

CHAPTER 3

SPIRIT HOUSES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Pre-historic archeological data, particularly discoveries at Ban Chiang, indicate that the earliest settlers of ancient Siam were likely animistic farmers. (White 1982:12) These ancient societies existed for thousands of years before being influenced by Indian and Chinese cultures. Scholars such as K. Landon view Thai religion as historical layers with one set of beliefs stacked on the other; indigenous-animist, Brahmanic and Buddhist. (Landon 1939) The separate belief systems did not require exclusive allegiance. Rather, they complimented one another in syncretic blending.

As animists, these early inhabitants believed that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces had power over human affairs. David Wyatt says that the early Tai civilizations regarded the world as being "peopled with good and evil spirits that had the power to aid or harm humans and thus had to be propitiated by ceremonies or

offerings of food." (Wyatt 1982:4) Motivated by fear of these unseen forces, they attempted to manipulate and gain the favor of amiable powers as protection against harmful and destructive forces both in the physical and spiritual realm.

The arrival of Indian influence with Buddhism and Brahminism did not extirpate these beliefs in supernatural forces but rather absorbed them and perhaps even gave them more credence by incorporating legends, mythology and rich ceremony. Buddhist cosmology and mythology gave explanation to the problems of humanity as well as the power of nature that controlled each person's life. It also served to unite society by means of a higher, common belief system. As these groups united into city-states, Buddhist cosmology also provided justification for the power and authority of ruling kings. However, while playing such an important role in the development of Thai society, the acceptance of Buddhism never required the elimination of the long-held beliefs of different people groupings in society. On the contrary, the indigenous supernatural beliefs of the people were actually incorporated into the ritual and ceremonies of Buddhism.

Beliefs concerning the Phra Phum are an example of this integration. Although no scholarly evidence for such

claims exist, ritual consultants find the origin of the Phra Phum in Hindu mythology. According to one such "legend" there was a king-deity who had 9 sons. All were wise and talented princes. The king-deity one day commissioned them to go out and rule over different parts of the kingdom as follows: (สุรศักดิ์ อัมพันวงศ์ 2526:6)

- 1) Phra Chaiyamongkon - Places of residence and business
- 2) Phra Nakornraht - Forts and military installations
- 3) Phra Tapane - Animal stables
- 4) Phra Chaisohp - Rice storage silos
- 5) Phra Khontaan - Ceremonial halls
- 6) Phra Thamhuraa - Fields and forests
- 7) Phra Tawatane - Temples and holy places
- 8) Phra Thamekarat - Orchards and gardens
- 9) Phra Thattara - Rivers and ponds

These nine princes grew to become the legendary ruling guardians of the land. Only two of them, however, have lasted to be revered by present day Thais, Phra Chaiyamongkon, guardian of places of residence and businesses and Phra Thamekarat, guardian over orchards and gardens. The guardian of the rice storage silos, Phra Chaisohp, has now been replaced in reverence by the rice

goddess, Phra Mae Posohp. The other princes in this legend have faded from notoriety in contemporary society.

There are also attempts by popular ritual consultants to connect the Phra Phum to the Buddha. For instance, ritual consultant จ. เปร็ญญ relates a "legend" that says one day the Buddha met the Phra Phum and made a request for a piece of land three steps long to use in spreading his teaching. The Phra Phum agreed easily because the request was so small. As the Buddha began to pace off the land his power was manifested and in only two steps covered the entire kingdom. The Phra Phum was shocked and had to give over the entire kingdom to the Lord Buddha as agreed. Once done, the Phra Phum left to go live outside the borders. He was very dejected and tormented because he no longer received gifts, honor and reverence from the people. He pleaded then with the Lord Buddha to be able to return to the land once again. The Buddha agreed and sent forth a decree to all people that before building a house, erecting the cornerpost and putting on a roof, permission and blessing must be sought from the Phra Phum. The story concludes with the admonition that from that time on, all those who followed these instructions were blessed with

happiness and prosperity. (จ. เปรียญ 2526:100-101) Another spiritual consultant, โจรหลวง, relates the same "legend" with the slight variation that the Buddha did actually take three steps which covered the earth, heaven and hell, leaving the Phra Phum with nowhere to live at all. (โจรหลวง 2528:49)

There is no such legend involving the Buddha and the Phra Phum in Hindu mythology. It appears, rather, to be an adaptation of the Hindu legend in which the incarnated Vishnu, disguised as a Brahman, asks for three steps of a demon landowner.

While current versions such "legends" cannot be treated as scholarly, they do illustrate what people are being taught concerning spirit houses. The fact that the Phra Phum and Buddha are placed together in this way illustrates a continuing progressive integration of animism, Brahmanism and traditional Buddhism in the contemporary Thai belief system.

This chapter will primarily discuss the 3 spirit houses currently found in Bangkok; the Phra Phum, Jao Thii and Phra Phrom. Other popular shrines and images will also

be mentioned briefly to facilitate comparisons in power perception and popularity.

3.2 THE PHRA PHUM SPIRIT HOUSE

As the guardian over places of residence and businesses, the Phra Phum is found near most houses in Thailand, particularly in Bangkok. There are differences of opinion as to the origin of this shrine. Many say it has Brahmic roots, citing the mythological history. (สมทรง

ปัญญฤทธิ 1983: 181) "Phra Phum" is a Sanskrit word, likely indicating Brahmic influence. Respected scholar, Phra Banya Nanda Bhikkhu, however, argues that the Phra Phum is of Chinese origin. He says, "The Phra Phum is not from India. There is nothing like a Phra Phum in India. The Phra Phum is a Thai adaptation of the Chinese ancestor shrine." (Phra Banya Nanda Bhikkhu 1994) He observes that in ancient times the Phra Phum was not found everywhere in Thailand and suggests that early Phra Phum shrines were found mostly along the Chao Phraya basin where the Chinese were quite influential because of business and trading that took place along the river. Chinese households typically had ancestor

shrines. They paid homage to the shrine with incense sticks, flowers and food offerings. The Chinese shrines were placed on the floors and even under stairways. The Thais, already deeply animistic, quickly adapted the Chinese ancestor shrine into their belief system but would not think of putting a holy shrine on the floor or under a stairway where people would walk over it everyday. It was therefore placed on a pillar outside the house, approximately eye-level to the owner. The Thai adaptation, then, was a shrine erected on a pillar and placed outside the house.

The Phra Phum is sometimes called "Phra Phum Jaow Thii" which is actually redundant because the two phrases mean the same thing, "lord of the place". Phya Anuman Rajadhon points out a possible linguistic association with the Chinese word "To" "Ti", the name of the Chinese god of the ground or guardian spirit of the village. (Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1986:127) He suggests that the word likely points to a time when the Thai guardian spirit of the house, or Phra Phum, like the Chinese, was none other than the god who protected the village.* The practice of every house having a Phra Phum is likely a later development which came as

* There is disagreement on this point. No evidence to support Phya Anuman Rajadhon's idea that the Phra Phum evolved from a village deity to house deity. Especially in Bangkok, the Phra Phum has always been the guardian spirit of a residence and never of a village.

people began to live in towns rather than small, closely knit villages. The Phra Phum of the house is called in Thai, "Phra Phum Ban". "Ban" originally meant village, but now more specifically means the actual house. The gradual restriction of meanings mirrors the development of this deity from the tutelary spirit of the village to the spirit of the house.

According to ritual consultants, a Phra Phum should be erected as soon as possible after the construction of a new house. After tidying up the area a sight must be chosen to place the spirit house. The selection of the location of the Phra Phum can only be done by a person who is versed in such lore. Usually it is placed near a wall, especially in a corner location. The Phra Phum should be positioned near the front of the compound where it can watch for enemies approaching the house to do harm. (สุทธิลักษณ์ อำพันวงศ์ 2523:12)^๖

It is to face either north or south but preferably north. It is important that the area be cleared of all debris. A Phra Phum should never be near a kitchen, toilet or trash dump for obvious reasons. It is written that under no circumstances should the shadow of a building fall on the spirit house as it would be an offense to the resident guardian spirit. (Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1986:127-8) This is

because it is believed that man and spirit are of distinctly different worlds and therefore they cannot logically live in the same place.

After the proper sight is chosen, a mound of earth two meters square should be raised and a hole for the post dug in the middle. Holy water is then sprinkled all over the area to drive away any ghosts or evil spirits that might be occupying the area. The post should then be set in such a way that the small temple-like structure placed on top will be at approximately eye-level to the homeowner.

The height of the Phra Phum shrine is evidently very important because an incident bringing international attention took place in 1992 concerning the height of the shrine. The *Bangkok Post* reports:

The British Embassy has a new spirit house, one that looks down on the British ambassador, AFP reports.

Spirit houses are common at homes, offices and embassies in Thailand. But the one at the UK mission was built before 6-foot 4-inch ambassador Christian Adams took up his post eight months ago.

Thai staff at the embassy became worried because Adams towered over the spirit house, considered a bad omen. They complained that the disgruntled spirits had knocked their low-lying house sideways and cast a spell of sickness over the entire mission.

So the embassy built a new spirit house just above the height of the ambassador.

On October 31 -- Halloween -- a white-robed Brahmin monk blessed the new

spirit house, and the embassy staff provided a feast of 108 types of food and drink to mollify the resident spooks. (Bangkok Post Nov. 9, 1992)

Detailed instructions concerning "Phra Phum" shrines have been passed down through the ages by ritual consultants. These are heeded when determining the most auspicious time for erecting shrines as well as knowing when they should not be erected. For instance, ritual consultant, **จันทร์ ไพจิตร**, lists the days shrines, in his opinion, should never be erected:

- 1) Thursdays and Saturdays in January, May and September.
- 2) Wednesdays and Fridays in February, June and October.
- 3) Tuesdays in March, July and November.
- 4) Mondays in April, August and December.

(**จันทร์ ไพจิตร** 2500:226)

Ancient records also give specific instructions to determine the direction the shrine should face. (**สุทธิลักษณ์ อัมพันวงศ์** 2523:16) Spirit houses at homes of the royal family should face north. Spirit houses in fields should face

west. Spirit houses at homes of businessmen and the wealthy elite should face south. Spirit houses at temples and public parks should face east. The records do not contain instructions for commoners but the preferred direction by those performing the ritual seems to be northeast and southeast. (สุทธิลักษณ์ อัมพันวงศ์ 2523:16)

Inside most Phra Phum shrines is a "Jawet" or small figurine representing the guardian spirit Prince Chaiyamongkon. The word, "Jawet", unfamiliar to most Thais, is not of Thai origin. It is assumed that like the word "Phra Phum" it is of Sanskrit origin. (Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1986: 128) Until recently the figure was carved or etched in wood. Now, however, plastic and bronze are more popular. In very large Phra Phum shrines the "Jawet" is often represented as a golden statue.

In his uplifted right hand, the "Jawet" holds a double-edged sword or "phrakhan" thought to represent the guardian's protection from evil forces which might harm the household. In pre-modern days the "Jawet" of Prince Chaiyamongkon held a book or scroll in his left hand (สุทธิลักษณ์ อัมพันวงศ์ 2523:20). It is likely that the scroll reflected influence from the Chinese Jaow Thii which was

believed to be responsible for keeping records for mankind.

(เรื่องเกี่ยวกับประเพณีไทย 2504:385) Anyone within the protective jurisdiction of the Phra Phum had both their deeds of merit as well as sins recorded on the scroll. Today, however, the left hand holds a bag of money, likely representing prosperity. This change is perhaps a reflection of society's shift towards a more material and financial emphasis.

The "Jawet" is placed on a pedestal inside the Phra Phum during the installation ceremony. According to ancient tradition, the "Jawet" should never be placed in the spirit house facing the entrance gate or door to the dwelling. It is believed that such an indiscretion could result in someone unknowingly stepping on the head of the "Jawet" while sleeping. This could possibly occur because normally the "Jawet" will lie down with its head reaching outside the spirit house.

The ceremony inviting the spiritual being to inhabit the shrine involves rituals which are mixtures of animism, Brahminism and popular Buddhism. Traditionally the professional expert, usually dressed in all white, will begin the ceremony by lighting candles representing the eight directions. Then, chanting magical incantations in the Pali language, he will sprinkle holy water, using the

palm of his hand, on his head, across his forehead and then around the area where the post will be set. Using a shovel he will fill three small bags with dirt before letting the workers continue the process of setting the post.

Once the post is properly set a table covered with a white cloth is placed near the spirit house. The "Jawet" is then brought to the table and placed on a pedestal. An umbrella should be positioned in such a way that the "Jawet" will be completely shaded. Next to the "Jawet" the house owner will place a sacrificial offering of money. Tradition suggests that the amount of this offering was determined by the social standing of the house owner. In ancient times it was recorded that an ordinary person must give 6 baht while the wealthy elite were required to give 24 baht and royalty 36 baht. Rice farmers were required to give 1.50 baht.

(สุทธิลักษณ์ อัมพันวงศ์ 2523:28) It is believed that if this money is kept in a safe place, wealth and good luck will come to the entire household.

All the other food and worship items prepared beforehand are then brought and placed on the table in an orderly fashion. This includes candles, incense sticks, various types of fruit and drinks. Many times the head of a pig is cooked and offered as well as chicken, ducks, fish

and crab. The amount and selection of food offerings are determined according to the prosperity of the house owner.

The actual ceremonies will differ according to the one in charge. They will all begin with incantations and prayers offered by the one leading the ritual, both in Thai and Pali languages. These incantations and prayers are to invite the Phra Phum to enter and dwell in the newly erected spirit house. Further incantations petition the Phra Phum for supernatural protection and blessings of happiness and good luck for everyone in the household. Once these are completed, the house owner will usually light candles and incense sticks and place them at the front of the spirit house. A ceremonial sash will be tied around the pillar. Miniature dolls of men and maid servants, dancers as well as elephants and horses will be placed on the small porch around the spirit house. These miniature replicas are made of paper, wood, plastic or ceramic. They are believed to represent actual servants, dancers and work animals which can be employed by the Phra Phum while in residence. The professional in charge of the ceremonies will then usually light 8 more candles representing the 8 directions and place them around the spirit house. Small cups of food are then placed around the spirit house and an incense stick is stuck in each cup and lit. When this is complete, the master of

ceremonies will stand in front of the shrine on his left leg with his right leg lifted and bent to cross his left leg just above the knee. This indicates that everything is prepared and a special incantation is delivered to invite the Phra Phum to enter the newly erected spirit house bringing supernatural protection and prosperity. At this point there is a twenty minute break for the Phra Phum to consume the offering. Following this, the master of ceremonies will begin further incantations. Once these are completed, he pours some white powder into holy water and fragrant oil. By dipping his finger into the solution he can place sacred marks on the forehead of each person in the household. Once this is done he then says the words, "Siri-pocha-na-maa-sa-yo" indicating the completion of the ceremony.

Tradition teaches that the Phra Phum should be worshipped daily with gifts of flowers, food, drinks, incense sticks and candles. The worshipper will usually place the offerings in the small porch area surrounding the spirit house. Larger spirit houses will often have an offering table in front of the shrine on which offerings can be placed as well. It is believed that the daily offerings keep the Phra Phum content and pleased for which the deity, in turn, will bless the household with peace and

prosperity. Should the people of the household neglect the Phra Phum by failing to make daily offerings, allowing trash to gather around the spirit house or leaning something against the shrine it is believed that the Phra Phum will be displeased and invoke punishment in a myriad of ways. People will get sick and even die. Mysterious things will begin to happen around the household. Bad luck will come often.

Most Thais are taught from childhood to show respect to the Phra Phum and all sacred shrines. When they pass near an important shrine, most will lift their hands in a reverent "wai".

In addition to the daily offerings, the Phra Phum is also worshipped in a special way on holidays and other special days such as one's birthday or wedding day. It is also widely held that special homage should be given the Phra Phum before making a big investment of money or embarking on a long journey. In some instances, when a loved one is sick or traveling, it is possible to petition a supernatural blessing on behalf of another.

Years ago childbirth was a frighteningly dangerous experience. Any difficulty was believed to be the work of evil spirits or "phii" and the only way to cope with such danger was to enlist the assistance of the Phra Phum that

looked after the welfare of the household. Even today, at the first appearance of labor pains, candles and incense sticks are lit in petition for safety. (Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1986:129)

Traditionally, if a stranger from another village stayed overnight at someone's house they would entreat the Phra Phum for permission and protection before going to sleep. Failure to do so would cause them to have a terrible nightmare which is believed to be the work of a "phii" or spirit who sits on the breast of a person making it difficult to breathe. (Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1986: 130) Likewise, when leaving the house the next morning the guest should visit the Phra Phum to pay respects and ask for a safe journey.

If someone has a strong sensation that disaster or bad luck is impending, they will petition the Phra Phum for special deliverance. In the same way, if a person has a strong desire to obtain supernatural assistance in fulfilling a desire, they will offer a prayer and attempt to "make a deal" with the Phra Phum. If their request is granted they promise to return the favor by giving something back in return such as wooden elephants, servants, gold or even a dance troupe performance. Should the supplicant fail to keep their promise the Phra Phum will send dreams and

nightmares as reminders. Failure to take notice of such reminders will result in evil retaliation. Many times ingenuity is required in fulfilling bold promises. Phya Anuman Rajadhon relates:

He promised boldly that he would present the Phra Phum with gold as big as a coconut or a "luk fak" and also other things. The only way open to him to fulfill such a big promise is by stratagem. He will stick a few pieces of gold leaf on a coconut or a "luk fak" and this he presents to the deity. As for servants, elephants and horses, he presents to the deity with miniature ones made of baked clay, of paper, so also a troupe of dancers called "lakon yok", that is "lakon" which may be raised or taken to any place. As for the pig, he will present the deity only with the pig's head. (Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1986:131)

Since the Phra Phum is the same deity in all shrines there is not much variation in the ceremonies and rituals. It is assumed that what the Phra Phum likes and demands has not changed even from ancient times because it is the same deity. Also, it is the same Phra Phum that inhabits all the Phra Phum shrines currently set up. Ritual advisor Ajarn Utaan explained it this way.

The Phra Phum is an angelic being that can go anywhere and everywhere. It can be in all Phra Phum shrines at the same time if it so chooses. It is like a radio waves. If I have a radio on this side of town and you have a radio on that side of town we can pick up the same station, even though we are miles apart and have different boxes. That does not

mean that the Phra Phum inhabits all shrines but that it can. The Phra Phum will only inhabit shrines that where it is invited and feels welcomed. (Ajarn Utaan 1994)

Although the rituals and ceremonies involving the Phra Phum shrine have not changed through the years, the shrines themselves have gone through quite a transition. Up until a few decades ago all the shrines were wooden and handmade. Now, however most Phra Phum shrines are store bought concrete models. The shrines typically resemble multi-colored temples and elaborate spires of various designs. Some recent shrines, however, have been built to resemble the buildings they oversee rather than temples. Ritual advisor, "Ajarn Utaan" does not like the newer style shrines. Although they are "not wrong", he said the shrine should be recognizable to people. Those walking by should be able to tell what type shrine it is from casual observation. That is difficult with the newer, more modern style shrines. (Ajarn Utaan 1994) While these newer shrines are perhaps controversial at present, the modernistic style Phra Phum shrine architecture will perhaps become a fashionable trend in years to come.

3.3 THE JAOW THII SHRINE

Years ago the Phra Phum shrine was called "Phra Phum Jaow Thii" indicating there was not the differentiation that currently exists. The Jaow Thii shrine is contrasted with the Phra Phum both in architectural appearance and spiritual inhabitation.

The Jaow Thii shrines are easily recognizable in that they are much shorter than the Phra Phum, the height of someone kneeling, and rest on usually four but sometimes six pillars rather than one central post. The shrine structure resembles a Thai house. While most Jaow Thii spirit houses today are colorfully painted and made of concrete, beautifully crafted wooden shrines are becoming quite popular.

In contrast to the Phra Phum shrines that are all inhabited by the same deity, each Jaow Thii shrine has its own distinctive spiritual resident. The Jaow Thii can be either the spirit of someone who has died or a "thewadaa". Thais commonly believe that every piece of land has spiritual beings in residence. Ajarn Utaan explains:

The Jaow Thii beings are usually the spirits of people who have died. The spirits remain in a certain area that they like. Thais are like that. They like certain areas and feel comfortable with where they are. They are not known as

wanderers or explorers. They always seem content with where they are. Or, it could be that the spirit is still worried about their descendants and chooses to remain in that area. (Ajarn Utaan 1994)

Each Jaow Thii has their own name. According to Ajarn Utaan, the difference in the Thai Jaow Thii and the Chinese ancestor shrine is that the Chinese can invite their ancestors to move with them where ever they go. A shrine in one city can be moved and the spirit is able move along with the shrine. The Thai Jaow Thii is the guardian of the land. It will not move. It has chosen to remain in a particular place as guardian. The owners or residents of the land may change but the Jaow Thii remains the same and cannot move. Boundaries exist and the size of a Jaow Thii's territory varies according to the being's power to oversee and control. Ajarn "Utaan" explains, "It is the same as a "Phu-yai Bahn" (village headman). He has authority only in his village. His authority has boundaries and cannot move." (Ajarn Utaan 1994)

Ajarn Korakot concurs and says that for this reason setting up a Jaow Thii shrine is much more difficult than a Phra Phum shrine. He explains that this is because there is only one Phra Phum in existence. It is a shrine to Phra Chaiyamongkon. "Other countries," he says, "may have

different names, a Chinese name or a farang name, but the spiritual being is the same." (Ajarn Korakot 1994) These shrines can be set up by ceremonies outlined in books.

When erecting a Jaow Thii shrine, however, one cannot use books, legends or formulas. The Jaow Thii of each piece of land is different. To make the spirit happy, the shrine must be set up according to what the spirit wants not according to a book. "Ajarn Utaan" continues:

Sometimes people set up a Jaow Thii shrine according to a book and think that it is the right way. The books might say a pig's head must be offered with whiskey. If you are a host and serve pork to your guest who is a "caak" (of Indian decent) it would be embarrassing. The "caak" cannot eat pork. If the Jaow Thii is a "caak" it will not be very pleased with the offering of a pork's head. Or, if the Jaow Thii abstains from vices for religious reasons ("teu sin") it will not be happy with an offering of whiskey. It is very important, therefore, to know exactly what the Jaow Thii wants. (Ajarn Korakot 1994)

It is possible to invite the Jaow Thii to inhabit the Phra Phum shrine but it is not possible to have the Phra Phum dwell in a Jaow Thii shrine. Ajarn Korakot says that if the Jaow Thii is unhappy living in the Phra Phum shrine it will express its disfavor with the homeowner by causing problems to occur around the house and property. The homeowner should then build a separate shrine for the Jaow

Thii. "The Jaow Thii enjoys freedom just like all of us people and prefers his own shrine." (Ajarn Korakot 1994)

It is quite common today, therefore, to see the Jaow Thii shrine erected in tandem with a Phra Phum, if it is a residence, or a Phra Phrom if it is a place of business. It is also possible that four or five Jaow Thii spirits might inhabit the same area. Some, therefore, choose to erect several Jaow Thii shrines. Ajarn Korakot adds:

All places are different. Some houses will have just one Jaow Thii. Others will have two or three. Each place is different. Normally we choose to erect shrines to the Jaow Thii having the most power. That spirit then becomes the "brataan" (head) Jaow Thii and the other spirits operate as subordinates. We cannot make one of the lesser Jaow Thii spirits the "brataan", however. The top Jaow Thii would then be angry and cause many problems. (Ajarn Korakot 1994)

Just as with the Phra Phum, offerings are made to appease the Jaow Thii. Incense, flowers and food offerings should be made every day. Miniature ceramic, wood and plastic figurines of animals, servants and dancers are placed around the shrine for the Jaow Thii's pleasure. Often the ritual advisor will advise the homeowner of their Jaow Thii's peculiar desires. Ajarn Korakot says, "This is done by peering into the spiritual world and conversing with the spirits themselves. Just as people have different

tastes, so too each Jaow Thii has special things that please." (Ajarn Korakot 1994)

It is common to see small figurines looking like a grandfather and a grandmother sitting inside the Jaow Thii shrine. These figurines serve as representors of the resident Jaow Thii. It is not necessary to have the figurines but they serve to help the homeowner visualize the Jaow Thii and make the relationship more personal.

Unlike the Phra Phum, Jaow Thii beings are believed to even be able to speak with the homeowner by means of a medium. Ajarn Korakot says:

The Jaow Thii have different names. These names are known because they tell us when we talk to them. Sometimes the owner of a house comes to me and wants to talk to the Jaow Thii of his house. I must first know what he wants to talk about. If it is not a good reason I will not help. But if it is a good request, I will make contact with the spirit. There is a young girl who lives nearby who I call and she allows the Jaow Thii to enter her body so that the owner of the house can talk with the spirit. This is very difficult and dangerous. We will only do this when there is a very important reason. (Ajarn Korakot 1994)

Thais do not seem to be bothered with logical questions about these spiritual beings: "If you sell half your land and a new shrine is put up, is it to the same

spirit or a new one?" or, "Is the new spirit a subordinate to the first one?". Wright explains:

The Thai do not presume to ask these questions. Any simple Thai will tell you they (the spirits) are immortal. It would seem that they are truly personal, not mere personifications of the land because they can come and go. They were there before men came. Indeed, it can be said that man holds and uses the land on lease as it were from the original owner. The name for them, "lord (or owner) of the place" suggests that they are first of all "owners" and only then rulers and guardians. In fact, according to Thai thought, we can say that man borrows the very ground he walks on. The world was not ours from the beginning. (Wright 1968:3)

Many Bangkok neighborhoods have a very large "Jaow Thii" shrine which oversees the entire residential area. This is likely from the influence of earlier times when a "Jaow Thii" was considered the protector of an entire village. (Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1986:131) These shrines are built on four or six pillars and resemble a playhouse large enough for small children to climb inside. Reverence to this shrine is made by all in the neighborhood, even those with one or more spirit houses at their place of residence as well.

3.4 THE PHRA PHROM SHRINE

Although Brahmin/Hindu influence has been felt in Thai history for over 2000 years, the practice of spirit shrine worship of Brahmin deities is quite recent. Brahmin influence spread to Thailand in a variety of ways. Buddhist missionaries who brought Buddhism to Thailand were themselves the products of Hindu order. (Desai 1980:3) The intermingling of Hindu and Buddhist traditions which began in India continued in Thailand. Through time, Hindu elements were adopted to make up the religious belief system of the Thai. In addition, many Hindu traditions were absorbed into Thai society from Cambodia where the Khmer, practicing Mahayana Buddhism, had already blended the Buddhist and Hindu traditions. (Desai 1980:4)

The Siamese elite represented by royalty, the clerical order and the social nobility drew heavily on Hindu Brahmanical sources for authority and example in their search for phenomenal order.

...Hindu astronomy and mathematics give the Thai elite their knowledge of the movements of celestial bodies and their seasons according to the Hindu calendar. Hindu cosmology helps them to evolve their concept of the sacred State or kingdom. Hindu religious lore provides the lesser and more human gods, without threatening the supreme position of the Buddha. Hindu political concepts transform the human king

to become divine. Hindu epics, primarily the "Ramayana," depict for the Thai the model of a righteous king, the "Dharma-raja" and also gives them an outlet for their literary and artistic expression. Sanskrit, the sacred and the classical language of the Hindus, contributes to Thai language, not only to philosophic, literary and aesthetic vocabulary, but it actually forms the very basis of Thai script... (Desai 1980:25)

In the villages, a type of folk Hindu/Brahminism developed as well, although all rituals and ceremonies fit nicely into the Buddhist world view. (Kirsch 1977:252) Hindu deities are respected and given a position of reverence and respect. They are seen as benevolent deities whose power can be called upon for special favor.

Up until recently all Brahmin shrines were located in temples. There is presently only one active Brahmin temple in Bangkok, located near the "Giant Swing" in one of the older sections of the city. (In later years others were built but are now no longer active.) This temple was built over two hundred years ago and since that time there have been many shrines to the various deities placed inside the temple. People can come and worship these Brahmin deities during daytime hours but the doors of the temple close in the afternoon. In order to allow people to worship at all

hours, a Phra Phrom shrine was built outside the main hall but still on the temple grounds.

It cannot be proven that the Erawan spirit house was the first such Phra Phrom shrine built outside the temple grounds but there is no evidence to the contrary. Documentation on the actual origin of this shrine is difficult to find yet Phra Banya Nanda Bhikkhu offers this explanation:

In the early 1950's the government was trying to promote tourism. Bangkok did not really have a first class hotel other than the Oriental which was quite small. The government decided, therefore, to build the Erawan hotel. The military was in charge back then and military men are not the greatest businessmen. After the hotel was built few tourists came. Of course airplanes were very slow back then. They also had to make stops at many cities along the way. But for whatever the reason, business was not very good at the hotel. It was losing money. The manager, therefore went to see a spiritual advisor, Luang Suvicharnpaad. He said the reason the hotel was not making profit was that the spirit of the land was not appeased before building such a large structure. He told the manager that they did not ask for permission to build on the land. The manager said, however, the land was royal land, specially given by His Majesty the King. Luang Suvicharnpaad said, "No, you are mistaken! The true owner of the land is the Phra Phrom. You have offended him by taking this land without his permission." The spiritual advisor continued, "Not only that, you named the hotel wrong! The name you chose is Erawan, the name of the god Indra's elephant." He said, "You have insulted

Indra as well by using the name of his elephant without asking his permission." As could be imagined, the hotel manager was quite concerned and wanted to know what to do. He was told that they should build a shrine to the Phra Phrom next to the hotel so that everyone could come and "wai" the deity. So that is what they did. (Phra Banya Nanda Bhikkhu 1994)

Majupuria relates a different version of the Erawan shrine's beginning. He says the Erawan Hotel was to be built by the government which was planning a world-wide meeting of the international police organization, Interpol. The sight was chosen for the hotel because it was near the police department. Many problems arose in construction. The ship transporting the marble stones to be used as the outside facing of the hotel sunk while in transit. Then, several laborers had accidents and died in the early stages of construction. The other construction workers were hesitant to continue the project because they believed there were evil spirits in the area ready to cause more accidents. A learned astrologer was consulted who suggested the building of a shrine to Brahma. This was quite a new idea because to the best of everyone's knowledge a shrine to a Hindu god had never been built in a public place before. Not only that, there already was a Phra Phum spirit house standing near the gate of the hotel. It was thought that the construction of this Phra Phrom shrine would bring good

luck and allow the construction of the hotel to continue on without further mishap. After the shrine was built, the hotel was completed in time and without further accident. (Majupuria 1987) The hotel and adjoining shrine was later purchased by the Tourist Promotion Authority. Interestingly, since that time, the Erawan Phra Phrom shrine has itself grown to be a major tourist attraction in addition to becoming one of Thailand's most revered shrines.

There have also been rumors of great wonders being received because of the Erawan shrine, such as lottery winnings of millions of baht, however, these lack substantiation. It is no doubt, however, that the Erawan Phra Phrom draws thousands of visitors daily from all over the world and has become one of Thailand's most revered shrines. Recently a hotel owner from the United States stayed at the Erawan Hotel and was so impressed with the Erawan Phra Phrom that he had one built at his hotel in Las Vegas. (Phra Banya Nanda Bhikkhu 1994)

No one is quite sure why Brahma was chosen as the deity for the shrine. Logically, with the hotel already named "Erawan" the shrine would have been Indra. In Hindu mythology, Erawan is Indra's elephant. Some suggest that the deity was chosen because the elephant is very dear to

the Brahma. Others say it was because the Brahma's reputation for liberal generosity. (Majupuria 1987)

The Phra Phrom shrine is typically much larger than the Phra Phum or Jaow Thii. It sits on top of a base as wide as the shrine itself. Most Phra Phrom shrines have four windows corresponding to the four faces of the Phra Phrom. It is believed that the Phra Phrom's four faces provide protection from all four directions. The Phra Phrom also has eight hands. The following objects are in the hands:

- 1) Staff - Representing power.
- 2) Wheel - Representing the cycles of time.
- 3) Vase - Containing holy water.
- 4) The self realization pose - Symbolizing wisdom.
- 5) Mirror - Representing ultimate reality beyond the
physical world.
- 6) Conch shell - Representing the origin of
existence.
- 7) Vedas - Representing spiritual knowledge.
- 8) 108 Rosary beads - Representing the counting of
time.

No doubt due to the Erawan shrine's popularity and success, most large buildings in Bangkok now have Phra Phrom

shrines as spiritual protectors. As with the Phra Phum, the Phra Phrom is a single deity. Phra Cru Wamthepmune explains:

There is only one Phra Phrom. He is not located at the Brahmin temple nor at the Erawan Hotel or any other place where an image of the deity can be seen. These images are merely points of connection to the deity. The deity can be reached through any point of connection although public shrines are more convenient than the private ones. This is because the public shrines are open all the time whereas the private shrines have limited access. If the shrine is well taken care of and the ceremonies pleasing, the point of connection with the deity will be much better and there will be a higher likelihood of a favorable response. The Erawan shrine is well taken care of by the public. People visit and worship there all the time. Because of this, there is much favor given when requests are made here. Other shrines are not as well taken care of. Not much consideration is given to the upkeep or ceremonial rituals. The point of connection is, therefore, not as strong and the likelihood of favorable response to requests is much less. If good care were given, the point of contact would be strong and the requests heard more favorably. (Phra Cru Wamthepmune 1994)

Ajarn Utaan offered a somewhat different picture saying that the Phra Phrom was a god and much too busy in the heavenly realm to concern himself with everyone's requests. He therefore, sends ambassadors to earth to take care of people's individual requests.

It's like a government official with a very important job. If they paid attention to every person's request the task of running the government would never get done. They have representatives and assistants to take care of see to the needs of individuals with special requests. (Ajarn Utaan 1994)

Ajarn Korakot says that the many buildings constructed today all have requirements and therefore different Phra Phrom functions are required. In setting up a Phra Phrom it is important to first determine just what function the Phra Phrom shrine should have:

If a Phra Phrom is needed the question must be asked, "Which Phra Phrom?". The Phra Phrom have many different occupations. There is the Erawan Phra Phrom and many other different Phra Phroms with many different names. The Phra Phrom of a department store will be different than the Phra Phrom of a bank because the buildings have different functions. The ordinary person does not know this. They think there is only one kind of Phra Phrom. If the name of the Phra Phrom is not written down on the shrine, the ordinary person will not know what kind it is. But I can tell the difference. I am able to open a window to the spiritual world and tell what kind of a Phra Phrom it is. (Ajarn Korakot 1994)

While the most elaborate shrines to Brahmin deities are located in the Rajadamri area, it is very common to see Phra Phrom shrines near large buildings throughout the city. Shrines to other Brahmin deities such as Indra, Vishnu,

Shiva and Ganish are becoming more commonly seen as well. More time is required before the popularity of these newer shrines can be established.

3.5 SPIRIT HOUSES AND THAI BUDDHIST COSMOLOGY

Buddhist cosmography has served as the basis for Siamese Buddhist belief for centuries, providing a comprehensive statement of the world as seen through the eyes of the Thai people. Perhaps the best known of all Thai cosmology manuscripts is the "Traibhumikata of Phra Ruang"* which was reputedly first compiled in Siamese prose in 1345 A.D., making it nearly as old as the Siamese state. Such teachings provided the foundational core for Buddhist values and primary instrument of education for all Thais from the lowest peasant to the king. Beginning in the late 19th century, however, as Siam began to have greater contact with the outside world, new knowledge of the world based on scientific discovery conflicted with the traditional views outlined in the sacred texts. The "Tribhumikatha" had to compete with other systems of thought. The consequence was not a complete dismissal of Buddhist cosmography, but a

* Translated into English by Frank E. Reynolds in "Three Worlds According to King Ruang - A Thai Buddhist Cosmology", Berkeley:Asian Humanities Press, 1982.

redefinition of the "moral" or "religious" world in face of the greater explanatory power of Western science. (Reynolds 1976: 211) Through the years there have been attempts to revise and explain certain parts of the cosmology to regain lost respect. It has been trimmed and refined yet the text is currently accepted as merely a kind of relic whose contents, at best, exert only a residual hold on the Thai imagination. (Reynolds 1976:220)

According to the "Tribhumikatha" there are three worlds of existence. These three worlds are further divided into thirty-one levels. The cosmography ranks all beings from demons to deities in a hierarchy determined by the merit each accrues according to "karma," the physical, cognitive and verbal actions of past lives. The lowest world, "kama phum", is described first. In this level of existence beings have form and sensual desire, pain and pleasure. It is in this world that man dwells, with six sub-levels of deities above and four levels of less meritorious creatures below. Both the "phii" and the "thewadaa" dwell in the "kama phum" realm. The second world of existence is the "rupa phum". This level is sub-divided into sixteen levels. In this world beings still have form but have accumulated enough merit to escape sensual perception of joy and pain. The brahman deities (not to be

confused with the Hindu gods) dwell in this world and have only intellectual enjoyment. The third world is the "arupa phum" which is divided into four levels containing deities that have accumulated enough merit to escape all form and sensation. In this world beings exist without form and have no needs or wants.

An examination of the extreme ends of the thirty-one levels show that there are certain oppositions obvious in the scale of cosmic hierarchy. From bottom to top there is form vs. formlessness, sense perception vs. no sense perception and sexuality vs. asexuality. The beings in hell are portrayed as pressed into tiny cubes while the formless deities of the highest world exist in almost limitless space without perimeters. Also, the further one gets from the center the greater the longevity in that existence. The beings on both extremes are destined to live for eons - the formless deities in tranquillity and the creatures in hell forever tormented. The levels nearest to that of mankind are measurable in comprehensible numbers; the levels further away on the extremes are incalculable and unable to be measured by numbers and time.

The higher a being is on the scale of cosmic hierarchy, the more self-reliant and self-sufficient. The beings in the highest world of existence no longer have

basic needs and whatever is required can be self-generated. The "phii" are dependent on the offerings of relatives living above them on the terrestrial level; but they are perpetually frustrated from ever satisfying their hunger and thirst. (F. Reynolds 1982: 87) Above the "preta" ("phii") lives mankind, which can satisfy itself but only temporarily. Next, the "thewadaa" who exist above the terrestrial level at the top of the world of sensation and desire which can self-produce objects of desire (F. Reynolds 1982: 183). The higher deities are above self-reliance because they have no desires and are therefore totally non-reliant.

One of the reasons Buddhist cosmography was so readily adapted by early Siamese societies was that it included a place for the creatures of animism. The "peta" (Pali) or "preta" (Sanskrit) which dwell below the terrestrial level between the "asura" or demons and the animals is none other than the "phii" or ghosts of the departed dead in popular Siamese Buddhism. (C. Reynolds 1976:205). The evolution of the spirit house then fit nicely into Buddhist cosmography influenced by both the inherited indigenous animistic beliefs combined with the Chinese practice of having a shrine to worship their ancestors. In the rural areas, the household spirit

guardian was called "phii ruan". As socio-economic conditions changed societies from a predominately rural to a city ("muang") setting the "phii ruan" changed to a higher deity on the cosmic hierarchy the "Phra Phrom" a "thewadaa". Set on the singular post, just as Mt. Meru serves as the Buddhist cosmic pillar of the universe, the Phra Phum shrine evolved as the house shrine of the city.

Immediately following W.W.II, the urban landscape began to change. Large buildings began to be built. With the Erawan Hotel's introduction of the Phra Phrom shrine, a new era was begun. The Phra Phrom shrines were of Hindu gods, in particular the god Brahma, and are not part of the Buddhist cosmography.

The selection of the Phra Phrom shrine indicates a shift in Thai society's allegiance to the "Tribhumikatha". The popularity of shrines to a Hindu deity which had no place in Buddhist cosmology is adds a new dimension to spirit house worship. Most Thais likely see the Phra Phrom as merely a component of Thai Buddhism. Unlike the Phra Phum and Jaow Thii spirit houses, however, the Phra Phrom cannot be explained in terms of the Buddhist cosmology.

3.6 OTHER POPULAR SPIRIT SHRINES

While not actually spirit houses, there are several spirit shrines currently popular in Bangkok. As with the spirit houses, these spirit are regularly petitioned for protection and prosperity. They are mentioned in this study in an effort compare the allegiance level held by different groups in society with the more traditional spirit houses.

THE NANG KWAK

The Nang Kwak image is commonly seen in shop house stores and other small places of business. The Nang Kwak is petitioned by business owners to entice customers into their shop to bring prosperity. What the Phra Phrom is to large businesses, the Nang Kwak is to the small private shopkeeper or streetside peddler.

Usually made of cast plaster wearing a traditional Thai costume and decorated with gold jewelry, the Nang Kwak is often found sitting on top of a shelf kneeling, her right hand raised in a beckoning gesture. Most representations seen today are brightly painted in red or pink and gold colors.

Although there are many legends surrounding the origin of the Nang Kwak, some find the source in the Indian epic Ramayana. (Wiriya Sungkhaniyom & Nattiporn Assavachai 1995) Here, the hero, Rama, an avatar of the god Vishnu, once defeated the subversive demon king Unaraja, and had him confined in a cave. Unaraja's daughter, Prachan, out of filial love and loyalty, came to look after him. The townspeople, however, were afraid the captive king would cause trouble again and tried to prevent Prachan from seeing her father. A friend of Unaraja's then sent over his own daughter to cast a spell on the townspeople who were causing such furor. When she cast her spell on the outraged crowd they became as "docile as little kittens." Prachan named her new friend "Nang Kwak" because of her spellbinding power.

The Nang Kwak's power to cast a spell on crowds of people has made her a popular sacred image for small businesses. She is believed to have the power to magically entice customers to enter the store and make purchases causing profits to soar.

As with shrines, a ceremony is required before the power of the divine being is released into residence. The ceremony is performed by a nun who will put make up on the doll and place a "sabai" (cloth sash) over the shoulder and

across her chest. Since the Nang Kwak is a maiden spirit, men are not allowed to touch the figurine. Should that happen the spirit would leave. Offerings given to Nang Kwak are feminine in nature as cosmetics, lipstick, perfume because legend says she was beautiful and liked to dress up. Gifts of flowers and fruit and fruit are appreciated as well.

Jirayu Ratanayong, a believer in the Nang Kwak, (she calls "Mae Thep" which means "mother angel") recounts the first day the Nang Kwak was placed in her office:

At first I was indifferent to such superstitious beliefs but ever since "Mae Thep" has come to stay with us, everything has changed for the better. Customers started calling from out of the blue and people began offering my husband extra jobs which created sidelines for our business. The outcome was overwhelming and so now my husband and I have great respect for "Mae Thep". (Wiriya Sungkhaniyom & Nattiporn Assavachai 1995:16)

Jiraya promises "Mae Thep" that if her prayers for success and prosperity are answered she will buy a 1 baht gold chain and put it around the Nang Kwak's neck. She says she has bought several chains. In an example of how the Thai can blend the non-Buddhist with the Buddhist elements with simple ease, once there are several chains hanging from

the Nang Kwak's neck, they are taken to the temple and donated to make merit in "Mae Thep's" name.

Samphan Srithairat, owner of a business selling Buddhist charms on Sukhumvit Soi 103, says that the Nang Kwak has been one of his best selling sacred images. He adds:

Some customers return to inform me that it has really produced positive results. There is really no proof as to whether these charms are as powerful as they are supposed to be. I cannot persuade anybody to believe in their so called powers. But for many of my customers, including myself, we have encountered positive results through our belief in them. Some may put it down to superstition coinciding with luck and timing. It is something that one has to experience for themselves. (Wiriya Sungkhaniyom & Nattiporn Assavachai 1995:17)

SADEJ PHO - RAMA 5 SHRINE

Gaining popularity in the early 1990's, especially in Bangkok, is the Sadej Pho - Rama 5, King Chulalongkorn. The equestrian statue of King Chulalongkorn the Great on the Royal Plaza is the center of worship but one is not required to go there in person. Followers often wear lockets with a picture of the great monarch or display small Rama 5 statues

or portraits in their homes and shops. Since King Chulalongkorn was born on a Tuesday, crowds gather with regularity on that day each week to participate in worship rituals. Worship of the Sadej Pho - Rama 5 shrine has few fixed rules. Other than believing the king to be a "deva" and not offering meat, everyone is free to worship and honor the Sadej Pho - Rama 5 as they please. There are those who go to the Royal Plaza and pay respect in the Buddhist tradition of using flowers, incense sticks and candles. Others might show honor by smoking one of King Chulalongkorn's favorite brand of cigars. (Sannitsuda Ekachai 1993) Almost all will bring personal shrines, icons and royal portraits to the Tuesday rites at the Royal Plaza. There are no mediums that monopolize access to the spiritual being. People who go to the Royal Plaza can just go and have direct communication with their compassionate "Royal Father."

Professor Nithi Iawsriwongse, historian and social critic at Chiangmai University says that the Sadej Pho - Rama 5 cult is the reflection of the new middle class's yearning for a more open, predictable, democratic system. He says:

I've never seen one farmer practicing this cult worship in rural areas. It is basically a product of the Bangkok middle class, a new social group created by

recent industrialization in the past three decades. These people have new needs and aspirations which the old spirit cults cannot answer. So they have to find their own new guardian spirit. (Sannitsuda Ekachai 1993)

The majority of the cult's followers are urban, independent business people with irregular incomes. Their occupations range from street vendors, shop owners and entrepreneurs to those involved in big businesses such as real estate and stock speculation. All, however, share the same feeling of vulnerability - their future is determined by the whims of government officials. This is because their income and business survival depends on how the authorities interpret the rules and regulations as well as to whether or not they will enforce them. Iawsriwongse explains:

The livelihood of street vendors depends on whether or not the authorities will turn a blind eye or enforce the law. Or those bankers who are in share speculation. What is exactly the definition of share speculation? And is it not true that everyone is doing it anyway? So why pinpoint particular persons? Or timber importers from Burma. They have to deal with minorities there, which can be seen as illegal activity. It is said that from 30-70 percent of the cash flow in our money market comes from this business sector which is legally ambiguous. That there are a growing number of followers in the Sadej Pho Ro Ha cult is therefore not surprising. (Sannitsuda Ekachai 1993)

The cult seems to be a reflection of society's yearning for a more open, predictable, democratic system. Predictability

is important to the smooth operation of business but in reality, the government is perceived as becoming more unpredictable. People no longer know what is expected of them because what they do today can be called into question tomorrow. In this sense, life has become more risky and uncertain because of the unpredictability they perceive from the government.

While the older guardian spirits have powers reputed to protect people from harm and injury, find lost items and charm the opposite sex, this is not what the modern Bangkok Thai is needing. They are looking for a more accountable power system. They are not searching for occasional good luck with the lottery but rather long lasting prosperity and security. None of the traditional spirit guardians fit these contemporary perceived needs.

The national hero and highly respected King Chulalongkorn has been adopted as the patron spirit of this emerging middle class in Bangkok. Iawsriwongse says:

He is the symbol of a compassionate, accessible state, a visionary monarch who saved the country from colonization through diplomacy and wisdom, not violent means. King Chulalongkorn stands for modernity, progress and prosperity. In short, he is the symbol of an ideal state that people want but which does not exist in reality. A state that is efficient, accessible, accountable and compassionate. The kind that uses wisdom instead of force for change. (Sannitsuda Ekachai 1993)

The term "Sadej Pho" (Royal Father) that believers use to refer to King Chulalongkorn is a reflection of the people's desire for more accessibility to government authority. The great king is seen as a father image, open to the needs of his subjects. The present government, however, is perceived as being authoritarian and highly subject to the influence of big powerful business groups. Iawsriwongse says:

Small businesses have been forced, therefore, to find their own market outlets and fight with the competitive world in and outside the country on their own. What they want is more access to the authorities so that they can benefit from some business opportunities themselves. (Sannitsuda Ekachai 1993)

The lack of complex rules, the feeling of direct personal contact and the convenience this brings are very appealing to Bangkok's busy urban middle class who want no extra burden in a life already complex and full of rush and worry. Since this belief system is the country's first that does not have mediums* or priests who act in mediation between the higher being and its followers, it is the first

* Since this is a very current cult movement more observation is needed before reaching the conclusion that mediums do not exist.

cult that truly belongs to the masses. (Sannitsuda Ekachai 1993)

MAE KUAN-YIN SHRINE

Imported from China, the Mae Kuan-yin shrine is currently growing in popularity and renown in Bangkok. The Mae Kuan-yin is depicted in a variety of poses, both standing and sitting. Portrayed as the goddess of mercy, believers in the shrine's miraculous powers say that merely uttering her name will bring special powers of blessing. The Mae Kuan-yin is ready to receive anyone's troubles and offer relief. A handbook of testimonies to the miraculous power of the shrine says:

For the times of hardship that come in life there is only thing that can help relieve your burden. That is the Mae Kuan-yin. Her warm smile is pure and comforting as if to say, "Little child, go ahead with life. Don't waver, mother will be right here by your side to give you support and protection." (Tuleekrung 1992:30)

With promises of comfort and relief in time of trouble it is easy to see why the cult is currently growing in Bangkok. Mae Kuan-yin offers relief from stress and hardship with the gentle and merciful touch of a mother.

THE LAK MUANG SHRINE

Thai cities, in addition to having "phii ruan" and Phra Phum as spirit guardians of houses frequently have a Lak Muang shrine pillar which is believed to house the spirit protector of the city. The pillar served as the spirit center of the city as well as being the foundation stone. It also represented the authority of the king. Archeologists have found evidence of Lak Muang shrines in cities dating back to the 13th century. (Guelden 1995) The posts are generally made from teak or sandalwood and have a bulbous top. The guardian deity inside is believed to be a former high ranking male and is referred to as "Chao Paw" or lord father. The Bangkok city pillar was installed by King Rama I. It is rumored that soldiers were chosen to be sacrificed in the installation of the pillar and buried at the four corners to be guardians of the city for eternity. The post is made from a 15-foot trunk of the "chaiyapreuk" (victory) tree which astrologers claimed contained a powerful spirit. The tree was first utilized in an astrological ceremony to raise military morale before a decisive battle with the Burmese. After the Burmese were defeated, the city's guardian spirit was asked to move into

the post. It is reported that over 1000 worshipers a day visit the Bangkok City Pillar to ask for supernatural intervention in bringing prosperity, good health and protection.

THE HING PHRA

The Hing Phra is neither a shrine nor an image. Rather it is a shelf alter very common in Thai homes on which sacred images, usually of Buddha, are placed. In some homes the Hing Phra consists of a simple board mounted on the wall. Other homes have a small table that is consecrated for the placement of shrines. Large homes will occasionally have an entire room devoted to the sacred images obtained by the family through the years. Petitions for divine intervention in protection and provision are frequently requested of the deities represented by the various shrines resting on the Hing Phra.