

A FOLK TAXONOMY OF TERMS FOR GHOSTS AND SPIRITS IN THAI¹

Manasikarn Hengsuwan²
Amara Prasithratsint³

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยส่วนใหญ่ ในอดีตมุ่งศึกษาบทบาทของผีในสังคม และแสดงให้เห็นว่าวิถีชีวิตของคนไทยผูกพันอยู่กับผีตั้งแต่เกิดจนกระทั่งตาย ยังไม่มีผลงานใดที่ศึกษา “ผี” เพื่อตีแผ่มโนทัศน์ของคนไทยอย่างเป็นระบบ ดังนั้น งานวิจัยนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์ระบบคำเรียกผี จัดจำพวกประเภทคำเรียกผี และตีความโลกทัศน์ของคนไทย ที่สะท้อนผ่านความหมายของคำเรียกผี โดยใช้วิธีที่เรียกว่า “การจัดจำพวกแบบชาวบ้าน” ซึ่งเป็นวิธีวิเคราะห์อย่างหนึ่งในอรรถศาสตร์ชาติพันธุ์

ผู้วิจัยเก็บข้อมูลด้วยการสัมภาษณ์ผู้บอกภาษาจำนวน 15 คน ซึ่งถูกคัดเลือกอย่างเฉพาะเจาะจงจากชาวบ้านในชุมชนวัดสวนแก้ว ตำบลบางเลน อำเภอบางใหญ่ จังหวัดนครปฐม ซึ่งถือเป็นตัวแทนทางความคิดของผู้พูดภาษาไทยส่วนใหญ่ ผลการศึกษาพบประเภทผีทั้งหมด 49 ประเภท ซึ่งจัดจำพวกแบบชาวบ้านออกเป็น 5 ระดับชั้น คือชั้นจุดเริ่มหนึ่งเดียว ชั้นรูปแบบชีวิต ชั้นบอกหมวด ชั้นเฉพาะเจาะจง และชั้นชนิดย่อย โดยชั้นจุดเริ่มหนึ่งเดียวมีคำเรียกผีเพียงคำเดียวคือ ผี (1) ซึ่งมีความหมายกว้างมากที่สุด ชั้นรูปแบบชีวิตมีคำเรียกผี 2 คำ คือ ผี (2) และ วิญญาณ สำหรับชั้นบอกหมวดมีคำเรียกผี 7 คำ เช่น ผีสวนทวด ผีเสื้อ ผีปอบ ส่วนชั้นเฉพาะเจาะจงเป็นระดับชั้นที่อยู่ภายใต้ชั้นบอกหมวดมีคำเรียกผีอยู่มากที่สุดคือ 33 คำ เช่น นางไม้ ผีป่า เปรต ระดับชั้นสุดท้ายคือชั้นชนิดย่อยมีคำเรียกผี 6 คำ เช่น เจ้าแม่ไทร เจ้าแม่ชะมด นางตานี

ผลการวิเคราะห์ความหมายของคำเรียกผีแสดงให้เห็นว่าผู้พูดภาษาไทยคิดว่าผีมีวิถีการดำรงอยู่เหมือนคน ผีส่วนใหญ่มีรูปร่างเหมือนคน และผีบางประเภทก็ยังมีความเป็นคนอยู่ ผีแต่ละประเภทถูกจำแนกออกจากกันด้วยพฤติกรรมการทำความดี ความชั่ว เพศ อายุ ที่อยู่อาศัย และอาหารที่ผีกิน นอกจากนี้ ผลการวิจัยยังแสดงให้เห็นว่าคนไทยมีทัศนคติทางลบต่อผี คือเห็นว่าผีเป็นสิ่งที่น่ากลัว น่ารังเกียจ คิดลบจนได้ อย่างไรก็ตามผีก็มีบทบาทสำคัญในการควบคุมสังคม

¹“การจัดจำพวกแบบชาวบ้านของคำเรียกผีในภาษาไทย”

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² (มนตรีการ เสงสุวรรณ) Ph.D. Candidate,

Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts,
Chulalongkorn University

³ (อมรา ประสิทธิ์รัฐสินธุ์) Emeritus Professor,

Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts,
Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract

Previous studies show that Thai people's ways of life and traditions from birth to death are related to ghosts. Most of the studies deal with the role of ghosts in Thai society but there has been no study on ghost terms in Thai, which would reflect the ghost system in Thai thoughts. Thus, this study aims to analyze the system and categorization of terms for ghosts and spirits in Thai. Folk taxonomy, which is a method in the ethnosemantic approach, has been adopted for the analysis.

Data elicitation of the meanings of Thai ghost terms was done at Wat Suan Kaew Community, Tambon Bang Len, Amphoe Bang Yai, Nonthaburi Province, as representative of the mainstream Thai community. Fifteen intentionally selected informants were interviewed. The result of the analysis shows that there are forty nine categories of ghosts and spirits in Thai. They are classified into a taxonomy of five hierarchical classes: unique beginner, life-form, generic, specific, and varietal. There is only one unique beginner term: *phǐi*(1) 'ghost+spirit'. There are two life-form terms: *phǐi*(2) 'ghost' and *winyaan* 'spirit'. As for generic ghost terms under life form, there are seven. Thirty three specific ghost terms were found e.g., *naaŋ-máay* 'female spirit of a tree', *phǐi-pàa* 'forest demon', *prèet* 'evil tall spirit', etc. There are six sub-specific or varietal ghost terms, such as *câaw-mêe-say* 'female banyan tree spirit', *câaw-mêe-mákhăam* 'female tamarind tree spirit', *naaŋ-taani* 'female banana tree spirit', etc.

It should be noted that Thai people conceive of ghosts as human. Indeed, most types of ghosts have a human shape and

some even are human. Thai ghosts are distinguished by their kindness or malevolence, sex, age, dwelling place and the food they take.

Furthermore, it has been found that Thai people have negative attitudes towards ghosts as can be seen from the meanings of ghost terms. They find ghosts frightening, disgusting, and susceptible to bribes or dogged with misfortune as a result of karma. However, ghosts are seen as a means of controlling society.

Introduction

Previous studies have shown that the Thai daily way of life is related to their belief in ghosts from the time they are born to the time they die. Phaithayawatthana (1995: 91) states that Thai people believe that ghosts are in everything and that human beings belong to certain ghosts even before they are born. Some believe that powerful ghosts invent a human body through magic and give life to it by catching an aimless soul, putting it into the body and bringing that live body to a mother's womb. There is, therefore, a Thai tradition called *súu lûuk* (meaning 'buying a child'), which has led to a ceremony in which a mother pretends to buy her newborn baby from a ghost, otherwise, the ghost will take the newborn back in three days, and it will die if the parents have not observed the tradition. If the newborn can survive this period, it will thrive. This belief underlies the saying: "A newborn belongs to a ghost for three days and to a human being for four days" (Phaithayawatthana 1995: 95). Another tradition based on the belief in ghosts involves deceiving ghosts that the baby is not human or is too ugly to take. Thai people do this by making a comment on a newborn baby such as "What an ugly

baby!” and naming their baby after an unpleasant thing or with an animal name, e.g. *dam* ‘black’, *mûwt* ‘dark’, *măa* ‘dog’ and *phûng* ‘bullfrog,’ etc. In addition, there is a tradition of performing a ceremony over a dead body to pacify the spirit and stop it from coming out and shocking humans. This is based on the belief that when a human being dies, it will be transformed into a living ghost.

The oldest written record that serves as evidence showing the Thai belief in ghosts is 716 years old. It is the first stone inscription of the Sukhothai period (1238-1438) that says the following:

“In the North of Sukhothai city, there is a entity where a scholarly monk lives in, a barrage, a forest of coconut and areca palms, mango and tamarind trees, and water resources. There is also *prá-khà-phuṅ-phĩi*⁴ in that mountain. It is more powerful than the other ghosts in the city. If a ruler offers worship to it, the city will prosper. If not, the city will not be protected and finally, will face a catastrophe.”

(The Fine Arts Department 1984)

The above quotation signifies that Sukhothai people made offerings to *prá-khà-phuṅ-phĩi*, the leader of ghosts and spirits in the Sukhothai City in order that it would protect them and allow them to live peacefully. It is generally accepted that after Brahmanism and Buddhism came to the city, their doctrines and practices harmonized with the tradition of worshipping ghosts and spirits as can be seen in several religious ceremonies in

⁴ *prá-khà-phuṅ-phĩi* means ‘the most powerful spirit.’

Thai people’s everyday life; for example, Buddhist ceremonies of offering alms to monks, making merit and funeral rites, etc., and Brahman ceremonies of establishing a spirit house, offering rice and summoning one’s spirit (*khwǎn*) to stay in and protect one’s body. This ceremony is called *baay-sĩi-sùu-khwǎn* and rites about ghosts, e.g. house-blessing and ghost-feeding ceremonies.

Obviously, the more roles ghosts have played in everyday life, the more terms for them are to be found in the Thai language. However, although it is observed that there are many ghost terms in Thai, nobody knows how many there are, exactly, how they are categorized in Thai cognition and what each category specifically denotes and connotes.

All of the questions above make it necessary to study terms for ghosts and spirits in Thai thoroughly and systematically. This study, therefore, is an attempt to analyze such terms using an ethnosemantic approach, which according to Prasithratsint (2006: 79), means arriving at a people’s way of thinking and worldview through the study of the meanings of certain words in their language. In this study, the meanings of the terms for ghosts and spirits were analyzed from the native Thai viewpoint and were finally categorized into a taxonomic system. Also, from the denotations and connotations of the terms, the concepts of “ghost” and “spirit” in Thai cognition are clearly depicted and Thai attitudes toward ghosts are inferred.

Folk taxonomy has been used in ethnosemantic studies for classifying the indigenous system of categorization. Frake (1961: 115) analyzed disease terms in Subanun in the Philippines. He found that

the diagnostic category was labelled by the disease name. On the other hand, several diseases names might indicate just a single illness. So, Subanun speakers had to use these medical terms carefully, otherwise the others would not understand what they wanted to describe. Frake (1961) said that the Subanun's disease concepts were different from Western ones. Berlin (1992) and Berlin, Breedlove, and Raven (1973) studied folk biology and proposed that there were five universal ethnobiological hierarchical categories: *unique beginner*, *life form*, *generic*, *specific* and *varietal* (See definitions of these terms below). Indeed, a number of studies applied the folk taxonomy approach to the classification of Thai cultural terms. For example, Pumyoo (2005) compared the systems of rice classification in Southeast Asian languages, including Thai, using folk taxonomy, and Panyaatisin (2009) showed the result of his analysis of the system of cooking terms in Northern Thai dialect through a folk taxonomy.

In the present study, the data used in the analysis consisted of terms for ghosts and spirits and their meanings. The terms were taken from fiction and non-fiction concerned with mystery, magic, and superstition. The meanings of the terms were elicited through interviews with fifteen informants, who were deliberately selected from the Wat Suan Kaew Community, Tambon Bang Len, Amphoe Bang Yai, Nonthaburi Province, which was generally regarded as representative of a regular community of mainstream Thai people. The informants were native speakers of Standard Thai who had lived in that community since birth and were over fifty years old. They had completed compulsory education; i.e., level 4 in elementary school. Among the fifteen

informants, eleven of them were orchardists, and the rest had been hired to do odd jobs in the community. They were all native speakers of Thai who lived in a Thai cultural environment with very little or no influence from other cultures. Thus, the information elicited from them would be expected to lead us to a knowledge and understanding of the Thai way of thinking related to ghosts and spirits.

In the process of data collection, at first we collected all the terms signifying any kind of supernatural being. Later on, however, only traditional ghost terms in Standard Thai were adopted for analysis. Therefore, terms in other dialects and recently created terms that signified ghosts of utensils, such as shampoo ghosts, soap ghosts, refrigerator ghosts, air-conditioner ghosts, etc., were removed from the list. Ultimately, there were altogether fifty six terms used in the analysis. Ideally, one term should represent one conceptual category, but we found that those fifty six terms represented only forty nine ghost categories. The reason for the discrepancy between the number of terms and categories represented by the terms was that, in some cases, more than one term represented a single category. All the terms can be seen in Table 1.

A folk taxonomy of Thai ghost terms

The results of the analysis of the meanings of all the ghost terms mentioned above enabled us to categorize all the terms and arrange them into a hierarchical folk taxonomy. We adopted Berlin's technical terms representing levels in taxonomy (Berlin 1992). He proposed five levels in the ethnobiological classification of plants and animals in traditional societies: *unique*

beginner, life form, generic, specific and varietal.

These five significant concepts seem to be most applicable to the classification of ghost terms. *Unique Beginner* is the topmost level of the hierarchy. It is the highest and most inclusive rank consisting of only one term that includes every term under it. The second is *life form* meaning the body form representing a kind of organism. Even though we are not sure whether all would agree that ghosts and spirits are organisms, we think that the term *life form* is applicable to an identifiable category of a group of supernatural things. The main principles of a folk taxonomy are *contrast* and *inclusion*. This means that each term is in contrast with others at the same level and is included in the term at the above level. Thus *life forms* contrast with one another and are included in *unique beginner*. At the same time, under *life form* there are other terms included. This level is called *generic* meaning general class or group. This term also suits the classification of ghosts and spirits in Thai in terms of describing a general class in which there are many sub-categories, labeled by Berlin (1992) as *specific*, meaning a special or particular class. As will be seen later, some ghost terms are particular and can be grouped under *generic*. The last level is *varietal*, here meaning something that deviates from a *specific* kind. Thus, *varietal* is included in *specific*. The *varietal* level is the lowest of the taxonomy. Below is a folk taxonomy of ghost terms in Thai.

Table 1: folk taxonomy of ghost terms in Thai

Unique beginner	Life form	Generic	Specific	Varietal	
<i>phǐi(i)</i> 'ghost+spirit'	<i>wiɲyaan</i> 'spirit'	<i>phǐi-hàa-saataan</i> or <i>phûut-phǐi-piisàat</i> 'bad spirit'	<i>naaŋ-máay</i> 'female spirit of a tree'	<i>câaw-mêɛ-say</i> 'female spirit of a banyan tree'	
				<i>câaw-mêɛ-mákhâam</i> 'female spirit of a tamarind tree'	
				<i>naaŋ-taani</i> 'female spirit of a banana tree'	
				<i>naaŋ-tákhian</i> 'female spirit of a ta-khian tree'	
			<i>phǐi-ŋûak</i> 'mermaid ghost'		
			<i>phǐi-pàa</i> 'jungle demon'		
			<i>phǐi-thalee</i> 'sea ghost'		
			<i>phǐi-náam</i> or <i>phǐi-praay</i> or <i>praay-náam</i> 'water ghost'		
			<i>phǐi-taay-tháp-klom</i> or <i>phǐi-taay-thóoŋ-klom</i> 'female ghost dying during pregnancy'		
			<i>prêet</i> 'tall evil ghost'		
			<i>yommabaan</i> 'the chief guardian of hell'		
			<i>yommathûut</i> 'guardian of hell'		
			<i>phǐi-rêerôn</i> 'stray ghost'		
			<i>phǐi-hàa</i> 'bad spirit causing epidemic'		
			<i>piisàat</i> 'devil'		
			<i>phǐi-sǎaŋ-theewadaa</i> 'good spirit'	<i>mêɛ-yâa-naaŋ</i> 'female guardian spirit of a boat'	
				<i>thee-phaa-ráak</i> or <i>rúk-khà-theewadaa</i> 'male guardian spirit of a tree'	
		<i>pùu-sóom</i> 'old male guardian spirit of treasure'			
		<i>câaw-khǎw</i> 'spirit of a mountain'			
		<i>câaw-pàa</i> 'spirit of a forest'			
		<i>mêɛ-phoosòp</i> 'goddess of rice'			
		<i>mêɛ-khoŋkhaa</i> 'goddess of a river'			
		<i>mêɛ-thooranij</i> 'goddess of land'			
		<i>theewadaa</i> 'angel'		<i>thêep-thíidaa</i> or <i>naaŋ-fáa</i> 'female deity'	
				<i>thêep</i> 'male deity'	
		<i>phrá-sûa-muaŋ</i> 'guardian spirit of a city'			
		<i>câaw-phôp</i> 'benevolent male spirit'			
		<i>câaw-mêɛ</i> 'benevolent female spirit'			
		<i>câaw-thíi</i> or <i>câaw-thíi-câaw-thaaŋ</i> 'guardian spirit of a place'			
		<i>phrá-phuum</i> 'male guardian spirit dwelling in a spirit house'			
		<i>phǐi-bâan-phǐi-ruaŋ</i> 'house spirit'			
		<i>mêɛ-súuu</i> 'female spirit that protects an infant'			

			<i>naaŋ-kwàk</i> ‘female spirit who attracts customers’		
			<i>kuman-thooŋ</i> ‘golden child spirit’		
			<i>rákyom</i> ‘twin children ghosts’		
	<i>phǐi(2)</i> ‘ghost’		<i>phǐi-dùut-lûat</i> ‘blood sucking ghost’	<i>phǐi-díp</i> ‘uncremated ghost’	
				<i>drêk-khiw-lâa</i> ‘Dracula’	
			<i>kràsũu</i> ‘female demon with internal organs outside the body’		
			<i>kràhǎŋ</i> ‘male demon with two winnowing baskets as wings’		
			<i>pòop</i> ‘greedy man-ghost’		
	<i>lûuk-kròk</i> ‘fetus ghost’				

Table 2: the unique beginner *phǐi(1)* ‘ghost+spirit’

Unique beginner	English equivalent	Meaning
<i>phǐi(1)</i> ผี (1)	‘ghost+spirit’	A supernatural being manifested in any form, which may be visible or invisible.

The first level: unique beginner

The *unique beginner* has the broadest meaning (See Table 2). It is represented by only one term: *phǐi(1)* ‘ghost+spirit’. Based on the analysis of traditional meanings and the informants’ judgment, all the other ghost terms presented in this article are included in this level of *unique beginner*. Indeed, this unique beginner of ghost terms in Thai distinguishes between what is a ghost and what is not. Such terms as *lũaŋ-pùu* ‘an old monk’, *sàdèt-phôo-ròo-háa* ‘King Rama the Fifth’ are not ghost terms—none of the informants said they were, when they were asked “Is this (the term) *phǐi*?”.

It is important to note that the word pronounced [phǐi] in Thai has two meanings, as shown in Tables 2 and 3. The difference in meaning is significant with regard to the breadth of each denotation, which suggests a hierarchical

difference. Thus, we conclude that there are two words in the same phonetic form: *phǐi(1)*, with the broader or more general meaning and *phǐi(2)*, being the narrower in meaning.

The most general ghost term in Thai, the *unique beginner phǐi(1)*, can be seen when it occurs in such sentences as (1) and (2).

(1) *khǎw chûa rûaŋ phǐi(1)* .
he believe story ghost
‘He believes in ghosts.’

(2) *phǐi(1) pen sîŋ nâa-klua* .
ghost be thing terrifying
‘Ghosts are terrifying things.’

The second level: *life form*

Next in the taxonomy from the *unique beginner* is the *life form* level containing two terms: *phǐi(2)* ‘ghost’ and *winyaan* ‘spirit’. They are in contrast with each other and are both immediate subcategories of the *unique beginner*. Analysis of the meanings of the terms (See Table 4) and the informants’ judgment confirm this. All of the interviewees said both *phǐi(2)* ‘ghost’ and *winyaan* ‘spirit’ are included in *phǐi(1)* ‘ghost+ spirit.’

Table 3: *life forms* *phǐi(2)* ‘ghost’ and *winyaan* ‘spirit’

<i>Unique beginner: phǐi(1)</i> ‘ghost+spirit’		
<i>Life form</i>	English equivalent	Meaning
<i>phǐi(2)</i> ผี(2)	‘ghost’	A supernatural being transformed from a deceased person or animal. It is visible and touchable and can appear in any shape. (opposite to <i>winyaan</i> ‘spirit’)
<i>winyaan</i> วิญญาณ	‘spirit’	A spirit, which is intangible, invisible and has no identifiable form. (opposite to <i>phǐi(2)</i> ‘ghost’)

These two terms in the second level occur in such sentences as (3) and (4).

- (3) *phǐi-kràsũu pen phii(2)*
Krasue be ghost
thĩ raw mɔɔŋ hěn dǎay.
that we look see can
‘Krasue is a ghost that we can see.’

- (4) *phũuchaay khon nán pàat*
man person that may
pen phǐi(2) phró chɔɔp
be ghost because(he) likely
hǎay pay tɔɔn khlaŋ kũun.
Disappear away at middle night
‘That man may be a ghost because he is likely to disappear at night.’

- (5) *chǎn mɔɔŋ mǎy hěn tɛɛ*
I look not see but
rúu-sũk wǎa winyaan
feel that spirit
khun-taa yũu thĩ-nĩ.
grandfather be here
‘I cannot see it but feel that my grandfather’s spirit is here.’

The third level: *generic*

The third level in the folk taxonomy of ghost terms in Thai is the *generic* level, which is under *life form*. There are eight terms representing seven categories at this level. Three of them; namely, *phǐi-sǎaŋ-theewadaa* ‘good spirit’, *phǐi-hàa-saataan* and *phũut-phǐi-piisàat*, both meaning ‘bad spirit’ are under *winyaan* ‘spirit’ in the second level. The rest are five terms representing ghost categories under *phǐi(2)* ‘ghost,’ which contrasts with *winyaan* ‘spirit.’ The five categories share one important characteristic; i.e., they are ghosts that are visible and touchable. Actually, we can say that they are humans who have become ghosts. For example, *kràsũu* is a human being who has become a ghost. At night, she usually goes out of her house and roams in the surroundings to find rotten things to feed on. Most of the time she appears and behaves as a normal human being. The meanings of the *generic* categories can be seen in Table 4 and Table 5 below.

Table 4: generic ghost categories under the life form *winyaan* ‘spirit’

<i>life form: winyaan</i> ‘spirit’		
<i>Generic</i>	<i>English equivalent</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>phǐi-sǎaṅ-theewadaa</i> ผีสงเทวดา	‘good spirit’	A good spirit who brings fortune and prosperity to man. It does not do harm or cause trouble to man.
<i>phǐi-hàa-saataan</i> ผีห่าซาดาน or <i>phûut-phǐi-piisàat</i> ภูติผีปีศาจ	‘bad spirit’	A dreadful wicked spirit who causes sufferings and all sorts of trouble.

Table 4 shows two *generic* terms under *winyaan* ‘spirit’ in the life form level. They are long compound words with collective meanings. The first one is composed of three words: *phǐi* meaning ‘ghost,’ *sǎaṅ* also meaning ‘ghost,’ (archaic), and *theewadaa* meaning ‘angel.’ Altogether, the compound means collectively ‘good spirit.’ The term *phǐi-hàa-saataan* is composed of *phǐi* meaning ‘ghost,’ *hàa* meaning ‘bad spirit causing an epidemic’ and *saataan* ‘devil’ The whole compound means ‘bad spirit.’ The last one *phûut-phǐi-piisàat* is composed of *phûut* ‘demon,’ *phǐi* ‘ghost,’ and *piisàat* meaning ‘devil.’ The compound means exactly the same as *phǐi-hàa-saataan*. They both denote the same category of ‘bad spirit.’

The following are examples of sentences in which the above *generic* terms occur (Examples 6, 7, 8).

- (6) *khǒohây phǐi-sǎaṅ theewadaa*
ask good spirit
khúm-khrooṅ phûak-raw.
protect we
‘May good spirits protect us!’

- (7) *khon thay baaṅ khon chûa*
person Thai some person believe
wâa rûaṅ leew-ráay
that happening bad
tháṅ-lǎay kǎyt càak kaan
all born from NOMINAL
kràtham khǒoṅ
action of
phûut-phǐi-piisàat rǔm
Bad spirit or
sîṅ nǔa thammachâat.
thing above nature
‘Some Thai people believe that all bad things are caused by bad spirits or supernatural things.’

- (8) *phǐi-hàa saataan ton day*
Bad spirit person which
don-bandaan hây khun tham chûa
inspire give you do evil
‘Which bad spirit inspired you to do evil things?’

Table 5: generic ghost categories under the life form *phǐi(2)* ‘ghost’

<i>life form: phǐi(2)</i> ‘ghost’		
Generic	English equivalent	Meaning
<i>kràsũũ</i> กระสือ	‘female demon with internal organs outside the body’	A woman who has become a demon whose body consists merely of a head and internal organs, such as the heart, the lungs, the intestines. She can emit a gloomy green light during the night while feeding herself. Her food is raw meat, excrement, fresh placenta and dirty things.
<i>kràhǎŋ</i> กระหัง	‘male demon with two winnowing baskets as wings’	A man who has become a demon who feeds on excrement, dirt and the fresh entrails of a dead body. He has two wings made of winnowing baskets (<i>kràdôŋ</i>).
<i>pòɔp</i> ปอบ	‘greedy man-ghost’	A male or female who is believed to become a ghost that is very greedy and feeds on fresh entrails, dead bodies and live animals.
<i>phǐi-dùut-lũat</i> ผีดูดเลือด	‘blood sucking ghost’	A human who has become a ghost which is believed to feed on fresh blood.
<i>lũuk-kròɔk</i> ลูกพรอก	‘fetus ghost’	A premature baby who dies when it is born and becomes a tiny ghost. It is believed that if people worship it, it will bring them luck, and, in contrast, it can bring them misfortune if it is not satisfied.

The five terms under *phǐi(2)* ‘ghost’ represent five categories of ghosts that share one important characteristic; i.e., they are humans who have become ghosts. *kràsũũ* (female) and *kràhǎŋ* (male) are human beings who have become ghosts. At night, they usually go out to find food. Examples of using the words *kràsũũ* (female) and *kràhǎŋ* (male) are as follows.

9) *chǎn khít wáa sěɛŋ*
I thought that light
sǐi khǐaw thǐi hěŋ pen
color green that see be
kràsũũ pró mii tɛɛ
female demon because have but

hũa lé krũaŋnaay thǎwnán
head and entrails only
‘I am absolutely sure that the green
light is *kràsũũ* because there is only
a head and entrails.’

(10) *kràhǎŋ tii piik*
male demon hit wings
kràdôŋ looy
winnowing basket fly
nǐi chawbǎan.
escape villagers
‘*krà-hǎŋ* flies away with his
winnowing basket wings.’

Similarly, *pòp* is a human who has become a ghost that eats greedily. It can be anyone in the family who turns into *pòp*, as in (11).

- (11) *yaay hǐw tǎlòt wəelaa*
 Grandma hungry all time
thángthīi kin cù
 although eat very much
chǎn wáa kεε khoŋ
 I think she likely
pen pòp.
 be ghoulish
 ‘Grandma/old woman is hungry all the time though she eats a lot. I think she is probably a *pòp*.’

As for *phǐi-dùut-lûat*, it is a human that has become a blood-sucking ghost, as shown in (12).

- (12) *thɯr khoŋ thùuk*
 you might passive
phǐi-dùut lûat
 ghost that drinks people’s blood
kàt nêe pró tua sīit
 bite sure because body pale
lé mii rɔɔy khíaw sǔɔŋ
 and have scar teeth two
sīi bon khoɔ.
 piece on neck
 ‘You might have been bitten by *phǐi-dùut-lûat* because your body is pale and there is a two-teeth bite scar on your neck.’

- (13) *chǎn líaŋ lúukkròk*
 I have raised foetus ghost
mǔan lúuk chǎn phúut
 like child I speak
kháp khǎw bǎy-bǎy
 with him often

‘I have raised the foetus ghost like my child. I speak to him often.’

The fourth level: *specific*

In this section, we will show specific terms under the *generic* level. Altogether thirty three **specific** ghost categories were found. Nineteen specific categories are under *phǐi-sǎaŋ-theewadaa* ‘good spirit’, twelve under *phǐi-hàa-saataan* or *phúut-phǐi-piisàat* ‘bad spirit,’ and two under *phǐi-dùut-lûat* ‘blood sucking ghost.’ Table 6 shows the specific categories under the generic *phǐi-sǎaŋ-theewadaa* ‘good spirit’, Table 7 shows those under *phǐi-hàa-saataan* or *phúut-phǐi-piisàat* ‘bad spirit,’ and Table 8 shows the two categories under *phǐi-dùut-lûat* ‘blood sucking ghost.’

Table 6: Specific ghost categories under the generic *phǐi-sǎaη-theewadaa* ‘good spirit’

<i>Generic: phǐi-sǎaη-theewadaa</i> ‘good spirit’		
<i>Specific</i>	English equivalent	Meaning
<i>mĕɛ-yāa-naaη</i> แม่ย่านาง	‘female guardian spirit of a boat’	The goddess guardian of boats, carts, cars and other vehicles. Those who believe in this ghost need to offer bribes and colorful garments to her so that she will protect them.
<i>theephaa-ráak</i> เทพารักษ์ or <i>rúkkhà-theewadaa</i> ภูทอกเทวดา	‘male guardian spirit of a tree’	A spirit dwelling in a particular tree in the forest who is in charge of protecting trees from being cut by humans.
<i>pùu-sǒom</i> ปู่โสม	‘old male guardian spirit of treasure’	The spirit of a very old man who is believed to be unable to leave his possessions. Therefore, it has to guard his property forever.
<i>cāaw-khǎw</i> เจ้าเขา	‘spirit of a mountain’	A spirit who is more powerful than other spirits in a particular mountain. Most people who pass by have to bribe or pay respect to it so as to be protected from mysterious harm. This term usually occurs with <i>cāaw-pàa</i> ‘spirit of a forest’ to form a semantic doublet: <i>cāaw-pàa-cāaw-khǎw</i> ‘spirits of forests and mountains’
<i>cāaw-pàa</i> เจ้าป่า	‘spirit of a forest’	A spirit which has more special powers than other neighboring spirits in a particular forest. People who pass by have to offer to pay respect to it so as to be protected from mysterious harm. This term usually occurs with <i>cāaw-khǎw</i> ‘spirit of a mountain’ to form a semantic doublet: <i>cāaw-pàa-cāaw-khǎw</i> ‘spirits of forests and mountains’
<i>mĕɛ-phoosòp</i> แม่โพสพ	‘goddess of rice’	The female spirit which protects all paddy rice fields.
<i>mĕɛ-khoηkhaa</i> แม่คงคา	‘goddess of a river’	The female spirit which protects rivers
<i>mĕɛ-thooranii</i> แม่ธรณี	‘goddess of land’	The female spirit which protects land.
<i>theewadaa</i> เทวดา	‘angel’	A male or female deity who has a beautiful seductive body and dwells with joy in heaven. He or she has more ability and power than humans.

A Folk Taxonomy of Terms for Ghosts and Spirits in Thai

<i>phrá-sūta-muaŋ</i> พระเสื้อเมือง	'guardian spirit of a city'	A spirit who dwells at the main shrine of a city. His duty is to guard the city.
<i>cāaw-phôo</i> เจ้าพ่อ	'benevolent male spirit'	A male spirit praised and bribed by believers who think that he can bring them fortune, prosperity or solve some difficulties they have undergone. A Thai style shrine is often established for his dwelling and as a symbol of people's respect for him.
<i>cāaw-mêe</i> เจ้าแม่	'benevolent female spirit'	Similar to <i>cāaw-phôo</i> 'benevolent male spirit,' this term denotes a female spirit who is praised and bribed by surrounding people because they believe that she can bring them fortune, prosperity or solve some difficulties they have undergone. A Thai style shrine is often built for her dwelling and as a symbol of people's respect for her.
<i>cāaw-thīi</i> เจ้าที่ or <i>cāaw-thīi-cāaw-thaaŋ</i> เจ้าที่เจ้าทาง	'guardian spirit of a place'	A spirit that haunts a particular place previously owned by him/her when he or she was alive. It is believed that this demon helps protect the place from bad spirits or disasters.
<i>phrá-phuum</i> พระภูมิ	'male guardian spirit dwelling in a spirit house'	A respectable male spirit invited by the owner of a place to dwell in a shrine (called a "spirit house") in a yard. People believe that this spirit will make them prosperous, healthy and protect the house from misfortune.
<i>phǐi-bāan-phǐi-ruan</i> ผีบ้านผีเรือน	'house spirit'	A spirit that protects a house, it is believed that this spirit is the ancestor of the house's owner. It protects all the members of the house.
<i>mêe-súuu</i> แม่ซู่	'female spirit that protects an infant'	The spirit whose duty is to protect an infant from any harm. It takes care of the baby until it becomes two/three years old.
<i>naaŋ-kwàk</i> นางกวัก	'female spirit who attracts customers'	A female spirit represented by a miniature figure poses by sitting and raising one of her hands to beckon people. It is believed that she can persuade customers to purchase goods in the store or bring prosperity to the owner who bribes her.
<i>kuman -thooŋ</i> กุมารทอง	'golden child spirit'	A child spirit dwelling inside a miniature childhood stucco or wooden figure. It is believed that its owner needs to bribe it with food or other things it likes.

<p><i>rákyom</i> รัถยม</p>	<p>‘twin children ghosts’</p>	<p>The ghosts of twin children (one male, one female) in the shapes of wooden carved miniature twin figures. It is believed that these doll ghosts feed on sandalwood oil and work as guardians of people and their houses.</p>
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As shown in Table 6, all the terms represent nineteen categories of ‘good spirit,’ but they differ in terms of gender. For example, The word *câaw-phôo* ‘benevolent male spirit’, *pùu-sôom* ‘old male guardian spirit of treasure’ are male but *câaw-mêe* ‘benevolent female spirit’, *mêe-phoosòp* ‘goddess of rice’, *mêe-súuu* ‘female spirit that protects an infant’ are female.

The dwelling place also distinguishes one specific ghost term from another. For example, *theewadaa* ‘angel’ resides in heaven, *phrá-phuum* ‘a male guardian spirit of land’ dwells in a spirit house, *phǐi-bâan-phǐi-ruan* ‘house spirit’ resides in the house.

Age is another factor that differentiates specific ghost terms. While, people see the image of *pùu-sôom* ‘old male guardian spirit of treasure’ as an old spirit, they see *rákyom* ‘twin children ghosts’, and *kùman-thooŋ* the ‘golden child spirit,’ as children.

Normally, people pray to *phǐi-sǎaŋ-theewadaa* ‘good spirit’ asking it to help, to prevent and to do anything that makes them feel happier. Most of the prayers concern the situations people cannot control. People also give bribes, such as a reward or a gift. The amount of the bribe depends on the degree of work.

The more difficult for the wish to come true, the bigger bribe. The following are examples of some of those ghost terms in sentences.

(14) *coon mây klâa khùt cœedii*
thief not dare dig pagoda
boraan pró klua
old because afraid of
thùuk pùu-sôom loŋthôot
Passive old male spirit punish
‘Thieves don’t dare to dig up the old pagoda because they are afraid of *pùu-sôom*.’

(15) *chǎn thawaay námdeey*
I give red soda
kùman-thooŋ lé rákyom
golden child spirit and twin children ghost
thùuk wan pûathîi thán
every day for they
ca chûay hây chǎn
will help give I
thùuk hǎay.
won lottery

‘I offered red-soda to *kùman-thooŋ* and *rákyom* everyday, so that they would help me win a lottery prize.’

With reference to *phǐi-hàa-saataan* or *phuut-phǐi-piisàat* ‘bad spirit’ twelve categories are found, as can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Specific ghost categories under *phǐi-hàa-saataan* or *phuút-phǐi-piisàat* ‘bad spirit’

<i>Generic: phǐi-hàa-saataan</i> or <i>phuút-phǐi-piisàat</i> ‘bad spirit’		
<i>Specific</i>	English equivalent	Meaning
<i>phǐi-hàa</i> ผีท่า	‘bad spirit causing an epidemic’	A dreadfully bad spirit dwelling in water and causing an epidemic. In the past people who died from cholera due to drinking infected water were believed to die because of this bad spirit.
<i>naaη-máay</i> นางไม้	‘female spirit of a tree’	A female spirit dwelling in any kind of tree, dressed in a white traditional Thai costume. It is believed that she can harm or kill people in cases where her occupied trees are cut without asking for permission or without bribing her.
<i>phǐi-ηūak</i> ผีเงือก	‘mermaid ghost’	A spirit that dwells in fresh water, such as a pond or a river. She can harm people. Her appearance is similar to that of a woman with long hair. She likes combing her hair at twilight.
<i>prèet</i> เปรต	‘tall evil ghost’	A tortured ghost which is extremely tall, very bony and has hideously frizzy hair. It has a tiny mouth of a needle’s eye size. Therefore, it suffers greatly from hunger because it cannot eat much. Thai people believe that its existence is a result of the wicked deeds it did in the past and it dwells in hell.
<i>yommabaan</i> ยมบาล	‘the chief guardian of hell’	The chief ghost who is in charge of judging all the dead and torturing all sinners. He has a dark complexion and two long horns on this head.
<i>yommathúut</i> ยมทูต	‘guardian of hell’	The ghost who works in hell. He takes a human’s soul to hell.
<i>phǐi-rêerôn</i> ผีเร่ร่อน	‘stray ghost’	A ghost which has no particular place to dwell. It is said that this ghost used to be a wicked man.
<i>piisàat</i> ปีศาจ	‘devil’	A hideous and terrifying demon or devil who harms and haunts people.
<i>phǐi-pàa</i> ผีป่า	‘jungle demon’	A jungle demon believed to belong to a person who died in a forest. This demon cannot go anywhere because he has no one to make a merit for him.
<i>phǐi-thalee</i> ผีทะเล	‘sea ghost’	The ghost of a person who drowned in the sea.

<p><i>phǐi-náam</i> ผีน้ำ or <i>phǐi-praay</i> ผีพราย or <i>praay-náam</i> พราย น้ำ</p>	<p>‘water ghost’</p>	<p>The water ghost of a person drowned in a pond or a river.</p>
<p><i>phǐi-taay-tháŋ-klom</i> ผีตายทั้งกลม or <i>phǐi-taay-thóŋ-klom</i> ผีตายท้องกลม</p>	<p>‘female ghost dying during pregnancy’</p>	<p>A female ghost who died during pregnancy or while delivering her baby.</p>

All the ghost terms representing the twelve ghost categories share the same feature of being ‘bad spirit.’ Specifically, they are differentiated by other features, such as dwelling place, duty, gender, etc. For example, *phǐi-hàa* ‘bad spirit causing an epidemic’ and *phǐi-ŋhák* ‘mermaid ghost,’ dwell in water, while *prèet* ‘tall evil ghost,’ *yommabaan* ‘the chief guardian of hell,’ and *yommathúut* ‘guardian of hell,’ dwell in hell. The following are examples of the specific ghost terms under the ‘bad spirit’ generic term.

(16) *nâa náam mák dâyyin*
time water often hear
sǎŋróŋ plèek plèek
sound queer strange
khǎŋ phǐi-hàa
of bad spirit causing epidemic
thǐi kamlaŋ plòoy pít
that being release poison
loŋ náam.
fall water
‘In the rainy season, we often heard the strange sound of *phǐi-hàa* releasing poison into the water.’

(17) *naaŋ-máay cà tham*
female spirit of a tree will make
ráay khon thǐi may khoo
hurt person who not ask
ʔánúyâat kòŋn tát máay.
permit before cut down tree
‘*naaŋ-máay* will hurt anyone who cuts down the tree without permission.’

(18) *kray thúp tii pòŋ*
anyone hit beat (his) father
mêe mûa taay cà
mother when(he) die will
klaaypen prèet.
become evil tall ghost
‘Anyone who hurts his parents will turn into *prèet* when he passes away.’

(19) *ʔyâa lén nám naay*
do not play water in
weelaa khlaaŋ khuum
time middle night
phǐi-praay cà duŋ
water ghost will pull
khǎa tham-hǎy raw com
legs make us drown
náam taay.
water die
‘Don’t play in the water at night. The ‘water ghost’ will drown us.’

- (20) *tháa mây ?yàak thùuk*
 If not want passive
phǐi-pàa kháa taay
 jungle demon kill die
tóon sùat-mon kòon
 must pray before
kháw pàa thúk khráŋ.
 enter jungle every time
 ‘If you don’t want to be killed by
 the ‘jungle demon,’ you have to
 pray every time before you enter the
 jungle.’

Table 8: Specific ghost categories under the generic *phǐi-dùut-lûat* ‘blood sucking ghost’

<i>Specific: phǐi-dùut-lûat</i> ‘blood sucking ghost’		
Varietal	English equivalent	Meaning
<i>phǐi-díp</i> ผีดิบ	‘uncremated ghost’	A Chinese court ghost recognized by its heavy bouncing instead of walking. The word <i>díp</i> means ‘raw.’ This kind of ghost has not been cremated.
<i>drêk-khiw-lâa</i> ⁵ แดร์กควิลา	‘dracula’	A blood drinking demon whose sucks blood from a victim, who will soon become another demon like him. He hates garlic and sunlight.

As shown in Table 8, neither *drêk-khiw-lâa* ‘dracula’ nor *phǐi-díp* ‘uncremated ghost’ appear in daylight. They are both considered sub-categories of *phǐi-dùut-lûat* ‘blood sucking ghost’ as can be seen in the following examples.

- (21) *chǎn hěn*
 I see
phǐi-dùut-lûat
 ghost that drinks people’s blood
plεεŋrâaŋ pen
 transfigure be
kháaŋkhaaw bin nǐi
 bat fly escape
pay man cà tóon pen
 away it will must be
drêk-khiw-lâa nêε nêε.
 Dracula sure sure
 ‘I saw *phǐi-dùut-lûat* change
 into a bat and fly away. It must be
 dracula.’
- (22) *phǐi dip chôop*
 uncremated ghost like
dùut lûut càak lamkhoo
 drink blood from neck
khǒon dèk.
 of children
 ‘The uncremated ghost likes drinking
 blood from children’s necks.’

⁵ This term *drêk-khiw-lâa* ‘dracula’ is the borrowed from the Western term.

The fifth level: *varietal*

The last level of the folk taxonomy of ghost terms in Thai is the *varietal* level. There are only six categories in this last level. Four of them are sub-categories of *naaη-máay* ‘female spirit of a tree,’ and two are under *theewadaa* ‘angel.’

Table 9 shows varietal categories under *naaη-máay* ‘female spirit of a tree’ and Table 10 shows varietal categories under *theewadaa* ‘angel.’

Table 9: *Varietal* ghost categories under the specific *naaη-máay* ‘female spirit of a tree’

<i>Specific: naaη-máay</i> ‘female spirit of a tree’		
<i>Varietal</i>	English equivalent	Meaning
<i>naaη-tàkhian</i> นางตะเคียน	‘female spirit of a <i>ta-khian</i> tree’	A female spirit who dwells in <i>Malabar ironwood</i> . She is dressed in a white traditional Thai costume. It is believed that she can haunt and hurt people. She can even kill or possess a person so as to make him insane.
<i>naaη-taani</i> นางตานี	‘female spirit of a banana tree’	A female spirit dwelling in a banana tree. She is dressed in a greenish traditional Thai costume. It is said that a man who courts her affectionately for three days will get her as a wife. However, if he treats her badly, she will break his neck and kill him.
<i>câaw-mêε-say</i> เจ้าแม่ไทร	‘female spirit of a banyan tree’	A female spirit who dwells in a banyan tree. She is respected and offered bribes by those who have faith in her. A Thai style shrine is erected for her dwelling and as a symbol of respect for her.
<i>câaw-mêε-mákhăam</i> เจ้าแม่มะขาม	‘female spirit of a tamarind tree’	A female spirit who dwells in a tamarind tree. She is bribed by people, who also establish a spirit house for her.

As shown in Table 9 the four varietal terms representing the four sub-categories of *naaη-máay* ‘female spirit of a tree’ share the same important features— [+spirit of a tree], and [+female] but they still differ from each other by the characteristic of their dwelling in different kinds of tree. For instance, *naaη-tàkhian* signifies a female spirit dwelling in the *ta-khian* tree, *naaη-taani* dwelling in a

banana tree, *câaw-mêε-say* in a banyan tree and *câaw-mêε-mákhăam* in a tamarind tree.

Because they are under the generic level of *phǐi-hàa-saataan* or *phuut-phǐi-piisàat* ‘bad spirit,’ Thai people see them as malevolent spirits who dwell in trees, as shown in the following examples.

- (23) *naay weelaa klaaŋ khuum*
 at period middle night
thâa hěn phûu-yǐŋ yuum
 if see woman stand
khon diaw tây tôn
 man one under tree
tàkian hây rîip nǐi
 ta-kian must quickly to run
pró nân khuum
 because she is
phǐi naaŋ-tàkian.
 spirit female *ta-kian* tree spirit
 ‘At night, if you see a woman
 standing alone under the *ta-kian* tree,
 you must run away because she is a
 spirit of the *ta-kian* tree.’
- (24) *zyàa plùuk tón klúay*
 do not plant tree banana
taanii nay khèet bán
 taa-nii in area home
ป้ວໜຶ່ງກັນ ນາາຊ-ຕານີ
 protect female banana tree spirit
cà ma tham ráay raw.
 will come make hurt us
 ‘Don’t plant *ta-nii* banana tree in the
 home area because the spirit of the
 banana tree will come and hurt us.’

Under the specific term *theewadaa* ‘angel’ there are two varietal categories: *thêep -thídaa* or *naaŋ-fáa* ‘female deity’ and *thêep* ‘male deity’; *thêep -thídaa* or *naaŋ-fáa* ‘female deity’ is female, while *thêep* ‘male deity’ is male, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Varietal ghost categories under the specific *theewadaa* ‘angel’

<i>Specific: theewadaa</i> ‘angel’		
Varietal	English equivalent	Meaning
<i>thêep -thídaa</i> เทพธิดา or <i>naaŋ-fáa</i> นางฟ้า	‘female deity’	A female deity who has a beautiful and seductive physical appearance and dwells blissfully in heaven.
<i>thêep</i> เทพ	‘male deity’	A male deity who has a handsome and seductive physical appearance. He dwells with extreme joy in heaven.

The term *thêep-thídaa* or *naaŋ-fáa* ‘female deity’ shares the same characteristics with *thêep* ‘male deity’ that is [+good spirit in heaven] and Thai people respect them. It is believed that if we regularly make merit and behave well, we will be born again as a *thêep* ‘male deity,’ or *thêep -thídaa* ‘female deity.’ This shows that Thai people have faith in life after death, as seen in the following sentence.

- (25) *hàak tham khwaamdii lɛ*
 If do goodness and
mii bun mâak phoo
 have goodness many enough
cà dâŋ pay kɔ̀rɔ̀t nay
 will get go born in
sàwǎn phûuchaay cà
 heaven man will
klaaypen thêep tɛɛ

become male deity but
phûuyǐŋ cà klaaypen
woman will become
thêep-thídaa rǔũ
female deity or
naaŋ-fáa .
female deity
'If you are good and make enough
merit, you will be born again in
heaven. The man will become
a *thêep* and the woman will become
a *thêep-thídaa* or *naaŋ-fáa*.'

5. Conclusion

In the preceding pages, we have shown a system of ghosts and spirits in Thai culture. It resulted from an ethnosemantic analysis of ghost terms in Thai. The findings shown here are an arrangement of all the ghost terms into a folk taxonomy of five levels based on Berlin (1992): *unique beginner, life form, generic, specific and varietal*. Our decision as to which terms refer to which levels of the taxonomy depends on the semantic features of the ghost terms elicited from informants who are native speakers of Central Thai. Also, the placement of each term in the hierarchy is also based on the suggestion whether the term contrasts with another term or is included in it. In brief, our conclusion is not based on our own logical thinking or scientific knowledge but on the folk world view.

The findings imply that Thai people are close to nature. Indeed, most ghost terms show that ghosts have fixed dwellings, for example, trees, rivers, mountains, forests, rice fields, etc.

It has been found that only female ghost terms have titles as part of their structure, such as *naaŋ* 'female title' and *mêe* 'mother' which marks the female gender

e.g. *naaŋ-máay* 'female tree spirit', *naaŋ-taani* 'female banana tree spirit', *naaŋ-takian* 'female spirit of a kind of tree named *ta-kian*', *mêe-yâa-naaŋ* 'guardian goddess of boats', *mêe-phoosòp* 'goddess of rice' and *mêe-thoʔrani* 'goddess of the land' etc. The findings show that terms with *naaŋ*- signify bad spirits and those with *mêe*- good spirits. Also, it may be interesting to note that all male ghost terms are unmarked; they do not begin with a title.

In conclusion, the analysis of ghost terms presented in this study reveals the Thai cognition of ghost system. It also implies that in that Thai cognition, ghosts do exist because there are ghost terms to represent them. Although they cannot be seen, people perceive that they are all around.

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