A FOLK TAXONOMY OF TERMS FOR GHOSTS AND SPIRITS IN THAI

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งานวิจัยส่วนใหญ่ในด้านศิลปะนานาชาติมีในสังคม และแสดงให้เห็นว่าลักษณะของคนไทยยุคพันธุ์
อยู่ในสิ่งแวดล้อมต่าง ๆ ของสังคมไทยอย่างเป็น
ระบบ ดังนั้น งานวิจัยนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์คือ
วิเคราะห์ระบบคำศัพท์จิตจักรวาลประกอบคำศัพท์
และศัพท์โลกภายนอกของคนไทย ที่สะท้อนค่าน
ความมายาของคำศัพท์ โดยใช้วิธีที่เรียกว่า “การ
จิตจักรวาลแบบชาวบ้าน” ซึ่งเป็นวิธีการที่อย่าง
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1 ข่าวจากภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย
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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: phi/ch224:0133+6006i ‘ghost+spirit’. There are two life-form terms: phi/ch224:0133+6006i ‘ghost’ and winyaan ‘spirit’. As for generic ghost terms under life form, there are seven. Thirty three specific ghost terms were found e.g., naa/1418-1ma/ch143:0133+6102ay ‘female spirit of a tree’, phi/ch224:0133+6006i-1pa/ch221:0133+6003a ‘forest demon’, pre/ch221:0133+6003et ‘evil tall spirit’, etc. There are six sub-specific or varietal ghost terms, such as caaaw-mee-say ‘female banyan tree spirit’, caaaw-mee-makhama ‘female tamarind tree spirit’, naa-taanii ‘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 s/1117/ch219:0133+6002/lu/ch223:0133+6005uk (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. ดาญ ‘black’, ม้า ‘dark’, แม่ ‘dog’ and ทุ่ง ‘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 an 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 พระ-กษัตริย์ 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 พระ-กษัตริย์, 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 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 (กษัตริย์) to stay in and protect one’s body. This ceremony is called บาวยัน-สิ่ง-กษัตริย์ 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 Prasithrathsint (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

\[ \text{พระ-กษัตริย์} \text{ means ‘the most powerful spirit.’} \]
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 Table1.

**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
A Folk Taxonomy of Terms for Ghosts and Spirits in Thai

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unique beginner</th>
<th>Life form</th>
<th>Generic</th>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>Varietal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phi-ha-sastaan or phut-phi-piisat</td>
<td>'bad spirit'</td>
<td>naa-maa 'female spirit of a tree'</td>
<td>caaw-mee-say 'female spirit of a banyan tree'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi-thalee</td>
<td>'sea ghost'</td>
<td>phi-n裳i or phi-praay or praay-naa 'water ghost'</td>
<td>phi-ee-thay-thay-kloam or phi-ee-thay-thooy-kloam 'female ghost dying during pregnancy'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi-reeroon</td>
<td>'stray ghost'</td>
<td>phi-bhaa 'bad spirit causing epidemic'</td>
<td>piisat 'devil'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi-baan</td>
<td>'angel'</td>
<td>phi-yaa-naa 'female guardian spirit of a boat'</td>
<td>thee-pheah-raak or ruk-kaa-theewadaa 'male guardian spirit of a tree'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piisat</td>
<td>'devil'</td>
<td>theewadaa 'male guardian spirit dwelling in a spirit house'</td>
<td>phi-baan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi-isee</td>
<td>'good spirit'</td>
<td>maa-maa-naa 'female spirit of a forest'</td>
<td>caaw-khaw 'spirit of a mountain'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi-phaa</td>
<td>'jungle demon'</td>
<td>phi-praay 'benevolent female spirit'</td>
<td>caaw-phoo 'benevolent male spirit'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi-praay</td>
<td>'bad spirit'</td>
<td>phi-ee-thay-thay-kloam or phi-ee-thay-thooy-kloam 'female ghost dying during pregnancy'</td>
<td>phi-baan 'guardian spirit dwelling in a spirit house'</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Folk Taxonomy of Terms for Ghosts and Spirits in Thai

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phi</td>
<td>‘ghost+spirit’</td>
<td>A supernatural being manifested in any form, which may be visible or invisible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unique beginner</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phi</td>
<td>‘ghost+spirit’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The first level: unique beginner**

The **unique beginner** has the broadest meaning (See Table 2). It is represented by only one term: phi(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 luang-puu ‘an old monk’, sadet-phan-roo-haa ‘King Rama the Fifth’ are not ghost terms—none of the informants said they were, when they were asked ‘Is this (the term) phi?’.

It is important to note that the word pronounced [phi] 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: phi(1), with the broader or more general meaning, and phi(2), being the narrower in meaning.

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

1. khaw chaaw rwan phi(1). he believe story ghost ‘He believes in ghosts.’

2. phi(1) pen sieng naa-klua. ghost be thing terrifying ‘Ghosts are terrifying things.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unique beginner</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phi</td>
<td>‘ghost+spirit’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second level: life form

Next in the taxonomy from the unique beginner is the life form level containing two terms: phi (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 phi (2) ‘ghost’ and winyaan ‘spirit’ are included in phi (1) ‘ghost+ spirit.’

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unique beginner: phi (1) ‘ghost+spirit’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winyaan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

(3) phi-krasua pen phi (2) Krasue be ghost thi raw moo y hen daay. that we look see can ‘Krasue is a ghost that we can see.’

(4) phuchay khon nán 2aat man person that may pen phi (2) phró chwap be ghost because (he) likely háay pay toon khlap kwun. Disappear away at middle night ‘That man may be a ghost because he is likely to disappear at night.’

(5) chan moo y má y hen tè I look not see but rúu-sák wāa winyaan feel that spirit khun-taa yuu thi-nfi. 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, phi-saan-theewadaa ‘good spirit’, phi-haa-saataan and phut-phi-pisāat, both meaning ‘bad spirit’ are under winyaan ‘spirit’ in the second level. The rest are five terms representing ghost categories under phi (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, krásu 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’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phi/sa-</td>
<td>‘good spirit’</td>
<td>A good spirit who brings fortune and prosperity to man. It does not do harm or cause trouble to man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theewadaa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi-ha-saataan</td>
<td>‘bad spirit’</td>
<td>A dreadful wicked spirit who causes sufferings and all sorts of trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi-phi-piisaat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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: phi meaning ‘ghost,’ saaq also meaning ‘ghost,’ (archaic), and theewadaa meaning ‘angel.’ Altogether, the compound means collectively ‘good spirit.’ The term phi-ha-saataan is composed of phi meaning ‘ghost,’ ha meaning ‘bad spirit causing an epidemic’ and saataan ‘devil’. The whole compound means ‘bad spirit.’ The last one phuut-phi-piisaat is composed of phuut ‘demon,’ phi ‘ghost,’ and piisaat meaning ‘devil.’ The compound means exactly the same as phi-ha-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) khoo hay phi-saanka theewadaa
    ask  good spirit
    khoom-koong phua-kraw.
    protect  we
    ‘May good spirits protect us!’

(7) khon thay baap khon chuap
    person Thai some person believe
    waa rwaang leew-raay
    that happening bad
    thay-lay kyr get kaan
    all born from NOMINAL
    kratham khoong
    action of
    phuut-phi-piisaat raw
    Bad spirit or
    si ng naa thammachaat.
    thing above nature
    ‘Some Thai people believe that all bad things are caused by bad spirits or supernatural things.’

(8) phi-ha-saataan ton day
    Bad spirit person which
    don-bandaan hay khun tham chuap
    inspire give you do evil
    ‘Which bad spirit inspired you to do evil things?’
Table 5: *generic* ghost categories under the *life form* phi(2) ‘ghost’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>krāsūm</td>
<td>‘female demon with internal organs outside the body’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>krāhāŋ</td>
<td>‘male demon with two winnowing baskets as wings’</td>
<td>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 (krādōŋ).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pōōp</td>
<td>‘greedy man-ghost’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phiī-dùt-lūat</td>
<td>‘blood sucking ghost’</td>
<td>A human who has become a ghost which is believed to feed on fresh blood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lūuk-krōok</td>
<td>‘fetus ghost’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

9) ชาน ขิ่ต ว้า สีชม
    I thought that light
    สีซิกห์วิ้นหินเป็น
    color green that see be
    krāsūm พระมีที่
    female demon because have but
    หัวเล่ krāagnaay ท่านนัน
    ‘I am absolutely sure that the green light is krāsūm because there is only a head and entrails.’

(10) krāhāŋ ติ่ยี่ พัก
     male demon hit wings
     krādōŋ ไอ้ย
     winnowing basket fly
     นิ้ว ชัวบาน.
     escape villagers
     ‘krāhāŋ 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)  
\[
\text{yaay híw tálòt weelaa}  
\text{Grandma hungry all time}  
\text{tháºtthíi kin cù}  
\text{although eat very much}  
\text{chán wáa kee khoŋ}  
\text{I think she likely}  
\text{pen pòp.}  
\text{be ghoul}  
\text{‘Grandma/old woman is hungry all the time though she eats a lot. I think she is probably a pòp.’}  
\]

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

(12)  
\[
thýr khoŋ thùuk  
\text{you might passive}  
\text{phií-duùt lûat}  
\text{ghost that drinks people’s blood}  
kát nêe pró tua sîit  
bite sure because body pale  
lé mii rooy khìaw sôŋ  
and have scar teeth two  
sîi bon khoɔ.  
piece on neck  
‘You might have been bitten by phií-duùt-lûat because your body is pale and there is a two-teeth bite scar on your neck.’  
\]

(13)  
\[
chán liáŋ lûukkrò̂ok  
\text{I have raised foetus ghost}  
mûán lûuk chán phùt  
like child I speak  
khâp khâw ðỳ-ðỳ  
with him often  
\text{‘I have raised the foetus ghost like my child. I speak to him often.’}  
\]

**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 *phií-sāŋ-theewadaa* ‘good spirit’, twelve under *phií-hàa-saataan* or *phùt-phií-piisàat* ‘bad spirit,’ and two under *phií-duùt-lûat* ‘blood sucking ghost.’ Table 6 shows the specific categories under the generic *phií-sāŋ-theewadaa* ‘good spirit’, Table 7 shows those under *phií-hàa-saataan or phùt-phií-piisàat* ‘bad spirit,’ and Table 8 shows the two categories under *phií-duùt-lûat* ‘blood sucking ghost.’
### Table 6: Specific ghost categories under the generic φhi-sāaŋ-theewadaa ‘good spirit’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mēe-sāa-nāng</td>
<td>‘female guardian</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>spirit of a boat’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theephaa-rāak</td>
<td>‘male guardian spirit of a tree’</td>
<td>A spirit dwelling in a particular tree in the forest who is in charge of protecting trees from being cut by humans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pūm-sōom</td>
<td>‘old male guardian spirit of treasure’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cāaw-khāw</td>
<td>‘spirit of a mountain’</td>
<td>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 cāaw-pāa ‘spirit of a forest’ to form a semantic doublet: cāaw-pāa-cāaw-khāw ‘spirits of forests and mountains’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cāaw-pāa</td>
<td>‘spirit of a forest’</td>
<td>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 cāaw-khāw ‘spirit of a mountain’ to form a semantic doublet: cāaw-pāa-cāaw-khāw ‘spirits of forests and mountains’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mēe-phoosōp</td>
<td>‘goddess of rice’</td>
<td>The female spirit which protects all paddy rice fields.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mēe-khoŋkhāa</td>
<td>‘goddess of a river’</td>
<td>The female spirit which protects rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mēe-thooranii</td>
<td>‘goddess of land’</td>
<td>The female spirit which protects land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theewadaa</td>
<td>‘angel’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Term</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>พ่อเมือง</strong></td>
<td>'guardian spirit of a city'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A spirit who dwells at the main shrine of a city. His duty is to guard the city.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>บุญ</strong></td>
<td>'benevolent male spirit'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>บนิ</strong></td>
<td>'benevolent female spirit'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar to <strong>บุญ</strong> ‘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.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ผู้คุม</strong></td>
<td>‘guardian spirit of a place’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>พ่อบ้าน</strong></td>
<td>'male guardian spirit dwelling in a spirit house'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ผู้คุม</strong></td>
<td>'house spirit'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>แม่สั้น</strong></td>
<td>‘female spirit that protects an infant’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>แม่ค้าน</strong></td>
<td>'female spirit who attracts customers'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>กุมาร</strong></td>
<td>'golden child spirit’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

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 cääabhō ‘benevolent male spirit’, püusōom ‘old male guardian spirit of treasure’ are male but cääawmëe ‘benevolent female spirit’, mēe-phōosōp ‘goddess of rice’, mēe-siūm ‘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-phūum ‘a male guardian spirit of land’ dwells in a spirit house, phīi-bāān-phīi-rwan ‘house spirit’ resides in the house.

Age is another factor that differentiates specific ghost terms. While, people see the image of püu-sōom ‘old male guardian spirit of treasure’ as an old spirit, they see rākyom ‘twin children ghosts’, and kūman-thọọn the ‘golden child spirit,’ as children.

Normally, people pray to phīi-sāān-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 mạ y klāa khút ceedii
thief not dare dig pagoda
boraan pró klua
old because afraid of
thuück püu-sōom lọngthọot
Passive old male spirit punish
‘Thieves don’t dare to dig up the old pagoda because they are afraid of püu-sōom.’

(15) chān thawaay námdeey
I give red soda
kūman-thọọn lé rākyom
golden child spirit and twin children ghost
thuück wàn pāathii thān
every day for they
ca chúay hày chān
will help give I
thuック hūay.
won lottery
‘I offered red-soda to kūman-thọọn and rākyom everyday, so that they would help me win a lottery prize.’

With reference to phīi-hā-saataan or phūt-phīi-piisāat ‘bad spirit’ twelve categories are found, as can be seen in Table 7.
Table 7: **Specific ghost categories under phiį-hāa-saataan or phuut-phiį-piisąat ‘bad spirit’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phiį-hāa</td>
<td>‘bad spirit causing an epidemic’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naag-māay</td>
<td>‘female spirit of a tree’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phiį-ɡ̄wak</td>
<td>‘mermaid ghost’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prèet</td>
<td>‘tall evil ghost’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yommabaan</td>
<td>‘the chief guardian of hell’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yommathuut</td>
<td>‘guardian of hell’</td>
<td>The ghost who works in hell. He takes a human’s soul to hell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phiį-rēerōn</td>
<td>‘stray ghost’</td>
<td>A ghost which has no particular place to dwell. It is said that this ghost used to be a wicked man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piisąat</td>
<td>‘devil’</td>
<td>A hideous and terrifying demon or devil who harms and haunts people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phiį-pàa</td>
<td>‘jungle demon’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phiį-thalee</td>
<td>‘sea ghost’</td>
<td>The ghost of a person who drowned in the sea.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The water ghost of a person drowned in a pond or a river.

A female ghost who died during pregnancy or while delivering her baby.

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, phiī-hāa ‘bad spirit causing an epidemic’ and phiī-ŋāak ‘mermaid ghost,’ dwell in water, while prēet ‘tall evil ghost,’ yommaaabān ‘the chief guardian of hell,’ and yommathūut ‘guardian of hell,’ dwell in hell. The following are examples of the specific ghost terms under the ‘bad spirit’ generic term.

(16) nāa nāam māk dāyyin
    time water often hear
siaŋroong plēk plēk
sound queer strange
khōong phiī-hāa
of bad spirit causing epidemic
thīi kamlā phōcy pīt
that being release poison
loŋ nāam.
fall water
‘In the rainy season, we often heard the strange sound of phiī-hāa releasing poison into the water.’

(17) naaŋ-māay cā tham
    female spirit of a tree will make
ráay khon thīi may khọo
hurt person who not ask
yānuyāat kōon tāt māay.
permit before cut down tree
‘naaŋ-māay will hurt anyone who cuts down the tree without permission.’

(18) kray thūp tīi pōo
    anyone hit beat (his) father
mēc māa taay cā
mother when(he) die will
klaaypen prēet,
become evil tall ghost
‘Anyone who hurts his parents will turn into prēet when he passes away.’

(19) ỳāa lēn nām nàay
    do not play water in
weelaa khlaŋ khumw
    time middle night
phiī-preay cā duŋ
water ghost will pull
khāa tham hāy raw com
legs make us drown
nāam taay.
water die
‘Don’t play in the water at night. The ‘water ghost’ will drown us.’
The Thai text reads:

(20)  thaā  māy  līyàak  thūuk
If not want passive
jungle demon kill die
must pray before
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 phi-dūut-lāat ‘blood
sucking ghost’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific: phi-dūut-lāat ‘blood sucking ghost’</th>
<th>Varietal</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phi-dip ‘uncremated ghost’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A Chinese court ghost recognized by its heavy bouncing instead of walking. The word dip means ‘raw.’ This kind of ghost has not been cremated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drēk-khiw-lāa ‘dracula’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A blood drinking demon whose sucks blood from a victim, who will soon become another demon like him. He hates garlic and sunlight.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 8, neither drēk-khiw-lāa ‘dracula’ nor phi-dip ‘uncremated ghost’ appear in daylight. They are both considered sub-categories of phi-dūut-lāat ‘blood sucking ghost’ as can be seen in the following examples.

(21) chān hēn
I see

phi-dūut-lāat
ghost that drinks people’s blood
transfigure be
khāakhaaw  bin  nīi
bat  fly  escape
pay  man  cā  tōōŋ  pen
away it will must be
Dracula  sure  sure
‘I saw phi-dūut-lāat change into a bat and fly away. It must be dracula.’

(22) phi dip  chāoop
uncremated ghost like
dūut  lāat  cāak  lamkhū
drink blood from neck
khōoŋ  dēk.
of children
‘The uncremated ghost likes drinking blood from children’s necks.’

---

This term drēk-khiw-lāa ‘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 naa-máay ‘female spirit of a tree,’ and two are under theewadaa ‘angel.’

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Varietal</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>naa-takhian</td>
<td>‘female spirit of a takkhian tree’</td>
<td>A female spirit who dwells in <em>Malabar ironwood</em>. 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naa-taanii</td>
<td>‘female spirit of a banana tree’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cákaw-mée-say</td>
<td>‘female spirit of a banyan tree’</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cákaw-mée-mákhaam</td>
<td>‘female spirit of a tamarind tree’</td>
<td>A female spirit who dwells in a tamarind tree. She is bribed by people, who also establish a spirit house for her.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 9 the four varietal terms representing the four sub-categories of naa-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, naa-takhian signifies a female spirit dwelling in the takkhian tree, naa-taanii dwelling in a banana tree, cákaw-mée-say in a banyan tree and cákaw-mée-mákhaam in a tamarind tree.

Because they are under the generic level of phií-hàa-saataan or phuít-phií-piisát ‘bad spirit,’ Thai people see them as malevolent spirits who dwell in trees, as shown in the following examples.
(23) naay weelaa klaa khawm
at period middle night
tha hên phú-yîng yûm
if see woman stand
khon diaw tay tôn
man one under tree
tákian háy riip nîi
ta-kian must quickly to run
prô năn khawm
because she is
phiîi naa-tákian.
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) Yâa plûuk tôn klûay
do not plant tree banana
ta-nîi nay khèet bân
ta-nîi in area home
pôôkkan naa-ta-nîi
protect female banana tree spirit
câ ma tham ráay raw.
will come make hurt us
‘Don’t plant ta-nîi 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 -thîdaa or naa-fâa ‘female deity’ and thêep ‘male
deity’: thêep -thîdaa or naa-fâa ‘female deity’ is female, while thêep
‘male deity’ is male, as shown in Table 10.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Varietal</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>thêep - thîdaa</td>
<td>‘female deity’</td>
<td>A female deity who has a beautiful and seductive physical appearance and dwells blissfully in heaven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naa-fâa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thêep</td>
<td>‘male deity’</td>
<td>A male deity who has a handsome and seductive physical appearance. He dwells with extreme joy in heaven.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The term thêep-thîdaa or naa-fâa ‘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-thîdaa ‘female deity.’ This shows that Thai people have faith in life after death, as seen in the following sentence.

(25) hàak tham khwaamdii le’
If do goodness and
mîi bun mâak phûo
have goodness many enough
câ dày pay kîw nay
will get go born in
sàwân phûuchaay câ
heaven man will
klaaypen thêp tééc
become male deity but phūuyiŋ cā klaəypən
woman will become thēep-thidaa ru₄u
female deity or naaŋ-fāa.
female deity
‘If you are good and make enough merit, you will be born again in heaven. The man will become a thēep and the woman will become a thēep-thidaa or naaŋ-fāa.’

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 mēe ‘mother’ which marks the female gender e.g. naaŋ-māay ‘female tree spirit’, naaŋ-taanii ‘female banana tree spirit’, naaŋ-taiki ‘female spirit of a kind of tree named ta-kia, mēe-yāa-naaŋ ‘guardian goddess of boats’, mēe-phoosōp ‘goddess of rice’ and mēe-thooranii ‘goddess of the land’ etc. The findings show that terms with naaŋ- signify bad spirits and those with mēe- 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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