand are composed of many belief systems such as Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, ancestor and spirit worship etc. The Chinese in Thai society or Sino-Thai have a belief system and ritual practice that comes from various religions. However, they placed no emphasis on believing in one religion at all. The Chinese have many more gods than other ethnic groups and their gods originated from natural phenomena, Taoism and the Mahayana Buddhism. Hinayana Buddhism is held as the main religion of Thailand, however the belief in spirit phenomena is still buried deeply in Thai culture and it has an important role in the Thai way of life. So, it can be seen that Thais still worship gods, spirits and souls of dead people at the present time. There are not many differences between the beliefs in spirits of the Thais or of the Chinese who immigrated into Thai society in the Ayutthaya period. Notwithstanding that, most rituals of the Chinese in Thailand try to follow Taoism, however, they are sometimes called Buddhists as are Thai people. Therefore, at the same time the Chinese accepted Buddhist rituals that Thai have always practiced, such as merit making on major Buddhist Holy Days and ordination as Buddhist monks in Hinayana Buddhism. Somboon Suksamran (1976:23), who studied Chinese belief in Thai Society, states that there is not much difference

between the religious belief of Thais and Chinese. Both the Chinese and Thai could weld harmoniously together. Most Thai people identify themselves as Buddhists, nevertheless they believe in sacred things and spirit possession. Although most of the Chinese in Thai Society performed Taoist rituals, sacrificing gods and sacred things, however in common with Buddhism the sect of the Greater Vehicle (Mahayana) still influences many rituals of the Chinese in Thai society.

Chatsumarn (1984:13), in her research of “Religious Beliefs and practices of the Thai People in Nakhon Pathom”, wrote about the belief of Chinese in Nakhon Pathom as follows;

“Religious practices as carried out by the Chinese lack the basic understanding of religious context underlying it. Therefore, religious observances become only traditional practices lacking inner vitality and understanding. The Chinese descendants are now at the transitional period that they do not uphold Chinese culture seriously as they are born in Thailand, but at the same time they have neither accepted the Thai culture nor religious value. They are at a very crucial situation for having neither Chinese nor Thai religious values to which they can base themselves upon for their moral foundation.”

According to the belief in the ritual of spirit possession, the local people of both Thai and Chinese backgrounds establish relationships with spirits through spirit media. In fact, this is nothing new and it is found also in other countries. What is striking is that this belief among the local people is becoming the most popular one in the present era. The majority of the population in Nakhon Pathom, is Chinese with an outstanding characteristic of practical synthesis. As observed, they usually follow the practices which yield good results. Hence, the belief in spirits through spirit media is gaining popularity easily. They seek guidance from the spirits for the problems which they have related to their businesses (Chatsumarn 1984:4-5).

The section on the Hindu religion from the article “The remarks in the history about the relation between Thai and Chinese since ancient until the end of 19th century” Praprüt Sakunrattanamatee (1989:31-32) referred to the fact that the Thai or Siam Empire was overwhelmingly influenced by the Indian subcontinent culture and identified this culture as an essential feature of High Culture. Approximately in 11th

century, Thai accepted the idea of the Hindu religion and Nakhon Pathom or the former Tavaravadee Empire was a centre of Indian culture. Thus Indian culture influenced many items such as the ideas of cosmology, language, animism, agricultural rituals such as *the annual ploughing ceremony*⁷, even the name of the capital city shows the influence of Indian culture, even if these are the names of Hindu gods, *God Indra* and *Vishnukarm (Visanu)*, are part of the official full name of Bangkok or *Krung Thep*⁸.

Thai continued to believe in a personal vital essence (*Khwan*), in spirits (*Phi*), in gods (now called *Devata* in Hindu-Buddhist terms), as well as in fate or cosmic influence (*Chata*) – notions adapted from Indian thought. These beliefs, however, related to proximate, not ultimate, causes of fortune and misfortune. One's karma ultimately determined whether one could be successful in securing one's wandering vital essence, in propitiating spirits, in worshiping the deities, or in dispelling cosmic influences.

In the history of Thailand, possession phenomena show a long mixing, borrowing and adaptation of influences from a variety of belief systems. In other words “Hybridity of culture” appears in ritual possession performances. The process of mixing, borrowing and adaptation among the various systems of Thai, Chinese and Hindu religion, in possession phenomena has been rather harmonious. Besides Hinayana Buddhism, in the belief of Thai people there are many gods or spirits as there also are in the Chinese Mahayana Buddhism and the Hindu religion.

⁷ This ceremony has been performed since ancient times and designed to give an auspicious beginning to the new planting season. In fact, the ploughing ceremony is of Brahman origin and it was practiced even before the birth of Lord Buddha. Nowadays, although Thai Majesties are present at the ceremony, the King no longer takes the leading role, the King appoints the Ploughing Lord as his representative to carry out the rites. During this colorful ceremony, the amount of rainfall to be expected in the coming season is forecast. The Ploughing Lord is offered a choice of three lengths of cloth, all looking identical, if his choice is the longest one there will be little rain during the coming year, if it is the shortest one, rain will be plentiful while the one of medium length indicates average rain. When the ploughing is finished the bulls are presented with seven different foods and drink, such as rice seed, beans, maize, hays, sesame seed, water and alcoholic liquor. Whatever the bulls choose to eat or drink, it is forecast that this will be plentiful during the year.

⁸ Usually Thai people call their capital “Bangkok” by its short form “Krung Thep” which means “city of Angels”. In fact, the capital's official full name is “Krungthep Maha Nakorn Amorn Ratanakosindra Mahindrayudhya Mahadilokpop Noparatana Rajdhani Burirom Udom Rajnivet Mahastan Amorn Pimarn Avatarn Satit Sakkatutiya Vishnukarm Prasit” which may be translated into English as follow : The city of angels, the great city, the residence of the Emerald Buddha, the impregnable city (of Ayutthaya) of God Indra, the grand capital of the world endowed with the nine precious gems, the happy city, abounding in enormous royal places which resemble the heavenly abode where reigns the reincarnated God, a given by Indra and build by Vishnukarm.

Consequently the types of god that appear in the possession ritual are formed from all these belief systems.

The hybridity of the belief system in Thai society is influenced by the ethnic group that the spirit medium belongs to and the type of god for which he or she is the medium. The hybridity also affects the flexibility of the possession ritual performance. The gods represented can be divided into three types, namely Thai gods, Chinese gods or Hindu gods so it can be understood how significant the hybridity in the performance is to the ethnic groups.

From the above four theories, the possession theories are fundamental to understanding the significance of spirit mediumship to society and culture, particularly where it is evaluated positively. Accordingly the body which recognizes the significance of movement and action as the basis of engagement with the world and performance as a form of embodiment that people use to encounter others. Therefore performance theories explain how to be a successful spirit medium and the interaction between spirit medium and clients. While ritual performance is proceeding simultaneously their interaction is also explicit. The question of gender has been explored; what happens or what are the changes that occur to the gender role of persons whose bodies are possessed by male or female gods in their social location and what effect do the cultural influences have on their real bodies? Yet the context of culture is concerned. In ritual performances the inequality between male and female spirit media is influenced by the viewpoint about menstrual blood and purity of the body that spirit media possess. However, the performance through the body is the presentation of another identity of a person and performance ability is held as the strategy for negotiating a person's gender. Furthermore because of the issue of ethnicity it is easy to understand the mixing, borrowing and adoption of culture, which appear in the possession ritual performance. Consequently, the embodiment of a spirit points to the significance of the body in the concepts of performance, gender, ethnic group and subjectivity.

Chapter 2

The Discussion of Spirit Mediumship Studies

The second chapter is composed of three topics. The first topic is a general theoretical discussion. Despite the fact that my study focused on spirit mediumship in Thai society, also included in this topic is the attempt to come to some conclusions about the spirit mediumship phenomena from various cultures and to consider various viewpoints on the subject. The second topic is Thai possession studies, in Thai society and other regions, possession is an important part of the belief system and this phenomenon has been discussed by Sociologists and Anthropologists from many viewpoints. Here it is useful to study the literature to understand the direction that the phenomenon is taking and to make comparisons with general case studies in other social and cultural settings. The third theme is a comparative summary of general studies and Thai cases; due to the many theories that are applied to explain spirit mediumship phenomena, researches from various cultures including Thai society have been discussed to illustrate the theories of analysis.

2.1 General theoretical discussion

Spirit mediumship appears in many cultural settings not only in Thai society and there are many explanations of spirit mediumship. Considering the research of anthropologists, their publications and reviews illustrate concepts for elucidating possession rituals in various cultures.

In a book by Heinze (1988) *Trance and Healing in Southeast Asia Today*, from her longitudinal study in Thailand, she found that also in Malaysia and Singapore, spirit media have a vital role in the healing system, using traditional healing to cure illness, using spirit media as psychologists who cure mental illness for people in a complex society. Furthermore, this belief system relates to the economic system. Spirit media hold annual ceremonies, therefore they spend lavishly on good food, arranging banquets for people in their ceremony. For the cultural system, spirit media act as agents who maintain the beliefs of the ethnic group in a heterogeneous society. There are examples on this theme in the research of Babb (1974b) "Hindu Mediumship in Singapore". The Indian community is the third biggest ethnic group of Singapore and there are 30 Hindu temples in Singapore. Spirit media are vital in the

religious beliefs of the Indian community, they mediate between Hindu deities and Indian people and by participating together, the rituals of the Hindu spirit media, their religion and the solidarity of the ethnic group were strengthened. The Hindu spirit medium has three standard patterns. The first, the place where the spirit medium operates is temple worship; the second, the gods and goddesses who possess spirit media are the same as those represented in temples and finally the healing of spirit medium are similarly meshed with broader traditions. Francisco (1978) also Rogler and Hallingshead (1961) referred to spirit media as psychologists because they understand the mental state and nature of humans, their knowledge of human psychology rises from their own experiences because they suffered from mental illnesses and then they were cured and recovered, thus they understand and know the strategies to cure mental illness. In addition, due to the fact that they are members of their culture, they know therefore all about the ways of life and interaction in the community thus they could apply various strategies to cure mental illness in people. In Puerto Rica, the lower classes always ask for cures for mental illness from spirit media. Sometimes spirit media cooperate with modern psychologists to cure patients. Such modern psychologists send mentally ill patients to spirit media. The lower classes tend to ask for services from spirit media more than middle and higher class because the people in middle and higher classes are too careful to use the services of spirit media (Rogler and Hallingshead 1961). Fry (1976) analyzes the roles of spirit medium in the Chiota village of Zimbabwe. Spirit media support the community in their way of making a living, such as a spell for rain, healing, predicting the future and getting rid of bad luck. Yet spirit media also support the community when social change occurs in the village. It is the result of economic development; young men go to work outside the village, this situation effects the family relations between men and women. Thus, the spirit medium has a role to solve tensions and be a mental harbour for members of the community. Sometimes the cause of tension is due to the tradition of inheritance, the oldest son will inherit all of the legacy but to abate this tension, a spirit medium while entering into possession always tells the daughters and younger sons that they will oversee the family and farm. So people will ask the spirit medium who reconciles conflicts or clears up disputes in the village for advice on how to stop fights and weld people in the village together. The spirit medium can do this as he or she knows well about the social tensions. Fry referred to the status and prestige of the

spirit medium who remains in public favour. They spend a lot of money on banquets and give clothes to the poor and his followers, at the same time he is the person who controls redistributive systems.

Of the theory frame, Fry used Weber's doctrine of authority to explain the spirit medium as a charismatic leader of belief and ritual whose status and relations with the community rises from personal attractiveness that makes others consent to him. In a political role, spirit media always give advice to the leader of the village on how to solve problems, thus he has political influence in the village.

From the many studies above that are illustrated, depicting the phenomena of spirit media in many areas that relate to systems of each society such as the economic and social systems and spirit media support the members of communities in many ways especially in the curing of mental illness. Walker (1972:171) wrote that altered states of consciousness⁹ may also be functional for the individual and society. They may be particularly useful in healing because of the heightened suggestibility of the patient, the tendency to give increased meaning and weight to ideas, the propensity for emotional catharsis, and the frequent subsequent feeling of rejuvenation. Some altered states of consciousness aid the maintenance of psychic equilibrium and mental health. They can also open the way to new realms of knowledge, inspiration, and religious experience. They use the art of dressing as a symbol to make gods real in the imagination and they can influence and control the emotions of others also the dramatic behaviour in possession ceremonies serves to convince the participants of the continued personal interest of their gods in them, to reaffirm their religious beliefs and to allow the community of men to exert some control over the unknown, all while enhancing group solidarity.

In the work of Raymond (1967), "Ritual and Drama in Malay Spirit Mediumship" he speculates about the performance of spirit media, that the audience,

⁹ In *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) an altered state of consciousness refers to any mental state subjectively recognized or objectively observed as a significant deviation from "normal" waking consciousness. Sleep, dreaming, hypnosis, brainwashing, mental absorption, meditation, and various mystical experiences are all altered states of consciousness. These states are characterized by disturbances in concentration, attention, judgment, and memory; by archaic modes of thought; by perceptual distortions, including those of space, time, and body; by an increased evaluation of subjective experiences, a sense of the ineffable, feelings of rejuvenation, loss of a sense of control, and hypersuggestibility. The altered state of consciousness most frequently associated with spirit possession is trance, defined as "a condition of dissociation, characterized by the lack of voluntary movement and frequently by automatism in act and thought, illustrated by hypnotic and mediumistic conditions".

too, though spectators, are themselves for the most part directly involved in the situation, as relatives, friends, neighbours, and may be personally concerned in the outcome. The situation is not a constructed one, conceived with any representative character; it deals with real people here and now. The plot is not worked out in advance but allowed to evolve as the action proceeds. The end is not known at the time of the beginning. Actors, spectators and patients all have a fairly clear idea of the general plan of what is about to occur, but their speculations as to the exact resolution of the situation may vary widely. It is like a scene in a theatre workshop where the play is allowed to develop freely out of the reactions between the actors. There is lacking what Virginia Woolf has called *the single vision of an author* (Raymond 1967:203-204). Schieffelin (1996) "On failure and performance : Throwing the Medium out of the séance" has illustrated, how the strategies that spirit media employ to continue their ritual performance work and about the effect of their presence, the ability to create reality by symbols of performance such as good dance and singing manner that are appropriate to the character of deity, a voice that differs from the natural voice of an ordinary person; furthermore oratory and prediction skill were vital talents for the reality of the performance. The dramatic enactments of ritual are more than theatre, since the roles are not merely "played", but are live: all the participants consider the events of the ritual drama as real as or more so than the events of everyday life and there is no skeptical, dispassionate, incredulous audience (Bourguignon 1965:57). Thus successful performance could increase people's faith and bring credibility, prestige and social attention. Likewise Raymond (1967:207) suggested that for a successful translation of the spirit medium rite into drama, the financial structure of the whole situation would have to be re-ordered and also the career structure for the performance.

The possession of women can best be understood by comparing their status with that of men (Hamer 1966: 400). According to the works of Boddy (1989) *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan* and Ong (1987) *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory women in Malaysia*, they stress the sexual difference in the context of Islam. There gender hierarchy is marked and women's behaviour is more rigorously controlled than men's. Thus, women are under considerable pressure to conform to the rather specific ideals of their sex, consequently conflict models depicting possession as women's indirect claim for

redress tacitly depend for their authority on the perspectives of socially dominant men (Boddy 1989:344; 1994:415). In the opinion of Ong women who are not in the position to negotiate with the manager and the owner of the factory where they work and are under pressure from the many prohibitions of Islam; they accommodate to work in the factory and suffer from tension, so spirit possession is the way to abate pressure and negotiate to terminate conflict in the organization.

According to the work of Lan (1987) "Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and spirit Media in Zimbabwe", possession states are manipulated consciously toward political ends and where they both influence and are influenced by mundane subjectivity. Just as lesbian butch and femme can be read as secondary elaborations upon a more primary but still constructed femaleness, so the monarchical masculinity of the Zimbabwean possessing spirits can be seen as secondary elaborations upon an initial construction of specifically ethicized maleness.

Consequently, considering the research works reviewed above, it is seen that the publications of Heinze (1988), Babb (1974b), Francisco (1978), Fry (1976) and Walker (1972) manifest that the functions of spirit media to their communities have been analyzed. Although the cultural settings are different the functions of spirit media in their communities seem to continue to fulfill the needs of the people in similar ways, especially in the role of traditional psychologists and healers. Fry's book shows the distinctive function of the spirit medium in agricultural society, beside functions as other societies. The spirit medium has another vital function that is a spell which can bring rain. Moreover possession belief is considered to relate to another system of society. From this concept, Heinze elucidates that this system relates to the economic system. From the point of view of the ethnic group, Heinze and Babb explained another role of spirit media: they act as agents who maintain the culture of each ethnic group by possession rituals in the situation where heterogeneous ethnic groups reside together in the same setting. In the works of Walker (1972), Raymond (1967) and Schieffeling (1996), the concept of performance is explained. Their arguments are based on in which direction the possession performance should be organized, what are the constituents of the spirit medium's presentation, how powerful is a successful performance and how about the effect of failure. The works of Raymond (1967) and Schieffelin (1996) besides representing the strategies of performance, the interaction between ritual performer and participants is emphasized.

How they interpretate each other influences the direction of the situation in the possession ritual performance. It is necessary for the performer, the spirit medium, to interpret the expectation of the participants who, as the audience, are expected to respond consistently and to interpret the symbols which the performer attempts to communicate. Therefore the direction of situation in the possession ritual performance depends on what the participant's expectations of the spirit medium are, such as healing and prediction of problem in everyday life etc.

In the works of Boddy (1989), Ong (1987) and Lan (1987) the circumstances surrounding the concept of gender are explained. Their purpose is to analyze the status of female spirit media in the context of a culture that is dominated by males and oppressed by the principles of religion.

From each concept above spirit mediumship is viewed in a different dimension, furthermore these concepts will be compared with the circumstances in Thai society for the difference and resemblance. As my research on Thai society will continue, it will be necessary to examine research publications and other literatures in order to maintain an understanding of the whole picture of spirit mediumship in Thai society.

2.2 Thai Possession Studies

Research of literature, in journals, magazines, books and old legal documents, at the libraries of Thammasat University, Siam Society and Institution of Archeology of Thammasat University helped to provide information on spirit mediumship in Thai society. The data provided in this literature, for the most part research reviews of anthropologists will now be evaluated and the concepts presented analyzed.

In Thailand the phenomenon of spirit mediumship is spread throughout the country so the studies have been done in the North especially in Chiang Mai province (Irvin 1982, Tanabe 1996, Wijeyewardene 1986, Chaladchai 1984) Northeast (Pattana 1999) and one part of Tambiah's study, in a book *Buddhism and the spirit cults in North-East Thailand* (1970), discussed spirit medium and possession phenomena in Central and Southern Thailand (Golomb 1993).

Several publications present the roles and adaptations that spirit media have to undergo to remain in the changing process of society, economics, culture and politics, despite the fact that Buddhism, the scientific system and modern medicine endeavour to destroy the belief system of spirit media. Nevertheless this system still remains and influences the people in Thai society and rapidly conforms to serve the various needs of the people. Tanabe (1996) discusses spirit medium circumstances in the Northern regions of Thailand in order to understand the aggressive external changes to religion in the Northern society. The result of the changes occurring since the late 1980s such as increasing mobility and the people migrating from rural areas to make a living in urban areas, in starting new businesses, the flow of new goods and services and the people moving to work as labourers in factories. The changing situation brings displacement and presses the people to adjust to the new life and they have no power to negotiate. Melvin Seeman studies these changes (Vogo 1980:333). He refers to the changing from primitive society to modern society that effect society in five issues;

1. Declining and weakening of the decision-making unit and kinship systems
2. Transformation of original belief to secularization and extension of bureaucratic organization
3. Social heterogeneousness occurs from division of labour and specialization
4. Extension of organizations and institutions. Development in economics, politics, and social infrastructure especially in the area of transportation
5. Migration and social mobility are increasing and this leads to a decline of localization and interpersonal relation.

Seeman's argument agrees with Tanabe's notion that, when change is happening rapidly in every part of life, the people feel alienated¹⁰ with feelings of

¹⁰ The sense that our own abilities, as human beings, are taken over by other entities. The term was originally used by Marx to refer to the projection of human powers onto gods, subsequently he employed the term to refer to the loss of control on the part of workers over the nature of the labour task, and over the products of their labour. Feuerbach used the term to refer to the establishing of gods or divine forces distinct from human beings.

powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness¹¹, valuelessness¹² and social isolation. Thus in complex society the Northern people are incompetent labourers moreover they feel confused, anxious and non-stable in their life. Tanabe suggests that spirit possession acts as an instrument for coping with social change, helps people when there are changes in their lives. Many people feel powerless, when a spirit comes to possess their body, their status transforms to become that of gods despite the fact that it is only for a short time and their services to clients are used as the mental treatment of a psychologist.

Chaladchai Ramitanon (1984) is another person who studied spirit media in the Northern Province of Thailand, he referred to the *Phi Chao Na*¹³ traditional ritual in which the spirit medium has an important role as a mediator between *Phi Chao Nai* and local people: when the spirit medium enters into possession, he will solve problems for the people. Moreover, this ritual is also involved in the economy and political system of Thailand. When historical *Lanna* or Chang Mai which were old empires of the Northern Thailand, became part of Thailand, this area encounter change in many ways; for example in the economic, cultural and belief systems. While the power of the original ruler abated also the influence of local spirits receded. The structure of the spirit and sacredness are believed to be related to political and economic change. The belief of Bangkok, the centre of Thai culture, is more influential. Thus spirit media transform to possessing spirits according to the belief of Bangkok. Likewise Pensri Dook (1986) argues, in a paper presenting the relation between spirit belief and Thai life especially in the Northeast society of Thailand, that a spirit medium is the important leader in the ritual of spirits for being the mediator

¹¹ Normlessness or a state in which norms have been eroded. A norm is an expectation of how people will behave, and it takes the form of a rule that is socially rather than formally enforced. The effect of normlessness whether at a personal or societal level, norms become less binding for individuals. Individuals thus lose the sense of what is right and wrong. A property of the social structure in which individual desires are no longer regulated by common norms and where, as a consequence, individuals are left without moral guidance in the pursuit of their goals (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normlessness>).

¹² Ideas held by human individuals or groups about what is desirable, proper, good or bad. Differing values represent key aspects of variations in human culture. What individuals value is strongly influenced by the specific culture in which they happen to live (Giddens 1997:586). Thus in a state of valuelessness the individuals lose the sense of what is desirable, proper, good or bad. This situation occurs when individuals encounter the new criteria of value.

¹³ Phi Chao Nai is local ruler spirit.

between people and their spirits; however Buddhism now takes part in spirit rituals so that monks are invited to participate in their ritual. Nevertheless, in the *Naga* sacrifice ritual¹⁴ in the Nakhon Phanom Province of Northeast Thailand, this traditional ritual has declined in popularity because of the failure of the ritual leader as a spirit medium (Pichead Saipan 1996). Of the east of Thailand, Virat and Nipawan (1990) referred to spirit media in Amphoe Muang Chachoengsoa province. From their fieldwork, they have shown that the following are the functions of the spirit medium in society:

1. In the economy: the ritual activity of the spirit medium forces the economy to flow and distribute revenue to people in many groups because much equipment is used in rituals such as food, clothing, music, flowers amongst others.

2. In the social system: spirit possession activity forces people to come together and interact in the ritual. At the same time, social solidarity occurs among participants and occasionally forces the establishment of a public benefit organization.

The research, of Auraiwan Pantuprapan (1986), in Bangkok, *Psychological health problems and clients of spirit medium* has the aim finding out what the problems of the spirit medium's clients were. From this researcher's viewpoint, her study is trying to understand the roles of spirit media. Auraiwan found that most of the clients were women (75%), their ages were between 31 to 50 years old (51.70%), most of them graduated from primary school (41.48%) and in addition the majority of them were Buddhist and married. For the causes of asking for services from spirit media, it can be said that the problems were concerns about the family 44.89%, economics 34.09% and illness 26.14% respectively.

With regard to the theme of gender, spirit media may be possessed by a deity with the same or different sex as the person possesses. Wijeyewardene (1986) reported that most female spirit media in Chiang Mai are possessed by male deities, often of princely or warrior rank. Yet the costumes create the impression of an intermediate sexless category, rather than transforming females into males. They are

¹⁴ For over a century mysterious fireballs the size of oranges or betel nut fruit were shooting up from the depths of the Mekong River into the sky. The unexplained phenomena generally take place on the full moon night of the 11th lunar month which coincides with the end of the Buddhist Rains Retreat (in October). According to the traditional belief, which has been established to describe the mysterious phenomena, the fireballs are created by the Naga, a mythical serpent like deity who is also a water symbol. One Buddhist legend describes a seven headed Naga which spread its cobra like hoods to shelter the meditating Buddha.

however more likely to identify the deity as being male than female. On the topic of gender, Tanabe (1991) based on Foucault's doctrine of a discourse, to analyze how power operates and what effects are produced by examining the ritual of domestic spirit cults, wrote

“In societies like that of the Northern Thai, the discourse is also, however formulated in quite a different way with much emphasis on a type of traditional authority. The discourse there refers to a corpus of patterned representations, utterances and other performing practices such as body movement, which are deposited in stocks of popular knowledge, and inscribed and embodied particularly in ritual (Tanabe 1991:185).”

The discourse on gender is best illustrated within the female centred spirit ritual of the *Phi Meng* ritual, only women were possessed by ancestor spirits. It is apparently full of women's claims to higher, prestigious status comparable to men's in religious, political and economic fields. This is frequently re-affirmed by the men's rather indifferent view that the matrilineal spirit cult and its ritual in general, are merely the concern of women; however the female claims addressed in the biologically-founded kinship are paradoxically broken down through the ritual process.

Pattana (2000: 163-164) discussed religious belief and the spirit medium situation at the present time in his articles entitled “*Discourses of the Irrationality: A Reflection on Spirit Media- Anthropologist Encounters*” and examined possession phenomena in Thai post-modern society. His research is based on the post-modern theory of Foucault, therefore he concentrated on this important subject, which is one part of the post-modern religions of Thai Society, although possession phenomena have appeared from former times until the present time.

In accordance with his explanation, Thai Society has recently passed through a modernization process, so there are immense changes in the fields of economics, society and politics. The term “post-modern society” included other popular definitions such as “information society” and “globalization”, on the perimeter of religions the people seek and participate in beliefs and rituals which could fulfill their psychological needs. Moreover, on the part of religious identity, the people nowadays

contemplate having more than one religious belief and faith. To clarify this phenomenon, they always participate, as observed, in the rituals at the Buddhist Temple, and at the same time, they go to consult spirit media and perform sacrifices to the god which belong to other cults such as the Chinese and Hindu gods. Moreover, it is found that godly images belonging to other cults have always been placed on the same ledge as the Lord Buddha image.

Taking into consideration theories about spirit mediumship in Thai society, one can conclude again that the work of Chaladchai (1984) and Virat and Nipawan (1990) is based on the concept of functionalism, yet they do not neglect to show that the possession belief system relates to other systems, namely economic and social systems. However for Chaladchai and Tanabe it seems that the concept of capitalism supports changes which are occurring in Northern Thailand. It is interesting to consider how capitalism and materialism relate to the spirit medium phenomena and how the occurrence of factory labour, the rapid changes and the new situations effect people in many ways. In this tense situation, spirit media serve as mental harbours and encourage the people to confront everyday life problems. Foucault's doctrine of discourse is another concept which, according to Tanabe and Pattana, explicitly explains possession rituals especially the question of female spirit media. Each hypothesis proffers speculations that try to present a basic picture of spirit mediumship although it is not one based on the field of anthropology.

2.3 Comparative Summary of General Studies and Thai Cases

Spirit medium in Thailand have important roles in many social and cultural settings particularly those of healing and prediction. The research projects of Heinze (1998) in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, Babb (1974b) in Singapore and Tanabe (1991) in Northern Thailand explore another role of spirit media; they indicate the significance of the spirit media in maintaining the culture. Spirit media who possess the gods of each ethnic group or sub-culture, such as the domestic spirit in the work of Tanabe; maintain the cultural identity and reinforce solidarity of each cultural or ethnic group to which they belong. Furthermore Virat and Nipawan (1990), Heinze (1988), and Fry (1976) illustrate the role of spirit media in the economic system and the distribution of resources in their community. Although, under the dominance of the main religion "Buddhism", belief in the spirit possession system becomes the

marginal belief, nevertheless spirit media still have the role of serving the people and helping them to solve problems in everyday life. The study of Rogler and Hallingshead (1961) carried out in Puerto Rico is consistent with the study of Golomb (1993) in showing that most of the spirit media's clients are in the lower class.

The publications of Tanabe (1996), Chaladchai (1984) and Golomb (1993) have signified that the roles of spirit media in Thai society are linked to social and cultural change. In the changes to everyday life caused by modernization and capitalism spirit media act as traditional psychologists. They maintain the equilibrium of mental health for the people. Also Fry (1976) has indicated that when social change occurs in Chiota village as a result of economic development the spirit medium has a role in solving tensions and problems for the inhabitants of the village.

Many studies present the similarity and difference of the roles of spirit media in urban and rural areas. The spirit medium in the role of a psychologist is similar in the two areas. They are consulted by people when they have problems such as with their family, illness, occupation etc. or in some cases rapid social and cultural change is the cause of tension. The study of Tanabe (1996), Golomb (1993), and Virat and Nipawan (1990), in Thailand, and Kendall (1996) in Korea present the role of spirit media in urban areas, while the studies of Fry (1976) and Boddy (1989) illustrate the spirit medium phenomena in rural areas. In the part of the difference it is clear that in urban areas spirit media serve the people who have to earn a salary or earn a living working in commerce. Consequently the spirit media are expected to help them to achieve a higher position in the organization or business. While in rural areas spirit media serve people whose livelihoods are related to their occupation in agriculture. In rural areas spirit media are expected to improve the fertility of the soil by performing the rituals of entreating rain.

In regard to the style of spirit possession, Tanabe (1996) and Chaladchai Ramitanon (1984) have indicated that in northern Thailand the possession of local spirits has declined due to the influence of the culture of central Thailand. Now the type of spirit in the possession ritual is rather more inclined to be the same type as in central Thailand. This is an example of the significance of cultural change on the spirit possession ritual.

In the ritual performance, Kendall (1996) in Korea and Raymond (1967) in the state of Kalantan in Malaysia have explained that a drum is the vital instrument to

create the intensive rhythm to stimulate people to enter the possession state. Moreover the study of Tanabe (1991) in Northern Thailand states that music also has a central role in this process, facilitating the possession of the gyrating women. Simultaneously spinning and rotating their body clock-wise around the rope, they become giddy and are finally entranced.

In many societies most spirit media are women as in the studies of Mischel (1958) in Trinidad, Irwin (1982) and Tanabe (1996) in Thai society and Boddy (1994) in Sudan. Golomb (1993) discusses this theme that unsurprisingly, the vast majority of possession victims among Siamese Thais have been women, due to their relatively underprivileged or oppressed status in traditional society. The circumstances that have touched off possession behaviour among Thai women are the very ones of which they have found themselves most fearful, powerless, burdened, or constrained. Most often difficulties in sexual or marital relations have been involved. It is reasonable to expect women to be more prone than men to possession in most societies because their life possibilities offer them little opportunity to gain self-esteem through personal achievement, and they have less range and degree of expression of various usually suppressed drives (Walker 1972). Boddy (1989) suggested that while women's status was low in the main religion, they could attain higher status and be released from the oppression by become the steed of god. Also as the study of Tanabe (1991) has stated, in the possession ritual of the domestic spirit cult of northern Thailand the status of women is raised in the possession ritual so that they have dominance over men who are inferior in this ritual.

The frames of theory which are explicit in the general studies and also in Thai cases explain the phenomena namely the first, "gender theories" as the frame of analysis which appear in the studies of Tanabe (1991), Ong (1987), and Boddy (1989). They emphasize that the status of the female spirit medium is under the influence and the restriction of the main religion. The second, "the concept of functionalism", indicates the roles of the spirit medium in each social and cultural setting. The third, "performance theories", for instance the studies of Kendall (1996), Firth (1967), Schieffelin (1996), and Tanabe (1991) present the factors that help individuals to be the successful spirit media and the interaction between spirit medium and clients while ritual possession performance is taking place.

Part II

The General Phenomena

In Part II I intend to begin with the delineation of the whole picture of spirit media in Thai society and Amphoe Muang Nakhon Pathom, in order to construct the fundamental understanding of general phenomena in my fieldwork before recounting and discussing five specific case studies according to each theory issue. Hence in each of the original 38 sample spirit media who were interviewed the following details, namely sex, age, level of education, conditions preceding initiation and the style of possession are clarified and discussed. Here my samples are instances of spirit media from the central region of Thailand therefore this data may be useful to compare with former researches which examined possession practitioners in other regions or provinces of Thailand. Consequently, this section covers two topics namely “spirit medium in Thai Society” and “The phenomenon of spirit mediumship as appearing in Amphoe Muang Nakhon Pathom Province”.

Chapter 3

The Spirit Medium in Thai Society

Here the whole picture of spirit mediumship from the past until the present day and the correlation between the belief in the spirit in Thai culture and possession will be presented. Therefore this chapter is composed of three sections: “The History of Spirit Media”, “Spirits and Séances” and “Spirit Possession in The Context of Social and Cultural Change”.

3.1 The History of Spirit Medium

It is not very clear historically when the spirit medium began to appear in Thai Society. However, the spirit medium has influenced Thais since the Chinese immigrated to settle their community in Thailand during the middle of the Ayutthaya era ¹⁵(Jakraphan Narayabutra, *Disappeared Year of Printing*: 6). According to the details of the principle of old law 1891- 1892, it was obviously proclaimed by the King Rama V (*King Chulalongkorn*) in order to prohibit Thais and Chinese from performing the spirit possession ritual.

¹⁵ One of the golden eras of Thai history was during the period from 1350 to 1767 when Ayutthaya was the capital. The former capital was founded in 1350 by King Uthong, later crowned King Ramathibodi I, who led his men from U Thong where there was an outbreak of cholera. The city was named for Ayutthaya, the home of Rama in the Indian epic Ramayana which means “Undefeatable”. The kingdom was the best known to Europeans, for it was during this period that Europeans began to wander East, and many of them came to visit Ayutthaya, during its heyday, Thai culture and international communications flourished in the kingdom. The Ayutthaya period has so far been the apex of Thai history. Ayutthaya remained the Thai capital for 417 years and was ruled by 33 kings of five Siamese dynasties until it was conquered by the Burmese. The defeated capital was left in the jungle for over a hundred years when it was wrested out of the jungle again.

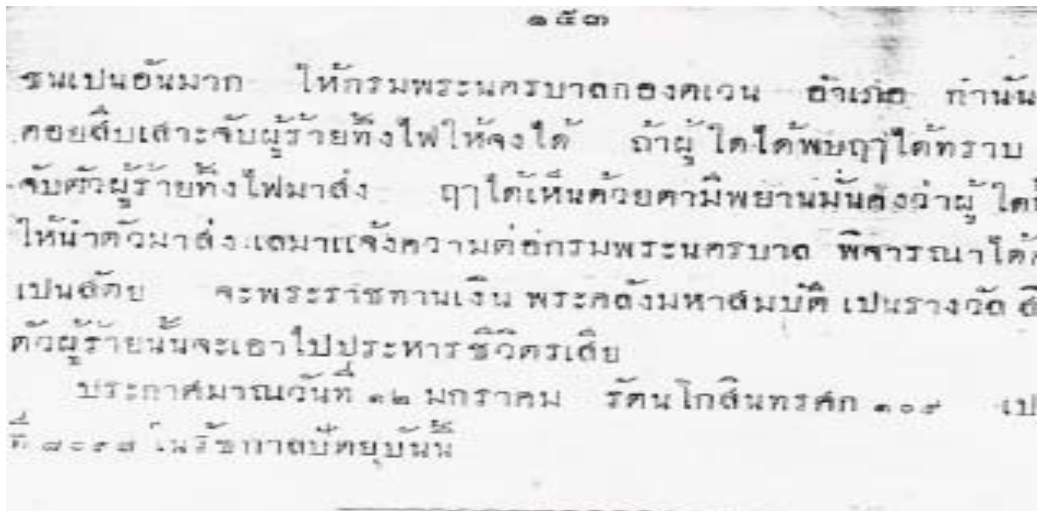
ประกาศ

ห้ามไม่ให้ ไทยแต่จีนทรงเจ้าในที่ต่าง ๆ

มีพระบรมราชโองการ โปรดเกล้าฯ ให้ประกาศขึ้นตราราชฎีกา โดย
 จำให้ทราบทั่วกันว่า เมื่อวันที่ ๔ เดือนเกิดเพลิงไหม้ ไทยขึ้นที่ตำบล
 ค้างเจ้าแก้ว เพลิงก็ตกลงตามมาก คือขี้เขี้ยวพอส้มบด แต่เดี๋ยวนี้
 คนหลายคน ทรงพระมหากรุณาแก่ผู้ ที่ต้องเพลิงไหม้ แดงที่เสีย
 ชีวิตในไฟ จึงได้ทรงโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้ทราบทั่วกัน ก่อนที่จะเกิดเพลิงไหม้
 นี้ มีคนทรงเจ้าเข้าบอกเหตุการว่าเพลิงจะไหม้ แต่เดี๋ยวนี้ไหม้ขึ้น
 ดังคำคนทรงเจ้า ครั้นเมื่อเพลิงไหม้แล้ว ก็ยังมีชาวเจ้าเข้าทรงที่
 ตำบลไหนตำบลนี้ บอกเหตุการว่าเพลิงจะไหม้ตำบลไหนตำบลนั้นคือ
 ไปถือ จมราชฎีกาว่าราชฎีกาบ้านแปงที่หวาดหวั่น พาดพิงถึงบ้าน
 เรือน การซื้อขายก็ไม่เป็นปรกติ จึงได้ตราตั้งกรมพระนครบาล
 ให้ประกาศตั้งนายอำเภอ ไปถือท้องที่ห้ามเสียมให้ทรงเจ้า ภายหลัง
 ได้ทรงทราบฝ่าฝืนของชุดพระบาทองค์ องค์การทรงเจ้าที่ศาลตั้งไป แต่
 ไปดอบดักเจ้าทรงที่ตำบลอื่น ๆ บอกเหตุไฟจะไหม้ ในอันไม่จริง แด

บอกเหตุจมน้ำใช้เจ็บคาง ๆ ราชฎีกาพาดพิงขึ้นบ่อน้ำคอก ๆ คนไป
 ในเหตุ ครั้นในเวลานั้นเกิดเพลิงไหม้ ขึ้นที่ตำบลบางรักอีก แต่ไป
 ทรงทราบว่ามีผู้ ตั้งใจก่อนหน้านั้น อีกต้องคำขาด จึง ทรงพระรา
 คำว่า การที่เพลิงไหม้ทั้งนี้เป็นที่น่ารังเกียจทุกคนทรงที่ทรงเจ้า
 แดงมีพรกพรต จะคิดอ่านให้คนนับถือ บูชานานเพื่อจะหาผลประโยชน์
 ส่วนคนหลายอื่น ๆ เห็นเป็นช่องโอกาสที่จะทุจริต โกงราชฎีกาให้
 ตกใจ ได้จะคิดหาผลประโยชน์อย่างใดอย่างหนึ่ง ก็ทอดยหาการ
 โกงกว่า เจ้าต้องทรงตัวบอกข่าวคราวราชฎีกาไปต่าง ๆ เมื่อถึงจะ
 มีสัมภารังว่า ก็คิดอ่านการทุจริตซึ่งไม่ประกอบเหตุ คืออย่างเหตุ
 การเช่นนี้ใด มีรับในแผ่นดินพระบาทสมเด็จพระนั่งเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว ครั้ง
 หนึ่ง โปรดให้พิจารณาคำหาตัวผู้ ตั้งไฟ ประกอบคำเจ้าที่เข้าทรง
 บอก ได้ตัวพิจารณาคำเป็นด้วย ได้ให้ไปประหารชีวิตเสียเป็นค
 อย่างมีมาแล้ว ครั้งนี้จึงโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้ประกาศมาให้ทราบทั่วกันว่า

ห้ามมิให้ ผู้ ไทยหนึ่งไทยๆ จีนเข้าทรง องค์เจ้าในเขตนี้ เป็นอันขาด
 ถ้าผู้ ไทยเข้าทรงองค์เจ้าในที่ใดตำบลใด ให้ตั้งคนเกณฑ์อำเภอตำบลนั้นจับ
 ตัวมาพิจารณา ถึงเห็นว่าใครจริงแท้เพียงว่าเข้าทรงองค์เจ้า นี้ก็
 คิดการทุจริตอย่างใดคือไปถือ ก็จะต้องพระราชอาญาตั้งแต่ ๓๐ ที
 จนถึง ๕๐ ที ตามโทษฐานโทษ ถ้าพิจารณาได้ความว่าคิดการทุจริต
 เนื่องด้วยการเข้าทรงองค์เจ้าประการใด ก็จะต้องพระราชอาญาทวิโทษ
 ฐานคนโทษ ถ้า กรมพระนครบาล ของเขตแดนอำเภอ ตำบลใดเคย
 ปลดปล่อยให้เข้าทรงองค์เจ้าในเขตตำบลของตัว จะให้ปรับใหม่ตม
 หนึ่งการตั้งไฟเป็นการทำอันศรัทธาแก่ชีวิตแต่ทรัพย์สินสมบัติ ทั้งปวง



**Figure 1: Announcement: No Spirit Possession among Thai and Chinese
Announced on 12th January of Bangkok Era 109**

Announcement:

No Spirit Possession among Thai and Chinese

In accordance with a royal command, it has been announced to the Thai and Chinese that the fire that occurred in the area of *San Chao Kao* District on 9th of this month has spread and reached neighbouring areas rapidly. Much property has been damaged and many people injured. His Majesty the King shows his quality of mercy towards those people who have been injured and have passed away. He ordered officers to investigate and has finally recognized that the fire occurred in accordance with the prediction of spirit media. Not only that but rumours regarding the whereabouts of the next fire, which has already been predicted by spirit media, are spreading among the people in that area. On account of the above mentioned rumour, much apprehension and chaos has occurred among the people as they try to protect their houses and their businesses. His Majesty the King has ordered the Metropolitan Constabulary to release an announcement strictly prohibiting spirit possession. Consequently spirit possession in that area has been stopped for the time being. However it has been appearing in other districts and predictions have been given as previously. As

predicted by the spirit media, fire has indeed occurred in the area of *Bang Rak* District, Bangkok. Furthermore, it has been heard that acts of arson had recently been committed in two districts before the above mentioned fire. The King thought that this situation was doubtful and it might be related to spirit media and their own clients to get benefit from these situations. Apart from this, others have spread rumours and then committed arson in order to support the predictions of spirit media. These situations used to occur in the reign of King Rama III and he ordered the man who had committed arson in accordance with the predictions of the spirit media to be arrested. Finally, after investigation, the King ordered that the man should be executed.

It is now announced that spirit possession among Thai and Chinese has been strictly prohibited. If anyone is seen performing anywhere, the area officers can arrest performers who will be investigated and punished if they are found to be in possession. A punishment of flogging of 30-50 strokes respectively will be given to those performers found not only in spirit possession, but also guilty of dishonesty. Moreover, fines will also be set for those area officers who neglect their own responsibility.

Arson is held to be harmful to people and their possessions. The area officers of the Metropolitan Constabulary have to investigate suspicious situations in order to catch and punish wrongdoers. If someone brings evidence of arsonists to the Metropolitan Constabulary, he will be rewarded with 10 *Chang*¹⁶ and the wrongdoers will be executed.

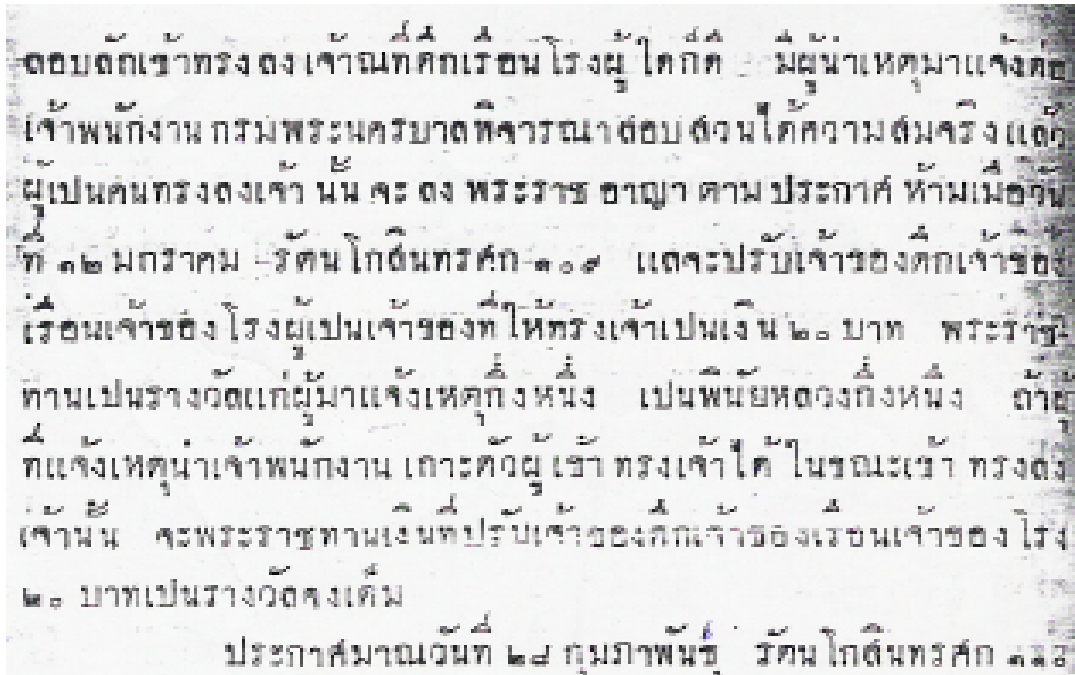
Announced on 12th January of Bangkok Era 109

¹⁶ A unit of money is equivalent to 80 Baht.

ประกาศกรมพระนครบาล

กรมพระนครบาลรับ พระบรมราชโองการได้เกล้าว่าไว้

ประกาศแก่บรรดาราษฎรไทยจีนให้ทราบทั่วกันว่า ด้วยมีพระบรมราชโองการ โปรดเกล้าฯ ประกาศห้ามมิให้ คนเราทรงตั้งเจ้าบอกเหตุการเพื่องใหม่ แต่บอกเหตุเกิดจากความใจเจ็บด้วยอุบายต่างๆ ถ้าผู้ใดมีพี่น้องเราทรงตั้งเจ้า เจ้าหมกงานลับลับได้พิจารณาเป็นคดีด้วยได้ทรงตั้งเจ้าจริง ให้ส่งพระราชอาญาผู้ ตั้งฝ่าฝืนพระราชบัญญัติ ตาม โทษานุโทษ ความแจ้งอยู่ในประกาศเดิมซึ่งออกห้ามไว้เมื่อวันที่ ๓๒ มกราคม รศ. ๖๖ ๓๐๘ นั้นแล้ว ถึงแต่ได้ออกประกาศไปแล้ว เหตุซึ่งเนื่องสืบ ทำให้ราษฎร คับแค้นใจ เกรงจะเกิดเหตุเนื่องสืบไป ครั้นเกิดเพื่องใหม่ ขึ้นในแคว้น กอปรมีเหตุเนื่องต่อกัน อย่างเช่นครั้งก่อน กระทำให้ราษฎรหวาดหวั่นอีก จึงได้ขอประสงค์เหตุที่เกินขึ้นได้ ความว่า มีราษฎรไทยจีนที่ยังคบคิดกัน ตบตักเจ้าทรงตั้งเจ้า ในหลังบ้านเรือนน้อยใหญ่ ๗ คนทรงแห้วเหตุต่อตวงทำให้คนตื่นอย่างเช่นครั้งก่อนนั้นออก แฉการที่ราษฎรบางคนยังขึ้นประพฤติต้องประกาศนี้ ก็เป็นไปด้วยมีต้นความเขตนบายความคิด หองเชื้อต่อคนทรงมีช้อยมาก แดงงม ๗ เป็นเจ้าของตัก เจ้าของเรือน เจ้าของโรง ก็ยอมพาไปตั้งที่เรือนหรือเห็นเป็นใจให้ผู้อื่น เป็นคนทรงเซ่งตั้งเจ้า เพื่อคิดหาผลประโยชน์อันผิดที่ผิดทางอันผิดแบบใหม่ โอนมอกจากพวกของตักไว้ เห็นบางที่นั้น เห็นมีโรงตั้งตักของโรงวาเรือนนั้น มีผู้เราทรงตั้งเจ้ากระตักมีคดีประกาศ ก็พาเอาคดีอยู่โดยไม่ว่าความมา แจ้ง คือเจ้าพนักงานด้วยคิดเห็นเดี่ยว่าไม่มีคนคนทรงหรืออะไร โดยเหตุนี้จึงได้ มีผู้ตบตักเจ้าทรงตั้งเจ้าอยู่ทั่วไป ให้มีที่ใจราษฎร คับแค้นใจ เกรงจะเกิดเหตุเนื่องสืบเนื่อง ๗ ถึงแต่ค้นต่อไปการที่ราษฎรไทยจีนได้คนทรงยังขึ้น



**Figure 2: Announcement of Metropolitan Constabulary
Announced on 28th February of Bangkok Era 110**

Announcement of the Metropolitan Constabulary

In accordance with a royal command given to the committees of the Metropolitan Constabulary, this announcement is issued to the Thai and Chinese populations stating that spirit media are strictly prohibited from predicting fires or illnesses. If anyone, after investigation, is found to have infringed upon this rule, he or she will be heavily punished. A previous announcement concerning this state of affairs was issued on 12th January of Bangkok Era 109 and it was observed that the situation became quiet after the first announcement.

However, the situation has recently reoccurred in the dry season and people have become apprehensive for the second time. After investigating this problem again it is clear that some Chinese have disobeyed the command and have been carrying out spirit possession within their own homes. The clients have been ignorant that the laws were being broken. Owners of buildings agreed to allow spirit possession to be performed and also kept these rituals secret for their

own personal benefit. Moreover, officers have not received any information from people who have witnessed these crimes as no reward has been offered to people imparting information. Disobedience with regard to the law forbidding the performance of spirit possession can be seen frequently and at the same time populations have suffered with fires that have broken out as predicted by the spirit media.

Therefore, it is now important to report any evidence that Thai or Chinese are disobeying and infringing the rule forbidding the performance of spirit possession. Spirit media concerned will receive heavy punishments according to the announcement given on 12th January of Bangkok Era 109 and the owners of buildings will be fined 20 Baht for being accessories. Half of the fine received will be given as a reward to the people who reported the crime and the other half to the royal finance. However, if those people who give the information to the officers can arrest the spirit media while performing possession, all the fine of 20 Baht received from the owners of the buildings will be given to them as a reward.

Announced on 28th February of Bangkok Era 110

From the two old laws set out above, it can be seen that the violent situation caused by arson in the past was a corollary of the predictions given by spirit media, because fire did really break out and damage people and their property according to the spirit media's predictions. In fact, the individual spirit medium's followers started fires in accordance with the spirit medium's prediction. They also wished to persuade people to have faith in spirit media and gain advantages from this credibility. As observed, although the spirit possession ritual is illegal, however, it still continues and has been playing a vital role in Thai Society from former times up to now.

3.2 Spirits and Séances

Generally speaking, the old existing belief in supernatural beings and the phenomena of spirits including holding séances come from the past but it still plays a large role among people in the present times. People in various countries seem to believe deeply in the supernatural being and its different manifestations in this world. Particularly the people of *Siam*, like other countries, believe explicitly in the supernatural being and there seems to be nothing that can break this continuing belief.

Historically, before Buddhism began to play a significant role in Thailand, most of the ancient Thais believed in animism including the existence of the mystical spirit. Frequently, they worshiped and prayed to these mystical spirits in order to beg for protection from hazards and good health. From the historical evidence of the *Sukhothai*¹⁷ inscription, it has been found that the people of the *Sukhothai* period worshiped “*Pa Khapuan Pi*” who was regarded as the sacred city god of *Sukhothai*. It was believed that people, who offered the proper sacrifices to this sacred city god, would be blessed and would live a happy and peaceful life. On the contrary, people, who denied or neglected to offer sacrifices would suffer various kinds of mystical punishments manifested by the sacred city god.

After Buddhism, which most of the population followed, had been accepted as the main religion and was having an influence on people in Thailand, then the different classifications of spirits was brought into the old belief system which descended from past generations. In the beginning, the lower spirits were called ghosts (*Phi*) and after that other higher ones were called divinity (*Deva*) and the supreme God (*Brahma*) respectively. Here, it can be discovered that the trend of animism, the ancient belief system, was clearly both from the historical and literary evidence involved with the Buddhist doctrines in the *Sukhothai* period and animism had not yet been destroyed at all, but still remained and later spread further with the belief in Buddhist tenets.

According to the ancient animistic belief system discussed above, the most

¹⁷ In the 13th century the Thais had already settled down within the Southeast Asian mainland with *Sukhothai* as the first kingdom. The *Sukhothai* era marked a period of great cultural development. Under King *Ramkhamhaeng* the Great who ruled from 1275 to 1315, the land of *Sukhothai* thrived. There were fish in the water and rice in the fields. Due to the kingdom’s prosperity, it is regarded as a “golden age” in Thai history.

evident example is illustrated in the Thai's old belief towards the local god of the land (*Chao Thi*). To make sacrifices to the local god of the land, Thai people built up small separate houses known as the spirit shrine (*San Pra Poom*) as his permanent dwelling. The spirit shrine has always been situated outside the owner's house, either within or near the living area. It is very important to keep in mind that the site of the spirit shrine should be an appropriate one chosen to conform to the ordinary formula which stated that the spirit shrine should not be covered by the owner's house shadow. The expense to be spent on the building depends upon the economic status of each house owner. Approximately, however, most of the spirit shrines built have a value of more than 10,000 Baht.

Subsequently, the influence of the belief in *Brahman*, the supreme Hindu God, entered into Thailand and then its status was regarded as the most important one with a large role in spiritual belief among the Thai people. Furthermore, *Brahman* became the most popular god and has been, in some cases, conveyed to inhabit permanently the spirit shrines. As to the individual aspect, *Brahman* is usually depicted with four faces. Related to the *Brahman* with four faces, the spirit shrine has also been built up with the four windows opened for viewing the *Brahman* image placed inside. The complications of the spirit shrines and the belief in Brahman grew rapidly during different periods.

As mentioned above, it can be observed that the popularity of building spirit shrines came in with the influence of Brahmanism and Hinduism in Thailand. However, it is very important to note that the old belief system in animism was predominant in Thailand before the arrival of *Brahmanism and Hinduism*. With the old belief in animism, *Brahmins* coupled the *Brahmanistic* rituals with the prevailing local concepts of local spirits. Therefore, *Brahmins* always found their places in the rituals of setting up the spirit shrines in a later period.

It is recognized undoubtedly that many classes of people in this country believe in the existence of good and bad spirits, both of this world, and, to a much more limited extent, of other worlds. These spirits are referred to by the general term *Phi*. Phaya Anuman Rajathon (1954:153) explains that the Thai people, as an ethnic group, called supernatural beings by the generic word *Phi*, which includes both gods and evil spirits. The *Phi*, like man, in a general sense, has also been divided into two classes, the good and bad *Phi*. When Thai people entered into contact with the high

Hindu-Khmer or *Cambodians* in Central Thailand in the 12th century A.D. and took over the ruling ethnic group in that region, they adopted most of the Khmer-Hindu cultures, especially the ruling class.

Throughout subsequent centuries, the Thai and Khmer people mixed racially and culturally to an appreciable degree. By this time, the Thai people had developed gradually and have been recognized as the Thai later. The old Thai word *Phi* like its owners has also undergone a change in meaning. In the famous inscribed stone of the Thai *King Ramkamhang* dated on 1283 A.D., a reference is made to the king of Khmer in that time as *Phi Fa* which literally meant the heaven *Phi*. Actually, *Phi Fa* meant a divine king, which cult has been adopted by Thai kings of the later periods. Instead of referring to a divine king as *Phi Fa* as hitherto, it has now changed into a *Thep* or *Devata* derived from the *Sanskrit* word *Deva* and *Devata* which literally mean a god or a shining one. It followed that all the good *Phis* of the Thai have by now become *Devata* or gods in their popular usage of the language. The generic word *Phi*, therefore, degenerated into a restricted meaning of bad *Phi*. It now means a ghost, a devil or an evil spirit only.

Nevertheless, the old meaning of *Phi* in certain cases has not yet died out, but still lingers in some expressions in the language. For instance, of any evil deed done in secret, it is sometimes said as a warning that “man cannot see the evil deed committed, but the *Phi* can.” In order not to divulge the source of any formula, especially a medicinal prescription which is effective, the owner will say that the formula, is *Phi Bok* or told by a *Phi*, so as to give it a sacred and mystical effect. The *Phi* here is a good *Phi* or *Devata*.

The dividing line between gods and devils is like humans divided into different types of people. As observed, some gods are bad and some devils are good. There are, in fact, almost as many kinds of good and bad *Phi* as there are humans. It follows, therefore, that out of these *Phis* there emerges a class whose position is on a border line between the gods and the devils. As far as spirit media are concerned, most of them possess good *Phis* (*Thep* or *Devata*) who are merciful and intend to release humans from adversity. While some spirit media possess bad *Phis* or devils, who committed bad deeds before they died. Spirit media tell how some *Phis* of this type, by releasing humans from distress can collect merit to redeem themselves from bad karma, in other words to escape from hell and (if they collect enough merit) they

may be reborn in heaven or be humans who have good fortune. A.J. Irwin (1907) divided the “*Phi*” of Thai society into 3 categories as follows;

1. The ghosts of the dead or “astral bodies” of the living in this group are *Phi Pret*, *Phi Tai Hong*, *Phi Tai Ha* and *Phi Kumara*. *Pri Pret* is described as having approximately a height from ten to sixteen meters. It is the ghost of one who performed evil before passing away. Its mouth, like the eye of a needle, is exceedingly small, so that it can never satisfy its hunger. Its appearance is that of a skeleton and it cannot speak, but it can make a noise like a whistle. *Phi Tai Hong* is the ghost of those people who have died by violent deaths such as by any kind of accident etc. *Phi Tai Ha* is the spirit of persons who have died suddenly by getting a disease and *Phi Kumara* is the spirit of an infant who died in the womb or a very short time after birth. If the infant is not properly buried, its *phi* may enter the mother’s womb again. The corpse has to be put into a pot, closed with leaves and paper on which charms have been written, and set afloat on its next course. I have found that many spirit media possess *Phi Kumara* or the spirit of an infant. Therefore he is the popular ghost in this category in ritual possession phenomena.



Figure 3: Kumara Image

2. *Chao Phi* or *Chao* or the spirit lord is called in Thai *Arak* or *Theparak*. Etymologically, the word “*Arak*” derived from the Sanskrit word *Araksha* and *Thep*

from *Deva* literally meaning deity. However, the Thai people reverently called it many names such as *Chao Phaw* meaning lord father or *Chao Mea* meaning lord mother. When addressing *Chao Phaw* or *Chao Mea*, the speakers will refer to himself/herself as *Luk Chang* meaning an elephant calf. Praya Anuman Rajathon (1954: 154) explained this word as follows;

“This is the interesting story. I ventured to think that in the old days, a herd of elephants roamed to earn a living. A herd of elephants might, at any time, come up suddenly and destroy the crops of the people. In such circumstances, the folk were helpless and unable to cope with the situation. To a primitive mind, anything inspired with such an abnormal event was accredited to the supernatural beings power. Here, the chief elephant of the herd must have been no other than a *Chao Phi* in disguise who came to punish the folk for their negligence towards the *Chao Phi* who was regarded as their unseen father. By calling themselves *Luk Chang* or elephant calves and entreating the elephants to leave the place, the *Chao Phi* in elephant’s disguise would be appeased. This is probably the origin of the term of *Luk Chang*.”

Ghosts or *Phi* in this category reside in the small shrines that are built from brick or wood known well as *San Chao*. It is presumed that such people who have entered into the *San Chao* are there with a view to obtaining favours, or they may be praying for whatever is desired. Very often a person, whom the *Chao Phi* or *Thep* entered and possessed at times, is attached to a *San Chao*, and with the proper persuasion will go into a fit and act as an oracle, curer and sometime remove sorcery called *Kun Sai*.¹⁸ Such a person who is known well as a spirit medium (*Khon Song*) is called *Chao Kao* after *Deva* comes to possess her or him. It is through the words or acts of such a *Kao Song* or *Song Chao* that the spirit of *San Chao* can be traced to its former possessor.

3. The spirit who dwells in other places of heaven or hell namely; *King Wejsuwan* is the master of all such spirits. His face is described like that of a giant’s or *Yaksa* and he abides in heaven.

¹⁸ Shaman compels each week to send out a piece of some substance, such as leather, which goes off and lodges in another person, if it is not removed by incantations it will cause him harm. If shaman does not get rid of *Kun Sai* once every week, it will injure him. The person who is affected by *Kun Sai* is said to “*Tuk Kun Sai*”. In this situation both sender and receiver seem to be unfortunate.



Figure 4: King Wejsuwan Image

The spirit who dwells in hell, namely *Praya Maccuraj*¹⁹ is the king of Death. He, as director of hell under *King Wejsuwan* the king of the spirits, *Praya Yommaban*²⁰ and *Prakan* issues orders for the death of humans, is described with the individual aspect of black skin and red clothing. For the third category, in possession ritual phenomena, I have found a spirit medium of *Prakan*, the spirit of the death, and *King Wejsuwan*. He is the god of art. Actors and musicians in Thai society have to respect and participate in the annual ritual of worship. In this ritual, *King Wejsuwan* is invited to possess a spirit medium to continue the ritual.

According to the categories of spirit or *Phi*, the possession of spirit media in Thai Society occupies all the spirits of three categories. However, the possessions of spirit media have various degrees depending upon the purity of each spirit medium and the level of the spirits. In some cases, the spirit media were completely asleep, in some cases the spirit media could hear what was going on, but could not control themselves, and in some cases, the spirit media listened to whatever the spirit said and then they brought the same message to the audience.

Carrying out research in this subject, the researcher always encounters this important question “Do you think there are spirits in this world or not?” It is difficult to explain and prove, but generally people in every culture fear spirits and believe that spirits influence their lives, although they have never seen the spirit themselves. By

¹⁹ He is the judge who apportions the punishments of spirits or phi who do wrong before death.

²⁰ He punishes the spirits of evil doers according to the orders of *Praya Maccuraj*.

the researcher, the spirit phenomena is considered to be a dimension of society and culture for the spirit has functions at all levels of the community. In this theme, spirit possession is one of many strategies that people employ to achieve their purposes or needs by begging for aid from supernaturals through a mediator between them and the spirits. Yet the séance of the spirit medium, as the leader of ritual, reproduces and emphasizes the discourse of spirit in Thai society.

3.3 Spirit possession in the Context of Social and Cultural Change

The society and culture of Thailand, like other developing countries, changed rapidly in the stream of the modernization process. This change was brought about by industrialization, capitalism and urbanization etc. Economic development has attracted rural labourers to move away from the country and get jobs in the chaotic urban areas. Not only that but the rapid changes in every part of people's lives has forced them to confront the problems of modern life. These problems bring stress and a state of alienation occurs. This state is composed of six dimensions namely; powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, valuelessness and social isolation. In other words, the levels of urbanization and modernization are increased more and more, at the same time the belief practitioner as a spirit medium becomes marginalized. Nevertheless the people, facing the problems of the modernization process, return to rely on the spirit medium for getting assistance amid the social pressure of the more complex life in the new competitive environment.

In such a worrying situation, a spirit medium seems to be the specialist for solving the mental problems of the people. The role of the modern psychiatric professionals has already been discussed; they remain underrepresented in Thailand, due partly to budgetary constraints, and partly to the Thais' fear of mental illness. According to many people interviewed, it is said that even highly educated individuals in Nakhon Pathom province, described the shame and stigma associated with psychiatric treatment. Some preferred to seek uncertain assistance from spirit media rather than consultation from a psychiatrist.

The main purposes of the services of spirit media are to give consultations and eradicate the misfortunes of the clients which can occur in business, love, education, professional promotion and also in times of illness. As remarked, due to the progress of modern medicine and increasingly accessible public health facilities their services

in modern society tend to have veered from healing physical illness to ameliorating mental illness by traditional means like an oracle. Nevertheless, stubborn physical afflictions are occasionally treated by spirit media when supernatural or magical foul play is suspected and spirit media may be called upon to treat chronic painful ailments or problems identified as incurable or fatal by modern physicians. Some individuals when confronted with the prospect of major surgery would firstly consult spirit media for therapeutic solutions.

Here, one woman in a case study suffering a fatal disease decided to be treated according to the spirit medium's means. She recounted as follows;

“I had cancer of the right breast and I went to meet a doctor at the famous hospital in Bangkok. He told me that I must have an operation to cut it out, if I refused, cancer would spread to other organs of the body. When I read about the miracle of *Chao Mea Kuan Im* in the magazine, I decided to ask for a cure from *Chao Mea*. She ordered me to eat vegetarian food and pray, repeating the text of *Kuan Im* everyday and she gave me herbs to eat and lustral water to smear on my skin. Only two weeks later the cancer began to get better. I was glad and bought an image of *Chao Mea* to worship.” (May, 2003)

Therefore, the growth of spirit medium activity expresses the significance of their services to clients in getting rid of life's problems. Spirit media always identify themselves as traditional curing specialists. However, the whole of the healing service is less than half of the consultation service (Irvin 1982, Wijeyewardene 1986). There was a correlation between the consultation and the value of the individual, such as material achievement, social and economic status in the case of not being employed, which did not fit with the standards of competition in materialistic society. Occasionally, clients required assistance from spirit media to hint at the winning lottery numbers. However, the people with good social and economic status asked spirit media how to maintain and increase their wealth.

The spirit medium still acts as a psychological specialist in modern society and the numbers are tending to increase. From the study of *Thai Farmer Bank*, Research Centre, it was found in 1996 that a minimum of 20,000 millions Baht changed hands connected to the spirit medium's activities each year. Moreover, the research centre calculated the number of spirit media there are in Thai society. It estimated that in 75 provinces of Thailand, there were 66,151 villages and in Bangkok, there were 151 districts, and in each village and district there were approximately 1-2 spirit media. On the average, there were 1.5 spirit media in each community. Therefore, in the whole country, there were approximately 99,453 spirit media, roughly a hundred thousand spirit media, and most of the spirit media were women. This significant fact shows that in the social and cultural change of the modernization process, women dominated the economics of the spirit possession activity in Thai Society.

The form of spirit possession nowadays is that spirit media possess *Chao* or deities who are wholly popular in every region of Thai society rather than the local deities such as ancestral and heroic spirits (Tanabe 1996, Irwin 1982). As well as the new style of possession it appears that especially most of the spirits are gods rather than goddesses. Furthermore, spirit media are possessed by a new style of deity such as Buddhist saints and the spirits of historical figures from central Thailand such as *King Naresuan*, *Krom Luang Chumphorn Khet Udomsak*, *King Chulalongkorn* and saints from other religions, such as the Chinese gods of Mahayana Buddhism and Hindu gods. Accordingly there are two types of religious belief in Thai society. Firstly, Hinayana Buddhism or Theravada Buddhism, the main Buddhist school in Thailand, which mainly wants to achieve the ultimate liberation (*Nirvana*) that is idealistic and difficult to attain. Secondly, the belief in spirits and deities from other great world religions, such as Brahmanism and Hinduism etc., which could help in achieving needs and mundane wishes. Consequently, Thai people, like Buddhists, pay a lot of attention to the spirits. Apart from this, the Thai people are now facing moral problems due to people neglecting the study and practice of Buddhist doctrines. As stated earlier, their understanding of Buddhist principles is just superficial. Thus, most of them cannot reach the true knowledge of the spirit, but are frequently misguided.

Nowadays, it is not a surprise to find that most people hope that spirit media can provide the means to success in business and can free them from illness etc., and turn to receiving assistance from supernatural beings (Chatsumarn 1984).

The native people considered spirit possession as folk technology for curing mental illness in mundane everyday life. In another dimension, spirit possession rituals have now transmuted to becoming the business of religious belief and faith, because a spirit medium's activities are affiliated frequently with businesses such as illegal and legal lotteries, healing and printing magazines and posters of famous spirit media and popular gods etc. The major feature of spirit possession ritual phenomena at the present time is mixed together with individual belief and religious rituals from many sources. The combination appears at all levels of symbol, belief and ritual.

On the part of symbolism, it can be seen that there are many images worshipped and they are all placed on the same altar of a spirit medium's service office such as the images of Lord Buddha, *Somdet Phraputthajarn (Tor Brahmarangsi)*, *King Chulalongkorn*, *Suranari*, *Chao Mea Kuan Im*, *Visnu*, *Ghanes*, *Kali* etc. As specified earlier, however, the Lord Buddha is regarded as the most important one according to the hierarchy. From this study, it has been found undoubtedly that the 38 spirit media interviewed identified with Buddha and insisted that they themselves are Buddhist followers but they further conceded that their status could not be compared with that of a Buddhist monk and novice at all, because they are just the normal laypeople who practice only five of the eight moral precepts as described in Buddhism.

Nevertheless, the Thai government and Buddhist organizations are concerned and always attempt to supervision and subjugate the spirit medium's activities and stress that the séance or belief and ritual of spirit, soul and the power of supernatural, settled down permanently in the structure of Thai society a long time ago, while the power of the logic of Western science and technology have trespassed due to the influence of the modernization process, but the phenomena of the séance still appears and continues onwards. Moreover, it is interesting to observe that during the decade of 1987-1997, spirit possession activity appears as the public religious culture of post-modern society.

Generally speaking, spirit media can be categorized into two types. According to the ancient history, once the chaos linked to arson in Thai Society was caused by spirit media, especially in association with their followers in order to achieve an advantage. This is held as a negative dimension of spirit media. However, the positive

dimension is that spirit media serve the people in Thai Society in order to offer especially traditional healing and consultation for life's problems. Consequently, spirit media still remain but at the same time they adjust their services to be applicable in the present situation of social and cultural change.

Chapter 4

The Phenomenon of Spirit Mediumship in Amphoe Muang Nakhon Pathom Province

In this area, I have been studying and surveying 38 cases of spirit media for nine years. These sample cases may give a picture and some basic data of séances in this area. Later I will return to the specific study of 5 cases.

I sought information from people in this area about where to find spirit media so that I could make contact and get to know them individually and start collecting information. My samples could not be random, the cases had to be chosen on the basis of the informant's willingness to impart information.

From the data I have collected, I will divide my samples according to the following characteristics: number of possession styles, age at initiation, gender, conditions preceding initiation and education level. Thus I will be relying on my own data on the 38 spirit media that operate in Amphoe Muang Nakhon Pathom Province. The discussion follows a presentation of the data in the form of a table.

Table 1: Spirit Media: 38 Cases

No.	Sex	Marital Status	Occupation before being spirit-medium	Education Level	Age at Initiation	Conditions Preceding Initiation	His or her relative was spirit-medium	Name of god/goddess	Type of god	Gender of god
1	M	Ma	Tcr	E4	38	I	Yes	Por Poo Yai	T	M
2	M	Ma	Fg	E4	38	I	Yes	<i>See notes</i>	T	M
3	F	Ma	Vst	E4	33	I	No	Sum Por Khong	C	M
4	F	D	Si	E4	40	I	No	Piar Khong	C	M
5	M	Ma	Mechanic	E4	31	I	Yes	<i>See notes</i>	C	M
6	F	S	Vst	E4	30	I	No	Umadevi	Ind	F
7	M	Ma	L	E4	38	I	No	Por Agu Yai	T	M
8	M	Ma	Far	-	56	I	No	Por Yam Dang Yam Kal	T	M
9	M	S	Vst & Fg	E6	26	I	No	Kumara	T	M
10	F	Ma	Vst	E4	30	I	No	Umadevi	Ind	F
11	F	Ma	Fg & L	E4	46	I	Yes	<i>See notes</i>	T	M
12	F	Ma	Fg	E4	32	I	No	Chao Por Poo Kal	T	M
13	F	Ma	Far	E4	40	I	Yes	Por Kumara Pā Dam	T	M
14	M	Ma	Fg & Far	E4	24	I	No	Por Tau	T	M
15	M	Ma	Student	Vc	29	I	No	Pra Shiva	Ind	M
16	F	Ma	Fg	-	36	I	No	Por Kaew Manee	T	M
17	F	Ma	Fg	-	32	I	No	Por Poo Jom Tong	T	M
18	F	Ma	Fg & L	-	50	I	No	Por Pin Suwan	T	M
19	F	Ma	Far	E4	40	V/D	Yes	Chao Por Luk Muang	T	M
20	M	Ma	Fg	E4	40	I	No	Por Sri Vichai	T	M
21	F	Ma	Fg & L	E4	37	I	No	Por Poo Kunkau	T	M
22	M	Ma	Fg	E4	39	I	No	Por Poo Hemmaraj	T	M
23	F	Ma	Far	-	60	H	No	Chao Por Poo	T	M
24	F	Ma	Far	-	50	V/D	No	Chao Mae Tanya	T	F
25	F	Ma	Vst	E4	44	V/D	No	Chao Mā Chandra	Ind	F
26	M	S	-	E4	19	V/D	No	Kuan Im	C	F

No.	Sex	Marital Status	Occupation before being spirit-medium	Education Level	Age at Initiation	Conditions Preceding Initiation	His or her relative was spirit-medium	Name of god/goddes	Type of god	Gender of god
27	M	Ma	L	E6	35	I	No	Luang Por Chang	T	M
28	M	S	Far	E6	33	I	No	Poo Rū Sri Ta Fai	T	M
29	M	Ma	-	-	42	I	No	Por Poo Lü Sri Narai	Ind	M
30	F	Ma	L	E4	42	I	No	Chao Por Po Tong	T	M
31	F	Ma	L	E4	35	I	No	<i>See notes</i>	T	M
32	F	Ma	Far	E4	35	I	No	Por Pai Chum Pol	T	M
33	F	S	L	-	46	I	No	Chao Mā Kalee	Ind	F
34	M	Ma	L	E4	47	I	Yes	Tai Ang Jū	C	M
35	F	Ma	Vst	E4	17	I	Yes	Sadaj Por Kraitsana	Ind	M
36	F	Ma	Far	E4	30	I	No	See Tai Teang Ong Khong	C	M
37	F	Ma	Vst, Fg & Si	E4	33	I	No	<i>See notes</i>	T	M
38	F	Ma	Fg	E4	31	I	No	<i>See notes</i>	T	M

Notes: Table 1**Gender**

Male:	M
Female:	F

Marital Status

Married:	Ma
Single:	S
Divorce:	D

Occupation

A farmer :	Far
A fruit gardener:	Fg
A vender of small trade such as foods, vegetables and dry goods retail:	Vst
A tricycle rider:	Tr
A Labourer:	L
A Singer	Si
No occupation:	-

Education Level

Elementary Grade 4:	E4
Elementary Grade 6:	E6
Vocational Certificate:	Vc
No education:	-

Conditions Preceding Initiation

Illness:	I
Hereditary:	H
Visions/Dream:	V/D

Name of gods

Case No.2:	Por Prasat Tong and Pra Kaew Morakot
Case No.5:	Kwan Ü and Teal Hui
Case No.11:	Chao Por Dam Dong, Por Poo Kaew Fa and Kumara
Seang Som	
Case No.31:	Por Prasat Tong and Por Prasat Sri
Case No.37:	Sadej Pee Chinnarach, Por Poo Kumsap and Kumara
Case No.38:	Por Vichean and Por Arnucha

Type of God

Thai	T
Chinese	C

Indian

Ind

Before everything else, I divided spirit media into three major groups according to the types of gods in different belief systems; each type presents us with particular styles of possession and performance. The three styles are given below;

Table 2
Styles of Possession

Style of possession	Male	Female	Number	Percentage
Thai Style	10	15	25	65.79
Chinese Style	3	3	6	15.79
Indian Style	2	5	7	18.42
Total	15	23	38	100

1. Thai Style: Some of the spirit media I saw could be recognized figures out of Thai history, from Bangkok and Ayutthaya, such as *King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn)*²¹ and *King Naresuan*²² and *Krom Luang Chumphon Khet Udomsak*; likewise some of them possess figures from legends. The names of some of the

²¹ King Rama V's long reign of 42 years was a busy era of full –scale reform and the emergence of Thailand into the modern age. He learned the systems of western Governments, made friends with major powers such as Britain, France, America and Russia and sent the royal children to be educated in the West. It seems he was prepared to learn from the west while at the same time, resisting domination by the major powers. Above all, he was the first Thai monarch who traveled widely: to neighboring countries in Asia and to Europe twice. Wherever he went, he was impressed by the hospitality and respect shown him by the Royalty of the various countries.

The King 's reforms, which involved almost every aspect of Thai life, included the abolition of slavery, the expansion of the communication system through the construction of railways, the establishment of post and telegraph services and the creation of a ministerial system in 1892. In addition, the King also established a variety of public utilities, particularly in the fields of health and education.

²² King Naresuan the Great was known as the hero of Taleng Phai (or the Defeat of the Mons). Thai people gave him the utmost respect and praised him as a warrior king. At an early age, Prince Naresuan was taken away to Pegu by King Bayinnaung (Burengnong) also known as "the Victorious One" when he put Maha Dhammaraja on the throne of Ayutthaya. He was kept nine years in Burma as a hostage. At the age of 16, his father asked him back and sends him to the Governor of Pitsanuloke. He succeeded to the throne when his father passed away in 1590. It is to be understood that during the reign of king Nand Bayin Ayutthaya was invaded 5 times. During the fifth and last campaign that the Crown Prince was killed by king Naresuan in a single duel , elephant fight , in 1592 at Nong Sarai in present day Suphan Buri Province.

legendary figures are clear but some of their names are obscure.

2. Indian Style: In this performance style, spirit media possess Hindu Gods and Goddesses such as *Shiva, Narai*²³, *Phra Phrom, Umadevi* etc. Hindu and Indian communities are not found in the area of my fieldwork, nevertheless these Gods and Goddesses are well known from television and Indian films about Hindu gods. In addition Indian culture is active and the belief in Hindu Gods spread into Thai society simultaneously with Buddhism a long time ago.

3. Chinese Style: In this mode of performance, spirit media possess Gods of Chinese Buddhism that we generally recognized in *a sect of The Greater Vehicle (The Mahayana)* and *Taoism* such as *Kuan Im, Kwan Ü, Sum Por Khong, Jee Khong* etc. The Chinese style of possession appeared in Thai Society due to the influence of television from Hong Kong which flowed into Thai Society. For example the story about *Kuan Im, Puntau Khong* and *Puntau Ma* (male and female gods who are the guardian spirits) and the Chinese historical tale of the three kingdoms (a part of this film presents the lives of *Kwan Ü, Teal Hui* and *Lau Pee* before their deaths and after they became gods in heaven.). Another reason is the influence of Chinese culture maintained by the large Chinese population in Thai society. Naturally the Chinese but at the same time the Thais accept that Chinese beliefs play a very important role in their own beliefs. The Chinese style of possession is observed every year in the Phuket province of southern Thailand, where the famous vegetarian festival is held. At this festival there are many spirit media that are possessed by Chinese Gods. This annual auspicious event is a most colourful and dramatic celebration which takes place during the first nine days of the ninth lunar month of the Chinese calendar. The nine days event is usually in late September or early October. The original history of the festival concerned is unclear. However, it has been believed and passed respectively from generation to generation that it originated in the South-Eastern part of China near the Fujian Province. The festival was celebrated to make merit and save animals from being killed for food. During the nine day period, the devout Chinese Buddhists dress in white attire, convert to vegetarianism and observe the ten rules in order to purify their minds and bodies. Besides a strict vegetarian diet and temple offerings, some highlights of the nine day event include incredible acts of self mortification such as climbing knife-blade ladders, walking on hot coals, a ritual of

²³ Narai, otherwise the Hindu god Visanu

bridge crossing and a street-procession in which the media in a state of trance have their cheeks pierced and bodies spiked with various types of sharp objects.

From my sample 38 cases, there are 25 cases in the Thai style of possession, in the Chinese style 6 cases and Indian style 7 cases. These numbers show that Thai style spirit media prevail over the other two styles which is not surprising as the area is dominated by Thai culture. Moreover I found that the type of god or the style of possession is only loosely consistent or may even be inconsistent with the ethnic group which the spirit media adhere to. Therefore Chinese may be possessed by Thai or Hindu gods and Thai may be possessed by Chinese or Hindu gods.

In consideration of the number of controllers, there are 6 out of 38 cases which have many controllers; they are possessed by two or three gods/spirits.

Case No.2: The spirit medium of Por Prasat Tong and Pra Kaew Morakot

Case No.5: The spirit medium of Kwan Ü and Teal Hui

Case No.11: The spirit medium of Chao Por Dam Dong, Por Poo Kaew Fa and Kumara Seang Som

Case No.31: The spirit medium of Por Prasat Tong and Por Prasat Sri

Case No.37: The spirit medium of Sadej Pee Chinnarach, Por Poo Kumsap and Kumara.

Case No.38: The spirit medium of Por Vichean and Por Arnucha

In each case above, all of his or her controllers are the same type of god. Yet in his or her routine possession, the spirit medium possesses only one god and possesses another god occasionally such as in annual rituals (Wai Khru or Annual Ceremony) and the birthday ceremony of the god.

Table 3
Gender of Spirit Media

Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	23	60.53
Male	15	39.47
Total	38	100

Of the 38 spirit media 15 were male and 23 were female. Women are believed in Thai culture to have a “soft soul²⁴” and weak body boundaries, easily penetrated and dominated by spirits. Thus, it is not surprising to see a higher proportion of them become possessed as spirit media and possession is considered a sign of weakness. According to studies by Walter Irwin (1982) in northern Thailand women dominate the specialty of spirit media.

Table 4 Gender of Spirit Media and Their Gods²⁵

Spirit Medium	God/Spirit	Number	Percentage
Female	Male	18	47.37
Female	Female	5	13.16
Male	Male	14	36.84
Male	Female	1	2.63
Total		38	100

Most of the female spirit media often assume the characteristics of male gods/spirits and distance themselves from their female cultural role. As shown by the studies of Wijeyewarden (1986) in Chiangmai Province of northern Thailand, most

²⁴ Being soft-souled or weak minded means that one’s Khwan-soul is easily frightened from the body. The strength of one’s Kwan is largely determined by factors at birth such as karma and astrology, but most importantly by gender. Women are considered unable to control spirits as well as men because they are born soft-souled and have a lower grade of karma and also menstrual blood, a destabilizing physical act thought to disrupt mental concentration and thus reduce psychic power.

²⁵ It will be discussed again in Part III, Chapter 6 in the theme of “Gender: The Transvestite and Correspondence”.

media are women and most deities are male; moreover the female spirit media are often possessed by male gods/spirits who are princes and have a warrior rank. Thus, during possession, they wear brightly coloured warrior clothes and flirt with other women.

From this table it is said that 50% of spirit media are possessed by gods/spirits of the opposite sex, from the studies of Heinze (1977) this is also true in Malaysia and Singapore. Only a few men are possessed by female gods, according to the table only 2.63%.

Table 5
Education Level of Spirit Media

Education Level	Number	Percentage
Elementary Grade 4	26	68.42
Elementary Grade 6	3	7.90
Vocational Certificate	1	2.63
No Education	8	21.05
Total	38	100

According to my samples, spirit media tend to have less education and belonged to the lower middle or the working classes. Before becoming spirit media, they were gardeners, farmers, mechanics, fruit and vegetable vendors and labourers etc.

Table 6
Conditions Preceding Initiation

Condition	Male	Female	Number	Percentage
Illness	14	19	33	86.84
Visions/Dream	1	3	4	10.53
Hereditary	0	1	1	2.63
Total	15	23	38	100

The majority of female and male spirit media indicate that preceding initiation they often suffered from an illness (86.84% : 33 out of 38 cases ; Male 14 out of 15 cases and Females 19 out of 23 cases.)

Conditions preceding initiation could be separated into three categories as follows;

1. Illness

Most spirit media in my sample said illness was the turning point of a person deciding to become a spirit medium. Symptoms such as headaches, suffering pain in arms or legs, weakness, unconscious, being violent and fearful without reason etc. These symptoms were identified by a sub-culture group of traditional healers who are spirit media, as strategy of gods/spirits to force person to be their vehicles by torturing their targets and causing them to suffer with illness.

Thus in this condition, possession is one way of being cured of an illness which is in the first instance caused by the possessing deity. After conceding to be the vehicles of gods/ spirits their illness disappeared at once. This condition is consistent with the studies of Crapanzano (1977), Tanabe (1996), Irvin (1982) and Fry (1976).

2. Visions/Dreams

There are 10.53% of my samples who have experienced visions or dreams preceding initiation. They frequently say that they were contacted by gods/spirits in a vision/dream and forced to be the spirit's human host on pain of retribution.

3. Hereditary

Being selected by the gods/spirits in this way is less frequent here than in northern Thailand. Only one sample said that she received the power from her mother. By passing from one generation to the next within this family, the deviant behaviour of an individual might be interpreted as spirit possession and the individual encouraged to become a spirit medium. Regarding northern Thailand, the studies of Tanabe (1991) "Spirit, power and the discourse of female Gender: The Phi Meng cult of Northern Thailand", show that in the Phi Meng possession ritual, the ancestors' spirits are inherited matrilineally. They may occasionally fall into trance; but they do not service clients outside their family on a regular basis.

Table 7
Age at Initiation

Age	Male	Female	Number	Percentage
17-19	1	1	2	5.26
20-29	3	-	3	7.89
30-39	7	12	19	50
40-49	3	7	10	26.32
50-60	1	3	4	10.53
Total	15	23	38	100

The data indicates that the majority of male and female spirit media began to be possessed by their controllers between 30 and 39 years old (Male 7 cases out of 15 cases and Female 12 cases out of 23 cases) in contrast to the younger age group between 17 and 19 years old (only 5.26%: 2 cases out of 38 cases).

Table 8
Marital Status

Marital Status	Male	Female	Number	Percentage
Married	12	20	32	84.21
Single	3	2	5	13.16
Divorce	0	1	1	2.63
Total	15	23	38	100

Most of them are married (84.21%: 32 out of 38 cases), only one female spirit medium is a divorcee, and she doesn't have any children, from my interview due to her husband who has a minor wife.

The remarks of whole picture

According to the 38 cases of my samples above, let me discuss this tentative survey. Women are the majority of the spirit medium population. Golomb (1993:39) mentions that the vast majority of possession victims among Siamese Thais have been

women, due to their relatively underprivileged or oppressed status in traditional society. The circumstances that have touched off possession behaviour among Thai women are the very ones in which they have found themselves most fearful, powerless, burdened, or constrained. Most often difficulties in sexual or marital relations have been involved.

Most of them have low levels of education and encountered poverty. Since becoming a spirit medium they now focus more on the explanation and elimination of illness and non illness, related misfortunes for instance failure in business or love and their lives have changed. Some could escape from poverty, have their own land and houses also the behaviour of their daily life changed such as they became vegetarians, this meant they did not eat beef, at least, not on the days they practiced. I will elucidate spirit medium's taboos in the following chapter.

Heretofore the new spirit possession professionals continue to supply magical services to the community members who require assistance in the stresses of their interpersonal and competitive social environment. From my observation and attainment in Wai Khru Ritual or annual ceremony, beside the spirit media that came to honour their teacher spirit, I saw many new spirit media that came to participate and to receive the teacher spirit "receiving bowl"²⁶ to be a complete spirit medium. At that time, I was surprised to see a spirit medium who was a girl aged 12 years old. In this case her parents told me their daughter had not yet opened a spirit possession service office (*Tam Nak*) to practice for clients because she was too young and ashamed; yet she must receive the teacher spirit to be cured of her illness. She was tortured by a god who caught her to be his medium. She will open *Tam Nak* in the future when she is ready.

There are various types of possession and expertise of spirit media and the people can select to use their services. They seem like traditional psychologists and they can play a large role in giving advice and solutions to people who suffer mental problems. Although, the charges for their services vary in price, they are however cheaper than the modern psychologists. Thus, it is easy for people from the lower or working classes to decide to go to them for mental treatment.

²⁶ See Page 86.

Generally, the features of *Tam Nak* or a spirit medium's possession service offices are as follows;

1. The room where a spirit medium works has obviously been modified so that it can be used for the possession ritual. So an altar, the figure of a deity, sacrificial material such as joss sticks, candles, flowers and fruits etc, have been prepared in the ritual room.

2. A shrine, some spirit media in the Chinese style have built up a Chinese shrine for continuing a possession ritual service.

While most of the *Tam Nak* don't have any signs to make it clear that this is a possession service office, mostly people know about this place by hearsay. Finally, if the spirit medium has many clients, this guarantees that he or she is a specialist in solving life problem and is successful in his/her occupation.

Part III

Theoretical Summary of Specific Case Studies

In the part of 5 specific case studies, the detail of each case will be elucidated. Analysis is based on theories especially performance theories as the main approach. In the part of other theory issues as the concepts, which are linked to the main approach, clarify the explanation completely. Consequently this part is comprised of four chapters namely “The Case Study Approach”, “Spirit Medium in Ritual Action”, “Possession Ritual and ethnic group” and “Spirit Mediumship and Gender”.

Chapter 5

The Case Study Approach

In this chapter I will recount particulars of my case studies. Five cases have been selected from the initial 38 cases to provide more detailed examples and give a specific study. This chapter begins with the process of how the people concerned became spirit media. Then the biography of each specific case study will be recounted.

- Case 1.** “*Lui*”: A Female with a Hindu God in her body (See Table 1: No.10)
Case 2. “*Kaew*”: A Female Possessed by Three Male Gods (See Table 1: No. 37)
Case 3. “*Sri*”: The Blind Female Spirit Medium (See Table 1: No. 3)
Case 4. “*Tong*”: How I became a Horse of Por Poo Yai (See Table 1: No. 1)
Case 5. “*Boon*”: A Male Performs Chinese Gods (See Table 1: No. 5)

5.1 How to become a spirit medium

Details will be presented of the stages in the process by which the five cases studied became spirit media. Their transformation process will be divided into 3 stages. The first stage deals mainly with the reasons why they became spirit media. The second stage covers the details of entering into spirit medium status, learning or training to be a spirit medium and initiating a state of trance. The third stage is about maintaining one’s position as a spirit medium. It is vital for the spirit medium to be able to show good performance ability in order to be able to maintain his/her status. Therefore in this stage the spirit medium learns and accumulates experience alone on how to perform the ritual so that he or she is responding to the needs of the clients. There are many more details to be discovered in each stage of becoming a spirit medium that will elucidate why and how individuals can complete the course to becoming professional spirit media.

The first stage: The proviso that forces a person to become a spirit medium

The present time is one of intense competition for the survival of each individual in society. Thus, many individuals who encounter difficult financial,

professional and personal situations that lead to them changing their lifestyle (turning point), decide to take on a new identity, that of a spirit medium. Generally considering the history and background of each spirit medium, it is clear that the turning point of becoming a spirit medium comes at a critical time of their lives when they have encountered many physical illnesses themselves such as; headaches, leg aches, arm aches and weakness. Not only that, sometimes they also suffered from different kinds of mental illness, such as loss of self control, violent madness, thinking and feeling that someone wants to attack them, getting very worried etc. Actually, these physical and mental symptoms have already been treated by modern physicians. But these symptoms could not be cured and the illness still remains and troubles them. Finally, their families do not hesitate and bring them to spirit media to receive the traditional healing service and the treatment offered by experienced spirit media. So, in a transitional time like this, the spirit media cured their illness and influenced them to enter the spirit medium. The spirit media claimed that these symptoms of illness related to the manifestations of gods, who wanted them to be their spiritual vehicle. However, at the same time, the spirit media informed them again that if they agreed to become a spiritual vehicle of the gods as they wished, the illnesses would disappear. Finally, the cause of these symptoms is pointed out to them. For their families who hope for their recovery from illness, it is found that they supported the patients in becoming the spiritual vehicle of gods. Here, it can be said that the fact of an individual having a personal desire to become a spirit medium and the desire to get rid of a harassing illness are regarded as the most important factors that helped individuals to decide to enter into the status of a spirit medium. However, it can be said obviously that the factor of an individual's vision of spirit possession had an influence on his or her entering spirit medium status at the different levels from time to time. From this study, it has been found that, before they encountered an unfamiliar illness, the individuals never believed in spirit possession at all; nevertheless they then had this experience themselves and were supported by relatives to become a spirit medium. From their point of view, the spirit possession had looked like a good performance of a funny drama. However, they thought it over and considered the cause of their symptoms that could not be treated by modern medical care and finally, they believed that these symptoms occurred from the manifestations of the gods in order to force them to be their media.

People who were close to the individual and had interaction with him or her at the critical period during which he or she was considering whether to become a spirit medium, especially the spirit medium who had given the treatment and the family, who could be called “Significant Others,” could give information about what had occurred. It is said obviously that they influenced the self-identification of the individual, who decided to be a spirit medium. Thus, the meaning of self is changed according to the situation and the decision to enter into the new identity. At this stage, sometimes an individual still has no confidence at all, but they are confused and ask some significant questions such as “Did the god catch me to be the vehicle really?” and “Is this the real god or not?” in their own mind.

The second stage: Entering into spirit medium status: The way of training and calling

After the individual has decided to become a spirit medium and the process of self transformation has occurred by the interaction of the significant others to make possible the entry into the new identity of spirit medium, the individual must participate in two rituals namely; the examination ritual and the inaugural ritual. Beside the two rituals as specified, consulting other spirit media helped the individual become a complete spirit medium.

Examination Ritual: The first calling to enter possession

First of all, the individual must pass the examination ritual that is recognized in Thai Language as “Teab”. This ritual deals mainly with the individual’s ability of calling or inviting a god to possess his or her body. After the first time of possession, the individual will know who the controller is. To begin the ritual, the teacher²⁷ will possess. After that, the teacher will invite a god to possess an individual’s body. However, before inviting a god to possess, the teacher gives the individual some suggestions and recommendations to follow. It is emphasized that it is good to clear and relax the mind, not to worry and resist during the possession, because with a clear mind it is easy for a god to possess. Then when the god arrives, the teacher asks many kinds of questions, such as “Who are you?”, “What is your name?” and “What do you

²⁷ The spirit medium who responded to take care of individual’s illness. (See The first stage: The proviso that forced one to become a spirit medium)

want your body to do for you?” etc., to the god who is going to inhabit an individual’s body. During the period of the examination ritual, it looks like a conversation between gods in the teacher’s body or the examiner and examinee’s body only. At the end of this ritual, the teacher will recount to the examinee the details of the controller, because during the time that the examinee was possessed by the god, the examinee was in a state of unconsciousness and had no memory, he or she could not remember what he/she said or did. In case the examinee was possessed by many gods, each god would possess until the end of the ritual. The examinee’s manner and voice would change according to the character of each god.

I have once experienced and observed an examination ritual, so let me explain the event. The time that I visited a “Tam Nak” or a spirit medium’s possession service office, I intended to observe and interview *Tong*, who was the spirit medium of *Por Poo Yai*. However, that day I was fortunate to have the opportunity to observe the examination ritual. *Tong* played the role of the examiner of the examinee, *Chai*, who was 32 years old, tall and thin, and has long hair and a beard. At the beginning of the examination ritual, *Tong* possessed “*Por Poo Yai*”, then his wife who acted as his assistant provided joss sticks to the examinee. *Chai* held the joss sticks and put his hands together in prayer, approximately after three minutes, he yawned and breathed fiercely and loudly, and then began to speak in an Indian language and brought his hands together over his head and swayed his head as in an Indian dance. At that moment, the conversation between gods or “Chao” in the bodies of *Tong* (the examiner) and *Chai* (the examinee) began as follows;

Visanu²⁸ : “..... (Language of god²⁹).....”

Por Poo Yai: “Do you speak Thai? I could not understand. Who are you?”

Visanu: “Yes. (Language of god).....I am Visanu.....”

Por Poo Yai: “Let me know what do you want and why do you want your body to practice for you?”

Visanu: “To receive clients..... (Language of god).....my body has cancer in his head.”

²⁸ Visanu, otherwise the Hindu god Narai

²⁹ Normally, the general participants could not understand this voice and it was identified as Language of god.

Por Poo Yai: “You didn’t help your body recover from cancer because he resisted you. Did you?”

Visanu: “..... (Language of god).....”

After the period of conversation given briefly, Chai took a long breath and later left possession. He then regained consciousness again but at this moment he looked like a dismayed man who had lost his memory. He did not know what had happened for many minutes before. Then *Tong*’s wife recounted to him that Visanu possessed his body. If he conceded to Visanu, his headache due to cancer would disappear.

Suddenly, another god “Chao” came to possess *Chai*, he began to yawn and respire fiercely and loudly again as in the last possession, but in the second possession, although he spoke again in an Indian language; however, as observed, the character of this voice was shrill and resembled a woman’s voice.

Ramavatee: “..... (Language of god).....Ramavatee Om
Ramavatee..... (Language of god).....”

Por Poo Yai: “Please speak Thai, you want this body, I will tell this body to find a dress for you, and will you come to my annual ceremony?”

Ramavatee: “This body does not help me to work, I helped him with luck, but why didn’t he help me.”

Por Poo Yai: “I will tell the body.”

Ramavatee: “By buying my image to worship; I will help the body to win Huay³⁰”

Por Poo Yai: “Which color do you prefer for your dress, because it is nearly my annual ceremony, you have to dress and come.”

Ramavatee: “Pink..... (Language of god).....tells the body to concede to possessing me and don’t confuse.”

Por Poo Yai: “He will concede to you, now he is not confused, but your body is poor.”

Ramavatee: “I will give him.”

Por Poo Yai: “In his house he has a wood pillar, “Nang Mai”³¹ haunts it.”

³⁰ An illegal lottery

Ramavatee: “Yes, she is “Nang Mai”; her name is “Chandra”. Please tell the body to ask the number of Huay from her and tell him please don’t hit his daughter, she is my daughter born in this human world.”

Por Poo Yai: “What else do you want the body to practice?”

Ramavatee: “Eating vegetarian and always merit making. Don’t forget to tell him that on Monday Visanu will possess, on Tuesday is the day for me and on Wednesday it is the day for Jang Tean Sü.”

Por Poo Yai: “Which color does Visanu prefer for his dress?”

Ramavatee: “Gold, this is the time for him to be our body..... (Language of god).....”

After *Chai* left the possession of Ramavatee, *Tong*’s wife explained to him what Ramavatee wanted him to practice. There was a break of possession for a moment, then he made the same signs as when the last two gods arrived. However, when the third god arrived, he spoke in a Chinese language. The dialogues between both of them are given below;

Jang Tean Sü: “..... (Language of god).....I am Jang Tean Sü, good, good, good, rich, rich, rich.”

Por Poo Yai: “You are Chinese.”

Jang Tean Sü: “I prefer red dress and yellow hat.”

Por Poo Yai: “This year you must come to my annual ceremony.”

Jang Tean Sü: “I will come, I want the body to receive clients, and I want a good medium like this to help humans, teach humans to do good. I have followed him since he lived in Samut Prakan province because he is a good person, and likes to pray and worship the Lord Buddha.”

Por Poo Yai: “The body still never buys images to worship; he must buy all three images.”

Jang Tean Sü: “Yes, he has to buy..... (Language of god)..... then he will be a lucky man.” (June, 2000)

³¹ The female spirit inhabiting a tree or wood nymph, a dryad. Thai people like to ask for lottery number from her by scrubbing a tree or wood that it is believed, she inhabits.

Finally, when the third god left his body, Chai recounted the utterance from God again.

From the illustration of the examination ritual above, in the first calling to invite god to possess the body the examinee attempted to clear and relax his mind. The environment during the ritual, such as the light of a candle, the smoke of joss sticks and many figures of gods, is the factor which stimulated the examinee to enter the possession state.

The function of the examination ritual or the first calling to enter possession could be classified into three points as follows;

1. To try to possess and confirm that the individual was possessed by the god.
2. To help the individual be confident in the existence of Gods and wipe out the vacillation about the question “Am I possessed by a god really? In other words, at this point, the examination ritual sustained an individual to reinforce and identify himself or herself as a spirit medium.
3. To sustain an individual in the development and grasp of spirit medium status because the examination ritual supports an individual to get to know the character of his or her god, and to be able to develop his or her identity.

Receiving Bowl Ritual “Rub Khan”

To formally become a spirit medium, the individual must participate in “Rub Khan” or “Receiving bowl Ritual”. The individual must prepare a bowl or “Khan” in the Thai Language. Here, Khan Ha³², is the sign of the five moral precepts in Buddhism. To continue to spirit medium status, the individual must pledge to follow the five moral commandments of Buddha strictly as follows;

1. Abstaining from killing
2. Abstaining from stealing
3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct
4. Abstaining from telling lies or falsehoods
5. Abstaining from taking intoxicants

³² Ha means five.

The commandments specified in the above must be followed for the purity of the body and mind of spirit media, because they devote their bodies to gods for merit making, that is held as the way to bring humans away from distress. So, they must follow strictly the moral standards of Buddhism, if spirit media stop practicing, their body and mind will be full of sin and impurity. Furthermore, to maintain purity is held as the way to create miraculous power, because sometimes the spirit medium may be safe from the wounds incurred when he performs miracles such as walking on hot charcoal and climbing the knife ladder etc. In this point of miraculous power, the principle of practicing Buddhism is brought together with spirit possession activity to increase faith. A bowl for offering is composed of rice grains, sesame, bean and popped rice, embellished with flowers, candles, joss sticks, areca nuts, betel leaves, cigarettes and three coloured fabrics.

To begin the receiving bowl ritual, the spirit medium who is the teacher and the new spirit medium enter into possession and then the teacher bestows a bowl on the recipient. After the ritual, the new spirit medium brings “Khan Ha” to put on the altar within his living room or possession service office “Tam Nak”

In view of the “Rub Khan” ritual, a bowl or Khan is a symbol to confirm the formal entry into spirit medium status; likewise an individual was recognized to be a member of the sub-culture group of the spirit medium world. On the part of “self”, the individual identified himself as a person who has responsibility to be a medium for a god to make merit by serving humans in this world.

The function of the receiving bowl ritual is to transform an individual from an ordinary person into a spirit medium. As a medium between gods and humans, he or she has the exceptional ability which makes him/her different from other people. Moreover, this ritual develops and reinforces the spirit medium identity of the individual.

To develop into being an accomplished spirit medium with a firm identity, training is continued individually to become familiar with the attitudes, beliefs and principles to be practiced in daily life; these are important dimensions of spirit medium status.

Training and Spirit Medium Identity

Training by significant others is regarded as essential for spirit medium development in order to be able to enter the new pattern of behaviour and to become familiar with the new attitudes. In the sub-culture group of spirit media, the spirit medium who functions as his teacher and other spirit media are important for influencing the socialization mechanism and in encouraging the new spirit medium to become accustomed to attitudes, beliefs and norms the practice of which will lead the way to a change of life style.

The significant others who played a role in socializing the new spirit medium, will be discussed in detail as follows;

1. Teacher

The spirit medium who was a teacher of the new spirit medium played a vital role for the new spirit medium by explaining any doubtful questions which occurred. For example, why the god selected him to be a vehicle, moreover, the spirit medium also gave suggestions regarding how to practice in daily life, because in order to become a spirit medium he or she must change his/her life style. Moreover, the teacher taught the new spirit medium how to perform the rituals.

At the beginning, the teacher is the significant other in helping to socialize and develop the identity of the new spirit medium.

2. Other spirit media

Occasionally, the new spirit medium consults and shares experiences with other spirit media, due to the fact that they were members of the same sub-culture group with this specific behaviour.

Training issues

In respect of the spirit medium group that led the new spirit medium to develop either inside or outside into being an accomplished spirit medium, here, inside means the new spirit medium learned to develop attitudes and incorporated belief, the intangible dominant role and life style. However, outside means the behavioural practices of the spirit medium as a human being.

In order to be able to identify himself or herself as a spirit medium new spirit medium must learn firstly the behaviour principles including taboos and secondly the beliefs and attitudes and the manifested self image of the spirit medium.

The first part: Behaviour principles and taboo

1. To consume vegetarian food on the Buddhist holy day.
2. To practice the five commandments of Buddhism.
3. To stop the possession on the Buddhist holy day due to the fact that spirit media have to make merit by offering food to monks at the temple and by meditating. Especially they have to practice “Seen Pad³³” or the eight commandments of Buddha³⁴.
4. To have an ablution to purify the body before possession
5. Of female spirit media, possession does not take place obviously in the menstrual period. Menstrual blood³⁵ is considered as pollution. So, during the menstrual period of a female spirit medium, it is not a pure time for the possession of a god. From this negative value, the female spirit medium is strictly prohibited to possess during this time.
6. The taboo of forbidden food namely; shellfish, fish, eggs, chickens and ducks. It is strictly prohibited to eat all of these. Furthermore, most spirit media claimed that they cannot eat any foods at a funeral house.
7. Of pollution through death, most of the spirit media said that they cannot attend a funeral ritual. If they participated and appeared in the said ritual, the power of gods to give predictions and heal clients would be reduced.

³³ Pad means eight.

³⁴ The eight commandments of the Buddha.

1. Abstaining from killing animals
2. Abstaining from lying
3. Abstaining from drinking alcohol
4. Abstaining from making mistake in karma
5. Abstaining from stealing
6. Abstaining from sleeping on soft bed
7. Abstaining from karma with spouse
8. Abstaining from evening meal

³⁵ This topic will be discussed in Part III Chapter 6, “Menstrual Blood and Purity: Inequality between Male and Female”.

The second part: Beliefs and attitudes of spirit medium beings

In this part, learning issues dominate the self image of the new spirit medium.

1. Belief

- a. Fate: to explain why the person was selected to be a spirit medium by a god, the belief in fate was used to elucidate that the spirit medium and his god have had their destiny connected since the last incarnation. The time for the individual to begin to devote his body is stipulated by his god and when that time has arrived, the god would presage divine law by making the person encounter illness.
- b. Merit making³⁶: to explain why the god proposes to utilize the human body to be the vehicle, some gods amass merit by helping humans due to wanting to achieve a higher level while others make merit to reimburse sin or bad actions (bad karma).
- c. Punishment: the issue of punishment elucidates what will happen if spirit media forget to practice according to the norm namely; they ignore eating vegetarian food and practicing the five commandments of the Lord Buddha. As a result of negligence, the god will punish the spirit medium with illness or misfortune.
- d. Living: this issue explains that as a consequence of devoting the body to being the vehicle of gods, the spirit medium will be lucky and live better and be wealthy.

With reference to spirit medium beliefs, it has been found that most spirit media felt that they deserved punishment because they had neglected to practice or follow taboos. The gods will punish them by determining that their destiny should be to encounter illness or misfortune. So spirit media must always be careful and pay attention to their practice.

³⁶ The belief that all is determined by one's "Karma", nobody can change it but have to accept and be satisfied with it. On the other hand, what you do in this life will affect your next life. Buddhists believe in re-birth. So they have to do well and be responsible for their own life. Their next life is determined by their present deeds and thoughts, and this is Karma. There are good and bad Karma. In this life, it's a duty for one to accumulate good Karma and avoid bad Karma, so that their next life will be good. Merit making (doing good deeds), is concerned with accumulating good Karma.

2. Attitude

To continue spirit medium status, the new spirit medium is forced to acknowledge the attitude of other people to their identity, especially the negative attitude of others such as that their activities were referred to as explicit deceit to earn money by possession of “Chao” or god. Spirit medium must accept that they will encounter negative attitudes and be careful during interaction with others.

The five spirit media in the case studies described the negative attitudes as follows;

Kaew;

“There are two parts, some spirit media hoodwink people. It depends upon us. If a spirit medium claimed much money from the clients, absolutely, the problem will crop up afterwards. The day before yesterday I have heard that the spirit medium of Narai was shot, because he deceived people and claimed too much money. Now he survived, but he has received a big injury from the above said shooting. The result of destiny overtakes him.” (April, 1999)

Sri;

“*Khon Song* (spirit medium) is widespread. I have heard that many cases are counterfeits. It affects those people who are the real spirit media. It can be compared with one fish which is tainted in one basket, then all the fish that belonged to the same basket are spoilt by the bad smell of the tainted fish as mentioned before. Sometime I was alleged also by others as a spurious spirit medium.” (February, 2000)

From the negative attitudes mentioned above, it should be understood why spirit media take precautions and worry when they interact with clients and strangers.

These learning issues encourage the new spirit medium being to keep the direct ways and make them different from general people. So, each person spent a lot of time developing himself to reach the complete spirit medium status. For being the complete spirit medium will depend both upon the personal factors of each individual before becoming a spirit medium and the verdict on each person after entering into the position of a spirit medium such as their competence in the new life style etc.

The third stage: Maintaining spirit medium status

As recognized in the first stage, the illness was the turning point that forced them to enter into the spirit medium world and their teachers and families were the significant others who influenced them to change the meaning of “self”. Finally, when they decided to become a spirit medium, they passed an examination ritual and receiving bowl ritual, because the two rituals were significant ones to change their identity to formally become spirit media. In the third period, the new spirit media began to provide services for their clients. Initially, they served within their family, relatives and neighbours. If it was discovered from hearsay among the people that they were successful, then they would have more clients. Regarding this stage, the number and outlook of clients or “generalized others” and if they successfully solved their problems influenced the self confidence and the identity development of the new spirit media. Meanwhile, from evaluation of themselves the new spirit media would take pride in their success. In addition, they felt that they were valued and received praise from others. This situation led to a positive attitude about themselves and reinforced them to continue the spirit medium status.

Tong;

“I am proud of myself when I could help people, my clients. One said that her son had been in America for five years, he never contacted his mother, and she worried about him so much. She asked Por Poo Yai to help her to find him, in the later morning her son called her and then she came to inform me, I was very glad, because I could help her.” (June, 2000)

Sri;

“The owner of the hotel in the south, her surname is renowned, she had a backache, the medical doctor gave her injections many times, but she was still in pain and backache still appeared. When she knew that I was here, she came to see me and I blew lustral water at her one time only, her backache disappeared later. Since that time she has faith in me.” (Feb, 2000)

Spirit media have an important role according to the expectations of clients, because a spirit medium is regarded as the person who is able to contact the gods and release people from various problems in their life. In the early stages spirit media while continuing to serve clients at the same time learn and accumulate experience from practicing which helps to develop their ritual performance.

Nevertheless after entering into spirit mediumship they often encounter a problem which they have to overcome to maintain spirit medium status. At the beginning, the new spirit medium is ashamed to perform and manifest the character of a god when entering into possession. Sometimes they would avoid the possession and not dare to possess and receive visitors at all. However, later they become accustomed to it and have the courage to take possession and therefore acquire more devotees. The feeling of shame is reduced and finally disappears.

Lui, who is the spirit medium of *Umadevi*, recounted

“At first I was ashamed. Now it is not like this. Then when someone came to see me, I attempted to avoid them and I told them that I had to go outside.” (August, 2000)

Kaew said

“When people came, I avoided them and I did not want to possess, but afterwards I was not ashamed and I dared to take possession. Nowadays, I cannot escape from this, because I can help people. Here, everybody

knows me well.” (April, 1999)

The problem of negative attitudes, accusing spirit media of pretending to be gods to make money has been mentioned above. Spirit media solve this problem by the following methods;

1. To reimburse: Spirit media always tell clients that they do not take possession in order to make money, but they wish to assist gods to make merit by releasing humans from distress. They would utilize some of the income received from services and donations from clients for merit making. For example, they donated to the temple etc. To reimburse is held as an important strategy of spirit media to counteract accusations from others.

Generally, spirit media do not ask for money from poor clients, but occasionally they even provide some money or something such as rice etc., to those clients. In consequence, these actions would let the others who participated in this session, especially other clients, see their good side and they would have more faith in the spirit medium.

2. To make merit/donation: Spirit media always donate money to temples for public use or social welfare. For example, they donate a lot of money to schools and hospitals and give rice and dried food to people who suffer from such disasters as fire or flooding. They also occasionally like to provide banquets for the poor students.

Boon is the spirit medium of *Kuan Ü*, and his followers. They organize the philanthropic foundation “Moon Niti Sawang Jit” to support, donate money and provide help for public welfare. This strategy of merit making and providing donations gives the spirit medium the reputation of being a perfect man or woman in the eyes of the people in the community and he or she becomes a popular person.

These two strategies of adaptation in response to the negative image that damaged their identity help the spirit media to maintain and continue their activities. At the same time they build up the confidence of their clients and other people in the community.

5.2 Biography

The specific five cases who have been selected from my fieldwork to illustrate the process of becoming a spirit medium have already been mentioned in topic 5.1. This section will describe their life history and in the following chapters, they will also be referred to as illustrations during the explanation and analysis.

Case 1. “*Lui*”: A Female with a Hindu God in her body

A single 40 years old Sino-Thai woman lives alone in the old brick house, her bedroom is on the first floor and the ground floor is used for possession ritual. She lives alone as her brothers and sisters are married and have moved out to live with their spouses. Also recently her aged parents moved to a new house. They still make a living; her father sells roast cuttlefish at the night food market in front of *Phrapathom Chedi Temple*. Her mother is a direct sales agent of the Amway Company. Nowadays she is vegetable vendor. Every night she open her vegetable stall at the market beside *Chedi Puja channel* thus her economic status is well to do.

Before I went to visit the house of *Lui*, who was possessed by *Umadevi*, I had called her to make an appointment. I observed her possession ritual carefully and then interviewed her. *Lui* practices possession regularly on Thursday in the afternoon. On the day I went to visit her living quarters, also this place was the spirit possession service office (*Tam Nak*) of *Umadevi*, it was raining. When I arrived the wooden door was still closed, at the same time I heard Indian music coming from her living quarters. Her father opened the door and invited me to come in. After waiting half an hour, *Lui* came out of the adjoining private quarters. She was dressed in a Sari which is in harmony with the character of *Umadevi*, who is a Hindu Goddess, and many ornaments decorated many parts of her body beautifully namely; earrings, anklets, rings, strings especially around her neck and head. She slowly walked to the cushion, sat down and lifted her hands to a Wai (holding both hands, like in prayer, together in front of her face) to the *Umadevi* figure on an altar. Suddenly I noticed her left leg. It looked strange and her walking was unsteady.

Then our conversation began. *Lui* narrated the turning point when she became a spirit medium. The crisis occurred when she was 30 years old. She got a pain in her left leg and was cured by modern medicine in a hospital; nevertheless, her illness still remained and harassed her. She stayed one month in hospital. The doctor could not

find the cause of her illness. Finally, her mother decided to bring her to a traditional healer for treatment. A spirit medium examined her symptoms and stated that the god had tortured her. If she consented to become a spirit medium her illness would vanish.

“*Chao Mä* (goddess) persecuted me and forced me to be her horse. She tortured me and my left leg swayed while walking. I could escape death because I consented to “Rub Khan”³⁷ to be “Rang” (body of a god). At first while I was possessed by *Chao Mä*, *Chao Mä* spoke in *Pasa Tep* (language of the goddess), and nobody could understand at all. So, I prayed to *Chao Mä* that she should speak in the Thai language when she possessed me. From that day people could understand what she said; *Chao Mä* always teaches people who come to see her that it is not good to play Huay (illegal lottery) because they will waste a lot of money unnecessarily on it. If they wish to be richer, they should be diligent and pay attention to work. Many months ago one of the clients asked her to predict the number of Huay. *Chao Mä* pointed to a little girl who was 5 years old and playing in front of the *Tam Nak*. *Chao Mä* told the client to ask the girl for the numbers. The next day, the client returned to see *Chao Mä* and reproached her because the wrong number had been given. Then *Chao Mä* said, I did not tell you that number, but a little girl told you and you believed her. Being Rang sometimes brought me negative reactions. Sometimes I was proud of myself when I could help people.” (August, 2000)

At the beginning of each possession she always speaks in a voice that sounds like an Indian language. The spirit medium called this voice “*Pasa Tep*” or the language of the goddess. This voice identifies that the goddess has already come to

³⁷ Receiving the teacher spirit “Receiving bowl”

inhabit her vehicle. However my neighbour, who is of Indian origin, helped me to identify this voice, he said;

“It sounded like but it was not an Indian language. She was only pretending to be a Hindu goddess”.

(September, 2000)

Lui's family were her first clients. The classes of clients belong to the lower and middle classes. Her parents or sometimes her sister play a role as assistant during the possession ritual. Generally, their duties are as follows;

1. to establish the waiting order
2. to explain how many joss sticks have to be lit when entering the *Tam Nak* and where they have to be put and in which sequence
3. to offer a lighted candle to the spirit medium (she uses her hand to touch the flame then dips it into a bowl of water and sprinkles lustral water on everybody in the *Tam Nak*)

According to the light as mentioned above, her life style has changed very much and is different from former times. *Lui* became a vegetarian particularly on every “*Wan Pra*”, the Buddhist holy day, and practiced “*Seen Ha*” the five commandments of the Buddha. Furthermore, she recounted that due to her goddess *Rang* everybody in the family should speak to her in politely and not criticize her.

Case 2. “*Khaeo*”: A Female Possessed by Three Male Gods

Khaeo, a 60 year old woman, is the mother of six children. Her husband is younger than her by many years. Initially she had many occupations. She was a gardener, sold Thai rice noodles with curry and occasionally earned money by singing at parties or temple festivals. *Khaeo* masticates areca nuts and betel leaves smeared with lime all day. On the day that I visited her place, she looked friendly, She was suggested to me by Pai, the spirit medium of *Narai* who has recently become a spirit medium and she passed the receiving bowl ritual from *Khaeo*, and we sat in front of her possession room and she recounted her life history.

“Before I first became ill I was a gardener, sold Thai rice noodles with curry and sometimes earned money

from singing at parties, merit making ceremonies and temple festivals. I encountered a strange illness when I was 33 years old; I had a headache. Because of this I could not work. I went to see the doctor at the hospital to be treated. The doctor examined me and he said I was normal. I went to see many doctors. But I still had a headache. My mother tried to bring me to be treated by magic from a spirit medium in *Supan Buri Province* and he told me *Chao* wanted me as a medium. I did not believe him at first. I encountered illness like other spirit media and I suffered with it. *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*, *Por Poo Kumsap* and *Kumara* possess me.” (April, 1999)

In this case one sees that the female spirit medium and the three male gods are from opposite sexes. Her gods present three characters of three different ages. *Kumara* is an infant spirit who is playful, *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* is a young and gallant man and the last *Por Poo Kumsap* is an old man. Before his death he practiced Vipassana Meditation in the forest to reach the Ultimate Goal, Nirvana.

Nowadays *Khaeo* is a teacher³⁸ of many spirit media. She possesses all three gods only on the day of her *Wai Khru Ritual*³⁹. When I was participating in and observing this ritual, she possessed all day and night. She stopped possessing merely when she shifted to possess another god.

While *Khaeo* was in the possession state she borrowed my mobile phone and then she called a flower shop.

“Is that Chün Jit flower shop? I am Sadej Pee (the spirit called herself). How about those flowers I have ordered from you? What time will you send them to me? And did you know last night I went to sleep in your house?

³⁸ See Page 91.

³⁹ See Page 146.

At that time you were my soul mate. Sadej Pee loves and misses you. I will call you again and go to sleep with you.” (April, 1999)

Then *Khaeo* gave back my mobile phone. Actually she knew the owner of Chün Jit flower shop as well as the owner of a shop who sold ritual instruments such as joss sticks, candles, footed trays etc. They had a good relationship with *Khaeo*; they could make money from her when she ordered ritual instruments to use in her rituals especially in the annual ceremony or *Wai Khru Ritual*.

There were more than 100 spirit media attained and possessed in the night of the *Wai Khru ritual*. Between the sessions, when the band started to play modern music, many of the spirit media who were the guests of *Khaeo* danced together. In her routine possession *Khaeo* possesses *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* and her mother plays the role of her assistant. Her expertise is predictions especially about lost things and anointments⁴⁰ on cars, trucks and motorcycles for safety and to prevent accidents.

Case 3. “*Sri*”: The Blind Female Spirit Medium



Figure 5: The Blind female spirit medium

⁴⁰ Blessing by making marks on the forehead with sachet powder.

In front of a small building like a Chinese shrine a tab on a hedgerow manifests the name of this place “*Tam Nak Sum Por Khong*”, office hours and telephone number. I went in, a thin man greeted me and brought me to his wife. *Sri* was an old woman, sitting in front of a house beside a building looking like a Chinese Shrine; I was surprised because she was blind. Instantly I had questions in my head about her deformity and how she could continue her possession ritual and offer a service to clients. So during our conversation about her life history *Sri* told me about her blindness which was caused by a god.

“At first my eyes were normal, subsequently they began to become abnormal and finally I was blind. I was thinking a lot. I went to see doctors many times but they could not find the cause. I took much medicine. I went to see *Laung Por* (an old monk), he gave me medicine, made from herbs, but it could not help me. At that time I was poor and had 6 children to support. I was ill. I was worried, cried and hit myself. Nobody understood me. I hid under a table, I felt so cold and became unconscious. Suddenly, my husband quickly ran to *Luang Ta Sai* (he is an old monk at the temple near her place), before he entered into the monastery as a monk, he was a spirit medium of *Chao Por Prasat Tong*. When my husband arrived at his *Kuti*⁴¹, he said, “I have known and waited to see you” He declared *Chao* wanted me to become a spirit medium, Lung (her husband) said “No, I don’t want my wife to be *Rang* (body of a god) and what should I do? *Luang Ta Sai* said if she refused to be a *Rang* she would die. After I had ignited joss sticks and given a notice to *Chao* I consented to be his body then I was never mad like that again” (February, 2000)

⁴¹ A house for Buddhist priests in a monastery.

In routine possession *Sri*'s husband plays the important role as assistant, sometimes her son or daughter play this role. Their duties are as follows;

1. to establish the waiting order for clients
2. to explain, how many joss sticks have to be lit when entering the shrine and where they have to be put, in which sequences and how much money clients must offer to the spirit medium for the service charge
3. to offer
 - A. a cup of tea to the spirit medium
 - B. a lighted candle, a bowl of water and the stem of a pomegranate to make lustral water for sprinkling on clients
4. to report the features of a Pair of wood bars ,that will be thrown on the floor, to the spirit medium for prediction
5. to sell a bottle of oil for putting in the lamp when clients pray to *Sum Por Khong*.

While I was interviewing her *Sri* recounted that before she became a god's vehicle she could not speak the Chinese language at all, but after becoming a spirit medium she could. At this point it seemed an unusual talent; however I found that in fact her husband could speak Chinese because when he was 7 years old, he moved to live in China with his mother and step father for 10 years. So, I then understood that the reason why she could speak Chinese was that her husband taught her to speak it.

Case 4. “Tong”: How I became a Horse of Por Pu Yai

A small house near the famous temple, *Wat Pai Lom*, the people call this place “*Tam Nak Por Poo Yai*”. The spirit medium's wife greeted me with a smile and invited me to sit in their house. The possession room was small, I was suspicious about whose green dress, of the sort worn by a warrior, a uniform for Thai theatrical performances, was hanging on a wall, because “*Tong*” the spirit medium of *Por Pu Yai* is attired in white clothes, trousers like “*Jong Ka Ben*” and a white cloth for putting across the shoulders, and wears a string of beads. His wife divulged that the owner was her son who was a spirit medium of “*Por Mahatep*”

Tong is 48 years old and his hair and beard are very long. He only graduated from level 4 of a Thai primary school. He has two children. Before becoming a spirit medium he made a living by driving a tricycle and his economic status was rather lower than at present. His wife works as an employee, she receives tobacco from a company to pack in a bundle; however she only earns a little money from this job.

I found the account of his family history interesting. *Tong's* mother was a spirit medium of a male god, named "*Chao Por Singhol*". After her death, *Tong's* elder sister continued to be "*Chao Por Singhol*". I had some suspicious questions in mind about how she had acquired this position. Why she had inherited the right of possession and was it inevitable to be her mother's heir?

Tong elucidated;

"*Chao Por Singhol* wants to expiate bad karma by merit making. When he helps humans and they are well then he gets merit. After my mother died he desired to continue helping humans. Thus he wanted to have a new medium and he selected my sister. She has to be "*Rang*" of "*Chao Por Singhol*" if she refuses, my mother's soul will not be tranquil and cannot be reborn." (June, 2000)

Moreover *Tong's* son is the spirit medium of "*Por Maha Tep*" (Male God), he enters the possession state only during the *Wai Khru Ritual*. *Tong* expounded to me, why his son is not a reutilization of possession.

"Indeed, he has only recently become a spirit medium, he is ashamed and he has a routine job, working in a soft drinks firm."
(June, 2000)

I should return to recount about *Tong*, my case study again. The crisis in his life occurred when he was 38 years old. He had collided with a car while he drove a tricycle, his leg was broken, a doctor operated on it and using an iron bar put a brace on it. Yet now he could not walk well and felt too apprehensive to ride his tricycle. After the frightful accident, *Tong* began to suffer physical and mental symptoms. At first he had fierce headaches afterward he had feelings of apprehension and imagining someone wanted to kill him thus he felt afraid and mistrusted everybody without reason. He had been treated by modern medicine for 3 years but he was still ill. Then he decided to visit the spirit medium of *King Narasuan* or *Pra Ong Dum* for healing and it was identified that his illness was caused by a god who wanted to exercise control over him. Therefore *Tong* consented to be his horse.

“I was ill for a long time, about three years. I had a headache and I thought someone would come to kill me. My family brought me to the doctor who gave me injections and medicines to build up my health, lots of it. I was still ill all the time, day after day, many times a day. Sometime I saw an old man; he came and stood at the door of my house. Next my family brought me to a psychologist and he wanted to send me to be treated in the hospital, I did not want to go there. After I left his clinic I went to see my teacher, he is Rang of *Pra Ong Dum*. I received the teacher spirit “receiving bowl” from him and then my illness disappeared.” (June, 2000)

Case 5. “Boon”: A Male Performs Chinese Gods

I have followed this case for nine years. In the area, there are two big buildings. One of these has been under construction from the time I started studying the case, and it is still under construction and has never been completed. In front of the *Kuan Ü* shrine there are tablets with the name of this place “*San Chao Kuan Ü*” or *Kuan Ü*’s shrine and another indicating the name of the philanthropic foundation of *Kuan Ü*’s spirit medium organization. This foundation was organized for public welfare. For instance, in December 2004, when a Tsunami damaged 6 provinces in

the south of Thailand, this organization donated lots of money, food, clothes, drinking water and coffins to the provinces concerned. Furthermore, this organization delivered money 10,000 Bath or approximately 200 Euros to support the activity of a police station in *Nakhon Pathom Province*; I have seen a letter from the police station thanking *Kuan U's* spirit medium foundation, which is pinned up on the wall inside a shrine.

A spirit medium's activity in promoting social welfare is obviously a strategy for creating and maintaining a good image, protecting the spirit medium and his entourage from negative points, especially possession by gods to make a living. This belief organization presents that the spirit professional possesses a god to help people avoid adversity. The result of a good image is widespread; the people will talk about his or her kindness and come to see him or her for services. After they have relief from their problems some clients donate money to the spirit medium. Moreover, the spirit medium sells magic objects namely; one charm paper 60 Bath or 1 Euro 20 cent, one magic photo of gods in the shrine 30 Bath or 60 cent, a string of beads 80 Bath or 1 Euro 60 cent, a small figure of *Kuan Ü* 120 Bath or 2 Euro 40 cent. So, he can get more money than his or her service charge of 24 Bath or 48 cent. If devotees donate things such as rice, oil and canned food, some of these will be donated for social welfare and others used for cooking the meal on special occasions for people who come to attend the rituals of the shrine, the birthday ceremony of the god, the annual ceremony of the shrine and the vegetarian festival.

Boon's gods are warriors in Chinese legend, *Kuan Ü* and *Teal Hui*. Nevertheless in his routine possession and during the Chinese vegetarian festival, he is possessed by *Teal Hui*. He possesses *Kuan Ü* only on occasions such as the birthday ceremony of *Kuan Ü* and the annual ceremony. In respect of his possession, I asked him why he doesn't possess *Kuan Ü* in his routine possession. He explained that was because *Kuan Ü* is the king of heaven; he has so much work to oversee so he bestows the power on *Teal Hui* to oversee and help humans on earth.

At this moment let me recount the life history of this case. *Boon* is 63 years old yet he still seems vigorous. He is the father of 4 children who are now adults and married. Before becoming a spirit medium he was a mechanic working at a motor company in *Nakhon Pathom*. Nowadays as well as being a spirit medium he has another occupation, as a rice merchant. His wife is a housewife.

In regard to his relatives, his uncle and nephew are both spirit media. The nephew is 15 years old and has still not opened a spirit possession service office to give service for clients, because he is too young and ashamed.

During our conversation, *Boon* described his illness and initial possession by his controllers as follow;

“The turning point in my life occurred when I was 31 years old. At that time I had resigned from the company to open my own shop (a car repair shop) but it did not work out satisfactorily, so I gave it up. After that I rented this land (now it is his “*Tam Nak*”). I built a small house and made a living by feeding pigs and chickens for selling later. In the mean time I began to have a terrible illness, for instance feeling rejected and isolated from others, feeling anxious and confused, sometimes I could not control myself and I ran to a tree and climbed it. Sometimes I ran into the jungle. Initially my wife thought I was pretending to avoid working. Subsequently she decided to bring me to *Tam Nak Kuan Ü* in *Chon Buri Province* according to a suggestion of a neighbour. This place is called *Tam Nak Kuan Ü* of the East and now there is another *Tam Nak* here. We possess the same Gods. I took counsel with a spirit medium and he told me Chao wanted me to become his horse. At first my *Tam Nak* was small, made from bamboo and its roof was made from the leaves of nipa palm.” (November, 1998)

Mainly his clients belong to the people from the middle socio-economic class, but also high and working classes. His expertise is healing; his main methods for curing illness are as follows;

1. Writing the name of a god on a piece of paper which then is burned and the ashes are mixed together with water and drunk to relieve the illness.
2. Burning charm paper then the ashes are mixed with water and drunk by clients, the name of a god is stamped on a part of the body for example; head, arm, leg, back, a sword is used to touch the client, a magic formula is said and then blown with the mouth to the body of clients as if to transfer the magic to the body.
3. By giving patients many kinds of mixed herbs to eat or smear onto themselves.

The spirit medium was supported by followers, approximately 15 men from lower, middle and upper income groups. As observed generally, those followers earned their livings by different kinds of occupations, such as for example there was a photographer, a butcher, the owner of a pig farm, a gardener, a driver, a fruit vendor, a shopkeeper etc.

Every Saturday and Sunday, 1 p.m. is the significant time for possession. The followers come and arrange instruments and a venue for the session, so let me describe what happens:

1. The waiting list is organized by giving out numbers to the clients;
2. Joss sticks are sold;
3. An explanation is given as to how many joss sticks have to be lit when entering into the shrine and where they have to put and in which sequence;
4. Offerings from clients such as money, the donation for the service of the spirit medium, whisky, fruits and cigarettes etc. are accepted;
5. Help is given to the spirit medium in dressing when the deity arrives;
6. The words spoken by the deity through the spirit medium's mouth are translated. The important person who explained this function to me told me that the followers who perform this function are the first generation of the spirit medium's entourage after he began to be the vehicle of the god. Because the deity speaks profound words in the Chinese language and many words are the terms of reverence that must be used when speaking to or of royalty, it is difficult for the general population to understand, however, learned people can understand this language well;
7. The Chinese text is chanted. This duty at first belonged to the woman

followers, but nowadays they train their descendants who are boy followers to do it.

In the light of what has been described above, it must be made clear that this case is very different from other cases, because the spirit medium is especially skilful in performing miracles such as sitting on a knife chair or nail chair. These two kinds of miracle performance are performed in regular routine possession. Others such as climbing a knife ladder, touching boiling oil and walking on hot charcoal, are performed in the annual ceremony of the shrine.

Finally, the history of the five specific cases in this chapter have been described in detail so that the basic characteristics of each case are understood before continuing to discuss the following topics, namely ritual performance and gender.

Chapter 6

Spirit Medium in Ritual Action

In this chapter I propose to discuss the ritual behaviour of the 5 cases I am studying in depth. The sub-topic begins with how to be a successful spirit medium. The basis of the argument intends to point out the factors that are important for the success of possession rituals. Details of ritual performances in each case study will be elucidated and the similarities and differences that lead to the efficiency of performance will be compared. Furthermore, ritual advertisement strategies intended to attract more clients will be explained. Here I attempt to explain and cover every dimension of the possession rituals that appears in my fieldwork. Thus my discussion on ritual action bases itself on performance theories to analyze the strategies of ritual performance and the interactions, which are explicit in the relation between spirit media and their participants such as their entourages and clients.

6.1 How to be a Successful Spirit Medium

There are many spirit media in the area of the Nakhon Pathom province and most of them are routine spirit media. These carry out their careers by entering into possession and providing a service for clients who consult them. Therefore, from among the various styles of possession and the special expertise that is offered, the clients have many alternatives to choose from for consultation. For this part, the factors that cause some spirit media to succeed amidst the tight competition at the present time will be discussed. Each case will also be illustrated and compared in order to give more understanding of the essential factors concerned.

6.1.2 Essential Factors

To be a successful spirit medium means the spirit medium has efficiency and ability to attract and persuade clients and other participants to have faith and believe that he isn't just pretending to be a god, but his actions are under the control of a god who possesses his body. Therefore, the performance perspective is fundamentally concerned with how to create a presence during the period of the possession ritual. An impressive ritual performance also serves as an advertisement. This is a very important factor for gaining more clients.

6.1.2.1 Ability of Performance

As the actor who could gain an Oscar, ability of performance is the most important factor to being a spirit medium. However, this ability differs in quality between each spirit medium as the success of the presentation depends upon experience and techniques. To explain the behaviour of each individual who wears the mask of a god or goddess and to analyze the strategies that an individual attempts to present to convince others to believe in him and accept him as a spirit medium, the concept of Goffman (1959) is used. In the possession ritual, the processes of communication, acknowledgement and interpretation between spirit medium and clients occurs. In the doctrine of Goffman about “Dramaturgical View”, the member of society uses “Impression Management” as the way to present themselves to others. It could be said that humans have many masks and select them in order to present them to others or audiences in each group and time.

From this concept mentioned above, we can compare this world with drama that is shown on the great stage. In everyday life, the activity that occurs and the performance of each individual could affect the interaction between the participants. Therefore, each individual, like an actor, plays and performs according to his role. However, each individual who as an actor will succeed or convince others to accept what he presents if his performance is the “Dramatic Realization”.

As shown above, spirit media, like other actors, attempt to present their role through the mask, while they interact with other people who are their audience. Furthermore, people’s perception and interpretation of their performance are important for their success or failure as a spirit medium and effect the interaction between them and other people.

6.1.2.1.1 Features of Performance: The Depiction of Each Case Study

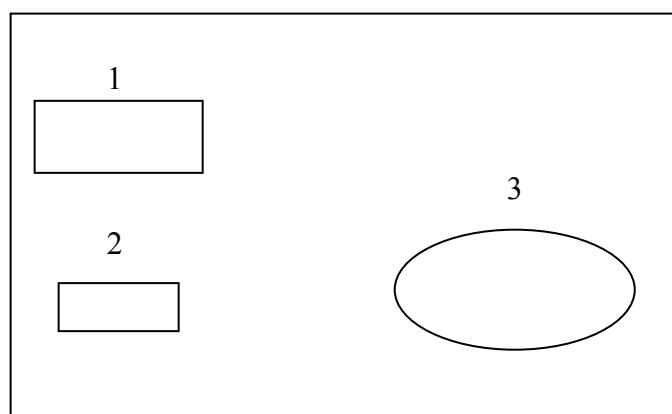
To present the reality, as the main actor, each spirit medium has a special role in each performance. The reviews of the performances of the five case studies will cover the following aspects; type of god, ritual location (Setting), costumes (Appearance), behavioural changes (Manner), calling, reason for spirit session, type of clients and type of assistants who play a minor role in supporting the presentation of the spirit media. I will explain the features of the performance of each case before discussing the similarities and differences later.

Case 1. “*Lui*”: A Female with a Hindu God in her body

The two storey commercial building made of wood is more than 50 years old. Most of the dwellers are Sino-Thai, however this building is not a shop, because it is situated behind the new commercial building beside the street. It is used as a storeroom. One section of this building is set up as the spirit medium’s residence and office. There is no sign in front of her room to give information about what this place is, there is only the old shrine of the household god.

The ground floor is used as the possession room. Indian music was playing loudly in this room. It was not difficult to find it. When I entered this room, *Lui*’s father welcomed me and told me to take a seat and wait, because *Lui* had to bathe her body before entering into the possession ritual. Then I and another client sat on the floor and asked her father about the service charge. In his small room, a little light came from the candle light which was set up in front of the kitchen and bath room section. A small table was used as the altar; there were statues of Buddha, figures of Hindu gods such as *Umadevi*, Narai and Ganesa⁴². Offerings to gods namely flowers, candles, joss sticks, fruits and a lustral water bowl also stood on it.

Diagram 2: Possession Room of *Umadevi*



Number 1: Altar

Number 2: The spirit medium’s seat

Number 3: The client’s sitting area

⁴² The Hindu god of wisdom

In *Lui*'s possession place, on every Thursday in the afternoon, a possession ritual was organized to serve clients. Indian style music was played loudly until the possession began, while the visitors waited to meet *Umadevi*. About half an hour later, *Lui*, the spirit medium of *Umadevi*, appeared in a yellow Sari, the Indian traditional clothing as *Umadevi* is a Hindu goddess. Her yellow sari has great style, decorated by golden thread and small beads. *Lui* wears the golden ornaments namely; earrings, necklace, the special arm lace with a long chain linked to the finger ring, lace for decorating her head and bracelets. Moreover, she makes up her face in intense tones and puts a red stud on her forehead.

To begin the possession ritual, *Lui* sat on the chair of *Umadevi*. Her father, as her assistant, ignited joss sticks and passed them to her. Within a few minutes *Lui* began to shake her body and lift her hand over her head, swaying her neck like an Indian dancer. At the same time, she spoke a godlike language that is similar to an Indian language. Then her father lifted the lustral water bowl and a lit candle to *Umadevi*. She cast a magic spell into the water before using the branch of the pomegranate tree to sprinkle everybody, who sat below her and put her hands together in prayer. Most of her clients were women. After they had offered flowers and the service charge to *Umadevi* in *Lui*'s body; *Umadevi* began to give a consultation and blessing to each client.

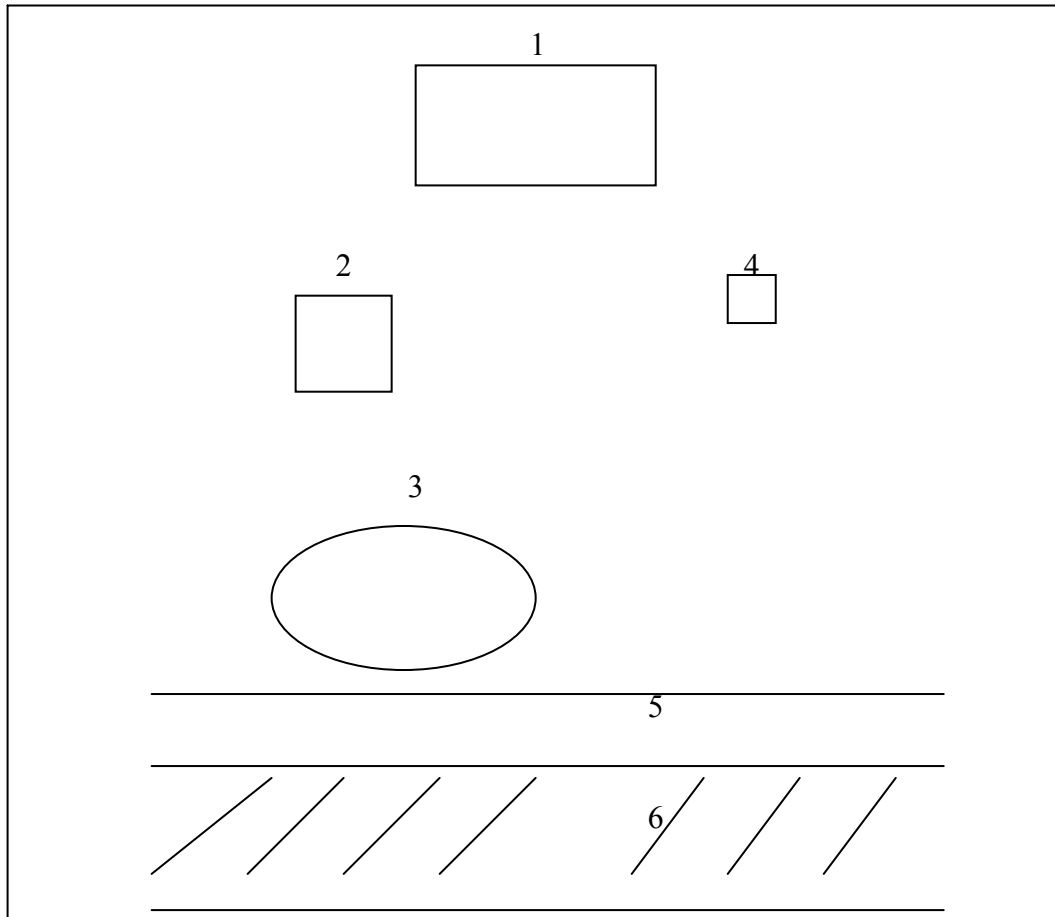
Case 2. “*Kaew*”: A Female Possessed by Three Male Gods



Figure 6: *Sadej Pee Chinnarach's Tam Nak*

Tam Nak of *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* is located beside the irrigation waterway. It is rather a narrow street and cars can only pass one by one. The small well is in front of the possession room and the small shrine of the household god stands opposite it.

Diagram 3: *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*'s Service Office



Number 1: The spirit medium's family house

Number 2: Possession room

Number 3: Small well

Number 4: The household god's shrine

Number 5: Street

Number 6: Irrigation waterway

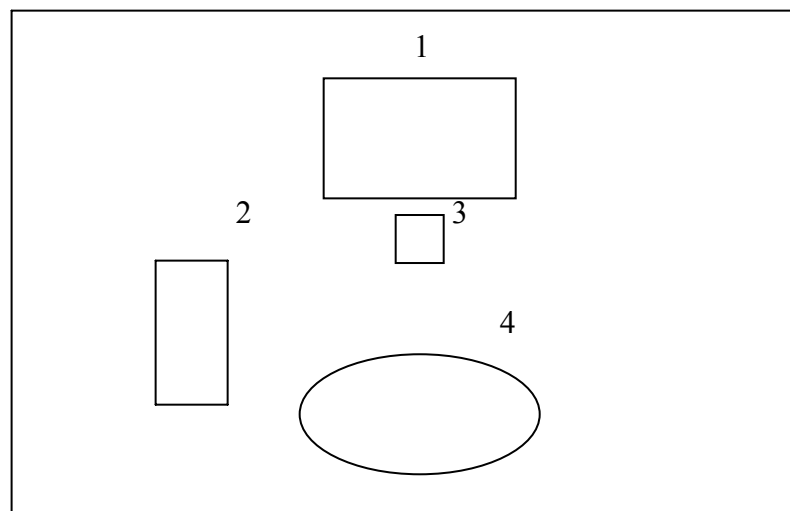
Inside the possession room, there are many instruments of worship and statues on the altar as follows;

Worshipping instruments: joss sticks, candles, vases, a fruit tray, cigarettes, a teapot, areca nuts and betel leaves.

Figures: *King Wejsuwan*, *Hok Lok Sui*⁴³, *Ganesa*, *Por Poo Kumsap*, *Kumara*, *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* and his wife.

The donation box is also placed in front of the altar and a wardrobe stands beside it. The images of the Lord Buddha and other Buddhist Priests are hung on the wall. During the possession ritual, the spirit medium and clients sit on the floor in front of the altar.

Diagram 4: Possession Room of *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*



Number 1: Altar

Number 2: Wardrobe

Number 3: Donation cabinet

Number 4: The spirit medium and client's sitting area

⁴³ *Hok Lok Sui*, are the three old gods of China and all of them are always regarded as the symbol of the ideal of Chinese. The word of *Hok* means absolutely the perfection of two things wished for by humans namely; happiness and wealth with material and followers. The symbol of this god is a rich Chinese with headgear and shawl, holding a baby.

The word *Lok* means prosperity, good fortune with virtues and stability of life. The symbol of this god is a Chinese nobleman with wide ears.

The word of *Sui* means longevity with good health. The symbol of this god is a Chinese old man with a long beard, holding a stick and Chinese fruit.

For this case, *Kaew*, the female spirit medium possesses *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*, a male god. In her imagination *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* was the prince and warrior. Accordingly, she dresses in golden yellow clothes composed of a close fitting blouse with tight long sleeves, a loin-cloth twisted and pulled tightly around the waist, holds a rectangular cloth for wrapping around her head and golden ornaments namely a long string worn as a decoration and a belt. In this disguise, she acted like a young man sometimes smoking a cigarette and flirting with other women. Only in her annual ceremony, she possesses *Por Poo Kumsap* and *Kumara* (infant spirit) also. When *Kaew* possesses *Por Poo Kumsap*, she dresses in a round-necked top and trousers with full-length legs made from cotton and its colour is yellow. To appear like this god she acted as if she was an old man. In the part of *Kumara*, *Kaew* dressed in the same costume as she had worn when she was possessed by *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* but in green. To take the role of an infant spirit, she acted the part of a little boy, and called herself “*Juk*”⁴⁴ when she talked with other spirit media. “*Juk*” danced and played pranks on the others. For example, “*Juk*” got a fruit from altar and ran to eat it under the table.

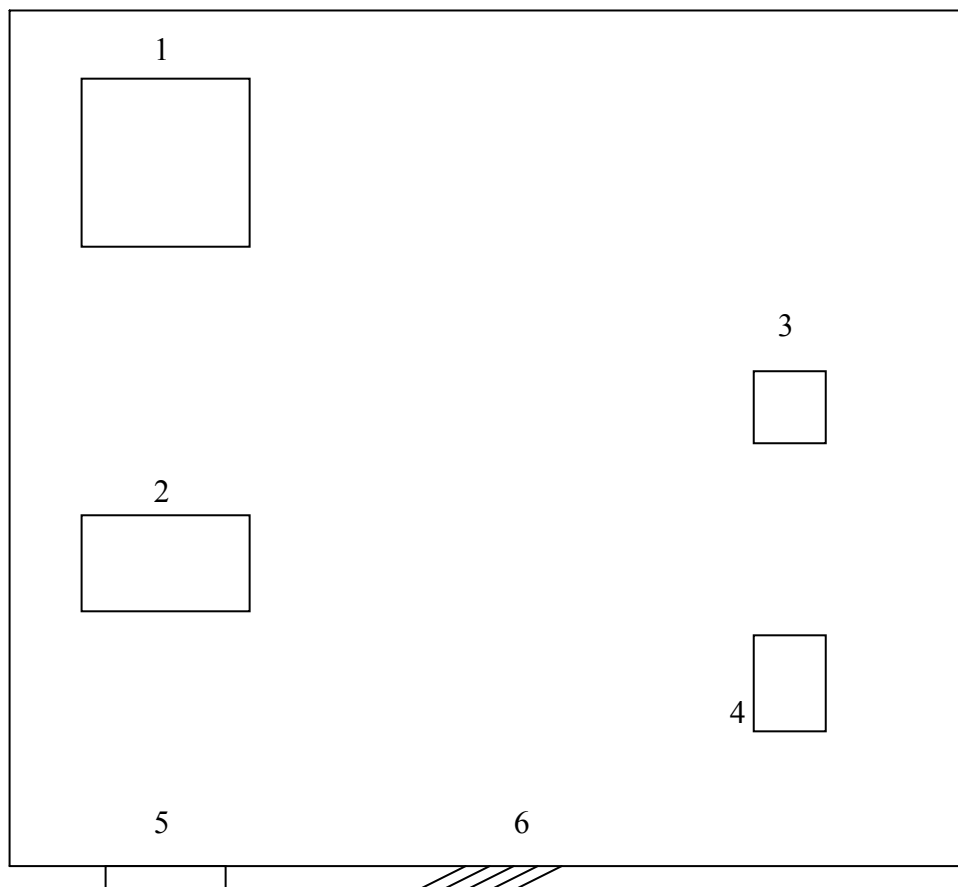
In the small possession room, on the day of the regular possession, a man and women held a tray of flowers, candles and joss sticks for offering to *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*. *Kaew* in white clothes sat on the floor in front of the altar, holding joss sticks in her hand to worship figures on the altar. Suddenly, her body shook, *Kaew*'s mother got the joss sticks from her hand then *Kaew* began to dance and sing in the old style of Thai music. Now, her mother brought the yellow clothes of *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* for her to dress herself. *Kaew* in this moment took on the role and manner of another person. She spoke in a louder voice, presented a manner like that of a young man, called herself *Sadej Pee*. Clients began to present offerings to *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* and asked for a consultation. On that day I observed one of the clients asking for a prediction from *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* for an auspicious day to get a new car from an auto company so that he would not have a car accident in the future. One of the women, asked for a prediction of where to find a lost necklace and another consulted *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* about a family problem.

⁴⁴ It means topknot, in the past a little boy in Thai Society always had this hair style.

Case 3. “Sri”: The Blind Female Spirit Medium

The service office of this spirit medium is approximately five kilometres from the main street. *Tam Nak Sum Por khong* is printed on a sign on the wall, indicating that this is the possession office of *Sum Por khong*’s spirit medium. Within the red door there is a compound of 0.42 acre or 1,680 square meters. In this compound is the spirit medium’s family home, the building for organizing the possession ritual and two small shrines; *Sum Por khong*’s shrine which is used for inviting *Sum Por Khong* to possess, and *Sarn Tep Prachao*’s which is used for inviting other “Tep” or gods to participate in the rituals of the spirit medium.

Diagram 5: *Sum Por Khong*’s Area



Number 1: The spirit medium’s family house

Number 2: Possession Room

Number 3: *Sarn Ar Khong* or *Sum Por Khong*’s shrine

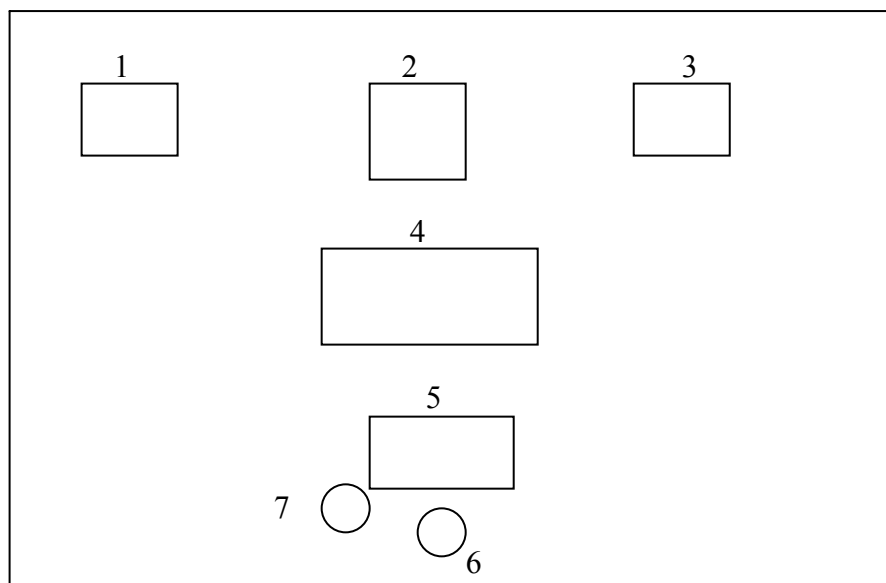
Number 4: *Sarn Tep Prachao* or the shrine of gods

Number 5: The tablet of “*Tam Nak Sum Por Khong*”

Number 6: Gate

When I entered into the possession room, there was the scent of joss sticks and rather a little light. There are the altars of many images namely; *the Lord Buddha image*, *Sum Por Khong* and *Kuan Im*. In the middle of this room, a big joss stick pot stands on a red table, and on another table, there are many instruments which the spirit medium uses in her possession rituals such as joss sticks, candles, a lustral bowl, the branch of a pomegranate, a paintbrush, ink bowl, oil lamp, teacup, areca nuts, betel leaves, *Pak Hua*⁴⁵, *Puay*⁴⁶, and a donation box etc. When the possession ritual is expected to begin, *Sri* will sit on the red chair in front of this table.

Diagram 6: The Possession Room of *Sum Por Khong*



Number 1: Altar of the Lord Buddha

Number 2: *Sum Por Khong*'s altar

Number 3: *Kuan Im*'s altar

Number 4: The table for standing joss stick basin

Number 5: The table of the instruments of possession ritual

⁴⁵ Pedestal wood and wood stick, for knocking when praying to the god.

⁴⁶ Wood sticks, used for prediction.

Number 6: A red chair for spirit medium

Number 7: A chair for client

Due to *Sum Por Khong* who is a Chinese god who was a Chinese monk, *Sri* dressed in yellow attire in the style of a Chinese monk for the possession performance and a string of beads was always held in her hand.

In the dim light of the possession room, the blind old woman in yellow clothes like the Chinese monk of Mahayana Buddhism kindly invited *Sum Por Khong* to possess her body to take away the distress of her clients again. Suddenly, after she held joss sticks and put her hands together in a salute over her head, her body began to shake, her head swayed from side to side, then her manner returned to calm on a red chair, presently *Sum Por Khong* arrived, her husband sent a cup of tea, areca nuts and betel leaves smeared with lime⁴⁷ to her. As *Sum Por Khong*, *Sri* called herself “*Ar Khong*⁴⁸”

“Who want *Ar Khong* to help today? *Luk Chang*⁴⁹ who has come to see *Ar Khong*, could you make merit (Tam Boon⁵⁰) by putting oil into a lamp? and then you will be lucky.” (March, 2000)

Most of the advice given in this case is about business, investment and predictions. For instance, one day when I attended a session I saw an expensive European car parked in front of a shrine and when I entered into the possession room I met two men, father and son, well dressed, from Ratchaburi Province. This province is the neighbour of Nakhon Pathom. They were businessmen and their business dealt with construction and selling building material. Furthermore, a young man took over the role as a local politician and a member of the provincial council.

⁴⁷ Chewed like chewing gum.

⁴⁸ *Ar Khong* means grandfather; deity treats people like his descendants so he uses this word to call himself.

⁴⁹ *Luk Chang* means a little elephant, in this situation this word is used as a personal pronoun, used sometimes when addressing a deity.

⁵⁰ Tam Boon means merit making.

The dialogue between them and *Sum Por Khong* who was in *Sri's* body is given as follows;

Client (Father): “Someone has contacted me to transport soil for reclaiming land in order to build up the new airport at *Nong Ngu Hau*. I don't know exactly if I can trust that person or not. That person I mentioned earlier is a woman. She said she knows many politicians in this government well.”

Sum Por Khong: “This is your good opportunity to seize. It can be compared with making hay while the sun shines.”

Client (Father): “Last time *Ar Khong* told me to buy trucks for the transport business. I have bought them but he said business does not progress.”

Sum Por Khong: “But you always have clients. You are not short of cash.”

Client (Father): “Yes.”

Sum Por Khong: “Your fate is that of a person who will be richer by a hundred million, thousand million. After this, good health and money will flow to you.”

Client (Son): “In the next national election, if I am candidate, could I have a chance of being a representative or not.”

Sum Por Khong: “You must speak on a rostrum”

Client (Son): “And then, how much money should I spend on it?”

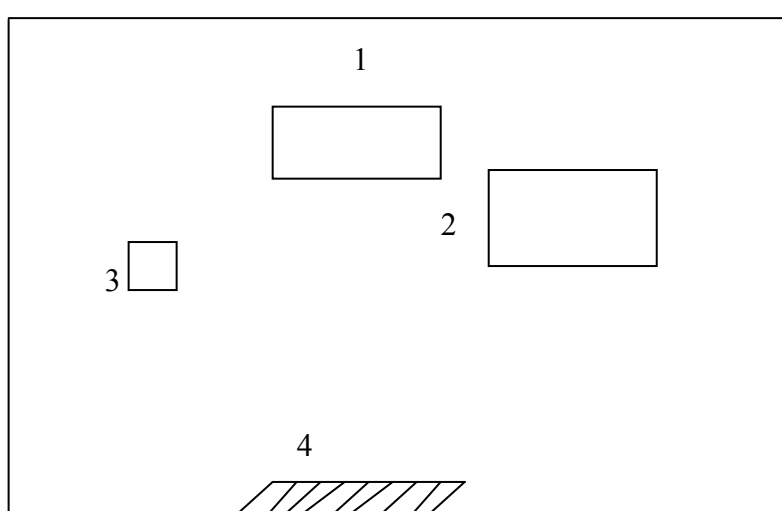
Sum Por Khong: “20 Million. *Luk Chang*, you are too young, it is not yet the proper time. Please wait for 3 years until you are more than 30 years of age and then everything will be better.” (March, 2000)

Not only individuals come to this shrine, but also entire families, mainly from the middle and high socio-economic classes and foreigners from Japan and China who are also interested to in getting solutions to mental problems from *Sum Por Khong*. They became clients for many reasons such as investment, health, problems within the family or with their jobs etc.

Case 4. “*Tong*”: How I became a Horse of *Por Poo Yai*

Around *Por Poo Yai*'s service office, there are many houses and commercial buildings along the small street leading to this place. Furthermore, it is located near the temple and primary school. From the outside it looks like an ordinary house built of wood and concrete. The roof is made from corrugated iron plates. Inside the fence, there are two houses, the first house belongs to *Tong* and another belongs to his son. A small room of his house is used for the possession ritual and welcoming clients.

Diagram 7: *Por Poo Yai*'s place



Number 1: The house of spirit medium's son

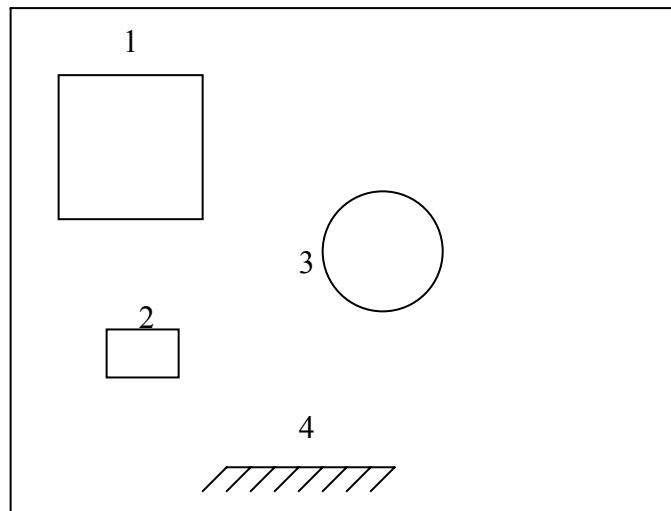
Number 2: The spirit medium's house

Number 3: *Por Poo Yai*'s shrine

Number 4: Gate

For *Tong*'s one floor house, the room in front of his bedroom was prepared for the possession ritual. It had rather little light, the windows could not be opened. The light was only from the candle and the air was full of joss stick vapours. On the altar, there were many figures. One of them was that of *Por Poo Yai*, the old man in a white cloth like Brahman. Others were the figures of Buddha, Kumara or an infant boy spirit and *Nang Kwak*⁵¹.

⁵¹ A small image of a young lady, by usually, installed on the self of all shop houses in the market, but to Thai people it has been regarded from early times as a charm or talisman which could be carved

Diagram 8: Possession Room of *Por Poo Yai*

Number 1: Altar

Number 2: The spirit medium's seat

Number 3: The client's sitting area

Number 4: The door of spirit medium's house

Por Poo Yai was an ascetic who sat, prayed and practiced meditation in the Buddhist manner in order to attain enlightenment and tranquillity of mind in the forest until he passed away. Consequently, *Tong* dresses in a white robe which is twisted and pulled up tightly around the waist, holding a rectangular cloth for putting across the shoulder and wearing a string of beads. Moreover, he has long hair and a beard.

About five o' clock in the morning was the time of the routine possession ritual at *Tam Nak Por Poo Yai*. Inside the possession room, *Tong* in white clothes sat on a chair in front of the altar to invite *Por Poo Yai* to possess his body. He began to worship the image of a god then closed his eyes. Suddenly, he breathed very strongly and loudly. When his eyes opened again, he spoke slowly like an old man, he sat so

from ivory or wood or bronze, clay or black lacquer with gold leaf. The image is called *Nang Kwak* which means a lady who beckons as it is traditionally believed that whoever has the *Nang Kwak* in the stall will enjoy brisk business through its mysterious attractions. According to Phaya Anuman Rajadhon, *Nang Kwak* refers to a small figure made from certain kinds of wood of the fig family or cast from metal in the image of a young woman with traditional hair style and dress attire in an attitude of sitting side-ways on the floor. The left hand either place on the thing or supported on the floor while the right hand is raised and stretched a little forward in a beckoning attitude of Thai style with palm downward.

that he bent his back. It could be said that *Por Poo Yai* had arrived, so *Tong's* wife hastened to serve tea to *Por Poo Yai*. Before allowing the clients to talk with him about their problems, he cast spells and blew magic by dropping a candle dripping with wax into water in a bowl to make lustral water and sprinkling it on everybody in the room. On that day there was only one client, a woman who sold things in the market. After she put the service charge on a tray and worshiped *Por Poo Yai*, she began to consult him about her illness, leg ache. To cure his client he incanted spells and blew on some herbs which he then gave to the client. Nevertheless, his service emphasized the expertise of prediction, as a candle and a water bowl are held as the important instruments for telling the future. He dropped a dripping candle into a water bowl and said the predictable words that clients hope to hear. His clients are people from lower-middle and working classes. His service charge is the cheapest compared to the other four case studies, 14 Bath or approximate 28 cent. At the same time he made magic objects to sell by using a magic incantation ritual, for instance, charm paper and a string of beads. Their magic properties prevent accidents, protect from malicious spirits and black magic and bring luck.

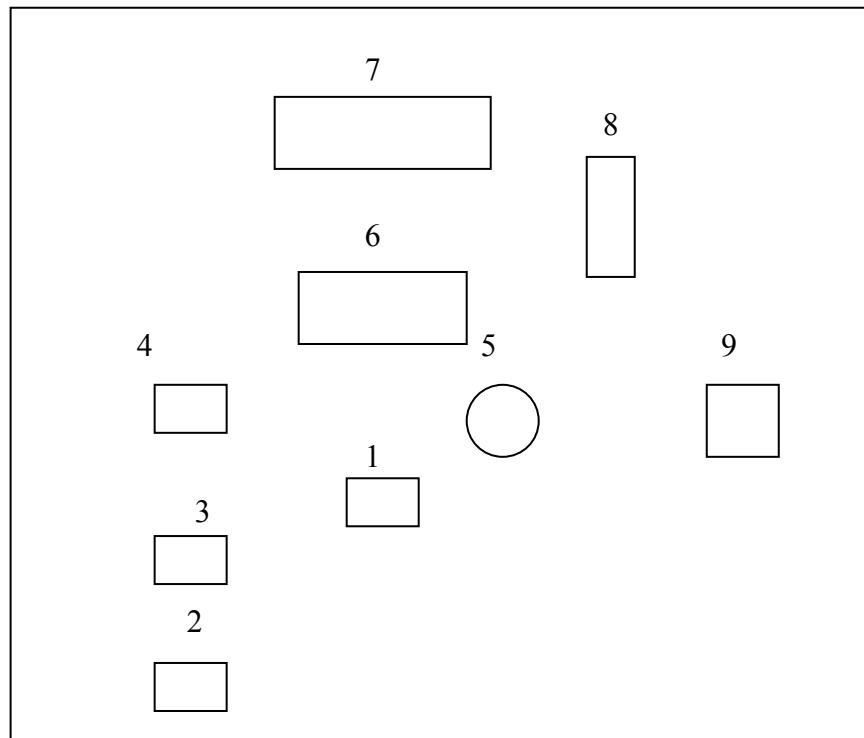
Case 5. “Boon”: A Male Performs Chinese Gods

The location of *Boon's* possession service office is about 14 kilometres from the main street. There are many houses and notice-boards give directions of how to reach the possession office which is beside the small street that intersects with the main street. The area (2.4 acres or 3,600 square meters) is composed of two sections as follows;

1. The house of *Boon* and his family
2. The buildings for the possession ritual which are in a Chinese style composed of three main buildings. The first building is where the possession ritual is carried out and here clients receive services. This building is called *Kuan Ü's* shrine. The second building is the hall of eight gods and this building, with three floors, is usually used to worship the eight gods, keep ritual instruments and the things that the people donated to the spirit medium, mostly rice and vegetable oil. And the third building contains the kitchen for preparing food to give banquets and here there are chairs and tables that are usually used for performing the ceremonies. Moreover, there are altars and small shrines in front of *Kuan Ü's* shrine namely;

- 2.1 The altar for inviting a god to possess
- 2.2 The altar for worshipping Brahma
- 2.3 The altar for worshipping *Ngo Tai Jieng Kong*
- 2.4 *Kam Thieng Tai Tee*'s shrine

Diagram 9: The Area of *Kuan Ü*'s Place



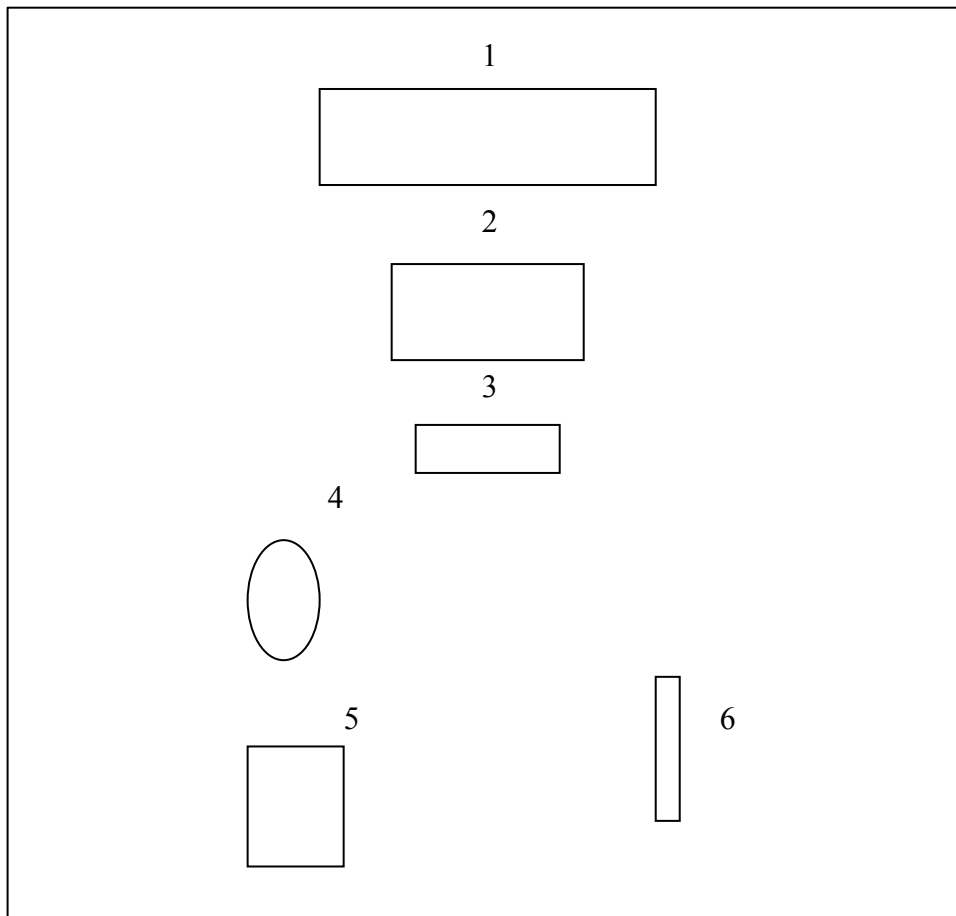
- Number 1: The altar for inviting the god
- Number 2: Brahma's altar
- Number 3: *Ngo Tai Jieng Kong*'s altar
- Number 4: *Kam Thieng Tai Tee*'s shrine
- Number 5: The Figure of *Kuan Ü*
- Number 6: *Kuan Ü*'s shrine
- Number 7: Vihara of eight gods or a hall of eight gods
- Number 8: The kitchen
- Number 9: The spirit medium's house



Figure 7: *Kuan Ü's* possession service place

In the room for the possession ritual inside *Kuan Ü's* shrine, first there was a big door. On this door the picture of the god who was held to be the guardian of this place stood out prominently. One side of the wall was embellished by a large picture of a dragon and another was decorated by a picture of a tiger. The dazzling red tables and chairs, the replicas of many gods made the visitors very excited. Furthermore, candle light and vapour from joss sticks created an atmosphere which favoured faithfulness and dedication to the sacred power. There were many kinds of furniture such as a knife chair, altars, a drum, a gong, figures of Chinese gods, chairs for clients, a show case of sacred things, cabalistic writing, rosary beads, the figure of *Kuan Ü* for sale, and donation boxes etc. Many instruments of the possession ritual such as the lustral water bowl, herbal medicine, sword, woods bars for prediction, red paper, an ink bowl and a paintbrush for making charm paper etc., had been prepared.

Diagram 10: The Possession Room of *Kuan Ü*



Number 1: Altar of the Buddha image and Chinese gods

Number 2: The table on which the joss sticks jar, candlestick, oil lamp, lustral water bowl and flowerpot stand.

Number 3: The seat and knife chair for the spirit medium

Number 4: The seats for clients

Number 5: The table from which cards indicating the clients place in the queue are distributed and where donations are received.

Number 6: The showcase of sacred things

Kuan Ü was a brave and faithful soldier in the Chinese story "The Three Kingdoms", according to Chinese belief. After death, he became the king of heaven, so his clothing is in the style of the king and yellow and gold, the colours that are symbolic of an emperor, are used for this attire.

Besides possessing *Kuan Ü*, *Boon* possesses *Teal Hui* in his routine possession ritual. *Teal Hui* was another soldier in the Chinese historical tale of The Three Kingdoms; he became the Chinese god of death. His character is valiant and honest, so his black clothing as a warrior is used for Chinese opera performances and here the black colour is the symbol of braveness and honesty. Moreover, he wears a fake beard and a wig.



Figure 8: Picture of Dressing Mode

While waiting among the other visitors I observed *Boon*'s routine possession ritual. When the time to invite the god arrived, the sound of a loud voice praying in Chinese was heard, after that there was the sound of drums and gongs. Then *Boon* stood in front of the red table in the middle of the room, he put his hands with joss sticks together in a salute over his head and his body began to shake. He hit the table with his hand. It made a loud noise, and he spoke a language of the god. Then the manner of *Boon* changed. He became reckless and he spoke in a loud and strong

voice. In the meantime, his entourage hastened to bring the clothes of *Teal Hui* to dress him. Afterwards, *Teal Hui* in the body of *Boon* stood conspicuously among the people who put their hands together in salute and waited for their god to cast a spell into the water and use the branch of the pomegranate tree to sprinkle lustral water on them. After that, he returned to sitting on a knife chair; clients began to talk with the god one by one through the entourage who translated between the god and humans.

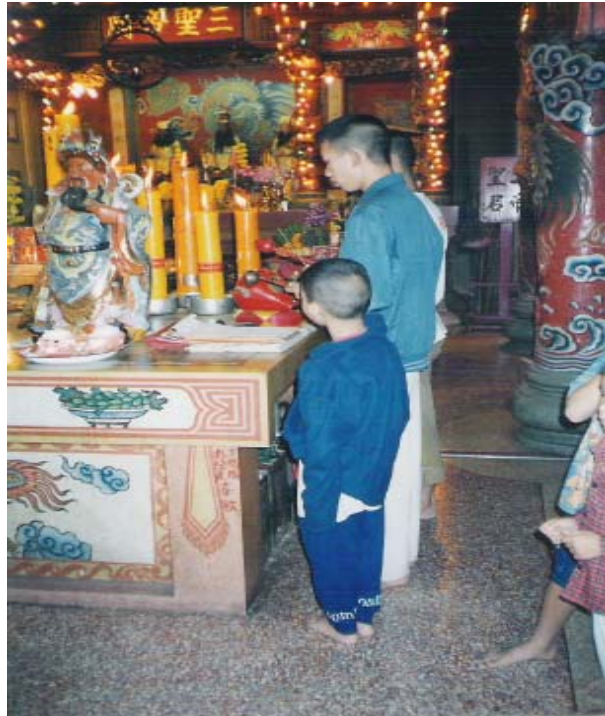


Figure 9: Chinese posterities pray in the spirit medium's possession room before the beginning of the possession ritual

His special expertise is healing, yet in his routine possession ritual many clients asked him for predictions and benediction of good fortunate. Sometimes he cast spells and blew on oranges then gave them to children who came with their parents; the properties of charmed oranges are to prevent illness and bring good fortune. Clients were from the upper, middle and lower classes.

From the ritual performances of each case above, the similarities and differences are explicit. Therefore comparison will be made in the next subtopic.

6.1.2.1.2 Comparison of the Similarities and Differences in Specific Case Studies

A comparison of each aspect of the ritual performances of the specific cases will be made and the similarities and difference studied.

A. Type of god or “Tep”

From the five case studies, *Lui*, a female spirit medium, possesses the Hindu goddess “*Umadevi*” while *Kaew* and *Sri* are illustrations of female spirit media whose controllers are male gods. *Kaew* possesses three male gods in the Thai style namely *Por Poo Kumsap*, *Kumara* or an infant spirit and *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*. *Sri* possesses a male god in the Chinese style, *Sum Por Khong*. Also *Boon* possesses Chinese male gods, *Kuan Ü* and *Teal Hui*. In the case of *Tong*, he possesses a male god in the Thai style, *Por Poo Yai*. Although the style of the gods is different, the sex of the spirit media and their gods is the same in the cases of *Lui*, *Boon* and *Tong* in contrast to the cases of *Kaew* and *Sri*. About the number of their controllers; *Lui*, *Tong* and *Sri* have only one controller while *Kaew* and *Boon* have more than one controller.

Regarding the type of god or the style of possession that is manifested in the cases of *Lui*, *Tong*, *Kaew*, *Sri* and *Boon*, it is the first dimension of the possession performance that determines the following presentations keeping their performance consistent to each type of god concerned.

B. Ritual Location and Set Up

A spirit medium’s possession place is the stage on which the performance occurs, the physical features are created and many devices are used to create the correct atmosphere such as the furniture, light and sound.

The locations or the settings of the ritual performances of the five spirit media can be compared to the stages of actors and actresses. The set and the costumes are the first things to give clients an impression that they can acknowledge and interpret when they reach the spirit medium’s place. In the cases of *Boon* and *Sri*, the Chinese style spirit media, their buildings are in the style of a Chinese shrine, the place for worshipping Chinese gods. These buildings lend atmosphere to the possession ritual. The buildings that are compatible with the possession style of these two cases could make a greater initial impression on clients than the sets of *Lui*, *Tong* and *Kaew*, who

use only one room of their residence for the possession ritual and welcoming clients.

Many religious objects and pieces of furniture are used to furnish and decorate the possession rooms. In all cases it was found that the figure of the god who possessed each spirit medium, was set up in the middle of the altar. In the place of the Chinese style spirit media, the wall, the window and the door were decorated beautifully with auspicious pictures portraying Chinese belief. For example pictures of dragons, tigers, Kilin⁵², a fruit bat, flowers and Chinese gods and goddesses have also been used for decoration. The tables and chairs are red. In the possession room of *Boon*, who is the body of *Kuan Ü* and *Teal Hui*, a knife chair and a nail chair are used for the presentation of the ritual performance of miracles.



Figure10: A nail chair

⁵² The Kilin of Chinese fables, with the body of a horse and the head of a dragon.



Figure11: A knife chair

Light and sound are important elements of the possession performance. For example in the case of *Lui*, *Tong* and *Sri*, a little light from candles and the vapour of burning joss sticks in their possession room create a feeling of mystery. An example of sound could be found in the case of *Lui*, the body of *Umadev*, where Indian music was played before the beginning of possession. Also in the case of *Boon*, there was the sound of praying for the god in Chinese, and a drum and gong were used as a sign that the possession ritual was about to start. This technique supports the ritual and makes it more powerful and interesting.

Therefore, the theatrical management of the possession performance stage is the first thing which will convince the clients of the reality of the spirit medium's performance and will give them confidence that he or she is possessed by a god. This then supports the interaction between the spirit medium and clients so that their relationship continues in the way that the spirit media expect.

C. Appearance

To perform as a god on the front stage, spirit media have to decorate themselves with attire, beautiful ornaments, make up and ornate hairstyles. However, the spirit medium's dress should completely harmonize with the character of the gods who possess them. In general, a spirit medium in Thai style dresses in the old fashioned Thai *Jong Ka Ben*⁵³, wearing a Thai Sarong⁵⁴ and wrapped in a *Sa Bi*⁵⁵. A Spirit medium in Hindu style dresses in traditional Indian clothes and most of the spirit media in the Chinese style, such as *Boon*, like to dress in the costumes of the Chinese opera.

Therefore it can be concluded that "Dressing or Appearance" is an important technique to present the particular character of each god and identify the special identity of each spirit medium. Consequently, this is how the spirit medium "who is his god" presents him or herself to the clients in the audience, whose faith is thereby strengthened.

D. Manner: Behavioural Changes

There are two important aspects to the manner in which the spirit medium acts and presents him or herself in the character of a god on the stage: body acting and voice.

1. Body Acting

Whilst a god possesses a spirit medium, his or her manner will change and be different from usual. The behaviour of the media will be influenced by the personality of the gods. For instance, in the case of *Boon*, to perform the role of *Teal Hui* who was a worrier, he had to act the part of an audacious man, with dexterous movements, turning his face upwards and smoothing his beard. Sometimes different manners of playing Chinese style boxing and brandishing a sword were also presented. When *Kaew* is possessed by *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*, her young male god, she performs in the manner of a man, paying attention to female participants and bantering with them. While she possesses Kumara or the infant spirit, her acting changes and she plays the part of a naughty child. Frequently, she kisses the cheeks of women and sometimes

⁵³ To thread the rolled end of a Thai sarong between legs and bring it up to the back

⁵⁴ A simple skirt somewhat like a tube skirt.

⁵⁵ A shawl, a wrap formerly used by a woman to wrap around her chest and back. When one end of the wrap is brought over the shoulder, it is called breast cloth.

she hides under the table and eats fruit or sweetmeats.

2. Voice

The voice also changes and is made to sound like the character of the god; some spirit media spoke in the language of their god in the possession ritual as in the case of *Lui* and *Boon*. When *Lui* was possessed by the Hindu god, it sounded as if she spoke an Indian language. *Boon* with his strong voice during his possession ritual, sounded as if he was speaking Chinese. His entourage who were Sino-Thai had to translate the Chinese into the Thai language for the participants. In this case, the clients who could speak Chinese recounted to me a little about the language of the god that this spirit medium spoke;

“I understood only some words and sentences, but mostly I could not understand because maybe there are the difficult words at the level that is used for composing poems. Only people who have learnt more could understand. His entourages are very good at Chinese. Previously, this *Rang* could not speak a Chinese language at all; however, he could speak after he has been possessed for being *Rang*. ” (December, 2004)

And *Lui* explained about the language of her god that:

“The *Goddess* was Indian, so she speaks Indian, Formerly in the beginning that *Goddess* came to possess me and she spoke only an Indian language. The people could not understand and required her to speak Thai.” (August, 2000)

For another case of the *Sum Por Khong* spirit medium, in her possession ritual, she speaks Chinese alternated with Thai. She recounted that:

“Formerly, I could not speak Chinese. Subsequently,

when I become *Rang* (body) for *Ar Khong* and I could speak automatically and I was astonished. Initially, *Ar Khong* spoke only Chinese and the visitors could not understand, since that time *Ar Khong* spoke Thai.”
(January, 2005)

In case of *Kaew*, she is possessed by three male gods, so she plays various characters belonging to her gods. While she was possessed by *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*, her voice changed and she attempted to imitate the voice of a man, speaking in a much louder voice than before entering possession. When *Kumara* came into her, her voice became small and shrill. Then when she was possessed by *Por Poo Kumsap*, her voice became that of an old man with bass tones and speaking slowly.

When it is considered that the god is being genuinely represented both by the movements of the spirit medium’s body and the voice and that there is an obvious change from the original personality of the spirit medium before possession by the god, the participants or clients will feel convinced by the spirit medium’s presentation and will believe that the spirit medium has a god in his or her body.

E. Calling: Entering Possession

I found that all my case studies have a similar way of entering possession. Before inviting the gods to possess, the spirit media have to be pure so they have to bathe. When the time of possession arrives, they will sit or stand in front of the altar in the possession room. Their assistants will bring joss sticks to them. Then after worshipping figures on the altar for approximately one or two minutes they will begin to act as if they have become different people which is the sign that they are being possessed by the gods. Their bodies begin to shake, they sway their heads or arms, breathe loudly and strongly, hit a table, speak the gods language or sing a song. After that the spirit media would perform according to the particular character of their gods. Then, assistants will offer a cup of tea to the spirit media. In the case of *Boon* when his god *Teal Hui* has arrived, his assistant will offer him alcohol. *Kaew* and *Boon* wear white attire for the beginning the possession ritual and when their gods have arrived their assistants will offer the attire of the gods to them and help them to dress.

F. Clients

Most of their clients were people from the Nakhon Pathom Province although some clients came from other provinces. They had heard of the spirit media from hearsay and the recommendations of their friends, relatives or neighbours, because *Kaew*, *Tong* and *Lui* did not advertise. In general, spirit media will not advertise. However *Boon* occasionally advertised the activities taking place at his shrine in order to publicize more the details of the ceremonies. Consequently, people knew him from the advertisements.

From observation about characteristics of the clients, most men and women are pleased to consult a spirit medium; however most of clients were women. Clients belonged to a wide range of age groups between 17 and 61 years; the majority of their ages were between 41 and 50 years. If we consider their socio-economic groups, most of them belonged to lower-middle and working classes, while a few from higher classes came to consult spirit media.

The ethnic groups of the clients in all of my case studies are Thai and Chinese although *Boon* and *Sri*, who are the bodies of Chinese gods, have more Chinese clients than *Lui*, *Kaew* and *Tong*.

For the attitudes and intensity of belief of clients, we could divide them into three groups as given below;

1. Absolute belief

Clients belonging to this group believe that a spirit medium has the actual ability to act as a medium between humans and gods. In their opinion, spirit possession is a good activity. However, some spirit media were suspected of being deceitful; therefore, they selected to visit only those spirit media who were known to be honest.

2. Hesitant belief

The people in this group hesitate to believe, so thus they decided first to have a trail consultation with a spirit medium, they take time to believe, because they think that some problems such as cancer etc. were too difficult to be solved by any kind of treatment. Therefore, their belief in spirit media grows slowly.

3. Unbelieving

Some clients did not believe in spirit possession at all. However, they followed

the advice of their relatives or friends to consult a spirit medium and they tried to see how they would respond to their suspicion and curiosity, but they still never believed.

To discuss the expectations of the clients of spirit media, they came to consult them on various problems; most of them came to consult about their misfortunes. Here we divide the kinds of problems into 8 issues as follows;

1. Business
2. Occupation
3. Illness
4. Family
5. Love
6. Bad Luck
7. Studies
8. Lottery numbers

From the problems of the clients as mentioned above, the conduct and the role of spirit media may reflect why they have been able to remain in Thai society from former times until the present day.

In the present social climate with intensive competition, individualism and pressure in daily life, it can be concluded briefly that spirit possession is regarded as one of many alternative ways to solve life's problems. The clients expectations of spirit media particularly emphasizes prediction and consultation. Irvin (1982) and Golomb (Watson, C.W., 1993) pointed out that the role of the spirit medium in Thai Society in the present time is different from the past. Originally, healing was their main service, but now there seems to be a transformation from healing to prediction, because of the progress of modern medical technology. Thus, the role of the spirit medium could be referred to as that of the traditional psychologist, who treats mental illness from which people suffer caused by the tensions of daily life.

G. Assistant

Besides the spirit media who are the main actors, there are assistants or entourages performing minor roles or minor actors assisting in the ritual performance of the spirit medium and ensuring that it runs smoothly. Their role includes

establishing the waiting order, explaining how much the service charge is and how many joss sticks have to be lit and where clients have to put them and in which sequence, furthermore preparing the joss sticks and candles, assisting spirit media to dress in their possession costumes and offering tea, areca nuts and betel leaves, cigarettes and the lustral water bowl to spirit media etc.

Generally, the assistants consist of a group of relatives, friends and devotees who serve on a voluntary basis. However, in the case of *Boon*, his assistants were a more professional group and most of them were men. The position and duty of each assistant depended upon the spirit medium. The occupations of the assistants are given below;

2.1 The owners of small businesses selling cloth, food, alcohol, vegetables and meat etc.

2.2 The owners of big businesses: hotels proprietors, estate agents, car dealers, rice mill owners, organizers of transportation etc.

The functions of Boon's assistants, besides serving him in his routine possession ritual, are given as follows;

- a. To organize the financing of the activities of the spirit medium.
- b. To plan and prepare the annual ceremony.
- c. To manage the donations received from clients and others.

H. Reasons for Ritual Sessions

Many types of possession ritual are performed. Each ritual has a different purpose, effect and function for both the spirit medium and the clients. Moreover each ritual is performed by different characters. In defining "Ritual" Firth, Raymond (1967: 202) explained it as "a formal set of procedures of a symbolic kind, involving social communication, and believed to possess an efficacy of themselves in changing the technical or social conditions of the performers or other participants." Thus, in each ritual performance there are many symbols that the spirit medium uses to communicate with the participants. Moreover, the ritual is related to social relationships, norms and social pressures and it is performed using symbols to represent the spirit. Here the spirit medium's ritual manifests the welding of the human to the spirit world.

The possession ritual performances of the five spirit media who are being studied in the present research could be divided into two types, namely annual ceremony and routine possession ritual to assuage distress by healing and solving other life problems for clients.

1. Annual Ceremony: *Wai Khru* Ritual

The *Wai Khru* ritual is not confined only to the spirit media; it is also practiced by any expert to make the annual offering of respect and thanks to the teacher or *Khru*⁵⁶, who provided them with that expertise. The *Wai Khru* ritual is similar to that of the annual ceremony of all spirit media. Nevertheless, the numbers of participants namely; spirit media, their entourages, clients and interested people are different in each case. If a spirit medium is exceedingly famous, there are numerous participants, but if the spirit medium is not renowned, the number of participants is less. Usually, the *Wai Khru* ritual is organized in April or May, however the date of the *Wai Khru* ritual is not assigned precisely. After the spirit medium who is to be the host at the *Wai Khru*, has set the exact date then he or she informs other spirit media, their entourages, and the people in the community. In some cases the spirit media use a big board or handbill to advertise the *Wai Khru* and to encourage the people to participate.

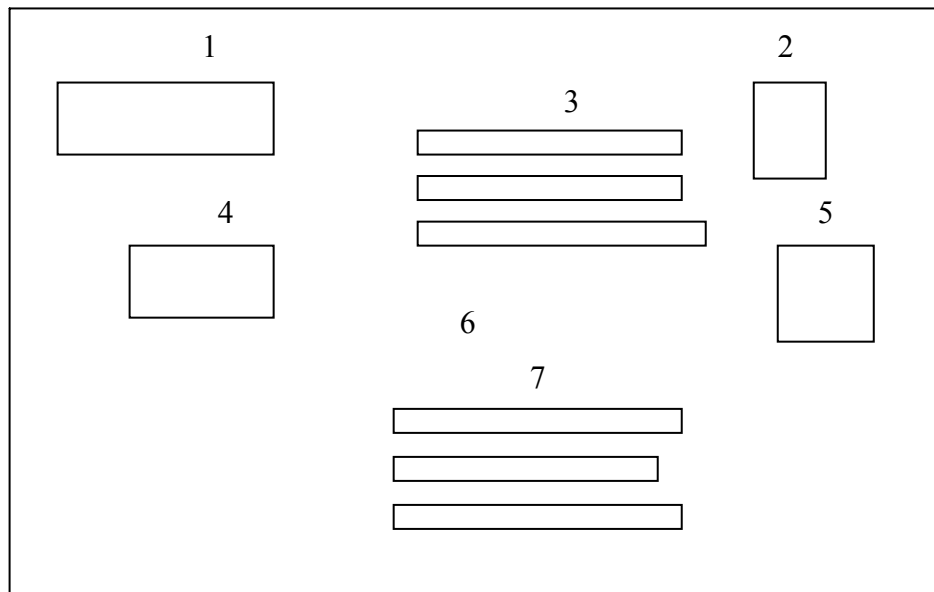
Wai Khru* Ritual at the *Tam Nak Sadej Pee Chinnarach

The *Wai Khru* ritual is an important ceremony. In order to elucidate what happens at the *Wai Khru*, *Kaew*'s ritual has been selected as an example.

The dates 9-10 April 2003 were assigned for the *Wai Khru* ritual at *Tam Nak Sadej Pee Chinnarach*. Other spirit media and their entourages enjoy erecting a tent, arranging chairs, about 80-90 seats, and decorating the place. The members of a band came to set their musical instruments and the dance floor carpeted by a read mat in front of the rows of chairs. On the night of the ritual, the spirit media would dance together until four or five o'clock the next morning.

⁵⁶ For students in education institutions, they also organized *Wai Khru* ritual, but their teachers are human beings.

Diagram 11: The diagram of the ritual place



Number 1: Kitchen

Number 2: Music Band

Number 3-7: Rows of chairs

Number 4: Possession Room

Number 5: "Joss house" The altar for inviting a god to possess

Number 6: Dance floor



Figure 12: “Joss house” The altar for inviting a god to possess

On 9th April, the first day of the ritual from the early morning preparations were being made for the ritual and at the same time, the host held a banquet, providing warm food for the participants. In the early evening, *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* was invited to possess and converse with the participants, after that other spirit media who came to participate were possessed and gods or *Chaos* talked together with each other and the people. The spirit media started to dance when the music began to play.

On 10th April, the second day of *Wai Khru* ritual, we could divide ritual performance into three scenes namely merit making, paying compliments and spirit dancing.

The First Scene: Merit making

The participants included monks, spirit media and the people from local communities. At approximately 9.30a.m., the entourage of *Kaew*, the host, brought monks, who were invited to have lunch and bless the celebration. It seems that in this scene, spirit media show their respect to Buddhism as they have borrowed the

principles of merit making from Buddhism. Merit making justifies their continuing possession activity and protects them from accusations of deceitfulness.

The Second Scene: Paying Compliments

After taking the monks back to the temple, *Kaew* entered possession again to converse with the participants, binding their wrists with a charm cord and to sprinkle lustral water on them. The new spirit media came to receive the bowl from *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*. Therefore, next, *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* gave the receiving bowl or *Rub Khan* to the participants, who were in the process deciding to become spirit media, and from this time they respected *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* as their teacher. The old spirit media, who already held the teaching of *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* in esteem, came to pay their respects to *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*. Thus, they entered into the possession state, then held a personal bowl which they had brought with them from the altar of their place. Then they filled it with flowers, eggs, candles, unhusked rice and bananas and offered it to *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* one by one and *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* walked around the heads of those bequeathing gifts. After this ritual, all the spirit media took their bowls back to set them on the altar at their place again. Accordingly, in this part of the ritual they could pay compliments to *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*, who is their teacher spirit.

The Third Scene: Spirit Dance

After the second stage above finished, the band played again and spirit media started to dance together. While the spirit media were dancing, the people could converse with them, consult them about their life problems or ask for blessings. Here the interaction between gods or *Chaos* and the people proceeded informally and in a relaxed fashion. Furthermore, *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*, in *Kaew's* body, enjoyed bantering with the participants especially the women and flirting playfully with the young women.



Figure 13: Blessing

The musical instruments of the band in the ceremony consisted of Thai and western musical instruments. Old style Thai music was played when *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*, at the request of the participants, sang a song in the style of a Thai theatrical performance. Western musical instruments were used for accompanying folk songs and modern Thai songs; almost all songs were in quick tempo rhythms suitable for the spirit media to dance to. Some spirit media did Thai folk dances, while others danced in the modern style. If, while they were dancing, the spirit medium felt tired, he or she would leave the possession state and rest for a moment to have a drink of water or some food. Undoubtedly the spirit media enjoy the *Wai Khru* ritual because they have the freedom to dance and flirt in public.



Figure 14: Spirits Dance No.1



Figure 15: Spirits Dance No.2

From all three scenes above, it is interesting to observe in this ritual the participation of approximately 100 -120 spirit media. Besides the spirit media who were intimately acquainted with *Kaew*, the host, other well known spirit media and spirit media who respected *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* as their teacher spirit, were invited to participate. Another group was composed of spirit media who were still not famous

and well known, and some in this group were the new spirit media. One can see the difference between them in the following ritual;

1. When a spirit medium is greeted by *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* it is a sign that they have a close relationship with *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*.

2. The *Wai Khru* ritual is an important opportunity for the new spirit media because the famous spirit media are present and the new spirit media can become acquainted with them and other spirit media and people.

An illustration of this style of possession is that, although *Kaew*, who was the host, possessed a Thai god, however there were also spirit media who possessed Chinese gods and Hindu gods who came to participate in her *Wai Khru* ritual.

2. Routine Possession Ritual

The clients come to the rituals with various problems, thus the purpose of routine possession rituals is to alleviate their troubles and suffering, which can be separated into two main categories namely; “*mental distress*” and “*physical distress*”. The first category, mental distress, includes generally problems about business, promotion in their occupation, family, love, misfortune, studies and lottery numbers. The physical distress comes mainly from illness. The data from 112 clients shows that 85 of them or 75.89 percent consulted a spirit medium about mental distress, while 27 of them or 24.11 percent had physical distress. It can be seen from the subcategories that most of the clients came to spirit media due to illness, misfortune, lottery numbers, promotion, family, business, love and studies respectively. The service rituals performed to solve the main categories of problem, will be considered in two parts.

Table 9: Problems of Clients

Type of problem	Number	Percentage
Business	9	8.04
The progress of Occupation	12	10.71
Family ⁵⁷	11	9.82
Love ⁵⁸	5	4.46
Unfortunate ⁵⁹	25	22.32
Studies	2	1.79
Lottery Number ⁶⁰	21	18.75
Illness	27	24.11
Total	112	100

2.1 Ritual to Get Rid of Mental Distress

There are many methods for solving mental problems;

1. Prophecy is usually used. After clients recounted their problems, the spirit media always ask the date of birth, and then give their predictions and any suggestions to solve problems.

2. Offering the clients a talisman to worship, because this will protect them from many kinds of misfortune such as accidents and at the same time it will bring good luck to clients such as being successful in business, getting a job and passing examinations etc.

3. To respond to the desires of clients, the ritual of hinting at lottery numbers takes place in every spirit medium's office. In the rituals of the spirit media of *Por Poo Yai* and *Sum Por khong*, lustral water bowls and candles were used for predicting lottery numbers. Spirit media sat reciting the mystic formulas and dripped the candle

⁵⁷ Here it deals mainly with the problems of married people, who may experience with many kinds of family problems such as husband committed sexual misconduct and children are out of moral lines etc.

⁵⁸ The love problem here is that of relation between the unmarried young.

⁵⁹ For the word of "Unfortunate" concerned, it means mainly the circumstance that clients experienced more with many kinds of problem namely; accident, vendetta of enemy, losing of wealth and lucklessness etc.

⁶⁰ This kind of problem is put in the group of mental distress, because it deals mainly with cause of suffering which occurred from the unlimited desire towards the worldly wealth.

wax into the lustral water bowl. Next the spirit medium let the clients look at the wax in the lustral water bowl and clients interpreted the patterns made by the dripping from the candle as lottery numbers. However, the spirit medium of *Kuan Ü* hinted at lottery numbers by painting a random pattern onto red rectangular paper after reciting mystic formulas and then let clients interpret what he had painted as lottery numbers.

4. The ritual of for getting rid of bad luck can be performed by pouring vegetable oil into oil lamps in the possession office of the spirit medium and writing the name of the patient on paper which the spirit medium burns. The client receives a candle from the spirit medium to light at home.

5. To solve problems in activities such as passing exams, selling goods well, getting a good job etc. a spell is cast on the lustral water which is then given to clients to drink. It is also auspicious to dash and take a bath.

6. Making love magic is one of the mysterious ways to recall a husband to come back who has left home. Particularly, a spirit medium is asked for love magic in the case of a first wife whose husband has gone to have a relationship with another wife. As an example, the spirit medium of *Por Poo Yai*'s ceremonial performance of love magic will be described below;

The procedure of casting the charm is as follows;

6.1 First of all, cut twenty small pieces of material from clothes belonging to the husband and wife. Taking a single piece from both husband and wife twist them together as a candle wick. Repeat this to make twenty wicks and then cover them with wax in order to make twenty candles.

6.2 Command the clients to light the said candles in the following parts of the house;

6. 2.1 Put three candles in front of the image of Buddha as a sign of prayer, worship and thanksgiving for protecting family members especially for helping the husband abstain from sexual misconduct.

6. 2.2 Put one candle at the door of the bedroom in order to help the husband love his family more.

6.2.3 Put another candle beside where he sleeps in order to help the husband come back home.

6.3 Light the candles in these places for four days

In the case of prostitutes, most of them requested the spirit medium to cast a spell on face powder in order to make love magic to attract men.

Another illustration of this type of ritual can be seen in the case of *Sri*. The dialogue shows how a spirit medium acts to get rid of mental distress.

At *Sri*'s possession office, she began to possess *Sum Por Khong* again. A client, who was the owner of a computer business, came to her on that day. The dialogue and situation were as follows;

Somchai: "Now I am opening a firm but I don't know if it will be successful or not"

Sum Por Khong: "Date of birth."

Somchai: "twenty-ninth, May, nineteen-seventy six"

At this time *Sri* dropped a lighted candle into a water bowl, and continued to ask Somchai questions;

Sum Por Khong: "What kind of goods?"

Somchai: "Computers"

Sum Por Khong: "Is it one kind of electrical goods?"

Somchai: "Yes."

Sum Por Khong: "There are three kinds of food, rice, fruit and sweetmeats. Which food do you select to eat?"

Somchai: "Rice."

Sum Por Khong: "If you select to eat rice, it means you will still be starving but don't worry, don't trust your friends, you are kind, I will help you." (December, 2004)

Then, *Sum Por Khong*, in the body of *Sri*, cast spells, blessed and blew on Somchai's head. He put his hands together in salute and *Sri* sprinkled lustral water on him.

The basic instruments for this type of ritual are a bowl, water and candles. Spirit media use them to perform when they give predictions to solve life problems. After asking the date of birth, the spirit medium would drop a lighted candle into a water bowl and after murmuring to himself then give the prediction. In order to transfer power from the god to the clients so that they will have good fortune and be released from distress, spirit media cast spells, drop burning candles into a water bowl then blow into it and sprinkle it on the body of the clients. The dialogues (as above and in page 125-126) are examples of conversations between spirit media and clients when clients present life problems, which they expect the spirit media to solve. Schieffelin (1985: 718) elucidates that in dialogues, they show great subtlety in obtaining information with which to construct an appropriate response.

The Significance of Rituals to Solve Mental Distress

The significance of the ritual performance in solving problems for clients is as follows;

1. The complexity and delicacy of the ritual convince the clients and promote their faith in the ability of the spirit medium.
2. The greater the complexity of the ritual the greater will be the conviction of the clients that the spirit medium is especially concerned with their problems, thus, they feel confident that their problems will be solved.
3. The clients feel the sacred powers of the gods inhabiting the sacred altar within the possession room and invite these gods to solve all their problems. This means it is very important for the spirit media to show that they are speaking for the gods who possess them and that they care about their clients very much and are trying their best to get rid of their client's problems. Then the clients also feel that they have been taken good care of not only by the spirit medium, but also by the gods and have more faith that the healing will be effective.
4. In the difficult and volatile situation of economic competition, even knowledgeable and experienced businessmen cannot expect their own businesses to be very profitable. So, they are convinced it is essential to consult with spirit media about how to run them successfully. They also gain enough confidence from the consultations to continue their businesses.

5. The ceremonial performance of the spirit medium is not only for the clients, but also for their relations. In other words, the ceremonial is obviously held as a way of managing relationships between members of the family etc. in present society.

2.2 Ritual of Physical Distress or “Healing Ritual”

On the topic of healing Firth, Raymond (1967) explains that the possession ritual of a spirit medium to heal is that a spirit medium uses traditional techniques to serve patients and his healing performance is obviously a kind of bridge between the ideas, emotions and behaviour of the patient and those of the people who surround him. Spirit media are concerned about the cultural and social background of the patient to be able to interpret, diagnose and decide on the way to manage the illness. Before considering the healing methods of the case studies, the causes of the illnesses suggested by the spirit media and the diagnoses they make will be explained.

In the view of the spirit media there are three main causes for illness namely;

1. The causes of illness depend upon weak internal factors of each individual patient. However, it can be said obviously that the illness causes the weakness of the patient's body.

2. Illness is also caused by interference by the spirit or sorcery. These are factors from outside the body. So, these are supernatural factors and the proper way to give treatment and to take care of the patient must be decided on and carried out by the spirit medium concerned.

3. Here the patient's body becomes weak because of internal factors changing as mentioned above and the patient is also affected by the power of spirit or sorcery at the same time. So, both are held as important causes of serious illness.

The diagnoses and healing methods of spirit media are based on these three causes. For instance in the case of *Boon*, the body of *Kuan Ū* and *Teal Hui*, normally his diagnosis means and healing of clients could be divided into three steps as follows;

The first step: The spirit medium will examine the symptoms of the patient by checking the injured parts of the body. Moreover, the spirit medium will also take

good care of the patient by discussing the treatment by modern medicine, which the patient may have received before.

The second step: Then spirit medium will inquire about the patient's record, the family background especially and former problems in order to consider analytically the original cause of the illness.

The third step: After interviewing the patient for information to help diagnose the cause of the illness, the next step deals with the treatment to be selected for healing.

As already observed, the case studies used seven treatment methods as follows;

1. Getting rid of bad luck by pouring vegetable oil into oil lamps in the possession place of the spirit medium, writing the name of the patient on the paper which the spirit medium burns, getting candles from the spirit medium to light at home etc.

2. The spirit medium makes a talisman for the patient to worship and it will protect the patient from interference from the spirit or sorcery, such as a charm of rolled gold or silver strips strung around the waist or the neck and charm paper etc.

3. Burning charm paper and mixing the ashes with water which is given to the patient to drink.

4. Making lustral water and bathing in it, or the spirit medium pours it or spits it onto the body of the patient especially the injured part.

5. Making lustral water and giving it to the patient to drink.

6. Healing by herbs with magic.

7. Casting a spell on the part of body which is ill.

Spirit media nearly always cure patients by the many means above and sometimes they suggest to patients that they should also use modern medicine, together with their cures.

One of *Boon's* healing rituals is offering a lustral water bath to clients. The proceeding of this ritual is another illustration and will be described in the three

following scenes:

The first scene: Preparation

At this stage *Boon*'s assistant prepared the instruments for healing such as two pails of water, candles, red paper, a paintbrush, stamps and red ink. The patients changed into clothes for bathing in lustral water and sat on the floor outside, in front of the possession room, to wait for the spirit medium.

The second scene: Entering possession

When everything was ready, *Boon* began to enter possession. He stood in front of the altar and worshipped his gods. Suddenly, he hit the table and made a loud noise, *Teal Hui* had arrived, and then his assistants helped him to dress in the uniform of this god. Another assistant offered alcohol to *Boon*. He drank and then the assistant offered a paintbrush to him. *Boon* cast a spell, and wrote on the red paper to make charm paper. Next, his assistant offered a lighted candle to him, *Boon* cast another spell and burned the charm paper. The ashes of the paper fell into the water in the two pails and finally he dropped a candle into the water. This scene shows how to make lustral water for healing.

The third scene: Bathing for healing

Boon held a lance in his hand and walked straight to the patients who sat on the floor in front of the possession room, his assistants carried two pails of water and followed him. The patient put his hands together in salute, *Boon* cast a spell and stamped the name of the god on the back of the patient then he touched the body of the patient with a lance, cast another spell and poured lustral water on the bodies of the clients, one after the other.

According to the symptoms of the patients participating in the lustral water bath at *Boon*'s possession place, such as cancer, headache, leg ache, arm ache and paralysis etc., patients have to come to bath in lustral water until the symptoms of the illness disappear.



Figure 16: Healing Ritual

The medical and classical anthropological works of Radcliffe Brown, Bronislaw Malinowski, Levi Strauss and Raymond Firth have been greatly interested in studies on the questions of what is the cause of illness, and the concept and means of diagnosis and healing of the people in Primitive society, Traditional society, Tribal society and Peasant society which is generally recognized as the Pre-modern society. The differences between traditional and modern medical healing and the weak and strong points of each system and why some people still hold onto traditional healing in the modern age are discussed below:

1. There is an understanding about cosmology, how the universe, sun, moon, earth, oceans, sky, trees, mountains, rivers, humans, animals and many things occur, continue and relate to each other etc. Humans in each culture have an answer to explain this. Furthermore, each culture's exposition of cosmology has more or less influenced the behaviour of people in that culture in many dimensions including the thinking about illness and healing. For this research, the attitude towards and treatment of illness and healing is not regarded as black magic but the perfect assimilation between traditional healing and modern medicine. This phenomenon occurs in Thai society due to the Thai view of the world and the thinking system of the people. At least, the present research concerns the Thai world view, which blends between the old and new system or between the belief of a supernatural system and a

science system from western society. These two world views still exist together. So, it can be observed that when suffering with many kinds of illness, people are firstly pleased to receive treatment according to medical science; however, they are also interested in the traditional care and healing of spirit media in order to make sure that they are cured.

2. The explanation of the cause, diagnosis and healing of illness according to modern medicine is superficially similar to that of the traditional belief system established in Thai society. It can be said that Thai society strongly believes that all beings consist of both body and spirit. Spirit is the most important and when the body expires, the spirit is still alive. It is assumed that the illness experienced may be the corollary of spirit interference and the body becomes deformed with illness. Thus, as observed above, diagnosis and healing should be carried out by the spiritual method for the physical illness to disappear. Obviously if people who believe in the traditional system get sick, they will receive black magic. If it is suggested that these people receive healing from modern medicine, they may not accept the diagnosis given by physicians or if they accept it they may still have doubts in their mind.

3. Modern medicine has been developed from the scientific basis of the western industrial countries where the population's world-view has been influenced by science, and particularly the belief system is based on causation. The economic system also has capitalism to support it. So, the treatment and healing proceed with perfect communication and understanding between physicians and patients, because both of them are based on the belief in modern science. However, modern medicine has also limitations when used in a society in which politics and economics are in the process of developing, which is different from the developed western society.

3.1 In the government hospitals there are not enough physicians for the numbers of patients concerned. So, it is easy to meet a lot of patients waiting to be diagnosed and although the physicians try their best to take care of all of them, it is often very inconvenient for the patients.

3.2 Due to the above, the patients may feel inferior because of the limited care that they receive from the physicians in the government hospitals. Wealthy patients will decide to have diagnosis and treatment at clinics and private hospitals, because there the patients are perfectly satisfied as they do not have to wait for a long time and they are well cared for by the physicians. Further in the capitalist

society, medical services with lower or higher quality can also be selected according to the buying power. These are reasons why patients with a different level of education and economic status may choose to be healed by the spirit media, because they feel happy and satisfied with the friendly reception they receive, especially because the offices of the spirit media are similar to their own houses and more convenient than a government hospital. Also the spirit medium uses simple language that patients can understand easily. Moreover, the atmosphere of conversation between a spirit medium and patients is friendly with the warm communication natural in daily life including the explanation about how to give treatment. They are perfectly convinced that their illness will be well taken care of, so they are happy to be treated traditionally and this is also regarded as important for the success of the treatment by the spirit medium.

3.3 In the case of patients who have to decide to whether to stay at the government as they have been recommended by the physicians, some patients may be more apprehensive and hesitate to decide because the hospital seems a little frightening and is so different from their own homes. Such apprehensiveness may occur because the patients have to in hospital with strangers especially because they have to leave relatives alone, as some hospitals do not allow relatives to stay with patients. This is very different from healing by a spirit medium where patients can go home to take a rest. This may be a significant reason for the popularity of traditional healing of patients who believed in black magic.

3.4 Modern medical science, has limited success in curing some diseases namely; AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), cancer, paralysis and many kinds of chronic pain caused by hard physical work etc. However, spirit media treat such diseases, which are incurable by modern medical science. They claim that it is possible to recover from these diseases by taking lustral water, getting rid of bad luck by sprinkling lustral water on the head and taking herbal plants. However, after the death of a patient, the spirit medium will explain to the relatives of the dead man that he or she did all that was possible to help him but he died according to the law of action or *karma*.

Whether people who are suffering from an illness decide to be treated by modern hospital medicine or traditional healing or both of them, it shows that the

patients have the willpower to discover a cure for their illness. This explains how the spirit media who deal with traditional healing and social problems lead their lives.

From the two categories of ritual above, relieving mental distress and the healing ritual, we can gain a concept of the power of the ritual process, such as reciting spells⁶¹ and blowing directly to the client's body or making lustral water for sprinkling or bathing, mobilizing the supernatural powers which lies dormant in spells and the activation of dormant winds of the humoral body. The healing power and blessing is said to lie in the winds and the lustral water. Furthermore talismans which spirit media sell to clients such as charm paper or fabric, a string of beads, a charm of rolled gold, silver strips or a cord strung around the waist or the neck and figures of gods as objects which are mobilized into supernatural powers, for the purpose of protecting the clients from bad luck and bringing them good fortune. It might be noted that this concept of power is associated in the ritual of spirit media to serve clients who expect to rely on this kind of power to attain their needs.

⁶¹ Spells are all-powerful spoken formulas, words, or phrases of power. The order given in the spell, addressed to deities, spirits, or the forces of nature, can be creative, destructive, protective, or medicinal; it can demand triumph over an enemy, or the attainment of impossible powers or things. It can be used to break spells, cast spells, or obtain love. Spells in magical activities, have many prerequisites. Spells in particular must be pronounced by a person who is initiated into the mysteries or endowed with supernatural powers, and who is sexually, dietetically, and socially pure. The person casting the spell must know with precision the words he will pronounce, the time when they must be uttered, the cardinal point toward which he will face, what he will stand or sit on, how his person must be arranged, the clothing, colors, ornaments, and objects he will use, the number of times he must repeat the words, and the psychological attitude and manners he must assume.

As a part of religious and magical activities, spells sometimes require musical backgrounds, specially prepared settings, appropriate instruments, prudent timing and attention to taboos that might be violated, such as sex, the lack of initiation, or impurity. Spells can serve personal ends, such as the attainment of love, health, power, wealth, virility, fertility, finding out who has stolen something, or causing harm to an enemy. As a general rule, spells accompany the preparation of potions, amulets, weapons, magical paraphernalia, scepters, and objects of sorcery. They are recited over sick people, addressed to the natural elements one wants to control or murmured softly and continuously (Eliade 1987:1).



Figure 17: A Charm of Rolled Cord

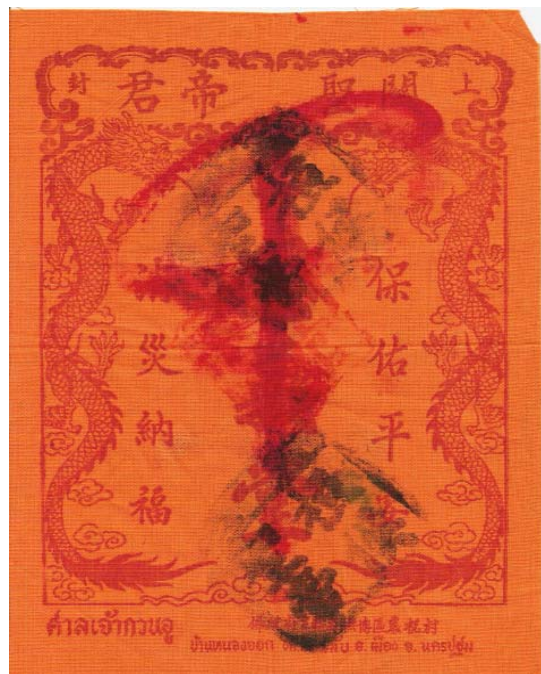
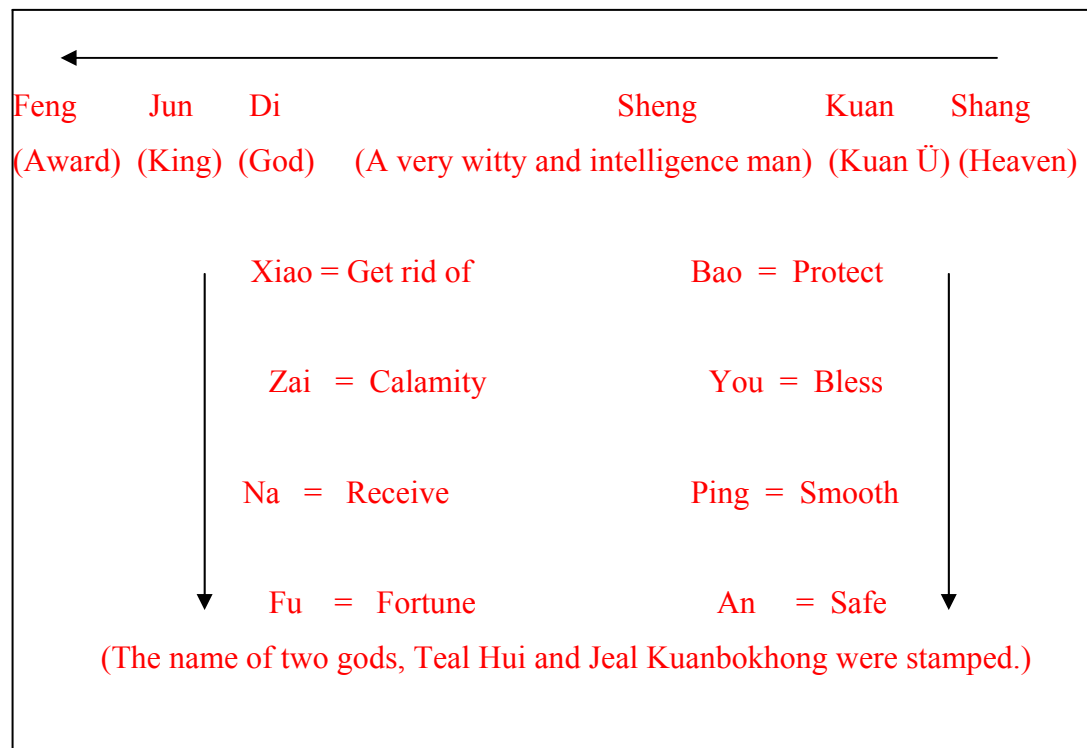
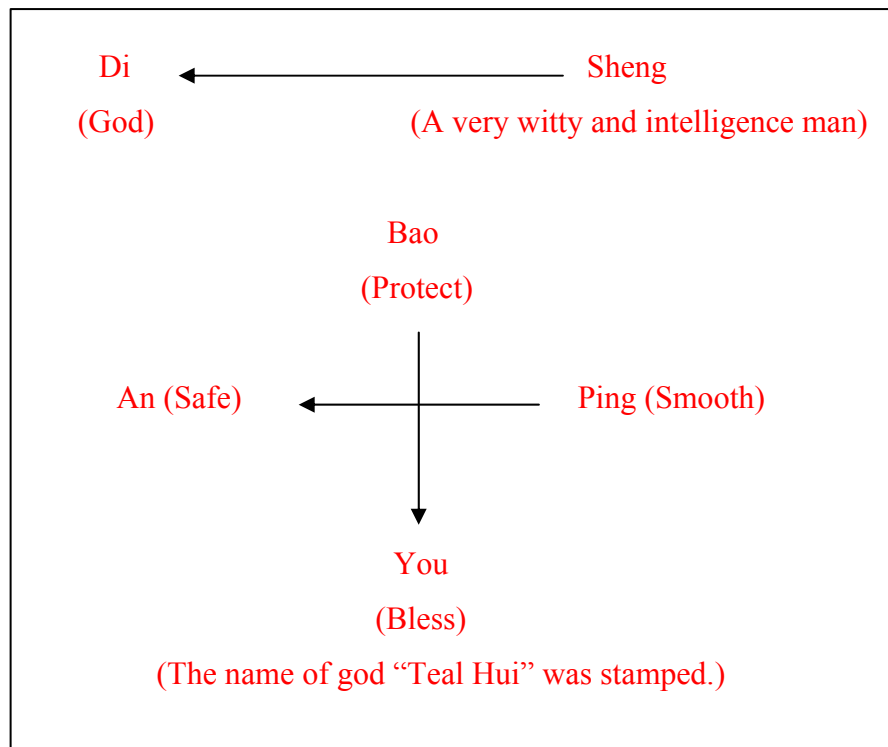


Figure 18: Charm Fabric No.1

Diagram 12: The words on charm fabric No.1**Figure 19: Charm Fabric No. 2**

The red cloth is for infants to wear. Its property is to give protection from malevolent spirits who tend to disturb them. The words on this red charm fabric are as follows;

Diagram 13: The words on the red charm fabric

The names of *Teal Hui* and *Jeal Kuanbokhong* were stamped on the yellow charm fabric in figure 19. For healing it is wrapped around the part of the body which has symptoms of a disease. Briefly, to make all three charm fabrics above the power of the gods entered into fabric pieces by affixing a seal which had the name of the god on it. In the mean time the spirit medium says a magic formula and blows on it to transfer the magic and power to it.

Ritual Performance Remarks

As seen from the five case studies, when the ritual performance begins, a spirit medium presents him or herself in the role of being a god. For the possession performance, perfect harmony of dressing, an accurate manner of acting with the correct body movements and voice and a fitting stage set are important to ensure that the performance of a spirit medium is successful.

If we compare the performances of miracles in the three styles of possession, we see that Chinese style spirit media always perform miracles, which look more exciting and dangerous than those performed in the Thai and Hindu style. The popular miracles are sitting on a knife or on a nail chair which are relatively light and portable,

and do not take up much space. Another contrivance with which more spectacular displays can be given is the knife ladder, but the equipment is very bulky and requires a more lengthy preparation. A knife ladder usually rises to about thirty or forty feet above the ground. Although its base is dug well into the ground, support must be given by strong ropes, which are staked into the ground at a considerable distance from the ladder. To allow for this performance and the large crowd assembled, plenty of space must be available. The knife ladder may have thirty-six or sixty-two rungs, each of which consists of a knife blade set between wooden uprights. At two or four points the uprights are braced by iron bars and at the top there are iron bars across the ends. The spirit medium climbs up the series of blades, not all the blades, however, are set with their sharp edges upwards. The spirit medium's assistants may have ordered, perhaps, that the third, seventh and eleventh blades will be set with the square, blunt edge upwards and the sharp edge downwards. At the top of the ladder, flags are set.



Figure 20: Climbing a knife ladder

Fire walking is likely to draw a large crowd of spectators. Usually not only spirit media perform this miracle, their entourages always participate too in walking across hot coals and they believe the power of the god will protect them from burning. The pit is over twenty feet long and the charcoal embers in it are undoubtedly very hot indeed. Far from leaping across it hurriedly some of the performers go across in as many as a dozen slow steps. Occasionally, a man falls down in the pit and suffers

burns on his body. While the fire-walking performance is taking place, as a safety precaution they cast handfuls of dry rice and salt into the air at frequent intervals as a deterrent to evil influences.

Another physical feature, which is sometimes staged at a Chinese style spirit medium's annual ceremony, involves the use of boiling oil. A large cauldron of oil is brought to boiling and a spirit medium then dips towels in and splashes himself with oil without appearing to suffer. Chuchat Agamkarn, who has performed as a Chinese god for more than ten years, reveals that the trick of this display is that water is poured in under the oil so that when the water boils it gives the appearance of boiling oil while it is only the water which has a lower boiling point than oil. Thus the oil is not as hot as it seems.

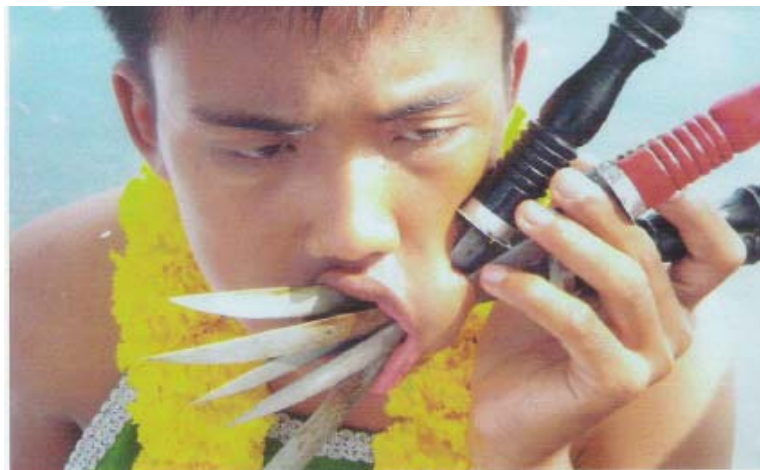


Figure 21: Piercing with sharp knives



Figure 22: Cutting the Tongue

Boon has very great skill and in the annual ceremony, he performed many kinds of miracles such as climbing the knife ladder, wading through hot charcoal and immersing his hands in boiling oil etc. In his routine possession, he has performed miracles such as sitting on a knife chair and drinking a great quantity of alcohol without showing any signs of intoxication. When *Lui* possesses *Umadevi*, she can put burning candles in her mouth, while *Tong* can smoke many cigarettes at the same time.

Here the miracle performances of *Boon* are described.

When I observed *Boon*'s annual ceremony the miracle performance took place in the evening. There was an audience of between two and three hundred people who came to participate in this ritual. To make the explanation of the ritual performance clearer the scenes are split into three parts.

The first scene: Preparation

On the day of the miracle performance, in the afternoon, the assistants of the spirit medium prepared the area in front of the possession place. They carried charcoal to make a pathway, about two meters, for fire walking. A big pan and oil were prepared for another miracle performance. A rope was brought to fence the area, which acts as the stage for the miracle performance.

The second scene: Entering possession

About eight o' clock in the evening, *Boon* invited *Teal Hui* to possess him so that he would be able to perform the miracles of *Teal Hui*. His assistants were dressed in white attire. *Teal Hui* in the body of *Boon* and his assistants walked to the square where the miracle performance would take place. At this time the people stood around this square and waited to see the miracles.

The third scene: Performing the miracles

At the beginning of the miracle performance, *Boon* stood beside a big pan. The oil in it was boiling and he held charmed fabrics in his hand and immersed them in boiling oil. After that he threw them to the people who stood around the performance area. The next miracle performance was fire walking, *Boon* and his assistants, who

were all men, stood at the starting point. Suddenly when a firecracker was lit and it made a loud noise, *Boon* began to walk quickly along the pathway of hot charcoal, then his assistants walked through the hot charcoal following him one by one. The people in the audience were excited and made a noise while *Boon* and his assistants were walking through the hot charcoal.

In this ritual, the attitudes of the participants could be split into three categories namely;

The first category: the participants thought *Boon*'s miracle performance was theatrical and full of tricks, nevertheless they did not know and could not explain clearly how these tricks were carried out.

The second category: the participants were not sure if this performance was full of tricks or not.

The third category: the participants insisted it was real, with no tricks.

Thus the first and the second category come to this ritual performance mostly for entertainment although the second category has doubts about whether it is genuine or not.

The purpose of the spirit medium's miracle performance is to persuade the audience that he has been possessed by a god and confirm that he is not pretending or deceiving them.

“Dramatic Realization” of the performance of being a god ensues from the experience, knowledge and skill of the performer. Furthermore elements of the presentation such as scenery, clothing, light, sound, and also other minor actors⁶² are all vital to support the person's performance. Nevertheless, at the time of the possession ritual on the front stage, a spirit medium could not assign the plot of the situation. It had to deal with the real participants there, and meanwhile the plot evolves as the action proceeds. The end is not known at the beginning. Moreover, the result of a possession performance does not end when the show is over, but it affects the feeling of clients who are in the audience. Many instruments and symbols are used. In addition to this, it is important for the spirit medium to be able to interpret of

⁶² See Page 144, Topic G. Assistant.

the expectations of the clients and to respond to them. If this is achieved successfully, the interaction between the spirit medium and the clients will continue smoothly and the spirit media will be able to attain fame and loyal support.

Finally, when the possession performance is over, the spirit media go back stage. They become ordinary people again, who are different from the gods that they presented front stage. Back stage is the real world and *Boon* with his taciturn character is very different from the god he was presenting during the time of possession. For *Sri*, the activity of her daily life is, as a blind woman, is to listen the radio. She has a good disposition and knows a Chinese language a little bit. *Tong*, the spirit medium of *Por Poo Yai*, doesn't have another occupation, only sometimes he helps his wife to count tobacco leaves and pack them before sending them back to the tobacco factory. From this work, they could earn a living wage, however it is very little money. *Lui* at night has opened a stall beside the canal to sell vegetables and the fifth spirit medium, *Kaew*, also doesn't have another occupation.

Although back stage the spirit media did not present themselves as gods, nevertheless, the members of their family are still careful in how they treat them, such as not allowing them to do household chores, to let them do whatever they like, not to violate them or use obscene words towards them etc.

6.1.2.2 Advertisement

Among spirit media as in many other occupations and businesses, advertisement is an important strategy to win clients. Spirit media advertise their proficiency and strong points in newspapers and magazines published by a printing house which specializes in topics about magic things. "Open the door to possession service office" or *Peut Pratuu Tam Nak Song* is a magazine that collects information about spirit media namely; address, telephone number, service time and life history.

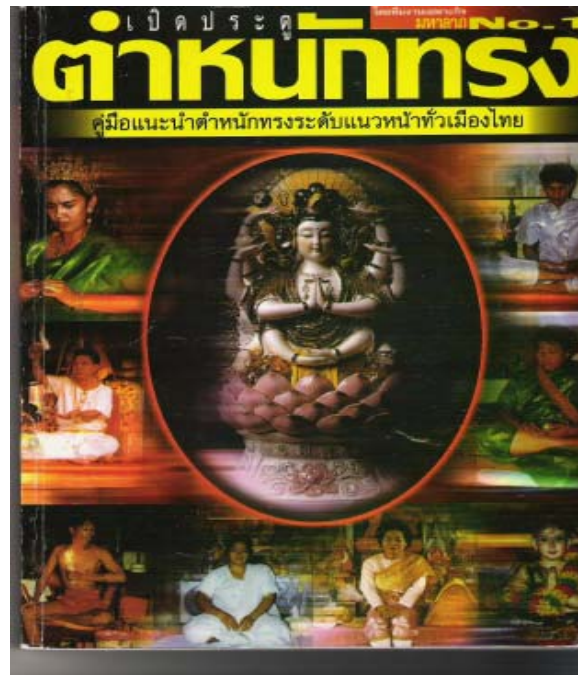


Figure 23: Magazine about Spirit media

Of the five case studies, *Boon* is a successful spirit medium and he had more clients than the other spirit media. Besides being well known because of his distinguished ability in performing miracles, the ornateness of his stage setting and dressing he has advertised to let the people know about him and his activities. He uses a leaflet, a billboard and a visiting card which he has had printed for this purpose.



Figure 24: Visiting Cards

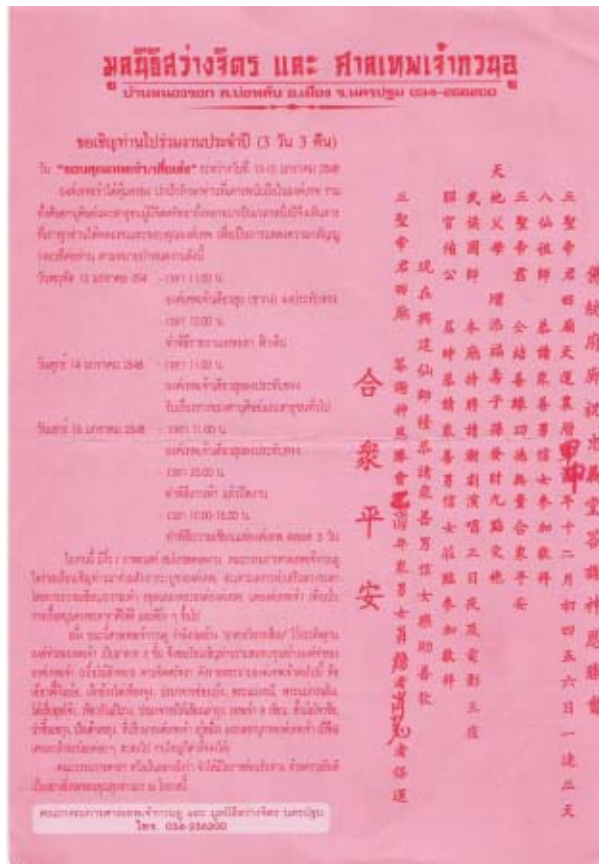


Figure 25: Handbill for Advertisement

The details of the visiting card give clear information of the address, telephone number and service time. *Boon*'s billboard and leaflet were printed to advertise his great rituals such as the annual ceremony and the Chinese vegetarian festival. There was much information about the program in his ritual including the miracle performance. This performance was the highlight of the ritual and the part that could make the people most interested in participating. Furthermore the contents advertised that participants could get rid of bad luck by writing a name on yellow cloth which is sold by his organization, could donate rice to reinforce good fortune and donate some money to build up the hall of eight gods.

The advertisement strategy is considered useful to *Boon* and his organization in three points. Firstly, it is easier for people to get to know about the spirit medium and his organization than through general hearsay. Secondly, it can persuade the interested people to participate and become his clients later in his routine possession ritual. Finally, he can obtain a lot of money and donations.

Kaew, Tong and *Lui* do not use advertisements, so people only get to know about them by general hearsay. However, *Kaew* is more successful than *Tong* and *Lui*, because she has been a spirit medium for a long time and her performance ability is more skillful.

From the case studies it can be seen that to be a successful spirit medium a good performance or presentation is essential and the use of advertisement can bring additional success. Therefore, the spirit medium who is competent in both of these two areas could be more successful than another spirit media. There are many advantages to being a successful spirit medium namely; gaining the faith of the people, having many clients and finally a successful spirit medium can obtain wealth and other benefits.

Chapter 7

Possession Ritual and Ethnic Group

Within the borders of the Thai state, there are many ethnic groups. Each group reveals its ethnic identity through symbols, such as rituals, belief and language, including and through the history of the group. However, in the context of my fieldwork, which was a study of various belief systems, as many ethnic groups have resided closely together for a long time, a “Hybridity of Culture” appears and is also significant in the ritual performance of spirit media. Consequently mixing, borrowing and adaptation among various belief systems has taken place in this area, illustrating the flexible relationship between the ethnic groups, and influencing which possession ritual the spirit medium adheres to and the type of god possessing the media. For instance, I found many spirit media who were Thai being possessed by Chinese or Hindu gods and Chinese media were possessed by Thai or Hindu gods. In this cultural feature, it seems that it is not necessary to designate ethnicity when analyzing ritual performance. However I could sense the significance of the possession ritual to different ethnic groups from the Thai and Chinese clients of spirit media.

Therefore, in this part I will describe the influence and significance of the possession ritual on an ethnic group when the spirit medium is possessed by a god of a different ethnic group.

Here the possession ritual is considered as empirical evidence of the continuing identity and maintenance of each ethnic group. The original ethnic identity is maintained and supported by the members of each ethnic group although there is clearly borrowing and mixing of some customs between each group. Thus a spirit medium is the person who has a significant role to play in the ethnic group when we talk about ritual and belief. It is interesting to pay attention to the possession phenomena and ethnic groups in the area of Amphoe Muang Nakhon Pathom and consider the significant correlation between spirit possession and two ethnic groups, namely Thai and Chinese. These are the main ethnic groups in this area and, although there are many spirit media who are possessed by Hindu gods, there is no Indian ethnic group. However, this type of possession appeared because of the influence of Indian films about the miracles of Hindu gods presented on television. Accordingly, the performance of the possession ritual is clearly very significant to the ethnic

groups. Three themes are discussed; the first is the significance to a Thai ethnic group of a spirit medium who is possessed by a Thai god, the second is the significance for a Chinese ethnic group of a spirit medium possessed by a Chinese god and finally the significance of a possession ritual to weld Thai and Chinese ethnic groups.

7.1 A Thai Style of Spirit Medium and a Thai Ethnic Group

The spirit media who are possessed by Thai spirits have the vital role of maintaining and continuing the Thai belief in supernaturalism which has been in existence from former times until the present day. Some spirit media are possessed by *Phi Kumara* or the infant spirit, which is one of the popular Thai ghosts. Another example is a Thai god or *Tep* such as *Prakan* who possesses some spirit media *Prakan* is the god who decrees the human's allotted life span.



Figure 26: Picture of *Prakan*'s Possession (a man in red cloth)

Thai people, moreover, believe in guardian spirits, who protects humans from bad fortune. Consequently, the shrine of the household god is set up in front of a house or building. A fortune teller or Buddhist monk is usually invited to arrange the setting ritual of the shrine of the household god. Sometimes a spirit medium is also invited to arrange this setting ritual. Therefore, the spirit medium is held to be one of the agents who perpetuates the Thai belief in the supernatural.

Thai style spirit media practice Hinayan Buddhism that is the religion of the Thai ethnic group, in some rituals of possession, spirit media introduce Hinduism and

blend this religion into their ritual. Usually Buddhist monks are invited to participate in the annual ceremony of spirit media. Generally, in this ritual after the monks have prayed, the spirit medium and participants dedicate food to the monks for lunch and when the monks have finished this meal, they pray again to bless those present and then the spirit medium dedicates the essential requirements of life such as money, the robe of a Buddhist priest, dry food etc. to the monks. The spirit media recounted that they invited monks to participate in their annual ceremony ritual, because they and their gods are Buddhist, therefore their purpose was to collect merit for themselves and their gods. Accordingly, they always make merit by dedicating food from the banquet to monks in this ritual every year. However, as the status of their possession belief system is at a lower level than Buddhism, blending Buddhism into the possession ritual seems to be the-way to raise the status of this marginal belief system and to be accepted and encouraged by Thai Buddhists.

7.2 A Chinese Style Spirit Medium and a Chinese Ethnic Group

In Amphoe Muang Nakhon Pathom, the Chinese attempt by belief and ritual to maintain Chinese identity. They support the activities of spirit media who possess Chinese gods although these spirit media are Thai. These Thai spirit media can attract Chinese people to become their clients and supporters. Generally, in Amphoe Muang Nakhon Pathom, the economic status of the Chinese is rather better than that of Thai. Most Chinese are the owners of small and big businesses. For another thing, the informal and formal groups of Chinese support the activities of spirit media. This builds up solidarity among them. A Chinese style spirit medium and his organization work to reproduce, revive and maintain Chinese belief and rituals about gods in the Mahayan Buddhist tradition. Moreover, by this mechanism, and influenced by Thai culture, reaffirming the identity of the Chinese through this ritual stimulates the Chinese ethnic group to an awareness of their culture.

In the past, Thai leaders developed many policies to assimilate the Chinese immigrant population into Thailand. According to history, from being labourers at the beginning, Chinese people finally became self-made men and successful merchants. They had much economic power in Thai society and at the same time they created many incidents in Thai society. In the period of *King Rama III*, Chinese set up *the*

Chinese Secret Society, who stole to maintain their position in the opium trade. Therefore the Thai government attempted to subjugate and arrest the leader of this group in order to punish him. In the reign of *King Rama IV*, the *Chinese Secret Society* had another activity, procuring jobs for Chinese, who had immigrated to Thailand and charging for their service. Chaotic events occurred often during this period due to competition for profit between the members of the *Chinese Secret Society*. Subsequently, at the beginning of the reign of *King Rama V*, Chinese labours created violence in the mines at *Ranong* and *Puket Province* in south Thailand. As the price of tin was down, the owners of the tin mines did not have money to pay them, and therefore Chinese labours resented this and became violent. Moreover, the members of the *Chinese Secret Society*, especially; killed Thai people and burned their dwellings. Subsequently, the Thai government subjugated them forcefully. At the end of the reign of *King Rama V*, the Thai government proclaimed an increase in taxes and the Chinese had to pay at the same level as Thai and other foreigners. This regulation made Chinese people resentful, because in former times they had the privilege of paying less tax than other groups. Accordingly, they caused trouble again by strikes, insisting that stores owned by Chinese should remain closed. If the owners did not close the store, the strike leader coerced them to do so. This crisis affected provisions and the necessities for everyday life were hard to acquire and became very much more expensive.

From the reign of *King Rama III* until *King Rama V*, the Chinese created trouble at times and affected the lives and assets of Thai people including the stability of the country. Subsequently, *King Rama VI* decided to solve these problems by subjugating them by force. He could only solve the problem temporarily and a continuing feeling of nationalism among the Chinese affected the stability of Thai society. Therefore, it was planned to solve the problem by reducing the feeling of national pride among the Chinese and increasing the Thai national consciousness. Thus the policy of assimilating the Chinese into the Thai culture and way of life was started with the purpose of making the Chinese feeling of identity less strong. *King Rama VI* announced an act of nationality in 1912 that decreed that people who were born in Thailand, even if their parents possessed another nationality, should be Thai citizens. Chinese schools played an important part in establishing the Chinese national conscience, therefore *King Rama VI* passed another act in 1918 a law enacting the

supervision of private schools. The purpose of this law was to stipulate the standards in private schools and control Chinese schools by enforcing them to teach the Thai language, Thai History and to encourage the students to be loyal to Thailand. During that period, the concept of Thai nationality was successfully established. There were many literary works of King *Rama VI* instilling patriotism and the laws which were proclaimed by him to assimilate the Chinese into Thailand at the same time implanted and impressed Thai Identity onto their Chinese descendants.

Previously, the government of Thailand was an absolute monarchy. In 1932 there was a transition to a constitutional monarchy and the government of Field Marshal *Poh Piboolsongkram* paid much attention to the problems of coexistence with the Chinese, because this minority group had great influence over the economics in Thai society. In this period, a policy to control Chinese business was put into practice in order to decrease the economic influence of the Chinese and new laws were passed to seize the economic power back into the hands of the Thai people. For instance, a royal decree was issued declaring that jobs in eleven named careers were reserved for Thai people only. Legislation was also issued to control both government and private factories decreeing that at least 75 % of the workforce should be Thai labourers. Moreover, there was a new act amending the registration of motor vehicles so that no other nationalities except Thai had the right to obtain a taxi license etc.

Throughout the time when Thai nationalism was increasing and being supported by the legislation of the Thai government there was fighting between the Thai ethnic group and the Chinese ethnic group. The Thai government introduced new laws with the aim of diminishing the Chinese feeling of identity and decreasing the economic power of this group. Furthermore, about religion and belief, the Thai government has enacted laws to control Chinese shrines, where Chinese rituals take place. To control the Chinese shrine, the Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior has laid down regulations for all Chinese shrines so that they follow the same criteria:

1. All the Chinese shrines should be kept clean and beautiful as they are important sacred places for the people.
2. There should be an Annual Chinese Shrine. The Department of Local Administration will support the budget. Certificates of Honour will be presented as a reward to the Chinese shrine that wins the contest.

3. For the special national days of Thailand, all Chinese shrines should always be decorated with the Thai national flag.

4. The supervisors of a Chinese shrine should not allow ritual possessions in order to collect money, which is held as dishonest within the shrine.

5. The Chinese shrine carers and supervisors should organize the annual conference and training projects in order to raise the participants' understanding of the Chinese shrine.

6. To follow strictly the policy prescribed by the Interior Ministry regarding drugs. All the joss houses or shrines should inform all participants at Chinese shrines to refrain from all drugs and co-operate with the government.

At the present time, due to the tactics of the Thai government, the Chinese have assimilated and integrated with the Thai people. They have also taken Thai nationality. For their religion, they have adopted Buddhism in the Hinayan School which is the main religion of the state. However, the Chinese still preserve their belief in gods of Buddhism in the Mahayan School and here the practice of Chinese spirit media and the Chinese god possession ritual is one way that the Chinese belief is maintained. From the case studies of *Boon* and *Sri*, one can see that the spirit media and their possession rituals took place at Chinese shrines and they were supported by Chinese entourages and clients. Although the main purpose of using their Chinese shrines was for performing the possession ritual and to give people service, the spirit media and their entourages also organized Chinese festivals there, namely the vegetarian festival and the moon festival,⁶³ like other general Chinese shrines which

⁶³ The Chinese Moon Festival usually takes place on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month (in September or October). This festival is held in honor of the Moon Goddess who is believed to have been born on this date. However, the historical fact about the origin of the festival is still unclear. Some say that the great Han dynasty emperor Wu Di initiated a three-day celebration to worship the autumn moon. Many, however, argue that the festival, in fact, originated around 1368 during the Mongol's domination of China. The cake was made to hide a secret message of the rebellion to tell people across the country of a large gathering during the eighth lunar month. The Mongol army was not aware of the rebellious purpose; they thought that the cakes were an old tradition. They, thus were defeated that night. After a new dynasty named Ming was set up, the practice has been carried on till these days. Besides these historical facts, there are also many myths and legends, one of these is that of Siang-Ngor, she was very beautiful. She was the wife of a high-ranking Chinese officer. After taking a magic medicine, she flew up to the moon and lived there. She later became immortal after consuming the immortal water given to her by a certain Goddess in heaven. Siang-Ngor the Moon Goddess was said to be very kind. When the cultivation season arrived, she would pour immortal water to the earth and this brought prosperity to all farmers. To express their gratitude to the Moon Goddess, farmers thus made Khanom go (or sweetmeat) from rice flour as an offering to her on the full moon night of the eighth lunar month. Chinese festivals usually involve special delicacies to be given as offerings, on this

have no spirit medium. Nevertheless, the spirit media of the Chinese shrines were different from others in these Chinese festivals. They entered into the possession state mainly to get rid of the bad luck of the participants and to bless them with good fortune.

According to the regulation of the Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of the Interior, the performance of the possession ritual is prohibited in Chinese shrines, but in fact the government does not enforce this regulation. In the case of *Boon*, he and his entourage established their Chinese shrines for public welfare. This foundation donated money to support the building of government police stations and government hospitals etc. Furthermore, people who had encountered disasters such as flooding and fire etc also received assistance from spirit media. This is a good way to protect the possession activity and to be able to continue its practice free from the resistance of the government.

Chinese style spirit media, being the practitioners who continue Chinese belief, bring together the Chinese at their possession rituals and the solidarity of their ethnic group is reinforced.

7.3 To Weld Thai and Chinese Ethnic Groups

It can be seen from the case studies, if we consider Thai style and Chinese style spirit media and the ethnic group of their clients, spirit media who were Thai and possessed Thai gods had clients from both Thai and Chinese ethnic groups. However, there were more Thai clients than Chinese. Of the spirit media who possess Chinese gods, one case, *Boon*, is half Thai and half Chinese and another case, *Sri*, is Thai. Nevertheless *Sri* grew up in a Chinese family as the second husband of her mother was Chinese, thus she and her mother moved to live in his Chinese extended family. *Boon* and *Sri* had both Thai and Chinese clients but there were more Chinese clients than Thai. Their entourage were also both Thai and Chinese, but here again most of the entourage were Chinese.

occasion, Moon cake is specially made as an offering. This Chinese delicacy is, however, hardly a cake in the western sense of the word. In Thailand, the art of the Chinese style cake was brought to the country by Chinese immigrants almost 100 years ago.

The original Chinese Moon cake included such ingredients as red beans, five types of Chinese nuts and ground lotus seeds and so on. Thailand has its own variations of including durian, chestnut, and persimmon. Additional ingredients may include lotus seeds, salted egg yolk and watermelon seeds.

Consequently, the possession ritual has the significances of welding together the two main ethnic groups in this area and from their participation in each other beliefs interaction is established between them. While at first Thai and Chinese maintain and adhere to their own original belief, nevertheless, at the second level, they accept another belief, which they hope can assist them to get rid of distress and bring them good fortune. Furthermore, there are other benefits of a good relationship between Thai and Chinese. I found that *Khaeo*, who was possessed by a Thai god, and *Sri*, possessed by a Chinese god, both had a good relationship with the owner of the shop, who was Chinese. She supplied them both with instruments for their religious rituals, when they organized the annual ceremony. They ordered ritual instruments from her and sometimes she consulted them to solve her problems.

The welding of their religious beliefs signifies that today the Thai and the Chinese can live together peacefully in Thai society, and cooperate in the activities that are mutually useful.

Notes

From the empirical evidence of my field work, it seems that the significance of the possession ritual to the ethnic group is as follows:

1. To maintain the identity of the ethnic group;
2. As a way of explaining and solving life's mundane problems.

A spirit medium possessed by a god from another ethnic group can cross the border into the ethnic group of the god and have an influence on the people there.

Chapter 8

Spirit Mediumship and Gender

To view spirit mediumship as a cultural phenomenon, the people who become the vehicles of the gods or *Tep* will be considered individually. Thus, the question “what happens to the gender which they possess when they occupy spirit medium status” is raised. To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the phenomenon carefully. It is also important to be familiar with the social and cultural environment to understand this question. In addition, the concept of purity will be considered to demonstrate the inequality between the two genders and the taboos of the possession ritual. Eventually, after the examination of the phenomena, the differences between male spirit medium and female spirit medium will be finally deduced.

In this chapter, the questions surrounding the gender issue of spirit media, deities and clients will be elucidated. First of all, if we contemplate the body of people who are the vehicles of gods, their original body, the natural body with which they were born, is objectively identified to be of the gender to which they adhere in their social and cultural context, as objectivity is due to its social and cultural construction. This original body however takes on another body when he or she is possessed by a god, as subjectivity or movement body, Therefore how does this second body assist the person to encounter others in society or in other words how does it stay in the social location? Here the topic of performance and gender will be elaborated on and explained clearly.

8.1 Gender: The Transvestite and Correspondence

In Thailand, all males and females could occupy spirit medium status, yet most spirit media are female. Thus it is recognized by spirit media and their entourages that women are by temperament prone to possession and gods possess them because they are soft and penetrable, therefore they are effective vehicles and more easy to possess than men. As an extension of this it is appropriate to note that women are also easily possessed by demons or evil spirits and attacks by black magic. Looking at the correlation between the sex of a god and its vehicle in the fieldwork, it was found that from the whole data of the samples of 38 cases in Amphoe Muang Nakhon Pathom the sex of the spirit media and the gods corresponded in 19 cases.

Most female spirit media were possessed by male gods whilst male spirit media being possessed by a female god were rather rare. In only one case was a male spirit medium possessed by a female god, Tambiah (1970) identified this condition as “a feminine syndrome of behaviour”. A male spirit medium who is homosexual may not always wear female clothes when he is not being possessed by a goddess, he has a feminine gait and manner, dresses and makes himself up as a female only for the possession ritual. A homosexual spirit medium, in his everyday life, encounters derision and ridicule and joking about his way of his life. To diminish these social responses, the performance as a goddess provides a way to encounter other people in public free of the negative responses. Moreover, it is the solution of mental, emotional and bodily distress. In the possession ritual, spirit media could act in a way that normally would infringe social and cultural rules of appropriate male behaviour without condemnation. Thus being the vehicle of a goddess is justified at present. Another case of a homosexual spirit medium that I found in another sub-division of Nakhon Pathom Province near Amphoe Muang district, in his everyday life, adopted female gait and mannerisms, wore female clothes and adorned himself with lipstick, rouge and eye shadow. He recounted that before becoming a spirit medium he had dressed as a man and concealed his desire to be a woman as he was the only son of a Chinese family and he realized obviously the expectations of his family for him in his natural gender, i.e. as a man, and his family could not accept it if he ventured to divulge in his homosexual identity. After he had suffered with illness, because he was attracted by a goddess eventually he became her spirit medium. He could then dress and act as a female without the resistance of his family. Therefore, for male spirit media that are homosexual, to become the vehicles of female gods is regarded as a strategy for negotiating that their female behaviour will be accepted without prejudice, not only in the possession ritual but also in everyday life, and this will enable them to encounter other people in their social location, due to them being the vehicles of holy goddesses.

On the topic of the transvestites, it should be argued that the male transvestites or homosexual spirit media who are possessed by female gods appear in an unconscious state whereas when they present themselves as female in everyday life they are perfectly conscious. If we consider them in the concept of gender which belongs to the physical body and divides humans into two categories, male and

female, there may be some ambiguity. There could also be the questions of whether there are incidences of lesbianism among female spirit media who are possessed by male gods. The answer is, yes, there is occasional gossip, but no firm information is available. Out of 18 cases 17 are married, only one case is divorced. Whatever information we could obtain about what happens or how they behave when they are possessed by male gods and how their status is altered after being a spirit medium is examined in this chapter.

For female spirit media who are possessed by male gods, their gods often are princes or warriors. Thus, their costume resembles that of a man. The female spirit media assume a somewhat transvestite appearance, and engage in unrestrained ecstatic behaviour in which there is liberal consumption of liquor and smoking of tobacco. They also present aggressive behaviour and speak in a loud voice.

However, the appearance of the opposite sexes between gods and hosts expresses the significance that this feature of possession manifests the looseness between the body and the self of the ordinary individual. That is to say they perform the role of the sex opposite to that of their physical bodies. Consequently during the possession ritual females are able to behave as males in a public place while at normal times this behaviour is not considered appropriate to their gender. During this period of the possession state, they could deviate from the appropriate behaviour of their gender identity, which adheres to the physical body. They can behave in the manner of the opposite sex without censure or blemish.

8.2 Negotiation Means

The issue of negotiation for the gender of spirit media in the religious system should be explained in the context of Buddhism, in the Hinayan School, the main religion of Thai society. At the level of the family, this negotiation is also obviously manifest in the management or reorganizing of the interaction between spirit media and their family members.

For Thai society, Buddhism is regarded as the main religion. Only men can enter into the monastic orders as monks and novices. This is one of the greatest traditions in the life of a Thai man who is regarded as a man of great merit. His wish is to dedicate the act of becoming a monk to his parents. It is a Thai custom for a young man to enter into the monastic order for a certain period of time in his life,

usually before marriage as Thai people believe that if a man becomes a monk after marriage, his wife is certain to receive half of the merit from ordination instead of his parents, who need most of the merit, because parents believed that after their son's ordination, they will be reborn in heaven after death. To enable their parents to achieve this goal, most Thai men therefore take this opportunity to express their gratitude to their parents by entering into the monastic order immediately after they reach a mature age of not less than 20 years old. A man who has not been ordained is not considered a mature adult and he seems to gain less respect from his community while a man who has already been ordained will be called *Thit* which is derived from the word *Bundhit* meaning a "learned man" or "scholar." Thus, especially in the countryside, we will frequently hear the elder people call the already ordained man *Thit* and then it will be followed by the name of the individual person such as *Thit Chom* etc.

Though ordination can be performed at any time of the year, it usually takes place in July or August of each year which marks the beginning of the rainy season as during this period monks throughout the country are committed to stay only in their respective temple throughout the three month Rains Retreat, or *Khao Phansa* in Thai. At the end of the three month Rain Retreat and after the *Kathin* robe is presented to their temple, some monks will leave the monastic order and become laymen while some others still continue to be monks for a longer period and some may spend their entire lives in the monastic order in order to attain enlightenment in many lives to come. However, this depends upon the individual's merit and his endurance in preserving the 227-Buddhist precepts. Some young men are only able to stay in the monastic order just for a few days, but even then they gain merit from their good deed.

Although in Buddhism women can be ordained as nuns and stay in the temple, in fact their main role is to serve monks by preparing food and cleaning the temple, while monks have the vital duty to concentrate and study the Dharma principle of Buddhism. Accordingly, inside the scope of Buddhism, males have the main role and dominate rituals and become the leaders continuing the belief system. Females are only subordinates and act as retinues.

After considering the difference between the sexes in the context of Buddhism wherein the main role of the religion is reserved only for males, one can see that

becoming spirit media is the strategy with which females can attain the main role in another religious system. Consequently, it appears that females dominate the males by being the leaders in ritual performance. Furthermore they have an important role in maintaining the possession belief system. Here, we can say that in this condition, the possession ritual is the vindication and a negotiation means for females to lift or change their status from the inferior one in Buddhism to be superior in another belief system in Thai society. In other words it can be elucidated that the position of those women who are competent at solving the problems of clients have negotiation means that allow them to attain considerable authority and influence over both male and female clients. Especially, if there is concern about the relationship between female spirit media and their male entourages, in the offices of female spirit media males become the subordinates in the females' possession rituals and they have the role of supporting their possession activity. Males in Thai society can have influence over others when they have become a monk and being a spirit medium is another way for men to be dominant within the religious system and in society. Moreover with a different belief they can be without the severity of the 227 Buddhist precepts for a monk.

Nevertheless, all female and male spirit media still identify themselves as Buddhists and use the Buddhist principle of merit making to justify becoming a spirit medium and serving gods for collecting merit. Therefore the presence of the compromise-between the possession belief system and the main religion has no signs of being antagonistic to Buddhism.

At the family level, being a spirit medium also revealed a negotiation for claiming to reduce role expectations which are required of their gender and/or something to respond to their needs. My illustrations, as empirical evidence, confirm a negotiation at this level.

In the case of *Kaew*, before being a god's vehicle, her economic status was rather poor and she had six children to support. However, after becoming a spirit medium, she gained many clients and earned a good income from them, thus the lives of her family became more comfortable than in the past. During the possession ritual, her husband and mother, like other participants, always sat on the floor in front of her and *Wai*, put their hands together in salute to present themselves respectfully to the god who possessed her body. After possession, members of the family were still

careful to look after her and spoke to her politely and would not reproach her. She was also released from household chores. This was justified because the sacred god was inhabiting her body. Furthermore, they had to serve her and could not violate her. This is based on the belief that if someone violates her, the god will send illness or misfortune to that person; however, if they serve her, the god will send good fortune to them.

Usually in Thai culture females are expected to do household chores and obey their husband. One of the Thai adages presents this idea by comparing the male to the forelegs of an elephant and the female to the hind legs. It means that the male is the leader of the family; while the female should be the follower. Another adage deals with a girl of birth and breeding. It means a good wife should always take good care of her husband and children. However, in this case, a female spirit medium has refrained from doing household chores for a long time, since she was a god's vehicle, without earning reproach from her family.

In the case of *Tong*, a Thai male spirit medium, when he first became a spirit medium, he was not well known and only had a few clients and no other occupation. He recounted that he spent most of his time practicing meditation and praying, because his god was an ascetic, who kept the Buddhist precepts regularly and he had to sit still and pray in order to attain merit. His wife earned some income as an unskilled labourer packing tobacco for a factory, however it was only a little money. Yet she could not blame him and looked after him well so that he had a comfortable life.

The case of *Lui*, the female spirit medium whose family is Chinese, is complicated as one of her legs is lame and because in Chinese families a son is more important than a daughter in general. However after becoming a spirit medium, her parents paid more attention to her, for example being assistants in the possession ritual, coming to visit and doing household chores for her and presenting her with a luxury sari and ornaments for dressing in the possession ritual.

Performing the role of a vehicle of a god gives a medium the chance not only to negotiate the reorganization of the interaction between individuals to each other, but in addition it manifests the negotiation between humans and gods as illustrated above. Families serve spirit media to satisfy the gods and avoid illness or misfortune and they also acquire good luck.

Consequently by means of performance, beside individuals being able to acquire the new higher status, females in particular can partially remove the restrictions of their gender. In the context of Buddhism respect for being a spirit medium shows that females have the means of negotiating opportunities for becoming the leaders of the belief systems in Thai society. At the family level, being a spirit medium has an inviolable and special status and the means to negotiate and release them from role expectations and gender values and also enables the individual to achieve his or her wishes which improves the interaction between spirit media and family members.

8.3 Menstrual Blood and Purity: Inequality between Males and Females in Ritual Performance

In the two main forms of religious belief in Thai society, Buddhism and the possession ritual, there is inequality between males and females. Buddhists do not allow woman to be ordained as monks and although in the possession ritual all males and females can practice ritual possession as a spirit medium, nevertheless, there are differences in the rituals that the two sexes perform. In this situation menstrual blood is the main cause for concern. Therefore, the questions of the meaning and value of menstrual blood in this context will be explained and how it effects females in the possession ritual will be considered.

8.3.1 Meaning and Value

As other ethnologists have reported, many cultural anthropologists have examined the cultural construction of menstruation. This study represents analytically the biological determinism of females linking it to the possession ritual and will proceed to understand the differences between male and female spirit media. According to the meaning of menstrual blood in the cultural context of the study, it is considered to be the most dangerous pollutant and it can be harmful to men and sacred objects. Men must avoid contact with it and have to make sure that neither it, nor objects in contact with it, should ever pass over their heads; for instance a washing line is a dangerous object due to women's undergarments being hung on it.

The negative response to menstrual blood is found not only in the area of the fieldwork, but also in other regions of Thailand. The harmfulness of menstrual blood

is presented in the old myth of *Lamphun Province* where the Queen *Chamadevi* governed the *Hariphunchai Kingdom* (now known as *the Lamphun Province*). She was so beautiful and *Khun Blangka*, the leader of *Lawa* wished to marry her. He, with his black skin, was very ugly, but he was more powerful. Thus, the Queen *Chamadevi* did not want to marry him. She tricked him by sending an emissary to inform him that if he could shoot an arrow so that it fell in the middle of *Lamphun*, she would marry him. At the first try, he shot an arrow and it fell nearly in the middle of the town. However, he had another chance to do it, therefore Queen *Chamadevi* was worried, then she used a trick by sending him gifts composed of a turban which was made of her undergarment and areca nuts and betel leaves which were touched on her vulva before sending them to him. Instantly, when he got the gifts, he was happy, chewed the areca and betel and wore the turban, and then his power was exhausted. This is the myth which spread the original idea of the pollution and danger of menstrual blood.

Accordingly, the meaning of menstrual blood is symbolically dangerous and/or offensive. In other words, this meaning is a cultural construction of the female body. Moreover, the imputed malevolence of menstruation raises the difference in levels of purity between male and female bodies, in this situation the male body is seen as being rather more pure. The pollution of blood adheres to the female body and is valued in the negative sense. If we consider the link to the possession ritual, menstrual blood causes harm that could affect the efficiency of the possession ritual and is seen as the vulnerability of female spirit media. Therefore, beyond its negative value, it leads to the construction of male taboos and taboos concerning the possession ritual; taboos are constructed for female spirit media and indeed extended to their female disciples and clients.

8.3.2 Pollution and Taboos

The menstrual taboo, as derived from the ascription of pollution to menstrual blood, is a method of protecting men from a danger that they believe in. In the possession ritual, the menstrual taboo is constructed to protect the efficiency of the rituals. These taboos are the prohibitions which cover not only female spirit media, but also female entourages and clients. There are two taboos of menstrual blood in the possession ritual as follows;

1. The first taboo for female spirit media is that they are not allowed to possess during their periods of monthly blood. The justification of this taboo is that the body of the female vehicle is not pure enough at that time. If she possesses, for instance, the oracle's words may distort because of the impurity of the body reducing the power of the god and the god would not be able to enter into full possession. Moreover, infringement will be harmful for the spirit medium herself as she will be vulnerable and ill.

2. The taboo for the two groups of females, the entourages and clients, could affect the efficiency of the ritual. Thus they are prohibited from participating in the possession ritual during their periods of monthly blood.

Consequently, in the area of a spirit medium's session place, it should be remembered that all the visitors must pay respect to that and that two groups of visitors are strictly prohibited from entering the possession room when the spirit medium continues possession. These two groups of visitors are given below;

1. Woman who are menstruating
2. People dressed in black clothing

In the first group, the menstrual blood is regarded as a factor of non-purity and in the second group, the colour black is held as the symbol of death, grief and misfortune. Therefore, black dress is used mainly in the funeral ritual only.

The taboos mentioned above reflect that adolescent women are dangerous to the possession ritual and they are sidetracked from the territory of rituals during the periods of monthly bleeding. Therefore, the menstrual blood, which is in the female body and is seen as the cause of impurity, causes women to feel inferior and is alleged to be the origin of erroneous and inefficient rituals. Beyond the negative dimension, the meaning of menstrual blood constructs the taboos of the possession ritual thereby creating the criteria of purity. In the rituals however men are not affected by these prohibitions.

8.3.3 Female Status and Oppression

It can be concluded that the inequality between male and female spirit media is the result of the pollution of menstrual blood. The taboos of the possession ritual that show the delineation of female status, prestige and eventually the oppression of females who are one part of the possession ritual are as follows;

1. The prohibition of menstruating women from possession and their isolation are signs of lower status in the possession ritual of females.

2. The prestige of female spirit medium is reduced by the negative value of her menstrual blood. Thus from the standard of purity, male spirit media have higher prestige than female spirit media.

3. Consequently, the menstrual taboo of the possession ritual has a function as a mechanism to reduce female status and prestige. In the terms of Douglas's theory, menstrual blood is perceived as a dire pollutant whose effects must be contained through stringent taboos. The fear of the negative effect of infringing taboos forces females to practice according to their contents.

4. On the topic of oppression, despite the fact that both males and females can occupy the practitioner role in spirit possession belief, only males can be Buddhist monks in practice, thus the possession belief opens an opportunity for females to be dominant in the ritual, nevertheless the female still has a lower status and prestige than the male in the possession ritual.

According to the possession ritual, actually it seems that the negative dimensions of female menstrual blood is not held as an obstruction for performing possession rituals or as the justification for the division of the role of males and females in the possession ritual, but it constructs the stigma of the female body and oppression affects the status and prestige of female spirit media.

The summary from prior discussion eventually inspires the picture of males and females embodied by performance to be spirit media. Here the following table shows the split conclusion between male and female spirit media again.

Table 10: The split summary of male and female spirit medium

Male Spirit medium	Female Spirit medium
<p>1. This is another alternative to be the leader of belief system beside ordination to be monk.</p> <p>2. Be able to present behavior as female, especially between the periods of possession ritual without reprobate, in case he possesses female god.</p> <p>3. Although he could not gain enough compensation from possession ritual yet he may slip off the role expectation of gender which cling obligation of being the main to earn income for family.</p>	<p>1. Attain the dominant position of belief system without the restriction as in Buddhism that only male may ordain to be monk.</p> <p>2. The behavior as male can be allowed to express in case she possesses male god.</p> <p>3. Be able to release from gender role identity of female such as the duties of doing household chores.</p> <p>4. In case she earns much compensation from possession ritual, she become the main to support family.</p> <p>5. Notwithstanding this status continue</p>

Conclusion

The final pages of this research will include the “general comparison and discussion of cases”, the discussion of my study in order to present their differences or similarities. “Concluding remarks on specific case studies”, to summarize the results of my study will be finalized as well.

General Discussion of Cases

The data of my study will be discussed in the light of the differences and similarities with other research. Thus the argument will continue to cover the various aspects of the ritual performance including the subject of gender among spirit media.

In Thai society both males and females can occupy this possession practitioner status. However, to be a successful spirit medium depends on the performance ability of each spirit medium. From the works of Schieffelin (1996) “On Failure and Performance: Throwing the Medium out of the séance” and Raymond (1967) “Ritual and Drama in Malay Spirit Medium”, it was clear that the authenticity of the presentation could support spirit media in influencing clients or audiences during the possession ritual. To make the possession ritual realistic, a spirit medium has to perform both in a manner and speak with a voice that is consistent with the character of the spirit or god and different from that of an ordinary person. From my observations, when in the possession state some spirit media spoke in another language, which they claimed that they could not speak before becoming spirit media. Likewise, in the case of spirit media in southwest Ethiopia, Hamer (1966:398) referred to one woman who stated that her spirit sometimes spoke in Gallenia⁶⁴, though she herself claimed not to understand this language. This was used as a performance strategy and confirms to audiences that a spirit or god has actually inhabited the spirit medium’s body. Concerning the norms, social context and expectation of clients, it is necessary for a spirit medium to respond to the needs of their clients, especially when he or she makes predictions and answers the questions about the problems of his clients. Nevertheless in the case of Schieffelin (1996), about *Kaluli* spirit media, and Raymond (1967), about spirit media in *Kelantan*, melodious

⁶⁴ This is a general term used to refer to words and phrases taken from the languages of the Arussi people in the north and the Gugi on the southern boundaries of Sidamo territory.

singing is an important part in the possession performance and adds to the success of a spirit medium. Beside effective presentation, from my research, advertising is another factor, which supports the success of a spirit medium. Due to this strategy, spirit media can attract clients widely and reach a broader public than hearsay alone.

Raymond (1967:207) elucidated that for a successful translation of the spirit medium rite into drama the financial structure of the whole situation would have to be re-ordered, and also the career structure for the performers. Schieffelin (1996: 68) pointed out that the successful will gain much praise, mediumship was a source of a certain amount of prestige and social attention in Bosavi and could bring its practitioner occasional strategic advantages (a young man who became a good medium might be a more attractive marriage prospect to potential in-laws, for example). Observing the career structure in my fieldwork, it was also clear that the successful spirit medium will receive admiration and prestige and higher social status. Furthermore he or she will gain items of value or money.

Regarding the relationship between spirit media, as Schieffelin (1996), I found sometimes they were in competition with one another and made disparaging remarks or told negative stories about each other in everyday conversation.

Therefore the relationship between the spirit media who are in the same sub-culture group could be depicted as follows:

1. Cooperation: it is obviously found that spirit media always visit and talk together and to one another. In some cases spirit media would respect a companion as the teacher or senior spirit medium. The personal relationships between spirit media would develop well during collaboration over the activities that they organized together. For example, when *Malai* the spirit medium of the Four Directions god (*Chao See Tai Teang Ong Khong*) wanted to make merit by offering an important feast to the Buddhists and gave a banquet for the students in the temple school, *Chit* the spirit medium of *Kumara* appeared to help prepare food at the living quarters of *Malai* and also followed her to make merit at the temple. *Chit* also appeared at *Kaew's* living quarters and also helped her to prepare food, flowers and a convenient place for the annual ceremony (*Wai Kru* Ritual). During this time, I also helped him to prepare flowers. Thus, the opportunity to discuss with him in an informal interview was available. He recounted that he respected *Malai* and *Kaew* (the spirit media of

Chao See Tai Teang Ong Khong and *Sadej Pee Chinnarach*) as his own relatives and senior spirit media, because they were together in the same way of life. Moreover *Pai* the spirit medium of *Narai* was a friend of *Kaew*. She came to help *Kaew* to organize this ritual every year. Also, the spirit media who passed the receiving bowl ritual (*Rub Khan*) from *Kaew*, as her apprentices, came to assist and participate in her vital ceremony every year. In the case of *Boon*, he went to participate in the annual ceremony of a spirit medium who was possessed by the same god, in Chon Buri Province. Besides helping by working, the participants always offered money to support the rituals of the spirit medium who was the chairman of the ceremony. This help was often reciprocated with cooperation at their annual ceremonies. Between them, if someone assisted and gave money to another, he would be compensated in the future, when he organized his own annual ceremony. The cooperation and group activities were an example of the significant success of spirit media in constructing their spirit medium community and also in reproducing and maintaining belief in spirit possession.

2. Competition: in the career structure, the consultation service is held as the main work of the spirit medium. Each spirit medium attempts to create their own personal strong point or particular specialized service to attract clients. For example *Boon*'s expertise is healing and *Sri*'s expertise is giving consultations regarding business. Yet it is found that spirit media always brag and claim that he or she is the real spirit medium, who was possessed by the veritable gods, while the others are fakes.

Kaew's story:

“There are many spurious spirit media, but here is the real *Khon Song* (spirit medium). *Khon Song Narai*, he possessed and called for a lot of money from clients. He deceived clients, one client was very angry, because he lost a lot of money. However *Narai* could not help him to get rid of his problems so that man easily recognized *Khon Song Narai* as a liar, and he was in difficult circumstances. Finally, he shot *Khon Song Narai*, *Khon*

Song was terribly wounded, but he did not die. Here *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* helped people humanely for merit making. *Khong Song Narai* got a bad turn from his bad action. I heard that he has the *Tam Nak* (spirit medium's service office) next to my office. Many days ago, a client came to see me about her necklace, which had vanished; *Sadej Pee Chinnarach* helped her to find it by giving a prediction. Finally, she could get it where it had fallen in her banana garden." (April, 1999)

Spirit media have two sides. On one side, they perform as if they were gods, who are agents of goodness, intent on making merit by assisting humans to get rid of distress. On the other side, they are humans who are possessed by avarice and material wealth is most important for their standards of living. In fact, these two parts cannot be separated. However, the income of each spirit medium and the number of their clients are obviously different, so their economic status is different. This situation forges envy and gossip among them, especially among some spirit media who are covetous and even hoodwink their clients for money.

In this sub-culture of spirit media, these two types of relationship portray the advantages that spirit media could gain from cooperation with others, while in competition, each spirit medium strives to attract the most clients by focussing on the strong points of the services they have to offer.

Considering spirit media and the ethnic group, the studies in Singapore, of Elliott (1964) "Chinese Spirit Medium Cults in Singapore" and Babb (1974) "Hindu Mediumship in Singapore", present the significance of spirit media as multi-ethnic group phenomena. The Chinese community constitutes the majority of the population while the Indian community is the third largest of the major ethnic groups of Singapore. In this situation the spirit medium is seen as the agent who maintains the belief system identity of each ethnic group. In the Chinese ethnic group, spirit mediumship is representative of a distinct trend in the religion of overseas Chinese. The emigrants to the South Seas select elements from the vast background of religious ideas and beliefs of China for institutionalization. The criteria for selection must depend upon a complex interplay of many social factors. Similarly, the manner in

which the original trends have been accentuated and developed under the local conditions of overseas settlement is dependent upon events, which are often peculiar to the history of each territory in Southeast Asia. In the case of Singapore, one of the most enlightening illustrations can be found in the way in which the story of “the Great Saint Equal with Heaven” has been used as a myth supporting religious practice. In all parts of China, there are numerous folk tales which may once have had a purely local popularity. The thread of the story was probably elaborated from the wealth of the professional story-teller’s imagination, and by a writer like Wu Cheng-en. The genius of authorship really belongs to the story’s unknown originators but its spread is largely the work of its elaborators. Not all stories by any means were written down, and not all those that were achieved outstanding success. But many were read and repeated throughout the length and breadth of China and wherever the Chinese settled overseas (Elliott 1964:166). In consideration of my fieldwork it can be remarked here that a Thai spirit medium who possesses a Chinese god of Buddhism in Mahayan School becomes an agent for the Chinese ethnic group to maintain the Chinese belief system in Thai society and the Chinese entourages have a vital role to help him or her to manage the possession ritual. Yet I found that monks from Buddhism in Hinayan School were invited to participate in the possession ritual (a spirit medium may offer food and money to monks, this is seen as merit making for the gods), especially in the annual ceremonies. Thus this situation manifests that the compromises and mixing between the two belief systems under the domination of the main religion “Buddhism in Hinayan School” is due to the spirit media, some of their clients and entourages are Thai, furthermore, the overseas Chinese settled in Thai society a long time ago and they internalized Buddhism in the Hinayan School to be one part of their belief. For Chinese gods, for instance, the story of “the Chinese historical tale of The Three Kingdoms” and *Kuan Im* as the popular myths support the practice of the spirit media in the Chinese style, because it is the influence of television dramas from Hong Kong.

In terms of the gender of spirit media, the studies of Mischel (1958) in Trinidad, Hamer (1966) in Southwest Ethiopia, Golomb (1993) in urban areas of central and southern Thailand, Wijeyewardene (1986) in Chiang Mai, Tanabe (1996) and Irvine (1984) in northern Thailand are similar to my data that most of the spirit

media are women. Irvine (1984: 315) recounts that the main feature of spirit mediumship is the dominance of women, both numerically and in terms of authority. About 84% of media are women. It is an expanding avenue through which women can exercise authority based on the supernatural over clients who are mostly women. Also the data of Auraiwan Pantuprapan (1986) found that 75% of the clients were women and from my data 85 people or 76% of 112 clients were women. If we consider the significance of the correlation between the gender of spirit media and their clients, in many researches such as Irvin (1982), Wijeyewardene (1986), Heinze (1988), Golomb (1993) including mine, the background of women before becoming spirit media was that most of them were poor, encountered family problems or had physical distress therefore it is obviously not surprising that female spirit media could understand the problems of their gender and then from their experiences they could also give better consultations in order to solve problems for female clients. Nevertheless Hindu spirit media in Singapore, Lawrence (1974) recounted, were mostly men from middle to low ranking castes.

About the gender of spirit media and their controllers, my data is consistent with the studies of Mischel (1958), Tanabe (1991), Wijeyewardene (1986) and Irvin (1982) that most female spirit media are possessed by male gods. In this a striking pattern, which is prohibited in the non-possessed state, involves the reversal of sex roles. Many females manifest male powers and, to a lesser degree, males manifest female powers. In such cases the female, under possession by a male power, is free to enact typically masculine behaviour, and the male is free to enact typically feminine behaviour. Individuals who have not learned clear sex roles, or who do not accept their roles, and whose goals partially involve those traditionally prescribed for members of the opposite sex, have a particularly appealing opportunity to assume temporarily the behaviour usually considered appropriate only for the opposite sex. For example the woman who resents a passive role can behave in a dominating, aggressive and belligerent manner (Mischel 1958:256). In the *Phi Meng* ritual during which only women are possessed by ancestor spirits, as the *Phi Meng* cults are basically made up of a matrilineal descent group, Tanabe recounted, most of these spirits possessing female bodies openly express their masculine character through bodily gesture, voice and habits such as drinking alcohol. In this sense the possession allows the woman, through the ritualized reversal to become a man who is powerful

and sensual (Tanabe 1991:202), for instance while females were possessed by male spirits in this ritual, they always flirted with other women who were participants.

Further information from my data is that many females possessed male gods who were children, such as *Kaew* who possessed *Kumara* or an infant spirit occasionally. Mischel who also found this possession type in Trinidad elucidated that the childish behaviour which occurs in possession, and was found also in Brazil, has been discussed (Herskovits 1943) and considered as a period of relaxation in which to bridge the gulf between the ecstatic condition of possession and normality. An alternative, and not necessarily contradictory, interpretation is that childish, regressive behaviours such as soiling, baby talk, and autoeroticism are still pleasurable to the individual, both directly and for their possible symbolic meanings. Within were possession behaviours which are still gratifying, but which have long since become unacceptable and which the individual has been forced to abandon, can again be enacted without inhibition (Mischel 1958:256).

For Boddy (1989) as the illustration of possession beliefs (*zār*) in a village in northern Arabic-speaking Muslim Sudan that she calls Hofriyat, this work presents the significance of being a spirit medium as a means to overcome the limitations of ascribed inferiority and thereby assert their social worth in an oppressive culture. For instance Boddy (1989:189-191) recounted that not so with *zayran*⁶⁵, who love cleanliness and beauty; desire gold, fine clothing, delicate perfumes; and demand a similar concern in their human hosts. When appearing in their human form, they are always bathed, well dressed, and lovely to behold. They prefer that their hosts eat “clean” foods: those described as white, enclosed, expensive, often difficult to obtain, and thought to contribute to the fertility of Hofriyati women by increasing or strengthening their blood. Hosts of *zayran* may also be asked to consume foods associated with their spirits’ ethnic groups or homeland. And a *zār* occasionally signifies its presence in a woman by drinking straight cologne (cf. Constantinides

⁶⁵ According to Leiris (1958:41), *zār* spirits in Gondar, Ethiopia, are thought most likely to possess beautiful women. Further, a myth about the origins of *zayran* attributed to Christian Ethiopia accounts for their inordinate concern with beauty and products of the human world (Messing 1958:1122; Fakhouri 1968:49). As Messing (1958:1122) writes, *zayran* are said to have been born in the Garden of Eden, as children of Eve: “one day Creator came to visit and began to count the children. In apprehension, Eve hid the fifteen most beautiful and intelligent ones; as punishment they were condemned to remain always hidden, nighttime creatures. Consequently, they envy their uglier and weaker human siblings who are the children of light.” A version of this story was recounted in Hofriyat, though it is not the only origin myth having currency among adepts (Boddy 1989:189).

1972:119; Lambek 1978), or demanding to smoke perfumed cigarettes. *Zayran* who attack a woman's fertility hold for ransom her husband's most valuable asset. They negotiate the release of their hostages, his unborn descendants, in return for certain demands, a curing ritual, and luxury items to be used by their host, his wife. In addition, they require her compliance via regular performance of the appropriate cosmetic procedures, in maintaining and revitalizing the bridely qualities that she diminishingly embodies. *Zayran* remember, want their hosts to be clean and attractive. And here, they obliquely call upon a man to recognize his wife's value, implying that neither she nor her fertility should be taken for granted. To restore his wife's *zār*-usurped fertility, a man must enter into an exchange relationship with her spirits; so doing, he implicitly renegotiates the relationship he has with his wife. And because most *zayran* are male as well as more powerful than humans, it permits such negotiation to take place in a context that need not entail loss of face for the husband who, to an outside observer, could be perceived as bending to his wife's requests. In the dimension of gender and authority, for females in my fieldwork and Tanabe (1991), performing to be a god in the possession ritual manifests the significance of power attainment. They become the leaders of ritual in the context that females are subordinates in the main religion "Buddhism", in which to be a monk is restricted only to males. In my case studies explicitly by being spirit media females can be released from the role obligations such as household chores, moreover the members of their families have to be careful in their practices with them and especially can not violate their wishes. Hamer (1966: 400-401) explains the changes in the status of women who became spirit media. The possession of women can best be understood by comparing their status with that of men. The Sidamo place so much stress on the importance of the male line and on patrilocal residence that a man, once he has paid bride wealth, has virtually absolute rights to the services and procreative potential of his wife. During her marriage her husband may send her away at will and beat her whenever he pleases. She must always defer to him and his male agnates and must observe a variety of taboos; for example, she may not mention the name of her husband's father, she must avoid him and all his collateral male agnates, and she must look down at the ground when spoken to by a man. Even in their ritual greeting of men it is customary for women to demean themselves by referring to their position as of no more consequence than the earth upon which the men tread. The only aspects of

a woman's role, which serve to alleviate her subordinate position, are her capacity for child-bearing and the dependence of her husband upon her for food preparation and labour. Since a man can never admit to accepting the opinion or advice of a woman, one of the few ways she has of commanding the attention of her male affines, or of achieving a wider popularity, is through spirit possession. In possession, it is not she but the spirit temporarily using her as a host who arrests the attention of the men in the community. Hence a woman who achieves fame as the "mule" of a powerful spirit does not constitute a threat to male feelings of status superiority. In the name of her spirit she can make demands on her husband and his agnates for food and presents which would not be appropriate to her role as a woman and a wife. Though a husband and his male kinsmen may resent the expense and inconvenience of feeding the woman's spirit, they usually accept the obligation in order to prevent conflict that could lead to divorce and the consequent costs and effort of obtaining another spouse. Failure to feed a possessed woman's spirit, moreover, provides her with an excuse for being ill and thus unable to serve her husband. Hamer (1966) identifies that one female informant even told of having "given in" after being admonished by her spirit to leave her negligent husband. Consequently in my fieldwork and that of Hamer explicitly those women who achieved the higher status and could negotiate in their family after becoming a spirit medium, and as in Hamer, a female spirit medium in my case study told me that during possession at the beginning of being a spirit medium, her god ordered her family members to look after her and serve her politely, rudeness to her would be punished by illness or bad luck.

If we consider women who are religious practitioners in the capitalist world, Kendall (1996) presents the situation that in the stream of economic development and capitalism of Korea the people need to attain economic success and material abundance. Therefore ritual performances of shamans are held in response to the desire for wealth. Kendall (1996:522) also referred to the fact that the shaman's perception was that in the past, shamanic rituals were usually held in response to life-threatening illness whereas now most "*kut*" are held in the hope of riches. This makes perfect sense in light of the medical options and economic possibilities of the 1990s. This is a matter of calibration not a radical transformation. At the same time shamans can consider themselves successful if they are the means of women to achieving wealth.——

All spirit media of Thai society are obviously also under the influence of capitalism, responding to their clients' needs and desire for wealth (for instance giving prediction for lottery numbers, blessings for good luck and consultations for commerce). Compared with healing, solving economic problems is more profitable. One spirit medium informant recounts that if her client was successful in commerce after asking for her help, the client would go back to compensate her with a valuable present (for example money or gold jewellery). This illustration reveals the relation between spirit medium and materialism. Therefore, instead of her husband, the successful female spirit medium, by means of her ritual performance becomes the main source of income for supporting her family. Normally a husband's role is expected to be the main one, earning a living for his family while the main role of a woman is to pay attention to the children and household chores.

Here the relationship between spirit media and the people around them is explained by the issue of "Power", for this phenomenon the power appears in the context of ritual performance in modern Thai society. Foucault (1983) identifies the words "power and power relation" as the mode of action upon action. Power is in the action and the relation of people in society. Foucault points out that power appears in every part of society, from the smallest to the biggest part, for example in family and sexual relations, therefore in social networks too, power occurs in every action and proceeds to effect various features. Spirit media apply the belief in spirit to the social power that relates to the life and lives of their clients and followers. However, power turns to technology to change from being abstract to be action that effects social relationships. Here technologies are held as the mechanics of power, technique and the process of operation of power. Technologies are divided into four types according to Foucault, namely;

1. Technologies of production: which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things.
2. Technologies of sign systems: which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification.
3. Technologies of power: which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject.
4. Technologies of self: which permit individuals to effect by their own means

or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Martin 1988:18)

The first two technologies are employed in the study of the sciences and linguistics. The last two technologies of power and self, have kept my attention. Technologies of power and technologies of self appear in every culture; however, both of them may be in various forms. To explain possession ritual as the relation between spirit media and clients, technologies of power plainly expound on how spirit media could dominate and manage others and technology of self is used as an individual's instrument to solve life's mundane problems. In another viewpoint, possession ritual as technology to attain power, the spirit medium uses spirit possession and performance ability, that are based on knowledge, experience and skill, to assist clients to get rid of distress. In the mean time, clients obey the practices and follow the ways of the spirit medium. Finally, the spirit medium can gain the trust of the clients and other people in their community and moreover can obtain remuneration, especially money and valuable objects.

In this last part of the paper, the power or authority, which manifests itself in the relation between spirit media and their clients and entourages in the ritual performance, will be scrutinized. Also the explicit significance of a spirit medium's status and prestige will be reviewed. In order to understand this issue, one should not neglect the cultural environment. The influence of "Buddhism", the main religion, "capitalism" and "ethnic group" are also considered. Concerning the issue of the spirit media and their ethnic group, spirit media, even if they are from a different ethnic group from their entourages, through the possession style or the type of god by whom they are possessed are able to dominate their entourages and conduct profound relationships with them.

In the domain of spirit possession belief, all males and females enjoy equal opportunities to be spirit media and gain authority from this dominant position. However, the authority and the prestige of male and female spirit media can be explained according to Foucault's doctrine. Foucault describes two types of technology, namely "technologies of power" and "technologies of the self", which are

evident in possession phenomena. These two technologies express the domination and manipulate the relations between a spirit medium and others.

For spirit media, their power derives from knowledge, experience, skill in the possession performance and in giving consultations, which clients and entourages accept following the suggestions of the spirit media as they are anxious to get rid of their problems. During the possession ritual, the differences in status are also expressed through various gestures, for example clients and entourages have to *Wai*⁶⁶, a gesture that shows respect to the spirit medium. Appropriate words have to be used when speaking with the spirit medium and seats have to be properly arranged, clients and entourages cannot sit higher than a spirit medium. The voice, words and manner of spirit media are full of power and words of command *Kha*, *Ku* and *Chao* meaning “I”, are usually used by spirit media in order to refer to themselves. Here they are obviously placing themselves in a higher position than anyone else, while they always call the others *Eng*, *Mueng*, *Luk Chang* and *Luk* meaning “You”. These words are used for inferior persons. The clients and entourages obey the words or signs, which a spirit medium communicates to them at least to the spirit medium’s face or in the context of the ritual. In this situation, no one can oppose a spirit medium when they wish to ask for help from him or her. Under the mask of a god, every word from the mouth of a spirit medium must be practiced and followed by the people.

Technologies of self can be applied to all parts of the possession phenomena, practitioners and their clients. All males and females from every social class can gain the status of spirit medium occupying the possession knowledge by presenting themselves as gods or goddess and using this knowledge to serve the community as professionals, healers, experts, counsellors operating through their special connection with the supernatural world. If we investigate their changing status, we should compare their status before and after occupying the spirit medium position. From the background of spirit media in the five specific case studies, only four of them graduated at the level of primary education and the fifth has no education. Moreover, their economic situation appeared rather poor. Thus they occupied a lower status in their community before being the vehicles of their gods. If they successfully solved the problems of their clients and entourages, their reputations would be more widespread and in this way the spirit media could gain prestige and respect. Their status

⁶⁶ Bringing the hands together to the face; to pay respect.

was uplifted, the people in the middle and upper classes who had faith in them became their clients and entourages. In the cases of the famous spirit media such as *Sri* and *Boon*, they acquired wealth from the patronage of the local powerful members of the community and political elites. The benefits of being possessed are means of escaping reality and gaining higher status by becoming gods. Additionally, without a period of being in the possession state every day, spirit media enjoy considerable social prestige due to the people in the community still respecting them. The respect shown to spirit media is based on moral worth so that they are special human beings and selected by a god to be a vehicle.

As to the spirit media's business resulting from the religious belief, they could obtain wealth from the charges for their services and selling talismans and other remuneration from clients for their success in solving their problems such as golden necklaces, money and furniture for their houses. The successful spirit media can earn a large income and their living is very openly comfortable.

Thus spirit media may gain income from the possession ritual in three ways as follows;

1. Service charge: Clients' payment for a spirit medium's services.
2. Donations from devotees: when a spirit medium has successfully solved the problems of his or her devotees, many of them will come to donate money to the spirit medium.
3. Selling the magic objects such as cabalistic writing, the statues of the gods etc.

From these sources of income, spirit media explain how they spend it as follows;

1. Living expenses. On this point, spirit media claim that as they are vehicles of gods, the gods allowed them to spend this money to have a good life.
2. Donations for public welfare.
3. Spent on activities of possession and buying many instruments such as joss sticks, candles, oil for lamps, flowers etc.
4. To improve their possession service offices.

In the case of *Boon* and *Sri*, their clients who were absolutely faithful to them bought the land to build houses and buildings for their possession rituals. These

changes in circumstances show what rewards can be derived from the practices of successful spirit media. On the other hand, some cases that failed to succeed are still poor and shown no sign of changing their circumstances. The study has found that sometimes when spirit media talked together with each other, they gossiped about some clients, who never came to compensate them with presents according to the promises given when the consultation was effective. In one case where a client was concerned, she came to *Sri* and requested god *Sum Por Khong* to foresee her destiny and assist her in order to sell off her land as soon as possible, because she needed money quickly. After the consultation, she might have sold the land, but she did not return to compensate the spirit medium as promised. Then, she suffered illness, had a vehement headache and eventually she went back again to the spirit medium. Obviously, she was informed that whatever she got was from the result of breaking an agreement to *Sum Por Khong*.

Sri said;

“When *Sum Por Khong* helped you to gain what you achieved, you should help his spirit medium.” (March, 2000)

The entourages of spirit media who are possessed by Chinese gods are mostly Chinese whose occupations are frequently merchants and businessman. Thus they can support their spirit media with a lot of money, as for example, in the case of *Boon* and *Sri*, mentioned above, where their entourages bought them land.

From all the details expressed above, most spirit media are female. Thus, the possession ritual enacts the female dominated possession business and this is held as an avenue for females to earn money in order to support their family.

Although, spirit media enjoy their social prestige and the benefits they receive, if it is seen that they are wealthy they may be thought to be selfish. Spirit media know which strategies will win them support and influence their entourages and the people in the community by displaying their generosity by inviting people to banquets, donating money, clothes, and dry food to poor clients, their entourages and other destitute people. Therefore, to maintain prestige, derive power and achieve a higher status, spirit media have to prove themselves by public works and from management

of the redistribution system.

When we analyze the spirit media's behaviour and their relationship with clients, the possession ritual can be regarded as the means of fulfilling their needs. The expectations of each client are different, depending upon the personal circumstances. For instance, unemployed men or students who expected to graduate also assumed they would get jobs, patients expected that they would be cured and the gamblers also assumed that they would win the lottery. However, each spirit medium has a different area of expertise to satisfy the needs and solve the problems of their own clients. For example, *Boon* is very much an expert on healing patients, *Sri*'s expertise is giving consultations about business and *Kaew*'s expertise is predicting the return of lost things. Many clients may have consultations with other spirit media at the same time in order to make sure their problems will be solved.

There is a correlation between the gender of clients and their specific problems. Most of the married women came to a spirit medium due to problems within the family, such as their husband having another wife or wanting to know the future of their children etc. The young single women always consulted spirit media about love, especially their future mate while most of the male clients consulted spirit media about their occupations and business.

In respect of the correlations between the gender of the spirit media to the gender of clients, generally most clients of all male and female spirit media are female and it has no significance on the god's gender. Clients select the spirit media when they hear about their particular expertise and their success in solving problems from hearsay or the suggestions of friends or relatives. It can be said that spirit media are effective in solving the problems of the clients and not least their possession ritual encourages clients to have more will power and feel more convinced that they can make a success of their lives.

If we compare "Buddhism" with "possession belief", the principles of Buddhism emphasize that it is very difficult to attain nirvana or the highest state, while possession belief and its rituals seem to be a way, which make it easier to solve problems and face life's difficulties under mundane conditions. Besides healing, in today's capitalistic society, which is now evident in Thailand, the needs of many clients come for consultations are on questions concerned with materialism and wealth. These are served by possession rituals such as the predictions for lottery

numbers and blessing for good luck in commercial life. At the same time the successful spirit media are able to achieve their own material wealth and escape from a poverty-stricken existence. Therefore clients find the possession ritual is one of many alternative means to solve problems or achieve their wishes.

Moreover, from the case studies concerned, if spirit media are possessed by a god from a different ethnic group they are able to cross into the territory of the god and dominate the clients or entourages who belong to that ethnic group. For instance *Sri* is a Thai and *Boon* is half Thai and Chinese and while his family follow a Thai life style, they possess Chinese gods. In this way, they could attract and influence Chinese clients more easily, thus they have a larger group of clients than *Lui*, *Tong* and *Kaew*. In general spirit media in the Chinese style of possession seem to be more wealthy than spirit media in the Thai and Hindu style, because most of the Chinese clients are businessmen and some of them are in the local political elites, thus they have money with which to support their-chosen spirit media. A comparison of male and female spirit media in the Chinese style-shows that male spirit media can attract more clients than their female counterparts as they perform miracles which seem more exciting and dangerous. For example *Boon* has the ability to perform “fire walking”, “climbing the knife ladder”, “sitting on a knife chair” and “drinking large amounts of alcohol” without becoming intoxicated.

Table 11
Possession Ritual as Technologies of Power and Self

	Power and Domination	Prestige	Psychological Need	Wealthy
Spirit Medium	Derive from knowledge ,skill and experience of performance to be god	Gain faithful and respect from clients and entourages		service charge ,receiving value things from compen- sation and selling talisman
Clients and Entourages	Concede suggestion and the means to get rid of problems of spirit medium		Desire the confident and will power from the suggestion of spirit medium to encounter problems in everyday life	may achieve to solve problem about occupation and business may be win lottery number

Finally the comparison between my study and other research provides a picture of the similarities and differences. This could be taken as a theme for new research in the future to compare the data of spirit mediumship in different cultural settings.

Concluding Remarks on the Specific Case Studies

Spirit mediumship phenomena present a picture of the human body in two dimensions, in one condition, the body is objectively in its social and cultural dimension while secondly, when in possession, subjective dimension appears. These two dimensions serve to explain how people construct ways of influencing others and attaining their needs such as prestige and wealth. Moreover they can negotiate for themselves. Nevertheless the social and cultural construction, which dominates the people who are spirit media, expresses also how it effects them. Furthermore, the different pictures of males and females appear in this phenomenon.

As subjectivity, the persons are able to present themselves through the body as their requirement. Hence, spirit mediumship is an empirical description, which attests to the emergence of the communicative body (Turner, 1991) in the practice of performance. According to the concept of Goffman, spirit media are actors who, in order to interact with others, attempt to present themselves as gods. "Manner", "Appearance" and "Setting" which are harmonious to the possession style will present their performance as a "Dramatic Realization". This performance is the path to communication and interaction with others, especially clients who are the audiences. The performance of spirit media has a special feature that they have no scripts and are face to face and interacting with others. Audiences or clients influence the proceeding of the performance as they interact with the spirit media throughout the presentation from the beginning until the end. The effective presentation will support the interaction between spirit media and clients and the performance of spirit media will be demanded again and again. Nevertheless among spirit media, there are different levels of skill of performance due to the experience and the length of time they have been spirit media. Furthermore, if we consider spirit mediumship as one type of occupation, as there has recently been more competition between spirit media, they have had advertisements printed to attract clients.

For spirit media, although due to the influence of modern psychology, their behaviour is thought of as mental illness, their performance is able to fulfill a psychological need for others along with their religious beliefs. If we consider it as a system in the whole of the social structure, the organization of each spirit medium appears to have positive functions in society. It seems quite probable that possession activity contributes positively to the good mental health of the community. Many

people might be psychologically disturbed if they did not have this culturally constituted defence mechanism to allow them a release from problems and stresses created by the society. This organization also may be particularly useful in healing.

We can conclude that people consult the spirit media either

1. About health: spirit media use many healing methods with remedies such as using herbs, drinking or bathing in blessed water, rubbing bodies.
2. They wanted to know more about their future, for instance
 - 2.1 of study, whether they would pass an exam
 - 2.2 of occupation, whether they would be promoted
 - 2.3 of commerce, whether, and how, they would be successful in business
3. They sought advice with relationship problems such as with their parents, spouses, children and other relatives.

Opinions of the people about spirit media can be separated into three groups as follows;

1. Clearly believe: the people in this group always ask for services from spirit media to solve their problems about physical distress and mental distress⁶⁷.
2. This group trusts spirit media by about 50%. They ask for services from spirit medium when their problems are difficult or could not be solved by any way such as illness that is difficult to cure by modern medicine thus they try cures suggested by spirit media.
3. Against spirit media: this group views the spirit possession ritual as hoodwinking and considers the person who is a spirit medium has a mental disorder.

The main clients of spirit media are female and belong to the lower and middle classes. They have backgrounds similar to their spirit media which is without a shadow of doubt why spirit media profoundly understand the distresses of their clients.

Beyond their services to individuals, spirit media have a role among ethnic

⁶⁷ See Part III, Chapter 6.

groups and represent the significance of “hybridity of culture” in Thai society; that is to say spirit media who are possessed by Thai gods, the Thai style of spirit medium, manifest an indirect role of continuing the identity of Thai supernatural beliefs. For spirit media who possess Chinese gods, the Chinese style, although they are Thai, they become important for the Chinese people and maintain the Chinese identity in the community. Thai and Chinese are the two main ethnic groups, although in the past the Thai government attempted to destroy the Chinese identity to assimilate the Chinese emigrants into Thai society. Spirit mediumship is representative of a distinctive character in the religion of the Chinese. The emigrants to Thailand and their descendants have selected elements from the ideas and beliefs of China which have been integrated into their religion in Thailand. The basis for selection depended upon a complex interplay of many social factors. Likewise, the customs in which the original features have been emphasized and developed under the local condition of settlement and depend upon events which are often peculiar to the history of each territory in Thai Society.

From early childhood, Chinese children have listened to stories of ancient kings, monsters, gods and demons. Furthermore, the stories of miraculous heroes and legends often had attributed to them not only historical reality but also the power to bring their miraculous influences to bear on the lives of subsequent generations. The Chinese maintain the characteristics related to the way of life to which they were born and their descendants develop their aspirations in a variety of directions but in the absence of any fixed criterion, it is probable that they too will retain many of their parents’ habits and beliefs. Here examples of Chinese style spirit media show that they are likely to serve the Chinese religion, therefore the features prominent in Chinese style spirit medium cults are found throughout the greater part of Thailand’s Chinese society. Furthermore the organization of each spirit medium as a Chinese centre constructs the solidarity of the ethnic group.

In Thailand spirit mediumship is dominated by Buddhism in Hinayan School. If we look at the relationship between Buddhism and the spirit possession belief, one sees that the principle of merit making, *Tam Boon* is borrowed from Buddhism by spirit media of all three possession styles, to justify their activities and the precepts of Buddhism. Especially the five commandments of the Buddha *Seen Ha* and the eight commandments of the Buddha *Seen Pad* are the norms of their practice in everyday

life. Therefore, in this relation, spirit possession belief takes its place under Buddhism and it is not surprising that monks are always invited to participate in the annual ceremonies of spirit media. Besides, the Buddha image is always put on the altar in the possession room. Thus it can be said that the spirit possession belief cooperates with Buddhism which is the main religion.

The issue of gender in the context of Buddhism in Thai society allows only men to become monks. Therefore men dominate the main religion. For women, becoming a spirit medium is an avenue to be taken to gain a dominant position in the belief and rituals of the community, yet female spirit media cannot resist the religious power of men. On the other hand, for males becoming a spirit medium is another way to be dominant in the belief system in Thai society. Throughout the population most spirit media are female, and most of them are possessed by male gods. As spirit media females can cross the territory of gender temporarily; in the possession ritual, they can present the aggressive behaviour and manners of men without reproach. However, it is hard to find a case where a male is possessed by a female god. However even when not in the possession state the people around spirit media are still respectful and careful to treat them well, especially members of their family. My case studies show that they are allowed to abandon the role expected of their gender, that is to say female spirit media can abnegate from household chores and in some cases she becomes the leader of the family and earns an income from the possession ritual to support family members, and if male spirit medium can only earn a small income from the possession ritual, which is not enough to support his family, he is allowed to abnegate from being the head of the family without reprimand. These instances confirm the negotiation ability and subjectivity of the possessed body, which derives from spirit medium status. They can release themselves from the expectations of the role of their genders and it seems that women can undoubtedly gain a higher status in their families.

Notwithstanding the objective side of the body, particularly for female spirit media, they express the influence of social construction which leads to the inequality between male and female spirit media, although they have equal chances to become spirit media in order to improve their status and gain prestige. However, it is the connotation of gender hierarchy and the difference through the taboos of the

possession ritual, in which the negative meaning of menstrual blood is the justification for these taboos. This oppression is not only for female spirit media, it covers likewise female clients and accordingly the prestige of female spirit media is decreased by the negative value which adheres to menstrual blood.

Lastly, in this book I have attempted to contribute to the understanding of spirit mediumship based on performance and how it ensues to persons. The search for longitudinal studies will provide for change in the spirit mediumship situation in Thailand according to social and culture changes.

Appendix

Thai Terms Used in the Text

Thai Terms

Chao	เจ้า, จ้าว	The spirit lord
Chao Mä	เจ้าแม่	Female God/ Goddess
Chao Por	เจ้าพ่อ	Male God/God
Chao Thi	เจ้าที่	The local god of the land
Chata	ชะตา	The fate or cosmic influence
Devata	เทวดา	A good spirit
Hauy	หวย	An illegal lottery
Jong Ka Ben	โจงกระเบน	To thread the rolled end of a cloth between the legs and bring it up to the back.
King Wejsuwan	ท้าวเวสสุวรรณ	The king of the spirits
Khao Phansa	เข้าพรรษา	three month Rains Retreat
Khon Song	คนทรง	A spirit medium
Khru	ครู	A teacher
Khwan	ขวัญ	A personal vital essence
Kumara or Phi Kumara	ผีกุมาร	An infant spirit who died in the womb or in very short time after birth
Luk Chang	ลูกช้าง	When addressing spirit medium the speakers will refer to himself/herself as “Luk Chang” meaning an elephant calf.
Naga	นาคา	The deity of a snake who dwells in the Meakhong River.

Nang Kwak	นางกวัก	<p>A small image of a young lady, by usually, installed on the self of all shop houses in the market, but to Thai people it has been regarded from early times as a charm or talisman which could be carved from ivory or wood or bronze, clay or black lacquer with gold leaf. The image is called “Nang Kwak” which means a lady who beckons as it is traditionally believed that whoever has the Nang Kwak in the stall will enjoy brisk business through its mysterious attractions.</p>
Nang Mai	นางไม้	<p>The female spirit inhabiting a tree or wood nymph, a dryad. Thai people like to ask for lottery number from her by scrub a tree or a wood that is believed, she inhabits in it.</p>
Pasa Tep	ภาษาเทพ	Language of God
Phi	ผี	Spirit
Phi Tai Hong	ผีตายโหง	<p>The ghost of those people who have died by violent deaths such as by any kind of accident etc.</p>
Prakan	พระกาฬ	<p>The god who decrees the human’s allotted life span.</p>

Praya Maccuraj	พญามัจจุราช	The spirit who dwells in hell. He is the judge who apportions the punishments of spirits or phi who do wrong before dead.
Praya Yommaban	พญายมบาล	He punishes the spirits of evil doers according to the orders of Praya Maccuraj.
Rang	ร่างกาย	Body
Sa Bi	สไบ	a wrap formerly used by a woman to wrap around her chest and back.
San Chao	ศาลเจ้า	The shrine of a dead person who has been deified
San Pra Poom	ศาลพระภูมิ	The shrine of the household god
Sarong	โสร่ง	A simple skirt somewhat like a tube skirt.
Seen Ha	ศีลห้า	The five commandments of the Buddha; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Abstaining from killing 2. Abstaining from stealing 3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct 4. Abstaining from telling lies or falsehoods 5. Abstaining from taking intoxicants
See Pad	ศีลแปด	The eight commandments of the Buddha; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Abstaining from killing animal 2. Abstaining from lie

		3. Abstaining from drinking alcohol
		4. Abstaining from making mistake in karma
		5. Abstaining from stealing
		6. Abstaining from sleeping on a soft bed
		7. Abstaining from karma with spouse
		8. Abstaining from evening meal
Tam Boon	ทำบุญ	Merit Making
Tam Nak	คำหนัก	A spirit possession service office
Teab	เทียบ	Examination Ritual
Thit or Bundhit	ทิด or บัณฑิต	A “learned man” or “scholar.”
Wai	ไหว้	Bringing the hands together to the face; to pay respect.
Wan Pra	วันพระ	The Buddhist Holyday

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