

**CONTEXTUALIZING  
WITH THAI FOLK BUDDHISTS**

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# CONTEXTUALIZING WITH THAI FOLK BUDDHISTS

## Introduction

*Grandmother Somlee<sup>1</sup> was a healer. This small, frail woman had been endowed with spiritual powers that enabled her to find **yah phii bawk**, (spirit-delivered medicine). Through spiritual interaction, it was revealed to her where certain herbs and plants grew. By mixing these together into potions (also supernaturally revealed) she was able to cure ailments, prevent miscarriages and bring about healings in several cases. All of these “acquired skills” came to her not from the study of books or from other human sources but from the spiritual interaction she had with the spirit of her area’s territorial power, called the **Chao Phua** located in the city pillar shrine of her northeastern Thai province.*

*In another nearby village lived a man named Father Niran. He was a village elder and well-known musician in his district. He had no formal training in music but knew how to play the Lao bamboo wind instrument locally called the **kaen**. This instrument is widely used throughout the Lao-speaking region of northeastern Thailand (known as Isaan<sup>2</sup>) at every good social event to provide the musical entertainment that delights the heart of these people. Father Niran, however, was not an entertainer. He did one thing with his playing which was known as **bpao phii faa**, (calling up the sky spirits). This was a specific ceremony for the sick where he would play a lively tune into the ear of the ill to induce the spirit of the patient to revive and get up and dance. It could be elaborately lengthened depending upon the need. It was also the only tune that Father Niran knew how to play.*

Are Thai people truly Buddhists? The answer to this would depend upon whom you were asking. Certainly the average Thai would answer that, “To be Thai is to be Buddhist.” But what is Thai Buddhism? Many missionaries have been surprised upon their arrival to Thailand to discover that despite what they have read in books<sup>3</sup>, Thai Buddhism as it is lived and practiced is actually a conglomeration of many religions and beliefs<sup>4</sup>. It is a syncretistic mix that is flexible, accommodating and dynamic. If the Thai are pure Buddhists then why the

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<sup>1</sup> Though the actual names of the people in these stories have been changed the author personally knew these individuals and their stories are true.

<sup>2</sup> Isaan is the Thai word for the language, people and geographic area of northeast Thailand. It is a distinct people group of approximately twenty million people. Among themselves Isaan people refer to each other, their language and culture as “Lao.” Isaan people are culturally linked with the lowland Lao across the Mekong river.

<sup>3</sup> Kosuke Koyama in his book, *Waterbuffalo Theology*, describes “Thai Buddhism as, perhaps, the purest form of Buddhism practiced in the world today” (Koyama 1974:129).

proliferation of spirit houses in front of many hotels, businesses, and homes<sup>5</sup>? Why the profusion of the sale of amulets and charms - often by Buddhist monks themselves? Why are tattoos still popular for spiritual protection? What, of all of this, is Thai Buddhism and what is not?

The author has had the opportunity to spend fourteen years in the northeast region of Thailand, known as *Isaan*, working in a team ministry with *Isaan* believers and has grown to deeply appreciate the cultural forms that are distinctive for this people group. This paper is submitted with the goal that it facilitate better communication of Jesus Christ to the Thai, through understanding their syncretistic worldview and through reviewing some contextualized practices that speak to the heart of the Thai Folk Buddhist.

## **What is Thai Folk Buddhism? An Historical Overview from Old Siam**

The Thai people have a long history of cultural and religious accommodation. The earliest racial group known as the “Thai<sup>6</sup>” is thought to have come into existence around the sixth century BC along the southern border of China, east of the Mekong river (Gustafson 1970:18). Some theorize that these early peoples were animistic<sup>7</sup>, though this is debated.<sup>8</sup> Archaeologists

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<sup>4</sup> “Brahmanical” rites, spirit cults and Buddhist rites ...form an interrelated set, with different values being attached to them in a single religious field (Tambiah 1984:381).

<sup>5</sup> “The guardian spirits...have village as well as regional significance, and the cult associated with them comprises a ritual complex that has an important place in the totality of religious behavior of the villagers. It is the phenomenon which some writers have called “animism” and which with pseudo-historical conjecture they have identified as pre-Buddhist. Moreover, they have variously treated it both as incompatible with, Buddhism. In actual fact its relationship to Buddhism is not simple but complex, involving opposition, complementarity, linkage, and hierarchy” (Tambiah 1970:263).

<sup>6</sup> The name “Thai” means “free.” This expressed desire for independence was shown early in their history as they migrated southward to escape conditions that might have led to them becoming vassals to the Chinese (Gustafson 1970:18).

<sup>7</sup> The term “animism” was originated by Edward B. Tylor in 1873 in *Religion in Primitive Cultures* and defined as, “the doctrine of Spiritual Beings. This includes the belief in souls and in a future state, in controlling deities and subordinate spirits, ...resulting in some kind of active worship” (Van Rheenen 1991:19).

<sup>8</sup> This is based on what Tambiah labels, “pseudo-historical conjecture (which) they have identified as pre-Buddhist” (Tambiah 1970:263).

have recovered evidence of Buddhist inscriptions in both Chinese and Sanskrit in this region dating from about the eleventh century AD. This would establish the date of existence of Mahayana Buddhism<sup>9</sup> within the people group from this time (Gustafson 1970:18). As the Thai people migrated south in the thirteenth century they added the cultural and religious elements of the Mon-Khmer peoples whom they encountered and adopted their animistic practices (HRAF 1956:26).

The history of the modern Thai people is first documented by King Rama Khamhaeng (1283-1317 AD), the founder of the Sukhothai kingdom and inventor of the modern Thai alphabet. During the late thirteenth century Theravada Buddhist monks from Ceylon settled in southern Thailand and their influence eventually caught the attention of the Sukhothai king (Gustafson 1970:22). In 1292 Rama Khamhaeng, by this time a devoted follower of the Theravada sect, made an inscription proclaiming the official religion of the Sukhothai kingdom to be the Theravada form of Buddhism. At the same time he continued his regular sojourns to the spirit of the hill located on the south side of the city of Sukhothai<sup>10</sup> (Gustafson 1970:25). Animism, or primal religious practices<sup>11</sup>, and Theravada Buddhism existed comfortably together.

Later, along with animistic practices, Brahmanistic rituals from Indian Hinduism were also incorporated into Thai Buddhism. Today, Buddhist tradition and Brahman tradition use the same vocabulary; it is impossible to separate the two. “It is unthinkable in Thailand that a local

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<sup>9</sup> The history of the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism in China is dealt with in other literature.

<sup>10</sup> The *Manansila* inscription now kept in the Chapel of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok reads, “To the south of the city of Sukhothai...there are monasteries and sanctuaries wherein monks reside; ...there is a spring by the hill; there is the spirit of the hill, greater than all the others spirits. Whichever monarch rules...Sukhothai, if he renders proper respect and due offerings thereto, then this state is stable and prosperous; if however, he renders improper respect and offerings the spirit neither protects nor respects him; and the state comes to calamity” (Gustafson 1970:26).

<sup>11</sup> Animism is considered a pejorative term among anthropologists today. The preferred term is “primal religion.”

*brahman* can be outside the Buddhist faith, or that his rites and those of the monk can be mutually exclusive” (Tambiah 1970:256).

Following the Thai tradition of accommodation, animistic practices, Brahmanistic beliefs and Buddhist foundations have all combined to make a complicated, and sometimes contradictory, conglomerate one that can be labeled Thai Folk Buddhism. Attempts to diagram this integration can be seen in Appendix I done by Harvard University Anthropologist, Dr. Stanley J. Tambiah. This brief paper does not allow for a thorough exploration of the interrelationship between the so-called “higher” religion of Buddhism and the so-called “lower” primal practices of supposedly pre-Buddhist animism. These issues have been dealt with extensively elsewhere<sup>12</sup>. The fact that Thai Folk Buddhism is syncretistic is problematic only for a devout few.

Most Thai people have a pragmatic view that whatever works for them in their area of Thailand is what is practiced.<sup>13</sup> While the external manifestations of Theravada Buddhism are highly visible around the country (temples, monks walking in the morning, celebration of holy days), in reality much of the actual practices follow animistic tradition. Animism, or primal religion, can be defined as,

The belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and frequently, to manipulate their power (Van Rhee 1991:19).

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<sup>12</sup> The relationship between Buddhism, Brahmanism and animism is covered in detail in Tambiah’s work *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults of Northeast Thailand*. Thai syncretism is covered in Gustafson’s *Syncretistic Rural Thai Buddhism*.

<sup>13</sup> Worldwide, the response to the Christian message has been one of pragmatism. Dr. Kraft shared that during his early experience as a missionary in Nigeria he noted Christian church leaders still continued their visits to the village shaman when they encountered problems. Upon inquiring he was told, “Oh, we believe in Jesus, but we go to the shaman because things happen faster” (Private conversation November 15, 2001).

## Missiological Approaches to Thai Folk Buddhism

Early missiologists took an evolutionary view towards animism that it was a “lower form of pre-logical primitive thought” and believed it would soon be replaced by one of the “higher” formal religions, preferably Christianity (Hiebert 1999:76). The German missionary Johannes Warneck’s 1922 volume entitled *The Living Christ and Dying Heathenism* is an example.

Describing his experiences among “animistic heathendom” in the Indian Archipelago, he strongly argued for the “spiritual superiority” of Christianity as viewed in terms of its “civilizing power.” It was clear to him that the “dull eyes of the heathen (would recognize) the earthly blessings that accompany Christianity, and thereby learn to value the new religion”<sup>14</sup> (Warneck 1922:18, 165).

The reality, however, has proved to be different. Neither “higher religion” nor modern scientific discovery have caused animistic practices to diminish. Anthropologist Robert H. Lowie writes,

(Science) is admittedly our best possible instrument for controlling physical environment and for formulating ideas of the material world. But it does not at all follow that it is soul-satisfying, or that it can serve as a basis for moral action...What the normal human being wants is peace, security<sup>15</sup>, and relations. And he can never find these things in that dynamic, ever-growing, ever-disturbing thing that we have found science to be (Lehmen 1985:23).

Much of traditional Christian missionary effort has followed a western rationalist approach and has thus divorced itself from addressing many of the issues that are between science and religion. This area has been labeled the “excluded middle” and has been well explained by Dr. Paul Hiebert (Hiebert 1994:189-202). Religion has been and continues to be the place

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<sup>14</sup> “A kindred fact in the divine leading, which cannot fail to open up the way for the Gospel among the indifferent heathen, is the superiority of the white race that brings them the gospel. That race takes a dominant position everywhere in the heathen world”(Warneck 1922:165).

<sup>15</sup> Elementary to human beings around the world is the need for security. After Sept. 11, 2001 one of the first actions taken by the United States’ president was to establish “The Office of Homeland Security.” For most people, however, a sense of personal security is not found in weapons technology or military strength.

where many in the world find their sense of security. If, however, the traditional higher religions (as defined by the evolutionary understanding of religions<sup>16</sup>) fail to provide the sense of security needed, the adherents may return to primary religious practices (animism) in their attempt to have their deeper, urgent needs addressed.

### **Understanding the Thai Folk Buddhist Worldview**

Pure Theravada Buddhism and its practices deal primarily with death. The making of merit in Buddhism is not primarily for those living today but for the future - either for the benefit of future reincarnations of the living or to benefit those already dead. Animistic practices, on the other hand, address the issues of the here and now. For the majority of both urban and rural Thai people,<sup>17</sup> a clear distinction would not be relevant to them. It is the practice of animism within their Buddhist context that provides a sense of security for the present, something that science and traditional western religious practices tend to ignore.<sup>18</sup> Animism is the means of dealing with what is important for living life today.

Within Buddhism religious action is phrased in terms of the ideology of *bun* (merit)-when one gives gifts to the monks or the temple (*wat*<sup>19</sup>) one receives merit; but when one propitiates or placates *Chao Phua* (*territorial or regional spirits*)villagers explicitly consider the transaction as a *bargain*, an offering made to gain a particular favor, generally to remove an affliction caused by the *phii* (spirit) because of an offense committed (Tambiah 1970:270).

### **How Does Folk Buddhism Help People?**

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<sup>16</sup> To summarize, the evolutionary theory of religion basically states that religions evolve from simple animistic beliefs and practices to the complex religions of the present. This is attributed to the growth of human rationality(Hiebert 1999:17).

<sup>17</sup> Refer to Hard's article "Does Animism Die in the City?" for an interesting Korean equivalent (Hard 1989:45).

<sup>18</sup> The "excluded middle" concept deals with these issues in detail (Hiebert 1994:189-202).

<sup>19</sup> *Wat* is the Thai word for temple.



*As a girl worshipping at the city pillar Somlee heard a voice that spoke to her. “If you worship me, I will give you power.” As a poor, uneducated girl this had great appeal. She decided to submit to this authority. She was given a promise of future abilities and eventually these came – but not for free. In the earliest years the simple donation of a candle or joss stick at the city pillar was sufficient. As her powers in herbal remedies increased, however, the requirements to return the favor also increased proportionally. More expensive gifts were required to be offered to the spirit. If at any time she failed Somlee would suffer severe headaches and chest pains. These symptoms became even stronger and more frequent as her popularity, power with medicine, and success increased. Her power came at a price.*

*Father Niran could **bpao phii faa** (call the sky spirit) on the bamboo **kaen** and bring the sick back to health – but there were personal requirements for him. He presented offerings regularly to spirits but for him there was added a dietary restriction: he could never eat any winged creature. No bird or fowl of any kind, neither domestic nor wild, could be in his meals. Not even the fruit bats, a popular food source in Isaan, could he eat. If, even unknowingly, he broke this taboo, he would suffer from severe intestinal pain for several days. The spirit of the sky exacted this price from him as long as he continued to play its song on the **kaen**.*

### **Folk Buddhism Promises Power – at a Price**

Buddhism, with its system of regulations and rituals, can be understood in the traditional religious sense. Animistic practices, however, with their emphasis on the present, are more involved with their requirements to the spirit or “gods<sup>20</sup>” from which the appeal is made. The price is much higher for a deeper sense of either security or some form of power. It is not uncommon for those who “receive power through a revelation to also receive usually at least one and perhaps more life-long and onerous restrictions”<sup>21</sup> (Lehman 1985:21). Within animism, power does not come without a corresponding price.

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<sup>20</sup> An in-depth treatment of the demonology of Thai gods is found in Attagara (1967:39-95). A good summary is found in Hiebert (1999:56-57).

<sup>21</sup> Lowie illustrates, “One old man of my acquaintance (among the Plains Indians) had not ridden a horse since the day of his vision thirty-years earlier, for the spirit had forbidden him to do so. He trudged on foot. Another Indian had been forbidden to eat eggs and was a constant nuisance because he would not eat anything unless he personally supervised its preparation, lest the cook slip in an egg without his knowledge. And a third was forbidden to touch salmon, one of the Crows’ few delicacies; on one occasion he ate a mixture of prepared fish without knowing there was salmon there and attributed the following eleven years of rheumatism to his unwitting breaking of his taboo” (Lehman 1958:21).

The forms of these onerous restrictions vary from person to person but clearly there is a price that must be paid for assistance from the spirit world. The higher the involvement the greater the price required. Sometimes these restrictions are taboos<sup>22</sup>, as in the case of Niran.

A taboo...is a ban or prohibition...which restricts the human uses of things and people. Some of the taboos are said to avoid punishment or vengeance from gods, ghosts and others spirits. Some of them are supposed to produce automatically their dreaded effects. Crop failures, sickness, hunting accidents, famine, drought, epidemic (events in the physical realm), they may all result from breach of taboos (Douglas in Lehman 1985: 64, 66).

In other cases the restrictions may involve lifestyle issues for the person who has been empowered. Very often there will be restrictions against sexual intercourse or immorality. The penalty for disobedience can vary in physical, emotional or spiritual forms. In addition, individuals who have invited these special powers to dwell within them and can themselves become a force for evil known in Thai as *phii paub*.

Village theory is that a man or woman who is a *mau wicha*, an expert in the magical arts of love magic, or protective magic (such as making amulets that make the wearer bullet-proof), or control of epidemics (like cholera), is the person who is prone to harbor a *phii paub*<sup>23</sup>, if he acts immorally or contravenes taboos associated with his dangerous but potent art. Since his special powers derive from this secret knowledge of charms and spells, it is said that under certain conditions these spells themselves turn into *phii paub*. Typical circumstances that lead to this transformation are (1) if a *mau wicha* discontinues his practice; (2) if he uses spells immorally by causing diseases in people rather than curing them, or if he exploits his patients by charging excessive fees (the accusation here being that he himself sends disease in order to extract fees); (3) if he fails to respect and propitiate his teacher; or (4) if he breaks food taboos associated with his profession... All controllers of magical powers (*mau wicha*) and all exorcists (*mau tham*) are said to have special food taboos associated with their practice...Such powers have their use in society and must be kept available for those who need them. But, at the same time, such powers are in themselves dangerous; they are a

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<sup>22</sup> Other documentation of taboo restrictions are listed. "Wanthong (a northeastern Thai village medium in Udon Thani province) observed certain food taboos which are required by his divining work"(Tambiah 1970:272). Also see note 18 above.

<sup>23</sup> Description of *phii paub* (a haunting spirit) found in Tambiah 1970:321.

double-edged sword, cutting both ways. He who dabbles in them in order to control spirits is in danger of becoming their victim or agent. Thus a man who learns to control disease through spells may himself sometimes send or cause disease; a man who gives love magic to dearest lovers may himself come to fornicate with village wives; the man who exorcises malevolent spirits may himself become a sorcerer sending spirits to possess his enemies (Tambiah 1970:318-319).

The localization of spirit power in specific designations, such as the city pillar for Grandma Somlee, is very common throughout the country of Thailand. Like that found in the earlier Sukhothai kingdom of Rama Khamhaeng, the city pillar is the localization of a territorial spirit to whom the authorities and the locals look for protection and granting of favors. These were often constructed with human sacrifice (Terwiel 1976:160ff). The most famous in Thailand is the Bangkok city pillar.

The *lak mueang* is the “pillar of the city” of Bangkok; because it is the foundation pillar of the country’s capital city, it is a focal point for the country as a whole. The Bangkok pillar was installed in 1792 as the very beginning of the Chakkri dynasty<sup>24</sup>. The pillar is placed in the center of a shrine, where also reside the guardian deities of the capital. The *lak mueang* is not unique to Bangkok. Many of the provincial cities of Thailand have city pillars and shrines associated with them...The guardian spirit associated with the pillar is believed to protect the locality or territory that constitutes the *mueang* (city). Today the pillar shrine at Bangkok is considered to be the foremost in the country. Hundreds of people flock to the shrine every day to ask for favors from the pillar and the deities and propitiated them with flowers, candlesticks, joss sticks, silk scarves, gold leaf, and food and drink for favors granted. The pillar is personified and referred to as “*Cao Phau*,” which, literally meaning honored father, is the usual reference and address term for a guardian deity (Tambiah 1984:244).

### **Folk Buddhism Counterfeits Christ**

Throughout Thailand animistic practices within Folk Buddhism address some of the heart issues of Thai people by providing them with a source of power they believe will assist them in

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<sup>24</sup> Chakkri is the name of the present reigning dynasty of Thailand. The present monarch, His Majesty Bumiphol Adulyadeh is ninth in the Chakkri dynasty and known as Rama the 9<sup>th</sup>.

life. A careful study of what is actually happening will show that much of what is being “offered” is a very clever counterfeit to what is actually found in Jesus Christ. To cope with the many uncertainties of life, an appeal to the spirits provides an attempt to appease or in some way connect with those forces seen to be “in control.”

Though primitive religions do tend to help (people) to adjust to the universe by giving them some sense of control, thus eliminating certain elements of fear, they do not actually solve this problem of meeting life’s crises. The trouble is that elemental fear of the immediate, primary danger is only transferred to a secondary agent of concern, namely, the spirits themselves, who cannot ultimately be trusted. Though fear demands a more highly charged response than does trust, nevertheless, in the ultimate analysis, the fear of largely irresponsible spirits is no competition to trust in a loving, heavenly Father (Nida 1959:58).

Within pure Buddhism there is no god. Thai Folk Buddhists do refer to an ultimate power or being who is known as *Pra Cao* (God). This term is rarely used other than as an exclamatory interjection in times of distress<sup>25</sup>, as in “*Pra Cao chuay!*” (literally, O God, help!) This does not indicate a relationship, merely an obscure awareness.

The language used within animism, however, is not coincidental. The spirit pillars are called “*Cao Phau*” (“honored father”) and sometimes “*Cao Mee*” (“honored mother<sup>26</sup>”). The assumption that these forces will care for the practitioner in a “parental” beneficent manner disguises the reality of spiritual enslavement. Initially the gods (or God), are perceived as far away, but the spirits are intimately close. They are Respected Father and Honored Mother who know and deal with the issues of daily life. Eventually, through increasing devotion, the follower begins to delegate an authority to the spirit so that for that individual it now becomes “a god.”

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<sup>25</sup> In a moment of surprise Thai youth think it comical to call out in English what they hear in western movies, “Oh my God!”

<sup>26</sup> “Cao Mee” (Honored Mother) at the south end of the Bung Kaen Nakorn park in the city district of Khon Kaen province is an example of a female pillar spirit.

From the beginning there is an attempt by (humanity) to place himself in the right relationship to unseen powers, to deprecate their hostility and to secure their good will. With deliberate acts of worship we come to a personal approach to the spirits and often they are regarded as gods (Harris 1960:14).

The promise of a presence upon which to rely has deep appeal within the human psyche. The spirit world demonstrates abilities that appeal (spirit of light) and makes promises that directly replace what Christ has offered. Animistic practices appear to guarantee (to the faithful) an ability to deal with life in ways that appear will not fail. Note the tactic that replaces Christ words, “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20, Acts 18:10). Another type of hope and light counterfeit the source of Light (John 8:12); the false servants masquerade as servants of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14-15). The appeal of a helper is there but the reality is false.

Perhaps the main appeal from many animistic practices of Folk Buddhism is to somehow know more, experience more, or gain more control than that possessed by the average human being. In fact, for however brief or long the period, the goal with connecting to this “power source” is to somehow allow the follower to ultimately become *like God*. This is the most ancient strategy employed by satanic powers known in scripture (Genesis 3:5) and directly counterfeits the work of Christ who, being God, became human in order to allow all of humanity to experience the fullness of God in him (John 1:14, Colossians 1:19,20).

Spiritual powers continually seek and demand worship from their followers at an ever-increasing expense (Matthew 4:8-9). This attempt to usurp what is due the Ultimate Creator Authority (Matthew 4:10), demands unquestioning obedience and is exacted through the use of fear and frequently even through physical force (see examples above). Unlike the True reality who came not to seek power or position (Phil. 2:4-8), spiritual forces hunger for followers with

an insatiable desire to possess, attack, devour and destroy (Gen. 4:7, I Peter 5:8). For more specific comparison of counterfeit forms of Christ by spirit powers refer to Appendix 2, “Claims of Christ and Counterfeit’s Claims” and Appendix 3, “Claims of Others About Christ and Counterfeit’s Claims.”

## **What Do we need to Learn from Thai Folk Buddhists?**

Many well-intentioned missionaries go overseas with the idea of being the conveyors of the gospel message. In part, this is true. However, should we not acknowledge that God is already working within the Thai Folk Buddhist context before we as missionaries ever arrive? Do we not come as fellow seekers ourselves? How, therefore, can we as fellow seekers, learn to be more sensitive and receptive to those areas where God is already present in the lives of Thai people? How can we communicate Christ in a society which says that, “to be Thai is to be Buddhist?”

Understanding Thai Folk Buddhism and the cultural context is an important starting place. There are several studies on contextualization from which we can learn much<sup>27</sup>. But what can be learned from Thai Folk Buddhists themselves? Four areas are suggested: 1) the need for a wholistic approach, 2) communication must involve all major signal systems, 3) a recognition that the major barriers to allowing Christ to fully enter into a culture are primarily social and not religious and 4) an honest awareness of the realities of the spirit world. Each of these areas will be discussed further.

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<sup>27</sup> In his book, *Poles Apart*, Dr. John Davis, gives four cautions for those doing contextualization. These are: no idolatry, no immorality, no injustice and no individualism (Davis 1998:21-22). Dr. Paul Hiebert outlines four steps in a process he terms “critical contextualization.” Step 1 Phenomenological Analysis – Learn from people what they do & why, Step 2 Ontological Reflections – test the truth from scripture & objective reality (life), Step 3 Critical Evaluation – Make decisions based on truth in #2, Step 4 Missiological Transformations, Result: Critical

## **The Need for a Wholistic Approach.**

Animists see themselves and their beliefs as part of the whole of life. The monistic worldview of the Thai Folk Buddhist sees no dichotomy between the community of the living, natural world and the supernatural spirit world. They do not compartmentalize their life as would western linear-thinking cultures. They would ask questions such as, How does Christ relate to the rest of life? Does he care about our rice crop? Will he be able to act on our behalf in a way that we now ask the spirits to do? Communication of the gospel with Folk Buddhists must integrate the physical, spiritual and social aspects of life within the community, not individually as is often done in evangelical approaches.

Individualistic thought forms are diametrically opposed to animistic perspectives. While individualists believe they can chart their own courses, animists believe that they are living in an inter-connected world. They feel intimately connected to their *families*, some of whom are living and some of whom have already passed on to a spiritual realm. Animists also believe they are connected to the *spiritual world*. Gods, spirits, ancestors, and ghosts pervade the world, and their ambivalent yearnings affect the living. Animists frequently feel a connectedness with *nature*... The animist believes that no person can live as an individual, separate and apart from his extended family, spiritual powers, nature or thoughts of other human beings. Animists live in an interconnected universe (Van Rhee 1991:131).

## **Communication Involves All Signal Systems**

Every culture uses signal systems to communicate. The twelve basic systems used are described by Donald Smith as verbal, written, numeric, pictorial, audio, artifactual, kinesic, optical, tactile, spatial, temporal, olfactory. These are in order of decreasing consciousness of use and increasing degrees of believability. 83% of the information we receive comes through seeing;

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contextualization. These steps allow for a critical way to understand worldview, communicate understandably and allow for transformation (Hiebert 1999:22).

11% we receive through hearing; 1.5% from touch (tactile) and 1% from taste and 3.5% from smell (Smith 1992:162-3). The sensory systems seeing, hearing (including spoken and musical), touch and olfactory are discussed as well as two more important signal systems often overlooked by western cross-cultural workers: the spacial and the temporal signal systems. These general categories can be reviewed in terms of evaluatory questions for any specific Thai Folk Buddhist context when seeking improved communication and understanding.

**Seeing:** Consider the perspective of a Thai Folk Buddhist when they hear about Jesus for the first time. What does he or she actually perceive? If a non-local is the communicator of the message a wide range of messages will be sent which are unrelated to the message. Is the speaker selling something? Is the speaker trustworthy? How can the speaker help me with what I need?

When a Thai Folk Buddhist is invited to church what does he or she see? Is the setting familiar enough to be comfortable to an outsider? Are there furnishings that speak of his or her culture or are the furnishings foreign? If so, why? Are there other items present that clearly communicate to outsiders or are they only “insider-friendly”? One Thai mother was greatly puzzled at her son’s Christian wedding in a western-style building. She considered each item decorating the sanctuary deeply symbolic for Christians but upon asking was unable to find anyone able to give meaning to any of them! Adoption of western “decorations” may speak a message to Thai Folk Buddhist people to which most westernized Christians are unaware. While westerners have sometimes criticized folk religionists for practicing meaningless ritual we need to consider our own forms and ask the same questions of ourselves.



**Hearing:** What language does Jesus speak? Can his words truly be understood by anyone?

Consider what it means for a Thai Folk Buddhist to hear a Christian sermon.<sup>28</sup> Typically, a Thai would go to the Buddhist *wat* and listen to the sermon in order to make merit. The purpose of listening to chanting in Sanskrit is not to convey meaning but for the transference of merit *through the hearing of the sounds*. The words themselves are considered sacred, powerful and meritorious for the soul. What happens, in this case, when an individual with this mindset is placed in a “Christian” context? He or she sits on a pew in a church, listens to a “sermon” and doesn’t necessarily understand the meaning of what was spoken. What is the effect? That person leaves thinking, “So what if I don’t understand anything? I’ve just made merit the Christian way!”

Interactive dialogue, still common in Thai culture, may allow more effective and natural communication of Biblical knowledge with Thai Folk Buddhists.

What signifies the end of a prayer? Is there a term used within the culture that communicates to the worldview of the Thai Folk Buddhist that the prayer is now over? In fact, there is. Throughout all of Thailand the word, “*Saatu*” (meaning, “so be it”) is used and clearly communicates the desire of the prayer. Followers of Jesus in Isaan churches use it today.

**Music:** What type of music speaks to the heart of the Thai Folk Buddhist? Some types of music are used to call up spirits and others to simply lend a joyous atmosphere to a social event.

Do the instruments carry spiritual meaning? Can they be dedicated for the service of God?

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<sup>28</sup> For western missionaries there is a great need to rediscover the breadth included in the meaning of the Greek word *kerygma* (usually translated in the English Bible “preach” or “proclaim:). The unfortunate generalisation that this term refers specifically to monologue preaching style is a misrepresentation of the text. Most of the uses of the word “preach” found in the New Testament can be better translated with the word “communicate” (Kraft 1991:28).

Writing new lyrics for traditional tunes has been done effectively. Even better are when local musicians are enabled to write new styles of music that still retain the cultural appeal and flavor but are distinctively of the family of faith (King 1999:59). The creative ability of God as expressed in his gifted local servants is not limited only to existing cultural tunes but can be expressed even more deeply through the encouraged production of new cultural music with great appeal and usefulness.

**Sense of Touch:** How do people from Thai Folk Buddhist cultures touch each other? Are there culturally appropriate forms that indicate genuine closeness and can be used to communicate spiritual intimacy both with God and within the family of believers? Consider the string-tying ceremonies of northeastern Thai (Isaan) culture<sup>29</sup>. What does tying a blessing on the wrist of a believer in the name of Jesus communicate to someone from a Thai Folk Buddhist worldview? Several who have experienced such a ceremony have felt it was the first time they could be a Christian and still be a Thai. In a culture where physical touching is not shown in public this ceremony has been a deeply significant experience of God's grace for many.

**Sense of Taste and Smell:** What is the staple of life for the community involved? Is it possible to use this as the element for communion? In northeastern Thailand the staple food, glutinous sticky rice, is roasted into small loaves and used in celebrating the Lord's supper. The

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<sup>29</sup> A thorough reporting of the use and role of the string-tying ceremonies for propitiation of the *khwan* (life-spirit) and possible contextualized usages within the church has been done by Stephen K. Bailey *Worldview Themes in Lao Khwan Rituals* Bailey (2000:Pasadena, Ca).

bitter red juice made from a local flower (krachiap daeng<sup>30</sup>) is used to represent the blood.

According to Smith, the communication system which most profoundly speaks to the heart and is most believed is the olfactory! Is it any wonder why Christ commanded that we eat his body and drink his blood regularly to remember him?

**Spacial:** How do Thai Folk Buddhists normally use the space around them? How far apart or close together do people need to be to effectively communicate? Thai people normally relax, while sitting closely together, barefoot, on straw mats. This is natural in house churches, however some churches that meet in buildings have also found this to be an inviting and natural spacial form that clearly speaks of fellowship to Thai people.

What is the body language used in communication? What is the physical posture which communicates prayer to a Thai Folk Buddhist? More and more Thai believers are using the commonly used greeting of the “wai” (palms raised together) in prayer. Such a form is used many times daily to show respect to fellow human. Using a raised “wai” means even more to Thais when speaking with God, including reverence, honor and submission.

**Temporal:** What is the attitude of the Thai Folk Buddhist towards time? Is there a feeling that time is limited and conversations should be rushed? One Thai Christian leader gave this testimony,

I always knew that the Christian missionaries had something important to say. They left their homelands and the life style from their countries and spent lots of money to come all the way to Thailand. They spent lots of time and effort going to language classes and trying to learn our language. I knew they had a significant message to communicate but what I couldn't figure out was: *if it was so important why did they have to try and say it all in the first ten minutes?*<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Krachiap daeng, commonly known in English as Roselle or Jamaican Sorrel, is *Hibiscus sabdariffa*. The dried red calyx of the flower is boiled to make juice, wine and food coloring and is said to have curative powers.

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Nanthachai Mejudhon, at the Isaan Congress, October 2000, Khon Kaen, Thailand.

## **Most Barriers are Social not Religious**

Along with employing a wholistic approach, and using all the signal systems in communication there is an urgent need to recognize that for most Thai Folk Buddhists the strongest barriers to Christ which they experience are not religious but social. The so-called “religious tenets” of their faith are relative! If cultural barriers do not exist or can be minimized, then social barriers must next be examined. As mentioned above, are the methods of communicating Jesus Christ to Thai Folk Buddhists encouraging the bringing of people together into social community (a high cultural value in Thailand), or are they pulling people away from a sense of community towards a more westernized individualism? Often evangelical witness focuses on individual conversion. This is problematic when working in the Thai Folk Buddhist context in which, even today, many major decisions are decided in a group.

Conversion theology is an inadequate model for converting animists for two reasons. First, conversion in animistic contexts frequently is not individualistic...Decisions to come to Christ might be made by a group of people interacting with each other and with God...A lengthy discussion precedes any response to the gospel message. The individuals in the group significantly influence each other to accept or reject the Christian message. Second, and more significant, the content of the biblical message encompasses more than conversion. The message to the animist must present a God who sent his Son not only to bring salvation from sin (Luke 19:10) but also to destroy the works of Satan (I John 3:8) (Van Rheenen 1991:131).

Once the new believer is part of a community of faith in Jesus Christ how are social needs integrated into worship and community? A social sense of the need for ceremony is extremely important to Thai people. As Rev. Tongpan Phrommedda, a Thai Christian evangelist for forty years in his home region of Isaan (northeast region of Thailand) explained,

You need to understand this part of Isaan culture. Ceremony is the traditional way in our culture to officially mark a new beginning. If there is no ceremony then there has been no new beginning. If we do a ceremony, then it means we have now received or started something new. These ceremonies address our cultural need to show that something has begun. They come from our cultural background and address the deep need we have as Isaan people to show “beginning” (Phrommedda in DeNeui 2001:35).

Ceremony can take many forms and fills a different role from the two Biblically commanded sacraments of baptism and communion. However, the importance of regular communion in a sacramental society cannot be overstated. Several churches in Thailand celebrate communion weekly at every worship service; anything less would be to abuse by omission one of the strongest symbolic social activities in which the follower of Jesus can participate.

The Animist is a member of a sacramental society. At his many praying-places he often takes part in ceremonies which involve a common meal and food shared with spirits. It is pathetic to find that so often, when a man becomes a Christian and has renounced spirit-worship, he is only able to attend a service of Holy Communion two or three times a year. ..The Animist has a genius for sacramental worship, and everything should be done to see that it find its fullest expression in the Christian rite (Harris 1960: 61-62).

### **Recognising The Reality of Power in the Spirit World**

Perhaps what Thai Folk Buddhism can best teach cross-cultural workers who seek to follow and communicate Christ, is the recognition of the reality of the power found in the spirit world. I Corinthians 4:20 says, “For the kingdom of God is not just a matter of fancy talk; it is living by God’s power” (NLT). It was because of a need for power that many sought out animistic practices in the first place. What is the attitude of the cross-cultural worker to be?

It is easy to go to either extreme. Many westerners come from a perspective that the realities of the spirit world are trivial and either deny their existence or rationalize them away.

Others focus on them too much. The scripture gives guidelines that these realities should not be ignored.

Ephesians 6:10-20 warns us that we must be alert to discern spiritual reality behind human facades. Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood (human beings), but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Verses 18-20 identify one of the most effective weapons to use in spiritual warfare: intercessory prayer.

Studying these passages leads to an important principle regarding spiritual warfare: *Physical situations may well be caused, controlled, or instigated by spiritual beings.*

You can see that discernment is necessary in spiritual warfare, and that one must avoid the twofold spiritual warfare problem. Maintaining dynamic balance between the two extremes takes discernment. A leader must heed two cautions concerning the spiritual warfare process item. Don't *underestimate* and don't *overestimate* the spiritual warfare behind every situation. God will give the necessary discernment as the leader is open to learn (Clinton 1998:112).

There are many excellent resources in this area which can be read and reviewed<sup>32</sup> but none will compare to a personal understanding that God has empowered each of his servants to the task to which he calls him or her. This includes not only natural abilities and acquired skills but also spiritual gifts including word gifts, gifts demonstrating love, and gifts demonstrating power (Clinton and Clinton 1998:40). We are unfaithful to his calling if any of these areas are ignored. There are many Folk Religionists that remain enslaved to spirit powers, even within churches all throughout the world, because issues of power have never been fully addressed.

*Father Niran became a follower of Jesus and led many in his village to also follow Jesus. Upon his conversion, however, he no longer played the **kaen**. He seemed unable to learn any new tunes upon this indigenous musical instrument that was used in the weekly worship of Jesus in his Thai village. He continued to be unable to eat meat of any winged creature or simply refused to. When he did he still complained of severe intestinal discomfort. Finally, when his wife demanded that he become a Buddhist monk for three days in order that he fulfill a vow that she*

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<sup>32</sup> Refer to Anderson 1990 and Kraft 1992. There are several other helps available on this topic.

*had made, he agreed - much to the chagrin of his local fellowship. Afterwards his feelings of shame kept him from rejoining the church and he continued to show enslavement to spirit forces.*

## **Conclusion**

Animistic practices have existed long before Bible times. Animism flourished in the days of the early church and many of the believers came from an animistic tradition. Michael Green asks what attracted the ordinary Gentiles to Christianity in the early church and concludes that “perhaps the greatest single factor which appealed to the man in the street was deliverance from demons, from Fate, from magic” (Green 1970:123). These same practices, dressed in modern garb, continue in our day and show no sign of demise. Have we learned yet how to communicate Christ to people of an animistic worldview?

Many efforts to bring Christ to the Thai Folk Buddhist worldview show that God’s spirit is working throughout the kingdom of Thailand and all over the world. Today there is a need for a measuring tool to use in deciphering how far contextualization of the gospel in the church has truly progressed. Appendix 4 is one attempt to provide this type of a spectrum scale.

May God give us willingness to be effective servants, willing to learn from our Thai Folk Buddhist friends and neighbors and to experience his grace in wisdom and in power.

*Grandma Somlee was in the midst of her most vivid nightmare. Crushing pressure upon her chest convinced her that angry spirits had come to squeeze the life breath from her. Just as she felt all must end she saw a white light and heard a voice which said, calmly, “Do not be afraid. I am coming to you.” She had no idea who it was. The next week two Thai believers came to her from the direction of the white light and began to talk. She accepted their message of freedom through Jesus Christ. That night her nightmare returned again but at the peak of her physical pain she cried out, “Jesus, Help me!” The pressure and pain was released immediately. When she woke the next day she had no further memory of the medicinal recipes which had formerly employed and enslaved her. She purged her yard of any remnants of the herbal plants*

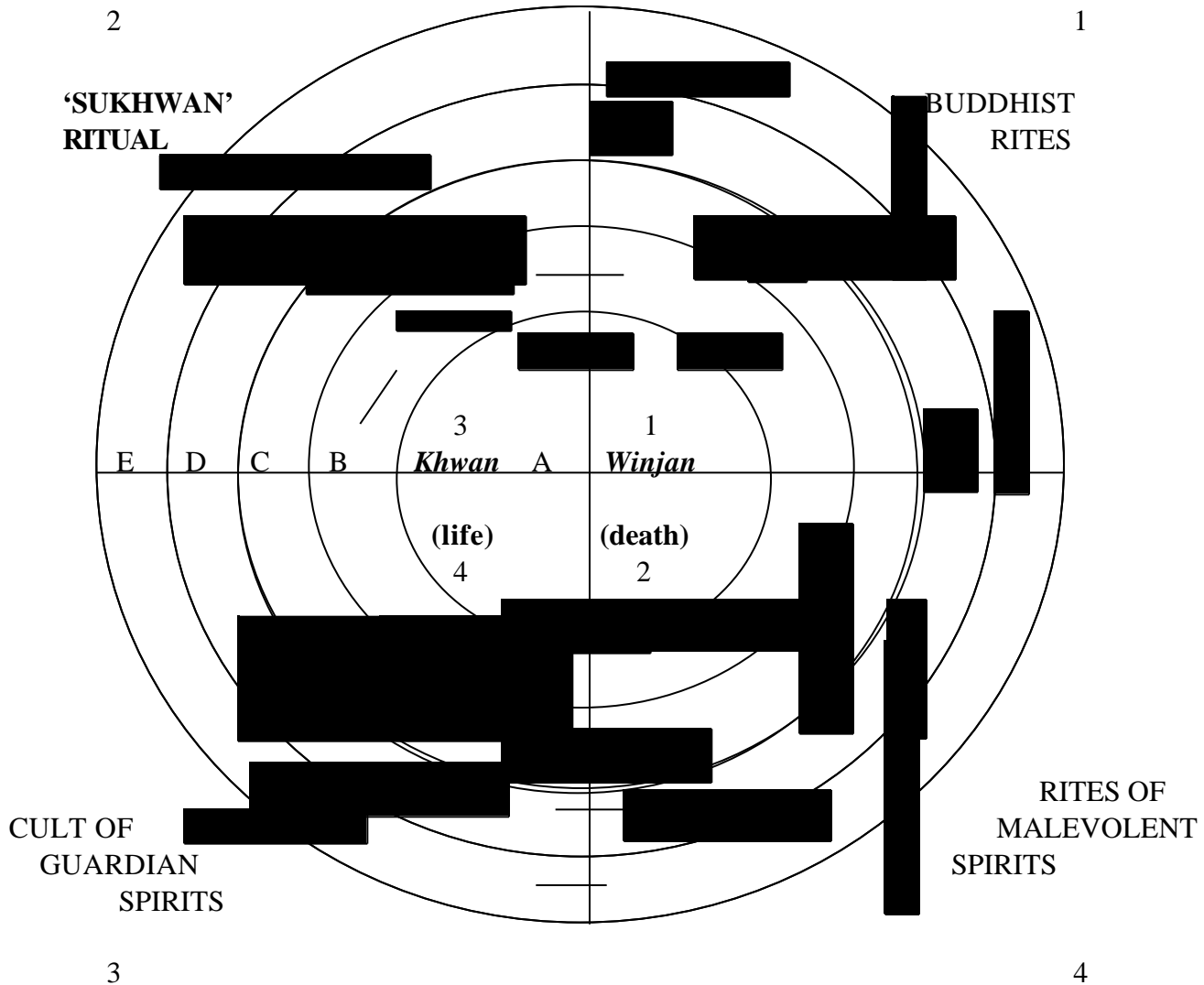
*much to the ridicule of neighbors. Later she told them, "The spirits were always hungry and never satisfied but God always wants to give. Now I am free."*

“Take a firm stand against the Devil, and be strong in your faith,  
Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world  
are going through the same kind of suffering you are.”

I Peter 5:9 NLT



## Appendix 1 Tambiah's Overview of Thai Folk Buddhism



### THAI RELIGION (Source: Tambiah 1970:180)

1. Thai religion is a complex of diverse religious fields.
2. Each religious “field” comprises a network of cognizably interrelated structural complexes.
3. The four most distinct “fields” and complexes are: Buddhism, Brahmanism, the cults of “guardian spirits”, and the cult of the malevolent spirits.
4. These are complementary systematic approaches to “the supernatural.”
5. This complementary, however, does not confuse their identities within Thailand’s religiously pluralistic socio-culture.

Source: (Day 1988:182)

## Appendix 2 Christ's Claims and the Counterfeit's Claims

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Jesus' Claims</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Animism's Claims</u>
Matthew 8:3 Matthew 9:2 Matthew 9:28	I am willing to act, to heal Your sins are forgiven Do you believe I am able to do this?	Christ desires to benefit us Deals with heart issues Christ can do the miraculous	Spirits Need Persuading Appears to deal w/ issues Spirits can do miracles
Matt. 11:28 Matthew 28:20	I'm gentle, humble in heart I am with you always (also in Acts 18:10)	Side by side with us in life An ever-present source of help	Easily offended, above us Presence comes and goes
Mark 14:62	I am the Christ, son of Most High God	Full authority revealed	Unknown source or position Appears able to help lead us to heaven
Luke 23:43	I assure you: Today you will be with me In paradise.	Assures us that he is able to take us to heaven w him	Appearance of sustaining life
John 6:35, 51	I am the bread of life, the living bread	Source and sustainer of life	Appearance of light
John 8:12	I am the light of the world, Light of life	Those who are in Jesus are not in darkness	
John 8:23 John 8:49	I am from above I am not demon-possessed	Christ comes from heaven Empowered by God Omnipresent	From lower realm Empowered by Father of demons Unknown origin
John 8:58 John 9:5 John 10:7,8	Before Abraham was, I am I am the light of the world I am the gate...whoever enters through me is saved.	Always existed A light in the last times Takes us in and moves us on to salvation	Appearance of light Appears to be only hope, only way to get help
John 10:11,14 John 10:30 John 11:25	I am the good shepherd I and the Father are one I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live	Beneficent on our behalf Christ is one with God As source of life, he is able to give life to others.	Assists those who pay Unknown linkages Helps as long as attended to, necessary but not "good"
John 13:13,14	I am teacher, Lord and servant	He gave us an example	Not a servant but to be served and then will help
John 14:6 John 14:20	I am the way, truth, the life I am in my Father, You are in me and I am in you	Only one, unique We become one in God through Christ	One of many Spirits dwell in people but not one with them
John 14:21	I love those who obey me	Basis of relationship is love	Basis of relationship is slavery
John 15:1,5 Rev. 1:17,18	I am the vine, the true vine I am the First and the Last (also 21:6)	Christ is the source Beginning and End	Appearance of source One of many, not unique
Rev. 2:23	I search hearts and minds	Knows us better than we know ourselves	Perceives but doesn't read minds or hearts
Rev. 22:16	I am the Root, David's offspring, Morning Star	Tied to a history of promise	Linked with a history of curse and destruction.

### Appendix 3. Claims of Others About Christ and the Counterfeit's Claims

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Scriptural Claims About Christ</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Claims of Animism</u>
Luke 24:6	He is not dead, he is risen	Victorious over death	Victory over present problems
John 5:21	He gives life	Life is in his control	Apparent control over life
John 1:14	He became one of us	God made flesh	Flesh appearing god-like
John 9:35-37	He is the son of Man	All we have to do is confess	Appeasement available at price. No personal change. Sought out, not rejected
Acts 4:11	He is the stone the builders rejected	Didn't appear as people thought he should	
Acts 17:27	He is not far from any of us	Close, readily available	Available at a price, distant
2 Cor 5:17	In Christ one is a new creation	Process begins w/ relationship	Not a relationship, nothing new, deeper enslavement
2 Cor 12:10	He's strong when we're weak	He is intimately involved	Strong when we ask for help
Eph 5:23	Christ is Head of the Church, Savior	He has supremacy over all	Unknown hierarchy of spirits
Col 1:17	In Him all things hold together	Compassionate, understanding	Holds fate and future
Col 1:18	He is the firstborn from the dead	Wants to intercede for us	Appearance of supremacy
Heb 2:18	He is able to help those being tempted	Takes care of everything	Able to help the powerless
Heb. 7:25	He is able to save completely	He did it all for us	Able to save specifically
Heb. 8:6	He is mediator		Requires a medium
I Peter 1:16	He is holy, therefore be holy like him	This is a hope for believers	Not holy, nor model to be like
I John 1:7	Blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin	Hope of transformation	Pays debt, does not purify
I John 1:9	He is faithful and just to forgive	He sought us out	Need to repay repeatedly
I John 2:2	He is the atoning sacrifice for us and the whole world	He did what we cannot	May or may not forgive
I John 2:29	He is righteous and makes us same	Desire our best for us	We must make sacrifice, One by one
I John 3:1,2	When we see him we'll be like him	And helps us get there	Helps but doesn't make us right
I John 4:10	He loved us first and sent his son for us	Able to transform	No one wants to see or be like s
Rev. 17:14	He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords	He initiated the relationship	People must seek out the spirits
	He will defeat all foes	Ultimate authority	Ultimate enemy, ultimate losers
		Ultimate victory	

## **Appendix 4**

### **Contextualizing the C1 to C6 Spectrum for Folk Buddhism:**

A Practical Tool for Defining the Body of Christ  
Expressed in Six Types Among Believers of Folk Buddhist Backgrounds

Anyone struggling with issues of cross-cultural evangelism in the Muslim context is familiar with the concept of the C1-C6 spectrum. This scale first appeared as a sidebar in an article entitled, “Danger! New Directions in Contextualization” by Phil Parshall in the October 1998 issue of the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (Vol. 34 No. 4: 407-408). The original tool was written by a John Travis (pseudonym) and was entitled, “The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of “Christ-centered Communities” (“C”) Found in the Muslim Context.” The original purpose of the spectrum was “to assist church planters and Muslim background believers to ascertain which type of Christ-centered communities may draw the most people from the target group to Christ and best fit in a given context” (Travis 1998:407). This scale has been a very helpful and highly debated tool in its context and the author believes that it can be contextualized for practical use for those working in the Folk Buddhist world as well.

Folk Buddhism, as opposed to pure “book” Buddhism, would include animistic or primal religious practices as well as Theravada or Mahayana Buddhist practice in a syncretistic mix. Often a wide variety of elements from other belief systems are also incorporated. The acknowledgment (and in most cases fear) of the spirit world is the starting point from which is built an understanding and allegiance to the One True God, who is above all other beings and powers in either the spirit or the natural world.

The C1-C6 Spectrum is a tool to understand different approaches to building the Body of Christ among people in the Folk Buddhist world. The six types in the spectrum are differentiated by language, culture, worship forms, leadership styles, degrees of freedom to worship with others; and religious identity. All worship Jesus Christ as Lord and would view the scriptures as God’s perfect rule for faith, doctrine and conduct. The spectrum attempts to address the enormous diversity which exists throughout the Folk Buddhist world in terms of ethnicity, history, traditions, language, culture, and, in some cases, theology.

This diversity means that myriad approaches are needed to successfully share the gospel and plant communities of faith in Jesus Christ (collectively known as the Body of Christ) among the nearly one billion people of the world who are *strongly influenced* by Folk Buddhism (Smith 2001:8). The purpose of the spectrum is to assist church planters and Folk Buddhist background believers to ascertain which type of Christ-centered communities may most effectively allow Christ to be brought into their cultural world and best fit in given context. All of these six types are presently found in some part of the Folk Buddhist world.

The author makes no claim to originality with this spectrum and remains highly indebted to Travis for the seed idea. It is the hope that this effort will begin a process that will allow

Jesus Christ to be clearly communicated and encountered in the many cultures and lives found in today's vast Folk Buddhist world.

### **C1 Traditional Church using National or Outsider Language**

May be Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant. Thousands of C1 churches are found in Folk Buddhist countries and areas today. Many reflect Western culture in forms, style, leadership and philosophy. A huge cultural chasm often exists between the church and the surrounding Folk Buddhist community. Leadership may be Bible-school trained or gifted local leadership using western style communication methods. Many of the members, though coming from a Folk Buddhist background, would have been exposed to western Christianity for some time and therefore feel at home in this context. C1 believers claim primary allegiance to the one true God and call themselves “Christians.”

### **C2 Traditional Church using Local or Insider Language**

Essentially the same as C1 except for language. Though insider language is used, religious vocabulary is probably non-Buddhist (distinctively “Christian”). The cultural gap between Folk Buddhists and C2 is still large. Leadership may be Bible-school trained or gifted local leadership using western style communication methods. Many of the members, though coming from a Folk Buddhist background, would be learning to understand western Christianity and are becoming more comfortable with it. The majority of churches located in the Folk Buddhist world today are C1 or C2. C2 believers claim primary allegiance to the one true God and call themselves “Christians.”

### **C3 Contextualized Worshipping Communities of Believers in Jesus Christ Employing Insider Language and Religiously Neutral Insider Cultural Forms**

Primarily from Protestant traditions. Religiously neutral forms may include some local forms of music (whenever appropriate) or culturally neutral combinations of local and western instruments, use of artifacts, time, space, artwork, architecture, furniture (sitting on mats). Folk Buddhist elements (where present) are “filtered out” so as to use purely “cultural forms. The aim is to reduce foreign-ness of the gospel and the church by contextualizing to biblically permissible cultural forms. Leadership may be a gifted lay person who may or may not have Bible school training. Forms of Bible teaching may be preaching or Bible discussion. The members would come from a Folk Buddhist background and most would not be familiar with Christianity but would be learning about it. May meet in a church building or more religiously neutral location (homes or sala). C3 believers claim primary allegiance to the one true God and call themselves “Christians.”

### **C4 Contextualized Worshipping communities of Believers in Jesus Employing Insider Language and Biblically Permissible Cultural and Folk Buddhist Forms.**

Similar to C3, however, biblically permissible Folk Buddhist forms and practices are also utilized (e.g. hands together for prayer, saying “Satoo” at the end of prayers, dance in worship, using rice at communion, etc.). Western cultural forms as found in C1 and C2 are avoided. Meetings are not held in western-style church buildings but generally in homes or public meeting areas.. Leadership may be a gifted lay person who may or may not have formal western-based Bible school training. Forms of Bible teaching would be Bible discussion or other culturally appropriate forms. C4 communities are comprised almost entirely of Folk Buddhism background

believers who know little of western forms of Christianity and are not learning about them or adopting them. C4 believers, though highly contextualized, are usually not seen as Buddhist by the Folk Buddhist community. C4 believers claim primary allegiance to the one true God and identify themselves as “Followers of Jesus”, “Children of God” (or similar terms) and avoid the term “Christian” because of its western association.

### **C5 Contextualized Worshipping communities of Folk Buddhists who have Accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, Employing Local Language and Capturing Non-Neutral Folk Buddhist Forms for use in Communicating the Gospel.**

C5 believers remain socially within the community of Folk Buddhists. Aspects of Folk Buddhism which are incompatible with the Bible are rejected, or reinterpreted if possible (use of string-tying in various ceremonies, for example). Meetings are not held in western-style church buildings but generally in homes or public meeting areas. Participation by C5 Believers in some Buddhist and animist functions varies from person to person and group to group. C5 believers meet regularly with other C5 believers and share their faith with unsaved Folk Buddhists. Folk Buddhists may see C5 believers as not being real Buddhists because they do not seek means of making merit or appeasing spirits as other Folk Buddhists do. C5 believers can, however, participate in some of these functions “in the name of Jesus.” C5 believer communities are comprised entirely of believers who come from Folk Buddhist backgrounds and know little about western forms of Christianity and are not learning about them or adopting them. Leadership may be a gifted lay person who usually does not have formal western-based Bible school training. Forms of Bible teaching would be Bible discussion or other culturally appropriate forms. C5 believers claim primary allegiance to the one true God and are viewed as Folk Buddhists who have Jesus by the Folk Buddhist community. They refer to themselves as “Children of God” or a similar name. They would claim not to be accepting, following or practicing Christianity but following Jesus Christ.

### **C6 Small Christ-centered communities of Secret/Underground Believers.**

Similar to persecuted believers suffering under totalitarian regimes. Due to fear, isolation, or threat of extreme governmental/community legal action or retaliation (including capital punishment), C6 believers worship Christ secretly (individually or perhaps infrequently in small clusters). Many come to Christ through visions, dreams, miracles, radio broadcasts, tracts, Christian witness while abroad, or reading the Bible on their own initiative. C6 (as opposed to C5) believers are usually silent about their faith. C6 is not ideal; God desires his people to witness and to have regular fellowship (Heb. 10:25). Nonetheless C6 believers are part of our family in Christ. Though God may call some to a life of suffering, imprisonment, or martyrdom, he may be pleased to have some worship him in secret, at least for a time. C6 believers claim primary allegiance to the one true God but are perceived as Buddhists by the Buddhist community and would identify themselves as Buddhists.



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