

# Ghosts in Thai culture - web source: Wikipedia

Belief in **ghosts in Thai culture** is both popular and enduring. In the history of Thailand, Buddhist popular beliefs intermingled with the legends about the spirits or ghosts of the local folklore. These myths have survived and evolved, having been adapted to the modern media, such as Thai movies, Thai television soap operas and Thai comics.

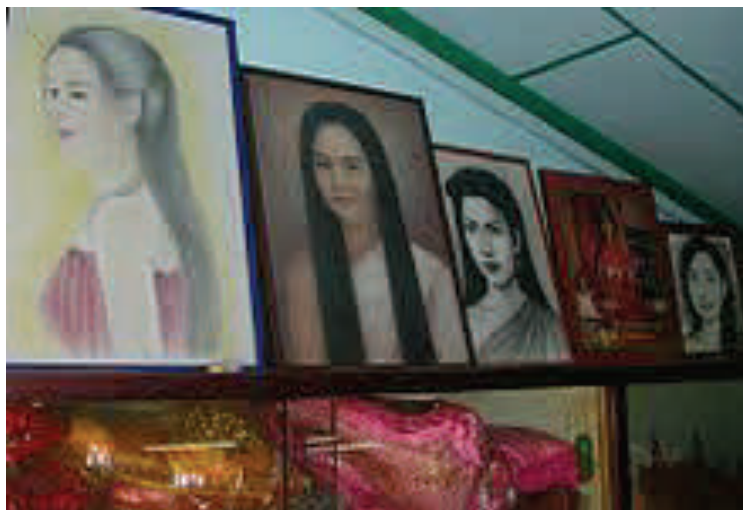
Some of the ghosts of Thai culture are shared with neighboring cultures. *Krasue*, for example is part of the Cambodian, Lao and Malay culture as well. A few of these, including the tall *Pret*, are part of the mythology of Buddhism. They are others though, such as *Phi Dip Chin*, which have entered the Thai ghost lore through the Chinese community residing in Thailand for the past few centuries.



*Krasue*, a nocturnal ghost of Thai mythology.

## Beliefs

Thai spirits or ghosts are known generically as *Phi* (ผี). A large proportion of these spirits are nocturnal. Except for the well-known *Pret*, most ghosts were traditionally not represented in paintings or drawings, hence they are purely based on stories of the oral tradition. The local beliefs regarding the village spirits of Thailand were studied by Phraya Anuman Rajadhon.



A shrine to *Mae Nak Phra Khanong*.  
Dresses and portraits of the ghost

Ghosts are believed to be found, among other places, in certain trees, burial grounds near Buddhist temples, as well as some houses, especially abandoned houses. There are different categories of ghosts. Certain ghosts dwelling in mountains and forests are generally known as *Phi Khao* (ผีเขา) and *Phi Pa* (ผีป่า). Geographic locations such as the *Phi Pan Nam Range* (ทิวเขาผีปันน้ำ), "the mountain range that the spirits use to divide the waters", and *Phae Mueang Phi* (แพะเมืองผี) are named after the ancient ghosts believed to dwell in the places. Female ghosts or fairies related to trees such as *Nang Ta-khian* and *Nang Tani* are known generically as *Nang Mai* (นางไม้ "Lady of the Tree").

## List of Thai ghosts

Some of the most well-known Thai ghosts are the following:

Chao Kam Nai Wen (เจ้ากรรมนายเวร), a ghost that maintains ill will towards a person due to the wrongful deeds the latter committed to the former during the former's life

Krahang (กระหัง), a male ghost that flies in the night

Krasue (กระสือ), a woman's head with her viscera hanging down from the neck

Mae Nak (แม่นาก), a female ghost who died at childbirth and that can extend her arms

Mae Sue (แม่ซื่อ), a guardian goddess or a female ghost of infants

Nang Ta-khian (นางตะเคียน), a tree spirit living in *Hopea odorata* trees

Nang Tani (นางตานี), a young woman haunting certain clumps of banana trees that appears on full moon nights

Phi Am (ผีอำ), a spirit that sits on a person's chest during the night

Phi Hua Khat (ผีหัวขาด), a headless male ghost that carries his head

Phi Phrai (ผีพราย), the ghost of a woman who died together with the child in her womb or a female ghost living in the water

Phi Phong (ผีโพง), a malevolent male ghost having an unpleasant smell. It lives in dark places under the vegetation

Phi Pop (ผีปอบ), a malevolent female spirit that devours human entrails

Phi Song Nang (ผีสองนาง), female ghosts that first lure, and then attack and kill young men

Phi Tai Hong (ผีตายโหง), the ghost of a person that suffered a sudden violent or cruel death

Phi Tai Thang Klom (ผีตายทั้งกลม), the vengeful ghost of pregnant women who died during child-



Statues of *prèt* at Wat Phai Rong Wua in Suphanburi

birth.

Phi Thale (ผีทะเล), a spirit of the sea. It manifests itself in different ways, one of them being St. Elmo's fire, among other uncanny phenomena experienced by sailors and fishermen while on boats. Also a slang for naughty men.

Pret (เปรต), an extremely tall hungry ghost part of the Buddhist lore; they are two stories tall, very skinny and have needle hole for mouths.

Phi Dip Chin (ผีดิบจีน), a jumping ghost from the Chinese lore dressed in an ancient costume and having a written paper in front of his face, that has become also popular in Thailand through the Thai Chinese community.

Phi Kong Koi (ผีกองกอย), a forest vampire with one leg

Kuman Thong (กุมารทอง), spirits of young children caught by voodoo masters to do his biddings, usually dressed in Thai ancient clothing with traditional hair bun.

Rak-Yom (รัก-ยม), appearing as two small boys similar to Kuman Thong

Phi Tabo (ผีตาโขน), a blind ghost with hollow eyes

Phi Ka (ผีกะ), a voracious ghost

Phi Tai Ha (ผีตายห้า), ghosts of persons having died of an accident; similar to ผีตายโหง

Phi Ma Bong (ผีแม่บ้อง), a female ghost from Northern Thailand

Pu Som Fao Sap (ปู่โสมเฝ้าทรัพย์), a male ghost who guards treasures appearing like a venerable old man

Khamot (โคมด), a luminescent ghost

Phi Pu Thao (ผีปู่เต่า), a ghost appearing as a very old man

Phi Lang Kluang (ผีหลังกลาง), a ghost from Southern Thailand with a very large wound in the back

Phi Thuai Khaeo (ผีถ้วยแก้ว), the ghost that makes the upturned glass move (Thai Ouija)

Phi Pluak (ผีปลวก), the ghost of the termites

Suea Saming (เสือสมิง), a male or female who transformed into a tiger as a result of the power of black magic similar to a Skin-walker or Werecat

## Interaction with ghosts

Ghosts in Thai culture may be benevolent. Certain ghosts have their own shrines and among these there are some, such as the Mae Nak Phra Khanong shrine in Bangkok, that are quite important. Usually though, humbler tutelary spirits live in little dwellings known as *San Phra Phum* (Thai: ศาลพระภูมิ), small ghost shrines that provide a home for these household or tree spirits. These shrines are common near trees and groves and in urban areas, close to buildings. It is considered a bad omen to neglect these spots and offerings are regularly made by people living nearby. Usually offerings to tree spirits are small things such as small food items, drinks, incense sticks or fruits, but when important favors are requested it is common to offer the head of a pig. After the ceremony is over the pig head is brought home and eaten.<sup>[4]</sup>

The *Phi Mo* or witch doctor (หมอผี) may invoke spirits of the dead. In this ritual usually four sticks are planted at equal distance from each other on the ground near the burial or cremation place. A thread is tied around the sticks forming a protective square and a mat is spread in the middle. The *Phi Mo* sits down within this enclosure, often along with other people present at the ritual. In front of him, outside of the square there is a *Mo Khao* terracotta jar containing ashes or bones of the dead person with a yantra painted on the outside. Beside the jar there is also a plate of rice as offering and a stick or switch to keep the spirits at bay.

On the other hand there are spirits that are considered dangerous and need to be disposed of. In these cases the *Phi Mo* may conduct a ritual in order to confine the dangerous ghost to an earthen jar, which may be sealed and thrown into a deep canal, river or lake.

## Modern media

Thai cinema began popularizing the ghosts and legends of the folklore of Thailand in the 20th century. Ghosts of the local tradition appeared in horror movies, as well as in side-roles in mainstream movies. Phraya Anuman Rajadhon established that most of the contemporary iconography of Thai folk ghosts has its origins in Thai films that have now become classics.

Thai television soap operas have contributed to popularize the ghost theme. Some soap operas, such as *Raeng Ngao*, include the folk ghosts of Thai culture interacting with the living. The *Raeng Ngao* story proved so popular that four remakes have been made after it was first aired in 1986.

Most of the Thai ghosts are so well-liked that they appear regularly in comic books as well as in films for children, including computer animated movies, such as *Nak*, and animated cartoons.