

**SYNCRETISTIC THAI RELIGION AND
CHURCH GROWTH**

BY

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PREFACE

This study consists of a synopsis of an M.A. thesis written at the School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth in 1970 entitled “Syncretistic Rural Thai Buddhism”

The subject matter of the thesis is divided into two parts. First, there is an analysis of rural Thai Buddhism (Buddhism as practiced by the Thai peasant) which incorporates sections on the origin and growth of Thai Buddhism, the world view of “pure” Thai Buddhism and the syncretistic nature of Thai Buddhism as practiced by the Thai peasant. Part two consists of the implications of this analysis for the growth of the Church in Thailand.

In the following paper I have condensed the foregoing material considerably. If the paper appears to be sketchy or lacking support at times it is largely due to this condensation.

I hope that it will be understood that what I am suggesting in this paper is not meant to be anything like a comprehensive word on the solution to the slow growth of the Church in Thailand. It is a brief look at one area which undoubtedly has a basic influence on the growth of the Church – the syncretistic religion of the Thai people.

I am firmly convinced that it is the work of God through the person of the Holy Spirit which gives growth to the Church. I am just as firmly convinced that the centrality of the role of the Holy Spirit should not tempt us to think that our role as the human agents of God is one of passivity. We each have the divinely given responsibility to exercise our mental, physical, material and spiritual abilities in seeking to carry out this work of God in this world. In the light of this I have attempted to write the following study.

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THE SYNCRETISTIC NATURE OF THAI RELIGION

It has been said that “the Buddhist religion as found in Thailand can be said to be, in its purest form, free from any dominating foreign influences”. Such a statement is not only misleading when one thinks of the great influence which Brahmanism has had on even the purest forms of Thai Buddhism, it is also highly improbable when one thinks of the syncretistic nature of the Buddhism practiced by the Thai peasant.¹

Luzbetak has defined syncretism as “the amalgamation of any innovation with an analogous element.” (1966:115) It has also been referred to as “the tendency for new cultural patterns to be combined and intermingled with existing patterns when they are adopted into a society”. (Beekman, 1959:241) When the religious behavior of the Thai peasant is the focus of our attention it is readily seen that “syncretism” is the word which best describes its practice. Lebar notes that Thai religion is comprised of three traditions.

Religious behavior (in Thailand) is a synthesis of Theravada Buddhism with remnant Brahmanistic beliefs and rituals and a strong underpinning of indigenous animism... the Thai love their Buddhism and practice it as a preparation for the next life; but in dealing with day-to-day problems and hardships they are likely to turn to the world of the spirits. (1964:219)

The roles which each of the three traditions comprising the religion of the Thai peasant play in his life are generally distinct. *Buddhism* is the basis of the moral system of the village. Texter notes that the function of Buddhism in the religious life of the Thai peasant is that of establishing a system of moral causation. (1960:546) Within the tradition moral merit is the motivating force

Animism is the basis of the daily life routine. The events of the day need both explanation and control. Animism gives both an explanation and a means of controlling and manipulating everyday events. “In times of crisis, sickness and anxiety very few Thai depend upon their accumulation of merit; instead the Thai turn to their age-old objects of propitiation, the animistic spirits”. (HRAF, 1956:353)

Brahmanism is very closely tied to the animistic practices of the Thai peasant. Together with the animistic practices it is the basis of the Thai belief in “gods”. It also plays a central role in the ritual life of the rural peasant. (HRAF, 1956:349,350)

A Veneer of Buddhism

Merit making is the “modus operandi” of Thai Buddhism. The Buddhism, which if practiced by the Thai peasant, is a Buddhism which deals basically with this process of merit making. The villagers seem unaware of the basic concepts of Buddhism outside of the few which are connected with their understanding and practice of merit making. Even such closely related themes or concepts as karma (kam) and *Nirvana* are not understood except in a broad way as they touch the process of merit making. (Keyes, 1966:196)

Buddhism is little more than a formal veneer on the religious system of the Thai peasant and even this formal veneer is strongly influenced by the animistic philosophy of life which governs the life of the Thai peasant.

“Modified Buddhist Concepts”

Textor notes five areas in which basic concepts of Buddhism have been modified by the existing animistic presuppositions of the Thai peasant.

The Buddha Statue: Contrary to the teachings of “pure” Buddhism which insists that Gautama Buddha no longer exists and therefore cannot be supplicated, the villagers constantly supplicate him via his statue and/or his goodness (khun). Most of the villagers are not aware of the position taken by “pure” Buddhism. Those that do rationalize their behavior by saying that a deva (a spiritual being from the Brahmanistic tradition) lodges in the statue of the Buddha and supplicants. Different Buddha statues aid the supplicant in different supplicants. Some are good for meeting specialized needs (such as helping one avoid conscription) and others are more versatile (such as the “Emerald Buddha”).

The Krachajjana Statue: This statue of a fat monk follower (saawok) of Buddha has a prominent place in the life of the village studied by Textor. Functionally it is on par with the Buddha statue. It aids the supplicant in similar ways as well as being good for helping one win at the lottery.

Lord of Time and Chief of Karma (caw ween naaj kam): This vague spiritual essence is believed to be connected with the existence of each individual. Its function is dual. It is first the Lord or supervisor of the amount of time that a person may expect to have in this life. Second, it is the chief of karma thereby determining the amount of karma which one will accumulate in his lifetime

This spirit is thought to personify the victims of a given individual's aggression past lives, the past of this life and in future lives. Textor notes,

(The villagers) stand in fear of retribution from the victims of these real and incipient acts of aggression. Karma will be the ultimate cause of the retribution and (the spiritual essence) personifies some natural person whom Karma will cause to become the immediate or efficient cause. Therefore (the villager) must deal ritually with (this essence) to forestall the retribution of this natural person. (1960:535)

The Preta Ghost (Phii Preed): This is the only ghost conceived of by the villagers which stems from the Buddhist tradition. It is the ghost of some person who had insufficient de-merit in life to be reborn in hell (narok) and insufficient merit to be reborn in heaven (sawan). Therefore, the ghost must remain in this present form until living persons extend enough merit to it for it to be reborn in heaven. Merit is extended by sympathetic villagers reciting a Pali phrase (Phae Bun).

The Winjaan-soul (Viganana): Buddhist teaching strictly maintains that there is no soul. It does, however, in its lists of the five Skandhas of attributes of man include the winjaan which is an Indic word meaning intelligence, consciousness or thought-faculty. At the village level, however, this term is used to mean a soul or spiritual substance which is the essence which is transmitted from death to rebirth. According to Buddhist teaching only the merit or de-merit of a person survives rebirth and is incorporated into the new existence. To the animistic villager this ongoing merit or de-merit is personified in the form of the winjaan-soul. (Texter, 1960:189-192)

Thus, while the Buddhist concepts of rebirth, merit making, karma and winjaan are part of the Thai peasant's religious system and although he may have a basic knowledge of the proper forms of action to take in regards to merit making, yet these concepts have been amalgamated with and reinterpreted by the existing animistic philosophy of the Thai peasant. To varying degrees this is true of their interaction with the whole of the Buddhist tradition.

A functional Presence of Brahmanism

The general concern of the Thai peasant with the land and its fertility has found its expression in the supernatural beings and expressions of the Brahmanistic tradition.

Prior to the migration of the Thai from Yunnan the Khmer peoples of mainland Southeast Asia were profoundly influenced by Indic Brahmanism as the result of the expansion of Indian

culture. When the Thai race moved into mainland Southeast Asia it assimilated many of the customs and beliefs of the people that conquered or merged with. Today much of this early Brahmanistic tradition remains in the religion of the Thai peasant as well as in the affairs of state.

“Functions of Brahmanism”

Brahmanism has two basic functions in the religion of the Thai peasant. First, it provides a majority, if not all, of the non-death-derived supernatural beings which the villagers revere. These “gods” are benevolent or treated well and provide a number of rewards for the conscientious supplicant. Second, it provides the villagers with a majority of their ceremonies, especially those connected with the life-cycle rites which give social and biological coherence to the community.

The pantheon of supernatural beings which the Brahmanistic tradition contributes to the religious structure of the Thai peasant is so large that it could not be adequately covered in so limited a paper.² It is sufficient to note that they consist of beings which are for the most part non death derived as contrasted with the indigenous phii which results from the death of an individual.³

The basic concept of Brahmanism is that these beings are a status into which an extremely meritorious person is born at death. These persons then maintain this status for a longer or shorter amount of time following which they are reborn again into a heavenly or worldly status. The villagers, on the other hand, regard these beings as permanent gods who are above all other supernatural beings in prestige and supplicate them accordingly.

There are no Buddhist ritual observances of the rites of passage. Only Brahmanism provides such life cycle ceremonies. The Thai have borrowed only those rites which they desired to use, leaving quite a number of the Brahmanistic rites unused. Every member of the community is involved in these rites which provide the stepping stones in the biological and social life history of the community.

Closely connected with the life-cycle rites is the Brahmanistic concept of the khwan, a “soul-like substance” similar to the winjaan-soul of Buddhist origin and the “soul-stuff” which is central to other animistic societies of the world. Each person is thought to possess at least one khwan which is essential to the well being of the individual. The soul-stuff must be kept within the body at all times, for if it wanders off and is lost the person may fall sick and even die. The baajsii sukhuan

ceremony of the northeast and the tham khwan and phuk khwan ceremonies of central Thailand all center on making an initial khwan, calling a wandering khwan back or keeping a resident khwan in the body. These ceremonies are often tied into the life-cycle ceremonies as part of the ritual to help the individual progress well in life.

A Base of Animism

Whereas the Buddhist aspect of Thai peasant religion involves the peasant in a moral system where merit is the motivating force, the animistic element of their religious behavior has nothing to do with this. The supplicant is punished only when he has overlooked some moral precept. His main association with the supernatural powers is to gain rewards, rewards which he needs for everyday living. The animistic system is completely tied up in the here and now of peasant life.

Textor notes that the villagers of the village he studied in central Thailand associated three basic types of “rewards” with the 118 non Buddhist supernatural objects and beings which they observed to a greater or lesser extent. (1) Gain rewards: there were 14 of these. In this situation the supplicant is trying to achieve a new situation. (2) Maintain rewards: there were 13. The supplicant seeks to maintain an existing desirable situation. (3) Cure rewards: there are 7. The supplicant tries to remove an existing undesirable situation. (Textor, 1960:54,55)

Each of the supernatural objects and beings observed by the villagers possess a power (it thirit) which is comprised of three basic kinds. (1) Khlang: 33 of the objects possess this “magical” power. (2) Saksit: 15 of the supernatural beings possess this “sacred” power. (3) Raeng: 17 of the supernatural beings possess this “strong” power. The rest of the supernatural beings studied by Textor cannot be classified as to the type of power they possess as there are no cultural adjectives extant to describe them. (Texter, 1960:39)

“Basic Focuses of Animism”

The animistic practices of the Thai peasant can be broken down into three basic areas of focus. The area of magic deals with those supernatural objects which are manipulated for the power that they possess. The realm of the phii (ghost or spirit) is one where both punishment and rewards are derived. Divination deals with the practice of determining the future. The first two areas are

concerned with causing or influencing an event to happen. The last area specializes in foretelling or predicting an event.

The supernatural objects which are manipulated for magic are of two basic kinds: those which can be found in nature with an inherent power and those which require sacralization by a mau or doctor of magic. These objects are applied variously, to the protection of the possessor, the harming of an intended victim, the achieving of sexual success, the achieving of financial success and the assurance of success in childbirth.

The word phii can mean several things in Thai. It can refer to a deceased person's soul-like after essence; it can refer to the corpse itself; it can refer to the corpse oil or material used in black magic. The most predominant use, however, is that referring to the spirit or ghost of a deceased person.

The phi is capable of punishing a living person as well as rewarding him. Some phi punish by scaring, others punish by bothering and other still by impairing health of the victim. The result of the indeterminate power which the various phii practice over the villager is that the most common element in the villager's relationship with the phii is that of fear.

The fear held for the phii is determined by several things (1) Fear of the phii depends on the manner in which the person died, when the spirit derives from a known person. The spirit of a person who has died a violent death is much more feared than the spirit of one dying a normal death. Suddenness and great suffering mark these violent deaths. (2) Fear is also dependent on when the person died. The spirit of a person who died long ago is not as feared as the spirit of a recently dead person. Day three following the death of a person is the most fearsome time as it is then that the spirit leaves the corpse to wander. (3) Fear is also contingent on the cremation of the corpse. The sooner the body is cremated the sooner the winjaan-soul gets merit following which rebirth takes place. At rebirth the phii is no longer free to wander about and scare people. (Textor, 1960:201-206)

One of the most frightening capacities of the phii is its ability to possess people. Along with the Shrine Lords (Brahmanic) they are the only supernatural beings capable of doing this. It seems that the more respected and awe inspiring the supernatural being is the less contact it has with the individual. Phii can possess individuals of their own accord or by the initiative of the spirit doctors.

Some Notes

As the above sketch indicates, while the religion practiced by the Thai peasant is nominally Buddhism, the hard core of their religious practice is comprised of Animism and Brahmanism. The base of this syncretistic religious behavior is the indigenous animism which the Thai brought with them when they migrated down from the north beginning in the first century A.D. As both Buddhism and Brahmanism were encountered they were interacted with and eventually amalgamated into the basically animistic religious system of the Thai.

Though many of the formal aspects of both Buddhism and Brahmanism were retained, the content of these assimilated religions was altered to fit the animistic philosophy possessed by the Thai. Thus, while in form the Thai may be called Buddhists, they are in fact animists, animists who have over the years assimilated both Buddhism and Brahmanism into their religious system, a system which has allowed Buddhism to become the formal expression of Thai religion while at the content level it has kept the old animistic tradition predominating and modifying the content of the assimilated religions.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

The question which must be asked, in the light of the foregoing material, is what should the response of the Church in Thailand be? What does this material have to say to a Church which is seeking to grow in Thailand?

Acknowledgement

The first thing that I feel it says is that the Church needs to begin to acknowledge the dual facts of (1) the Highly syncretistic nature of Thai religion and (2) its basically animistic orientation. This must take more than the form of a few casual remarks about the “animistic corruptions” in Thai Buddhism. It must take the form of an intensive search for a true knowledge of the religious behavior of the Thai as practiced by them and not as it is ideally propounded by those in the Buddhist hierarchy who have all of the correct doctrine. In most religions there is a gap between the ideal tenets of the religion and that which is practiced by the adherents. In the syncretistic religion of Thailand this gap is wider than most.

If over 90% of the population of Thailand is made up of those whose practice of “Buddhism” is of the syncretistic kind described above and if the bulk of our churches and our growth is taking place among this population we need to begin to realistically deal with the people where they are spiritually and not where we are told they should be.

If the core of the religious practice of the Thai peasant is animism and not “pure” Buddhism then let's face the fact and deal with it. Too often we who belong to the category of western Christianity regard animism as “superstition”. It is something that our progressive institutions and medical work will dissolve. But this is not so, or at least it is not working in one country which is about as progressive as a country can get. In the U.S.A. today our so called “secular society” is fast giving way to full blown animism: the occult, magic, spiritism, astrology, divination, satan cults you name it and we have, it, or we soon will.

If animism represents the basic content of the religion of the Thai peasant (and a great many who are not peasants) then it is on animism that the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be focused in an informed way if the Church is to grow.

Power Encounter

Once we have acknowledged this fact our response to the syncretistic religion of the Thai peasant must be that of power encounter. I see at least two reasons why the Church needs to respond with a power encounter: first, to meet the basic need of the Thai peasant and second, to deal with the problem of syncretism.

“To Meet the Basic Need”

The focus of animism around the world is “power”. Power to deal with the problems of life – “power” to exist in this life. In animism this power is acquired by the supplication of supernatural beings and the manipulation of supernatural objects. The felt needs which the acquisition of this “power” meets are those which deal with the basic needs of life-subsistence, sickness, fertility, growth. Along with this, animism meets the need of a basic explanation of the events occurring in life. It gives a basic coherence to these events and at the same time enables the adherent to exercise a certain amount of control over these events as well as to foretell future events.

If we are to offer the Christian faith to people who have such basic concerns it must be a faith which is tuned in to their felt needs. It must be a message which offers help where the need is apparent and not a message which offers help where there is no apparent need. We do not have time to try to answer questions which have not been asked when there are plenty of questions which have been asked. It is these that we need to seek to answer.

At this point in his life the animist is not necessarily interested in the fact that his sins can be forgiven (as essentially true as that fact might be). What he is interested in is how he can find power to live life in a rich and full way; how he can find power to free him up from the control of the supernatural beings and objects which surround him and have him in economic, emotional and spiritual bondage. What he seeks is the power of a “new life”, a “new life” which will give him power for life here and now.

This calls for the development of a theology of “power”, a theology which is solidly Biblical but which grows from the basic concerns of the people, a theology which will emphasize a power encounter between Christ and Satan and consequently between Christ and animism.

The focusing of the Gospel on the basic areas of need represented by the recipients is one of the best ways to make sure true communication will take place. When seeking to communicate the Gospel it is often necessary to use cultural parallels which will make the message significant within the immediate context of the recipient's life. This may mean selecting from the total message those features which are culturally relevant to the hearers and focusing on these.

Such methodology is not all uncommon to the life of the Church. In fact it is more often than not the norm in the historical life of the Church. Eugene Nida notes that in the early centuries the atonement of Christ was referred to in terms of conflict between Christ and Satan. Christ, by means of the cross and empty tomb gained victory over sin, Satan and death. Beginning at the Reformation and continuing until today, however, the most prevalent theory of the atonement has been that of the substitutionary work of Christ whereby he took our sins upon him and died in our place. Today, however, others who are aware of the terrible conflicts of our day that divide and alienate people are beginning to think of the atonement of Christ in terms of reconciliation – God reconciling the world to himself (II Cor.5:19).

Each of these statements about the atonement of Christ is true. They differ because each age has focused the message of the Gospel on its own peculiar needs. Today the message of the Gospel needs to be freed up from an overt “westernization” so that it can speak to the various cultural situations of other societies.

A theology of the atonement emphasizing the encounter and defeat of the power of Satan by the power of the resurrection of Christ would be the beginning of such a theology. Such a theology of power, while solidly Biblical, would also focus on the basic need of the animistic Thai peasant: power for life.

The Bible is basically a book about power, the power of God. The power of God in creation, in the mighty acts which he performed during the history of Israel, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ – the greatest manifestation of the power of God which gives us the power to live life here and now and also assures us of the power of God to make “all things new” including us at the final consummation.

“To Solve the Problem of Syncretism”

It is not enough to endeavor to focus on the felt needs of the society, however, especially when the society is as marked by religious syncretism as Thai society is. The normal tendency of a syncretistic religion is to readily accept those elements of other religions which are compatible with it and to infuse only these elements into its system. Luzbetak has noted,

There is a natural tendency for a society to select from the many possibilities those innovations which are most compatible with the rest of the culture. Generally, too, only those innovations which leave the configurational, too, only those innovations which leave the configurational system unimpaired will be accepted. (1966:119)

The difficulty for the Church seeking to grow in such a context is that if it merely focuses on the felt needs of the society it could experience wide acceptance at the expense of becoming highly syncretistic.

It is precisely for this reason that the response of the Church must be that of a power encounter. An encounter brings about a confrontation crisis between two opposing forces and results in an outcome – the one giving way to the other. It is absolutely essential for the Church to bring about such an encounter if it is to keep from the experience of both Buddhism and Brahmanism which have been amalgamated with the basic animistic tradition. Animism and especially syncretistic animism will not work out of a system unless faced with such a power encounter.

The central cause of Christo-paganism (the syncretism of Christianity and the existing religious system) is lack of a power encounter between the Christian faith and the existing religious tradition. William Madsen who has done an anthropological study of Christo-paganism among the Mexican Indians deals with this problem. He notes that the Indians took only those elements of Christianity which were applicable to their own culture. The Indian adoption of Christianity was limited to four basic items. (1) Only the things which were familiar to them were kept. (2) Items which were readily communicable were kept. (3) Some elements of Christianity which the early missionaries were able to force on them were kept. (4) Those elements which had a value for them and a use in their culture were kept. (1957:172-175)

Madsen notes also that “the form of an innovation is more readily accepted (by the Indians) than its meaning”. Thus, they accepted such of the basic forms of Christianity and then infused these forms with meaning which was indigenous to the old religious tradition. One of the basic problems which led to this syncretism was the failure on the part of the early missionaries to bring about a power encounter between the content of the old religion and that of Christianity. Had the Indians been brought to the place where they had to choose between the old religious content and the content of the Christian faith such a development would have had a hard time taking place. The fact was that the missionaries were content with transplanting a religious expression which looked like what they knew Christianity to be and sounded like it but yet at the content level was not Christianity but a Christopagan religion.

As we seek to aid the growth of the Church in Thailand in the face of a highly syncretistic religion we need to make sure that a power encounter takes place in our presentation, an encounter between the basic content of the Thai religion and content of the Christian faith.

Incarnation

But if power encounter is necessary for the growth of the Church in a syncretistic and animistic society so is incarnation. As the Church seeks to encounter recipients with the power of the Gospel it needs to do so within the framework of incarnation. It needs to put the content of the Gospel into the forms and expressions which are indigenous to the local culture in order that the encounter which takes place will be one in which the issues are understood. If a power encounter at the content level is to take place then the content of the Gospel must “possess” or “infuse” local forms and expressions or we will be faced with a power encounter minus the power. To use a word which is often severely limited in meaning, the Church must indigenize the Gospel message.⁴

This is the procedure which God used when he sought to communicate the Good News to mankind. John 1:14 tells us that He put His Word into human flesh (to incarnate means to “put in flesh” of human form) in the person of Jesus Christ. He then expressed His Word in human words and purposely limited its expression to the cultural forms and expressions of the time in which it was given. Because He chose to limit it in this way it was understood and because it was understood it initiated response and acceptance.

John Fleming has rightly noted in his thesis “The Growth of the Chinese Church in the New Villages of the State of Johore, Malaya” that “if the Gospel is not ‘heard’ in terms of indigenous life and culture, the response to it will be inadequate and the growth of the Church will be correspondingly retarded or stunted.” (1962:301)

Fleming uses a quote from Hendrik Kraemer which summarizes this concept of power encounter within the context of incarnation.

Christianity must be rooted in the soul of the Sudanese. It must learn to express itself in Sudanese terms and forms, but it must also conquer the ancient view of the world and of life and transform it into spiritual life of an essentially different, Christian nature, instead of being submerged by or amalgamated with the old notions, as has been the case with Islam. This is the gigantic task of missions, calling upon people to repent and turn about, yet without ‘quenching the smoking flax’. This is the way that I would like to formulate the problem of propagating the Gospel to an oriental people. (Fleming, 1962:302, Kraemer 1958:129)

Conclusion

It would seem that our task in Thailand in the face of a syncretistic religion which has amalgamated two other religious systems within its history, is to plant the Church of Jesus Christ in such a way that:

- (1) Its content is clear and vivid to all who hear its message and see its form and life, and
- (2) It brings about a power encounter which denies the continuation of the old religious content side by side with the new, and
- (3) Its message is focused on the basic felt needs of this society.

Such a response on the part of the Church of Jesus Christ in Thailand will not only sponsor growth now, but will also enable the continuing growth of the Church in this land to be possible.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ The ethnic focus of this paper is the Thai race of Thailand. The peoples of Southeast Asia who find their common origin in the Thai race which descended into mainland Southeast Asia in the first century A.D. are widely spread (7 to 26 N & 94 to 110 E). They have been divided into five distinct ethnic groups by Lebar and subdivided into some six sub-groups within Thailand proper by Seidenfaden. This study draws its materials from three of these sub-groups: the Thai (of the Menam Plain and the northern half of the peninsula); the Lan-na Thai (of the north) and the Thai-Lao (of the northeast)

² For a complete listing of these supernatural beings Textor (1960:460ff.) should be consulted I have attempted to give a summary listing of them in my thesis "Syncretistic Rural Thai Buddhism" pages 131-139

³ The Brahmanistic tradition provides many basic kinds of supernatural beings apart from those stemming from the indigenous Thai tradition.

- (1) Shrine Lords: This supernatural being differs from the phii only in status. It has an exalted position and has been given a residence.
- (2) Devas (Chao or Theewada)" The most exalted supernatural being of all is the deva. These beings are more powerful than the phii and yet they are more passive, They are not harmful unless treated with disrespect or discourtesy.
- (3) Several non possessing ghosts.
- (4) Supernatural beings related to the cosmos.
- (5) Supernatural beings related to natural elements. (egg. Mother of earth and mother of water)
- (6) Supernatural beings in nature. (egs. Natural ghosts inhabiting and personifying trees and the like)
- (7) Supernatural beings with specific responsibility. (egs. Guardians of the house residing in the spirit houses)
- (8) Supernatural beings related to rice.

⁴ This brings up the point that the Church itself must be truly indigenous if it is to indigenize the Gospel. By this I do not mean that the Church should evidence the “3 self’s” (self support, self propagation, self government) of the popular version of the indigenous theory. These qualities may be important definitions of the growth of a church to maturity, but the possession of these “self’s” hardly makes a church indigenous in the true sense of the word. A church could conceivably possession all three “self’s” and yet remain a foreign body within a given cultural setting if the forms and structure that it adopted were foreign by nature. It is the church which has been “planted” in its own cultural setting, one which is integrated in form and structure with its own society that is truly an structure with its own society that is truly and indigenous church. This is the church which can best work to express the Gospel in the idiom of its own culture.