THE MISSIONARY AS STRANGER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES' ENCOUNTER WITH THE FOLK RELIGIONS OF THAILAND

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Two major dimensions of strangeness, the cognitive and normative, are distinguished in Schuetz's classical phenomenological model of the transition from strangeness to familiarity. It is argued that there is a category of stranger roles whose role obligations encourage a cognitive, but preclude a normative transition from strangeness to familiarity. The argument is examined on empirical data on Christian missionaries in Thailand. Specifically, the changing attitudes to local beliefs in spirits (phii) and their accommodation into the missionaries' worldview are examined. It is found that the missionaries tend to 'Christianize' the spirits, thus modifying their worldview, but not changing it fundamentally.

The stranger, as a newcomer to an unfamiliar environment, in which he intends to sojourn for an extended period, or even to settle, normally experiences internal and external pressures to accomplish a transition from strangeness to familiarity by adapting to the worldview, values and behavioral patterns of the natives of this environment. Schuetz (1944) has described this process of transition, in phenomenological terms, as consisting of three principal stages, beginning with an initial attempt of the stranger to impose upon the host environment his own categories of thought and action, through a middle stage of learning and experimenting with the patterns customary in the host environment, to the final stage in which those patterns are internalized and become natural to him; then, "the stranger is no stranger any more" (Schuetz 1944: 507). Berger and Luckmann (1966: 176) have described such a process of transition between extremely dissimilar cultural environments as one of "switching worlds," using as their paradigm religious conversion (ibid.: 177ff.).

However, such descriptions of the transition are merely ideal typical, and are not always fully borne out in actual practice. In fact, many strangers, though residing for prolonged periods of time in the host environment, do not accomplish a transition at all, or accomplish it in only a partial and incomplete manner. Phenomenologists have paid relatively little attention to the systematic analysis of situations in which a full transition was not accomplished by the stranger, apparently considering them as mere deviations from the ideal type of the process, as described by Schuetz. In particular, they failed to distinguish between two very different configurations of factors which account for the absence of a full transition. One configuration is related to the personal motivation, predispositions and abilities of the strangers: some strangers do not desire to make the transition or fail to accomplish it; these will not concern us further here. The other configuration, however, is

related to the role-commitments of the stranger: there are some types of roles, whose successful performance in the foreign environment precludes a full transition from strangeness to familiarity. Indeed, such a transition could in fact subvert the role itself. However, in order to corroborate our argument, we have to go beyond Schuetz and make a fuller analysis of the structure of strangeness than has been accomplished by Schuetz himself or by his followers.

The Dimensions of Strangeness

"Strangeness," for Schuetz is a monolithic whole, which remains unanalyzed. However, one can distinguish three dimensions in the concept, which do not necessarily always co-vary—namely, the social, the cognitive and the normative.

Social strangeness was treated implicitly, in terms of "nearness and remoteness," in Simmel's (1950) formal analysis of the stranger. It relates to the nature of the social characteristics and relations, which the stranger shares with the locals. In this paper, however, I shall refrain from dealing with this dimension of strangeness and concentrate on the other two dimensions, which are implicit in Schuetz's (1944) phenomenological analysis of the stranger, though he did not distinguish between them, namely, the cognitive and the normative.

Cognitive strangeness will here be defined as an absence of understanding on the part of the stranger of the worldview, the categories, thought patterns, values, norms and customary meanings prevalent in the host environment. The overcoming of this kind of strangeness consists of the accomplishment of such an understanding, or insight, into the working of the host culture, irrespective of whether or not one adopts it for himself or identifies with it.

Normative strangeness will here be defined as an absence of identification with, or internalization of the values, norms and customary meanings prevalent in the host environment. The overcoming of this kind of strangeness consists of the accomplishment of such an identification and internalization (whether or not the values, norms and meanings are "correctly" understood by the stranger).

It follows that different phenomenological patterns of transition from strangeness to familiarity can be distinguished, ranging from a complete transition (both cognitive and normative), through a partial transition (i.e., on one but not on the other of these dimension) to a complete absence of transition (on either dimension). For our present purposes, one particular pattern of partial transition is of special significance: namely, a successful cognitive transition, accompanied by an absence of a normative transition. I shall call this pattern "interpretative," since those who practice it usually seek to understand the host environment, but interpret the significance of what they understood in terms of normative relevances derived from their own culture of origin, or from their specific professional sub-culture, and not from that of their hosts. Such an understanding, hence, does not amount to an adoption of the host culture's construction of reality, or to "switching worlds"; rather a distance is consciously maintained by the stranger between himself and the host environment. This pattern appears to be characteristic of a whole range of stranger roles, such as spies, anthropologists, diplomats, journalists and—the subject of the present paper—missionaries, and to endow these roles with a distinctive internal tension and dynamics.

The incumbents of these roles share a conscious effort to prevent their transition

into the host society from proceeding "naturally" (i.e. in the manner described by Schuetz), but refrain from adopting normatively the hosts' worldview and identifying with their values, norms and meanings, even as they strive to reach a cognitive understanding of these. Indeed, such an adoption and identification will, in the case of these role bearers, necessarily entail a failure to perform their roles successfully, and may even spell the end of their careers. The spy who "crosses the line," the anthropologist who "goes native" (cf. Gronewold 1972), and the missionary who converts to the religion of those whom he has sought to proselytize, are examples of such failures in role-performance, due precisely to a "successful" completion of the transition from strangeness to familiarity. Indeed, individuals destined for such roles often receive special training which is intended to enable them to withstand the tensions which this partial, "interpretative" pattern of the transition engenders, and to hold fast to their convictions and values despite the onslaught of the social construction of reality prevalent in the host environment.

The Missionary as Stranger

The missionary, as a particular type of stranger-role, has not been the subject of much research or analysis in sociology and anthropology (Salamone 1977: 408; but see Wolcott 1972, Sider 1978). We shall therefore start by a brief and perhaps somewhat schematic analysis of that role.

The missionary is a very particular kind of stranger: Unlike the "sojourner" (Siu 1952, Bonacich 1973) and the expatriate (Cohen 1977), who typically live in full-fledged "environmental bubbles" (Cohen, 1972: 171) which segregate them from the locals, the missionary is expected to live among the host people to whom he ministers and whom he seeks to proselytize. However, he is not expected to submerge completely among the locals; missionaries who "go native" are looked upon askance. Hence, even when living among the host people, missionaries usually tended to keep themselves somewhat apart, creating what could be called "mini-environmental bubbles," in which they maintained many of their accustomed life-ways. These ranged from fairly comprehensive "civilized infrastructures" (Huber, 1987: 111), to rather modest mission stations and compounds in which only the bare essentials of a Western life-style have been preserved. The thinner the missionary's "mini-environmental bubble" the more he is exposed to the natives' culture and worldview; such exposure may have an important impact on the way he manages his stranger-role.

Like the anthropologist—but unlike the stranger who seeks to submit to the strangeness of the host environment and "go native"—the missionary is usually psychologically and professionally prepared for his mission (Hvalkof and Aaby, 1981: 11). While missionaries often went out of their way to enter and understand the native world (e.g. Ostling 1982, Arbuckle 1983), their training is intended to prevent such empathy from interfering with their original convictions and purpose. Indeed, their ability so to interpret the native construction of reality as to enhance the effectiveness of the promulgation of their own message, is a measure of their professional competence.

Contemporary missionaries are more ready than their predecessors have been to adapt Christianity to native world views. This is a consequence of a less exclusive and more tolerant approach of the Christian churches to the religions and cultures

of non-Christian people. While some adaptations are done from motives of pure expediency, others are a result of profound soul-searching, and of a genuine openness to native beliefs, often coupled with a radical rejection of the traditional approach of the churches to native people and religions (e.g. Shapiro, 1987: 136).

Change of attitudes by the missionaries to their native surroundings have also taken place in Asia, and specifically in Thailand. In the past, the attitude of both Catholic and Protestant Christianity to non-Christian religions—irrespective of whether they were the great eastern religions or the mythico-magic religions of "primitive" peoples—was unequivocally negative: These religions were considered erroneous, and their adherents "heathens," whose unfortunate fate was to be condemned to hell. Hence they were to be converted by virtually any means, for their own salvation (cf. e.g. Miller 1974: 280-2). Owing to the perceived radical, qualitative difference between Christianity, which was alleged to have a monopoly of truth, and all other religions, which were said to be in complete error, conversion of the natives was expected to involve a total religious and cosmological reorientation on their part. Moreover, since conversion to Christianity was closely and indistinguishably related to Westernization, the conversion of the natives in fact meant that not only their religious beliefs and practices, but their whole way of life were to be fundamentally revamped and adjusted to that brought by the missionaries. The missionaries on their part were not expected to "learn" anything from the natives, nor to adjust or accommodate their own construction of reality in any way.

In recent decades some important changes have taken place in the approach of the Christian churches in Asia as elsewhere to other religions; these have reduced the sharpness of the dividing line between the Christian and non-Christian worldviews and beliefs and opened some new possibilities of accommodation between the Christian missionaries and their host environment. On the one hand, the Christian churches realized that their message has been in the past formulated in a distinctively Western idiom (cf. Ostling, 1982: 39) and that by distinguishing between the message and the idiom, Christianity can be made more accessible and palatable to non-Western people. On the other hand, a more pluralistic theology recognized that there may be elements of truth in other religions, although Christianity alone was said to be in possession of the complete truth. This recognition was made most explicitly by the Catholic Church (cf. Arbuckle 1983), and was formally pronounced in the decisions of the Second Vatican Council (Declaration 1966); but it can be found, perhaps less explicitly formulated, even among some conservative Protestant denominations (e.g. Ostling 1982: 40).

As a consequence of this reorientation, the boundary line which in the past crisply divided the Christian and the non-Christian constructions of reality became progressively permeable. Thereby new possibilities of legitimate accommodation were opened to Christian missionaries, accompanied by new challenges. For, even as it became more legitimate for missionaries to adopt elements of local custom and religion and integrate them into the version of Christianity propounded by them, the threat of "syncretism" became more acute.

The literature on Christianization deals primarily with adaptations of the Christian religion on the institutional level. However, the closer involvement of the missionaries, as individuals, with local cultures and beliefs could not but have also a personal impact on their own world views and beliefs. It is this aspect of the process which is of central interest in this paper. We shall examine this impact on

the example of the Christian missionaries active among the Thai peasants practic-ing a version of folk Buddhism, and among the tribal people adhering to "animis-tic" religions in contemporary Thailand. The data are derived from a comprehensive survey of the literature on Christianity in Thailand and extensive interviews with missionaries and officials of several major Christian churches active in Thailand.

The Missionaries' Encounter with Native Beliefs

The early Christian missionaries in Thailand, Laos and Burma, and particularly the nineteenth century American Protestants, chiefly Baptists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists (cf. McFarland (ed.), 1928; Cohen, 1991) were fired by a profound religious conviction, a certainty of the unique and exclusive truth of their Christian message. Hence, they did everything in their power to spread the "good news" among the "heathens": They learned the Thai language, and later the languages of many other ethnic groups in Thailand and contributed to the efforts to translate the Scripture into these languages (cf. Thompson, 1967: 656-7, Seidenfa-den 1930, Seely 1957); they travelled to the most remote parts of the country, arduously striving to reach as many natives as possible (e.g., McGilvary 1912, McFarland (ed.) 1928); and they practiced medicine and other modern arts (e.g., Thompson 1967: 658-9, Thanasthid 1981) in order to help the people, but also to convince them of the superior power of the religion they sought to disseminate (Cohen 1991).

Though at first the Christian missionaries had little knowledge of the people and little understanding of their religious beliefs and customs, the more observant among them gradually acquired a considerable expertise on the local cultures and lifeways. Native beliefs, however, appear to have had little impact on the mission-aries' own beliefs and worldview. They were people of strong and unshakable convictions, who rejected indiscriminately as erroneous and sinful (Thabping 1974: 86) all local beliefs and customs, whether cultural or religious. For the Protestant missionaries in mid-nineteenth century, ". . . the northern states [in contemporary Burma, Thailand and Laos] were not only a land of darkness but also ruled by Satan. The religion of the people [whether Buddhist or animist] was held to be a counterfeit religion which cannot save" (Swanson 1984: 39-40).

Consequently, the missionaries asked the newly converted natives to abandon completely their old ways, to cast away their "idols," whether Buddha images or spirit houses, and put their trust exclusively in Christ. By this wholesale condem-nation of native religious beliefs and customs and their exclusion from Christian practice, the early missionaries apparently also forestalled any inner need to come to grips with the native world view. They were certainly convinced of the reality of the "Satanic powers" lurking behind the "idols" and spirits whom the natives worshipped and appeased (compare Shapiro, 1987: 1267). Indeed, the belief in the existence of such "Satanic powers" was integral to their own worldview, and the fight against them was conceived as their mission. However, they apparently refrained from a detailed theological examination of the nature and reality of the spiritual entities the natives believed in, indiscriminately condemning all of them as diabolic manifestations. An unbridgeable chasm separated the world views of the missionaries from that of the natives.

As Christian churches in Thailand became better established and missionary activities proliferated in the course of the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, mission compounds and "base-camps" (Kuhn 1956, Hudspith 1969: 20) have been created in major cities, ". . . from which, after survey-cum-evangelistic trips established strategic locations and responsiveness, 'advanced camps' were founded: Usually, after an initial response . . . a 'summit camp' [in a village] was occupied" (Hudspith 1969: 20-21). While many missionaries settled down in the major cities and towns, and did not actually live among the people, a fair number were dispersed over the rural and tribal regions, particularly in the northeast and north of the country. Here they were intensely exposed to the native beliefs and world views at a time when the wholesale denial, on the part of the churches, of their validity was being reconsidered, and the sharp dividing line between the respective world views of the natives and the missionaries gradually softened.

Paradoxically, however, the modern missionaries were, in a sense, initially more remote from the natives' world view than their early predecessors. The latter, while damning the animistic beliefs and practices of the natives as the worship of the devil, were still convinced of the reality of the satanic powers dominating the country. The modern missionaries, raised in the rationalistic spirit of their age and the "demythologizing" theologies of contemporary Protestantism, did not believe in the reality of these powers. As the beliefs in devils and demons ". . . has declined steadily in both popular and learned circles from the time of the Enlightenment to the present" (Long, 1987: 286), modern missionaries, even those belonging to the more fundamentalist circles, tended upon arrival to Thailand to discard the animistic beliefs of the natives in spirits as mere superstitions. Indeed, as they learned more about religion in Thailand, they learned to distinguish between the "superstitious" folk-beliefs in the powers of spirits and of Buddhist "idols," and the tenets of philosophical Buddhism, which they came to respect (but not to accept). However, since the latter are maintained in a pure form by only very few Thais, they were of little relevance to the everyday experience of the missionaries living among the native people. Here they continued to encounter mainly the former—animistic and folk—Buddhist beliefs, which, being judged "superstitious" and unfounded in reality, were not supposed to have any impact on the missionaries own accustomed world view. The missionaries may have sought to understand the nature of the natives' construction of reality—but their own convictions fortified them against any temptation to come to terms with it or even to adopt it.

The dividing line between the worlds of the missionaries and that of the natives was not, however, to remain perpetually so sharply drawn. Rather, in the last two decades several new factors began to affect the missionaries' world view, shaking their rationalistic outlook, and thereby infusing a degree of fuzziness into the previously crisp line dividing their worldview from that of those whom they sought to convert. Three factors appear to have been of particular significance in this process: (1) The progressive opening up of Christian theology, both Catholic and Protestant, to the religions of other people, whose belief-systems were consequently granted a more sympathetic attention by the local churches and missionaries than in the past; (2) The desire of the Christian missionaries, partly out of liberal convictions and partly as a tactical exigency, to bring the presentation of Christianity closer to the local people's cultures and worldviews, and to divest it from its foreign, Western image (cf. e.g. Gustafson 1970); and (3) partly as a

consequence of the preceding two factors, the progressively greater direct involve-ment of individual missionaries with the grass roots of local life—a circumstance which necessarily confronted them more directly with the plausibility structures dominating the outlook of those whom they sought to convert, and hence increased the inner tension experienced by the missionaries between the two worlds in which they lived. Their attempts to reduce this tension, without giving up their own religious and cosmological convictions, led to subtle accommodations of their world view. Here I shall concentrate on a single but basic issue in this process, and document it by several pertinent case studies of individual missionaries.

This basic issue is the confrontation between the missionaries' and the natives' world views with regard to the problem of the existence and nature of spirits (compare Ostling 1982: 40). The world of the animistic tribal people and of the nominally Buddhist Thai peasants is permeated by beliefs in a wide variety of guardian and malevolent spirits (*phii*) of differing descriptions and dispositions (see e.g. Mulder 1977, Salayakanond 1973, Tambiah 1970). The spirits are generally seen as benevolent and malevolent powers inhabiting the environment, whose mode of existence does not significantly differ from that of other natural entities. In other words, in the popular Thai and tribal construction of reality, the spirits are part of the world of everyday life, as "real" as stones, trees or human beings. Good and, particularly, bad luck—e.g. sickness, death, drought or harvest failure—are generally ascribed to the spirits. To prevent such calamities the spirits have to be ceaselessly worshipped, propitiated and appeased. This ritual activity, in turn, reinforces the plausibility of their existence.

Christian missionaries are unceasingly confronted with the native belief in the reality of spirits. For many of them this belief poses a problem: Christian theology recognized the existence of a plurality of spirits, angelic as well as demonic. Demons and the exorcism of demons are frequently mentioned in the New Testament (e.g. Lk. 10: 17-18, Mt. 12: 28). However, since the Enlightenment, spirit beliefs declined considerably; even Catholic theologians who continue to believe in the existence of a plurality of demonic powers, argue that ". . . it would be untheological levity to look on Satan and his devils as a sort of 'hobgoblins knocking about the world' " (Rahner and Vorgrimler, 1965: 124). Rationalist Protestant theology tended to deny, or at least discount as improbable, the existence of spirits, although belief in them was preserved in some of the more extreme American fundamentalist Protestant sects. Indeed, the early missionaries to Thailand hailed from a background in which belief in the reality of the "Satanic powers" was widespread. Most of their successors, however, raised in the rational-istic spirit of mid-twentieth century America, had been remote from such "obscu-rantist" beliefs when they arrived in Thailand. Paradoxically, however, owing to their greater sympathy for and openness to the native worldview than their prede-cessors, they were inevitably faced with the nagging question: Do the spirits, which so realistically inhabit the world of the natives, "really" exist?

The majority of missionaries active in areas where animism is strong, particu-larly those belonging to Protestant missions in northern Thailand, appear to have eventually answered this question in the affirmative, sometimes after considerable doubt and hesitation. Indeed, one of my informants claimed that he is unaware of any Christian missionary who lived in Thailand for a long time, and does not believe in the existence of spirits. The process of the acceptance of the reality of these beings and the manner of their accommodation to the Christian worldview of the missionaries can be vividly illustrated by some detailed case studies.

Accommodation of Native Spirit Beliefs into the Missionaries' Worldview

The three cases to be presented are of Protestant missionaries, belonging to different denominations. Two are from northern Thailand, while the third is from Bangkok.

Reverend A. is an American "fraternal worker" (the term used for foreign missionaries in the Church of Christ in Thailand), who grew up, by his own testimony, in a rationalistic, though Christian, worldview. This worldview stood in sharp contrast to the prevailing animism of the nominally Buddhist inhabitants of the central Thai rural area, in which he worked as a missionary for about twelve years after his arrival in Thailand. He relates that he has struggled for about ten years with the problem of the reality of the spirits which inhabited the world of the local population, and the belief in whose existence conflicted radically with his rationalistic view of the world. Eventually, however, he felt constrained to accept their reality; but, having been trained as an engineer prior to becoming a missionary, he sought objective proof of their existence, i.e. by means of an actual experience.

Once he was transferred to the northern city of Chiang Mai, the plausibility of his beliefs in the existence of spirits was reinforced when he found out that his Thai colleagues in the city generally believed in them as a matter of course. He was confirmed in his belief by the experience of spirit possession and exorcism. He relates vividly several cases of spirit possession, especially one of a local woman possessed by a *phii ba* (mad spirit), whose husband brought her to to be exorcised by him. But he was as yet unexperienced in such matters, and as the woman shouted and raged, an American colleague with experience with spirit exorcism from his work among the Hmong, advised him: "Tell her to shut up in the name of Jesus Christ!" Reverend A. followed this advice and claims that he eventually succeeded in exorcising the spirit from the woman's body. Following this, the woman is said to have "received Jesus in her heart." Similar experience later on further strengthened his belief in the reality of the spirit world. He now claims that "The [local] people had as much evidence of the existence of spirits as I have of God".

Reverend A. thus not only understood the construction of reality of the people to whom he ministered, but, in a sense, partially adopted it. He claims to have been forced, by his new realization, to change his rationalistic world view, acquired in America, where, he says, the spirits did not manifest themselves any more, because the strong belief in Christianity prevailing there precludes their manifestation.

However, by accepting the existence of the spirit world, Reverend A. did not abandon his Christian convictions. Rather he has in a sense "Christianized" the spirits, accommodating them into his Christian world view or, in Berger and Luckmann's (1966: 139) terms, integrating them with it. He claims that he was ultimately able to accept the existence of the spirits by the fact that they are "in the Bible." Though in his studies he has been taught that they should be taken as "allegories" rather than real entities, he is now convinced that they are "real" powers for good or evil which manipulate man. However, he has not yet decided whether they are "devils," although he tends to identify them with the Fallen Angels of the Bible. He insists on the use of the purely Christian ritual of exorcism of the spirits who possess man, as exemplified in the New Testament, and refuses to permit the use of any of the customary native means to exorcise them. This

insistence is, in fact, also a means to propagate among the natives the belief in Christianity's superior power, within a general strategy of "contest of power" with the folk religions of Thailand (Cohen, 1991).

The important point to note in this account is that the manner in which Reverend A. interpreted the new element, which he accommodated into his worldview, enabled him to stick to his religious convictions, even though his perceptions of the world changed. He does not feel that he has "gone native." His conviction and Christian interpretation of his experiences, however, is not necessarily shared by members of his church, who have not gone through similar experiences. Thus, when Reverend A. informed his superior in the United States of his novel belief in spirits, the latter accused him of having adopted the world view of the natives.

Another missionary, Reverend H., a Baptist who worked for about thirty years among the Karen, a hill people inhabiting the borderlands of Thailand and Burma (Keyes (ed.) 1979), shares Reverend A.'s belief in the reality of the spirits. During his many years of life among the Karen, Reverend H. developed a strong conviction of the malignant powers of the spirits inhabiting the environment of the Karen villages. As an example of their powers, he tells the story of the wife of an anthropologist who was working in a Karen village. The lady fell seriously ill and no medication could heal her. It turned out, according to Reverend H., that the anthropologist neglected to offer the customary sacrifice to the spirits upon entering the village, and has thereby incurred their wrath. Only when he eventually sacrificed to the spirits did his wife become well again.

Reverend H. did not "go native" himself, even though he believes, as this example shows, in the efficacy of the Karen sacrifices. Rather, he drew his own theological and practical conclusions from the reality of the spirits' existence. He criticizes those missionaries who argue that "the spirit world is merely psychological [i.e., an unreal superstition] and who are telling the Karen not to worry about the spirits, but to forget about them and believe in Jesus Christ, and they will be saved." Rather, he advocates an active "battle of power at every level" between Jesus and the spirits and develops a veritable theology of the "contest of power," according to which the Karen (and, for that matter, the northern Thais) will become convinced of the superiority of Christianity, owing to its ability to withstand and overcome the power of the spirits (Cohen 1991). Like Reverend A., he accommodated the Karen spirit world into his own world view, interpreting the spirits in terms of Christian theology. He also acts towards the spirits in the light of this interpretation. He relates, for example, that on one occasion he was himself accused by the Karen of causing the death of several children in the village in which he resided, allegedly because he did not sacrifice to the spirits upon entering the village. When challenged, he argued that he was protected by the blood of Christ, sacrificed once and for all times for all mankind, and hence did not have to sacrifice to the spirits. Not satisfied with his explanation, the villagers decided to ask a northern Thai spirit medium (cf. Irvine, 1984) for the cause of the children's deaths. Though he usually refuses on principle to get involved in divination, in this case he agreed to go along—convinced that Jesus will not permit the issue to be decided against him. The medium, indeed, divined that the deaths were caused by some inappropriateness committed by the villagers at a preceding festival, and ordered sacrifices to be offered to appease the offended spirits. Regarding Reverend H., the medium found that "the presence of this foreigner was a very good thing for the village," thus in fact vindicating him.

Reverend H. has accomplished a remarkable integration of crucial elements of local folk-religion with the basic tenets of Christianity. In the process, he accommodated the native belief in the reality of the spirit world into his own world view. He believes in the power of the Spirits, as shown by the case of the anthropologist's wife, but gives them a Christian interpretation. He also believes in the efficacy of divination, but interprets it as divinely inspired—as seen by his conviction that Jesus will not permit the spirit medium to decide against him.

Reverend H.'s approach, however, serves not only his personal need to reconcile the two worlds in which he lived—it also enables him to develop a practical strategy for the conversion and salvation of the Karen. Contrary to his missionary predecessors, Reverend H. does not advocate an abrupt abandonment of the spirits by the Karen after they have adopted Christianity. Rather, in accordance with his own conviction of the reality of the power of the spirits, he advocates that the converted Karen should ritually bid the spirits farewell and thereby redeem the chickens and pigs which they had consecrated to them (i.e. to Satan) in the past. Severed from the Karen in an orderly manner, the spirits will then peacefully depart from the Karen villages and release the inhabitants from the hold of their power.

Both ministers reported that they were surprised, during recent furloughs in the United States, to find there much more understanding for their belief in the existence of spirits than they did in the past (owing apparently to the recent occult revival in the U.S.). This understanding, in turn, confirmed them in their own belief: In their perception, contemporary Americans are only now rediscovering a spirit world of which these missionaries have been aware for a long time (and about which they have in fact learned from the very people whom they sought to convert).

Our third case is somewhat exceptional, but on the whole parallels the two preceding ones. Mr. E. is a young anthropologist, of a Protestant background, who originally came to Thailand to do a study of one of the new and flourishing Pentecostal churches, established in Bangkok by a young and dynamic Thai minister. In the course of his field work, Mr. E., in a sense "went native": he became a member of the Pentecostal church which he studied, and, being drawn into church work, for a while neglected his research project.

In the course of his "conversion," Mr. E. acquired a strong conviction in the existence of spirits. He argues that spirit-beliefs are not any less ubiquitous in Bangkok than they are in the rural areas. He advocates a battle against the spirits, which in his view are demonic powers, and the worship of whom is the worship of Satan. He goes further than the other ministers, in that he sees the Buddhist Thevada (heavenly beings) and even the powers believed to inhere in Buddha images, as demonic powers, on the strength of his conviction that whatever power is not God's is necessarily opposed to God (and hence demonic). Mr. E. therefore argues that, in principle, "spirit houses" and other objects serving as abodes of the spirits should be destroyed.

Like Reverend A., Mr. E. was also strengthened in his belief in the reality of spirits by observing spirit possession and exorcism. He has had several occasions to observe the performance of exorcism by the leader of his church, and was particularly impressed by a case of "multiple possession." He describes in picturesque language the protracted process of exorcism, during which one spirit left the victim, but the others refused to leave for a long time despite the exorcist's efforts. For him, as for Reverend A., such experiences provided concrete evidence of the reality of the spirits—while the fact that spirits are mentioned in the New Testa-

ment, confirmed and legitimized his belief. His world view did not change—but the spirit-world was accommodated into it, by endowing it with a Christian interpretation.

Conclusion

Schuetz (1944), in presenting a general model for the newcomer's transition from strangeness to familiarity with the host society, failed to distinguish between two principal phenomenological dimensions of this transition, the cognitive and the normative. There exists, however, an important category of stranger roles, whose role obligations, while encouraging them to make the cognitive transition, preclude an accomplishment of the normative one. The missionary constitutes one of the most salient examples of such a role, which obliges the bearer to make a partial transition from strangeness to familiarity: While the missionaries' success depends to no small measure on their thorough cognitive understanding of the native world view, their own religion, and the very purpose of their sojourn among the natives, precludes their normative identification with that world view.

The missionaries' own strong convictions of the truth of their religion and their professional training, are generally supposed to enable them to withstand the tensions engendered by their partial transition from strangeness to familiarity and to prevent their "going native." In the past, the social and cultural gulf separating the missionaries from the natives, served to reduce considerably the saliency of this tension. However, the recent opening up of many Christian churches to the religions and cultures of non-Christian peoples, reduced the sharpness of the separation between the respective constructions of reality of the Christian missionaries and those whom they seek to convert. As missionaries experienced the native world more immediately, and took more seriously the native world view, they were forced to wrestle more intensely with the problem of the validity of the native construction of reality. In Thailand, one of the most salient problems facing the missionaries was the reality of the spirit world which constitutes such an important component of the world view of the native people. Missionaries who had a prolonged and intensive experience of life among the local population, particularly but not exclusively in the northern region of Thailand, eventually tended to accept the existence of spirits, a belief utterly at variance with the plausibility structures prevalent in their modern American society of origin, and alien to the rationalistic tenor of their own theological upbringing. They thus accommodated within their own world view a crucial element of the native construction of reality. In a sense, such an accommodation involves a mode of normative transition: an element of the native world view is not only cognitively "understood" but also normatively judged as "true." However, the accommodation did not lead to a wholesale abandonment of the missionaries' Christian world view, or to the evolvement of a new religious syncretism. Rather, the missionaries drew upon their own religious resources to interpret their newly acquired belief in the existence of the spirits, and found justification for it in the New Testament. From here the way led easily to a "Christianization" (Kaplan 1986: 274-8) of the native spirits: namely their interpretation as devils or demons recognized by Christianity, but largely neglected or even negated (at least as concrete "natural" phenomena) in contemporary Christian theology. The missionaries' world view, then, underwent a modification but did not change fundamen-

tally. The worlds of the missionaries and the natives, which have in the past been completely disjointed, now in a sense partly overlapped, but, from the missionaries' perspective, the juncture has been accomplished by way of accommodation of part of the native into the Christian construction of reality. This accommodation has in turn been made to serve the missionaries as a bridge into the world of the natives, by which the conversion of the latter can be facilitated: now the natives are not asked any more to abandon their traditional beliefs (in the existence of spirits) altogether, but merely to reinterpret them in Christian terms. Such a reinterpretation can then be made into a means to rid the native people of the spirits (and not merely of spirit-beliefs), and to convince them of the supreme power of Christianity (cf. Cohen, 1991).

Acknowledgement

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