

Spirits in Thailand

- ผีต้นไม้ or "*PHI TON MAI*" means "ghosts that reside in tree". They are generally classified into two categories, i.e. benevolent and malevolent spirits.



Everywhere in Thailand, some trees are wrapped with a cloth. Especially in temples but also in forests. It means that a spirit inhabits the tree. Of course the tree shall not be cut without warning the spirit in order to let him find another tree.

Spirit Tree

According to local beliefs, an old tree (ต้นไม้เทพ) may contain powerful indigenous spirits. Large trees with multi-coloured silk tied around signify that heavenly beings reside there.

There is often a certain spirit associated to a certain type of tree such as banana tree. นางไม้ or "*NANG MAI*" is a female spirit inhabiting a tree. Other famous spirits are นางตะเคียน or "*NANG TAKIAN*" located in hopea trees and นางตานี or "*NANG TANEE*" located in banana trees. That kind of trees spirit need colored satin cloth.

To protect forests against logging, some monks ordain trees and wrapped them up with a thin orange cloth. Trees were then sacred. For Buddhist people it was now impossible to harm the trees. Alas sometimes officials used another monk to defrock the trees.

- กุมารทอง or "*KUMAN THONG*" is a baby spirit.

The first story related to "*KUMAN THONG*" was found in the Thai book "*KHUN CHANG KHUN PAEN*" (ขุนช้างขุนแผน). The way to get a "*KUMAN THONG*" is quite horrible: one must get a dead foetus and burn it in order to obtain a small body. Then dark incantations are cast to insert black magic inside. The "*KUMAN THONG*" spirit is supposed to warn and protect his owner in case of danger. The owner must also feed and protect it.

Nowadays "*KUMAN THONG*" are made of wood. It often represents a little child with a hair topcut. If the owner doesn't take care of his "*KUMAN THONG*", power disappears from the statue.



A few years ago a monk addicted to black magic made a "*KUMAN THONG*" with a dead fetus. He was disrobed.

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- ผีปอบ or "*PHI POP*" is an evil spirit.

This ghost lives inside a witch and leaves her body during sleep. Before the witch can die, they have to find somebody who will inherit the spirit by consuming some of the old witch's saliva.

These ghosts are powerful, fearful, full of mischief and evil. If they succeed to possess someone, who is sick or weak, then they rush to eat his intestines, chew on their liver and gnaw on their kidney. One solution to get rid of them is to call a "doctor" dancer. This spirit doctor chases the "*PHI POP*" by making a whirlpool dance. When watching the dance, the "*PHI POP*" entered a whirlpool and is chased from the body.

Origin of "*PHI POP*" came from an old legend. Once upon ago a Prince fond of magic found the way to enter inside alive bodies and to take control over them. Once the prince said magic words

and entered into the body of an animal. His servant listening to those words repeated them, entered to the body of the Prince and of course became the Prince. The Prince entering the body of a bird rushed to tell the truth to his wife. This one destroyed the servant's body and challenged the false Prince to enter the body on an animal, then the real Prince re-entered in his body but the servant was not able to re-enter his body. Since this time his spirit goes from one body to the other eating its intestines.



Thai people are really afraid of ghosts ("PHI" - ผี). Jokes shouldn't be told about them otherwise they might come. Numerous Thai magazines about ghosts and spirits are available in Thai bookshops.

A Thai magazine

In year 2007 villagers at Kalasin's Sam Chai sub-district raised Bt 35000 to exorcise the ghosts allegedly dwelled in two female villagers. Following four mysterious and sudden deaths of villagers feared to be caused by the evil spirits, some 1000 residents raised money for an exorcism of "PHI POP". Today there are at least two villages in Sakon Nakhon province where people have been labelled "PHI POP" and live together as they have been expelled from various other villages.

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- ผีอำ or "PHI AM" is a spirit.

The spirit "*PHI AM*" sleeps on the chest. When somebody has difficulty to breathe, Thai people say that a "*PHI AM*" spirit sleeps on his chest.

For example, the belief about widow ghosts which prompts men in some northeastern villages to put on lipstick (widow ghosts then believe they are women) before retiring to bed, or to place effigies in front of their houses, cannot be proven true. But it involves no fraud and makes the villagers feel better.

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- ผีกระสือ or "*PHI KRASEU*" is a evil spirit.

The spirit "*PHI KRASEU*" is a malicious and very dangerous spirit which manifests itself as a beautiful woman. It floats through the air because it has no lower body. It appears as a length of intestines suspended from a lovely woman face.



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- เปรต or "*PRET*" are creatures that suffer as a result of their bad deeds in their previous lives. They are portrayed as extremely thin and tall. Their mouths are as small as a pinhole so they are always hungry as they cannot find enough food to feed them. They are moaning loudly out of intense pain and suffering.

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- ผีตายโหง or "*PHI TAI HONG*" are the most fearful ghost.

These spirits died of violent death (murder, crash car and so on...). The velocity of their death surprised them. The most powerful of all is "*PHI TAI HONG TONG KLOM*" (ผีตายโหงทองกลม), spirit of a pregnant woman. This ghost is more powerful because it has the power of two people.

Thai people are really afraid of these ghosts. Even today the belief is still strong in Thai society. Some ghosts' stories are often based on women already pregnant and abandoned by their husband or boyfriend. After committing suicide, the ghosts of these women could be seen wandering and looking after their mate.

Some people still believe that an undertaker shall use needles to sew up the mouth, a death ritual believed to prevent the spirit of a person who died young and in a violent manner from haunting the living.

Following the 2004 deadly tsunami, tales of ghost sightings in the six worst hit southern provinces have become endemic, with many locals saying they are too terrified to venture near the beach or into the ocean. Health experts described as an outpouring of delayed mass trauma.

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- พญานาค or "*PHAJANAK*" is a mystical snake living in the Mekong river.

People living close to Mekong river, especially in "*ISAN*" area have a strong belief in the "*PHAJANAK*". Thai and Lao people avoid swimming in Mekong river due to the "*PHAJANAK*" threat. It grabs the legs of people swimming and brings them under water to be used like servants. Some villagers have seen a "*PHAJANAK*" coming from the Mekong rolling around a tree.