

**Dynamics of Kinship and the Uncertainties of Life:
Spirit Cults and Healing Management in Northern Thailand**

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Tidawan Vaseenon

School of Social Sciences and Law, Brunel University

September 2006

Dynamics of Kinship and the Uncertainties of Life:

Spirit Cults and Healing Management in Northern Thailand

Abstract

This thesis is about kinship, health and healing in a Northern Thai village. Although traditional spirit mediums and spirit cult observances in Chiang Mai city are in decline and have led to a breakdown of the matrilineal system, in the village of Baan Yang Luang in Mae Chaem district the belief in matrilineal spirits and ancestors is still maintained in interesting counterpoint to social change. The power of spirits is used to manage human suffering—whether sickness, death or agricultural failure. Kinship in Mae Chaem is based on the relationship between humans and ancestral spirits or lineage guardian spirits. Illness is thought to derive from conflicts among humans or between humans and spirits. Healing is attained by the reforming and reshaping of relationships, and by the reconciliation of conflicted parties. The thesis investigates how matrilineal spirit cults, personhood, and social relatedness are created, shaped and transformed through the struggles of illness and healing management. It examines the complex relations among illness, kinship and personhood in reincarnation, healing, lineage recruitment, sacrifice, and spirit worship. In conclusion, it explores the mutual relationship between the two processes: kinship transformation and healing management, both of which depend crucially on power relations within the society. People use the dynamic aspects of the kinship system to interpret and manage illness; at the same time, illness is used as a means to reform and maintain the fluidity of kin relationships. The dynamic systems of health and kinship enable people to create, choose, negotiate and participate in the transformation of social relations and identity, in order to cope with a changing society. Finally, I hope this study will shed light on how identity, kinship, personhood, and lay medical knowledge are conceived, created and sustained from an emic perspective.

Acknowledgements

I express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, **Dr. Andrew Beatty**, for his patience and support throughout the preparation of the thesis. His guidance and critical comments helped me to see the world outside the biomedical model. I will always value the time he has given me over the years. I am grateful to **Dr. Nicolas Argenti**, my second supervisor, for his support and pragmatic advice. I also thank **Prof. Andrew Turton** and **Prof. Adam Kuper**, my examiners, for their invaluable comments on my thesis.

I am indebted to the **Thai Government** for awarding me funds which supported my study and **Chiang Mai University** for enabling me to conduct this work full-time.

I also express my gratitude to colleagues in the **Department of Community Dentistry**, Chiang Mai University for their support and encouragement to take time out to study, especially **Ajarn Songvuth Tuangrattanapan** and **Ajarn Sasitorn Chaiprasit** who introduced me to the world of anthropology.

I am thankful to all those people in Baan Yang Luang village who warmly welcomed me into their homes and took the time to talk to me. In particular, I am grateful for the incredible generosity, hospitality and care of my host, **Mae Nee and Poh Noi Pia**.

I have benefited enormously from the teaching and support of staff and fellow PhD students at **Brunel University**. The creative and fruitful discussions with friends in the research group encourage my study. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the considerable help of my close friend, **Sanae Hayashi**, who always listen and support me, not only academically but in all other aspects of life. I have learned a lot from her.

I would like to thank **Mike, Pichet Sriyanyong**, my best friend for helping me in every possible way and always making himself available whenever I needed. I also thank all the Thai friends at Brunel University for their warm fellowships and generous help during my study. I would also like to thank **Yang and Linchin** for

being friends from the first year I came here until now, especially Yang who helped me improve my English writing.

Specifically, I would like to thank my sister **Tanyawadee Vaseenon** and my friend **Pakpoom Homsuwan**, for their proof reading on this thesis, but any errors or defects are of course my own.

My heartfelt gratitude is due to **P' Wichai Wiwacunoopakarn**, for his love, caring, understanding and being so supportive. Thank you for always being with me throughout the long road.

Finally, I would have found it even harder to finish without the love, encouragement and help from my family. They have been continual sources of strength throughout the whole period of this study.

Dynamics of Kinship and the Uncertainties of Life:
Spirit Cults and Healing Management in Northern Thailand

*Healing is not something we only do when we are sick;
it is part of the process and journey of life
(Ted Kaptchuck)*

CONTENTS

	page
<i>List of maps</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>List of tables</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>List of diagrams</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Glossary</i>	<i>v</i>
CHAPTER ONE	
Introduction	1
Introduction.....	1
Fieldwork Site.....	7
The circumstances of fieldwork	9
Thesis Outline.....	10
CHAPTER TWO	
Ties through Spirits: Dynamic Kinship Systems in Baan Yang Luang	16
Northern Thai Kinship Studies.....	16
Contemporary Kinship Studies.....	20
Mae Chaem Kinship: Ties through Spirits	22
• <i>phii puu nyaa</i> (Ancestral Spirit).....	22
• <i>Poh Chao Luang</i>	26
<i>phii puu nyaa</i> , Poh Chao Luang and the Matrilineal Spirit Groups.....	28
What is it that the Members of Minimal and Maximal Lineages Share?.....	29
• Minimal Lineage.....	29
• Maximal Lineage.....	30

What is Different between <i>phii puu nyaa</i> and Poh Chao Luang?.....	34
Viewing <i>phii puu nyaa</i> and Poh Chao Luang Spirit Group in Practice.....	35
• Minimal Lineage.....	35
• Maximal Lineage.....	37
Relationships among Maximal and Minimal Lineages in Baan Yang Luang.....	39
Why cannot Every Minimal Matrilineage that Shares the Same <i>phii puu nyaa</i> Develop or Create its own Poh Chao Luang?.....	43
Residence, Inheritance and the “Spirit Worlds”.....	44
House Inheritance	46
Inheritance.....	50
Fission of the Spirit Group.....	51
Talking about Kinship in Everyday Life.....	52
• Which House do you belong to?.....	54
• People who Eat the Same Rice.....	54
• People of <i>phii diaw kan</i>	55
On what Occasions are the Notions of <i>phii diaw kan</i> Involved?	56
• Marriage.....	56
• Reincarnation.....	56
• Death.....	56
<i>Pee-nong</i> : The Bilateral Kindred.....	57
• Close/ Distant “ <i>pee-nong</i> ”.....	59
Being Kin by Tying the Wrists.....	61
Conclusion.....	62

CHAPTER THREE

Poh Chao Luang and Phaya Muang Chaem: Spirit Cults in the Transformation of the Traditional Political System.....	64
--	----

Introduction.....	64
The <i>muang</i>	65
Lanna Kingdom: Historical Context	69
• King Mengrai: the Founder of Chiang Mai.....	72
• The Golden Age of Lanna.....	74
• Mae Chaem during the Golden Age of Lanna.....	74
• Chiang Mai under Burma: The Age of Decline.....	75
• Lanna under Siam: The Turning Point in History.....	75
• Reviving the City – “Putting Vegetables in the Basket and People in the City”	77
• British and Chiang Mai Logging Industry.....	78
Rebellion.....	80
Rebellion in Mae Chaem.....	81
From Lanna Kingdom to Chiang Mai Province.....	82
The Last of the Chao Muang Chaem (Lord of Muang Chaem) and the Changing Identity of Poh Chao Luang (the Guardian Spirit).....	83
Links between Guardian Spirits of the <i>muang</i> in Northern Thailand.....	87
The Parallel Relationship between Spirit Cults and the Political System.....	90
Reproduction of Political History and Hierarchy through Ritual Performances and Discourses.....	92
The Chao as a Healer: Legitimising and Maintaining Power through Healing Ritual.....	95
Conclusion.....	97

CHAPTER FOUR

The Welcoming Ritual, The Feast of the <i>muang</i> and the “Bribe”: Manipulation and Negotiation of Power through Spirit Worship Rituals.....	101
---	------------

Introduction.....	101
<i>Hub Toan</i> : The Welcoming Ritual.....	102
• The Ethnography.....	103

○ The Possession.....	103
<i>Liang</i> : The Sacrifice Ritual.....	110
• The Sacrifice Ritual.....	112
Bribery (<i>keun</i>) in The Healing Ritual.....	120
Patron/client Relationships in the Spirit Cults.....	121
Being a Medium and an Officiant.....	126
• The Ethnography.....	127
Challenging the Spirit's Power.....	129
• Case One.....	129
• Case Two.....	130
Conclusion.....	132

CHAPTER FIVE

Khwan, Phii, and Sangkar: Understanding Mae Chaem Kinship and Personhood through the Dynamics of Intangible Essence.....	135
Kinship Revised.....	135
Body, Self and Person in Kinship.....	137
Body and Bodily Substance.....	137
Substance and non-Substance Relationship.....	139
Tangible Substance and Intangible Essence in Body and Kinship.....	140
<i>Khwan, Phii, and Sangkar</i> : The Intangible Essence in Northern Thai Kinship....	142
• <i>Khwan</i> : The Dynamics of Life Essences.....	142
• The Thirty-two <i>Khwan</i>	143
• <i>Khwan</i> Lost and Restored.....	145
• Age, Gender and the Quality of <i>Khwan</i>	147
• <i>Khwan</i> and the Local Knowledge of Conception.....	149
• The Permanent <i>Khwan</i> and Temporary <i>Sangkar</i>	153
Is the person “Partible” or “Permeable” in Mae Chaem?.....	156

Continuity of Generations through the Reincarnation of Matrilineal Ancestors....	159
Sharing <i>Khwan</i> : Linkage among People of the Same Spirit (<i>phii diaw kan</i>).....	161
The Transmission of Spiritual Essence through Eating.....	161
A Seed (<i>cheau</i>): Bodily Substance in Mae Chaem.....	163
Blood, Wind, Poison and <i>Khwan</i> : Relationship between Body Elements and Spiritual Essence.....	165
Conclusion.....	167

CHAPTER SIX

Lived through Illness, Learned through Healing: A Study of Reincarnation as a Process of Becoming Kin.....

170

Introduction.....	170
<i>Khwan</i> : the Dynamics of Life Essences.....	171
Concepts of Reincarnation in Mae Chaem.....	171
Reincarnation Ritual (<i>taam kerd</i>)	174
The Complexity and Dynamics of Reincarnation.....	177
• One can be Reborn before One has Died.....	177
• Reincarnation by the Same Spirit.....	179
Reincarnation and the Negotiation Process.....	180
• Case One.....	181
• Case Two.....	183
Implications of Reincarnation.....	185
The Quality of Death affects the Quality of Life.....	186
Regenerating of Life after Death.....	189
Woman and the Reproduction of Ancestors.....	190
Reincarnation and Identities.....	191
Binding the Tie and Cutting the Tie: Becoming a Person.....	192
Reincarnation in the Changing World.....	195
• Case Three.....	196
Conclusion.....	198

CHAPTER SEVEN

Dynamics of Kinship and the Uncertainties of Life: Kinship Transformation

through the Process of Healing Management..... 200

Introduction..... 200

Illness Experiences and Healing Management: A Case Study of Totae's Burn.... 203

- At Home..... 207
- Divination through Spirit Possession..... 207
- Stress in the Hospital..... 210
- Exorcism of the Violent Death Spirit..... 211
- Second Exorcism of the Violent Death Spirit..... 213
- Parent Spirit Exorcism (*tad kerd*)..... 213
 - Detail of the Ritual..... 214
- Biomedical vs. Local Healing..... 217
- Expelling the Poison..... 219
- Failure after the Blow Healing..... 224
- The Second Exorcism of the Parent Spirit..... 226
- Egg Divination..... 226
- *Thaen* Ritual..... 228

Exploring the Story behind the *thaen* Ritual..... 231

Family History as the Sources of Illness Explanation..... 231

Creating Kinship through Illness..... 239

Well Being, Good Relationships..... 242

The Concept of *thaen* Ritual..... 244

Continuing the Tie, Contining the Cycle of Rebirth: The Cosmological

Explanation of the *thaen* Ritual..... 245

The *thaen* Ritual: A Systematic Analysis..... 248

- The *thaen* Ritual as a Late Compensation for Bridewealth..... 248

- The *thaen* Ritual in the Changing Pattern of Land Inheritance..... 251
- “The Spirit is Greedy” or “The Spirit Only Wants to Maintain
the Tie”..... 254
- The Development Process of a New Lineage..... 255

The Dynamics of Kinship and the Uncertainties of Life: A Discussion..... 258

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion..... 260

REFERENCES..... 267

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Thai Traditional Lunar Calendar..... 280

Appendix B: Lanna Kingdom Dynasty..... 284

Appendix C: *Hiak Khwan* Rite (Recalling *Khwan*)..... 286

LIST of MAPS, TABLES, DIAGRAMS and FIGURES

	page
Maps	
Map 1.1: A Map of Thailand showing Chiang Mai	5
Map 1.2: A Map of Chiang Mai showing Mae Chaem District.....	6
Map 1.3: A Map of Baan Yang Luang Village.....	14
Map 7.1: Location of Mae Nee's and Mook's land.....	236
Tables	
Table 2.1: Thai political administration compared with Mae Chaem spirit cult system.....	27
Diagrams	
Diagram 2.1: Maximal and minimal lineages in Baan Yang Luang village	41
Diagram 2.2: Parallel between inheritance practices and the authority of the spirits.....	49
Diagram 3.1: Transformation of the traditional ruler into the guardian spirit system.....	85
Diagram 3.2: Parallel between the Thai political and administrative system and the Mae Chaem guardian spirit cult system.....	91
Diagram 3.3: Parallel between hierarchy in the traditional political system and spirit cult system.....	92
Diagram 5.1: The cycle of rebirth in Mae Chaem	153
Diagram 5.2: Reincarnation cycle.....	168

Diagram 6.1: Reincarnation in Nee's family.....	180
Diagram 6.2: Sequence of reincarnation process in Tui's case.....	182
Diagram 6.3: Sequence of reincarnation process in Gong's case.....	197
Diagram 7.1: Kinship genealogy of Pang's family and the 'replacement' members.....	232
Diagram 7.2: The local system of offering making	247
Diagram 7.3: A system of offering making in the family that lacks of a daughter.....	248
Diagram 7.4: The possible choices of the <i>thaen</i> (replacement) lineage.....	249
Diagram 7.5: The exchange cycle of the pig	250
Diagram 7.6: The genealogy of Mae Tem's family and its replacement members	257

Figures

Figure 1.1: Baan Yang Luang Village in Mae Chaem District.....	13
Figure 1.2: Baan Yang Luang Village in Mae Chaem District.....	13
Figure 1.3: Baan Yang Luang Village in Mae Chaem District.....	13
Figure 2.1: <i>Kaw phii</i> (the head of lineage) ties the wrists of the spirit cult members.....	29
Figure 2.2: <i>Kaw phii</i> (the head of lineage) ties the wrists of the spirit cult members.....	29
Figure 2.3: The Ancestral Spirit's shelf.....	30
Figure 2.4: The shrine of Younger Poh Chao Luang.....	32
Figure 2.5: The shrine of Eldest Poh Chao Luang.....	32
Figure 2.6: The Officiant gives offerings to Poh Chao Luang at the meeting shrine.....	34
Figure 2.7: The Officiant gives offerings to Poh Chao Luang at the meeting shrine.....	34
Figure 2.8: A spirit cult member brings <i>suay</i> to the Origin House.....	36

Figure 3.1: Kitchaguud in Wat Yang Luang Temple.....	67
Figure 3.2: Kitchaguud behind the Buddha statue.....	67
Figure 4.1: The spirit medium waits to be possessed.....	109
Figure 4.2: The possessed medium dances to the shrine.....	109
Figure 4.3: Members wait for Poh Chao Luang.....	109
Figure 4.4: Poh Chao Luang comes out from the shrine after changing cloth.....	109
Figure 4.5: The members bath Poh Chao Luang with the lustral water.....	109
Figure 4.6: The members bath Poh Chao Luang with the lustral water.....	109
Figure 4.7: Poh Chao Luang ties sacred thread on the member's wrists.....	109
Figure 4.8: Talaew painted with the pig's blood.....	114
Figure 4.9: Men slaughter the pig at the shrine.....	114
Figure 4.10: Women cook the offering foods at the shrine.....	117
Figure 4.11: Women arrange the trays of offering.....	117
Figure 4.12: Offering trays are put in order reflecting the hierarchy in the cult.....	118
Figure 4.13: Offering trays are put in order reflecting the hierarchy in the cult	118
Figure 4.14: The trays are carried up to the shrine.....	118
Figure 4.15: The baskets are placed on the ground outside the shrine for the elephants and horses servants.....	118
Figure 4.16: The offerings are left on the shrine for the spirits to finish the “essence” of the food.....	119
Figure 4.17: Men wait on the shrine.....	119
Figure 4.18: Women gather on the ground waiting for the spirit to take the offerings.....	119
Figure 4.19: Foods are shared among the people of the same spirit.....	120
Figure 4.20: A “bad” offerings is hung on the fence to bribe the malevolent spirit.....	124
Figure 5.1: The elder ties the threads around the patient's wrists.....	147
Figure 5.2: The offering foods for <i>khwan</i>	147

Figure 5.3: The <i>sangkar</i> raft is carried to Mae Chaem River.....	155
Figure 5.4: The <i>sangkar</i> raft is carried to Mae Chaem River.....	155
Figure 5.5: The zodiac animal figures are thrown into the raft.....	155
Figure 5.6: Washing out the <i>sangkar</i>	155
Figure 5.7: Floating the <i>sangkar</i> raft.....	155
Figure 5.8: People jump into the river.....	155
Figure 5.9: Children wash hair and take a bath	155
Figure 6.1: A child wearing a thread bracelet.....	175
Figure 6.2: A child wearing a thread bracelet.....	175
Figure 6.3: Making offering inside the temple.....	188
Figure 6.4: Making offering to the Violent Death Spirit outside the temple boundary.....	188
Figure 7.1: A Child is rubbed with rice dough.....	214
Figure 7.2: The dough is made into a human-figure.....	214
Figure 7.3: The spirit healer sprinkles the sacred water onto the child.....	215
Figure 7.4: The spirit healer chops the thread.....	215
Figure 7.5: The healer blows the wound to expel the poison.....	223
Figure 7.6: The Egg Divination.....	227
Figure 7.7: The Egg Divination.....	227
Figure 7.8: The diviner interprets the signs from the metal coin.....	227
Figure 7.9: The metal coin.....	227

Glossary

<i>baan</i>	house, household, village, sections in the village
Chao	lord, prince, ruler
<i>chart</i>	life
<i>chart ghon</i>	previous life
<i>chart nee</i>	this life
<i>chart naa</i>	next life
<i>klub chart maa kerd</i>	reincarnation
<i>cheau</i>	seed, substance
<i>hub toan</i>	welcoming
<i>hyan</i>	family, bedroom
<i>hyan kaw</i>	the Origin House: the main or origin house of the lineage: normally the house of the <i>kaw phii</i> (the leader of the lineage)
<i>Kerd</i>	born
<i>taam kerd</i>	reincarnation ritual
<i>tad kerd</i>	exorcist of the parent spirit
<i>keun</i>	bribe
<i>khwan</i>	life essence
<i>hiak khwan</i>	recalling <i>khwan</i>
<i>liang</i>	feast
<i>liang phii suum</i>	feast of the matrilineage
<i>liang muang</i>	feast of the <i>muang</i>
<i>leud</i>	blood
<i>lom</i>	wind

<i>muang</i>	domain, city, town or village which was the seat of a king, prince or local chief: the northern Thai traditional territorial political unit
<i>Chao muang</i>	lord of the <i>muang</i>
<i>khon muang</i>	people of the <i>muang</i>
<i>kam muang</i>	the northern Thai dialect
<i>liang muang</i>	feast of the <i>muang</i>
<i>tua muang</i>	northern Thai religious script
<i>pee-nong</i>	siblings, relatives
Phaya	title of the traditional lord in northern Thailand
<i>phii</i>	spirit
<i>phii chao baan</i>	village spirit
<i>phii chao wat</i>	temple spirit
<i>phii hyan</i>	house spirit
<i>phii ka</i>	witch, a kind of fierce spirit
<i>phii muang</i>	spirit of the <i>muang</i>
<i>phii tai hong</i>	violent death spirit
<i>phii puu nyaa</i>	ancestral spirit
<i>phii diaw kan</i>	people of the same spirit, people of the same matrilineage
<i>haw phii</i>	spirit shrine
<i>kaw phii</i>	an old woman who is successor to the role of matrilineage head. This position is inherited from the mother to the youngest daughter. Literally, <i>kaw phii</i> means the origin of the spirit cult.
<i>kok phii</i>	spirit group

<i>phid phii</i>	wronging the spirit
<i>saiy phii</i>	spirit line
<i>pid</i>	poison
Poh Chao Luang	Father Great Lord: the guardian or tutelary spirit of Mae Chaem, the spirit of a former lord of Muang Chaem. This term also refers to the head ancestral spirit of each matrilineage.
<i>poh kerd mae kerd</i>	parent spirit: a personal spirit which protects each person. It is believed that everyone is sent by the parent spirit to be reborn in the human world.
<i>samai</i>	modern
<i>sangkar</i>	life, age, the physical body
<i>suay</i>	an offering set composed of flowers, jostick, candles and popped rice, put in a small cone-shape container made from banana leaves
<i>sueng</i>	spirit group
Taaw	title of the traditional noble in northern Thailand
<i>talaew</i>	a talisman to ward off evil spirits made from bamboo, woven in a six-angle star shape
<i>tang kaw</i>	the officiant of the lineage; normally a man of the matrilineage who represents the members in serving the ancestral spirit, Poh Chao Luang, and arranges worship rituals
<i>thaen ritual</i>	a healing ritual in which a person is required to ‘register’ as a new member of another lineage
<i>tii nang</i>	spirit medium (literally means the place to sit)
<i>wat</i>	temple

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

This thesis is about kinship, health and healing in a Northern Thai village. Although traditional spirit mediums and spirit cult observances in Chiang Mai city are in decline, in the village of Baan Yang Luang in Mae Chaem district, the belief in matrilineal spirits and ancestors is still maintained. The power of spirits is used to manage human suffering—whether sickness, death or agricultural failure. Kinship in Mae Chaem is based on the relationships between humans and ancestral spirits or lineage guardian spirits, so health and kinship are intimately related.

On a practical level, Northern Thai kinship is organised into matrilineal clans (*kok phii*), each of which has its own tutelary spirit. Each matrilineal clan consists of many matrilineal descent groups; and each matrilineal descent group has its own ancestral spirits (*phii puu nyaa*). The ancestral spirits and tutelary spirits are generally said to be propitiated and handed down from a founding ancestress to her descendants. The principle of succession of the spirits is matrilineal. In consequence, membership in the matrilineal cult passes from a mother to her children (see Davis 1984a, Turton 1984, and Rhum 1994). And it is women who control the spirit cults (see Muecke 1984). It is important to keep the house in the maternal line because matrilineal spirits keep watch there. Moreover, they are said to bring well-being to the family.

However, since the Second World War, due to female migration in search of employment, a growing number of women were separated from the houses of their parents, from the residences of their ancestral spirits, and from their female consanguines. Muecke (1984: 466) argues that female migration has affected the maintenance of matrilineal spirit cults, which are the important source of traditional domestic morality. She finds that migrants either return home for major ritual

observances or become the head of the lineage in their new homes. Nevertheless, when women migrate long distances, some give up the ancestral spirits altogether. Among the urban women in Chiang Mai, reasons commonly given for the abandonment of ancestral spirits were: “lack of a daughter to carry on the ritual observances; husband did not want his children to mind the spirits; belief that ancestral spirits are old-fashioned; belief that modern medicine is a more reliable cure than ancestral spirits; and most commonly, death of the senior lineage person responsible for maintaining the spirits” (Muecke 1984: 466). Neglect of the ancestral spirits can therefore be regarded as an important marker of modernity.

There are corresponding changes in the practice of spirit mediumship. In many big provincial centres, particularly in Chiang Mai, there arose new style professional mediums when Thailand was undergoing early capitalist development in the late 1970s, and their numbers were constantly increasing in the 1980s (Irvine 1982, Ganjanapan 2003). In its modern form, spirit mediumship has been modified. For instance, the urban mediums tended to be middle-aged females who accepted donations for their services, whereas the traditional village mediums were old females possessed by matrilineal spirits who tied communities together spiritually (Cohen and Wijeyewardene 1984). While village mediums mainly manage medical issues, urban mediums concentrate more on capitalist consumer needs. Tanabe (1991: 192-3) found that, in the past, ritual offerings to ancestral spirits, known locally as the Phii Mot and Phii Meng cult, were performed in order to strengthen the well-being and health of members of the domestic spirit cult as a whole but, at present, are organised for individual purposes in relation to vows concerning success in business, winning lotteries, and academic success, as well as healing illness and driving away misfortunes. Furthermore, according to Ganjanapan (2003:129), the spirits with which the urban mediums identify are no longer local spirits as in the case of the traditional mediums, but more often Thai national heroes or even the deities of Mahayana Buddhism.

According to Irvine (1982, 1984), the emergence of urban spirit mediumship was owing to the transition from an agricultural based to an industrialised society which led to community fragmentation and migration for jobs and education to the cities. The village guardian spirits were thus left behind and a new spiritual sustenance was found among urban professional mediums. Furthermore, Ganjanapan (2003:129) argues that

by becoming spirit mediums, women, especially those of the lower socioeconomic status in urban areas, regain their spiritual and social status which has deteriorated as a result of the decline in the ancestor spirit cults at village level in which women were once considered to have high ritual authority.

On the other hand, Davis (1984a) argues that it is the character of Northern Thai matrilineal groups that affects the rapid decline of clan ideology in urban and commercially developed areas, as they only become operative in sacrificial rites, (hence he called them “occasional kin groups”). Contrary to Davis (1984a), I find the matrilineal spirit cults and kinship systems in Northern Thailand cannot be viewed merely in the context of ritual observances but have to be understood as the ideologies which are embedded in everyday practices. Matrilineal spirit cults in Northern Thailand do not just function explicitly in ritual, thus cannot be simply seen as “occasional kin groups”. Instead, they should be considered as the idiom in which people talk about their identities, kinship ideologies, social relationships and morality.

While many studies focus on the social changes in urban areas of Northern Thailand (Irvine 1982, 1984, Muecke 1984, Tanabe 1991, Morris 2000, Ganjanapan 2003), few look carefully at what is going on in the villages. Typically it tends to be predicted that spirit cults in the village will diminish with the decline of traditional village mediums and spirit cult observances, leading to a breakdown of the matrilineal system, a loss of female control over household membership and respect for family elders (Muecke 1984). In other words, there is a presumption that the village is passively changed by an externally imposed modernity (Mulder 1985). Implicit to such a presumption is the idea that a village is a homogeneous and coherent cultural world. Furthermore, the agency of human beings in changing the society has been ignored. In fact, the boundaries of communities have become more fluid, thus it is needed to examine cultural dynamism whether in the urban city or the “traditional” village.

Although the practices of spirit cults have been strongly criticised as superstitious, backward, deceptive, and in violation of scriptures by social critics and Buddhist scholars, in Mae Chaem, where I conducted my fieldwork, the belief in matrilineal spirits and ancestors is still maintained, as the villagers often claim that “people in this village believe in (and respect) the spirits” (*khon baan nee tue phii*). In the face of

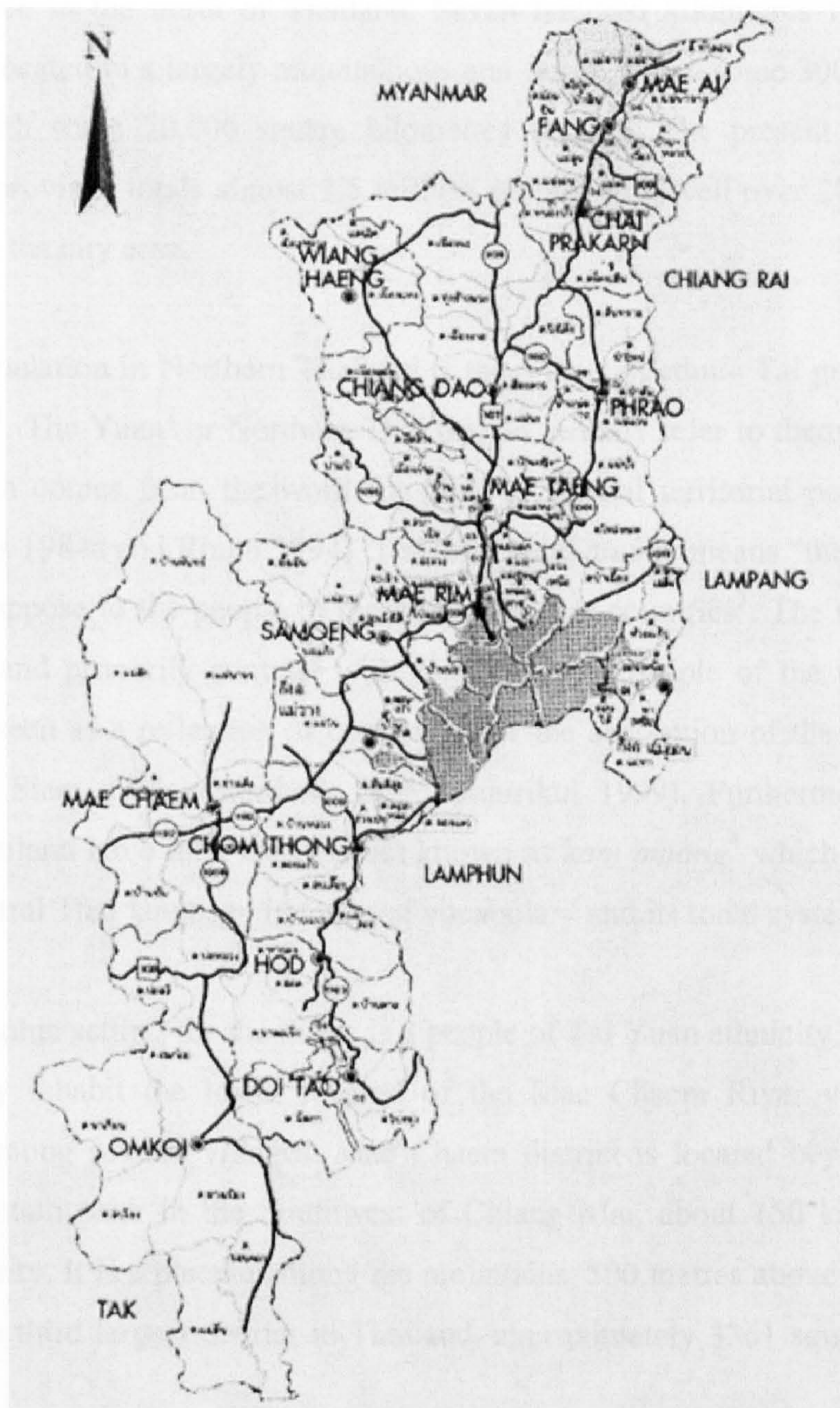
crisis—sickness and death, the failure of crops, the widening gap between rich and poor—the belief in spirits and matrilineal ancestors is confirmed. In other words, the power of spirits is used to manage those sufferings. However, the villagers also observe that, influenced by modernity, their culture is changing. They mentioned that after the road was constructed connecting the village to the low-land town, the power of spirits has declined. They often say “*phii ba deaw boh hang*” (the spirits nowadays are not as powerful as in the past), when talking about changes in society. Sometimes spirit beliefs are challenged, as when a villager said “if you begin to search you will find it” (*pai saww mun teung pa*), which means, if you do not let the medium (or any spiritual healer) diagnose your sickness you will not be judged as being punished by the spirits. Moreover, if the spirits or the spirit mediums do not uphold the social morality, they may be offended.

I am interested in spirit cult discourses as they are negotiated, transformed, contested, and reproduced over time. Instead of assuming that culture is integrative, my thesis will focus on contradictions in the dynamics and transformations of culture within the village. It aims to examine how modernisation affects the culture, history, and identity of villagers; how they act and feel, contest and adapt to the changing society in turn. It focuses on the experiences of people in different generations as they initiate, negotiate, contest and debate changes in a period of transition. And, it looks at the subjectivity of Northern Thai villagers as they reproduce and construct their values, identity, and power.

I will show how spirit cult discourses in Mae Chaem are transformed and maintained through the processes of illness diagnosis and healing management. Therefore, the thesis investigates the process of creating, shaping, and transforming matrilineal spirit cults, personhood and social relatedness through looking at experiences, and narratives around illness and healing. At the same time, it examines the way in which the power of the matrilineal spirits and the moral concerns in kinship ideology are used to manage illness. Through an examination of spirit cult beliefs and practices at village level, I hope this study will shed light on how identity, kinship, personhood, and lay medical knowledge are conceived, created and sustained from an emic perspective.



Map 1.1: A Map of Thailand showing Chiang Mai Province



Map 1.2: A Map of Chiang Mai showing Mae Chaem District

Fieldwork Site

The setting where I conducted my fieldwork is a village located in Chiang Mai, the major province in the north of Thailand. Seven hundred kilometres from Bangkok, Chiang Mai located in a largely mountainous and fertile valley some 300 metres above sea level, with some 20,000 square kilometres in area. The present population of Chiang Mai province totals almost 1.5 million people, with well over 200,000 making their home in the city area.

The main population in Northern Thailand is the Yuan, an ethnic Tai group inhabiting the lowlands¹. The Yuan² or Northern Thai people, usually refer to themselves as *khon muang*, which comes from the word for their traditional territorial political entities, *muang* (Davis 1984a and Rhum 1994). The term *khon muang* means “the people of this country” as oppose to the people of the hills and other countries³. The term is used to differentiate and primarily contrast with *khon thai*, the people of the Central Plains. This can be seen as a reflection of conflicts after the absorption of the North into the Kingdom of Siam (Wijeyewardene 1986, Damrikul 1999). Furthermore, people of Northern Thailand have their own dialect known as *kam muang*⁴ which differs greatly from the Central Thai language in terms of vocabulary and its tonal systems.

The ethnographic setting for the thesis is a people of Tai Yuan ethnicity in Mae Chaem district. They inhabit the lower reaches of the Mae Chaem River valleys and are distributed among several villages. Mae Chaem district is located beyond Thailand's highest mountain peak in the Southwest of Chiang Mai, about 150 kilometres from Chiang Mai city. It is a plateau among the mountains, 500 metres above sea level. Mae Chaem is the third largest district in Thailand, approximately 3361 square kilometres.

1 The Yuan population is mainly to be found in the provinces of Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Payao, Phrae, and Nan.

2 While the term “Yuan” has been established as standard scholarly practice, it is practically unknown among the Yuan themselves. They identify themselves as *khon muang* to mean that they are born and live in Northern Thai, speak *muang* dialect, eat *muang* food, while the word “Yuan” is homophonic with the Thai word for Vietnamese.

3 The original significance of the term is geographic rather than ethnic, and only became “ethnic” in the context of the modern Thai nation-state (Rhum 1994).

4 There is some debate as to whether *kam muang* ought to be called a language or a dialect. It differs from Central Thai in its script and in having six rather than five tones (Morris 2000).

There are some small low plains along the Mae Chaem River, the main river of the district. However, only 10% of the lowland plains are useful for agriculture, the rest are forests and mountain. Therefore the population density is low. Mae Chaem is mainly populated by Tai-Yuan (the Muang) (44%) while the rest are hill-tribes. The second biggest population after the Muang is the Karen. There are also Mong, Leesaw and Lawa.

Research was conducted in the village of Baan Yang Luang on a bank of Mae Chaem River and Mae Raag River. It is one of ten administrative villages in Tah Pah sub-district (*tambon*) which is 115.8 square kilometres in area and 5 kilometres from the centre of Mae Chaem district. At the time of my research in 2002-2003, the village was composed of approximately 900 people, and consisted of about 190 households.

Nearly every household in Baan Yang Luang is organised around farming. Their primarily subsistence is the production of wet-rice for household consumption. Farmland is divided into *rai* (un-irrigated fields in the hills), and *na* (irrigated fields, usually in the lowlands). *Rai* supports corn, while on *na* the farmers grow rice. Other important cultivated foods include potatoes, peanuts, tobacco and fruits such as longan. Each household has a courtyard with a nearby vegetable garden and livestock shed. Most of the rice is for subsistence, but the other crops, such as corns, potatoes, peanuts and fruits are sold to markets via middlemen.

During the 1980s and during the Vietnam War, Thailand allied itself with the USA against the threat of communism. This allowed US forces to be stationed in Thailand. In Mae Chaem, the communist movement began around 1973 and ceased around 1981. At that time the USAID (USA International Developmental Organisation) funded 9.2 million US dollars for the Mae Chaem River developmental project and 10 million US dollars for supporting the replacement of opium with cash-crops. Furthermore, USAID sponsored the 48 km road construction from Chom Tong district to Doi Inthanon (the mountain where Mae Chaem is located). The road was a part of military construction of the US in Thailand (Aporn 1998). These development projects were the major turning point of Mae Chaem. There have also been various NGO projects in Mae Chaem intended to encourage the maintenance of traditions and local cultures. For instance, traditional weaving which has been ignored by the young generation is now a main

source of income for many young women after its promotion by an NGO. Nowadays Mae Chaem, as elsewhere in Chiang Mai, has become a place of display in which local history and culture are commercialised and made the objects of visual pleasure. According to Morris (2000), the Northern Thai past has become the object of tourist interest. In this changing context, Mae Chaem values, identity and ideology have been affected. Therefore I am interested in the processes in which Mae Chaem people live their life, interpret, contest and adapt to the changes, especially regarding the spirit cults and kinship systems.

The Circumstances of Fieldwork

The data presented in the thesis were collected between June and August 2001, when I did my MSc research, and later between October 2002 and December 2003. My original research focused on Mae Chaem concepts and perceptions of health and cultural explanations of illness in relation to cosmology. At that time I was introduced to the family of Poh Pia⁵ (father Pia) and Mae Nee (mother Nee), who let me stay with them during my fieldwork. In 2002-3, I returned to stay with the same family as we had already developed a good relationship. They have two children: a daughter, Kanha, who moved out to live with her husband in another district; and a son, Boonsom, who married a woman in the same village. Boonsom has one son who later became a novice. They built a house next to Mae Nee's house in the same compound surrounded by the same gate. I stayed in Poh Pia's and Mae Nee's house. They let me sleep in their daughter's room and I gradually have been treated as their daughter. Although living in separate houses, they consume rice from the same "*long kao*; rice stock" (a little house made from wood use for storing rice for a year), and use the same kitchen (their kitchen is build separately outside the houses). Using the same rice stock, cooking in the same kitchen and eating together are important aspects identifying members of the same family. As Poh Pia said, introducing his family to me, "there are five people in my family. We eat the same rice from the same pot".

⁵ The word "Poh" means father and the word "Mae" means mother. People usually add "Poh" or "Mae" as a prefix to the name of an adult approximately above forties as it is polite and respectful to call others "Poh" and "Mae".

My research, conducted over a 13-month period, used standard participant-observation methods supplemented by extensive interviews with several knowledgeable informants including spirit mediums and traditional healers. The majority of my time was devoted to living in the community, observing case studies and participating in rituals.

Thesis Outline

After the introduction of the thesis in chapter one, chapter two is a critical analysis of previous researches on kinship in Thailand and Northern Thailand in particular. It also presents an overview of kinship systems in Mae Chaem which are based on spiritual cosmology. The chapter looks at local ideas and experiences of interpersonal relationships.

In chapter three, I examine the organisation of spirit cults or spiritual kinship systems in Mae Chaem in relation to the political history of Northern Thailand. Northern Thailand was once an independent kingdom (Lanna Kingdom), but after the administrative reform of 1896, it became a vassal state of the Siamese. Mae Chaem, which was a state of Lanna Kingdom, lost its independence. The Lord and nobles of Mae Chaem lost their power and status when the Siamese sent administrators from Bangkok to govern the district in the 1930s (Wyatt 1982, Rhum 1994). Interestingly, I found that the head ancestral spirit and the tutelary spirit of Mae Chaem are claimed to be the reincarnation of the previous lords. Furthermore, the hierarchy of the spirit cult system in Mae Chaem is parallel to the traditional political hierarchy in Thailand. Therefore, it can be argued that the identity of the state and the power of the traditional lord are reproduced through the organisation of spirit cults in Mae Chaem. The chapter thus investigates how the villagers express and maintain their identities through the practices of spirit cults.

Chapter four considers the process by which hierarchy and power in the spirit cults are maintained and recreated through spirit rituals. In particular, this chapter considers the patron-client relationship which is central to the organisation of the spirit cult system in Mae Chaem. Furthermore, the chapter describes power relationships among the spirits,

the mediums, the officiants and the spirit cult members which are negotiated through healing rituals.

In chapter five I focus on notions of body, self, and personhood in Mae Chaem in relation to kinship ideology. This chapter critiques contemporary kinship analysis, which typically concerns a fluid and transformable bodily substance. In Northern Thailand, however, kinship ideology is not conceptualised in terms of blood or corporeal substance but in terms of an intangible spiritual essence (*khwan*). In other words, Mae Chaem kinship is linked through spirits as the villagers call people of the same matrilineage as *phii diaw kan*, which literally means “people of the same spirit”. The chapter thus examines the way in which social relationships are constituted through connections to spiritual essence (*khwan*).

The next two chapters, six and seven, are concerned with the dynamics and uncertainties of kinship in Mae Chaem through the process of illness explanation and healing management. Chapter six is about the beliefs and practices in reincarnation. The villagers believe that people are always reborn into the same matrilineage as in the previous life and it is necessary to define the name of the particular ancestor who is reincarnated in a newborn baby. Furthermore, the close relative of such an ancestor has to perform a ritual to welcome the spirit in order to ensure the well-being of the newborn baby. Nevertheless, if the baby gets sick, even if the ritual has already been performed, it is possible to redefine the name of the reincarnated spirit. It is the dynamics and uncertainties in the process of defining the reincarnated spirit, illness interpretation, and healing management that concern me. In particular, I am interested in the power relationships and negotiation process in defining kinship and, at the same time, maintaining well-being.

Chapter seven presents a case study of Totae, a five-year-old boy whose leg was burnt, with a discussion of the process of kinship transformation through healing practices. Through the long process in which Totae’s parents and relatives try to find the causes of the accident, search for remedies to heal his wounds and help him to recover, the notions of morality and kin relationship are debated. One of the successful remedies was a healing ritual called “*thaen* ritual” in which a person is required to “register” as a new member of the affinal matrilineage. After Totae had registered in his MMF

lineage, he could walk properly. Therefore, it can be argued that the dynamics of kinship is used to manage illness. In the last section of the chapter, I analyse the transformation of lineage structure systematically, and discuss how illness is used as a means to maintain the solidarity of the matrilineage, in terms of ideology and practice. In short, the chapter draws a connection between local beliefs about spirits on one hand, and kinship ideology, or cultural ideas about interpersonal relationships, on the other, through examining healing practices. Finally, chapter eight concludes the thesis.

Baan Yang Luang Village, Mae Chaem District



Fig. 1.1

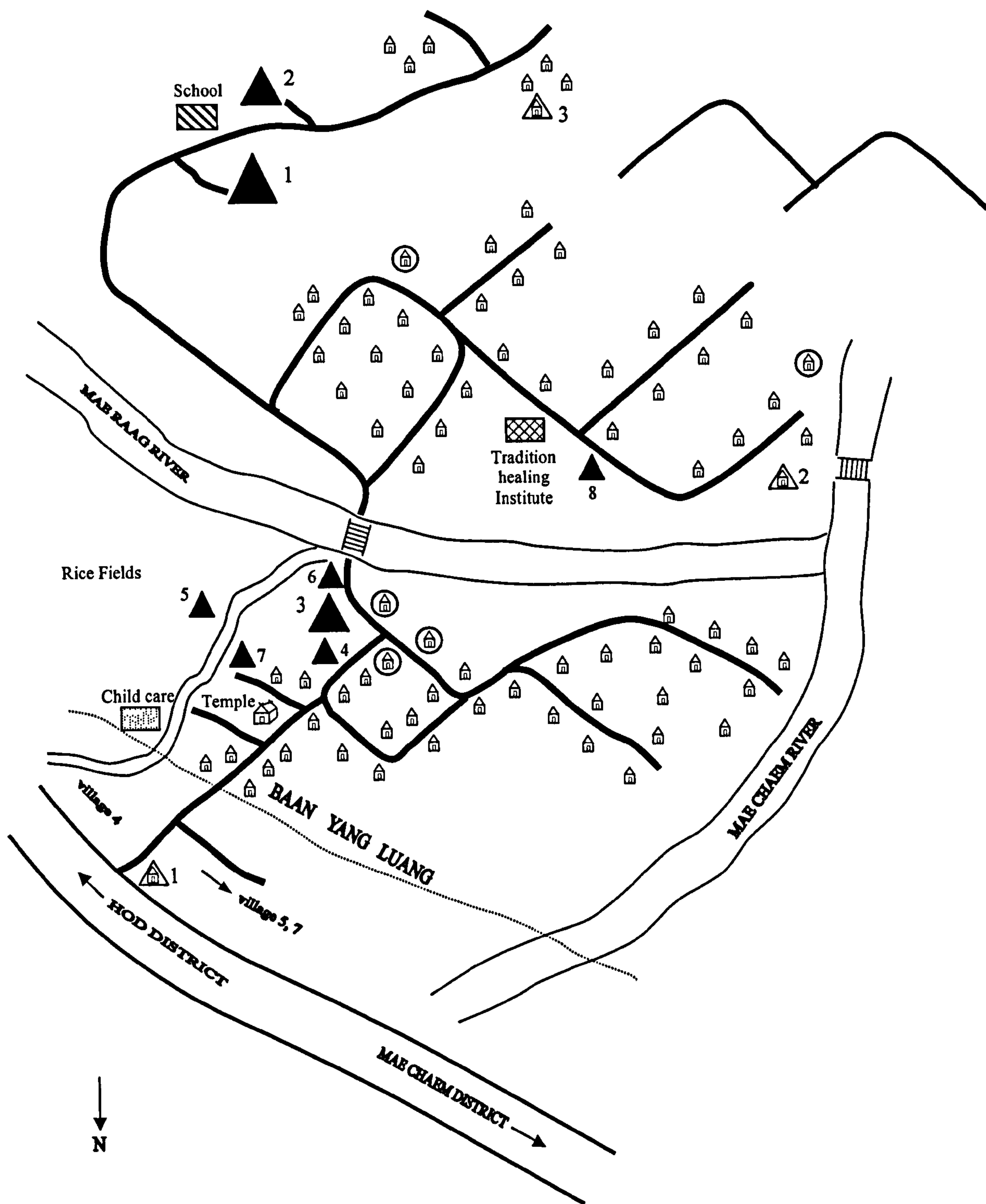


Fig 1.2
















Fig. 1.3

Map 1.3 A Map of Baan Yang Luang Village



Map 1.3 A Map of Baan Yang Luang Village

Symbols in the Map of Baan Yang Luang Village

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
|  | 1 | A shrine of the Eldest Poh Chao Luang (Spirit A) |
|  | 2 | A shrine of the Younger Poh Chao Luang (Spirit B) |
|  | 3 | A main meeting shrine |
|  | 4 | A meeting shrine of Spirit C |
|  | 5 | A shrine of <i>phii puu nyaa</i> (spirit b1) |
|  | 6 | A shrine of <i>phii puu nyaa</i> (spirit a4) |
|  | 7 | A shrine of Temple Spirit |
|  | 8 | A shrine of Temple Spirit |
| | | |
|  | 1 | A house of the spirit medium of Spirit A |
|  | 2 | A house of the (previous) spirit medium of Spirit B |
|  | 3 | A house of the (present) spirit medium of Spirit B |
| | | |
|  | | The Origin House of each matrilineage |
|  | | House |

Ties through Spirits:

Dynamic Kinship Systems in Baan Yang Luang

Northern Thai Kinship Studies

The way Thai kinship has been studied and written about gives a contradictory and confusing picture. On one hand, some claim that there are “matrilineal descent groups in at least certain parts of the North, while cognatic organisation prevails elsewhere and especially so in the central region where kin relations have been presented as particularly fluid and individualised” (Kemp 1982: 28). On the other hand, some suggest that it is generally ambilineal organizations that are found, while others argue that the descent groups are nothing of the sort. From the study of kin groups in a Thai-Lao community, Keyes (1975) concludes that “the Thai material does not fit exactly into the theoretical frameworks evolved elsewhere as these models were descent group oriented. For descent alone provides one type of solution to the problem of allocating power and authority to regulate social relations in the politicojural realm” (ibid.: 275). Keyes places considerable emphasis on the “ego-based descent group” which is “predicated upon lateral extensions of kin ties, not lineal ones” (ibid.: 276) and he focuses on the domestic realm of social relations. However, according to Husken and Kemp (1991), as kinship is a set of symbolic relations it cannot be reduced to neighbourhood nor may neighbourhood be simply rendered in terms of kinship. Instead, the two overlap and create a new set of meanings.

Thailand is a very large-scale “complex” society. In the Northern Thai area alone, there are various kinship “systems” that have been widely discussed by a number of scholars. According to Davis (1984a), the two salient features of Northern Thai social structure are an initial period of matrilocal residence, and matriclan organization. Turton, Cohen and Potter follow the same path in analysing the matrilineal ancestral spirit cults as a main form of organisation. While Turton (1984) uses the term “descent group”, Cohen

and Potter (1984) use “matrilineages” and Davis (1984a) uses “matriclans”. McMorran (1984), on the other hand, found that in Kalang district in Lampang Province, there were three major traditions or variants of the ancestral spirit cults and the major structuring principle is locality not descent group; therefore, he suggests the term “cult group”. Likewise, Rhum (1994), working mainly in Baan Com Ping in Lampang province and other villages in Lampang, found a wide range of variation in descent ideologies.

In Ban Ta Lo, for instance, the *phii ahak*, which is what they call their ancestral spirits, are clearly and explicitly matrilineal. In Lampang City, however, the various dancing descent spirits (the *phii mot* and *phii meng*) are essentially cognatic with matrilineal tendencies. That is there is a statistical tendency for these spirits to be passed down through the mother’s line, but there is no prescriptive rule that this must be done. Moreover, there are “mixed” spirits like *phii mot son meng*, created when a group of people wants to keep spirits from both mother and father’s sides. Also an individual may belong to two spirit descent groups (ibid.: 41).

Cohen and Potter (1984), however, suggest that the Northern Thais have an ideology of unilineal descent—which exists in tension with other principles such as bilateral affiliation and inheritance—and argues that the matrilineal “spirit groups” (*kok phii*) are specialised descent groups. Davis (1984b) similarly argues that “matrilineality among the Northern Thai applies only to the rule of recruitment to spirit groups”. According to Rhum (1987, 1994), the term “clan” or “lineage” implies a range of competence and degree of corporate identity which the “spirits group” do not possess, therefore he finds the term “descent group” seems to be more appropriate for the matrilineal groups whose membership is recruited by descent and whose only manifest function is the worship of common spirits handed down from the ancestors. Correspondingly, Davis (1984a) points out:

Muang matrilineal groups are ritual groups rather than “corporate” groups in the strict sense, in that they do not hold any property in common (other than their spirit shrines) and in that the political or legal status of an individual does not depend in any way upon his or her membership of a particular group. Nor does

membership in any way affect economic relationships or determine the composition of corporate labour teams.

Since they only become operative on special occasions—sacrificial rites—Davis prefer to interpret the *muang* matrilineal descent groups as what Murdock (1960:5), following Raymond Firth, has called “occasional kin groups”. He suggests that for these reasons the clan ideology is fast declining in urban and commercially developed areas. Although it is true that the “spirit group” may appear most clearly when it performs the sacrifice rite, I disagree with Davis’ overlooking the relationship between spirit cult and political and economic life. Davis analysed Thai society as a system composed of separated and unrelated domains, for instance, kinship, political and economic, whereas in real life they are all related and the boundaries between them are blurred.

The matrilineality of the ancestral spirits is clearly related to the matrifocal structure of the Northern Thai household. Davis (1984b: 291) suggests that

The connection between the matrilineal cults and what seems to be a form of matrilineal succession arises out of a fortuitous connection between the cults and the “rule” or “preference” for the youngest daughter residing with her parents and inheriting their house.

Potter points out that common lineage residence results from the rule of preferential matrilocal residence.

As the generations pass, a core of matrilineally related women form a group of households living adjacent to one another. These groups of households worship a common spirit or spirits (1976: 141).

Rhum (1994), on the other hand, argues that this structure cannot be regarded as a sufficient cause of the cults, since Central Thai have a very similar household cycle but no matrilineal spirits. “The Lao have matrilineal spirits (called *phii sua*) but without the ritual organisation of the Yuan or *muang*” (Formoso 1991: 73 cited in Rhum 1994).

Rhum (1994) suggests that there is a strong tendency for households to be structured around a group of women because men must first live in their wives' parents' home (initial uxori-local residence) and the youngest daughters, who generally marry last, usually inherit the family home. On the other hand, he found kinfolk are generally "brought together in kindreds—that is, broad networks of relatives, as opposed to corporate groups like lineages—and descent is bilateral...If you ask a Yuan who his/her ancestors or kin are he/she will give you a long list of people related on both his/her mother's side and father's side...Daughters and sons inherit equal shares of parental property" (ibid.:12, 25). Therefore he concludes that the kinship system in Northern Thai is cognatic with a matrifocal bias and "matriliny is a secondary structure arising from the uxori-local residence rule" (1987: 19).

To understand kinship, however, is not just to "label" the system. If we start with a label of kinship as "unilineal" or "cognatic", we tend to see things in that way and arrange what we observe in conformity with such labels. As Watson (1991: 55) has argued, Malay kinship can be regarded as either cognatic or matrilineal, depending on how one approaches it. In a review of lineage theory, Kuper (1982) showed that the classical "lineage model" has limited relevance for the understanding of social organization. Kinship can be analysed only within its complex context and the important point is to understand how people in such groups themselves make sense of their kinship systems.

In the case of the Sumatran Kerinci (Watson 1991), it is interesting that both cognatic and matrilineal perspectives "work" in their respective contexts. However, what is more interesting is the point made by Husken and Kemp (1991:8), namely, that within a society with unilineal descent we also find a cognatic kinship system, and "that different elements of the politico-jural domain are handled quite distinctly in different ways." Therefore "one must recognise the existence of both matrilineal and cognatic elements as well as the distinction between ideology and practice." A similar observation is found in Burma (Spiro 1977), where there is a cognatic descent system of stocks alongside a distinction between maternal and paternal sides which relates to the spirit cults. The hereditary spirit is inherited patrilineally. All persons in a particular descent group make offerings to the same hereditary spirit.

Trying to give a precise label for kinship systems in Northern Thailand is not enough in understanding the process and experiences of kin relationship in Mae Chaem. Discussion should go beyond previous studies which focus entirely on questions of descent and inheritance. What is more important is to consider kin relationships in process and analyse them through everyday practices. Although I do take the point from Cohen and Potter that spirit groups are “specialised groups”, or as Davis called them, “ritual groups”, further questions need to be considered, such as: for what purpose are they specialised? On what occasions are the spirit groups needed? What do “spirit groups” mean or do for the Northern Thai people, in particular in the context of social changes? These questions have to be understood within their dynamic context and analysed with a processual approach through their histories, cosmologies, religion, and concepts of person.

Contemporary Kinship Studies

After the focus of consideration in anthropological concepts shifted from a static and abstract structural-functional analysis to a historical and processual approach, the perspectives on what was important in kinship had changed. The way in which kinship is understood has shifted from structure and function of kinship to a focus on meaning. Current work tends to focus on the cultural meanings of kinship in different places, on the politics and meanings of body, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, instead of the structures of descent and alliance (see Peletz 1995; Holy 1998; Carsten 1997, 2000; Lamphere 2001, and Stone 2001).

In addition, kinship is viewed as a process of inter-relationship and symbolic construction of persons and relations that people experience and constitute through time. The dynamics of movement, change and conflict in performance and practice are emphasised in viewing kinship as a process of relatedness. For instance, anthropologists are concerned with kinship as “becoming” rather than “being”. Humans are understood not just as “given” but “active” beings, who “make” kinship through the process of growing, learning, living and experiencing in daily life. Therefore we have to consider what people do, not just what people are (Boddy 1998, Bodenhorn 2000, Carsten 2000, Stafford 2000, Brettell 2001, Galvin 2001).

Mckinley's (2001) conceptualisation of kinship as a philosophy is interesting in that it gives a broader perspective to kinship studies. He states that,

kinship is a philosophy about how a person can feel categorically obligated to a series of other persons...[it] is the philosophy many cultures hold about what completes a person socially, psychologically, and morally and how that completeness comes about through a responsible sense of attachment and obligation to others (ibid.: 143-5).

Viewing kinship as a philosophy allows us to go beyond human relationship to the links between the living and the dead and/or the unborn. Interestingly, Kelly explains kinship as a domain of social relations, which is not confined to the living (1993: 521-22 cited in Peletz 1995: 348-9).

Kinship relations are social relations predicated upon cultural conceptions that specify the processes by which an individual comes into being and develops into a complete (i.e. mature) social person. These processes encompass the acquisition and transformation of both spiritual and corporeal components of being. Sexual reproduction and the formulation of paternal and maternal contributions are an important component of, but are not coextensive with, the relevant processes. This is due to the ethnographic fact that a full complement of spiritual components is never derived exclusively from the parents...foods may also constitute essential ingredients in the spiritual or corporeal completion of personhood...[and] maturation frequently entails...replacing, adding, and/or supplanting spiritual and corporeal components of personhood.

Following the processual approach of current kinship studies, I am interested in meanings and practices of kinship in Northern Thailand which are linked through matrilineal spirits. It should be noted, however, that I am not arguing for a cross-culturally valid category of "lineage systems" but am sticking to a local conception of how descent is conceived and reckoned for practical purposes. This chapter will investigate the Mae Chaem "idioms of relatedness", to use Carsten's term (2000), to see

how people talk about relationship; and how kinship is created, recreated and transformed through the practices of spirit cult rituals and the experiences of spirit-human interrelations in everyday life.

The following section focuses on the Mae Chaem spirit world in relation to the dynamics and fluidity of kinship processes and practices in everyday life.

Mae Chaem Kinship: Ties through Spirits

The religious beliefs of the Northern Thai people consist of a mixture of Hindu Brahmanism, Buddhism, and animism. Spirits play a very important role in the everyday life of many Northerners, both rural and urban. One aspect of animism which has been widely written about by researchers is that of local spirit cults. There are two main spirits relevant to the discussion of Mae Chaem kinship systems, i.e., the *phii puu nyaa* (ancestral spirits) and Poh Chao Luang (the tutelary or guardian spirit).

***phii puu nyaa* (Ancestral Spirit)**

The ancestral spirit is called *phii puu nyaa*. Literally *phii* means spirit. *Puu* and *nyaa* are kinship terms. While in Central Thai, *puu* means FF and *nyaa* means FM, in Northern Thai, the terms are not used for paternal grandparents.

Turton (1972: 236) found that, in Chiang Rai, *puu* refers to parents' and grandparents' elder brother, and *nyaa* to parents' and grandparents' elder sister and also their spouses. Therefore, unlike the Central Thai usage, in Northern Thailand *puu* and *nyaa* may refer to both patrilineal and matrilineal kin. Consequently, Turton argued that because "the fundamental categorical distinction between people in Northern Thai culture is between older and younger, with the distinction between older and younger members of the same generation as important as that between senior and junior generations" (1972: 238), thus *puu* and *nyaa* denote generational authority.

In Mae Chaem, nevertheless, I found that people use the term "*ui*" to refer to any grandparents and their siblings. They differentiate between the gender (not age) of

kinsmen in the second ascending generation as *poh ui* for male grandparents and their male siblings and *mae ui* for female. Parent's siblings (either elder or younger) are called with the same term as father (*poh*) and mother (*mae*). Although the term *puu* and *nyaa* are not generally used for kinsmen in Mae Chaem, when they talk about *phii puu nyaa*, the compound term "*puu-nyaa*" is used instead and refers to ancestors as a couple in a collective sense; a couple of the lineage.

The *phii puu nyaa* is normally transmitted matrilineally. The villagers group themselves in matrilineal groups for the purpose of propitiating these spirits. They are generally said to be handed down from a founding ancestress (David 1973:56) whose identity is usually not remembered or from a group of sisters (Turton 1972:219). The ancestral spirits, however, are neither the reincarnations or the free-floating souls of specific ancestors nor the ghosts of the dead founders. The spirits have been inherited from the matrilineal ancestors who once served and controlled them.

These matrilineal groups are usually called *kok phii*, which means "spirit group" or *saiy phii*, which means the "spirit line". The membership of *kok phii* is recruited by descent. They worship common spirits which are handed down from the ancestors. The villagers also call people who worship the same spirit as "*phii diaw kan*" which literally means "people of the same spirit". Spirit groups do not own property or serve as a basis for labour recruitment. The only thing transmitted matrilineally is spirits.

In general the ancestral spirits are said to ensure well-being and protect the members of a matrilineage from the depredations of living people, malevolent ghosts, disease and death. They grant prosperity to those who propitiate them respectfully and punish wrongdoers who violate certain rules of morality. If offended, the spirits are capable of causing their descendants to become ill. One of the special functions of *phii puu nyaa* is to punish the members of a matrilineal spirit group in which nubile girls have violated the rules of sexual morality.

Sexual morality for Thai in general and also Northern Thai prohibits premarital intercourse as well as any physical contact related to sexual relationship. It is believed that if a girl violates it she is liable to expose another member of her spirit group (particularly her mother) to the anger of the ancestral spirits, who will cause that person

to be ill. It is interesting that it is not the girl herself who will be in trouble but her relatives, in particularly her mother, and that make the rule more serious. Such sexual violations are known as *phid phii*, which means “wronging the spirit”.

According to Rhum (1994), when such a case is suspected, a medium will be consulted, the wrongdoer will then be identified, and she is in turn expected to identify her partner. This partner is expected either to marry the girl or pay a fine to the spirit (*kha sai phii*). Usually, if a girl has engaged in premarital sex, she feels guilty and afraid that she may cause someone in her spirit group to fall ill, and thus will tell her parents as soon as possible. Moreover, it is shameful to let the issue be discussed openly through the spirit medium. Consequently, a typical traditional Northern Thai marriage ritual would be performed. Her parents would ask the adult or senior of both families to approve the marriage. If both families and the bride and groom accept the marriage, the auspicious day will be chosen for the marriage ceremony and feast. After this the groom’s side will give the bride’s side an amount of money as the “*kaa sai phii*” which is “the price to be paid to the ancestral spirits of the girl’s lineage for raising the girl”. The *phii puu nyaa* of the bride’s matrilineage were fed and informed by the “*kaw phii*”¹, the old women of her lineage. This is crucial step in traditional marriage for the villagers. The marriage can not take place until the *phii puu nyaa* of the girl’s lineage has been informed to get “permission”. Since the young couple reside at least initially with the parents of the bride, her ancestral spirits have to be informed so that they will protect her husband (see Potter 1976 for more details on marriage rituals).

The premarital sexual violation is particularly bad if it happens inside the girl’s house where the ancestral spirit is believed to be present. In the past (40-50 years ago) a girl spent most of her time helping her mother do all the domestic as well as agricultural work; cleaning, cooking, carrying water from the river, cutting fire-wood in the forest, planting rice, etc. At night there was a traditional activity a girl tended to do at home, that is to spin cotton thread in the hall called “*tuen*”. It is a hall used for welcoming guests, located upstairs at the front of the house, in front of the two bedrooms situated at the back. The *tuen* was the place where a girl and a boy met each other. A boy visited the girl he liked at her home during the night to have a chat while she was spinning the

¹ The explanation and discussion about *kaw phii* is presented below

cotton thread. The girl's parents might go to bed and observe their behaviour from a distance. If the girl allowed the boy to enter her bedroom, it would be considered as "*phid phii*" ("wronging the spirit"). On the next day the girl would inform her parents and the marriage process would begin.

Guests from outside the village, even married, are prohibited to sleep together in the house because they are not descendants from the *phii puu nyaa* of the house. It is regarded as a "wrong doing" (*phid phii*) toward the ancestral spirit as well. They can stay in the house but in a separate room.

After marriage, a man's status in the descent group is rather ambiguous. Potter (1976: 120) found that when a man marries, for all practical purposes, he becomes a member of his wife's matrilineage, but he never completely loses membership in his own mother's matrilineal descent group and can return to it. Turton (1984: 273) showed that in Chiang Rai, husbands "buy entry" (*sue kao*) into their wife's spirit groups. Nevertheless, many scholars have suggested that an affinal male is in theory incorporated into his mother's group, but in practice he is allowed to belong to either his wife's or mother's descent group, though multiple membership is very rare (Cohen 1984, Tanabe 1991). In Baan Yang Luang, similar to what Davis (1984a: 263) found in Nan province, a man will remain in his natal group. He does not have to change his matrilineal spirit group after married. However, if he has got an illness and the diagnosis turns out that he needs to enter his wife's spirit clan, then he has to perform a worship ritual to his wife's spirit. After the ritual, it is believed that a man becomes a member of his wife's spirit cult group, although his matrilineal link with his mother's spirit will never be lost.

Many scholars argue that the ancestral spirits in Northern Thailand have an important function in controlling female sexuality and regulating marriage. This argument may be an excellent explanation of Northern Thai context in the past, at least in the last generation when girls were in the sight of their parents all the time and the premarital rules were strictly. At present, however, as everyday activities have changed, girls and boys do not meet at home. They spend more time outside the house. Children spend more time at school and less time at home. Therefore, it can be seen that the "power" of ancestral spirits to regulate female sexuality at home becomes weak. Although before

marriage the villagers still have to worship their ancestral spirits to inform and ask for permission, the function of controlling premarital sex at present is not strict. As the villagers often said “the spirit’s power at present is not strong as in the past” (“*phii ba deaw boh hang*”).

If we follow functionalist logic, the ancestral spirits should have disappeared after their function weakened. But that is not the way it works. The notions of ancestral spirits are much more complex than that. In Baan Yang Luang, the meanings of *phii puu nyaa* are not limited to a domain of sexuality. If we look carefully into everyday life, we find the ancestral spirits are involved in many aspects of life. The spirits are believed to protect and ensure well being, from birth to death, from individual to household and throughout the territory. There is no “fixed” function for any spirit. The meanings and conceptions of spirits are subject to continuous change.

Poh Chao Luang

There is another spirit in Baan Yang Luang which is believed to be the most important spirit, called Poh Chao Luang. Poh means father, Chao means Lord, and Luang means great, big, or main. So Poh Chao Luang could be translated as the Father Great Lord. It is believed that Poh Chao Luang is a spirit of long-time dead nobles or warriors, who has dwelt in the area and historically was the Lord of Muang Chaem (or Mae Chaem district at present), who governed their community before. Moreover, it is believed that after he died his spirit still worried about the commune, therefore, he was not willing to be reincarnated but continued to “govern” people in Mae Chaem until the present time. Poh Chao Luang is therefore considered as a tutelary spirit, granting prosperity to those who propitiate him respectfully and also punishing wrongdoers who violate certain rules of morality. Nevertheless, Poh Chao Luang have two different but overlapping “roles”, for instance, they are sometimes seen as “ancestral spirits” but in a higher position than the usual ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) presented above, at the same time, they are also considered as territorial spirits.

In Baan Yang Luang village, there are three Poh Chao Luang which are related to each other as siblings, the Eldest and two Younger Brothers. Different Poh Chao Luang

prefer different kinds of meat; some prefer black pig, while some prefer buffalo. At the worship of Poh Chao Luang, it is a tradition for each spirit cult to feast their spirit with its preferred meat.

The Eldest Poh Chao Luang is believed to govern the whole population of Mae Chaem district, whereas the other two Younger Brothers govern at a lower level and smaller areas. The villagers made this clearer when they compared the structure of those spirits with the governmental political structure. In Thailand, the political structure is governed in hierarchical order from the centre of country in Bangkok, to province, district (*amphur*), sub-district (*thambol*), and village (*muu baan*), respectively. The head of a province is called “*puu waa*”, the head of a district is called “*nai amphur*”, the head of a sub-district is called “*kamnan*”, and the head of the village is called “*puu yai baan*”. Parallel to the head of each level, the spirits “govern” the same hierarchical structure; while *phii puu nyaa* (ancestral spirits) govern at a household or village level, Poh Chao Luang governs at higher levels (see table 2.1).

Politic Structure	Politician	Spirit	Kinship Territory
Province	<i>Puu waa</i> (Head of Province)	Chao Luang Kam Daeng (The Head of Guardian Spirits in Chiang Mai)	
District	<i>Nai amphur</i> (Head of district)	Poh Chao Luang (The Eldest one)	Maximal lineage
Sub-district	<i>Kam nan</i> (Head of sub-district)	Poh Chao Luang (The Younger Brothers)	Maximal lineage
Village	<i>Puu yai baan</i> (Head of village)	<i>Phii puu nyaa</i> (ancestral spirits)	Minimal lineage

Table 2.1: Thai political administration compared with Mae Chaem spirit cult system

***phii puu nyaa*, Poh Chao Luang and the Matrilineal Spirit Groups**

I would like to borrow the term maximal lineage from Ishii (1995) where he uses it to explain the level of social organisation in a patrilineal village in Newar. It would be more understandable for the case of Baan Yang Luang if I use it together with the term minimal lineage. Furthermore, it will give a clearer explanation of how the villagers consider their relationship to each other through the ancestral spirits and Poh Chao Luang. Nevertheless I do not mean to use the terms “maximal lineage” and “minimal lineage” in a strict and bounded sense as many anthropologists used them in the past. The terms are helpful to give a clear picture, but the complex and dynamic process within the lineages must be taken into account. It should be noted here as well, however, that during the time I was in the village I did not find the villagers use any term to refer to “lineage”. They rather speak of each other as the people who have a spirit in common.

I apply the term “minimal lineage” for a matrilineal group who hold the same ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*). There are groups of minimal lineages that hold the same guardian spirit (Poh Chao Luang); I will refer to these groups as “maximal lineage”. The minimal lineage can be seen as a sub-set of a maximal lineage. For instance, under each Poh Chao Luang (the head of maximal lineage) there are many *phii puu nyaa* (the head of each minimal lineage). People who hold the same *phii puu nyaa* also hold the same Poh Chao Luang, while people who hold the same Poh Chao Luang may hold different *phii puu nyaa*. In conclusion, Poh Chao Luang is a territorial guardian spirit and also a head spirit of each maximal lineage. As a result, sometimes Poh Chao Luang is referred to as the head of ancestral spirits.

The principle of succession of the spirits (Poh Chao Luang and *phii puu nyaa*) is matrilineal. Membership in the matrilineage passes from a mother to her children; a child belongs to the matrilineage of his mother and not of his father. That is to say every child has the same *phii puu nyaa* and the same Poh Chao Luang as their mother. The woman’s husband, the father of these children, tends to be of another matrilineage. This is because of the rule of lineage exogamy which I will discuss later (see also Potter 1976).

What is it that the Members of Minimal and Maximal Lineages Share?

Minimal Lineage

Apart from holding the same *phii puu nyaa* (ancestral spirit), each “minimal lineage” also has a woman of the senior generation as the core of the lineage, called *kaw phii*. *Kaw* literally means stem, or origin, *phii* means spirit. Therefore *kaw phii* may be translated as “origin of the spirit cult”. She is the successor to the role of matrilineage head, passed from a recognised ancestress in the ascending generation (Tanabe 1991). Her role is to be the head of lineage. When there is a worship ritual for the *phii puu nyaa* she will be the representative of the lineage to serve the spirit. This position is usually inherited from the mother to the youngest daughter; for it is related to the inheritance rule of the house as well (the rule of inheritance is presented below).



Fig. 2.1, 2.2 After the worship of *phii puu nyaa* (ancestral spirit), *kaw phii* (the head of the lineage) ties the wrists of the spirit cult members to bless them luck and well-being

Another important property the minimal lineage shares (particular in the context of worship ritual) is the “*hyan kaw*”. *Hyan* can refer to house or family, *kaw* means origin or stem, so *hyan kaw* can be translated as “Origin House”. It is the house of the leader of lineage, which she inherits from her mother together with the position of *kaw phii*. Inside the *hyan kaw*, in the main bedroom² where *kaw phii* and her husband stay, there is a spirit shelf (*hing puu nyaa*) hanging on the wall. The shelf is built for the ancestral spirit to stay and protect the household³. It is believed that the ancestral spirits are lodged on the shelf. It is a simple empty shelf without any symbolic material to

² Regarding the Northern Thai traditional house, the main bedroom is considered to be the most sacred space in the house.

³ Therefore, the ancestral spirits are also known as “house spirits” (*phii hyan*) (Davis 1984a, 1984b).

represent the spirit. Every year the members of each “minimal cult” will gather at the *hyan kaw* to perform the worship ritual. Some matrilineal clans build shrines (*haw*) on the site for their ancestral spirits, but it is normally much smaller than that of Poh Chao Luang.



Fig. 2.3 The ancestral spirits are believed to be lodged on the shelf in the main bedroom inside the Origin House (*hyan kaw*).

Maximal Lineage

A maximal spirit cult is a group of people who hold the same Poh Chao Luang. However, people in the same maximal cult do not need to have the same *phii puu nyaa*. While a minimal lineage has “*kaw phii*”, each “maximal lineage” has two important persons who may be seen as their representative; (1) the medium of the spirit and (2) the officiant. These positions are held until the person dies.

The medium is a woman in the maximal lineage whose body has been chosen by the guardian spirits (Poh Chao Luang) to be their human host. The medium is called *tii nang* (literally means the place to sit). The ritual possession of mediums is one of the central features of the spirit cults. In Baan Yang Luang village the medium is always a female although the possessing spirit is always a male. Men are believed to possess strong *khwan* (life essence), and are psychically characterized as strongly bounded entities thus are able to easily defend themselves from penetration by outside supernatural agents. On the other hand, women’s *khwan* are said to be weak. This means their personal boundaries are less able to resist penetration by external

supernatural elements. However, when possessed by the spirit she will behave with “male” characteristic, for instance, take off her shirt and wear a traditional sarong⁴ (to represent a male way of dressing in the past), and drink large amounts of whisky without getting drunk.

The officiant (*tang kaw*, literally means the man who places the rice), is held by a male member of the cult. He is chosen by the spirit to be the mediator between the spirit and the members. Basically he is the person who serves the offering dish to Poh Chao Luang and organises the possession ritual, and worship ritual. When people fall sick and want to give a bribe (*keun wai*⁵) and ask the spirit for help, or make an offering in order to pay respect to them, or worship the spirits on the Buddhist Lent day, the offerings are given through the officiant who will give them to the spirits at the shrine.

Apart from Poh Chao Luang, the important property the members in the same maximal lineage share is the spirit’s shrine (*haw*). The shrine is similar to the Northern Thai house style; a wooden house built on stilts with one bedroom and a wide balcony outside to use as a guest room. The size of the shrine is the same as usual house in the village. Nevertheless, the eldest spirit’s shrine is larger than the other two. This reflects the importance and hierarchy of the spirits. The shrine is a place where the sacrifice worship as well as the “welcoming” rituals are performed. At these rituals the officiant,

4 The traditional dress the spirit medium wear, however, is actually similar to the Burmese traditional style. This may be influenced from the 200-year Burmese rule, from 1558-1804, according to the history of Lanna Kingdom (Chiang Mai at present).

5 There is an ambiguity in translating the term *keun* into English. In practice, the villagers make an offering to the spirit with a lower quality food and promise a better quality food if the spirit fulfils their requests. Generally, to make a promise to a deity and ask for some special favour in return can be translated as to “make a vow”. However, I find the term “vow” lacks an implication of a power; in a sense, the person only can declare a promise and wait for a result without any negotiation. Whereas to “*keun wai*” one offers some small “gift” to the spirit when asking for help and promises a better offering afterwards. Therefore, to emphasise the power relation in the practice of “*keun*”, the term may be translated as “bribe”. This can also explain the process of changing the offering made for the Temple Spirit, whose favourite food was changed from chicken to pig (see chapter 4). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the power of negotiation is not an ideal, because even if one’s request fails, one still has an obligation to offer the spirit a service or an offering according to the promise one has made.

In Central Thailand there are two different terms denoting “vow” and “bribe”. While “*bon*” means to make a vow, “*sin bon*” means to bribe. To make a votive offering is called “*kae bon*”. The term “*bon*” is used exclusively to the deity, whereas the word “*sinbon*” is only used for a person. To “*bon*”, one does not give any offering to the deity until one’s wish is fulfilled. To “*bon*” is to declare one’s promise to the spirit and persuade it to help.

Nevertheless, in Mae Chaem, the practice of “*keun wai*” reveals an overlap between a vow and a bribe. There is no term for a votive offering. People simply say they will feast (*pai liang*) the spirit after their wishes are fulfilled.

singers, and the musicians have to gather at the balcony of the shrine, only the officiant can enter the bedroom to present trays of offering food to Poh Chao Luang. As a result, the shrine needs to be big enough for the ritual performance. Women, on the other hand, are forbidden from entering the shrine, not even the balcony. Instead, they gather on the ground to prepare food for Poh Chao Luang⁶.



Fig 2.4, 2.5 The main shrine of Poh Chao Luang

The shrine has to be oriented in a particular direction: the North-South direction. It is considered to be auspicious for human houses as well. The villagers explained that the roof of the house should not face the sun. It is believed that the right direction brings health and prosperity to the family. Accordingly, the direction of the shrine could even influence the spirit's quality. For example, in the village there was a shrine built for the Temple spirit. Normally the Temple spirit is regarded as a benevolent spirit for it protects the temple and all the members. However, the villagers found that the Temple spirits in Baan Yang Luang often harmed and caused illness to everyone, especially the pregnancy women and children. Finally they decided to rebuild the shrine and turn it from the East-West to the North-South direction.

As a *phii caw wat* (the Temple Spirit), it should be a guardian of our village, but this spirit is fierce. It easily disturbs people. It is a *phii kee kohb* (a spirit that likes to “bite” people). It may be because its shrine was built facing the wrong direction. It should face the North or South as our house. It should not face the east as it does now. I think because of this reason, it frequently harms people.

⁶ The details of rituals performing for Poh Chao Luang as well as ancestral spirits are discussed in chapter 4

There are two types of spirit shrines for Poh Chao Luang; the “main” shrines and the “meeting” shrines. The main shrines are a place where the spirits are believed to stay. They are located outside and far from the household area at the eastern edge of the village, adjacent to the rice fields. The sacrificial worship rituals are performed at the main shrines. All the maximal lineage members gather at the shrine annually for the minor ritual and every three years for the major ritual. There are three main shrines for the three Poh Chao Luang; two shrines located in Baan Yang Luang area, and another one situated in a village nearby. All three shrines were built long ago in a forest outside the residential area. Although the exact time cannot be determined, it could not be less than 80 years ago. As the population rose, the need of land increased. Therefore, the forest around the shrine was gradually destroyed to extend rice-fields. Nevertheless, the land around the spirit shrine was strictly prohibited to be occupied. The power of Poh Chao Luang was used to protect the trees around the shrine. Many villagers were believed to die from the spirit’s punishment after their trespassing. However, the prohibited area around the spirit shrine became smaller as time passed.

Nevertheless, the shrine and its surroundings are still considered to be sacred spaces, where proper manners are strictly observed, as the villagers mentioned; “should anyone urinate or spit, they could be attacked by the spirits”. In the past the villagers did not dare to walk past the shrine during the night. It was also because the shrine was not so far from the cremation field. At present, as the road is constructed near the shrine, every time when the villagers drive a car past the forest where the shrine is located, they will press the horn to greet and pay respect to Poh Chao Luang.

The “meeting” shrines are built at the border of the household area on unoccupied land. This particular shrine is built for the ritual without sacrifice activity. Every year on the major Buddhist offering days such as the Buddhist Lent Day, the Tan Guay Salak, and the Northern Thai New Year, it is believed that every Poh Chao Luang gather at the “meeting” shrine. On those days the ancestral spirits as well as Poh Chao Luang are worshipped by all the members with an offering set called *suay*⁷. The villagers make two sets of *suay*; one is presented to the *kaw phii* (the head of the minimal lineage) for the ancestral spirit and another one to the officiant of Poh Chao Luang. The *kaw phii*,

⁷ The offering set is composed of flowers, jostick, candles, and some popped rice, put in a small cone-shape container made from banana leaves.

and the officiant, as the representatives of the lineage bring those *suay* to the *phii puu nyaa* and Poh Chao Luang respectively. While the *suay* for ancestral spirit are put on the shelf in the Origin House, the *suay* for Poh Chao Luang are given at the “meeting” shrine, because it is nearer and more convenient for the officiant. Only the officiant performs the ritual at the meeting shrine on behalf of everyone.



Fig 2.6, 2.7 The officiant brings *suay* to Poh Chao Luang at the “meeting” shrine

What is Different between *phii puu nyaa* and Poh Chao Luang?

The most obvious difference between *phii puu nyaa* and Poh Chao Luang is that the latter spirit has human-like “identity”, which appears through the medium “he”⁸ possesses. This is related to how the villagers treat Poh Chao Luang. The spirits are served with the same food as humans, have a big shrine with the same style and same size as human house. However, when the spirit is invited to possess the medium it will be held at the medium’s house, not at the shrine. On the other hand, in the villagers’ sense, *phii puu nyaa* do not have any human-like characteristics, they are rather abstract groups of ancestors. The spirits only have an empty shelf inside the bedroom of the lineage head’s house (*hyan kaw* or Origin House), for the spirits do not possess nor come to visit humans. The shelf is the only symbol for the villagers to worship and pay respect to the ancestral spirits. Nevertheless, some minimal matrilineage may have a

⁸ I use “he” because the spirits is believed to have male characteristics, although the medium usually is a woman.

small shrine for their *phii puu nyaa*, besides the shelf. But it is just like a model, too small for humans to go inside. The shrine does not need to be large because there is no ritual performed inside the shrine. It is merely a place to present the offerings given by its members. The difference in size between the spirit “house” of ancestral spirits and Poh Chao Luang is related to the hierarchical system of the spirits as well. Poh Chao Luang in one aspect is seen as the head of ancestral spirit, which is higher than the ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*). Consequently, the maximal lineage group who hold the same Poh Chao Luang has a bigger organisation to manage and maintain the group than those of minimal lineage.

Viewing *phii puu nyaa* and Poh Chao Luang Spirit Group in Practice

Minimal Lineage

In the ninth month of the Northern Thai lunar calendar⁹ (around June-July) just after the annual sacrifice to Poh Chao Luang there is the most important annual event for the minimal lineage, called “*liang phii suum*”. A pair of chickens is sacrificed every year, while a pig is sacrificed every three years. The ritual takes place at the Origin House where all the members who hold the same *phii puu nyaa* (ancestral spirits) are gathering. Every member attending the sacrificial rite has to prepare a pair of *suay* for the *kaw phii* (the head of the lineage) who then presents all those offerings to the ancestral spirit on the shelf in her bedroom (or at the shrine built in a garden near the house, depending on each lineage).

⁹ The Northern Thai lunar calendar is presented in appendix A



Fig. 2.8 A member of the minimal lineage brings a pair of *suay* to the Origin House

The *suay* are made to show their attendance and to pay respect to the ancestral spirit. If they ignore the spirits they may get angry and cause harm. However, although the villagers said every member has to attend the ritual, in practice only the representatives of each family do. If nobody in the family can participate, a pair of *suay* has to be given via any attending member to the *kaw phii*, and a small parcel of cooked food will be sent to them in return. The ritual is considered to be a good opportunity for members to meet and strengthen their relationships.

When a mother and her children attend the worship ritual for their ancestral spirit, the father does not attend because he belongs to a different matrilineage group and thus has to attend the ritual of his own lineage. However, there are many households where a husband becomes an assistant of his wife's lineage, although he has no lineage relationship. In some cases the husband has to become a member of his wife's lineage, in order to recover from his illness. The detail of becoming a member of another lineage is presented in chapter 7.

Sometimes when people have an illness, the diviner may suggest they make an offering to their *phii puu nyaa* in order to be healed. Fairly often, illness is said to be a punishment of *phii puu nyaa* if there are conflicts between the lineage members. The villagers say "I have to go to *puu nyaa*" which means they are going to make an offering to the ancestral spirit at the Origin House. They normally bring a pair of cooked chickens to the Origin House. After the *kaw phii* offers the food for the spirit,

normally, the person would give one chicken to the *kaw phii* and take one home to eat as a sacred food.

Mae Nee, my host mother, was an elder sister of the *kaw phii*. Her Origin House was located opposite to her house. I often saw people come to make an offering to their ancestral spirit at the Origin House. Sometimes if the *kaw phii* was not at home, Mae Nee had to receive the offerings on a behalf of her sister. One day Mae Nee went to the village nearby, she saw betel nut trees in a house on the way she went back, so she asked the girl in the house if she could take some. The girl did not welcome her nicely and seemed to ignore her, so Mae Nee was angry. She told me after arriving home that she remembered the girl was the people of the same spirit as her. She said “I will wait. Some day the girl will meet me at the Origin House, and she will realise who I am. Or one day she might have to come to *puu nyaa*”. A couple of weeks later, the girl came to our house and tried to call Mae Nee. The girl needed to give an offering to the ancestral spirit because one of her relatives fell sick, but the *kaw phii* was not at home. Mae Nee intentionally ignored her. She told me “I remember, that was the girl who ignored me last time, so I do not want to receive her offering.” Therefore, it is not only important to pay respect to the ancestral spirit but to all the members of the same spirit, in particular the head of the lineage or the higher position members.

Maximal Lineage

Just before the worship ritual for the ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*), people of the same Poh Chao Luang will gather at the spirit’s shrine to worship and have a feast. Nevertheless, for some lineages, *phii puu nyaa* and the Poh Chao Luang is the same spirit. Therefore in this case they will have only one worship-ritual a year. While other lineages have to perform separate rituals for the two spirits, one with their maximal lineage and another with their minimal lineage. Similar to the annual worship to the ancestral spirit, a pair of chickens is sacrificed at the shrine every year in the ninth month¹⁰ of the Northern Thai calendar. For the triennial worship, however, the

¹⁰ The ninth month of the lunar calendar is usually a short period before the new agricultural year is started. Therefore, the worship ritual is also performed to ensure good products in the coming year.

sacrificed animal is different depending on each Poh Chao Luang. The eldest Poh Chao Luang is said to prefer a cow, while the younger Poh Chao Luang prefer a pig.

At every Northern Thai traditional New Year, Buddhist Lent, and Than Guay Salak day, a pair of *suay* is offered to pay respect to Poh Chao Luang and the ancestral spirits. Moreover, at the New Year, Poh Chao Luang is believed to possess the medium at his shrine to visit and bless his members.

The most frequent occasion the villagers encounter their Poh Chao Luang is when they fall sick. However, there are many different ways to “contact” the spirit. Firstly, they may go to “ask” Poh Chao Luang through the medium. The villagers use the word “ask” when they perform a possession ritual. The clients have to ask the officiant of the maximal lineage to find an auspicious day¹¹ and arrange the possession ritual. The ritual is performed at the medium’s house. The spirit may find out the cause and suggest proper remedies for those clients. Secondly, after all the healing process is done, it is the client’s responsibility to perform a thanksgiving-ritual for the spirit, by organising a feast at the spirit’s shrine. Thirdly, in some cases, the sick persons make a contract with Poh Chao Luang. For instance they promise a sacrificed animal to Poh Chao Luang if he lets the person recover from illness. In short the sacrifice is seen as a bribe for the spirit. Finally, sometimes a diviner suggests that a sick person apologise (*su-ma*) to Poh Chao Luang, as he or she may have violated some rules, or done something morally wrong. A pair of chickens is offered to the spirit at his shrine through the officiant.

The villagers pay great respect to Poh Chao Luang. Any important changes in life, such as moving a house or leaving a village, would be informed to the spirit. In any critical period of life the spirit is even regarded as their “god”. A couple of years ago (August 2002) there was a flood and landslide disaster in the village. Many houses were destroyed but, fortunately, nobody was killed. The villagers believed that Poh Chao Luang had saved their lives. According to the villagers, at the moment of the disaster,

¹¹ Spirit rites of any kind are strictly forbidden on Wednesday. Wednesday is said to be the spirits “meeting day”. They are usually said to meet in the cave at Chiang Dao Mountain in Chiang Mai province. Like bureaucrats everywhere they are unavailable for other business while in meeting.

nobody could think of anything but cried for help from Poh Chao Luang. Furthermore, after the tragedy, Poh Chao Luang (through his medium) had a crucial authority to make a decision for all the victims regarding the land they should move to.

Relationships among Maximal and Minimal Lineages in Baan Yang Luang

In Baan Yang Luang there are three Poh Chao Luang, therefore it may be seen that almost all villagers of Baan Yang Luang descend from the three main maximal spirit cults. According to the villagers, the three spirits are related to each other as siblings; the Eldest Spirit and another two Younger Brothers. The Eldest Poh Chao Luang is believed to “*kuab teung muang Mae Chaem*” which literally means that the Eldest Spirit “governs all over the Mae Chaem district”. It also means that the Eldest Poh Chao Luang belongs to everybody in Mae Chaem. Consequently, it may also be seen that all the people of Mae Chaem district originate from the same founder who holds the Eldest Poh Chao Luang and later, they gradually separated into many sub-groups who hold the Younger Brother spirits. In general, therefore, the villagers often said they all are relatives, for they come from the same origin. It is interesting, however, that the shrine of the Eldest Spirit is located in Baan Yang Luang, and is believed to originate here.

To give a clear picture of how the three Poh Chao Luang or the three “maximal lineages” are related to the minimal lineages, let me call the three maximal lineages **A**, **B** and **C**, each of which has its own Poh Chao Luang **A**, **B** and **C** respectively. Spirit **A** is the Eldest one, and spirit **B** and **C** are the Younger Brother spirits. I have not heard people define which spirit is older than another, between these two brothers. There are at least 6 minimal lineages in the village. Four minimal lineages share the same Eldest *Poh Chao Luang* (spirit **A**), and the same shrine (called the Big shrine: *haw luang*). I shall call the four minimal lineages **a1**, **a2**, **a3** and **a4**. Another two minimal lineages each have their own Poh Chao Luang and spirit shrines; spirit **B** and **C** respectively. I will call the minimal lineage under **B**, **b1**, and the last minimal lineage under **C**, **c1** (See diagram 2.1). (N.B. none of these lineages is, in fact, named.)

The maximal lineage **A**, the groups who hold the Eldest Poh Chao Luang (spirit **A**), are composed of **a1**, **a2**, **a3** and **a4** minimal lineages. Each minimal lineage, **a1-a4** has their own ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*), which I will refer to as “spirit **a1**”, “spirit **a2**”, etc. respectively. Spirit **A** is seen as the head of ancestral spirits **a1-a4**. People of **a1-a4** gather at the spirit **A**’s shrine annually to worship the spirit. And once in every three years they will organise the “major” worship ritual. After worshipping spirit **A**, each minimal lineage (**a1-a4**) will find an auspicious day to worship their ancestral spirit separately. For instance, **a1** will perform the ritual at their Origin House (*hyan kaw*), where the head of **a1** lives. People of **a2-a4** perform the worship ritual for ancestral spirits **a2-a4** at their own Origin House.

The **b1** minimal lineage is different from all other minimal lineages in Baan Yang Luang village, because the ancestral spirit **b1** and Poh Chao Luang **B** are the same spirit. Although they have an Origin House where the shelf of ancestral spirit (**b1**) is located, as well as a shrine for the spirit **B**, they do not worship them separately. They often said that their Poh Chao Luang is also their ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*).

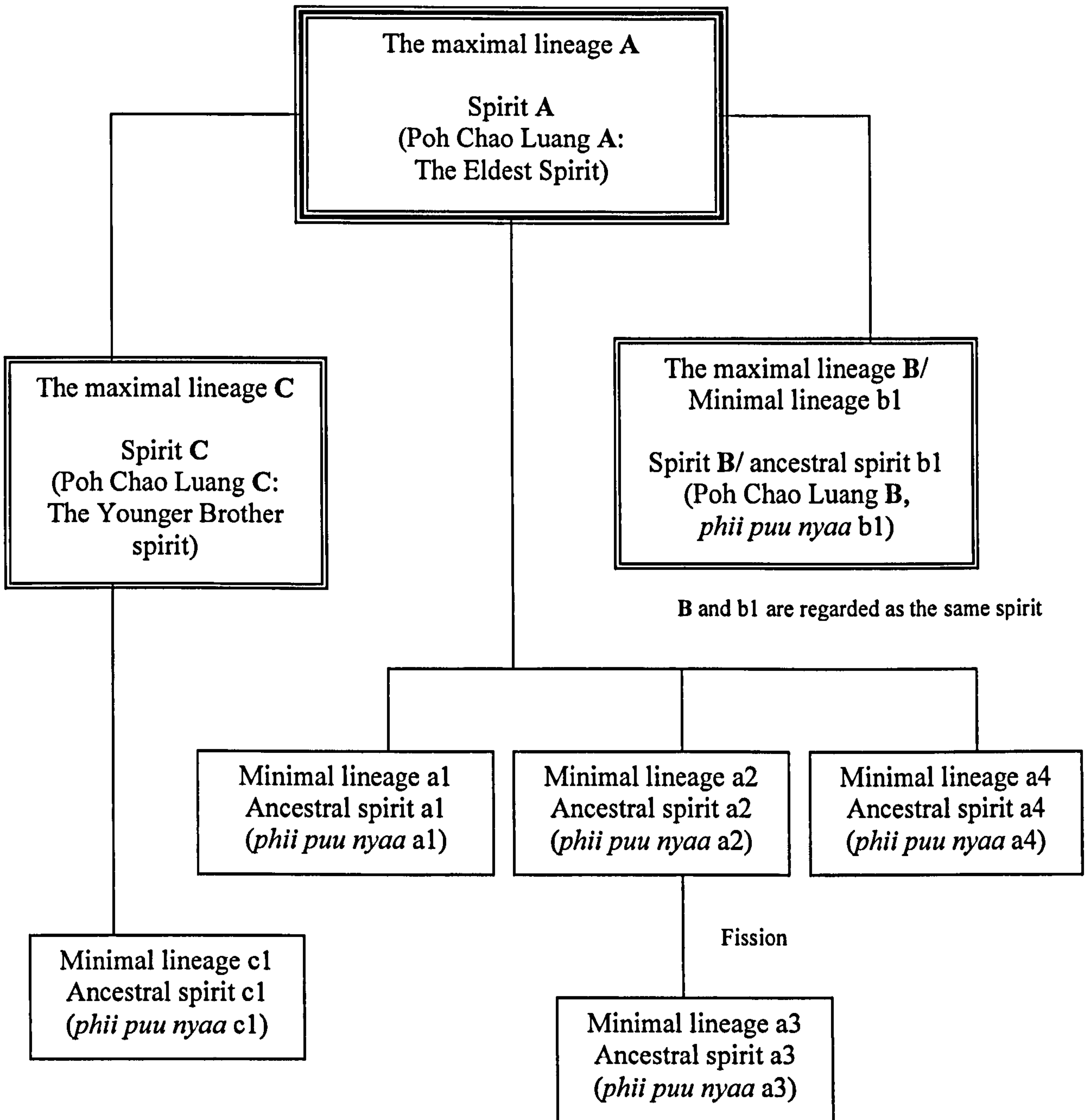


Diagram 2.1: Maximal and minimal lineages in Baan Yang Luang village

Both **b1** and **c1** hold different Poh Chao Luang from maximal lineage **A**. But **c1** has to share spirit **C** with another minimal lineage living in another village, where the shrine of **C** is located. After worshipping spirit **C**, minimal lineage **c1** will arrange another worship ritual for their own ancestral spirit **c1** at the Origin House in the village. By contrast **b1** has authority to manage their shrine which is located in the village, where almost all members of **b1** live. There are some members of other **b** minimal lineages, living in another village as well. They have to come to Baan Yang Luang to worship the Poh Chao Luang **B** with **b1**.

In some contexts spirit **A** is regarded as the spirit of everybody in Mae Chaem district. Therefore, at the worship ritual for spirit **A**, not only members of **a1-a4** will attend, but the members of **b1** and **c1**, and also people from other villages. On the other hand, the minimal lineages **a1-a4** will not attend the worship ritual of spirit **B** or **C**. Nevertheless, the members from another maximal lineage (**B** and **C**) seem to attend the “major” worship ritual (which is performed once in three years), rather than the normal annual worship ritual.

When the villagers fall sick, if they want to consult Poh Chao Luang, they go to the officiant of their own maximal lineage. For instance, people of **a1-a4** will go to the officiant of spirit **A**. People of **b1** and **c1** will go to the officiant of spirit **B** and **C** respectively. Theoretically, everyone has rights to ask spirit **A** for help, or ask the officiant of spirit **A** to organise the possession ritual, but members of minimal lineage **b1** and **c1** seldom do that. Rather, they (**b1** and **c1**) will go to ask their spirit **B** and **C** instead. The officiant of **B** told me that “It is more appropriate to firstly ask help from your own Poh Chao Luang. It means you respect your own spirit. Only if your medium is ill, then you can go to see the other medium of the other Poh Chao Luang.”

Why cannot Every Minimal Matrilineage that Shares the Same *phii puu nyaa* Develop or Create its own Poh Chao Luang?

Sometimes I was confused when the villagers referred to Poh Chao Luang as their *phii puu nyaa*. Davis (1984a, 1984b) also found that in some contexts the clan spirit is referred to as the “house spirits” or “ancestral spirits”. Potter (1976) observed the same confusion and points out that since both ancestral spirits and clan spirits (which, in Baan Yang Luang, is called Poh Chao Luang) are addressed as *phii puu nyaa*, they would seem to be manifestations of the same spiritual essence. However, after I related all the “spirit worlds” with the kinship system, I found another interesting aspect. We have to view spirits as parts of the human world, in other words, view spirits as part of kin relationship as well. For instance, the relationship between Poh Chao Luang and *phii puu nyaa* is parallel to the relationship between elder sister and younger sister in Northern Thai. Moreover, it is related to matrilineal descent and the preference of the youngest daughter to inherit the house as well. Details of these points are described below.

Only some minimal lineages have authority to manage their Poh Chao Luang. The officiant and medium of the spirit are normally selected from that particular minimal lineage. Although the villagers said that it is Poh Chao Luang himself who selects a person to become officiant or medium, they also said they tended to be selected from a particular minimal lineage. However, the officiant and the medium do not need to be close relatives. These two important positions have authority to organise ritual, to contact the spirit, and make decisions for their members (through the spirit) when they have illness or any other problems.

The medium and the officiant also have prior rights to the offerings the members give to the spirit at the annual worship ritual, or at a ritual performed after recovery from illness. In these cases, a pig is slaughtered at the spirit shrine then the members who attend the ritual cook food for the spirits. After serving food for the spirits, the rest of

the food is shared among those attending. However, the pig's head always belongs to the officiant, and the legs go to the medium¹².

In Baan Yang Luang only **b1** has such authority in managing Poh Chao Luang. For instance, the medium and officiant of Poh Chao Luang **B** are always selected from **b1** lineage. Moreover, **b1** is the main lineage responsible for the spirit **B**'s shrine. The minimal lineage **a1-a4** and **c1** only has authority of their *phii puu nyaa* but not the Poh Chao Luang. Poh Chao Luang **A** and **C** are managed by another minimal lineages living in another village. The main minimal lineage of spirit **C** lived in another village where the spirit **C**'s shrine is located. The medium and officiant of **C** are selected from that minimal lineage (I will call it **c***). The minimal lineage **c1** have their own *kaw phii* (the head of minimal lineage) who lives in the *hyan kaw* (the Origin House), located in Baan Yang Luang. Therefore they form their own minimal lineage different from **c*** and thus perform separate worship rituals from **c*** for their own ancestral spirit. However, **c1** attend the worship for Poh Chao Luang **C** together with **c***. Similarly, the officiant and medium of Poh Chao Luang **A** are not selected from the minimal lineages **a1-a4** either. The main minimal lineage of **A** lives in another village, even though the shrine of spirit **A** is located in Baan Yang Luang.

Therefore, within the village, **b1** minimal lineage seems to have more power than the other minimal lineages. Why? The answer is related to the residence pattern and house inheritance in Mae Chaem.

Residence, Inheritance and the “Spirit Worlds”

Similar to what many scholars found among the Northern Thais, after marriage men in Baan Yang Luang initially stay in their wives' parents' home (initial uxori-local

¹² Other positions also have prior rights to take the food back as well, for example, the musicians and the singers of the spirit who work during the possession ritual, and some elderly women of the maximal lineage who are “*chao kan*”. The “*chao kan*” may be translated as the “owner of the tray”. They are some elderly women who have rights to take home, one of fifteen dishes the other members serve the spirit. This position is succeeded from her mother. Usually the daughter who inherited the “tray” would be the same daughter who inherited the house. All the positions stated above are selected by Poh Chao Luang. See further details of *chao kan* in chapter 4

residence¹³). If a wife has no unmarried sisters, she and her husband will remain in her parental home. If she has unmarried sisters, she and her husband will leave the house and reside permanently nearby, often in the same courtyard, when the next sister marries¹⁴. If she is the youngest daughter, who will inherit the parental house, the couple will stay there permanently. Nevertheless, if a man's parents have no daughters, he may remain living in his parental house and bring his wife to reside with him, or if he has previously married and has children in his own or his former wife's house, the woman will move to the husband's house (see also Potter 1976). If there is no land at all available, then the young couple has to find land elsewhere even out of the village.

A consequence of the preference for uxorilocal residence was that sisters tended to live as neighbours to each other, thus there is a strong tendency for women to be the structural focus of households. The solidarity provided an economic and emotion support. According to Muecke (1984: 463) it was also common source for a childless woman. Although adoption was uncommon, it was common for a childless woman to raise one or more of her sister's children as her own.

While women form the stable core of the household through its developmental cycle, men move from their natal household to that of their wives. Potter (1976) points out that the core of women have common interests that last more than one generation. They bring men into the family to perform the necessary labour in the rice fields, to act as executive heads of the family, and to give them children. Jural authority, however, rests with the men. According to Potter, the system is therefore matrifocal in a structural sense.

The pattern of residence, that a man lives with his wife's family, puts him in a weak position. During the early years of his marriage he is an outsider to the people surrounding him, and he is under the authority of his wife's father. He works the rice-fields of his wife's family under the supervision and direction of his father-in-law, eats

13 Keyes (1975) suggested the term "uxori-parentilocal stem family" to describe a similar pattern in Northeast Thailand. He argued that "none of the established terms adequately describes the situation in which a man follows his wife after marriage and moves into the household of her parents (not the household belonging to her mother's side or her father's side)".

14 Normally the couple will live there for at least a year or two. In rural Nan, the length of this period varies, typically lasting a year or more (Davis 1984a).

rice from the granary of his wife's family. Matrilocal residence and the labour that the groom performs for the bride's family is seen as a form of bride-service, a way of repaying the matrilineal spirits of the girl and her family for raising her to maturity.

The couple remains under the domination of the parental house, since the father-in-law controls their labour. The less dependent households are independent in terms of food production, have their own granary, and manage their own fields; but they do not have formal ownership of their land, which still lies in the parents' hands. However, they attempt to gain independence, often by seeking to buy their own land as soon as they are able. The parents, on the other hand, like to retain ownership of their land as long as possible to ensure that they will be well supported by their children when they get old. The process by which a household gains independence is usually long and tends to involve more or less conflict (Potter 1976: 127-28).

House Inheritance

Normally daughter and son inherit equal shares of parental property. However, the house tends to be inherited by the youngest daughter because she is often the last child to be married, so she can take care of parents until they die. Therefore parents usually give the house to the children who still live in the house. Not only the house but the most important piece of the rice-field, the one which contains the Rice-Field Spirit and the Mother Rice, is also inherited by the youngest daughter who has to maintain the worship ritual for those spirits. While she has to take responsibility for the Mother Rice, her husband has to worship the Rice-Field Spirit. Similar rules of inheritance and residence are found in Burma, as Spiro (1977:77-78) observes that the property is divided in equal shares among children. However, it also based on expected sex differences in the domestic and life cycles. As he indicates: "The youngest daughters in Burma tend to remain with their parents even after they marry, their share of the land is often given to them while the parents are still alive, the sons and other daughters inheriting after the parents' death".

The important house in Northern Thai is the Origin House (*hyan kaw*). *Hyan kaw* is where a female member of the senior generation, who is the head of minimal lineage group (*kaw phii*), lives. The position of leader (*kaw phii*) is usually inherited along with ownership of the house. Considered with the inheritance and residence practices, the *kaw phii* tends to be the youngest daughter who inherits the house from her mother. The elder sisters share the same ancestral spirit, but usually will not become the *kaw phii*. After elder sisters move out with their husbands and build new houses in the same compound, their houses are not considered to be *hyan kaw*. In the next generation, the elder sister's house is inherited by her own youngest daughter, but will not become a *hyan kaw*, because the house is new and thus is not an "origin" house. Therefore, only some houses in the village are considered to be a *hyan kaw*. In Baan Yang Luang there are six minimal lineages, consequently, there are six houses considered to be *hyan kaw*, where the ancestral spirit's shelf or shrine is located.

Coming back to the question I raised above, it is clearer if we consider the rule of inheritance at minimal lineage level, parallel to maximal lineage level. For instance, the inheritance of *hyan kaw*; a place for ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) is parallel to the inheritance of the shrine of Poh Chao Luang. Only the youngest daughter will have rights of the *hyan kaw* and have rights to become the head of minimal lineage (*kaw phii*). Likewise, only some minimal matrilineage will have rights for Poh Chao Luang; for instance, the medium and the officiant are selected from that particular minimal matrilineage rather than others. Therefore, not every matrilineage can easily create their own Poh Chao Luang from the ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) (See diagram 2.2).

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the creating of Poh Chao Luang from the *phii puu nyaa* never happens. During my fieldwork, there was a woman from the minimal lineage a4, Mae Paw, who tried to claim that she was selected by her *phii puu nyaa* to become its medium. She said she was possessed by the ancestral spirit a4, and the spirit told her to appoint a son of the present *kaw phii* of a4 (head of lineage a4) to be an officiant of the cult. Mae Paw tried to transform her ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) into a new Poh Chao Luang and change an organisation of the minimal lineage to that of maximal lineage. The minimal lineage a4 was not originally descended from the same origin as other minimal lineage a. They migrated from another province near Chiang Mai, and were later on accepted as members of maximal lineage A. In other words, Poh

Chao Luang A, finally accepted the ancestral spirit of minimal lineage a4 as one of his brothers. However, nobody believed Mae Paw. They thought she was pretending to be possessed. Moreover, the *kaw phii* of a4 (the head of lineage a4) was angry at her. She said “our *phii puu nyaa* never require any mediumship. Mae Paw just made up all the stories”. As far as I know, the villagers often gossiped that Mae Paw was a nosy and distrustful person. Normally, people did not trust her when she told any story. The villagers ignored Mae Paw’s claim about the possession. They merely saw it as a strategy that Mae Paw tried to call for public attention.

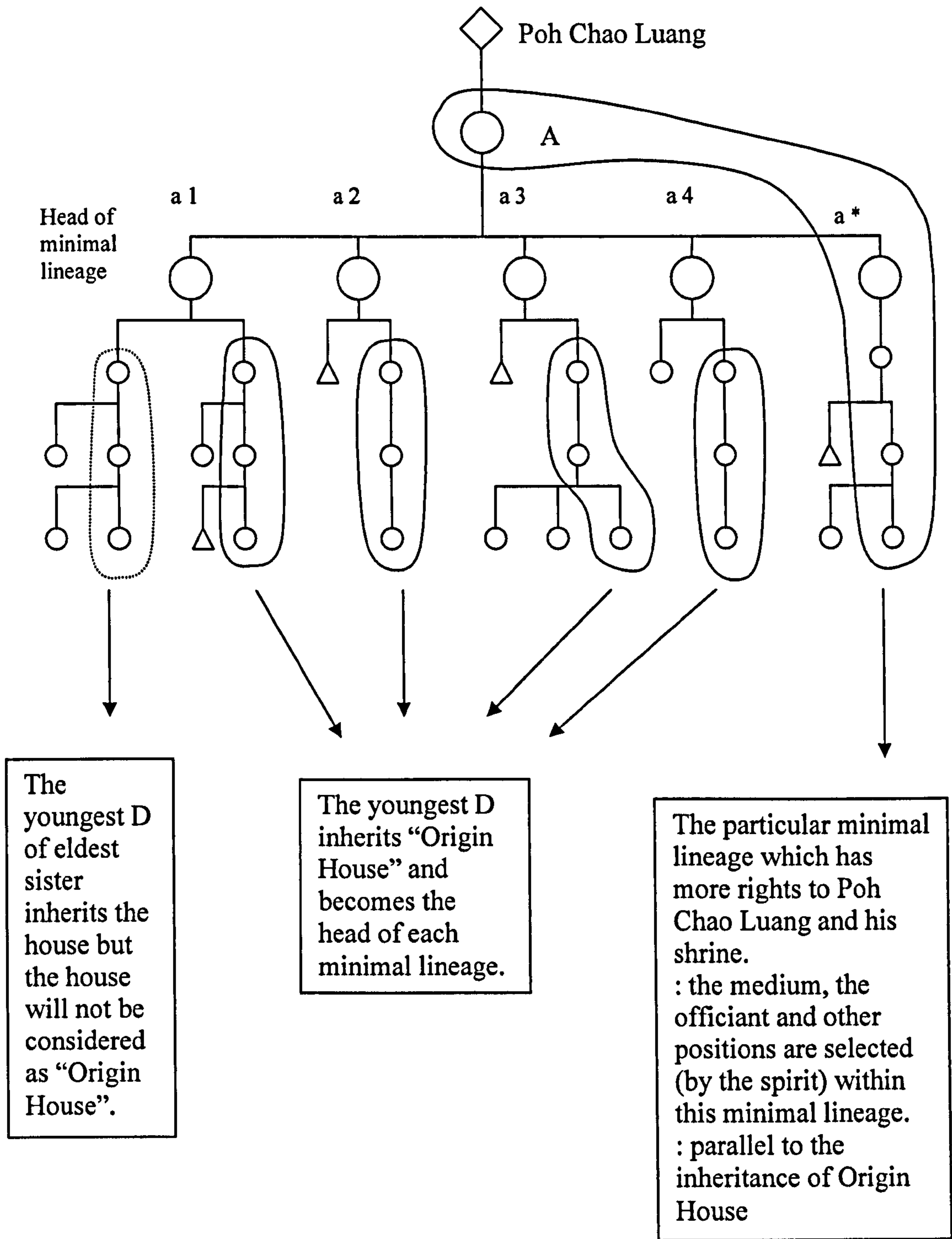


Diagram 2.2: Parallel between inheritance practices and the authority of the spirits

Inheritance

Among the Northern Thai, apart from the house which tends to be inherited to the youngest daughter as stated above, other properties are inherited bilaterally. All children receive equal shares of their parents' property. The ideal and general rule is that all children inherit equally the rice fields, orchards, and gardens of their parents. There often are the cases that sons who marry outside the village are likely to sell or give their share of the parents' agricultural land to their sisters, since it is inconvenient for them to travel from their new homes to work the land in their old villages (See Potter 1976 for a variety of inheritance practices in Northern Thailand). This may be seen as one of the reasons why marriage patterns among Northern Thai tend to be village endogamous. Potter (1976) suggests that many men prefer village endogamy because although a man has to move into the house of his father-in-law and is still in a weak position, the members of his wife's family are fellow villagers and he remains close to his own family, kinsmen, and friends; his move does not cut him off from all his previous relationships as marriage into another village does.

The property sharing can be delayed until both parents die, but sometimes parents divide the property after they retire; or if one member of an old couple dies, the surviving member frequently divides his property. He may or may not retain a portion for himself as security. In Baan Yang Luang, the elders tend to keep a small piece of land for themselves until they die. The land is called *kohn hed* ("a log that mushrooms are grown on"). It is a metaphoric saying, as mushrooms can grow on even a small log, so a small piece of land is enough for life to go on. While the rest of the land is divided equally among the children, the *kohn hed* land tends to be inherited by the youngest daughter who lives and takes care of the old parents. Usually the youngest daughter and her husband work on the *kohn hed* land and use those products or any incomes to feed her parents. After the parents die the land belongs to the daughter. The *kohn hed* even ensure one's life after death, as an old woman told me that after she died her children may sell the *kohn hed* land and use the money to buy offerings for her afterwards.

It can be seen that, since the youngest daughter tends to reside permanently with her parents, the transmission of authority (head of household status) tends to go from a father-in-law to his youngest daughter's husband. Since sons must eventually leave their natal families and marry into another family, they do not have as much status in their natal families as do sons-in-law. Therefore, Potter (1976: 124) points out that the "key relationships in Chiangmai village families are between parents and daughter, a woman and her husband, and between father-in-law and son-in-law". Furthermore, he cites Sulamith Heins Potter's work (1975) for the explanation;

The villages solve the problem of succession to jural authority in the family in a way different from the classical patrilineal mode, where authority passes from F to eldest S; and different from the classical matrilineal mode, where authority passes from MB to ZS. The mode in Chiangmai is one of affinal succession, where authority in the family moves from father-in-law to son-in-law, men who are connected only by ties to their wives, a line of women. They both married into the same family line of women.

However, Davis (1984b: 52) argues against Potter's rule-bounded interpretation of Northern Thai household and kinship structure. He points out that this is a result of the uxori-local rule and tendency to ultimogeniture, and not a succession rule in its own right. Since men are the jural heads of households, and since a youngest daughter resides uxori-parentilocally with her husband, leadership of the household will pass to her husband from her father upon the latter's death.

Fission of the Spirit Group

Since the Origin House (*hyan kaw*) is usually inherited by a junior daughter, this may lead to conflict between sisters, while it may be felt that the eldest woman of the descent group should be the leader as *kaw phii*. Such conflicts can lead to fission of the spirit group.

Mae Pok's matrilineage (lineage a3 in diagram 2.1) was separated from Mae Pan's matrilineage (lineage a2 in diagram 2.1), because of conflict between the mother and daughter. The villagers told me that "when Mae Pok was young she was very naughty therefore her mother "cut" her off from the family" (Mae Pok is now 91 years old). She had to set up her own lineage at the opposite end of the village. Since then, Mae Pok performed a worship ritual for her *phii puu nyaa*, separately from Mae Pan's lineage. It was held at Mae Pok's house, which was regarded as a *hyan kaw* (Origin House) of her minimal lineage. There is an ancestral shelf inside the main bedroom. Nevertheless, both Mae Pok and Mae Pan lineages hold the same Poh Chao Luang: the Eldest one (Spirit A).

However, sometimes the fission can occur without conflict, for example, when a household belonging to the same maximal lineage, moves to a distant location which is too far away to participate conveniently in the annual worship ritual for the spirits. Finally they may "divide the spirit" (*baeng phii*) and start a new group. They will set up the new shelf for the ancestral spirit in the house of the elder female of the group (or may build a small shrine for the spirit). Finally this house may become a *hyan kaw* (Origin House), if the group performs the worship ritual separately from the original lineage they divided from. The new ancestral spirit cult is thus created and their matrilineal kin from whom they have separated are said to be "people of the same clan" (*kog diawkan*). However, each group possesses its own shrine and performs its own rites.

Talking about Kinship in Everyday Life

Now, I would like to focus more on kinship practices in everyday life. Kinship is one of many issues the villagers like to talk about in their everyday conversation. When introducing someone, their kinship background is the very first topic the villagers mention. Consequently, it was not so difficult for me to find out who was related to whom (at least superficially). When they introduced themselves, they tended to link their relationships with my host family. "I am Mae Nee's *pee -nong* (relatives)". "I am Poh Pia's relatives". Somebody even linked the grandson in my host family to her dead

relative, as the boy was believed to be a reincarnation of her father. The villagers often gave me details of a person they wanted to introduce to me in terms of his or her family history, although not in depth. They liked to tell me about another's background how he or she related to a third person. For example, if somebody walked past us while we were chatting, the villagers would start telling me a story about such person in details (even though I didn't ask):

...that girl is poor. Her mother died when she was young. Now she stays with her grandfather. Her grandmother also died 2-3 years ago in the hospital during surgery...

A boy with polio (10 years old) often followed me when I visited villagers' houses. He liked to accompany me as a guide. Once I was uncomfortable when I visited a family and they started to tell a story about the boy even though he was sitting nearby. They didn't care how the boy would feel.

His mother left him for a new husband. She has two sons from two husbands. Now she lives in the town, seldom comes here and has left this boy with his grandmother.

I noticed the boy's face changed and he just sat quietly, so I tried to change the topic of our conversation.

Sometimes Mae Nee (my host mother) wanted to tell me stories about somebody. She started by giving me a long, detailed description of a person, "...that person, who is a father of the man who has two children; one is now working in the town, another one is staying at home, a daughter. Her height is similar to Owan (the girl next to our house) but slimmer. Maybe slim as my granddaughter..." Finally, she forgot what she wanted to say in the first place.

Which House do you belong to?

When the villagers wanted to know another's background, however, they would not ask directly about the other's family details. Instead, they would start to probe through questions about their residences. When I first arrived in the village, one of the questions they often asked was "Which village do you belong to?" "Which '*baan*' (village) do you come from?" *Baan* can be referred to house, household, or village depending on the contexts. It is an important aspect of one's identity. The villagers tended to define characteristics of others according to their *baan*. The behaviour or personality of the members in the household is sometimes embodied in the house. Sometimes when the villagers gossiped or complained about their neighbours they would say "that *baan* is [for example], greedy". In some contexts, *baan* refers to the sections in the village. The village is divided into five sections. Each section is named as a different "*baan*", related to its geographical aspects. People from different sections are considered to have different characteristics, for example, "those '*baan*' are talkative", or "*baan nai* are not as friendly as *baan tapa*". In short, residence background was used, to some extent, to probe others' identity.

People who Eat the Same Rice

In some contexts, the villagers refer to their family in terms of rice consumption, as one villager said, "In our family we have five people. We all eat rice from the same granary." Each family has its own granary which is usually built near the house. However, some families share the granary, for instance, when daughters get married and build a new house in the same compound, they may share the same granary. Sharing the same granary means that they still share the rice field and equal responsibility for the cultivation. When they cultivate their own land, they would then have to separate the granary and consume rice separately. Therefore, the granary, to some extent, symbolises the family. Moreover, people who eat the same rice or those who eat rice from the same pot are, to some extent, understood to share the same corporeal substances. In consequence, the villagers believe that they are "too close to heal" each other. For instance a father or husband who is also a traditional healer tends not to succeed in healing his children or wife. The villagers said they are "too close".

People of *phii diaw kan*

When speaking of the spirit groups the villagers speak of groups which have “*phii diaw kan*”, means “people who have spirits in common” or “*seung diaw gan*”, which literally means “people of the same cult”. They distinguish their matrilineage spirit cult group by saying “my ‘spirit’ (*phii*) is different from his”. The members of a matrilineage feel themselves to be related because they share these spirits and worship them in common. Descent in general is called “*kagoon*”, or “*kagoon gnoon gnao*”. Villagers do not have a special name for the spirit cult group (either the “minimal” or “maximal” lineage). When they talk about the matrilineage they usually refer to each lineage by calling the name of the head of the lineage (*kaw phii*) as the owner of the *hyan kaw* (the Origin House). For instance;

Today Mae Tem’s *hyan* (family) will *liang phii suum* (worship the ancestral spirit).

My *phii puu nyaa* (ancestral spirit) is at Mae Oon’s house.

(Mae Tem and Mae Oon are the *kaw phii* (head of lineage) of different minimal lineages)

In the case of maximal spirit cults (those who hold the same Poh Chao Luang), there is no specific name for each Poh Chao Luang. On the other hand, they usually refer to the location of the spirit’s shrine instead. For example, the shrine which is located near Mae Rag river is called Mae Rag shrine, the shrine in the forest is called Dong shrine (*dong* means forest), the shrine under the tree called Mai Hia, is simply called the shrine-under-Mai-Hia-tree.

I have to go to the Mon Kum shrine to worship.

Today at the Dong shrine there was a welcome feast for Poh Chao Luang.

My shrine is at Mae Raag.

On what Occasions are the Notions of *phii diaw kan* Involved?

Marriage

Firstly, when people get married, the notion of *phii diaw kan* (people of the same spirit) has to be considered. This is related to the taboo of lineage endogamy, which was strictly observed in Baan Yang Luang in the past. The rule, however, is not so strict at the present time. A woman suggests;

To marry “people of the same spirit” (*phii diaw kan*) is even better, I think, because we do not have many problems in dealing with the spirit’s payment.

Nevertheless, it can be said that the villagers in Baan Yang Luang still prefer matrilineage exogamy. According to Potter (1976), the villagers in Chiang Mai village where he studied believed that if marriage takes place within the group the resulting children would be malformed or insane. By contrast, in Lampang, Rhum (1987, 1994) found that marriage is permitted within a matrilineal spirit group (*kok phii*), and it does not violate any incest prohibition, while Davis (1984a: 265) discovered only four cases of intraclan marriage in the genealogies of Landing village in Nan province.

Reincarnation

Secondly, the *phii diaw kan*, or *seung diaw kan* is considered at birth. The villagers believe that everybody is reborn into the same “*seung*” or “*kok phii*” (spirit group) as in the previous life. In other words, one’s reincarnated spirit is believed to come from the dead relatives of the same minimal lineage. Furthermore, in the next life, it is believed that people of the same spirit will reborn again into the same *kok phii*. Therefore, the ties between *phii diaw kan* are more complex and stronger than other kinds of linkages in the sense they carry on beyond this life to the previous and even the next life. Further details about reincarnation will be discussed in chapter 6

Death

Finally, the notion of *phii diaw kan* is particularly salient after someone dies. For instance, the links between “people of the same spirit” are, to some extent, confirmed materially through their foods, in particular the preserved beans called *tua nao*, “rotten

beans". Preserved beans are made regularly to use as a cooking paste. It takes long time, about a week, to finish the preserving process¹⁵. If someone in the same lineage dies while the bean preserving process has not finished, the beans will be considered as polluted foods. It is believed that the beans would turn bad and smelly. As people of the same ancestor or the same spirit are considered to have particular links, the rotten corpse of one's relative is believed to affect one's foods. Therefore, the villagers should avoid cooking "rotten" foods when someone has died. However, if one's relative dies while one has been making the preserving beans, the beans must be cooked as fast as possible, or it should be taken away from one's house. The villager tends to leave the bean basket with the neighbour who is in different lineage and ask her to finish the cooking process.

Mae Porn was a person of the same spirit as Mae Pin who had just died. She brought her basket of fermented beans to let Mae Yod to grill them for her.

That is Mae Porn's fermenting beans. She asked me to keep and grill it for her. Her relative died yesterday so she cannot keep the rotten beans inside her house. They would turn bad and smelly, and so could not be eaten. When someone of the *phii diaw kan* dies you should not keep rotten things in the house. It is not a good thing to do. It is a taboo.

***Pee-nong*: The Bilateral Kindred**

Although Northern Thai villagers regarding matrilineage spirit groups as their major kin groups, they also considered their kindred bilaterally. All the descendants of one's maternal and paternal grandparents are regarded as relatives includes all one's uncles and aunts and their children (first cousins) through both his father and mother. However, the quality of one's relations with the members of one's bilateral kindred depends upon the residence of one's father and mother. According to the tendency of matrifocal residence, children grow up within the lineage territory of their mother and

¹⁵ The beans are boiled, pounded, fermented and left for 3 nights before being wrapped in banana leaves, and left for another 3 nights before being grilled. They can be kept for long in the kitchen.

are surrounded by her relatives through the matriline. Therefore they will visit those matrilineal relatives more frequently than those of their father's side. Consequently, they tend to be closer to kindred on their mother's side. Nevertheless, as the village is small enough so ties to both sides will still be very close. However, if one's father has married out of his own village into the village of his wife, one's paternal kindred will be much less close.

According to Kemp (1982), residence creates kinship as much as kinship creates residence.

Kinship is so pervasive in Hua Kok because it is the means of expressing all close interpersonal relations, often regardless of actual genealogical connection...it is the bonds arising from proximity and common interests strengthened by the moral ideology of kinship which create Hua Kok's identification as a community...In the end, it is the ideology of kinship rather than actual blood ties that seems to matter (ibid.: 112-3).

To refer to relatives in general the villagers use the word "*pee-nong*". Literally, "*pee*" means "elder siblings" and "*nong*" means "younger siblings", when they refer to relatives, however, the sense of relatedness is often expressed by the phrase "*pen pee-nong kan*", to be elder and younger siblings in common. The term "*pee-nong*" is very flexible and broadly used, in a sense it can be referred to their relatives bilaterally, either mother's or father's side and even through one's affine, or it may be referred to the people in the same spirit cult in particular. Sometimes the word "*yaat*" or "*kreau*" are also used to refer to relatives in general.

The villagers sometimes mention that "In this village we all are *pee-nong*", which implies that everybody is linked to somebody in some way or another. Moreover, they even say everybody in Mae Chaem district is *pee-nong* (relatives). This is related to their beliefs that the three Poh Cao Luang are related as siblings. The ancestral spirit of the family which emigrated from Lampang province to settle down in the village was also made to be a younger sibling to the Poh Cao Luang.

Close/ Distant “*pee-nong*”

The relationships between *pee-nong* are differentiated as “close relatives” and “distant relatives”. The core family, parents’ siblings, one’s first cousin, spouse’s parents, spouse’s siblings, children’s spouse are usually regarded as “close relatives”. Second cousins are more ambiguous: some people regard them as close relatives who therefore cannot be married, while some regard them as “distant relatives” and marriageable¹⁶. The intimacy between relatives also depends on their mutual support, sharing, compassion, and consideration through their everyday practices, such as sharing foods, reciprocal labours exchanged in the field, visiting and support in times of illness or some other misfortune.

When a family organises ceremonies such as wedding, ordination, or moving a house, the closeness and distance of *pee-nong* are considered. Close relatives are expected to be invited to participate in those ceremonies. It is even expected that the family who organises the ceremony should tell close relatives directly at their home. The proper invitation indicates your considerateness to the person you invite. It will make them feel they are important as a part of your kin ties. In return, the relatives who are invited have to prepare money, food or materials to share with the host family. However, the notions of “closeness” are not the same for everybody. Therefore, sometimes there are conflicts regarding this issue. Some villagers complain that such-and-such relatives or neighbours do not invite them directly. Nevertheless, even though one has not been invited one cannot simply ignore the ceremony, in particular if he or she has some links or lives in the same area. On the other hand, the host family also observes if any of their relatives do not turn up.

One day I was chatting with five women (one of them was 85 years old and the rest were about 50 years old) about the ordination which was performed recently.

¹⁶ Tambiah (1985a) analyses the parallel symbolic ideology among three different domains: sex and marriage regulation, edible animals, and the space in household which has some taboo for a particular group of people. In a Northeast Thai village where Tambiah studied, the kinship system is bilateral. The ordering of persons is along two axes: the vertical generational and lateral siblings. While marriage across generations is prohibited, marriage and sex regulations are usually formulated on the lateral axis in ego’s own generation. Sex relations between siblings and between first cousins are prohibited. Sex between second cousins is ambiguously tolerated. But distant relatives (*yatt hang hang*) can be married. This notion is similar to the central Thai. Nevertheless for Northern Thai, the rule is based primarily on the matrilineal spirit group.

“We didn’t feel comfortable when we attended Mae Nee’s grandson’s ordination because they didn’t invite us. They did not pay enough attention to us. But we have to go anyway because we knew their son was ordained. We just took it as our duties. As we arrived we gave some money to the host, stayed for a while and then came back”, one woman said.

I asked the woman “Maybe because you are in the same village he thinks he does not have to tell you directly?”

Another woman commented; “I heard that for an ordination you should invite as many others as possible, so as to share your merit¹⁷. It is not good to keep your merit for yourself greedily.”

“It depends how you think. If you think good, good things will happen,” Mae Thi, the 85-year-old woman who was a mother of another two women in the group suggested.

“I didn’t care even though they didn’t invite me, I just went. They are your relatives, aren’t they? If they are somebody else, or some other families, I may not go. But they are your relatives, so you can go and will feel warm and fun anyway. For example, at Mae Nee’s house I have to go even though she didn’t tell me. Or at Mae Moon’s new house celebration, I also went even though she didn’t tell me”.

At this point, however, Mae Thi commented on her daughter’s ideas, “In your case it is different from others. You follow the thread and find a knot but for others they find nothing, not even a single knot.”

The villagers commonly talk of a relationship tie as a thread. In the conversation presented above, Mae Thi referred to her daughter’s link with Mae Nee family as a thread. The knot implied the tie between the two families. A spirit matrilineage is referred to as “*saiy phii*” which literally means “spirit line”. To keep kin relationships intact, the villagers normally say, “to prevent the line from being cut (*boh heu saiy phud*)”. The destruction of relationship is imagined as a cut thread. At some age, one

¹⁷ According to the villagers, and Buddhists in Northern Thailand in general, to be ordained or to organise an ordination for a son or grandson wins great merit. Therefore, those who have a chance to participate in the ceremony win some merit in return for their gift of money or materials.

has to cut the tie with one's Parent Spirit (*poh kerd mae kerd*)¹⁸, it is believed that if the relationship between the Parent Spirit is too strong, one is susceptible to be ill. In the Cutting Tie Ritual (*tad kerd*)¹⁹ a thread is tied from the foot of the sick person to an offering tray which is prepared for the spirit. At the end of the ritual the thread is cut off by a sword, symbolic the end of relationship between the human and Parent Spirit. On the other hand, to create a relationship, a thread is symbolically tied. Mae Chaem kinship is therefore flexible and dynamics. Relationships are tied and cut all the time throughout one's life cycle.

Being Kin by Tying the Wrists

On some occasions people can become kin without any biological or genealogical link. Kin can be created in many situations. One can become a foster child of somebody after performing a ritual called "tying the wrists". This may happen when one has experienced an accident.

A long time ago, Nom, a sister of the village headman, fell down into the river and floated into the river in my garden. I was at the river and heard somebody shout "please help my sister! Please get my sister!" I saw her head in the water, so I threw away my bucket and carried her up. Later they went to ask a spirit medium somewhere outside our village. The medium told her that "this girl's fate was terminated but somebody in the south helped her. You should go to that person and asked for a sacred thread." Therefore they came to see me and I tied her wrists, received her as my daughter.

Another case was created between the girl who had a motorcycle accident, and the owner of the cow which ran into her. After the girl's parents found out who was the cow's owner, the owner expressed her regret by taking the girl as her foster daughter. A thread tying ritual was performed. The owner of the cow tied a sacred thread on the

18 The Parent Spirit (*poh kerd mae kerd*) is a personal spirit which governs and protects each person, particularly during the childhood. It is believed that everyone is sent by the Parent Spirit to be reborn in the human world.

19 See chapter 5 and 7 for further discussion on *tad kerd* ritual

girl's wrists and thus become her step mother, called "*mae geb*" (which means "picking up mother"). Every traditional New Year the girl visits the "step-mother" and pays respect to her with some clothes or food.

Another kind of step-parent is called the "ordained parent" (*poh buad/ mae buad*, means "the ordained father", and "ordained mother", respectively). They are persons who perform the ordination ritual, take responsibility for all the payments, and organise all the ceremonies for an ordained boy. It is believed that in having a son ordained one receives great merit. Therefore somebody who does not have a son of their own, or does not have a son who is willing to be ordained, looks for an opportunity with another's son. Some families who have many sons may allow others to perform an ordination for their sons, in particular if they have already performed the ritual, at least once, for one of their sons. Some families may have financial problems so they cannot support their son to be ordained and so have to let others do it. Nevertheless, the ordained parents do not replace the natural parents completely. One still keeps both kinds of parent. But the merit in ordination is believed to be transferred to the ordained parents only, not the natural parents.

Conclusion

Most of the previous kinship studies in Thailand focused on the structure and rules of descent and tried to find the most suitable "label" for the complex systems. They described and considered the function of such systems in terms of "lineage" and "sublineages" whose clear boundaries seemed never to be in question. In this chapter even though I use the terms "maximal" and "minimal" lineage for purposes of analytical clarity, they are not simply regarded as fixed or bounded entities. I rather try to present how the boundaries of those lineages are blurred and overlapping.

The chapter presents the overview of kinship systems in Mae Chaem which are based on spiritual cosmology. It considers kinship as the openness of discourse rather than the closure of a code or text, and looks at local ideas and experiences about interpersonal relationships. People talk of kinship in terms of spirits. People of the same lineage are

regarded as people who hold the spirit in common (*phii diaw kan*). Furthermore, Mae Chaem kinship ideology is created, recreated and transformed through the practices of spirit cult rituals and the experiences of spirit-human interrelations in everyday life. Kinship dynamics and changes depend on the “willing” of ancestral spirits which tends to be expressed in a sign of illness. Social relations, either the human-human or human-spirit relationships can be cut or tied at any time.

In the next chapter, the focus of consideration is turned to historical aspects of the spirit cult in Mae Chaem. I will investigate the history of the spirit cult in relation to the transformation of the traditional political system of Mae Chaem and Northern Thailand in general.

Chapter Three

Poh Chao Luang and Phaya Muang Chaem:

Spirit Cults in the Transformation of the Traditional Political System

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the history of Mae Chaem associated with the organisation of spirit cult systems in order to understand the process in which the spirit cult has been constructed and transformed over times. It is now widely perceived that the formerly dominant ahistorical perspectives within anthropology severely restricted interpretation and analysis. Much recent work has therefore been concerned with social change and history. Nevertheless, I do not aim to investigate historiography only but the indigenous knowledge and understanding of history, and its reproduction over time (Reynolds 1995, Soontornpesuch 2000). I aim to investigate how people talk about their history in everyday life. What information do they choose to reproduce, to tell, or to disguise? How is history used among the people? What does history mean for them?

In the previous chapter I showed that the spirit cult and kinship in Northern Thailand are closely related. However, not only is the spirit cult organisation in Mae Chaem related to and based on kinship, it is also rooted in the traditional political system.

Mae Chaem was a buffer state between Lanna Kingdom and Burma. It used to have a relatively independent political administration with its own ruler. At that time the power of the guardian spirit (which was also his matrilineal ancestral spirit) was the imperative source for the ruler to legitimise his authority. However, after Lanna Kingdom was conquered by the Burmese in 1558 and later became a vassal state of Bangkok after it was liberated by the Central Thai troops of king Rama I in 1804, the lord of Chiang Mai as well as the ruler of Mae Chaem finally lost their authority. I am interested in the changes of identity after the loss of political power of the ruler and

after Chiang Mai, as well as Mae Chaem, ceased to be an independent state, in relation to the system of tutelary spirits. Therefore, in this chapter I investigate the process of political transformation in Northern Thailand and its relations to the spirit cult system in Mae Chaem. My aim is to understand how the matrilineal spirit cult ideology and practice in Northern Thailand have changed in terms of meaning, understanding, and the way people “use” the power of spirit, following the transformation of the political and administrative system in Mae Chaem.

The *muang*

Northern Thailand was divided into a number of territories called *muang*. For almost all the Tai peoples¹, the *muang* was the primary unit of social and political organisation above the village level up to kingdom or nation-state. The word *muang* denotes a domain, city, town, or village which was the traditional seat of a king, prince, or local chief. A king or prince was known as “*Chao muang*” (Lord of the *muang*) (Davis 1984b, Tooker 1996, Soontornpesuch 2000).

The Northern Thais identify themselves as people of this or that *muang* and call themselves *khon muang*, which literally means “people of the *muang*”. The term *khon muang* is used to distinguish from the peoples of the hills and contrasts with *khon thai*, the people of the Central Plains, which maybe seen as a reflection of conflict in the absorption of the North into the Kingdom of Siam (Wijeyewardene 1986, Damrikul 1999). The original significance of the term is geographic rather than ethnic, and only became “ethnic” in the context of the modern Thai nation-state (Rhum 1994).

There are sub-regional variations of *muang* culture throughout the area, with a number of ethnic groups: Yuan, Lua, Karen, Kohm, Mon. They all share their culture and environment, which set them apart from the Central Thai people (Davis 1984b Damrikul 1999). Today, as formerly, being a Northern Thai means identifying with some level of the *muang* hierarchy, sharing in its culture, and speaking a *muang* dialect

¹ The ethnic groups in Southeast Asia include the Lao of Laos and Northeast Thailand; the Thai Yuan of Northern Thailand; the Thai of Thailand; the Shan (Thai Yai) of Myanmar; the Thai Lue of Laos and China; the Black Thai of Laos and Vietnam, the Red Thai and the White Thai.

known as *kam muang*². *Kam muang* is used as a common language among the *muang* people in Northern Thai. It differs much from the Central Thai vocabulary and in the tonal systems of its dialects. Educated residents of Chiang Mai speak Central Thai more than Northern Thai. Outside the city, however, *kam muang* is more frequently spoken (Morris 2000: 59).

According to Wyatt (1982:7-8), *muang* originally arose out of a set of political, economic, and social interrelationships. Under dangerous circumstances Tai villages banded together for mutual defence under the leadership of the most powerful village or family. In return for such protection, participating villages provided labour service to their Chao (Lord), or paid him local produce. A Chao built up his administrative apparatus for collecting tax. Security, wealth and life of the *muang* all depended upon the networks of individuals and families. According to Wyatt (1982:9), the Chao would conquer a distant region and settle it with his families, organise a community and might give each son a principality of his own to rule in order to enhance the power of the parent *muang*.

Muang are ordered in a hierarchy of inclusiveness. In the past, Northern Thailand was unified into the single *muang* of Lanna kingdom centred at Chiang Mai, and comprised the other large old *muang* like Nan and Phrae. These correspond very roughly to modern day provinces. These major *muang* traditionally included a number of lesser *muang* ruled by local princes³. Each *muang* was centred on a fortified town or village called a *chiang* or *wiang* and each comprised a number of villages (*baan*). According to Dang (1972:160-1, 172-80 cited in Davis 1984b: 38), the hierarchy of *muang* is still found among the Tai of Vietnam in the present time.

According to Tooker (1996: 323-4), the dominant theories of pre-modern Southeast Asian political and social structure were the concepts of “*mandala*”, as well as other spatialised concepts associated with the “cosmic polity” such as “exemplary centre”

2 There is some debate as to whether *kam muang* ought to be called a language or a dialect. It differs from Central Thai in its script and in having six rather than five tones (Morris 2000).

3 The larger of these lesser *muang* correspond very roughly to present-day districts. The smaller of the lesser *muang* comprised clusters of villages.

“concentric circles” (Errington 1989), “nested emboxment” (Condominas 1978), “theatre state and sinking status” (Geertz 1980) and “galactic polity” (Tambiah 1985b).

Influenced by Hindu-Tibetan Buddhism, the concept of “*mandala*” was widely found in Southeast Asia. The *mandala* is composed of two elements, a core (*manda*) and its surrounding satellites (*la*). It is typically described as a pattern with five points, one in the centre and four others in the four cardinal directions, with a raised core and lowered periphery. The spatial and hierarchical pattern of *mandala* is a reflection of the cosmic and supernatural world, with reference to Hindu-Buddhist cosmological systems of *mandalic* Mount Meru at the centre of the universe as the abode of the gods and deities surrounded by oceans and mountain ranges (Tambiah 1985b, Tooker 1996: 351). The design of the kingdom replicates the image of Mount Meru, with the capital as the centre standing for the whole country and the king as possessor of the country. This conforms to what Wheatley (1969:10 cited in Tambiah 1985b: 257) argues, namely, that there was a tendency to reproduce the cosmology by constructing on earth a reduced version of the cosmos, usually in the form of a state capital. Chiang Mai, the centre of Lanna Kingdom, is also built on the cosmological pattern of *mandala*. Correspondingly, in Mae Chaem there is a moulded stone called Kitchaguud built behind the Buddha statue in Wat Yang Luang temple. It is an imitation of the Kitchaguud Mountain, one of the surrounding mountains of Mount Meru. This is to symbolise that Mae Chaem is one of the surrounding territories of Chiang Mai, the centre of Lanna Kingdom.

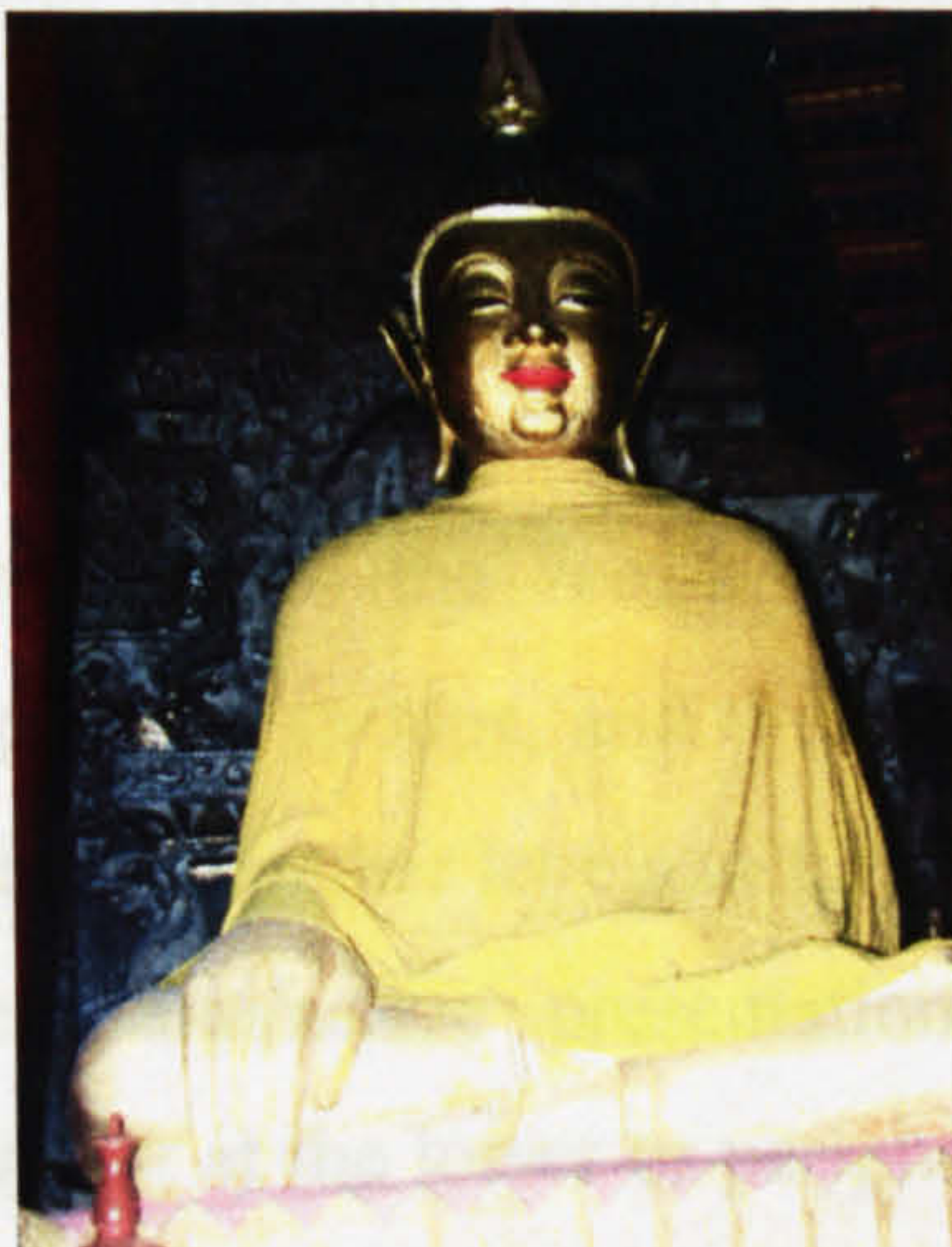


Fig. 3.1, 3.2 Kitchaguud; a moulded stone built behind the Buddha statue, in Wat Yang Luang temple

The *mandala* pattern serves as a conceptual and practical model for centre-periphery relations. The capital and the king are the hierarchically highest status position of the kingdom. The provinces and vassal states and their rulers, on the other hand, are lower level replications of the capital and the king. Power would come from the centre of the kingdom down to lower and periphery territories to villages and finally to individual households (Bentley 1986, Reynolds 1995, and Tooker 1996).

Tambiah (1985b) suggests a model for Southeast Asian political geometry, called “galactic polity” in which the *muang* was arranged according to a galactic scheme. He draws the model from the Hindu *mandala*. The power came from the centre to the surrounding provinces, and these again were surrounded by tributary polities more or less independent. Similarly, Moertono (1968:112 cited in Tambiah 1985b:260) symbolises the Javanese concepts of state power as a torch with its light radiating outward with diminishing intensity and the power of the centre determined the range of its illumination.

The power of the central *muang* or state depends on the prestige of the king and his military force. When the king lost his prestige, like a fading star, the centre then moved as well as its surrounding. Before Western colonisation and before Lanna kingdom was merged into Siam, there were many states in mainland Southeast Asia, for instance, Ayuthaya, Sukhothai, Chiang Mai, Yangkung, Mautama, Luang Prabang, Wiangchan, Panompen, and Wea. These states took their turn to be the centre and periphery status, depending on the socio-political situation at the time.

Tooker (1996) argues that previous approaches to the “cosmic polity” have been defined from the perspective of dominant political groups, and thus provide top-down and encompassment models of hierarchy whereby higher levels in the political structure encompass lower ones and ignore other “alternative presentations and possible contestations of that hierarchy that might appear at the lower or peripheral levels of the hierarchy” (1996:348). He finds the Akha, the highlanders in Chiang Rai, Northern Thailand, transform the lowland centres (the *muang*) into a devalued, negative and dangerous periphery and conceptualise their society as a superior and protective space. Nordholt (1981: 475 cited in Tooker 1996: 349) and Tambiah (1985b: 257) criticise

Geertz for providing a model which is “too cosmologically based” and ignore socio-political aspects. Moreover the cosmological explanation provides a static perspective and neglects variations and changes. Tooker (1996) suggests that the “imagined reality” of social structure may have various versions according to the point of view and level of society from which one has approached.

Tambiah (1985b) suggests a “totalisation” approach which analyses indigenous concepts as multifaceted and integrated between cosmological, political and economical domains. He aims to escape from viewing the galactic structure as a given cultural system outside historical or sociological entities. Moreover, he argues that “the cultural model and pragmatic parameters are in concordance and buttress one another, and cannot be disaggregated” (ibid.: 280). Nevertheless, in his essay, *The Galactic Polity in Southeast Asia*, he did not show how the polities have been transformed through time although he did mention that there was a change in galactic polity after the impact of Western colonial powers. My aim is thus to investigate the process of political transformation in Northern Thailand through its history. Moreover, as opposed to other studies which analyse political structure from the perspective of dominant or elite class in the society, I am interested in changes in the outskirts villages to see how hierarchical polity is practiced and how the values, identity and power are constructed on the ground level.

As stated above, there was a sense of exclusiveness between the *muang* or Northern Thai and the central Thai. This is related to the history of Lanna Kingdom which was once an independent kingdom long before the nation-state reformulation of Thailand. Below is a brief history of the rise and fall of Lanna Kingdom along with the changing status of Mae Chaem as a part of the kingdom.

Lanna Kingdom: Historical Context

Two thousand years ago the Lawa were supposedly the first inhabitants of Chiang Mai in the area of Chiang Saen. They may have occupied the fertile valleys of River Ping in the North before they were nudged off their lands gradually by the Tais. Now they live

in the hills and those who remained in the plains were soon assimilated into the main stream of the Mons and the Tais (Chandrangaam 1980). According to the Chiang Mai Chronicle (Wyatt and Wichienkeo 1999), the first Northern Thai kingdom, called Chiang Lao or Lawa Nagara, was founded by King Lao Cankararaja in 638 A.D. at the command of the god Indra.

The legend of Muang Chaem which was told from generation to generation also indicates the Lawa inhabitation in the area before the Tai⁴. Today the Lawa have either fully assimilated into Thai society as in some villages in the Chiang Mai city area and only retain some of their language, or they have been marginalised into hilltribe villages in the Mae La Noi and Mae Chaem district. More than 200 abandoned temples have been found along the Mae Chaem river bank. The villagers believe that those abandoned temples belonged to the Lawa before their ancestors migrated to Mae Chaem. The villagers often refer to these temples as the “*wat hang* Lawa” (abandoned temple of the Lawa). This indicates that the Lawa were Buddhist and that Buddhism was an influence in Mae Chaem a long time ago.

4 The legend of Mae Chaem

Long time ago there were two brother lions lived in the big forest. The two lions often fought each other for their hunting land. One day the Buddha visited the place while the two lions were fighting. He resolved their problems by creating a stream and divided the land into two parts, equally. The stream was called “Huay Chang Keung” since then, which means “half dividing”.

Later the Buddha continued his journey and stayed at Doi Saghan (the mountain in Mae Chaem), where an old woman (some said she was the Lawa) offered rice and half a fish to him. The Buddha asked her where another half was. She said she was poor so she kept another half for her children. The Buddha said “this place is such a Chaem (starving) muang!” Chaem is a Lawa word means to lack, or to be in need. Since then the place was called Muang Chaem. Nevertheless, at present, the name is changed slightly in tone and therefore the meaning has also been changed. Mae Chaem (with low tone) means bright and cheerful. (Samawatha 2003: 9-10)

It is believed that the two lions were the head of the Lawa who were inhabited in Mae Chaem before the Tai came. Until the present, Mae Chaem people in the lowland villages roughly divided the area into two parts called the North village (*baan nueay*) and the South village (*baan dai*). This, however, does not correspond to the official village in the present. Although the distance between the North and the South *baan* are close, there are many differences between the two *baan*, such as the accent of some words, and the styles of weaving (particularly among women). It may be inferred that people of the two groups came from different origins.

There is also evidence that the Lawa and Karen once inhabited Mae Chaem. According to Poh Nan Suwan, an eighty-year old man who used to be the head of Baan Yang Luang village, the founder of Baan Yang Luang might have been Karen. He said,

The name Baan Yang Luang means “a village of the big Yang”. Its name came from the history of the village as the older people in the past told me, they said people here years ago were not Tai, not the Muang but the Yang, (*Yang* is another name for the Karen ethnic group). They had very large body frames (*Luang* in Northern Thai language means large), the men’s chests were as large as three-arms width (This is similar to the Thai metaphors referring to a brave and powerful man; a three-arms width chest man)...that is why other people often misunderstand that we are the Yang, not the Muang

Later the Tai Yuan or the Muang from Chom Thong and San Pa Thong district moved into the area and settled down along the Mae Chaem River. The Lawa then migrated up to the highland area.

Up to the present, there are many sayings and jokes told among Mae Chaem peoples which refer to the relationship between the Lawa and the Tai Yuan in Mae Chaem. For example, “*Lawa pong hai, Tai pong moh*”, which means “the Lawa remove the rice steaming-pot, while the Tai remove the water pot underneath”. Another saying is “*Lawa hing Fai, Tai hing tao*” which means “the Lawa warm near the fire, while the Tai warm by the ashes”. These metaphoric sayings imply that in the past the Lawa outnumbered the Tai, therefore they got the rice and the fire while the Tai just got the water used to steam rice and the ashes. Nevertheless, there is also a joke, told among Mae Chaem people, about how the Tai Yuan man, Pu Sed, deceived the Lawa until they all died. There is a cave in Mae Chaem named after the story. It is called “*hom Lawa wai*” which means, “the cave where the Lawa were killed”. The joke implies that the Tai are cleverer than the Lawa, thus they took over the land.

King Mengrai: the Founder of Chiang Mai⁵

The history of Chiang Mai can be traced to the reign of King Mengrai (1259-1317)⁶, the greatest of all Northern Thai monarchs. At the time of his birth in 1239, the Mekhong river area was a centre of many small kingdoms and principalities. In 1259 King Mengrai succeeded his father as a ruler of Ngoen Yang before he moved the capital to the city of Chiang Rai in 1262. In quick succession he conquered his neighbours and placed his own officers over them. Once he had successfully brought all the cities in the Kok River basin under his power, he declared it a dominion which he called Khwaen Yon or Yonok kingdom.

King Mengrai's next move was to come when he learned that the Mon city of Haripunchai had become a prosperous trading city that served as a major centre by river and by land. Inspired by the prospects of greater power, King Mengrai desired to include these cities in his own domain and finally captured Haripunchai in 1283. By this time, King Mengrai had subdued the aboriginal Mon-khmer population and forced most of the Muang and many Lao princes to pay him tribute. He called his new enlarged kingdom "Lan-Na", meaning "land of a million rice fields," and brought prosperity and stability to the whole area. Many towns and temples were built, and arts and crafts were encouraged.

The culture of Haripunchai influenced many aspects of the Kingdom of Lanna. The Lanna religious script known as *tua muang*, was adapted from the Mon Haripunchai script. The religious architecture was also copied in the construction. Moreover, a book of laws compiled by King Mengrai known as the Mengraisart is believed to be based on the code of ethics of the Mon of Haripunchai. While the Northern Thai absorbed the religion and culture of the Haripunchai Mons, the Siamese came under the cultural influence of the Peguan Mons and Cambodia and later became even more Cambodian and less Tai-like in character. According to Davis (1984b), this difference in cultural influences can be seen in the contrast between the Muang and Siamese. For instance, Siamese writing reflects a heavy Cambodian influence in its frequent use of Sanskrit,

⁵ The history of Chiang Mai presented in this chapter is adapted from Thonman 1971, Sutthisirikul 1985, Wyatt 1982, Ongsakul 1995, Phomsao 1996, Wyatt and Wichienkeo 1999, and Penth 2000.

⁶ See appendix B for the Lanna Dynasty

while the Indic borrowings in Muang generally follow Pali spellings. Furthermore, the Siamese king, influenced by the Cambodian model of kingship, was a sacred object. He had the right to impose burdensome taxes on commerce and make heavy demands on the populace for labour. Court procedure and the legal code were extremely elaborate and formalised. By contrast, the Muang kingship model was rather informal with a paternalistic king. In Sukhothai, as in Chiang Mai, labour requirements were relatively light, and no tax was imposed on trade. Nevertheless, Davis (1984b:30) goes too far in distinguishing between the Siamese and Muang in the quality of their social interaction. He states that,

The subservience to superiors, the status-consciousness, and the obsequiousness and formality characteristic of Siamese behaviour may be considered an inheritance of the Ayudhyan model, while the relative egalitarianism ease of social interaction characteristic of the Muang might be in closer conformity to a truly Tai model of social behaviour.

The political system cannot be generalised to social behaviour and personality because it implies that the society is homogenous and static. Furthermore, to stereotype the Muang and Siamese characteristics according to their political system ignores the contradiction, differences and changes in the society.

King Mengrai resided at Haripunchai for three years. Then he found it was too small with little opportunity for territorial expansion, and so was not suited to be the administrative capital. Therefore, a search began for a better location, one that would serve as the permanent capital of the Lanna Kingdom. In the year 1291, King Mengrai discovered an area at the foot of a mountain that provided both water and timber and the lie of the land most suited the founding of a new city. In 1296 King Mengrai founded the new city and gave it the name Nophaburi Sri Nakhon Ping Chiang Mai which was later shortened to Chiang Mai. From the year 1296 Chiang Mai served as the centre of the Lanna Thai Kingdom. Chiang Mai became, and still is, the most important town in Northern Thailand. King Mengrai ruled over the new capital until he reached the age of eighty. After the demise of King Mengrai in the year 1311, several other rulers of the Mengrai Dynasty ruled over the city of Chiang Mai.

The Golden Age of Lanna

The Golden Age of Lanna (1355-1525) began with the reign of Phaya Keau Na, the sixth king of Lanna. In 1373, he established a Sinhalese Buddhist sect that became the major cultural influence in Lanna. The Kingdom of Lanna reached its peak during the reign of the ninth ruler, Phaya Tilokaraj (1442-1487) who was considered the greatest of the Lanna kings after King Mengrai, because he greatly extended its territory⁷. Moreover, during the reign of Phaya Tilokaraj, Buddhism reached its peak. Many temples were constructed during this time. The eighth world synod of Theravada Buddhism was held in Chiang Mai in 1477. During the century following Tilokaraja's accession, an abundance of Muang literary and religious works were produced by Muang scholars, all of them in Pali.

Mae Chaem during the Golden Age of Lanna

There are few historical documents concerning Mae Chaem. The oldest document might be the Thamnan Mullasassana Suandok, which claimed that during the reign of Phaya Keau Na (1355-1385), Phra Anon, a monk from Burma led his team to Chiang Mai to propagate the old Sinhalese Buddhist sect. During his journey back from Chiang Mai to Burma, however, he died in Muang Chaem, in 1369. This indicated that Mae Chaem was, since long time back, a *muang* and a main route from Chiang Mai to Burma (Samawatha 2003).

Much evidence shows that Mae Chaem was an important Buddhist *muang*. Numerous abandoned temples, believed to be built by the Lawa, the first inhabitants in Mae Chaem, are found along Mae Chaem River. Moreover there are many ancient Buddha statues and temples found in Mae Chaem. The Boh Tree in Wat Yang Luang temple is believed to be planted by the monk from Langka who came to study and stayed at the temple. It might be in the same period as the Golden Age of Lanna Kingdom (1355-1525) when the Sinhalese Buddhism spread from Burma.

⁷ This includes most of what now constitutes Northern Thailand, Northwestern Laos, the eastern Shan states of Burma and Xishuangbanna in southern Yunnan.

Chiang Mai under Burma: The Age of Decline

In the 14th and 15th centuries, Lanna fought several times against the Siamese Thai of Ayutthaya and the Burmese. Weakened by internal struggles for the throne and by oppression, the city fell to the Burmese forces and was under Burmese control for over two centuries (1558-1774). After its capture, Chiang Mai was made a vassal state of Burma. There was no direct colonisation, but annual tributes to Burma had to be paid, and a Burmese prince sat on the throne in Chiang Mai. During the Burmese occupation, the people of Lanna attempted several rebellions, but they were all unsuccessful.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a chaotic and violent period. Once secure in Lanna, the Burmese nobility looked to extend their influence further, particularly towards the kingdom of Ayutthaya to the south. The Burmese used Chiang Mai as a military base for attacks from Ayutthaya. The people were a manpower resource for slavery and conscription. Whole populations were shifted from one area to another by the Burmese for purposes of pacification. Finally, in 1767, the Burmese took and sacked Ayuttaya, destroying most of the culture and heritage of this previously magnificent city.

Mae Chaem was involved in the war between Chiang Mai and Burma. The names of many villages as well as Mounts in Mae Chaem indicate that they were involved in the war, such as, Baan Maan (the Burmese village), Baan Tap (the troop village), Baan Mae Seug (the Mother war village), Mon Ma Haw (the flying horse Mount), and Doi Samsib Hoag (the 30-swords-Mount).

Lanna under Siam: The Turning Point in History

During the 200 years that Burma ruled over Chiang Mai, Burmese ministers and officials maintained a strict control and harsh treatment which caused regular rebellions. In 1771, Phraya Cha Ban and Chao Kawila waged a battle but were defeated because the lack of sufficient forces and weapons. Later they turned to the Siamese for help. The Siamese, under King Taksin who re-established Thai sovereignty after Ayutthaya, realised the vital strategic importance of Chiang Mai and the need to drive

the Burmese out of Lanna to prevent them from further attacking Siam. With the aid of the Siamese king, Chiang Mai was liberated in 1774 and thereafter became a self-governing vassal of Siam.

According to Ongsakul (1999), Lanna Kingdom had at least 3 distinct characteristics compared to other vassal states under the Siamese during the same period. Firstly, the Lanna was a powerful kingdom in the past, ruled by numerous kings for generations. Therefore, Lanna had long maintained its own culture, traditions and language. Secondly, unlike Pattani state in the south which often fought with the Siamese, Lanna had a good relationship for a long time. Thirdly, Lanna Kingdom was located in the militarily critical area. As Lanna was ruled by the Burmese for more than 200 years, the Siamese worried that Lanna must have developed close relationships to the Burmese and might revert to the Burmese again rather than Siam.

The Siamese did not consider using Chiang Mai as a military base but used it as a buffer state for preventing attacks from Burma. Therefore, there is no evidence of officials being sent from the central region to rule over Chiang Mai. Local administration and income collection were left in the hands of the Chao Muang (Lord of the *muang*). Furthermore, the Siamese showed their respect for the ruler of Chiang Mai by raising him in rank from Chao Muang to Phraya Chiang Mai.

Nevertheless, as a dominion, Chiang Mai had to submit the traditional triennial tribute of trees made of gold and silver and annual taxes. Taxes from the principle cities of Lanna (Chiang Mai, Phrae, Nan, Lampang and Lamphun) included teakwood of an amount dependant on the size of the city. Furthermore, Bangkok had the right to claim whatever was required, especially teak, for important ceremonies or the construction of temples and palaces. At times of war, the dominion was required to assist by sending military conscripts. The Chao Muang was also required to attend the royal ritual of Siam to pay his respects to the king.

Reviving the City – “Putting Vegetables in the Basket and People in the City”

At the end of the Thonburi period, Phraya Cha Ban passed away and Chiang Mai became a deserted city. The villages had returned to forest and the fields were overgrown. Chiang Mai was a ghost town for 15 years (1776-1791) until the beginning of the 19th century when King Rama I ascended the throne and established Bangkok as the new capital, he appointed Phraya Kawila (1781-1813) as ruler of Chiang Mai. Phraya Kawila's duty was to rebuild the city. During that period, people in Lanna had to take refuge from the war and escaped to the forest or mountains. To repopulate Chiang Mai, Phraya Kawila had to persuade and force the people of the outer provinces and those who had fled to the jungles to move back to Chiang Mai. This period was known as “putting vegetables in the basket and people in the city” (*keb puk sai saa, keb kha sai muang*). Craftsmen were settled in different parts of the city. Those who had no craft skills were settled outside the city. Many different ethnic groups were brought to settle in Chiang Mai, such as Tai Yai, Tai Leu, Tai Khoen and Tai Yong from Sipsong Panna. According to Ganjanapan (1984) the majority of villages in Lanna, in particularly those situated in the outskirts of Chiang Mai city, were settled after the year 1807, after Phaya Kawila repopulated Chiang Mai.

It may be during this period that Muang Chaem settled down again after the long period of war. People from a variety of places, different ethnic groups, migrated to Mae Chaem such as the Lawa, Tong Su, Yang Daeng (red Karen), Ngeaw, Lampang, Phrea, Nan, Chiang Saen, and Chiang Rai. According to Sucksawatti (1990) a famous temple in Baan Yang Luang, namely, Wat Yang Luang was assumed to have been built during the reign of Phraya Kawila. The most famous part of this temple is the Kitchaguud, a moulded stone that is an imitation of the Kitchaguud Mountain. The art style of Kitchaguud is a combination of Burmese and Chiang Saen (once the capital of Lanna Kingdom) cultures due to the conquest of Burma for a long period of time. Furthermore, Chao Kawila might have forcibly moved inhabitants of Chiang Saen to Mae Chaem, therefore the architecture of Kitchaguud was Burmese mixed with Chiang Saen style. Sucksawatti (1990) suggested that Chao Kawila might have planned to build Mae Chaem as a vassal *muang* (domain), to protect Chiang Mai city from Burma.

Phraya Kawila was able to re-establish the new city of Chiang Mai in 1796. In 1800 he built the monumental brick walls around the inner city that are still standing to this day, and extended the borders of the city state (*muang*) and established a river port. Chiang Mai then became an important regional trade centre. Many people migrated to the area, including wealthy teak merchants from Burma. Phraya Kawila ruled over Chiang Mai for 31 years until he died.

British and Chiang Mai Logging Industry

In the nineteenth century Lanna was rich with forests which formerly had no value as there had been no commercial logging. However this began to change from around 1829 during the reign of King Rama III, when Chiang Mai began to have contact with foreigners, especially with the British. The colonial powers began to exert their political and economic influence over Northern Thailand. The colonial interest in Northern Thailand was mainly to extract teak. Towards the end of Phraya Phutthawong reign (1825-1846), the fourth ruler of Chiang Mai, the British requested permission to log teak along the border. British and French teak trading companies bought leases to extract teak from the Northern ruling Chao who controlled rights over this valuable resource. In those days, the forests belonged to the ruler of the city and anyone wishing to enter the forest for logging had to first get his permission. Finally the Siamese administration allowed the British to enter the region to conduct logging on a commercial basis (Vadathanaphuti 1984, Aporn 1998, Ongsakul 1999).

The growth of the logging industry brought many lawsuits which resulted in the second major revolution in the history of Lanna. Many problems arose because there were no fixed regulations relating to concessions and taxes. Struggles for concessions that overlapped began to occur, bringing a large number of complaints and legal charges. Many people under the British crown who were involved in logging with Lanna were murdered. Towards the end of the century the British Government sought help from the central administration in securing the safety of the British and constantly pressured the Siamese Government to impose centralised control (Ongsakul 1999).

The conflicts between the British and Lanna led to an intervention of the Siamese state. The Siamese feared that if the logging problems were allowed to continue, the British would attempt to take control of the logging business in Lanna, and that the cities in the North would not be able to repel them. At the same time, the Siamese attempted a major bureaucratic reform as a response to the colonial threat (Vadathanaphuti 1984).

Finally in 1873, the Treaty of Chiang Mai was drafted with the main objective of preventing banditry along the borders near Chiang Mai. In response to British expansion in Burma, the Siamese government appointed a royal commissioner to oversee the administration in Chiang Mai. Similar appointments were subsequently made to other *muang* (domain) principalities. However the central government had no policy to bring about major changes because they were afraid there would be a reaction from the Chiang Mai Lord. Later, in 1883 the second Treaty of Chiang Mai was drawn up to satisfy British demands for the Siamese to send fully empowered officials to take care of matters.

During the last decades of the 19th century, as Siam was attempting to stave off the invasive forces of both English and French imperial power, was forced King Rama V to introduce administrative reforms (Morris 2000:5-6). This was to happen during the reign of Chao Inthravichayanon (1871-1897) who was a very weak ruler. The local ruler's power and authority were gradually reduced until the death of Chao Inthravichayanon in 1896, when the central government fully annexed Chiang Mai to Siam. The following Chao were left their private incomes and only carried the high-sounding but ineffectual titles of Chao and were merely honorary figures. Their position was non-hereditary, however, and upon their death it was not refilled. This resulted in the gradual end of the system of rule by local lords in the 1930s⁸ (Wyatt 1982, Rhum 1994, Vandergeest and Peluso 1995).

⁸ When Chiang Mai became part of Monthon Phayap after Chao Inthravichayanon's death, there remained only two living Chao Muang: Chao Inthawarorot and Chao Kaeo Naowarat, who were the sons of Chao Inthravichayanon. Chao Kaeo Naowarat was the last Chao Muang of Chiang Mai.

After losing its status as a city state, Chiang Mai was administered as a *monthon thesaphiban* (centre of local administration) with a royal commissioner as governor. The city states of Chiang Mai, and other states in the North were collectively made into an administrative unit called Monthon Phayap, so that all the outlying city states could be combined as one group. Educational reform was considered the best way to achieve the unity and establish a feeling of nationalism. Chiang Mai became the seat of a significant bureaucratic apparatus through the strategic deployment of a national education system, and the establishment of Central Thai as the language of both government and schooling (Morris 2000: 6).

Rebellion

Bureaucratic reform meant the loss of political power of the Northern ruling Chao, and of their control over forest leasing, as well as an imposition of various taxes on the Northern population (Vadhathanaphuti 1984: 105). The Lords of the *muang* (Chao Muang) were displaced by provincial governors who took over local administration. Schools were set up in Bangkok for training the children of the nobility to become salaried government officials who were rotated in different provinces so as to minimise the development of local loyalties (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 398).

Reform needed lots of money, therefore, the central administration began to control the economy in the Monthon Payap. All indirect taxes, labour obligations, and tax farms were eliminated or replaced by a direct poll tax collected throughout the territory now claimed by Bangkok (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 399). Taxes were collected on land owned by local nobility. Men of conscription age were required to pay an annual tax of four baht in lieu of being conscripted for labour. However, even though they paid the tax, men were still conscripted without payment. The level of suffering rose and the people became very dissatisfied with officials from the central administration because they conscripted labour for the construction of roads and bridges both within and outside the city. Moreover, the money taxation copied from Bangkok was incompatible with the economic system in Chiang Mai at that time, which was mainly self-sufficient,

not the market economic system. Therefore, people avoided paying tax by migrating to the highland towns, including Mae Chaem (Aporn 1998).

When the Muang faced this critical time, the power of the guardian spirit was used in order to challenge the authority of Bangkok. When Phraya Phetchpilai (1888) was the royal commissioner from Bangkok, he allowed the Chao of Chiang Mai to request the Siamese king to change the administrative rules and taxation system. The Chao claimed that the guardian spirit of Chiang Mai was angry and disagreed with the administration system set by the previous commissioner, therefore the spirit punished the domain by causing the rain to stop and lessen agricultural products, especially rice. The Siamese king refused the requests but Phraya Phetchpilai broke the order and allowed the Chao to change the rules. However, he was finally sent back to Bangkok.

The conflicts within Chiang Mai and other principalities in the North became worse. This led to local dissatisfaction and peasant rebellions. At the beginning of 1902 several hundred people protested in Chiang Mai against forced labour. They refused to construct roads or obey the orders of the government officials. The important uprising occurred in Muang Phrae when the migrant Shans, with the backing of the local rulers and people, successfully seized the city and killed over twenty officials from the central region. As a result, the central government sent troops to control the rebellion and punished the local ruler by dismissing him from his position. Government officials from the central region were sent to take over the entire administration. Nearly the same time with the raid of the Shans in Phrae, there were also rebellions in Chiang Mai, as well as a raid in Mae Chaem against the administrative centralisation (Aporn 1998, Samawatha 2003).

Rebellion in Mae Chaem

The central government attempted to govern Chiang Mai down to the district level. In the year 1900 Siam integrated Muang Chaem in Chom Tong district, under the Monthon system. Muang Chaem became a "*kwaen*" (equal to a district in the present time), and the head of the "*kwaen*" was titled Phaya. In 1904, however, Mae Chaem

was firstly established as a district and the first head of district was sent from Bangkok. This was the first time Mae Chaem connected directly to the central government. The district office was established not far from Baan Yang Luang village.

The Siamese commissioners gradually diminished the authority of the Chao of Muang Chaem, as elsewhere in Lanna. The speed of political and economical reform made people struggle, especially the Chao who were frustrated by the loss of their authority. Finally the district office was attacked, and the head of the district was killed (Samawatha 2003). There was a rumour that the leaders of the rebellion were two brothers in Baan Yang Luang, Taaw Inn and Taaw Phrom, the nobles under Chao of Muang Chaem (Taaw was a title of the noble under the Phaya).

The rebellions induced further intervention by the Siamese state in administrative, educational and religious spheres. The central government continued centralization measures, even down to village level. These included the tax collecting from Chao and nobles in Lanna to lessen the local economical authority.

After the rebellion, the district office was moved to Chang Keung village (and remained there until the present). In 1938, because of population decline and high rates of migration, the Government lowered Mae Chaem to a sub-district of Chom Thong district. In 1956 it was re-elevated to be a district again.

From Lanna Kingdom to Chiang Mai Province

After king Rama V died, king Rama VI reformed the governmental administration again in 1916. Muang was changed to be a province (Changwat), the smaller Muang under the province became a district (Amphur). Under a district was a sub-district (Tambol), and under a sub-district was a village (Mu Baan). These new administrative titles were used until the present time. By 1915, the administration of Northern Thailand was entirely in the hands of bureaucratic officials, paving the way for the gradual penetration of capitalism into Northern Thai society (Vadathanaphuti 1984: 111).

After the rail route between Bangkok and Chiang Mai was completed in 1921, changes came quickly to Chiang Mai. Economic changes were also quick to arrive. Agricultural land for the cultivation of rice and other cash crops was expanded so that surpluses could be produced for export from Chiang Mai to the central region. Many people also sent their children to study in Bangkok. After completion of the railway, roads were constructed linking the railway with various points both within and outside the province (Ongsakul 1997).

Administrative changes began to occur after the bloodless revolution of 1932, when the People's Council abolished the Monthon Thesaphiban and Monthon Phayap system. Siam⁹ ceased to be an absolute monarchy and Chiang Mai changed from the status of a capital city of a state into that of a province like any other province in the country (Chandrangaam 1980). Altogether, Chiang Mai served as the capital of the Lanna Kingdom for 600 years (1296-1932), and celebrated its 700th anniversary as a city in the year 1996 (Ongsakul 1997).

The Last of the Chao Muang Chaem (Lord of Muang Chaem) and the Changing Identity of Poh Chao Luang (the Guardian Spirit)

Two crucial forces which largely changed the course of development of the Northern Thai political economy are the penetration of capitalism and incorporation by the Thai state (Vadthanaphuti 1982). According to Tambiah (1985b), after the impact of Western colonial power during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in Thailand there was a change from a galactic to a more centralised radial polity. However, the galactic characteristic is still expressed in regionalism and communalism. In Mae Chaem, although the system of Chao ceased after the administrative reforms, their power was maintained and legitimised by villagers in the form of the ancestor and guardian spirit cults.

⁹ It only became officially known as Thailand in 1949

Before the centralisation of the Siamese government in 1897, Mae Chaem had its own political administration, headed by a local ruler known as Chao Muang Chaem. Under the Chao there were lower nobles governing smaller areas in hierarchical order. These nobles were titled “Taaw” while the Chao was “Phaya”. Located in the outskirts of Chiangmai, Muang Chaem was rather independent. The Chao of Muang Chaem only had to pay a tribute every three years to the Chao of Chiang Mai to maintain the integrity of the Lanna kingdom (Aporn 1998).

The last Chao of Muang Chaem, before the Siamese ruled Chiang Mai, was Phaya Keaun Kaew. Under Phaya Keaun Kaew, there were another two nobles named Taaw Inn and Taaw Phrom who governed at a lower level (the village). Although there is no documentary evidence, the villagers said Taaw Inn and Taaw Phrom led the raid against the Siamese centralisation and killed the first head of district who was sent from Bangkok.

The story about the rebellion in Mae Chaem was often told and became a legend. Taaw Inn and Taaw Phrom who were believed to be the leaders of the revolt were said to have magical power.

Poh Chao Luang was a Taaw and was the person who killed the first Nai Amphur (the head of the district) who was sent from Bangkok. Our ancestors told us that when the police came to catch him he flew and disappeared. He had magical power so nobody could catch him.

The villagers believed that it was Phaya Keaun Kaew who installed the present Guardian Spirit of Muang Chaem, commonly known as Poh Chao Luang (literally means The Father Great Lord), and built the shrine for the spirit in a forest in Baan Yang Luang village. This spirit is said to have been the tutelary spirit of Phaya Keaun Kaew’s matriclan before it was instituted as the principal spirit of Muang Chaem. The spirit presided over all the lesser spirits of Muang Chaem, including all the ancestral spirits (*phii puu nyaa*), the village spirits (*phii chao baan*), spirit of a dam (*phii faai*) and field spirits (*phii naa*). Phaya Keaun Kaew’s matriclan spirit was regarded as Poh Chao Luang *kao* (The Eldest Father Great Lord), whereas the spirits of other matriclan was regarded as its younger brothers.

Mae Chaem people believe that, after the end of the system of Chao (after the political reform by the Siamese government), the soul of the last Chao incarnated as Poh Chao Luang (the Guardian Spirit) and continued to govern his *muang*. The Eldest Poh Chao Luang is believed to be the spirit of both Phaya Keaun Kaew (the last Chao of Muang Chaem), whereas the other two Younger Brother Guardian Spirits are believed to be those of Taaw Inn and Taaw Phrom (the nobles) respectively. In short, in Baan Yang Luang village, there are three Poh Chao Luang: the Eldest Spirit and another two Younger Brothers. While the Eldest Poh Chao Luang (Spirit A) is the soul of Phaya Keaun Kaew, the Younger Poh Chao Luang (Spirits B and C) are the souls of Taaw Inn and Taaw Phrom respectively (see diagram 3.1).

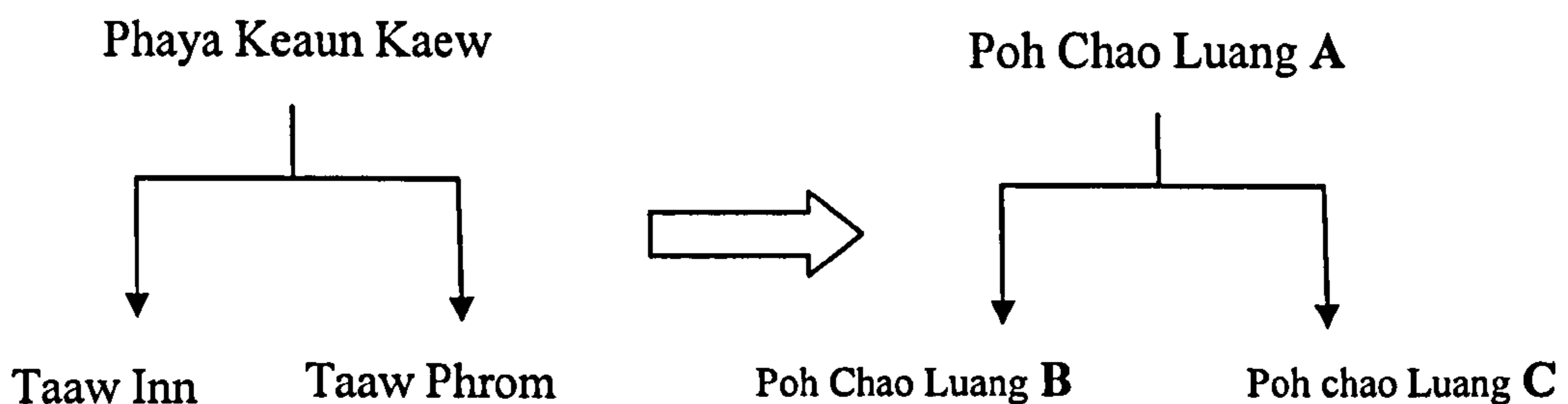


Diagram 3.1: Transformation of the traditional ruler into the guardian spirit system

The three lineages (A, B, C) are linked as siblings. The spirit of the Chao (Spirit A) is thought to be higher than the other two spirits of nobles (Spirit B, C), therefore the spirit of the Chao is regarded as the Eldest Poh Chao Luang, and the other two spirits are Younger Brothers.

Other minimal lineages which migrated from different areas have their own ancestral spirits separate from the three spirits mentioned above. However, they respect the Eldest Spirit (Spirit A) as the territorial guardian spirit (*phii muang*; the spirit of the *muang*), who protects them as inhabitants of Mae Chaem. Interestingly, the ancestral spirits of those lineages which do not share the same origin are finally “adopted” as “brothers” of the Eldest Poh Chao Luang. Therefore, it can be seen that different

lineages are linked through the creation of siblingship between the guardian and ancestral spirits. As long as the Eldest Poh Chao Luang accepts their ancestral spirit as “sibling” (*pee-nong*), they become Mae Chaem people. This is similar to what Tambiah (1970) found in Northeast Thailand, and Carsten (1995a) among the Malays, that siblingship is created between neighbours who do not share the same origin.

Turton (1972) suggested that the matrilineal spirit cults of Northern Thailand developed in the absence of traditional jural authority at the local level. The Lord of the *muang* in Chiang Mai was a remote figure, and local men were often away at war, hunting, or serving as labourers. The matrilineal spirits thus filled a gap in the village jural and political system, punishing offenders for quarrelling, neglect of ritual, and sexual misconduct. Davis (1984b) comments that although during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were wars, rebellions and invasions that forced villagers, in particularly men, away from their homes, the same conditions also occurred in Siam and Laos during this period, but matrilineal cults did not develop.

Wijeyewardene (1984) suggests that the cults may have developed in reaction to the ideology of male dominance which permeates Northern Thailand through Buddhism. However, he stresses that the cult is not a form of female protest because actually ritual leadership in the cults often falls upon men. Furthermore, as many scholars have suggested, the cults serve to regulate the sexuality of women. Rather, Wijeyewardene argues that a female oriented set of beliefs and practices has emerged in response to male ritual dominance. According to Davis (1984b: 63) “although this hypothesis seems reasonable, it can only be disproved by historical evidence that the Muang had already developed their matrilineal cults before the influence of Buddhism”.

In contrast to Turton (1972), I do not see the spirit cults as a compensation for the lack of jural authority. Conversely, the spirit cults were used by those Chao who controlled the *muang*. The Chao used the power of tutelary spirits to legitimise and strengthen their authority. According to Davis, (1984b:267) “the institution of territorial spirit cults has served to make sacred these political hierarchies and thereby lend them stability and permanence”.

Nevertheless, what is more important is not the question about the function of matrilineal spirit cult but its change in form and meaning through time. Precisely, my question is how the matrilineal spirit cult has been used while the political administration is transformed.

In the past, the spirit cult and political system of the village and of Lanna were closely related. The Chao needed spiritual power to legitimise his authority therefore he maintained the ideology of spirits through worship ritual. The guardian spirit was used by the Chao and his officers to conscript labour and collect agricultural products. Moreover, as the Chao needed labours and respect from his people, the spirit was used to ensure the prosperity of agriculture. To succeed to the throne from the previous Chao, a confirmation from the guardian spirit was also needed (Aporn 1998). When the Siamese government increasingly controlled the authority of the Chao of Chiang Mai, one of the strategies the Chao used to challenge the invasion was to claim the power of the tutelary spirit of Chiang Mai (Wyatt and Wichienkeo 1999).

Later, Mae Chaem as well as Chiang Mai lost its authority to govern its own *muang* and became a vassal state under Siamese. Apart from a number of rebellions, the transformation of the spirit cult was another strategy that the villagers used to maintain the power of Chao and consequently maintain their identity as an independent *muang*. Although the position of Chao ceased, his power did not disappear but survived in the organisation of lineage spirit cults. The guardian spirit of Muang Chaem acquired a new identity as a spirit of the last Chao. Correspondingly, the other two maximal lineage ancestral spirits (Younger Brother Poh Chao Luang) also became the spirits of the previous nobles.

Links between Guardian Spirits of the *muang* in Northern Thailand

Since the past, each *muang* in Lanna had its own guardian spirit which governed and protected all the residents in the area. After the demise of Chao, the networks among the guardian spirits of each *muang* were maintained in a hierarchical order, parallel to

the traditional political system of Chao. All are under the highest guardian spirit in Chiang Dao Mount, namely Chao Luang Kam Daeng.

According to the legend of Chiang Dao Mount and Chao Luang Kam Daeng¹⁰, thousands of years before Phaya Mengrai founded Chiang Mai in 1296, the first king of Lanna kingdom was Prince Suwan Kam Daeng¹¹. He built a *muang* on the plain land near Ping River and named it Lanna. After Prince Suwan Kam Daeng died, he became the guardian spirit of Lanna called Chao Luang Kam Daeng, who later gave Chiang Mai city to Phaya Mengrai (the founder of Chiang Mai). Chao Luang Kam Daeng, is regarded as the highest protector spirit of Chiang Mai (Turton 1972), which is supposed to protect the entire territory of a Northern Thai region. Furthermore, it is the head guardian spirit of all the lesser spirits in Lanna kingdom (Ramithanonta 2002).

Beginning in the 1980s there was an increase in urban spirit mediums, who are mainly women, especially in big provincial centres particularly Chiang Mai (see Irvine 1984, Morris 2000, and Ganjanapan 2003). According to Ganjanapan (2003: 129), this phenomenon is a means for women to regain their spiritual and social status which has deteriorated as a result of the decline in the ancestor spirit cults at the village level in which women were once considered to have high ritual authority. Ramithanonta (2002) studied the structure and function of spirit mediumship in Chiang Mai city and found that the mediums in Chiang Mai create networks to each other through their possessed spirits. Most of the mediums are believed to be possessed by noble spirits. Although these mediums develop individually, they tend to claim links to other mediums. Some mediums claim their noble spirits to have kin relationships with other noble spirits of other mediums. Moreover, many mediums link their spirits in a hierarchy, and all are under Chao Luang Kam Daeng, the head guardian spirit of Lanna.

10 The legends of Chiang Dao Mount and Chao Luang Kam Daeng were not only told orally but also written and copied on palm-leaf by many Lanna monks. The documents are found in many temples in Chiang Mai and distant provinces such as Nan province. The belief about Chao Luang Kam Daeng is not only shared in Lanna but also Lan Chang kingdom near the Kong River, not only among the Tai but also the Lisu (see Ramithanonta 2002).

11 The legend stated that one day Prince Suwan Kam Daeng followed a golden deer into a forest and finally found himself in front of a cave where the deer was suddenly disappeared. Instead, he found a beautiful woman, Nang Inlao, with whom he later fell in love. After he stayed with Nang Inlao in the cave, he wished to find the golden deer, so he decided to continue his journey until he reached the plain land near Ping (Raming) River. An ascetic at the place suggested he build a *muang* and named it Lanna. After he finished establishing Lanna, he went back to Chiang Dao cave to live with his wife, Nang Inlao and never returned. (Chokdeesrisawas 2004).

The guardian spirit of Mae Chaem (Poh Chao Luang) is also claimed to have a link with Chao Luang Kam Daeng. Mae Chaem people believe that Phaya Keaun Kaew the last Chao of Muang Chaem was the founder of Poh Chao Luang. It is said that he invited Poh Chao Luang from Chiang Dao Mount, the sacred mountain in Chiang Mai where Chao Luang Kam Daeng was believed to reside. Therefore, Poh Chao Luang is believed to be a brother of Chao Luang Kam Daeng who shares the same origin.

The Northern Thais believe that all the guardian spirits in Chiang Mai live with Chao Luang Kam Daeng in the cave at Chiang Dao Mount, the sacred mountain in Chiang Mai. At the beginning of every spirit worship ritual in Mae Chaem, the officiant must invite Poh Chao Luang from Chiang Dao and always informs Chao Luang Kam Daeng. After the spirit is invited, it is believed to travel by elephant and horse caravan¹² from Chiang Dao to the ritual site. Moreover, on every Wednesday and the Buddhist Sabbath day¹³ all the guardian spirits in Lanna are believed to attend the meeting in the cave at Chiang Dao Mount (see also Davis 1984b). Therefore, they are unavailable for other business while meeting. Consequently, spirit rites of any kind in Mae Chaem, as elsewhere in Chiang Mai, are strictly forbidden on Wednesday and Buddhist Sabbath day.

A myth told among Mae Chaem people emphasises the connection between Poh Chao Luang in Mae Chaem and Chao Luang Kam Daeng in Chiang Dao¹⁴. Chiang Dao is a district in Chiang Mai, located in the North, 72 kilometres from Chiang Mai city, while Mae Chaem is 115 km from Chiang Mai city to the South-west. In Chiang Dao district there is a sacred mountain call, Doi Luang Chiang Dao Mount. It is the origin of the Ping River which is the main river in Northern Thailand. It is believed that the Ping River flows from the bathing pond of the Lord Buddha which is located in Doi Chiang Dao Mount, called Ang Salung. To prove the connection between Chiang Dao and Mae Chaem, the myth claims that when somebody dropped eight lemons in the Ang Salung

12 This is similar to the traditional way of travelling of the Chao in the past.

13 It has been traditional for every temple in Thailand to arrange for a delivering of the sermon four times a month. This is done on the Buddhist Sabbath day, called in Thai "*Wan Phra*", which, calculated from the lunar calendar, falls on the full-moon day, the half-moon days (of the waxing moon and the waning moon) and the day before the new moon day. On these days laymen go to the monastery to hear the monks chant, listen to the sermon, make merits by offering foods to the monks, and participate in the service.

14 At present the story is written on a board at the spirit shrine in Mae Uam village in Mae Chaem district.

in Chiang Dao, three of them appeared in a natural spring beside the guardian spirit's shrine in Mae Uam village in Mae Chaem district. The three lemons represent the three Poh Chao Luang in Mae Chaem; namely, Poh Chao Luang at (1) Muong Gon, (2) Don Thaen, and (3) Baan Gog shrine¹⁵.

We can see a relationship between spiritual cosmology and geography in Chiang Mai. While Chao Luang Kam Daeng in Chiang Dao was the founder spirit of Lanna Kingdom, Chiang Dao Mount is the origin of the Ping River, the major river in Chiang Mai. All the guardian spirits in Lanna share the same origin as Chao Luang Kam Daeng at the Chiang Dao Mount, just as the rivers in other *muang* originates from the same source: the Ping River.

It can be seen that the concept of *mandala* is still maintained in the spirit cult system in Chiang Mai, with a centre at Chiang Dao Mount. In Mae Chaem, Poh Chao Luang is claimed to have a spiritual link with Chao Luang Kam Daeng, the head guardian spirit of Chiang Mai, which was the centre of Lanna kingdom. The link through guardian spirits is created to confirm the hierarchical relationship between Mae Chaem and Chiang Mai as the centre of Northern Thailand. Furthermore, it confirms the identity of Mae Chaem as a part of the *muang* hierarchical system and subordinated to Chiang Mai.

The Parallel Relationship between Spirit Cults and the Political System

The hierarchical relationship of the different guardian spirits corresponds to the hierarchical arrangement of the political and administrative, in both traditional and

¹⁵ These three Poh Chao Luang, however, are not exactly the same as those I have mentioned before. Considering the whole district, there are three major Poh Chao Luang whose shrines are located in Baan Yang Luang village (Muong Gon shrine), Baan Phraw Noom village (Don Thaen shrine) and Baan Gog village (Baan Gog shrine) respectively. Among the three, the spirit in Baan Yang Luang village is the highest and the most powerful guardian spirit, as the villagers claimed that their Poh Chao Luang govern all over Mae Chaem.

In Baan Yang Luang village itself, the villagers also said there are three Poh Chao Luang. Certainly, the eldest and highest spirit is the same one, but another two spirits (the younger brothers) are different. Apparently, the two younger brothers Poh Chao Luang are believed to be the souls of Taaw Inn and Taaw Phrom, as presented above. However, all the spirits are called Poh Chao Luang.

present-day systems (Vadathanaphuti 1982). Tanabe (1988: 13-14) finds the hierarchy order of Tai Lu guardian spirit cults also correspond to their contemporary polity (see also Spiro 1967 for a similar finding in Burma). According to Davis (1984b:42), the analogy between the hierarchy of territorial spirits and a political hierarchy suggests that social and religious structures are made equivalent.

Political and Administrative System	Guardian Spirit Cult System
Nation ↓	
Province ↓	Chao Luang Kam Daeng ↓
District (Amphur) ↓	The Eldest Poh Chao Luang ↓
Sub-district (Thambol) ↓	Younger Poh Chao Luang ↓
Village (Mu Baan) ↓	
Family (<i>hyan</i>)	<i>Phii puu nyaa</i> (ancestral spirit)

Diagram 3.2: Parallel between the Thai political and administrative system and the Mae Chaem guardian spirit cult system

According to diagram 3.2, each family, the lowest unit in the political and administrative hierarchy, is under the responsibility of the head of the family. Each village, a higher political and administrative unit than family, is under the responsibility of a village headman. Higher than a village, there are sub-district (*thambol*), district (*amphur*), and province, which in turn are under the larger political and administrative unit at the national level. Like a village head who is subordinate to the higher level officials, the lower level spirit is inferior to the higher level ones. Ancestral spirits (*phii puu nyaa*), the spirit of each lineage, is under Poh Chao Luang, the head of a maximal lineage. Each Poh Chao Luang is under the eldest Poh Chao Luang, as a spirit of the *muang*. Each *muang* spirit is under the highest guardian spirit and the founder of Lanna

kingdom, Chao Luang Kam Daeng. The guardian spirits of various *muang* form a symbolic hierarchy corresponds to the political dependence of the villages on the national.

Precisely, the hierarchy of tutelary spirits in Mae Chaem is parallel to the administrative system of Phaya and Taaw. Phaya Kaeun Kaew governed the *muang* (which became a district), while Taaw Inn and Taaw Phrom governed the *baan* (a sub-district or village at present). The Eldest Poh Chao Luang (spirit A) governs all the residents in Mae Chaem, just as the authority of Phaya covers all the population in Muang Chaem. The Younger Brother Poh Chao Luang (Spirit B and C) is considered to be under the Eldest Poh Chao Luang (spirit A) as the Taaw is under the Phaya.

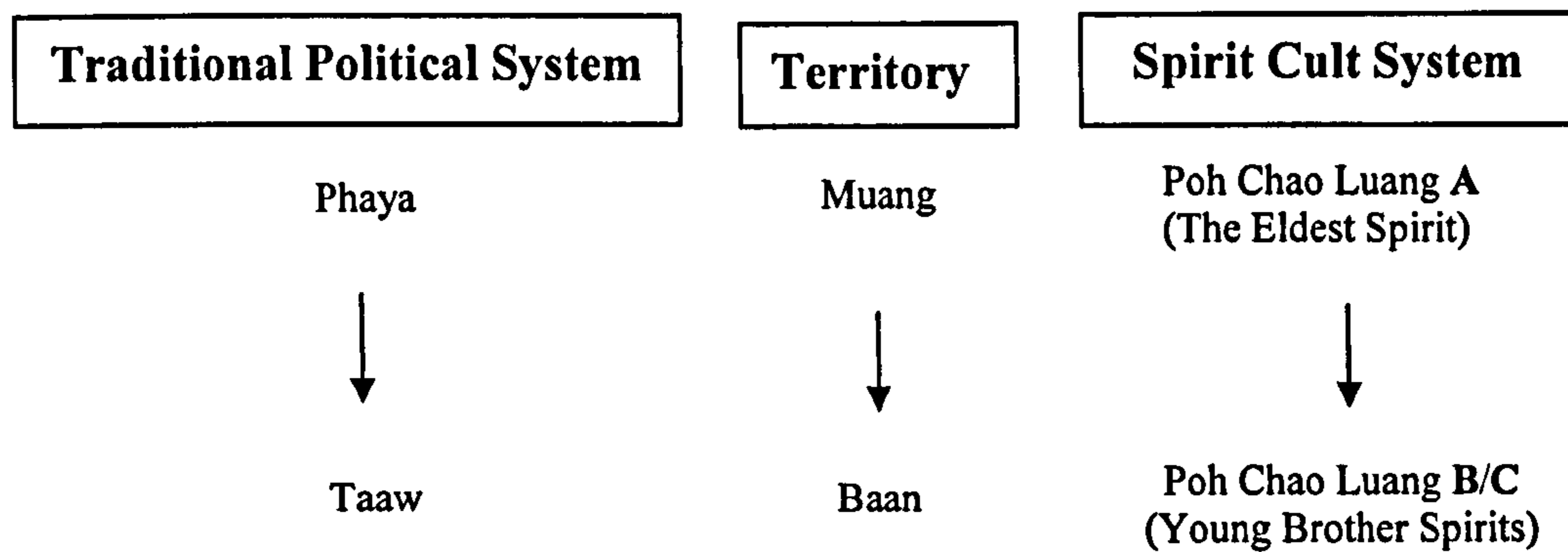


Diagram 3.3: Parallel between hierarchy in the traditional political system and spirit cult system

Reproduction of Political History and Hierarchy through Ritual Performances and Discourses

The hierarchy in the spirit cult can be seen from the sequence of ritual performances. According to Tambiah (1985b:266), the performance of annual cosmic ritual is normally started at the capital and replicated at a lower provincial level on a

diminishing scale¹⁶. Tannenbaum (1992) sees this sequencing as a “symbolic incorporation” that indicates “political subordination”. In Mae Chaem, the sequence of annual sacrifices to guardian spirits and ancestor spirits also follows the same order. For instance, the worship of the Eldest Poh Chao Luang has to be performed before the other younger spirits. Moreover, the worship of the Eldest Spirit is regarded as the most important ritual of the *muang*. After the worship of the Eldest Spirit is completed then the worship of the Younger Brother Spirits can be performed on another day. The worship of the ancestral spirits which are lower than the Younger Spirits is performed last and on a smaller scale (i.e., fewer of attendants, lesser degree of formality, and smaller animal sacrificed, etc).

The traditional political system is reproduced in a number of ritual performances. Firstly, the frequency and order of worship ritual performance for the territorial spirits is similar to the arrangement of the traditional tribute paid by the Chao of the lesser *muang* to the Chao of Chiang Mai (or Lanna). For instance, a major sacrifice has to be performed every third year and a minor one in the intervening two years, whereas the major tribute had to be paid triennially and the minor tribute on the other two years.

Secondly, the role of the guardian spirit as Chao is expressed in the discourse and performance of the possession ritual and worship ritual. At the beginning of the worship ritual, the officiant (*tang kaw*) carries a sword on his shoulder and goes to invite Poh Chao Luang to attend the ritual. This is to imitate the role of the noble of the Chao in the past. During the possession, Poh Chao Luang (through the medium) often mentions that he and his officers have just come back from the battlefield.

The Officiant: “Dear Poh Chao Luang, how many of you came here today? Does Mae Ui New come as well?”

Poh Chao Luang (The medium): “Mae Ui New does not come. She is busy fighting on the battlefield. Don’t you know about that?”

16 The sequence of ritual that the lower level political unit replicates the capital are found in the rocket festival and boat races in Vientiane (Condominas (1975); Northern Thai sacrifices (Turton 1984); Northern Thai temple festivals (Davis 1984b); and Northern Thai offerings to guardian spirits (Tambiah 1970).

The Officiant: “What war? Is there any war here? I only see on television that there is a war in Iraq and lots of news about Saddam”

Poh Chao Luang: “Of course, that’s the war I am talking about.”

The Officiant: “Oh. Really?”

Poh Chao Luang: “Yes. We are very busy these days.”

According to the dialogue presented above we can see that the spirit expresses its role as a traditional Chao who protects the *muang* by fighting on the battlefield (although the war they mention may be in the present time). The villager explained to me that;

...after the last Chao of Mae Chaem died he still worried about his residents and *muang*, so he reincarnated as the guardian spirit, Poh Chao Luang, and continued to govern *maung* Chaem.

Thirdly, the personalities of the spirit mediums, in possession ritual, reproduce the identities of the Chao and the nobles. For instance, the medium of the Eldest Spirit, which is the highest spirit in Mae Chaem, presents a strict, distant, and powerful character at the possession rite to represent the authority of the Chao. On the other hand, the atmosphere of the spirit possession performed by the mediums of the Younger Spirits tends to be more intimate, friendly, and warm.

Finally, the structure of the spirit cult organisation replicates the traditional political structure of Lanna. In the past, before the administrative reform by the Siamese government, each *muang* in Lanna was governed by the Chao. Under the Chao there were 5 major nobles called Chao Kan and 32 officers called Kao Sanam Luang. In Mae Chaem spirit cult there is a medium called *tiinang*, normally an old woman, who is selected to be a “body” for Poh Chao Luang to possess. The medium thus is seen as a representative of the Lord. Under the medium, there is an officiant (*tang kaw*), usually a man of the same lineage, whose role is to organise the ritual, place food offerings to the spirit, and be a mediator between the medium and its members in the possession ritual, that is to ask questions on behalf of members. He may be regarded as the closest noble of the Chao. Under the medium and officiant, each spirit cult contains a fixed number of persons who hold the position of Chao Kan. The Chao Kan position is handed down

matrilineally but only to the youngest daughter who inherits the house¹⁷. At the worship ritual, those who inherit the position of Chao Kan should attend. Only the medium, the officiant and Chao Kan can share the “leftover” food after offered to Poh Chao Luang, which is believed to be auspicious food. Apart from this, however, Chao Kan do not have any other precise role in the ritual.

The Chao as a Healer: Legitimising and Maintaining Power through Healing Ritual

The power of Chao and the power of spirit overlap and mutually enhance one another. The power of Chao is used to strengthen the power of guardian spirit. At the same time, the power of Chao is maintained through the discourses and performances of spirit cults.

In the past the power of Chao was legitimised mainly through the political authority, but, interestingly, at present the power of Chao (as a guardian spirit) is legitimised through healing. The spirits of the Chao and the nobles have now become magical and powerful “healers”. They are believed to be able to see the past, know history, connect the past with the present and mediate between the human and spirit world. Through possession ritual, Poh Chao Luang diagnoses and suggests ailments. Thus it can be said that illness is used to confirm the power and existence of Poh Chao Luang. As one villager said,

I know Poh Chao Luang will never disappear. Nobody could ignore him, even the young generation. Poh Chao Luang will bring them back, eventually. Look at Mon, he left the village many years ago. Now he has stomach-ache and has tried a number of remedies and been to many hospitals but finally he has to return home to perform a ritual to Poh Chao Luang and apologise to the spirit.

¹⁷ However, in some cases, a person becomes Chao Kan because their ancestors were “*phii ka*” (witches) and in order to be freed from being a witch they had to practice food taboos for three years and three months and three days under the control of Poh Chao Luang. They would then be able to expel the witch from themselves, and Poh Chao Luang would accept them into his cult as one of his Chao Kan.

Poh Chao Luang complained that Mon ignored his relatives and ancestors as well as Poh Chao Luang after he left the village, so he called him back by giving him stomach-ache.

The power of Poh Chao Luang is important for the villagers, especially when they face a disaster. In August 2002, an enormous flood and landslide occurred in Baan Yang Luang. Many houses were destroyed but nobody was killed. The villagers told me that at the time the flood was coming, everybody could not think of anything else but beg Poh Chao Luang to protect them. After the flood, a possession ritual was performed. Through his medium, Poh Chao Luang confirmed how hard he had tried to help the villagers to survive the disasters. The villager who attended the possession ritual told the story to me;

Poh Chao Luang said “Certainly, I was so tired. Everybody, here and there, needed help”. That night when the flood came people in Baan Tap village heard a loud noise like a drum. We also heard the noise. We thought the noise came from their village. They also thought the noise came from us. Poh Chao Luang said the noise you heard was from him. He ordered his officers to hit the drum so somebody could come to help us and warn us that the water was coming.

It was a miracle. If we do not have Poh Chao Luang we would not have survived.

Not only is the power of Poh Chao Luang maintained and emphasised among the villagers but also occasionally by outsiders. A villager told me a story about a lecturer in a university in Bangkok who works with an NGO to develop and maintain traditional culture in Mae Chaem. He is also a major sponsor of the temple reconstruction in Baan Yang Luang village.

Ajarn Pitoon had cancer, but after he worshipped Poh Chao Luang he was healed. Now you can see that he is healthy. That’s why he comes to refurbish our temple to thank and pay respect to Poh Chao Luang.

During the fieldwork I myself also experienced an illness which was turned into a strategy to convince me of the power of Poh Chao Luang. One day after I attended the spirit worship at the shrine of Younger Brother Poh Chao Luang I got severe diarrhea. My host mother suspected it might have been caused by Poh Chao Luang because I participated “too much” in the ritual. She said;

Others [outsiders] only observe the ritual and take some photos but you helped them cooking and washing dishes. Poh Chao Luang may think that you are a new resident here so he wants you to inform him. You should bring a pair of chickens to the shrine and apologise to him, tell him your purpose in being here and ask him to protect you.

This happened after I had stayed in the village for almost half a year. When other villagers heard about my diarrhea they told me; “Poh Chao Luang just wants to know you.” Later, at the possession ritual, the medium asked me to introduce myself to her in front of other attendants (even though we had already known each other in a “normal” situation when she was not being possessed). Then, Poh Chao Luang (the medium) tied a sacred thread to my wrists to welcome me as a daughter of Mae Nee (my host mother) and a descendant (*luuklaan*) of Poh Chao Luang.

Conclusion

The chapter has investigated the political history of Mae Chaem in relation to the history of Chiang Mai and Lanna Kingdom. I found that the traditional political system is expressed and reproduced through the spirit cult practices in Mae Chaem. The identity of the Guardian Spirit in Mae Chaem (Poh Chao Luang) is recreated as the reincarnation of the Chao, whose position ceased with the administrative reform by the Siamese King. The creation of the spirit’s identity reproduces and maintains the power of Chao and consequently the ideology of the *muang*. Moreover, they are maintained in the organisation of the matrilineal spirit cult system and the rituals associated with it. On the other hand, it can also be argued that the power of the Chao is, at the same time,

used to strengthen the organisation of the spirit cult system. In other words, the power of the guardian spirit is legitimised by the power of Chao.

Why do Mae Chaem people try to maintain and reproduce the power of the Chao? It is helpful to consider this within the context of globalisation in Southeast Asia. The consequence of the process of globalisation is that the boundaries which have separated communities and states are now increasingly permeable, and the identities of individuals and groups are less certain (Tong and Lian 2003). According to Yamashita (2003: 4), the increase of new lifestyles among the urban middle classes is a remarkable feature of Southeast Asia in the present day. “Young, well-educated middle-class city dwellers, who only a few decades ago firmly believed that they belonged to national and local communities, now perceive that they may have more in common with the middle classes in the older industrialised countries than with their own fellow countrymen on the periphery” (Yamashita 2003:4).

The nation-state shares a common goal with globalisation in homogenising the diversity of communities. However, because of its homogenising tendency, it is in danger of losing the distinctiveness on which its identity and existence are dependent. Consequently, there arises cultural resistance in the communities to preserve their identities and “negotiate a meaningful life space or position themselves within a situation of power” (Chun 1996:69 cited in Tong and Lian 2003: 45). Tong and Lian (2003), state that the connection between national and communal cultures can be seen as centre-periphery relations. While national culture emanates from the centre and is homogenised, communal culture is peripheral and resistant to such homogenisation.

Being in contact with the lowland communities and through negotiations with researchers, government officials and NGO workers, Mae Chaem people became conscious of their own ethnic identity and their distinctive cultural heritage. During the past decade, there were many “traditional revival” projects ran in Mae Chaem, especially in Baan Yang Luang where I conducted my fieldwork. The organisation of local herbalists and traditional healers was established by a medical doctor who worked with NGOs. The traditional weaving of clothes which had nearly been abandoned was promoted by an NGO that introduced the Mae Chaem style of weaving into the market. The heritage temple in the village was restored by an NGO who found sponsors from

private companies, celebrities, and the rich from Bangkok. Several documentaries were filmed in the village, showing the Northern Thais' (the *muang*) traditional rituals which are still maintained in Mae Chaem. Finally, "home-stay" tourism was introduced to the village on the basis of its traditional reputation. All these projects encouraged people to rethink about their own identity.

I therefore understand the reproduction of history in Mae Chaem spirit cults as a contest in a changing society. The historical experiences and memories of the Chao and the *muang* are seen to sustain their identities and challenge the centralised autonomy and homogenous creation of the nation-state. Furthermore, I argue that the power of Chao which was legitimised through his governing authority is now strengthened in the healing cults. In other words, illness and healing management are used to maintain the power of spirit or the power of Chao. Consequently, this will also maintain the community identity.

It is not only through the spirit cult rituals that the power of spirit and Chao is maintained. Apparently, it is embedded in the practices and interrelationships in everyday life. The common saying which the villagers use to introduce themselves is "*khon baan nee tue phii*" which literally means "people of this village respect and believe in spirit". This is an expression of Mae Chaem religion and cosmology in that they are people who believe that various kinds of spirit in their cosmology control moral relations in the society. Furthermore, when the villagers say they "believe in spirit", they, to some extent, intend to refer to Poh Chao Luang in particular. As stated above, the most important spirit in Mae Chaem, and the focus of the villagers, is Poh Chao Luang. Therefore the saying above is also to emphasise their faith in Poh Chao Luang. Furthermore, the saying also stresses solidarity in the community, for instance, "we, [people of Mae Chaem], respect and believe in Poh Chao Luang who govern the *muang*"

In the previous chapter, I have shown that the villagers talk about kinship in terms of spirit, as they refer to people of the same lineage as "people of the same spirit" (*phii diaw kan*). In this chapter, however, we can see that the phrase denotes other meanings as well, apart from kin relationship. As stated above, Poh Chao Luang is regarded as the head ancestral spirit as well as the territorial guardian spirit. Therefore "people of

the same spirit (Poh Chao Luang)” are those who hold and descent from the same spirit as well as those who are governed under the same spirit. In conclusion, “*phii diaw kan*” is a concept by which villagers indicate their identities as people who descend from the same origin, share the same history of the *muang*, and are protected by the same Chao in the same territory.

In the next chapter I will present more details of the process in which hierarchy and power relationships are constructed in spirit rituals through illness experiences and healing management.

The Welcoming Ritual, the Feast of the *muang*, and the “Bribe”:

Manipulation and Negotiation of Power through Spirit Worship Rituals

Introduction

Before the administrative reform in the reign of the king Rama V (1868-1910), Thai political structure was based on a feudal system which contain mainly two classes; (1) aristocrats (the Chao (Lord) and noble), (2) the commoners and farmers. In the present time, after the political reform, however, this social structure has been replaced by a division between the rich (government, politicians, and businessmen) and the poor (farmers and workers). In Mae Chaem, notions of feudalism are, to some extent, continued in the spirit cult. Among the good spirits there is a hierarchy, a division of authority and duty in a defined territory. The spiritual world reflects the socio-political structure of Northern Thai society, in that each village, each district, and each city has its own guardian spirit. The Guardian Spirit is regarded as the image of a feudal lord who governs matrilineal members (see chapter 3). Furthermore, the spirit cult is structured hierarchically. The medium as the representative of the spirit holds the highest position, followed by the officiant, the *chao kan*¹, and the musicians respectively. The structure is made visible and given emphasis in rituals.

This chapter focuses on those rituals which are related to the Guardian Spirit (Poh Chao Luang), including the spirit worship, sacrifice and healing rituals. My aim is to investigate how the hierarchy and the spirit's power are expressed, constituted, and

¹ *Chao kan* are those who are believed to be descendants of the historical nobles of Poh Chao Luang (see chapter 3). This position is handed down from mother to the youngest daughter. In some case the *chao kan* may be selected by Poh Chao Luang through the possession ritual.

reproduced in the spirit rituals. Moreover, I explore the dynamics and complexity of the power relationships between the spirit and human beings. In particular, the chapter examines the way in which the power hierarchy is negotiated in daily life through the process of healing management and illness explanation.

***Hub Toan* : The Welcoming Ritual**

The Welcoming (*Hub Toan*) is a ritual performed for Poh Chao Luang to welcome the spirit to the shrine twice a year: at the Northern Thai New Year (in April) and at the beginning of the Buddhist Lent (in August). No animal slaughtering is required in this ritual. Members gather at the shrine to pay respect to the spirit. A medium usually attends the ritual at the New Year and becomes possessed. It is a time when Poh Chao Luang visits (by possessing the medium at his shrine) his descendants in a joyful atmosphere. However, at the Buddhist Lent no possession ritual is normally performed and only some members gather at the shrine to offer a pair of chickens to the spirit.

The spirit possession is a typical performance for the Welcoming in which people can communicate directly to the spirit. On other occasions the possession ritual is not performed in public but in the medium's house, in which personal matters, such as illness and suffering are concerned. However, at the traditional New Year, it is a special occasion for people to gather, meet and spend time together, and therefore is a good time for the spirit to "visit" its members. Furthermore, the New Year is regarded as a critical and liminal period between the old "life" and a beginning of the new "life"². In Mae Chaem there are several rituals performed during the New Year to ensure an auspicious and prosperous life. The Welcoming at the New Year is thus considered to be a special time for the Poh Chao Luang to bless its members. In turn the members pay respect to the spirit (the medium) by washing her with lustral water³. Moreover, the

2 There is a ritual called "Lon Sangkara" (literally means "floating life"), performed on the traditional New Year as a symbol that one's life in the past year has come to its end and has to be floated in the river, in order to begin the new life in the coming year. The details are discussed in chapter 5.

3 The typical ritual in traditional New Year, practiced in Mae Chaem, as elsewhere in Thailand, is called *dam hua*. People pay respect to the elders by pouring lustral water on their hands, and the elders bless them luck in return. Therefore, in the Welcoming ritual, Poh Chao Luang, as the great ancestor, is also paid respect by the lustral water.

ritual is crucial for strengthening the solidarity of the lineage cult. In the case of the Eldest Poh Chao Luang, moreover, it is also to maintain the spirit's territory. Consequently, it is to recreate the identity of the *muang* (domain) and reproduce the power of the spirit in a collective sense as the Lord of the *muang* or the head of the lineage. Therefore, when performing a possession ritual in public, the medium presents a special and different role compared to the usual possession performed for individual purposes. What I am interesting in is how people, in particular the medium, manage to reproduce such ideology.

The Ethnography

Members of the spirit cult gathered at the shrine in the morning of 18 April 2003. It was the Welcoming of the Eldest Poh Chao Luang, therefore representatives of each family from every village in Mae Chaem attended the rite at the main shrine of the Eldest Spirit. They were waiting for the spirit to visit and possess the medium. It was a time for Mae Chaem inhabitants to meet each other and celebrate New Year together. The officiants of every Poh Chao Luang (of every lineage cult), the singers, and the musicians climbed up the shrine and sat in the balcony, prepared for the possession. Other members sat on the ground inside a hall built near the shrine. The medium sat in the crowd among the old women on the ground. However, everybody avoided sitting in front of the medium, to avoid blocking the way for the spirit to come and possess her.

The Possession

The major officiant⁴ of the Eldest Poh Chao Luang prayed to the Buddha, then he informed and invited Poh Chao Luang to visit his descendants. The musicians took up their instruments (a flute and a traditional guitar-like instrument). After the officiant finished his praying, the musicians and singers began to sing a specific Northern Thai style hymn (*saw*), to inform Poh Chao Luang that his descendants had come to pay

⁴ In some lineages there are more than one officiant. If the main officiant does not live in Baan Yang Luang where the spirit shrine is located, the spirit may allow a man in the village to be his minor officiant. However, he can only perform or organise a minor ritual.

respect to him on the New Year and beg him to possess the medium. The hymn needed to be sung several times by different singers until the spirit was satisfied and came to possess. While the musicians and the singers carried on with their songs, the medium waited quietly. Finally, the medium gradually presented some signs of possession. She was yawning a couple of times, wiping her face with a towel, shaking for a while then she suddenly stood up and climbed up the shrine. At that time, all the singers and musicians stopped their performance. Everybody was quiet and watched the medium. Inside the shrine she changed her cloth to wear the traditional male cloth, then came out to sit in the centre of the balcony, surrounded by the officiants and musicians. The medium changed her manner. She began to sound and act like an autocratic lord holding audience before his court.

As the lord of the *muang*, the New Year was a good opportunity for “him” to present his role as the governor in front of all his members. In other words, the Welcoming in the traditional New Year was a chance for the medium to reproduce, maintain and strengthen her power and the power of the spirit as well as the notion of the *muang*. The medium of the Eldest Spirit chose to point out problems which had happened in the *muang* (Mae Chaem district) last year and reminded members to be aware of them.

Poh Chao Luang [through the medium]: How is the New Year, do you have fun?

The Officiant: Well, it is fine. We do have fun, although it is not as much fun as in the past. Things have changed as time goes by. It becomes modern now. Therefore we just have fun as it is.

P: *Baan muang* “*samai*” (The *muang* becomes “modern”) don’t you know that, officiant?

O: [responded with no word but smiled hesitatingly].

P: Do you know that, officiant? The *muang* is “hot” (this implies that the district is in trouble). It is “hot” inside and outside. The *muang* is at war. We are surrounded by “enemies”. It is easy to die nowadays, no matter what you are doing, standing, sitting, or sleeping. There is no safety at all.

O: Yes

P: You see, bloodshed, don’t you? The *muang* is so “hot”.

At that time, when the Thai government was clamping down on the drug trade, a large number of drug dealers were killed, either by the government or the drug mafia. In Mae Chaem, many people involved in the drug business were killed. It was a very hot issue during that time. Therefore the medium picked this topic to stress in public. As the lord, “he” was concerned with the problems in the district and opined that the society had become “modern” (*samai*) therefore many people use and sell drugs which bring the district in trouble.

Similarly, in the Welcoming for the Younger Poh Chao Luang which was performed on a different day, the question of modernity was also discussed

Officiant: Dear Poh Chao Luang, do many of your people come today? This New Year is such a hot year, isn't it? There is not much rain, this year.

Poh Chao Luang: [suddenly spoke with a loud noise] You have to perform the *Bucha Bann* ritual (Village Blessing), don't you know, Officiant?

O: Well, I am going to...

P: This year I haven't seen any ritual, have I!

O: Oh, there was a flood this year, and we did perform the Sueb Chata Luang at the temple (The village prolonging life ritual). After that the village cooled down. Actually, I was thinking of doing the Bucha Baan, but we didn't have time yet. So many things had happened. After New Year, I will find a day to do it, then.

P: You ask for rain but you don't worship

O: We were busy after the flood. We normally perform the Bucha Baan rite every year. I never forget. But this year so many things happened after the flood, many funerals, many busy ceremonies. We were too busy.

P: Another thing I want to comment, some of you made an offering to the Violent Death Spirit (*phii tai hong*) inside the temple. I tell you what, that is wrong. That is not a proper way to do it.

One of the members asked: You mean the spirit could not receive it?

(Her son died by a thunderbolt, and thus is believed to be a Violent Death Spirit)

P: Of course, he could not eat. You have to give an offering outside the temple.

The mother: But the monk said making an offering at any place is the same. He said

we don't need to make an offering outside the temple.

O: Some monks like to complain. He said it is troublesome and wastes his time to receive offerings both inside and outside the temple. He did not understand that in some cases, they really need to give an offering outside the temple, because their relatives cannot receive the foods. These monks are too young. They are born after us, after all the elders. They do not understand what is right or wrong. They are our descendants. They should remember that we, the elders, perform the ordination for him.

P: I am not happy with people at the present time. You ignore many rituals, especially at funerals. You don't follow the tradition. You have to maintain the tradition.

The musician: yes some rituals I saw when I was young have disappeared.

Nowadays, our *muang* has become "modern" (*samai*).

O: I agree. People nowadays are too simple, as you say, Poh Chao Luang.

P: Everything is changed, faster and faster. That is why our *muang* is in trouble.

The singer: Because we throw away many old traditions. Just like those Karen, they throw away their ancestral spirits, nowadays their spirits return to harm them.

P: There are so many elders here, but nobody says anything. Why don't you warn the young generation?

O: We cannot warn them. Children nowadays do not listen.

The musician: Yes. Nowadays children study in the school. They say they know everything. Nobody likes an old tree.

The singer: That is why we, the elders, do not speak. We just keep quiet and look at them.

P: Why don't you ask those children "from whom do you inherit those houses and lands?"

The singer: They think they can find their own way. Our *muang* is modern now, isn't it? (He said sarcastically)

Others laughed hesitatingly.

We can see that the ritual was a chance for the villagers, in particular the elders to discuss problems within the village. The elders used this chance to complain and teach their descendants through the possession ritual. They stressed the obligations that children should have toward their parents, and how important it is for parents to have

power over their children. The problems within the village were understood as consequences of the weakness of the parent-child relationship. “Modernity” was raised as a main factor that changes society. As seen from the conversation presented above, the elders complained that after children “go to school” they do not listen to the elders, and tend to reject traditional cultures. The young were present at the ritual, and listened to the complaint without any argument, although they may not totally agree with the elders. However, outside the ritualised context the young sometimes argue with the elders that society nowadays has changed, so do their lifestyles. After the transition from an agricultural to an industrialised society, Thai society has undergone drastic social and cultural transformation. The villagers have less time to rest during the agricultural cycle, consequently less concern with the traditional rituals.

According to Vadathanaphuti (1984), because of the conflicts and contradictions between parents and children, the spirit cult serves to produce and reproduce the ideology of subordination among junior members. The guardian spirits (Poh Chao Luang) and the ancestral spirits (*phii puu nyaa*) are the spirit of the elders which look after the children and grandchildren in the lineage, who in turn have certain obligations toward them. It is believed that the ancestor spirits, which are, according to Turton understood as “the jurally superior kinsmen” (1972:237), as well as Poh Chao Luang “are capable of punishing members of the lineage for certain wrongs, for example, quarrelling...failure to sacrifice, improper sacrifice or disrespectful treatment of the spirit shrine” (Turton 1972: 233). The belief in the power of these spirits to punish and reward, and the ritual obligations toward them, reinforces the ideology of subordination toward the elders, the superiority of the elders, and the solidarity of the lineage, the family and the *muang*.

At the end of the Welcoming, furthermore, the power of the spirits was emphasised through the sacredness of the ritual. As stated above, the traditional New Year was the beginning of the new cycle of life so many rituals were performed to ensure an auspicious renewal. Poh Chao Luang was regarded as the most powerful spirit so, in the Welcoming, “he” was asked to sprinkle lustral water (*sompoi*⁵ water) to the members of

⁵ *Sompoi* is the herb used in everyday life both as medicine and food. For the Northern Thais, *sompoi* is very famous as a “magical” herb. It is believed that planting the *sompoi* tree in the North of the house can protect against malevolent spirits. Furthermore, its pod is grilled and put in water to make lustral water. The sacred water is used in almost all rituals. Sick person may drink or bath

the spirit cults to bless them luck and health. Furthermore, everyone prepared sand, cotton thread, whisky, and water with the *Sompoi* herb, all of which were regarded as auspicious for life, for the spirit to bless. They took those items back home to keep in the family to enhance their prosperity throughout the year⁶. Moreover, in the Welcoming for the Younger Poh Chao Luang, because of fewer amounts of members, the spirit (medium) spend longer time with the members to chatted and drank whisky and also had enough time to tie sacred thread on everybody's wrists and bless them one by one.

In addition, the Welcoming is an occasion to pay respect to the spirit, as well as its representatives (the medium and the officiants). The typical ritual in the traditional New Year, practice in Mae Chaem, as elsewhere in Thailand, is to pay respect to the elders by pouring lustral water on their hands (*dam hua*), and the elders will bless them with good luck in return. The mediums and officiants were invited to sit on the chair prepared in the middle of the compound in front of the spirit shrine, so the members could line up and poured lustral water on the medium's and officiant's hands to pay respect to them. In case of the Younger Poh Chao Luang, its medium did not just have the lustral water poured on her hands like that of the Eldest Spirit, but was bathed with the lustral water all over her body, at the shrine. The bathing showed great respect to the spirit. Some elders were also bathed by their close relatives during the traditional New Year in order to pay respect.

sacred water to be healed. The monk, the healer, and the medium may sprinkle sacred water on clients to bless harm. In the New Year, young people bring *sompoi* water to pay respect to elders.

⁶ The *sompoi* water, after being blessed is believed to be lustral water which they use to sprinkle on the head and keep the rest for their families. The cotton thread is used in many auspicious rituals to tie on the wrists for keeping the *khwan* (life essence) within the body. The whisky, after being blessed by the medium is said to be a "medicine", which is good to drink. Finally the sand is a symbol of longevity because of its unchangeable appearance. Therefore, the blessing sand is thrown on the ground around the house for luck and health.

The Welcoming of the Younger Poh Chao Luang



Fig 4.1 The spirit medium waits to be possessed. Fig. 4.2 The possessed medium dances to the shrine.



Fig. 4.3 Members wait for Poh Chao Luang. Fig. 4.4 Poh Chao Luang comes out after changing cloth.



Fig. 4.5, 4.6 The members bath Poh Chao Luang with the lustral water to show great respect.



Fig. 4.7 Poh Chao Luang ties sacred thread on everybody's wrists to bless them luck and health.

Liang: The Sacrifice Ritual

Now let me present the sacrifice rituals, and discuss how the power of Poh Chao Luang is reproduced and strengthened in the performance of offering. There are many rituals which contain a sacrificial performance, such as the annual sacrifice, the triennial sacrifice and the healing ritual. In these rituals, an animal (a pig, a cattle or chicken) is slaughtered at the shrine as an offering for the spirit.

The **annual sacrifice** is performed once a year and is attended by a representative of each family in the lineage. Chicken, a bottle of rice whisky, joss sticks and flowers are offered to the spirits. After the sacrifice is performed, food is consumed by those who attend the ceremony.

The **triennial sacrifice** is performed every three years at the spirit shrine. A large-scale ceremony is held⁷ and a large amount of food (pigs, buffaloes, etc.) is offered. The offerings made to the spirits vary according to the identity of the spirits. Some lineage spirits may prefer cows; others may prefer buffaloes.

The Eldest Poh Cao Luang is not only regarded as the head ancestral spirit of a lineage but also the tutelary or territorial spirit of Mae Chaem which protects and governs all the inhabitants. Therefore, the triennial sacrifice for the Eldest Poh Chao Luang is regarded as a major worship for the *muang* (domain) and is attended by a representative of every family living in Mae Chaem. It is called *liang muang*, literally means “the feast of the *muang*.” All the members perform the sacrifice to show their respect and to ensure peace, prosperity, health, and happiness for themselves and for the *muang* in a collective sense.

The annual and triennial rites are attended by all members of the clan, unless a group of clan members establish their own shrine at another location after permission is given by their ancestral spirit (Davis 1984b). Each household of the same matrilineage has to

⁷ In some villages a dance was performed by the lineage members. However, according to the villagers, those who dance at the triennial sacrifice are people of different ethnic group. Nowadays in many villages in Northern Thai, such a triennial sacrifice is no longer made, because, among other things, it involves a large sum of money.

prepare a basic ritual offering; a pair of “*suay*” (an offering-set)⁸ for the spirit. Even if one cannot attend the sacrifice ritual he/she should give “*suay*” to the officiant to represent their respect, otherwise, the spirit would suspect their ignorance. The rites have to be held at a prescribed date in the ninth lunar calendar month of the Northern Thai⁹-which is June or July¹⁰. The officiant has to find the appropriate day for the sacrifice. Different dates are suitable for different kinds of food offerings the spirits would accept¹¹. If the offering is not made according to the date, the sacrifice may be incomplete because it fails to fulfil the spirit’s request (see Appendix A for the detail of the spirit’s consumption day).

The sacrifice ritual for the ancestral spirits (*phii puu nyaa*) is similar to that of Poh Chao Luang (a pig is slaughtered every three years and a pair of chickens in the other two years). It is called “*liang phii suum*”. Every three years, in the ninth lunar calendar month, after the sacrifice for Poh Chao Luang, a pig is slaughtered at the Origin House where the ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) is believed to stay. People of the same minimal lineage attend. According to the villagers, the ritual is a time for villagers to meet and strengthen their relationships.

Another occasion when the sacrifice needs to be performed for Poh Chao Luang is when one becomes sick, thus a **healing ritual**. In the healing ritual one is required to slaughter a pig at the spirit’s shrine. It is different from the annual and triennial sacrifice in that it has no fixed date. It is only performed after one is sick, as a remedy to heal. Moreover, the healing ritual is often performed as an offering after the “bribe” (see the discussion below).

8 A cone-shape container made of banana leaf contain flowers, joss-sticks, betel leaves, and slices of areca nut

9 Iddhichiracharas (1980) found that the annual rite for *phii caw naih* (The Lord Spirit) is also held at the same time while Davis (1984b) found in Nan that it can be performed from the beginning of the sixth to the ninth month. However, it may be confused with the worship after the Northern Thai traditional New Year, which is held on the sixth month as well.

10 See appendix A for the detail of Northern Thai lunar calendar

11 For example, on the first waxing day it is said the spirits will “eat” spirits, which means the spirit will eat nothing on this day but spirit. If one makes an offering with, for example chicken or pork, to the spirit on this day the spirit will not accept the food, thus one may not be healed. The second day of the month is believed to be a “day of spirit eating human”, therefore; it is dangerous to make offerings on this day. On the third day, the spirit is believed to “eat” chicken, on the sixth day it will “eat” pig, or any four-legged-animal, etc.

Although I have divided rituals which include sacrifice into three kinds: annual sacrifice, triennial sacrifice, and healing rite, the villagers do not have any specific name for each sacrifice ritual. They call every ritual which includes a slaughter at the spirit shrine “*liang*” (feast). For instance, the villagers refer to a certain ritual as follows;

The diviner found I have to *liang* (offer a feast) at the Dong shrine.

Today people from Omkood village come to *liang* Poh Chao Luang.

I *keun wai* (had bribed) Poh Chao Luang, so I have to *liang* (feast) him before the New Year.

However, the only sacrifice ritual which has a special name is that of the triennial sacrifice rite for the Eldest Poh Chao Luang. It is called “*liang muang*” (literally means “the feast of the *muang*”).

Nevertheless, although the purpose of each sacrificial ritual is different, the structure, form and order of the performances are very similar.

The Sacrifice Ritual

For the triennial sacrifice ritual, a large crowd of matrilineage members gathers at the shrine in the morning of the appointed day. In case of healing rituals, only the sick person (if he or she is able to attend), his or her family, close relatives and neighbours who are asked for help (slaughtering and cooking) and *chao kan* (as witnesses) attend the ritual. The main performance of the ritual is to slaughter the animal and to share the feast between the spirit and the members or the family and relatives of the sick person (in case of healing ritual). When a pig is sacrificed, a collection of cash is solicited from members' households.¹² This is to pay for a pig to be sacrificed. There is treasurer who

¹² The pig usually used in the sacrifice ritual is not a pig normally consumed in everyday life. It has to be a black male pig. This type of pig is normally fed by the Karen village nearby. It cost 750-1000 baht, depending on its size. The sacrifice for the younger brother Poh Chao Luang, each household has to pay 50 baht. Each house which has at least one person belonging to the lineage has to pay 50 baht. If there is more than one person, however, only 50 baht is collected. In the triennial sacrifice for the eldest Poh Chao Luang, which is also the “*muang* sacrifice rite”, a buffalo is slaughtered. It cost about 10000-20000 baht. Every household in Mae Chaem pays 25 baht for the contribution, (except those who are different ethnicity, such as Karen and Lawa).

records and holds cash offerings made by members at the time of the annual/triennial sacrifice. Contributions are also taken from member households which have moved to distant areas but have not yet formed their own clan by building new shrines. In addition, people of different lineage who have “registered” in the cult through the “replace ritual” (described in chapter 7) are included¹³.

Normally the ritual is performed in the morning, after breakfast. While participants came to the spirit shrine, the officiant cleaned up the shrine preparing for the ritual, while other men cleared the compound. Women prepared spices and other ingredients for cooking and made bowls from banana-leaf as containers of offering food. Old women prepared the “leading tray”¹⁴ (*kan num*) which was placed in the spirit shrines at the beginning of the rite as well as a set of “betel nut trays”¹⁵ as the appetiser for the spirit.

The officiant placed the “leading tray”, a betel nut dish, and a pair of coconuts inside the shrines, prayed to the Buddha and then made an offering to Poh Chao Luang. Old men gathered inside the shrine chatted with the officiant while waiting for young men to slaughter the pig and women to cook food. Normally only men are allowed to climb up and sit in the shrine. The power of spirits overlaps with male authority and is constituted through the ritual behaviour. The shrine is a space of power, a space for males, while females are thought to be lower and thus have to sit and do their work on the ground near the slaughtering area. Old men gather inside the shrine with the officiant who is the leader of the ritual and is closest to the spirit and thus to the power. Young men usually sit on the ground with women unless the old men invite them to sit in the shrine. Young men are expected to do the rough work, to kill the pig, which is understood to be a sinful act according to the Buddhist. Therefore, we can see that age

13 Briefly, the “Replace” ritual is one remedy after one gets sick. The illness is a “message” from one’s dead relative of a different lineage to ask the sick person to “replace” its position in such lineage. Therefore, the sick person has to perform a sacrifice to the spirit of another lineage he or she has to enter. See chapter 7.

14 The “leading tray” is also called “major tray” (*kan luang*). It is used in almost all rituals for the leader of the ritual to pray to the spirit at the beginning of the rite. Normally old women know best the details of ingredients. Whenever a ritual is performed this task is for old women to do while younger women observe. On the tray there are eight “*suay tian*” (cone-shape container with flowers, joss-sticks and popped rice), four “*suay maak*” (cone-shape container with betel leaves and slices of areca), red and white clothes, shell (as a tradition money), small amount of money (32 baht), a pair of boiled chickens, small balls of glutinous rice and a small bottle of whisky.

15 The tray contains betel leaves, slices of areca, tobacco, fermented tea leaves.

hierarchy is also central to the ritual. The only woman who is allowed to sit in the shrine is the medium, but only when she is possessed in the Welcoming at the traditional New Year. In that ritual she has the highest position and power.

While the officiant offered the “leading tray”, other men made a “taboo indicator” called *talaew*¹⁶. It is a protection symbol made from bamboo, woven in a six-angle-star shape. In the sacrifice ritual, one big (about a metre wide) and four small (a handful size) *talaew* were made. The pig was stabbed in the neck. Its blood was painted on the *talaew*. The biggest *talaew* was tied with the pigtail and placed behind the shrine. Another four small *talaew* were placed at the four corner of the compound as a “fence” to indicate the boundary of the ritual¹⁷. The shrine was then ritually “closed”. People inside the area were prohibited to go out, and people from outside were not allowed to enter.



Fig. 4.8 Talaew painted with the pig's blood.



Fig. 4.9 Men slaughter the pig at the shrine.

After the *talaew* was placed, men slaughtered and boiled the pig while women prepared to cook. The pig had to be slaughtered at the place to present the spirit with fresh meat. There was a case when somebody added meat from a market with the slaughtered pig at the shrine which, according to the villagers, made Poh Chao Luang get angry and thus punished an old woman who died afterwards. The villager explained:

¹⁶ Literally, *talaew* means the eyes of an eagle. The Lue (one of Tai ethnic groups in Northern Thailand) believes the *talaew* can protect animals and baby from the eagle (Nantayana 2004). Payomyong and Gesphrom (1996) explain that *talaew* is made as the eagle eye which has powerful vision, thus can watch out for bad spirits. In Mae Chaem, as elsewhere in Northern Thai, *talaew* is believed to frighten and keep out unauthorised spirits. It is put in front of the entrance of each house to protect against evil spirits.

¹⁷ According to Davis (1984b), in Nan, the villagers make a fence to surround the compound.

After the landslide disaster in August (2002), we performed a sacrifice for Poh Chao Luang to pay respect and present our thanks to him for protecting all of us from death. Somebody was afraid the pig would not be enough for all the attendants, so they added some pork from the market. Later, not long after the worship, Mae Pa, one of the “*chao kan*”, suddenly got sick and died. So we knew that Poh Chao Luang was angry. Mae Pa’s relatives tried to apologise and ask Poh Cao Luang for help, but he did not listen and let her die.

You cannot add any meat from outside. We have to slaughter the pig in front of Poh Chao Luang at his shrine, and use all the meat to cook. Even oil you cannot bring from home, you have to use oil from the pig. Poh Chao Luang said (once through a possession) “Don’t worry if the pig is not enough for everyone. Just share it equally no matter how small the pig you have brought. We all share it together. If we have less we eat less.” The most important thing is to kill the pig at the shrine to make sure the pork is fresh and only done for Poh Chao Luang.

In the past, consuming meat was regarded as a special occasion provided only in a feast such as at a wedding or funeral. The traditional New Year was the only time men went to hunt game in the forest. This game was special food to celebrate the New Year with their families. The sacrifice was therefore regarded as a special occasion. In particular, the meat provided for the spirit was considered to be the best way for the members to pay respect to their “Lord”. At present, after the road was constructed from the lowland city to Mae Chaem (a highland district) many markets were opened near the village. Consequently, it became easily to find meat and therefore it was consumed more often. The meaning of meat consumption has changed. Therefore, as mentioned above, in some cases, villagers bought pork from a market to add to the ritually slaughtered pig in the sacrifice. For those people, their concern was to prepare enough food for all those attending, while those who control the ritual tried to keep the ritual “sacred” by stressing that meat in the ritual was different from the meat consumed in everyday life. That is to say, it is not just to provide feast for the spirit, but the most important performance in the sacrifice is to have an animal slaughtered at the spirit’s shrine. As usual, to convince people about the importance of the tradition, illness or death of the

victim is interpreted as the consequence of the neglect or wrong performance of the ritual.

Another important point is that no foods can be tasted before serving the spirit. The order of food serving is very important for indicating the hierarchy. The spirit is regarded as the Lord of the *muang* or the Head of the lineage so nobody can be served before him. There was a case when a sick person tasted the food before making an offering; later her illness got worse so she had to perform the ritual again. On the other hand, the remainders after the spirit has eaten are believed to be auspicious.

A hierarchical order of eating is also practiced in everyday life. Within the family, children should not eat before their parents. In particular, a father should be the first person who starts the meal. When there is a guest joining a meal, the wife lets her husband eat with the guests and she eats the leftover food. In addition, each year after the new rice is harvested, it cannot be consumed unless one performs a “new rice offering” (*taan kao mai*) for the parents. According to the myths told among Mae Chaem villagers, parents are regarded as “gods” who are the most appropriate to consume the new rice before any other family members. After the parents, the new rice should be offered to ancestors (through the monks in the temple). After all those rituals are performed the new rice then can be consumed normally in the family.

Turning again to the ritual, while young women cooked, old women were sitting, chatting and chewing betel nuts. After all the food was cooked, old women arranged trays of offerings. The distribution, however, was not simple. Each lineage had a particular number of trays to prepare, depending on the number of *chao kan* in the lineage. Basically each tray had to contain every part of the pig, i.e., the skin, meat, organs, heart, liver, intestine, etc. This was to symbolise that every invited spirit was feasted with the whole pig. However, Poh Chao Luang (the medium) and the officiant received larger portions, whereas the rest of the trays were equally distributed.



Fig. 4.10, 4.11 Women cook and arrange the trays of offering.

To make it clearer, I will give an example from the lineage I observed. Grilled organs and meat were divided into small piles. The first tray was for the medium. It contained the legs, a big bottle of whisky, two piles of the grilled organs and meat, two dishes of rice, and foods (soup and minced pork). The second tray was for the officiant which contained everything like the first tray, except that he got the head of the pig. The head was put in a basket, hung with the big *talaew* at the back of the shrine. Other trays contained only one pile of grilled organs and meat, one rice dish, one bowl of soup and one dish of minced pork, and a small bottle of whisky. The latter trays were for the singer, the musician, and the *chao kan*. Furthermore, the same amount prepared for the *chao kan* were served in another two baskets for the “servants” of Poh Chao Luang who were believed to look after the spirit’s elephants and horses¹⁸. It was believed that Poh Chao Luang, using a traditional means of transport, paraded from Chiang Dao Mount to the shrine by elephants and horses. Therefore the servants should be feasted along with the other spirits during the rite.

The trays were put in order. They represented hierarchical structure in the traditional political (feudal) system. The first tray for the medium was placed at the front, followed by the officiant’s tray, the *chao kan*’s, and the last two trays for the musician and singers. The baskets of the servants were put aside. The medium’s tray was believed to be taken by Poh Chao Luang, the Lord of the *muang*. Other trays were not specified for

¹⁸ Davis (1984b) finds in Nan province the villagers make a post and a small bamboo chain, which is supposedly for the spirits to tie up their elephants and horses. In Mae Chaem, however, the basket is simply put on the ground next to the shrine to make an offering for those spirit servants.

any spirit in particular. According to the officiant, all three Poh Chao Luang are invited every time when they perform the sacrifice. In addition, the spirits of the nobles, officers, soldiers and servants of the Lord (the spirit) are all invited.



Fig 4.12, 4.13 Offering trays are put in order reflecting the hierarchy in the cult.



Fig. 4.14 The trays are carried up to the shrine.



Fig. 4.15 The baskets are placed on the ground

outside the shrine for the elephants and horses servants.

Men inside the shrine carried those trays up to the shrine to make an offering to the spirits. The baskets, on the other hand, were placed on the ground outside the shrine for the elephants' and horses' servants. The offerings were left on the shrine for about half an hour for the spirits to finish the "essence" of the food. After a long pause the trays were carried down from the shrine. The owner of each tray (the officiant, the *chao kan*, the musician, and the singer) packed the remainders left by the spirits back home to share with their families. Normally the medium did not attend the sacrifice ritual, therefore somebody would bring the portion for her at home. On the other hand, if the singer, the musician and the *chao kan* do not attend the ritual, their foods would be shared among the participants of the rite. The baskets of the horse and elephant men did

not belong to any person in particular. Any man could be asked to make an offering on behalf of the members, and in turn he could take such a portion back home.



Fig. 4.16, 4.17, 4.18 The offerings are left on the shrine for the spirits to finish the “essence” of the food. While men wait on the shrine, women gather on the ground.

Eating remainders is believed to be auspicious, sacred and healthy. Therefore foods on the trays which are directly offered to the spirit are “special” and only a few people have a chance to eat them. This is another important point where hierarchy is affirmed. The officiant and the medium are in a higher position therefore they receive particular parts of the animal and also get larger portions of food. Other participants, however, are feasted with the rest of food at the site. Women and young men gathered on the ground and ate inside a hall, while old men gathered in the shrine.

It is believed that everyone who attends the rite has to share the food and drink. Whisky after being “drunk” by a spirit becomes “medicine”, thus everybody should drink, at least a small sip, or take some to sprinkle on the head and face if one cannot drink. Eating the same pig and drinking the same whisky as the spirit is to show that you have

participated in the ritual. One pig is shared among the members who then become the same person: the people of the same spirit (*phii diaw kan*).



Fig. 4.19 The foods are shared among people of the same spirit

After everybody had finished the feast, the officiant came down from the shrine to tie sacred thread for everybody on their wrists and bless them, as in the Welcoming at which the medium (the spirit) tied sacred thread for the members. This part of the ritual can be seen as a symbolic strengthening of the link between matrilineal members¹⁹.

Bribery (*keun*)²⁰ in The Healing Ritual

While the “*liang muang*” (triennial sacrifice) has to be performed at a particular date, healing rituals, on the other hand, can be performed at any time, depending on one’s illness. Nobody knows when it will happen and who will be the next person to perform the rite. When one becomes sick the villagers visit the diviner to find out the cause and remedy. Performing a sacrifice for Poh Chao Luang is one among several remedies suggested by the diviner. Commonly, the illness explanation is that “one is being punished by the spirit” and therefore needs to perform the *liang* (sacrifice ritual).

In some cases the diviner gives a precise reason why one has been punished, such as one has broken the social rules, behaved wrongly to the spirit, ignored the spirit (does not attend or perform a ritual for the spirit), or has had conflict with one’s family, etc.

¹⁹ In case of the healing ritual, however, it is also tied to ensure the *khwan* (life essence) stays inside the body.

²⁰ see chapter 2 footnote 5 for a discussion on the translation of the term “*keun*” into bribe

Many scholars similarly say that the ancestral spirit or Guardian Spirit punishes the members (with illness) in order to control labour (Turton 1972, Mougne 1984), to control land (Hale 1979), to control both land and labour (Vadathanaphuti 1984), to control female sexuality (Wijeyewardene 1977), and to strengthen the solidarity of society (Turton 1984).

Nevertheless, I found the healing rituals performed in Mae Chaem do not always follow the logic presented above. Not all the time the sacrifice ritual is understood to be a “punishment”. Instead, in many cases, the sacrifice becomes a power tool for the sick person to negotiate with the spirit and ask for its help. In other words, it is used as a “bribe” to force the spirit to help. It is very common that one bribes Poh Chao Luang before going to a hospital. Villagers believed that if you inform and bribe the spirit before going to the hospital, the spirit can help lessen the seriousness of the diagnosis and any treatment at the hospital. Sometimes the villagers bribe the spirit and ask it to protect them from danger when they leave the village.

To bribe (*keun wai*), one has to bring a pair of chickens, a bottle of whisky, and a small amount of money (20 baht), to the officiant and ask him to inform Poh Chao Luang at its shrine. This is to ask the spirit for help and if his wish is fulfilled he then performs a sacrifice in which a superior food, i.e., a pig, is offered. After the person assembles enough money to buy a pig he then finds a proper day (a day when the spirit accepts pork) to perform a sacrifice. Now we can see that the healing ritual is not always performed after divination. In other words, one is not always under the control of a diviner. One may decide to perform the sacrifice by oneself. Therefore, the previous logic of analysis that “illness is a punishment by spirit after one has broken the rule” is not the only explanation. Consequently, I suggest the relationship between the ancestral or Guardian Spirit and humans is complex and better be understood as a patron/client relationship.

Patron/client Relationships in the Spirit Cults

Considering the logic behind the healing ritual, (for instance, when and why it is performed) gives us a better understanding of spirit-human relationships. To go further

than saying the Guardian Spirit has power over its members, and that there is a hierarchical structure in the spirit cult, I argue that relationships between Poh Chao Luang and the cult members can be seen as a patron-client system.

Many studies find that the patron/client relationship is common in Thai social systems (see Pongsapitch and Kuwintarapanta 2002). Lucian M Hank (1962, 1975) suggested that the core of social structure in Thailand is constructed by an inequality and vertical relationship throughout the society. In addition, Rabibhadana (1975) stated that the patron-client system is rooted in the Thai belief in karma, merit, and reincarnation. Hierarchy is therefore seen as natural and normal. Consequently, the status hierarchy system constitutes social organisation. Andrew Turton (1978) and Hans-Dieter Evers (1979), on the other hand, argue that the patron-client system is relevant for analysing society at a micro level. It cannot explain the overall picture of social structure in Thailand.

While I argue that there is a reproduction of patron-client relationships in the spirit cult, through healing rituals in particular, I do not mean to study the healing ritual exclusively and generalise that Thailand social structure is a society based on hierarchy and patron/client relationships. Rather, the chapter understands rituals as manifestations of cultural continuity and processes in which patron/client and hierarchy are manifested in ritual as well as non-ritual behaviour in daily life. I am interested in the process by which “clients” manipulate the power they can access and make the power of spirits serve their interests. In particular, I am interested in bribery as a strategy that a sick person and his/her family use to control the spirits (and the system of the spirit cult).

According to Scott (1972), the patron-client relationship is an exchange relationship in which an individual of higher socio-economic status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection and/or benefits for a person of lower status (client) who reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron. A client avoids offending, having conflict or doing anything against the patron, so that he is not seen as an “enemy” and loses protection. For the client, the basic purpose of the patron-client contract is the provision of basic social guarantees of subsistence and security, such as, enough land to feed the family, subsistence help in case of sickness or accident, and minimum physical protection

against outsiders. The patron gets benefit as long as he takes responsibility for his clients' living.

According to Lyon (2002), patron-client relationship patterns emerge from asymmetrical relations of age within the family (i.e. father:son::elder brother:younger brother::mother-in-law:daughter-in-law etc). In Thai culture, respect and obedience to elders, trust in their wisdom and protection, and return of favours received, are highly valued. Underlying these ideas are concepts of mutual dependence and reciprocity, and the idea of being practically and morally indebted (*bunghun*). Wichiarajote (1975) characterises Thailand as an "affiliative society" in which people highly depend upon each other and find their security in dependence and patronage rather than in "individualism". He states that "the basic drive of individual behaviour is to establish extensive networks of personal relationships: these basic motivational drives are characterised by the need for friendship, love, warmth, and social acceptance" (1975: 118-9 cited in Mulder 1985: 86). As long as one grows up one depends on the goodness of others. One learns to reciprocate that goodness, first by being grateful and by showing recognition, later in life by providing goodness towards other persons who are expected to reciprocate. This mechanism of reciprocity and obligation cements the group, first of all the family, and further the community (Mulder 1985: 91-92).

Similar to the relation between the parent and child, there is a sense of gratitude and obligation from the cult members toward Poh Chao Luang as well as the ancestral spirits (*phii puu nyaa*). According to the healing ritual presented above, the spirit is regarded as the patron who is expected to protect its members from any harm and ensure their prosperous life. What is different, and should be noted, is that the spirit only can "act" through humans, either through its medium or through the diviner's words. The spirit cult members (clients), in return, pay respect by performing rituals and feasts for the spirit, taking care of its shrine (a representative of every family of each lineage is asked to clean up the compound and the shrine once or twice a year) and maintain the spirit cult system. Should the members ignore or behave wrongly to the spirit, they can be punished.

Nevertheless, a spirit's power has a relatively short time perspective and the contract with it needs to be continually renewed. In order to activate the spirit's protection the

worshipper has to initiate the action by paying respect and making a small offering (a pair of chickens, a bottle of whisky, and a small amount of money i.e., 20 baht). The worshipper then offers his terms of contract (*keun wai*): if the spirits fulfil his wishes he will come back and offer them a feast. The order of the invocation is always the same: one first pays respect and makes a small offering to attract attention, then makes a wish and a promise, and finally after being granted one's wishes one has to give the promised offering (*pai liang*). In short, a spirit needs to be bribed to be good.

Bribery is not only done for the Guardian Spirit (Poh Chao Luang) which is regarded as kinsmen, but also to other spirits. For example, if one finds his or her illness is caused by a malevolent spirit, one may not immediately go to make an offering to the spirit. Instead, one may bribe the malevolent spirit first, say, only if the spirit lets him or her recover from the illness, he or she would give a proper offering. To bribe the malevolent spirit, which is regarded as the lowest status spirit, a small ball of sticky rice mixed with the ashes, a tiny piece of meat, and a small piece of burnt firewood (instead of a candle) are prepared. These offerings are regarded as bad food, thus if the spirit wants to have a proper meal it should let go his or her illness. Normally a pair of chickens is offered to malevolent spirits as a proper food. This is similar to the bribery for Poh Chao Luang, when a chicken is offered first and later a slaughtered pig is offered. However, the purpose of a bribe for the malevolent spirit seems to be coercion, whereas in case of Poh Chao Luang it is done in a sense of persuasion.



Fig. 4.20 A “bad” offering (small ball of sticky rice mixed with the ashes, a tiny piece of meat, and a small piece of burnt firewood) is hung on the fence to bribe the malevolent spirit.

There is a limitation of time in which one should perform the ritual after the bribery. If one bribes (*keun wai*) before the traditional New Year (April), one has to make an offering (*pai liang*) no later than New Year's day which is a starting point of the new cycle of life. If one bribes after New Year, she or he has to perform a ritual before Buddhist Lent (August-October) which is the time when Poh Chao Luang is believed to practice the Buddhist precepts²¹; therefore he does not accept any slaughtering ritual for killing is regarded as sinful according to the Buddhist.

No matter what the result is, after one has asked Poh Chao Luang for help, whether the person is healed or not, or even dies, one still has to perform a sacrifice ritual which one has promised in the bribe. Otherwise the spirit may get angry and bring further harm, not only to the sick person but his or her relatives. Therefore, it can be seen that although the sick person or his family may, to some extent, control the spirit with the bribe, the spirit, (in other words, the system of spirit cult), eventually has power to keep the cult members dependent. This may confirm that the relationship between the spirit and humans is an unequal reciprocity.

21 Devotion is not the main path in Buddhist belief, but practice of good morality. All Buddhists are encouraged to observe Buddhist Precepts, that can be in five, eight or ten. The practice of precepts help to cultivate compassion, generosity, contentment, truthfulness and mindfulness. Every Buddhists should try to observe at least five precepts in order to elevate himself morally and spiritually. Buddhist Five Main Precepts are as follow;

1. Refrain From Killing
2. Refrain from Stealing
3. Refrain from Lying, Slandering, Gossiping and Spreading Rumours
4. Refrain from Sexual Misconduct
5. Refrain from Taking Intoxicants

Buddhist Eight Precepts are observed by some Buddhists (commonly among the elders) on Full Moon and New Moon days as well as during the Buddhist Lent. The elders spend more time in the temple, during the afternoon and stay in the temple over nights to break away from the material and sensual world. The idea is to withdraw from daily life to cultivate spiritual development, self training and peace of mind. Buddhist Eight Precepts are as follow;

1. Abstain from Taking Life.
2. Abstain from Stealing.
3. Abstain from Speaking unnecessarily.
4. Abstain from Sexual Activity.
5. Abstain from Taking Intoxicants.
6. Abstain from Taking meals at inappropriate times.
7. Abstain from Entertaining, Dancing, Singing, Use of beauty products & perfumes.
8. Abstain from Sitting on high and luxurious chairs and beds.

Being a Medium and an Officiant

Ritual is a political process where ideologies are emphasised. So far, I have focused on ritual contexts, which give us a clear picture of how patron/client relationships “work” systematically. Poh Chao Luang (Guardian Spirit) is regarded as the patron while members are clients. A particular member is selected to be the representative of the spirit, that is, the medium. Through possession, the medium is thought of as the spirit. Therefore, she is expected to “act” as the patron who should protect the members. Meanwhile, the officiant is selected to be the closest client of the spirit.

However, to create and maintain authority is an ongoing process through interrelations with others, in ritual and non-ritual social contexts. Therefore, it does not mean that those who are in a high position in the spirit cult can, all the time, maintain their authority. They may hold an authoritative status in the ritual but not in everyday life. People expect them to behave differently from ordinary villagers. For instance, the medium and officiant should refrain from eating food at a funeral feast. Villagers like to observe whether the medium or the officiant practice such taboos or not. This is one of the topics they like to gossip about. Furthermore, the medium and officiant cannot walk under the house (the house is normally built on posts) because there may be a woman in the house, and it is inauspicious to walk “under” a woman. Furthermore, they should not go under the clothes line. The head is the highest part of the body therefore it is inauspicious and taboo to let the head go under the clothes, particularly a pant or skirt. Once, the officiant of the Eldest Poh Chao Luang was sick, people suspected and gossiped that he had been to a “taboo” place and therefore was being punished by the spirit.

On the one hand, being a medium and officiant are seen to be high status positions. According to the villagers, even after a medium, an officiant, as well as a musician and singers have died they continue to “work” for Poh Chao Luang in the death world as nobles of the lord (Chao) thus are regarded as higher spirits than ordinary ancestors. On the other hand, however, they are considered to be, to some extent, “sinful” persons. The villagers explained that every time the officiant serves the slaughtered animal to worship the spirit, he commits a Buddhist sin (*baab*). Moreover, he may have more sin

(*baab*) than others because he takes part in every sacrifice. Some officiants always make merit for those slaughtered animals at the temple after performing the ritual, in order to lessen their sins. In case of the medium, she does not usually attend the sacrifice, but she may be the one who (while possessed) suggests that members perform the ritual. The villagers believe people who hold these positions face a difficulty in death. Once, my host father said;

I don't want to be a medium or officiant. Just look at Poh Uii Pook (one of the officiants), it took him so long before he died. He suffered for so long. If you are an officiant, when people come to you to bribe Poh Chao Luang, it seems you allow them to kill an animal, and that you accrue sin.

Obviously, there is contradiction between the ideology of the spirit cult and Buddhism. While the villagers believe and respect Poh Chao Luang as their lord and the head ancestor, who has power to protect them from harm, they realise that many ritualised practices are regarded as sinful according to Buddhism. Nevertheless, there is reconciliation between the two different concepts. On every Buddhist holy day the sacrifice cannot be performed because it is an auspicious day when one should practice the Buddhist precepts. Furthermore, during the Buddhist Lent (3 months long) it is said that Poh Chao Luang does not accept any sacrifice because he has to practice the precepts.

Apart from the taboo presented above, the officiant and medium are expected to follow the social morality in everyday life. Let me present ethnography of the officiant of the Younger Poh Chao Luang.

The Ethnography

People often gossiped about Poh Noi Takam, the officiant of the Younger Poh Chao Luang. They complained about his disloyalty. His house was located next to the village herbal office (a project organised by a doctor and NGO about ten years ago around

1993-4 but was later abandoned)²². He took responsibility for guarding the herbal office. However, the villagers often gossiped that he took a clock, a fan, etc., which belonged to the public office to use in his house. Furthermore, they complained that he avoided paying electricity for his house by including his bill with those of the public herbal office.

Poh Noi Takam was 73 years old, married to Yon (75 years old) and lived in his wife's house with his step-children and step-grandchildren. He did not have any children of his own. Yon had only one daughter, who died a couple of years ago, and three grand daughters. Poh Noi Takam, Yon, Kaew (her son-in-law), and Sai (her youngest granddaughter, 31 years old) lived together in Yon's house. The other two granddaughters were married and had moved out to live with their husbands. In the year I conducted my fieldwork, many of his family members suffered from serious sickness. After Yon's daughter died, a couple of years later Kaew (her son-in-law) had hemorrhagic stroke. Then Sai had hysteria and developed hallucinations. One day Sai's symptoms became worse and unconsciously she hit her neighbour. Later, she was admitted at the mental hospital in Chiang Mai city for a couple of months. During the same time, Yon often had headache and stomach-ache and had to visit a doctor in Mae Chaem.

People started to spread rumours. Some said his family was cursed. Some said they were punished by Poh Chao Luang. Quite often, Poh Chao Luang (through the possession) suggested and urged his family to move out from the house. The "spirit" told them that his house was built on a bad land. It should be noted here that his house was built next to the land where there used to be an abandoned temple. At present the temple was replaced by the village herbal office. Adjacent to the site where the abandoned temple was located, there was a shrine of the Village Spirit (*phii chao baan*). This spirit is considered to be a fierce spirit because it often causes sickness to

22 A private doctor and NGO founded the herbal medicine centre and organised the local traditional healer group in the village. Their project was to mix the modern and traditional health service. The doctor came to the herbal medicine centre once a week to give a health care service. At the same time, the village traditional healers gave traditional health service. Nevertheless, the doctor did not come regularly therefore finally the project failed. Nowadays the land and the herbal medical office are abandoned. The officiant was one of the traditional healers in the project. Because his house was next to the herbal medical office therefore he was asked to take care of the office.

the villagers (see below). Once, Sai (his step-granddaughter) tried to destroy the shrine while she was in hallucination. Therefore Poh Chao Luang often suggested him moving to live near the medium's house. Every time when the officiant was told, he hesitatingly accepted the suggestion and said he would try to move as soon as possible. Nevertheless, his wife seemed not happy to move.

In this case we can see that people use illnesses in the officiant's family as a "weapon" or "tool" to protest against the morally wrong behaviour of the officiant. Gossiping is a successful weapon they often use. When the officiant's family was sick, people suspected that they may be cursed with black magic because of the officiant's greed. Some said, the person who tried to use black magic may aim to harm the officiant himself, but because the officiant may have efficient magical knowledge so he could protect himself but not his relatives. People often mentioned and gossiped about Poh Chao Luang's suggestion that he should move out because his house was built on bad land. This rumour was an indirect way to complain about the officiant's faults. The villagers said he extended the gate of his house over public land (the land where village herbal office and the Village Spirit shrine are located), used the electricity and water from the office, and sometimes took public utensils to use in his house.

Challenging the Spirit's Power

The villagers are not always convinced by the divination or the "words" of the spirits. Some "clients" even resist and challenge the spirit's power. That is to say, the power of spirit is uncertain. Case studies presented below show the complexity of the human-spirit relationship.

Case One

I talked with an old woman in the village about healing rituals in Baan Yang Luang. She told me that last time when she was sick, it took her a long time to be healed. She had to make an offering with a pig to her ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) again and again. Almost every time she went to see the diviner, she got the same results, that is,

offer a pig to the ancestral spirit. Her son got angry. He said, "If you let me go there again I will burn the shrine!" The old woman told me;

After that, surprisingly I was healed. I don't have to make offerings so often. Pork, nowadays, is expensive. I can't afford performing the ritual that often. An ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) should protect and support its descendants. They should tell us the lucky number (lottery), instead of harming us. Don't you think so?

Normally, after one gets sick, to make an offering to the spirit is a powerful remedy. However, there is a limitation on a spirit's demands. As we can see from this case, if the "spirit" requests too much, it is challenged rather than respected. The angry reaction of the son became a rumour in the village. As a result, a diviner would be more careful with his divination. According to Scott (1972, 1977), the resistance of clients in Southeast Asia is not a negation of the patron/client system, at least it does not lead either to clients or patrons rejecting the asymmetrical reciprocity, but is rather a tool for the weak to ensure that patrons not only satisfy their obligations, but restrict their demands.

Case Two

Another interesting case is about the Village Spirit. The Village Spirit (*phii chao bann*) is the spirit of the village proper, has jurisdiction over the village exclusive of the surrounding fields. It is the lowest spirit that is called *chao* (Iddhichiracharas1980). In Baan Yang Luang the Village Spirit overlaps with the Temple Spirit (*phii chao wat*). They are referred to, somehow, as the same spirit. They share the same shrine which is built inside the temple compound. This may be because the temple is the centre of the village. The spirits are worshipped regularly in the New Year, at the beginning and the end of Buddhist Lent. There is a strict requirement when one leaves the village that one should inform the Temple Spirit, asking for its protection.

In Baan yang Luang there are two Village Spirits shrines: one is situated in the Yang Luang Temple, and another one is located on the land where there used to be an

abandoned temple. At the present there is no temple there, because the area is replaced with the village herbal centre. Only the Temple Spirit's shrine is still located there. The villagers believed that any spirit which is ignored will become a fierce spirit called "*phii ka*". According to the villagers, the Temple Spirit at the abandoned temple was ignored (nobody worship it for a long period), therefore become "*phii ka*". Nowadays the spirit is not ignored anymore because the villagers built a shrine for the spirit and worship it every year. However, many villagers complain that the spirit tends to be fierce and often harms people. The diviner often finds that a sick person is "caught" by the "*phii ka*" at the Village Spirit shrine and he or she needs to worship the spirit in order to be healed.

Once, the villagers thought the spirit's shrine was built in a wrong direction, not corresponding with the houses which are built in the North-South axis. The villagers rebuilt the shrine two years ago (2001), however, the spirit seemed to be even fiercer. When I was in the field, many people complained that the spirit changed its character. Usually after offering the spirit a pair of chickens, one would be healed. However, after somebody had offered a pig head to the spirit, it seems chicken does not "work" anymore. It is said that nowadays the spirit does not accept anything but pork. Therefore one would not be healed if he or she refuses to offer pork. The villagers, particularly those who are poor, complain that they are not just suffering from sickness; they even more worried about the higher cost of offerings. A villager said;

The spirit prefers pork now, after it had tried pork once. Now it becomes greedy and wants to have more. That is why it becomes more and more fierce nowadays.

The offering has to be made by an officiant of the Village Spirit. Every time the offering is made, the officiant receives some offering food while the rest belongs to the person who offers. If the officiant is not available, any man who has been ordained as a novice or monk and has learned the offering chant could be asked to perform the rite and receives the food in return.

How does the spirit "change" its preference of food? I was told that somebody started to promise the spirit pork. He promised the spirit that *if* the spirit protected him from

conscripted, he would offer pork to the spirit. Since then the spirit always ask for pork. So what can we understand from the changing of ritual? Pork is more expensive than chicken, therefore those who are poor find it difficult to perform the rite. On the other hand, those who can perform the ritual are seen to be rich. In other words, social status can be affirmed through ritual performance. This is how the patron-client relationship is constituted. Those clients, who can offer what the patron prefers, are protected. If chicken does not “work” then a higher quality food may be more effective. Consequently, those who have the means can get closer to the source of power. Villagers learn to live with a patron-client relationship and at the same time recreate or maintain it in everyday life.

Conclusion

Many scholars in Thailand aim to ameliorate the asymmetrical relations in the society and try to create a more equal social system. Many blame the state for failing to provide stable infrastructural alternatives, or blame the culture for preventing the state from doing so. However, we need more information on the grounded experiences to understand how asymmetrical relations in the society are reproduced.

I find hierarchy in Mae Chaem is strongly maintained in the local religious ideology. After the political reform in the reign of King Rama V, the feudal system, to some extent, was continued in the spirit cults in the form of patron/client relationships. Hierarchy and patron/client relations are recreated through a small interaction between human and spirits, as well as between human and human in everyday life. Mae Chaem people learn to depend heavily on asymmetry and inequality, through the practices in spirit cults and the processes of healing management.

Through the sacrifice and Welcoming rituals the traditional political system of the *muang* is reproduced and the power of the Guardian Spirit (Poh Chao Luang) is legitimised. The Welcoming (*hub toan*) is also a chance for the spirit medium to maintain her power and status. Furthermore, the spirit possession in the Welcoming is an occasion for the villagers to express their contradictions regarding the social changes in the modern world (*samai*). It is a chance for the elders to complain to the young, by

using the power of the “spirit’s voice”, for ignoring the traditional culture. Moreover, the ritual reproduces the ideology of subordination among young members. In the sacrifice (*liang*), hierarchy is manifested through the symbolic order of serving and consuming the sacrificial feast. Meanwhile, the sharing of the feast in the sacrifice maintains the solidarity of the lineage and reproduces the identity of the group as “people of the same spirit (*phii diaw kan*)”.

The villagers’ values of hierarchy or stratification, reciprocity, seniority are embedded in their world view. The patron/client relation is one aspect of Thai cosmology which constitutes the ways in which man relates to man, man to nature and animals, and man to the gods and demons and other nonhuman agencies. The fundamental value which links the patron spirit and its clients is reciprocity. While the spirit needs members to pay respect and maintain the spirit system, the members need the spirit to protect and ensure their prosperity.

Obviously, the hierarchical power of the spirit and the people who are in a higher position in the spirit cults is maintained in the ritual practices. However, subordinate members also develop a strategy to manage the patron spirit to ensure its support. I find bribery is a common tool the villagers use in order to negotiate and confirm their protection. Bribery in the healing ritual is influenced by the concepts of patron/client practiced in the society. At the same time, the patron/client relationship is reproduced and maintained through the practice of healing ritual and illness explanation.

In addition, the relationships between the patron and clients are controlled by the moral concerns of the society. Poh Chao Luang is regarded as the great ancestor of the matrilineage as well as the lord of the *muang*, therefore, is expected to be powerful as a lord but generous as a father. Moreover, it is expected to take care and protect the lineage members from illness and misfortune. In turn, the spirit cult members are expected to continue the traditional worship rituals to pay respect to the spirits. Although those who are in higher positions in the cult, such as the medium and the officiant, can control the spirit power, they are observed, checked, and controlled by the members all the time. They are expected to follow the moral norms and have to practice special taboos. That is to say those who have higher power in the spirit cult can maintain their status and power as long as they behave corresponding to the social

morality. Rumours and gossip are the tools people use to control the spirits and those who are in high positions in the cult.

Another important point I want to argue is that the relationship between the spirits and humans is woven around the matter of illness and suffering. Illness is a source of power either for the patron spirit or the clients. The spirit (through the medium, the officiant as well as the diviner) uses illness to control its descendants and legitimise its power. When one becomes sick, the common explanation is that he or she is punished by the spirit because he or she has broken the social rules. In other words, the matrilineal spirit (through the medium) links the communities together spiritually through medical issues. On the other hand, if the medium, the officiant or any person who is in a high position in the hierarchy becomes sick, their illnesses become a chance for people to criticise or judge their power. In short, an important aspect of healing rituals, one that has been underestimated, is the role of social control and power.

To conclude, the spirit cult system depends upon and, in turn, promotes and supports, age hierarchy or seniority, political power, religious power, kinship ideology, patron/client relationships, territory, culture and a shared history. All these aspects reinforce each other and maintain the spirit matrilineal cult.

Khwan, Phii, and Sangkar:

Understanding Mae Chaem Kinship and Personhood through the Dynamics of Intangible Essence

Kinship Revised

In the 1970s and 1980s the study of kinship, which had been the core discipline in anthropology for many years, became rather uncertain, and remained of interest only to some anthropologists. At that time, two principal problems were challenged: the problems of structural and processual approaches, and the question of relationships between nature and culture.

The crucial critique that brought kinship to such a critical stage was that of Schneider (1980, 1989), who challenged the Western allegedly ethnocentric viewpoint of “kinship”, in which procreation was a core symbol and the system was defined by two dominant orders, that of nature or substance, and that of law or code. It was taken for granted that people everywhere organised kinship systems based on the universal conceptions of relationships that derived from biological procreation. Consequently, kinship created divisions in society by conceptually separating those who are genealogically related to each other from those who are not so related. In short, kinship was regarded as the fact of social relationships rooted in the fact of nature: biological reproduction¹. Schneider challenged the universality of assumptions on kinship and suggested that anthropologists should take kinship as an empirical question rather than assume from the outset that it has universal cross-cultural significance.

The biological-based presumptions imply that blood relation is not something one can choose, therefore genealogical relationships are involuntary and beyond a person's

¹ see Strathern (1992), Yanagisako and Collier (1987), Holy (1998), Carsten (2000), Galvin (2001), Ottenheimer (2001), and Stone (2001) for further details of discussion regarding Schneider's critique

control. Kinship status, thus, is seen as an ascribed status, derived from an individual's birth, unalterable and permanent. Once established, it is non-negotiable and lasts until death. However, in many societies kinship status is not, in fact, "given" through birth but is created through an ongoing process of interrelation (see Bloch 1992, Carsten 1997, Toren 1999, Astuti 2000, Bodenhorn 2000, Stafford 2000, among others). That is to say, the viewing of birth and kinship as ascribed status based on natural facts is not at all universal.

Current anthropological studies of kinship are greatly aware of the biological presumption stated above (see Peletz 1995, Holy 1998, Carsten 2000, 2004, Stone 2001 and Mckinley 2001). Yanagisako and Collier (1987) stress that we can no longer take it for granted that kinship is grounded in "biology" or "nature" and that approaches to the study of kinship should avoid such biological bias because different societies might conceptualise differently what makes people related to each other. Nevertheless, Carsten (2004: 63) argues that the awareness of pre-cultural biology outside social construction leads to another assumption, namely, that the social construction itself depends on something "out there" to construct.

Anthropological concepts in general have moved from a static structural-functional analysis, which defines culture as the abstract and internally coherent systems of rules to a more historical and processual approach (see Peletz 1995; Holy 1998; Carsten 1997, 2000; Lamphere 2001, and Stone 2001). The focus of consideration shifts from the institutional functioning of society to processes of symbolic construction of persons and relations, the active engagement of persons, the fluidity of movement, performance and practice (Boddy 1998). Kinship then began to be understood as a process of interrelationship that people experience and constitute throughout their life. Kinship theorists began to pay attention to historical enactments that shape and reshape meaning. It is a process of becoming which is, in a sense, never complete. Astuti (1998, 2000) argues that there will always be a tension between what is viewed as fixed in the person and what is processual or transformable and the boundary between the two aspects varies from society to society. Through processual and historical theory, the cultural meanings of kinship can better be understood, thus helping us to avoid the biological presumption.

Body, Self and Person in Kinship

According to Carsten (2004), since the 1980s individual lives and cultural notions of self and personhood have become necessary elements in the revitalisation of kinship studies. Furthermore, the concept of embodiment which conceptualises “body” through ways of being and acting in the world has interested many scholars of kinship. Strathern and Lambek define the meaning of embodiment as a process that “lies in the reception of the cultural into the body but equally the work of the body in building cultural forms” (1998: 13). Therefore, the idea of embodiment provides some advantages over other approaches to personhood. For instance, it indicates the intersection of the biological and cultural in the realm of lived experience, reconciling the tension between “objectivised personhood” and “subjectivised selfhood” which concerns the “willed bodily actions of persons rather than their passive performance of roles” (Strathern and Lambek 1998: 13).

By contextualising and criticising “personhood”, humans are conceptualised not merely as a “given” but active beings, questions about power and social control are raised, and the processes through which such control is reproduced are examined (Carsten 2004). The embodiment of persons and the personification of bodies can help us understand cultural practice and processes of social interaction and interpretation (Strathern and Lambek 1998, Boddy 1998).

Body and Bodily Substance

After the critiques of Schneider, the currently dominant paradigm attempts to move beyond understanding kinship in terms of a distinction between “social” versus “biological” relationships. In challenging the universality of a belief in physical reproduction as the primary basis of human kinship, the new theoretical model demonstrates that corporeal ties are not given at birth but are gradually produced and created through time and by non-sexual means such as caring, eating, living, and consuming together.

According to Carsten (2004), because kinship has often been considered as “given” rather than what is made, anthropological studies of kinship have lacked a vocabulary for conveying change and fluidity in relation. After Schneider’s introduction, the term “substance” became a key symbol in anthropological analysis of kinship (Thomas 1999). Many have found substance an appropriate term in describing the mutability and transformative process of kinship (Gibson 1985, Weiner 1982; Carsten 1995b; Busby 1997). According to Carsten (2004: 131-3), this is because it may carry the meaning of the essence of a thing, its form, and its content, as well as its liquid properties. Consequently, bodily substances—blood, milk, saliva, and sexual fluids—have been a subject for analysing how people articulate and conceptualise bodily transfers and transformation as well as physical connectedness.

Janet Carsten’s work with Malays in Southeast Asia (1997 see also 1991, 1992, and 2000) is, among others, a representative of this growing trend. She tries to move away from the presumption of kinship in the fixed notion of “blood”, to the fluidity and transformative notion of “substance”. Furthermore, she demonstrates that kinship may come into being without procreative links. It may be constituted through the idiom of co-feeding, of living together or of friendship. As she finds among the Malay that blood as well as food are central to their ideas of life and relatedness. Blood is transformed food, people acquire blood through life in the form of food, and breast milk is also understood as transformed blood. For them, kinship is not as much based on blood or flesh as on cooking, feeding and house composition. Shared sustenance can take the form of milk for infants, created through the blood of the mother, or it can be other forms of food, in particular, rice. Blood, breast milk and food are thought to carry emotional as well as physical properties from the mother. Mothers and their children are thought to be particularly closely connected because a child is fed on the mother’s blood in the womb and on her milk after birth. Those who eat the same food together in one house also come to have blood in common. Consequently, Carsten sees the hearth as a medium for building kin relationships, especially parent-child and sibling relationships. This also implies that bodily substance is not something with which Malays are simply born and remains forever unchanged, but gradually accrues and changes throughout life as persons participate in relationships.

Substance and non-Substance Relationship

While the newer approaches have helped to challenge the biological versus social dichotomy, they continue to take the idea that kinship is grounded in the embodied and substance-based link. Thomas (1999) criticises that those approaches (Gibson 1985, Weiner 1982, Carsten 1995b, Busby 1997) hold the assumption of kinship to be coextensive with the sharing, transmission and exchange of substance, and exclude “alternative ways of constituting and representing relatedness, and reducing kinship to a single principle and effectively leaving any society which does not imagine social relations in terms of substance without it” (Thomas 1999: 23). According to Bamford (2004: 301), implicit in this line of argument is that “the Western notions of hereditary substance can have only one antithesis, viz. substance acquired not at birth, but processually over time and as a consequence of intentional human effort”.

Exploring the relations between parents and children among the Temanambondro, Thomas finds the notions of shared substance is not the basis of their relatedness. They place emphasis on relations constituted through ritual and other practices such as exchange, shared place, residence, work and consumption, rather than through procreation and bodily substance. Therefore, he conceptualises Temanambondro kinship is primarily performative rather than substantial. In consequence, he insists that substance is a “product of analysis rather than indigenous thinking” (Thomas 1999: 25).

Furthermore, considering substance as a key feature in kinship constitution, presumes the nature of kinship as something which is rooted in bodies. As seen in Carsten’s analysis of Malay kinship (1997), it seems that she attempts to extend “blood” relationship to other kinds of substance such as milk and food, which are, to some extent, seen as transformed blood. Bamford (2004) suggests that it should not be taken for grant that kinship always has to be conceptualised as a material bond and bodily connectedness between people.

Drawing upon data collected among Kamea of Papua New Guinea, Bamford (2004) finds their parent-child ties do not rely upon physiological reproduction as in Europe and America, but are conceptualised as inherently non-embodied relations.

Only persons born of the same womb are considered to be “one-blood” and have originated from the same maternal container. Nevertheless, neither a woman nor a man is considered to be “one-blood” with their children. One’s mother would be “one-blood” with her own “true” siblings, but not with any person in the ascending or descending generation (ibid.: 291).

Instead, lineality is formed between men who work the same land. “Land, paternal names, and modes of ritual competence are all transmitted through men, typically from a father to his son” (ibid.: 292). Their generational continuity is not genealogical connections but rather the history of individual men and their relationships to the land.

Tangible Substance and Intangible Essence in Body and Kinship

I would like to argue further that the presumption of kinship as grounded in bodily substance or embodied relations is an extended version of the previous presumption of “blood”. This can be seen from the meanings of substance which are used in kinship analysis.

Carsten lists some meanings of “substance” from the Oxford English Dictionary which seem to be relevant to its uses in the anthropological study of kinship, such as “essential nature” or “essence”; “separate distinct thing”; “that which underlies phenomena”; “matter or subject matter”; “material of which a physical thing consists”; “matter or tissue composing an animal body part or organ”; “any corporeal matter”; “solid or real thing (opposed to appearance or shadow)”; “vital part”; “what gives a thing its character”; and “the consistency of a fluid” (2004: 111). According to her, the using of the term “substance” in kinship studies is problematic because of its multiple meanings in English. However, it is this blurring of meanings that makes the term a fruitful theme to broaden the study of person, body and relationship (ibid.: 132). Nevertheless, in the new approaches to kinship study, the term substance is also used to express transformability, mutability, and the flow of objects or bodily parts between persons, even though those meanings are not at all specified in the dictionary. Therefore, Carsten states that the term “substance” neatly filled the gap in the analytic vocabulary of

kinship which lacked a means to express malleability and relationality in terms of flows between persons or between persons and things (ibid.: 134).

I observe another unchallenged and problematic aspect in the meanings of substance related to kinship study. Behind the meanings of substance listed above, I find another presumption of kinship theory that is, kin relationship is always connected through a tangible or material substance. Most of the meanings presented above associate substance with the physical body, for instance, an “essential nature”, “material of which a physical thing consists”; “matter or tissue composing an animal body part or organ”; “any corporeal matter”; “solid or real thing (opposed to appearance or shadow)”. This implies the fixation of kinship theory with nature, biological body, and material. Moreover, it also implies that the only “real” or “fact” is the natural, biological, or physical body. Although the notion of blood as the core of kin relationship has been replaced with broader and fluid concepts of substance, still, it seems to fall in another presumption that relationship is always based on corporeal matter. Food, one of the substances in the creation process of Malay kinship, may not be considered directly as a bodily substance but in one way or another it is connected and transformed into blood and breast milk, and vice versa.

In Mae Chaem, notions of “body” and “person” are significantly different. Their “physiology” (knowledge of the body) regards both physical body and the intangible spiritual essence as parts of the body. They do not exclude the immaterial soul from the corporeal body in their conceptualisation about “being” and “relation”. For them, the spiritual part is a “personal” not “impersonal” part. The spirit is the vital part of the body, it is the essence of life, and it constitutes a person’s character, emotional and self. Furthermore, Mae Chaem people explain their relationship in terms of spirit. They are connected through the spiritual essence inside their body, rather than the corporeal substance. People talk of lineage as a “people of the same spirit” (*phii diaw kan*). They define character, and behaviour of a person according to the quality of the intangible bodily essence. In their conceptualisation of life, kinship, and cosmology, they emphasise the spiritual essence over the corporeal body. For them, the spiritual part is permanent while the body is temporary.

I agree with Thomas (1999) and Bamford (2004) that kinship does not have to be grounded in embodiment and substance-based discourse, which provides only one antithesis, namely, that kinship is not given at birth but is created through time. However, instead of looking for a non-substance linkage *outside* the body I would like to consider more deeply a “non-substance” *inside* the body. How is kinship and personhood constructed in a society where spirit persists and the body is temporary? What can we learn from the relationship through immaterial spiritual essence? The ethnographical analysis presented below about *khwan* (life essence), *phii* (spirit), and *sangkar* (age) in Mae Chaem concepts of body and person will help clarify my argument.

Khwan, Phii, and Sangkar: The Intangible Essence in Northern Thai Kinship

Khwan: The Dynamics of Life Essences

The Thai believe that the principal part of the body which constitutes the being of a person is the vital essence called *khwan*. *Khwan* is literally translated as “morale”, “energy elements” (Tambiah 1970), but can also refer to “souls”, “ego”, “grace” or “prosperity” (Davis 1984a, 1984b and Sriwongrach 1998). Among the Thais, as well as Laos, it is regarded as the vital principle and essence of life. It is something abstract, also regarded as a mysterious and supernatural power which brings about blessing and creates a sense of balance in one's life.

It is believed that *khwan* is inherent in both animate and inanimate beings; for instance, in man, animals, plants, houses, rice pots, as well as in a collective sense of territory such as village and the *muang* (domain). The interrelation between the *khwan* of humans and of animals, plants and other beings is stressed in several rituals. In the process of cultivation, the *khwan* of rice and the water buffalo need to be protected and taken care of. After its tough work, a farmer apologises and pays respect to the water buffalo by recalling its *khwan*. It is believed that the buffalo's *khwan* is susceptible to be lost or weakened after the hard work. After rice harvesting, a woman who is the owner of the rice-field recalls the *khwan* of rice to stay in the granary and apologises to

the Mother of Rice for hitting the rice during the harvest. In the rice-steaming pot, which is regarded as the centre of the hearth, resides the most important spirit of the household called the Steaming Pot Woman (*phii nyaa moa neung*) whose duty is to retrieve and watch over the departed *khwan* of ailing household members² (similar to people in Nan, see Davis 1984a: 52).

Khwan is also inherent in the house, the village and the *muang* (domain). Just as the body is a container of the *khwan*, the house, the village and the *muang* contain the collective *khwan* of the family and residents. After a disaster or any tragedy in the village, a ritual is performed to recall the *khwan* and “prolong the fate” (*sueb chata*) of the house and the *muang*. In the ritual, a sacred thread is tied from the Buddha statue inside the village temple and connected to every house in the village. At one end, each house is tied with the sacred thread at the main post inside, and another end is tied to the main thread from the temple. The chanting from the monk is believed to follow the thread to every house to bless and prolong life for all inhabitants. At the end of the ritual everybody takes some part of the thread and asks the monk (in the case of a man) or any elder to tie it on their wrists. It is seen that the *khwan* of humans, the house and the village or the *muang* are held together by the ritual and symbolised in the thread-tying. The well-being of humans and their territory are interdependent. If the house and the *muang* contain healthy *khwan*, so do the residents. Mae Chaem “interpersonal” relations cover not only the interactions among human beings but all other entities which share the multiple, detachable, and permeable *khwan*.

The Thirty-two *Khwan*

In Mae Chaem, as elsewhere in Thailand, it is commonly known that each person has 32 *khwan* associated with the particular body parts, such as head, ears, eyes, cheeks, shoulders, etc. Other animals and entities also have *khwan* but fewer in number. A “complete” individual (that is healthy and not handicapped) is said to be “*krop samsib song*” (complete with all the thirty-two *khwan*). Nevertheless, the 32 *khwan* are not regarded as separated elements but merged as a whole.

² See appendix C for detail of the recalling *khwan* ritual. The dynamic characteristics of *khwan* are clearly expressed in the chant of recalling *khwan* ritual.

The concept of multiplicity and separability of components of the self is commonly found in Southeast Asia. For instance, the 32 *khwan*, as well as *phii* (spirit) among the Thai and Lao (Rajadhon 1962; Inge-Heinze 1977, Tambiah 1970); the *semangat* of the Malays (Carsten 1997) and the Islamic *nyawa*, *ruh*, and *napas* (Endicott 1970; Laderman 1987:297 cited in Roseman 1990: 244); the *leip-bya* of the Burmese; the *pralung* of the Cambodians; and the *pung khamau* of the Mons (Rajadhon 1962:121).

The number thirty-two also corresponds to the amount of natural elements inside the body. According to some theories written in the Lanna Buddhist doctrine, the body consists of four principal natural elements: the earth, water, wind and fire. While wind and fire circulate inside the body, water and earth are parts of the body. There are 20 earth elements and 12 water elements. Parts of the body which come from the 20 earth elements are the head hairs, body hair, nails, the teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bone, the spleen, the heart, the liver, the lungs, the kidneys, the bowels, the intestine, undigested food, the residue of digested food, the skull, membrane and the brain. The 12 water elements are those of fluids inside the body, for instance, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, saliva, nasal mucus, bone marrow, synovial fluid (or lymph) and urine.

Nevertheless, this theory is not commonly a concern of everyday life. What is rather mentioned is the association of the amount of the earth and water elements with the “primal quality” (*kun*) of a father and mother respectively. The villagers said the father has 20 primal qualities (*kun*), while the mother has twelve. This, however, is not to say that the earth elements come from father and the water come from mother. The number 20 and 12 are rather concerned with the proper age of a boy to become a novice and a man to become a monk. For instance, it is believed that, a boy can become a novice only after he is twelve years old. At that age he can contribute merit to his mother, however, not yet to his father. Not until 20 years old, can a man enter monkhood and be able to offer his merit to his father. That is to say, a father has higher qualities than a mother, and a monk has higher merit than a novice³. When a boy becomes 12 years old he is believed to have higher merit than his mother, and is able to “teach” and offer

³ According to Buddhist doctrine a novice has to practice 8 Buddhist rules (*seela*), while a monk, following the Lord Buddha, observes all the 227 Buddhist rules. Basically, ordinary people should at least observe 5 rules in everyday life. Therefore a monk is regarded as having high merit compared to a novice and ordinary people respectively.

merit to his mother as a novice through Buddhist ritual. In the same way, at 20 years old his merit is believed to be high enough to “teach” and offer merit to his father.

***Khwan* Lost and Restored**

In Northern Thai, illness is thought to originate from an imbalance of body elements. When they are imagined as principles of universal composition—earth, wind, fire and water—illness is said to result from an overabundance of one or more elements (Morris 2000, Brun and Schumacher 1994). In contrast, when body elements are understood in the idiom of “vital essence” or *khwan*, illness will be interpreted as the dislodging of *khwan*.

Khwan frighten and flee easily. Anyone who suffers attack, illness or just unease may thus lose *khwan*. Separation or loss of one or more *khwan* from its corporeal anchor results in illness, weakness, susceptibility to spirit possession, and possible death (Tambiah 1970, Davis 1984a, 1984b, O'Connor 1990, Sriwongrach 1998). When a person dies, it is believed that all the 32 *khwan* leave the body⁴. After death, *khwan* is changed into *winyan* or *phii* (spirit) which is considered as supernatural, powerful and mysterious but opposed to *khwan* in the sense that it is related to death, not life. According to some villagers, the *phii* (spirit) may be separated and flies to 32 different places, depending on one's karma. After some time, the *phii* (spirit) is sent by the Puu Thaen Nyaa Thaen⁵ (the Old Couple Deities) to be reborn.

There are many factors that may cause “a loss of *khwan*”; perhaps from fright or excitement, rapid changes of temperature (this often happens to little children when they have a bath), a psychological trauma, or it may be kidnapped by malevolent spirits.

4 For Mae Chaem people it is believed that the *khwan* come out from the feet. Thus one should not hold the feet of the person who is dying so the *khwan* can leave peacefully. Furthermore, a window in the room where the dying person lies down should be opened to let the *khwan*, (or *winyan* as it is called after death), leave the room.

5 Puu Thaen Nyaa Thaen is the Old Couple Deities, believed to be the origin of all humankind. They are also named Nang Itthang Gaiya Sangkasi and Pu Sangaiya Sangkasii (Peltier A-R 1991). They send human beings to be reborn in the human world and determine each human fate and life span, which no one can deny. When one dies it is said that the Old Couple Deities call for his or her return. Sometimes they are regarded as the Parent Gods of human beings (*poh mae tang bon*). Of the frequently sick, it is often said that “his or her Parent Gods are too powerful” therefore an offering has to be made to them to prolong life in the human world. The deities are worshipped annually at the beginning of the Buddhist Lent and the traditional New Year.

When a child, whose *khwan* is more “tender”, suffers a shock from some sudden fright and cries sharply and continuously, the child’s *khwan* is said to have taken flight. An adult man experiencing a great fright may die of its effect. Furthermore, to harm a person is to injure the *khwan* (Rajadhon 1962:122-123).

The dislodged *khwan* must be called back, as suggested by the name of the rite *hiak khwan* (to call the *khwan*) or *pang khwan* (restoring *khwan*). A ritual is performed to call all the thirty-two *khwan* to bestow health, prosperity, and well-being on the participants. The one who performs the *hiak khwan* rite for another thus has enormous power over that person’s well being (Morris 2000: 111-112). Normally an elderly man is asked to perform the rite, in particular, a man who has been a novice or monk before⁶, for he is believed to have higher knowledge and power than an ordinary man. In the *hiak khwan* ceremony the healer ties sacred thread around the wrists of the patient in order to secure the *khwan* of the patient within his or her body. An oral blessing is spoken by the healer, so in effect tying the words of blessing and *khwan* to the person at the same time (see also Inge-Heinze 1982). Traditionally the left wrist is tied before the right, as a common saying in the village, “tie the left for the *khwan* to come, tie the right for the *khwan* to stay”. According to O’Connor (1990), the balance of *khwan* can occur only within a physical place that can be ritually closed and protected. Therefore the body, which serves as a container to which the *khwan* are called, has to be sealed.

Apart from a performance for those suffering from prolonged illness, the *hiak khwan* or *pang khwan* ritual is performed on many other occasions, for example, rites for dispelling bad luck from inauspicious happenings, ordination into monkhood, weddings, ceremonies of reintegration, when a person returns home after a long absence or before leaving for a long journey, when a person changes status or residence and when visitors are given a welcome or farewell. In the North-eastern part of Thailand, the rite is performed on similar occasions as well as for rites of passage such as the first hair-cut of a one-month old baby and a coming of age (cutting top-knot) (see Tambiah 1970 and Inge-Heinze 1977).

⁶ A man who has entered the monkhood before is regarded as *khon suk*, which literally means ripe man as oppose to an ordinary man who is regarded as *khon dib* (literally means unripe man).

As *khwan* is regarded as an individual essence, a typical *pang khwan* ceremony (restoring the *khwan*) is performed in the most personal space in the house: the patient's bedroom. The patient sits on his or her bed, while the elder (the *khwan* healer) chants to recall the *khwan*. The patient sits opposite the elder with a low table in between. On the table are a boiled chicken, a basket of sticky rice and a bottle of water. The ritual is never done in the morning but late in the afternoon anywhere between three to seven o'clock, because this is the time when the spirit is out wandering around. The elder performing the ceremony recites a chant to recall all the spirits to the body. Having completed the chanting ritual, food offerings are given to the *khwan*. The patient has to consume some of the offering foods alone inside the bedroom. It is said that he or she "eats with his or her *khwan*", to welcome his or her own returning *khwan*. After that the elder ties the white cotton threads around the wrists of the patient to ensure the *khwan* remain inside the body and protect both the interior and exterior of the body and all the 32 *khwan* propitiated. The thread is to be kept on the wrist for at least three days. The rest of the chicken is then shared among the family and the elder or the healer. It is seen that the ritual encourages the patient to be strong in mind and body (see also Tambiah 1970 and Davis 1984b).



Fig. 5.1 The elder ties the threads around the patient's wrists to ensure the *khwan* remain inside the body.



Fig. 5.2 The offering foods for *khwan*

Age, Gender and the Quality of *Khwan*

The quality of *khwan* changes through time. Sometimes they are weak sometimes they become stronger. It depends on physical, mental and emotional status. Psychological disturbance and stress normally happen along with the weakening of *khwan* and vice versa. The weak *khwan* are at risk of being caught by malevolent spirits. In general, they gradually become stronger as one gets older. However, the very young and the

very old are said to have weak *khwan* because they are believed to be close to the spirit world and are susceptible to loss of *khwan*. *Khwan* is the part of body that connects or overlaps the human world and the spirit world. A newborn baby is believed to be sent to be born by the Old Couple Deities (Puu Thaen Nyaa Thaen). It has weak *khwan* and is at risk of being caught by a number of spirits, in particular, the baby's Parent Spirit⁷ (*poh kerd mae kerd*) which may want him or her return to the spirit world. This is because the connection of the newborn baby to the spirit world is thought to be stronger than the relationship between the baby and the parent in the human world. When one becomes very old, one is waiting to return to the spirit world. He or she sees him or herself as a "half-human, half-spirit" person (*phii gueng khon gueng*). A crucial sign is when one has lost some memories. That means they are close to the spirit world again and thus are susceptible to losing *khwan* and dying.

The quality of *khwan* is sometimes used to explain a characteristic of a person, for instance, somebody is said to be a "weak *khwan* person" (*khon khwan oan*) which means he or she is easily frightened. On the other hand, those who have strong *khwan* (*khwan hang*) could harm others. A woman who loses a child due to miscarriage, stillbirth or early infant death is said to have "too strong *khwan*" (*khwan mae mun hang lum*) which cause the death of her own child. If a mother frequently loses her child, a ritual called "*hon khwan*" has to be performed. It is a bribe rite in which a small portion of food is given to herself to persuade her own *khwan* not to harm the coming baby. If her baby is saved, she and her husband promise her own *khwan* to get a proper food. In this sense the person and the *khwan* are seen as separate entities. One can bribe his or her own *khwan* as if it is distinguished from his or her self. However, the relationship between the body and self is changing all the time. They can be merged as a whole or separated from each other, depending on context. For instance, in an extraordinary context, such as illness, the *khwan* (or self) is separated from the body.

In general, those who are older have stronger *khwan* than the younger, and man's *khwan* is stronger than woman's. When somebody falls sick he or she needs to restore his or her *khwan*. An elderly man, in particular, would be asked to perform the *hiak*

⁷ The Parent Spirit (*poh kerd mae kerd*) is regarded as a personal spirit which governs and protects each person, particularly during childhood. It is also believed that each one is sent by the Parent Spirit to be reborn in the human world, similar to the Old Couple Deities who send the whole human beings to be born.

khwan rite. The villagers explain that if those who have weak *khwan* perform the *hiak khwan* ritual for others, he or she would harm him or herself instead. Therefore, when a healer is sick he would not perform the *hiak khwan* rite, or any healing rituals, for others. Normally a woman does not perform the *hiak khwan* rite for others because she is thought to have weak *khwan* than a man. However, an old woman can tie a sacred thread for the patient or participants. The sacred thread tying is an important part of a performance in a number of rituals. It is believed that an old woman has strong enough *khwan* to tie the thread for others.

A pregnant woman is, in some contexts, believed to be dangerous to others. Anybody who is severely or chronically ill is susceptible to lose his or her *khwan* to the pregnant woman. The lost *khwan* is reborn as a baby and the sick person dies. The villagers believe that one must avoid stepping over a pregnant woman's cloth otherwise the *khwan* enters the womb (*khwan kao thong*), which means he or she may die.

A foetus and a baby are not thought of as a person until the *khwan* is completely installed in the body. This is different from the Western understanding of the foetus and personhood. For Mae Chaem people, physical formation is secondary to the existence of the soul. There is no precise time when the new *khwan* (or spirit (*winyan*)) completely reside in the womb. *Khwan* may enter the womb and go freely all the time. Even after the baby is born, the vulnerable stage is not yet over. A baby is believed to be reincarnated from an ancestor. The reincarnated spirit could change all the time until the "correct" ancestor is defined and the welcoming ritual is completely performed⁸. Before the precise reincarnated spirit is found, it is possible that anyone's *khwan* can be "reborn" as the baby. In particular, if one has got a serious illness his or her *khwan* becomes weak, thus has a high possibility to lose *khwan* to the baby. Therefore, a pregnant woman and a newborn baby are thought, to some extent, to be dangerous.

***Khwan* and the Local Knowledge of Conception**

According to Morris (2000), in a principle found in the Buddhist Pali Doctrine, the 32 attributes of the human body are related to the Muang theory of conception. According

⁸ See chapter 6 for further discussion of reincarnation.

to the Muang theory, conception results from the union of 33 primal qualities (*kun*), which are the physical components of which every human being is composed. These primal qualities are inherited. Twenty-one of them derive from the father and are transmitted by his semen. The other twelve are inherited from the mother.

In Mae Chaem the understanding of conception is rather different from what Morris found. In the “calling *khwan*” rite before ordination in Mae Chaem, the Buddhist Doctrine which contains the chapter about knowledge of the process of human birth is read for a new novice or monk to make him realise the importance of his parents who gave him life.

...your spirit and soul, as small as one-eighth of the hair, travel from the Pagoda in the heaven to your father’s *khwan* on his crown. At that time, inside your mother’s womb, the 4 elements (*dhatu*) combine as a small gland. Its size is equal to the head of a match. It has clear-red colour similar to the water after washing meat. Seven days after copulation, you are transmitted from the father’s head into your mother’s womb. Fourteen days later you become as big as a drop of sesame oil. Another seven days later your soul is made into a body with 5 nodes: the head, 2 arms and 2 legs. You are in the womb for 10 months which is equal to 300 days, and is counted as 480,000 *yam* (a local unit of time used among the Thais in the past)...

The theory of conception ascribes equally important roles to the mother and father. According to the former theory presented by Morris (2000), the Muang seems to be a “partible” person like those in Melanesia (Strathern 1988); the 20 attributes are contributed by the father and the 12 elements derive from the mother. Nevertheless, in Mae Chaem the villagers do not regard their body as composed separately from father’s and mother’s parts. Rather, a person is seen as a whole *khwan*. *Khwan* is an entity sent from heaven, transmitted through the father, and residing in the mother’s womb. The villagers believe that everybody is a reincarnated soul of the ancestor. A baby is understood as a transmutation of “spirit” into a bodily essence i.e., *khwan*. It is believed that identities, characters, behaviours, fates and karma of the reincarnated ancestor are embedded in a person’s *khwan*. To determine the identity of the ancestor who has been reborn into the body of a child, a diviner is usually consulted (see also David 1984: 61).

Put in another way, the ancestor's spirit enters the woman's womb as a complete entity, therefore a child, to some extent, is believed to "be" the ancestor. Furthermore, gender is partly acquired at birth from the reincarnated spirit; a boy is normally a reincarnated spirit of a male ancestor, and a girl is a spirit of a female ancestor.

A baby is not yet a complete person. Sometimes it is thought of as the reincarnated spirit and another time as a newborn baby. At birth everyone is part human and part spirit. People pay more attention about "who is the "returned spirit" inside this baby?" However, as one grows up, one becomes more "human" and less "spirit". An individual's identity gradually takes shape. In Mae Chaem there is no distinct rite of passage for a child to leave his or her childhood as in many other cultures. Rather, a child goes through a healing ritual called "*tad kerd*" (cutting the tie with Parent Spirit)⁹ a number of times. It is a healing ritual commonly performed when a child becomes sick. Everybody has his or her own guardian Parent Spirit called *poh kerd mae kerd*, which literally means "the birth father and birth mother". During childhood, a child is closer to the spirit world than the human world, thus the Parent Spirit may want the child to return to the spirit world at anytime. Therefore the tie between them should be cut.

Strictly, the ritual is performed for a child, not for an adult. For a girl, the last occasion she needs to perform the *tad kerd* rite (cutting the tie with Parent Spirit) is when she gives birth for the first time. Therefore, having a baby is a crucial indication for a girl to become an adult. For a boy, after he gets married normally he would not perform the *tad kerd* ritual anymore. If a man or a woman becomes sick in adulthood, other kinds of healing rituals are suggested instead. Gradually, after cutting the tie with the Parent Spirit many times, the tie between the child and parents in the human world becomes stronger. Finally a person becomes an individual. A child with a "reincarnated spirit" inside gradually becomes a person in his own right. Therefore, to some extent, the *tad kerd* ritual can be seen as a rite of passage, by which a child is cut off from the spirit world and becomes a complete person in the human world.

⁹ See chapter 7 for the detail of the ritual

When one becomes old one loses the power of *khwan*, therefore is susceptible to harm by any spirit. At death *khwan* leave the body and change into *winyan*; a powerful bodiless essence. The villagers tend to refer to *winyan* as *phii* (spirit). That is to say, death is a transition from *khwan* to *phii* or from a human being to a spirit. The *winyan* or *phii* (spirit) is then taken by the creator deities, named the Old Couple Deities (Pu Thaen Nyaa Thaen), who bring the soul down to earth and into the body of a living foetus (see Davis 1984b: 61). In other words, a dead person is believed to be “alive” somewhere in the form of a spirit until the “right” time comes for reincarnation. At birth, the *phii* (spirit) is returned in a form of *khwan*. In the Mae Chaem cosmological worldview, the life cycle is an endless cycle of “being” in the human world and spirit world. Nevertheless, the *khwan* of persons who die by accident, violence, or in childbirth are not reincarnated, becoming instead malevolent spirits (*phii tai hong*) (see chapter 6).

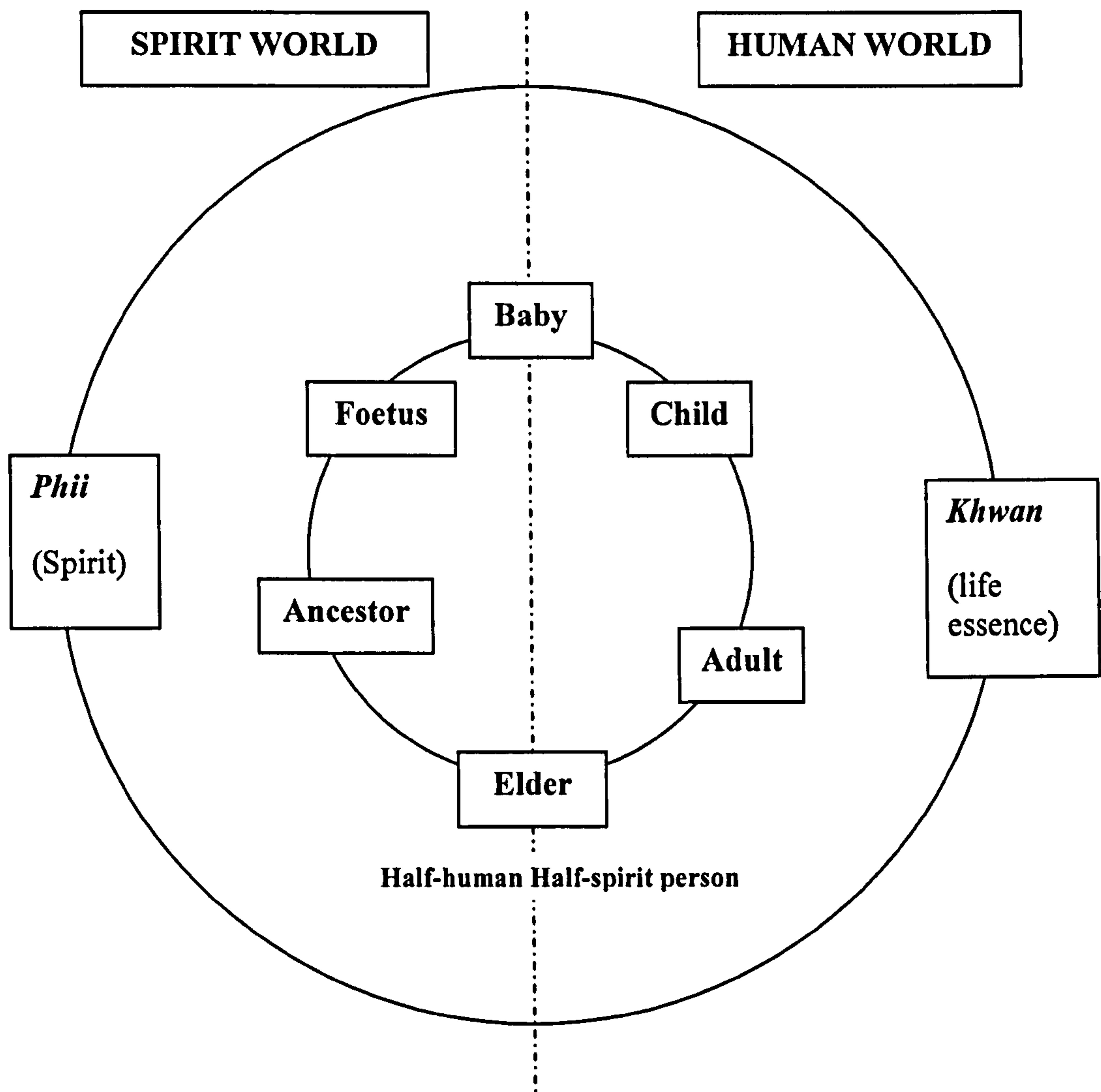


Diagram 5.1: The cycle of rebirth in Mae Chaem

The Permanent *Khwon* and Temporary *Sangkar*

It is seen that the physical body is less important than the spiritual essence. The body is temporary but the spirit eternally exists and flows through time. The temporary nature of the body is emphasised in the concept of “*sangkar*” and the ritual called “*sangkar lon*” (literally means “floating life”) performed at the traditional New Year. *Sangkar* is one of the components in the Buddhist concept of self. In Mae Chaem, however, the notion of *sangkar* refers to age or life. It is used in the sense that life and age degenerate all the time, as people say “*sangkar* is falling down all the time”; or “we gradually lost

sangkar every year”. Moreover, the word *sangkar* is sometimes use as a metaphor for a physical body as well.

On the first day of the traditional New Year in Mae Chaem, the *sangkar lon* ritual is performed at the riverbank. Everybody parades to the Mae Chaem River, carrying a big raft which is used in the ritual to carry everyone’s *sangkar* (age) and float them along the river. The ritual is to remind or emphasise the transience of the body, life and age and the endless cycle of rebirth. At the riverbank everyone brings out a handful of rice dough and rubs it over the body from head to toe. The dough is rubbed all over the skin to take all the “expired” *sangkar* out. The dough is then made into a figure of a zodiac animal according to one’s year of birth¹⁰. The zodiac animal figure represents one’s self. Everybody’s animal figures are thrown into the raft. This is to mark that another year has passed, and one’s temporary *sangkar* which has become old thus has to be peeled off and thrown away. A monk is invited to the riverbank to perform the rite. He blesses water in a big bowl. Then everyone takes some of the lustral water and pours it over his head, spilling down onto the “*sangkar* raft” where the animal figures are placed. This is to wash one’s *sangkar* down from the head into the raft. Finally the raft is floated into the river. The floating of the figure symbolises the degeneration and discarding of *sangkar* (life) once a year. Right after the *sangkar* raft is floated, everybody jumps into the river excitedly. Some men try to dive under the raft to the other side of the river. It is believed to make them strong and healthy. Others wash hair and take a bath in the river. Children laugh and shout while playing and swimming with friends in the river. It is a time for everyone to celebrate and welcome the new life after the old *sangkar* (the old life) is washed out and floated away. During the week before the *sangkar lon* ritual is performed, a house, which is regarded as a collective self, is cleaned up, and all the bedding is washed in a kind of symbolic spiritual Spring cleaning. Furthermore a new cloth is prepared to be worn on the New Year to symbolise a new “life”.

10 In Mae Chaem, instead of asking one’s age, people may ask a question like “what animal do you rely on?” or “what animal do you belong to?” There are twelve animals corresponding to the twelve year cycle, each year being represented by an animal that imparts distinct characteristics to its year. Those animals are mouse, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig.

The Sangkar Lon



Fig. 5.3, 5.4 The *sangkar* raft is carried to Mae Chaem River.



Fig. 5.5, 5.6 The zodiac animal figures, representing one's self, are thrown into the raft. Then everyone pours the lustral water over the head, spilling down onto the *sangkar* raft, to wash one's *sangkar* out.



Fig 5.7, 5.8, 5.9 After the *sangkar* raft is floated; everybody jumps into the river, washes hair and takes a bath.

Is the person “Partible” or “Permeable” in Mae Chaem?

A Mae Chaem person is composed of multiple components, the 32 *khwan*, associated with different parts of the body. Each component can be detached from the body in extraordinary contexts such as in dreams, spirit possession, and illness. When sleeping it is believed that some parts of *khwan* can fly away from the body. The villagers explain that when they recognise dead relatives in dreams, it means their *khwan* leave the body and “meet” ancestors in the other world. In spirit possession, the medium’s body is occupied by the spirit’s soul until the spirit leaves her body then her *khwan* return. Some parts of *khwan* may detach from the body and cause the person to be ill. If all 32 *khwan* leave the body, however, the person dies.

Although it is believed that each part of the body (head, ears, eyes, hands, etc) contains *khwan*, they are not perceived separately. Rather, all 32 *khwan* are merged and conceptualised as internally whole. When they lose *khwan*, the villagers do not mention precisely from which particular body part *khwan* has been lost. Therefore, the Mae Chaem person cannot be analysed as a “partible” person (Strathern 1988), even though the body is composed of multiple and detachable components in different parts of the body. Furthermore, compared to the “partible person” in Melanesia¹¹ where a person is partly derived from the father and partly from the mother, the Mae Chaem *khwan* is derived as a whole from the matrilineal ancestor. *Khwan* contain the character, behaviour, and identity of the ancestor, thus the baby is thought to “be” the ancestor. While gender in Melanesia is performative of the internal relations between parts of persons as well as the external relations between persons (see Strathern 1988, Busby 1997), in Mae Chaem gender is acquired from the reincarnated spirit; a girl is normally

11 Busby (1997: 269-271) cites several examples of the Melanesian body and person, for instance, the Maring child, according to LiPuma (1988), is formed by the mixing of the father’s semen and the mother’s menstrual blood: the mother’s blood and milk form the child’s bone, muscle, blood and hard tissue, while the semen forms the lymphatic system, and the genitals and hair of boys, however the child’s life force or “spirit” is received from both parents. For the Daribi, studied by Wagner (1977), the seminal fluid forms the outer layer while maternal blood forms the inner layer of an embryo. In Sambia, semen is transformed in the womb into the fetal bone and tissue, while the mother’s blood becomes circulatory blood in the fetus (Herdt 1984). According to Weiner (1988), the Foi child’s flesh is made up from maternal blood while the bone is from paternal semen. Underlying all the conceptualisation of kinship relations and bodily personhood in this area is a belief that a part of each person is male (derived from the father) and a certain part is female (derived from the mother). In this sense, persons in Melanesia are thought of as “partible” or “divided” entities (Strathern 1988).

a reincarnation of a female ancestor and a boy is a reincarnated spirit of a male ancestor.

To some extent, the concept of *khwan* shares some aspects in common with the person in India. In India, substances within the body become indistinguishable; bodies cannot be divided according to male and female substantive components, and gender is a fixed and stable attribute of the body. They are complete in themselves, but are connected through the flows of substances which they exchange with each other (see Busby 1997). Similarly, the Mae Chaem person is understood to be an internally whole person with a fluid and permeable body. However, while in India the exchange of substance normally happens in everyday life through sexual relations, eating, and living together, in Mae Chaem a person is permeable through illness. The person who is susceptible to illness has a higher permeability than a healthy person. The very young, the very old and pregnant women are more permeable. The permeable body is seen as a sign of illness. A sick person may lose his or her *khwan* to a pregnant woman or a newborn baby. Therefore, *khwan* is not being “exchanged” in the same sense as substance is exchanged in India or Melanesia.

According to Carsten (2004: 134), through the analysis of bodily substance the dichotomy between “the West” and “the rest” is created (2004:134). “Dividual” non-Western persons in India or Melanesia, for instance, is opposed to the Western individual; the fluid and transformative substance in India or Melanesia is contrasted to the permanent and immutable substance in the West; and the non-Western “relational” person is opposed to the Western bounded and autonomous individual.

Nevertheless, many scholars find that there is some similarity and universality between the West and non-West, in other words, they share something in common. For example, dualism is not totally absent from Indian notions of personhood but the body and “spirit”, or blood and “spirit” are separately derived (Barnett 1976; McGilvray 1982 cited in Carsten 2004:118). Parry (1989 cited in Carsten 2004: 119) suggests that both monism and dualism are presented in the West and in India. Similarly, Carsten (2004) finds Malay personhood is boundedness as well as unboundedness, depending on the context. Their bodily substances are both given and acquired. Moreover, they can transform characteristics that are acquired into those that are given. Therefore, she

concludes, the “Malay, Indian, Melanesian and even North American discourses of kinship have a considerable amount in common, while also revealing some quite subtle differences” (ibid.: 135).

Mae Chaem persons can be bounded or unbounded in different contexts. Normally one is expected to be a bounded person with an intact *khwan* inside the body. It can become unbound in dreams, spirit possession, illness, at birth, and death. The integrity of the life essence inside the body indicates health while the unbound body or detachment of *khwan* indicates illness. Mae Chaem people aim for a bounded body in order to be “healthy”.

Nevertheless, this is not to say a Mae Chaem person is an “individual” person as in the West. To regain or keep *khwan* a person must rely on the good will of nearby elders who can recall lost *khwan* and restore it in his or her body. In the recalling of *khwan* for a sick person, a number of relatives and friends gather at the house to support and welcome the lost *khwan*. After the ritual they share the offering foods with the sick person’s *khwan*. Therefore the recalling *khwan* ceremony is not merely considered as a healing ritual for an “individual”. *Khwan* restricts individual autonomy and asserts the importance of balance for the person and harmony for the group (Tambiah 1970, O’Connor 1990).

Not only do humans share *khwan* in common, but so do other non-human entities, such as rice, animals, houses, and the *muang* as well. Growing rice, nurturing the young and sustaining kin and neighbours all thereby presume interdependence. All require sensitivity to others to maintain the balance that brings rice, individuals and groups to prosperity and well-being. Improper social interaction, on the other hand, can cause illness or misfortune. The “unhealthy” state of the *muang*, house, animal, or rice means ill health for humans. According to Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), the Mae Chaem case might be referred to as a “sociocentric” self whose boundary is beyond the individual. However, they do not create only a sociocentric whole through other people in the community but other beings, non-beings and supernatural beings as well.

Continuity of Generations through the Reincarnation of Matrilineal Ancestors

As presented above, the reincarnated spirit is always an ancestor of the child to be born. Precisely the reincarnated spirit is normally a rebirth of a matrilineal ancestor. That is to say a woman gives birth to matrilineal ancestors. As stated above, for Mae Chaem people the body is temporary while the spirit is permanent, and it is through women that the spiritual essence can continue to exist, and the cycle of rebirth keeps continuously turning.

Furthermore, to be reborn, ancestors have to be fed and receive merit from their descendants regularly. If the spirit does not receive any offerings or merit it keeps wandering in the spirit world, or haunts other people and is not able to be reborn. It is believed that dead parents and grandparents return to receive offering foods and merit only from the daughter not the son. Therefore it is very important for a daughter to make an offering regularly for her dead parents, grand-parents and other ancestors. Normally a woman makes an offering to her ancestors bilaterally, both father and mother. However, she does not make any offering to her husband's dead parents. His dead parents and ancestors receive offerings from their daughters instead.

Reproduction in Mae Chaem emphasises the endless cycle of the rebirth of ancestors and the continuation of generations over time rather than procreation within the same generation. The 32 *khwan* are not a mixture of father's and mother's bodily substance, nor a substance which father or mother transfer to their offspring. In other words, *khwan* is not transmitted through procreation. It is rather a transformation of the matrilineal ancestor's *phii* (spirit) into a baby's *kwhan* (life essence). Therefore, reproduction in Mae Chaem should rather be seen as part of the ancestral rebirth cycle. As one villager explained:

In Mae Chaem a mother becomes a daughter and a daughter becomes a mother.
It is simply going on and on like that.

This is related to Mae Chaem concepts of continuity over time; a continuity of a stream of life from ancient ancestors through the present and into endless future generations.

The life cycle does not start from birth and end at death and is not bounded in this life. It is rather a cycle of rebirth and re-death. It is a recycling of generations from higher to lower. That is to say Mae Chaem reproduction is not bounded by biological or substantial relations. The core of reproduction is rather the continuous cycle of generations. And woman is the core of the reproduction of ancestors.

Through living in the family a husband or father gradually loses his “individuality”. According to Carsten (2004), in Malaysia, people seem not to emphasise the difference between sexes. A couple refers to each other in terms of sibling, and the husband and wife gradually become one self. In Kerala (Busby 1997), husband and wife become one body as symbolised by eating from one plate and eating together at the same time. In Mae Chaem, the couple is regarded as one person, referred to as *poh-mae* (literally means father-mother or parent). As a consequence of matrilineal residence, the house is normally referred to by the wife’s name, such as “Mae Nee’s house” (*baan Mae Nee*). When people refer to a household, they use the wife’s name not the husband’s; “Mae Nee’s home” (*hyan Mae Nee*). A wife sometimes refers to her husband as “a father of [daughter’s name]” (*poh ee* [daughter’s name]), or simply call “the old one in this house” (*khon tao nai hyan*). In some cases, the husband has to register into his wife’s matrilineage after he suffers from illness. In other words, the registering is performed as a healing ritual. Although he is a person of a different spirit cult, after death a husband or father is regarded as an ancestor of his offspring. When a daughter makes merit to her ancestors she invites her dead mother and father, as well as her dead grandmother and grandfather to take the offerings. They gradually become ancestors in a collective sense, and finally become part of the ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*). However, as a father is a “person of different spirit”, after death he can only be reborn into his matrilineal spirit cult.

Reproduction is not restricted only to this world. After death one is believed to live in the world of spirit, waiting for the Puu Thaen Nyaa Thaen (the Old Couple Deities) to send him or her to the human world again. In the spirit world, the dead continues to live the same lifestyle as that of the living. Therefore, when a woman becomes old, she starts preparing a new set of personal belongings, such as clothes, bags, pillows, and bedding, to “use” after death, one for herself and another set for her husband. After her cremation, her children “send” these belongings to their dead parents by offering them

to a monk. Preparing to die is thus a preparation to be reborn (in the other world). Therefore, it can be seen that a woman “gives birth” to life after death as well, not only for herself but also her husband. The preparation to “live” in the spirit world confirms the importance of spiritual essence. Moreover, it also continues the cycle of “life” in both human and spirit world.

Sharing *Khwan*: Linkage among People of the Same Spirit (*phii diaw kan*)

In some contexts, *khwan* is regarded as an individual essence, whereas, in other contexts, it is thought of as a collective self. People of the same matrilineage are called “people of the same spirit” (*phii diaw kan*). They are people who hold the spirit in common. What spirit do they hold? In previous chapters I have shown that Mae Chaem people believe that “people of the same spirit” or people of the same matrilineal cult are those who have the same ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) and guardian spirit (Poh Chao Luang). Further than that, according to the reincarnation concepts, people also link to each other through the “spirit-inside-the-body” called *khwan*. As stated above, ideally a child is a reincarnated spirit of a matrilineal ancestor. Therefore, a mother and her children are reborn from ancestors of the same lineage. A father, on the other hand, is a person of different spirit cult. He was reborn from an ancestor of a different lineage. Therefore, mother and her offspring are “people of the same spirit” (*phii diaw kan*) for their spiritual essences share the same origin. In other words, people of the same matrilineal cult share common *khwan*. To conclude, kinship ideology in Mae Chaem is not conceptualised in terms of blood or substance, but a spiritual essence which is intangible and immaterial.

The Transmission of Spiritual Essence through Eating

Although *khwan* is not regarded as a physical “substance”, it is, according to the local knowledge, a part of the body. The boundary between spiritual essence and physical substance is blurred. In other words, in some contexts, Mae Chaem people do not distinguish sharply between the body and spirit. *Khwan* or the spirit-inside-the-body can be transmitted through physiological processes such as eating. Just as food can be

transformed into breast milk and blood, thus transmitting the substance of relatedness in Malaysia (Carsten 1997), food, or saliva in particular, can carry and transmit spiritual essence from one to another in Mae Chaem.

The villagers conceptualise a family as people who eat rice from the same pot or the same granary. They are thought to be “too close to heal each other”. The villagers believe that usually a healer would not be able to heal his own children because they are too close, and share too much “self” in common. To some extent they become the same “person” through sharing food in everyday life.

The belief about witchcraft in Mae Chaem is relevant here to show how spiritual essence can be transmitted through sharing food. The villagers believe that a woman can become a witch (*phii ka*) if she collects an object which is believed to be embedded with a “substance of a witch” (*cheau phii ka*)¹². The object is simply referred to as a “thing” (*kong*). Nobody knows what the “thing” looks like. It is a secret object. It is said that if a person finds the “thing” and keeps it she will become a witch.

When somebody is possessed by a malevolent spirit, he or she is forced by a healer to reveal the name of the spirit or the name of the witch who is believed to control the possessed spirit. The patient is hit and tortured so the possessed spirit leaves. It is believed that the patient will not hurt. Instead, it will magically torture the possessed spirit and the witch. The person whose name is mentioned in the exorcism is then blamed as a witch. A rumour spreads. If the woman’s name is frequently mentioned in cases of spirit possession, she might be expelled from the village.

It is believed that the “witch substance” (*cheau phii ka*) is embedded inside the body of the witch as well as in the “object” she keeps. Moreover, the “witch substance” is inherited matrilineally from mother to daughter. Any woman who shares the lineage with the witch is also believed to have some “witch substance”. Parents do not allow their sons to get married with any women from the “witch lineage”.

12 See Ganjanapan (1984) for details in *phii ka* (the witch) in Northern Thailand

Furthermore, the witch essence can also be transmitted through eating. The villagers believe that those who share food with a person who has the “witch substance” for at least three days may become a witch. A witch is believed to transmit her “substance” through her saliva. Some villagers secretly told me which family was a witch family and warned me not to share food with them.

A Seed (*cheau*): Bodily Substance in Mae Chaem

Among the Thais, the term *cheau* means a substance that links a person to his or her kin or origin. It is often used with the word “*leuad*” (blood). The common term which refers to a genealogical linkage is “*leaud neau cheau kai*”, which literally means “blood and flesh substance”. The term *cheau* itself sometimes means “blood”, for instance, if one has “*cheau chao*”, it means he or she has royal blood, and “*cheau kaek*” is a person who has Indian blood.

In Mae Chaem, however, “*cheau*” does not mean or is not used in terms of blood. Instead, for them, *cheau* means a plant seed. In terms of kinship it is used as a metaphor in a sense that everyone is a seed of his or her parents and ancestors. However, they do not develop the metaphor as in certain other cultures where woman’s womb is a “field” to cultivate a seed produced by a man. Sometimes the word *naw*, literally meaning a bamboo shoot, is also used in the same way. When the villagers saw a child that they did not recognise, they would ask, “whose *cheau* is this?” or “whose *naw* is this?” which means “whose child is this?”

Nevertheless, the notion of “seed” is not bounded by the parent-child relationship but extended to family, lineage, descent or its origin. A person may embody the “seed” directly from his or her reincarnated spirit. For instance, everyone is believed to inherit some characteristics from the reincarnated ancestor. It is believed that each “seed” has typical character, behaviour or personality of its own. One shares some behaviour, characteristic and personality with his or her kin because they are the same type of seed. The word “*cheau*” is sometimes used when they complain about somebody, for example, “he has such a stingy ‘seed’”, or “their *cheau* is greedy”.

The “seed” does not have to be transmitted biologically in the same sense as “blood”. Furthermore, the *cheau* can also come from somebody who does not have any genealogical link. This happened in the case of a newborn baby presented below.

In Mae Chaem the mother and child are believed to be in a vulnerable state for at least a month after birth. The mother’s body, skin, flesh, and tendons are believed to be loosening, expanding, porous and “cold”. If she has smelt or eaten something wrong, she could suffer from an indigenous disease called “*lom phid duen*” which has various symptoms such as madness or blindness. In the past, a new mother had to lie down by the fire with her baby beside her for about one month¹³, to keep her body warm and to strengthen the skin and the womb. This is called “*yuu fai*”, which literally means “staying by the fire”. If she does not stay by the fire long enough her breast milk is believed to be “un-cooked” and so will cause diarrhea for the baby. At present, however, the villagers believe that because a mother can give birth in the hospital where she takes lots of medicine and vitamins, she does not need to practice the *yuu fai* (laying down by the fire) as strictly as in the past. Nevertheless, she still needs to keep herself and the baby warm by remaining inside the house during the month after giving a birth. She must wear long-sleeved shirt and socks, and must lay down inside her bedroom with her baby all day and night under a mosquito net. The new way to “*yuu fai*” nowadays is therefore called “*yuu fai yen*” which literally means “staying by the ‘cold’ fire”. Moreover, a number of food taboos are still strictly practiced. That is why sometimes the *yuu fai* is also called “*gam deun*” (literally meaning “practice taboo for a month”).

After the month of “*yuu fai*” (staying by the fire) and practicing food taboos, the mother and newborn baby are allowed to come out of the house and the mother may go to work in the field. The first day the mother and the baby come out of the house is considered to be the most critical day for the baby. On this day, the first person who comes in sight of the baby at home can influence and “transfers” his or her “*cheau*” (seed), which

¹³ The exact amount depends on the sex of the baby. If she has a girl, she should lay down by the fire, or stay inside the house (as practiced in the present) for a month plus another 3 days. On the other hand, if she gives birth to a boy she should practice for 27 days, or as the villagers said a month minus 3 days. This is explained under their ways to discriminate gender. According to the villagers, in the case of a baby girl, the 3 days are added for the weaving machine and cotton. It implies that to be a girl or a woman she should learn to weave. By contrast, the 3 days which is deducted in the case of a baby boy is to get rid of any risk he might get from swords.

contain characteristics, to the baby. This is called “*lawn deun*”. It is not easy to translate the term “*lawn deun*” into English. Normally the word “*lawn*” means “frighten” and “*deun*” means the month. Therefore “*lawn deun*” may be translated as “frighten of the month”. However, according to the villagers, the person who comes to visit the baby that morning is not regarded as a “frightening” person. Nevertheless, people tend to avoid visiting the mother or baby on that day. They do not want to be complained to afterwards that the baby was influenced by their characters (which are embedded in their “seeds”). Once a woman told me that her newborn son was being “*lawn deun*” from her neighbour whom she does not like, she laughed and said;

Well, I don’t know why I can’t escape from Poh Toon. My first son was “*lawn deun*” by him. He came to visit us on the first day I finished the “*yuu fai*” (laying by the fire) month. That’s why my son is so talkative, just like Poh Toon. This time, again, Poh Toon is the first person whom the baby saw on the day I finished the “taboo month” (*gam deun*). So now both of my sons will have Poh Toon’s talkative “*cheau*” (seed).

Blood, Wind, Poison and *Khwan*: Relationship between Body Elements and Spiritual Essence

The notion of blood in Mae Chaem is considered as a physiological part of the body, not in terms of reproduction. There is a close connection between blood (*leud*) and wind (*lom*) in that wind may spread around anywhere in the body with blood. Wind is regarded as the most vital constituent of the body and is referred to in the explanation of a variety of diseases ¹⁴ (Brun and Schumacher 1994). The concept of *leudlom*

14 Diseases in which an abundance or deficiency of wind is a prominent symptom affect the balance, movement of the limbs, and result in headache and fainting, pressure in the heart, breast, and stomach regions, and jerks and spasms. A typical disease of this kind is *lom phid deun*, often occurring with women during the postpartum period, certain foods and smells are often given as the immediate reason of the ascending wind. Wind may also appear as a secondary symptom or complication in diseases like skin lesion, many cancer, tumour, pus or thyroid. In fact, diseases may be cured as such, but wind may still remain. Finally, the wind may turn poisonous (*lom pid*), which is then considered very dangerous. If the poisonous wind is ascending it would result in sudden loss of consciousness, which is normally followed by death. There is a wind disease called “*baheng kuud*” which is understood to be “common” and “normal” for an elderly. At the coming of age, wind will ascend to different parts of the body depending on the individual. Some ascend to the eyes, causing blurred vision; some ascend to the ears, causing loss of hearing; to the head, causing grey or white hair; and to the mouth causing the loss of teeth or loose teeth.

(blood-wind) is often used to explain the health status of a person. A “healthy person” is said to have “good wind and blood” (*leudlom dee*). Blood may be found in various states: it may be normal (*leud dii*) or it may turn stale and become spoiled (*leud sia*). Hot or cold blood and wind can cause diseases. A deficiency of wind causes the hardening of blood, thus hot foods and remedies are prescribed to enhance the wind and to dilute the blood.

Wind and blood may turn “poisonous” (*pid*). Some cancers and tumors have poisonous blood as an inherent symptom. The “poison” (*pid*) also refers to the less tangible concept of “something with the attribute of poison”, which is not easily conceived in concrete terms. Any malevolent spirits may, for example, insert “poison” into the body. Some animals are believed to have more “poison” than others, such as chicken, therefore should not be consumed when one is sick for he or she is susceptible to receive the “poison”. Some foods, such as meat, are “poisonous” only for somebody but not others. The presence of “poison” (*pid*) normally results in pain, and the disease is regarded as acute or critical and should be treated with great care. The poison should be prevented from spreading by means of dietary restrictions and incantations (*kathaa paw pid*). The poison has to be expelled by a traditional healer. The healer normally uses both mechanical and magical means, such as rubbing off with an egg white, scratching out by a fang, or simply blowing out with a magic incantation. After the healer expels the poison, he asks somebody to sweep the floor where the patient has been sitting, to prevent the poison from spreading to others. It is believed that the poison may contaminate someone else if they sit on the site where the healer has just expelled it from the patient’s body. The poison can also be transmitted by massaging. When one asks somebody to massage, after finishing she should wash the massager’s hand. It is believed that the person with back pain or fatigued muscles may have “poison” which passes on to the massager. These points confirm that Mae Chaem conceptualise the body and self as permeable, particularly when one has illness.

Blood, wind and *khwan* (life essence) are related to each other. As stated above, the quality of *khwan* is weaker when one is getting older. The quality of the blood and the wind correspond to that of the *khwan*. A very old person has weak *khwan* as well as weak blood-wind substance (*leudlom*). The body temperature at the forehead and the feet indicates whether one has lost *khwan* or not, particularly in the case of a baby. If

the forehead is warm but the feet are cold, it is believed that the baby has lost its *khwan* into the water. This is a typical sign for an illness called “*khwan tok nam*” (*khwan* falling into the water), which often happens after a baby takes a bath.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that kinship is not always a substance-based relationship. However, I do not mean to ignore the natural or bodily matter which is central to kin relations in many cultures. In Mae Chaem, people do connect each other through the “body” or “bodily” aspects. But for them the body is composed of both physical and spiritual components. And their relationships are constituted through the complexity and dynamic of the physical-spiritual body. Therefore, we need a careful consideration of local perceptions about the “body” in order to understand how it symbolises gender, personhood, relationship, connection and disconnection, dependence and independence, individuality and dividuality.

For Mae Chaem people, the physical body contains a spiritual essence (*khwan*) which gives life and constitutes personhood. *Khwan* is the vital part of the body. Without *khwan* one is dead. Health status depends on the quality of *khwan*. The tangible and intangible components of the body, such as flesh, blood, wind and *khwan*, are related and affect each other and the equilibrium of all these elements brings health. The boundary between the body and the soul is blurred. In some context, the spiritual essence can be passed on through eating. That is to say, bodily processes like eating can be a means to transmit the immaterial components as well.

Khwan is not merely a part of the bodily elements, it is also a part of the “self” which defines the characteristics and identity of a person. When an ancestor’s spirit transforms into a baby’s *khwan*, it carries the ancestor’s characters within it. Therefore, a person is believed to carry the ancestor’s identity.

The core of reproduction in Mae Chaem is not bound to biological procreation. Reproduction is rather seen as the endless cycle of ancestral rebirths. It is a continuous transformation cycle from an ancestor’s spirit into a baby’s *khwan*, in other words, the

spirit-outside-the-body transforms into the spirit-within-the-body (*khwan*). In return, the human's *khwan* is transformed to a spirit after death and becomes a part of the ancestors. Certainly, this is related to their ideology of life which emphasises the permanence of the soul (*khwan*) or spirit (*phii*) over the temporary nature of the physical body (*sangkar*).

The continuity of the rebirth cycle is also the reproduction of the matrilineage. Normally a person is a reincarnated spirit of the ancestor of the same matrilineage. Reproduction in Mae Chaem does not emphasise the exchange of bodily substances as in many cultures. The child's body does not contain any part of mother's or father's *khwan*. Instead, the child's *khwan* is a reincarnated spirit of the ancestor. Therefore, it can be said that a mother gives birth to the ancestor. What is shared among the matrilineal kin is the origin of the *khwan* which all come from the spirit of the same lineage. They are the "people of the same spirit".

However, the cycle of rebirth does not simply imply a static worldview. The cycle is moving forward continuously. For instance, even though a child is thought to be a reincarnated spirit of an ancestor, when he or she grows up his or her own identity is gradually created through time. At death he or she is referred to as "a spirit of [his or her name]" (*phii tai* [name]) who waits to be reborn in the next life.

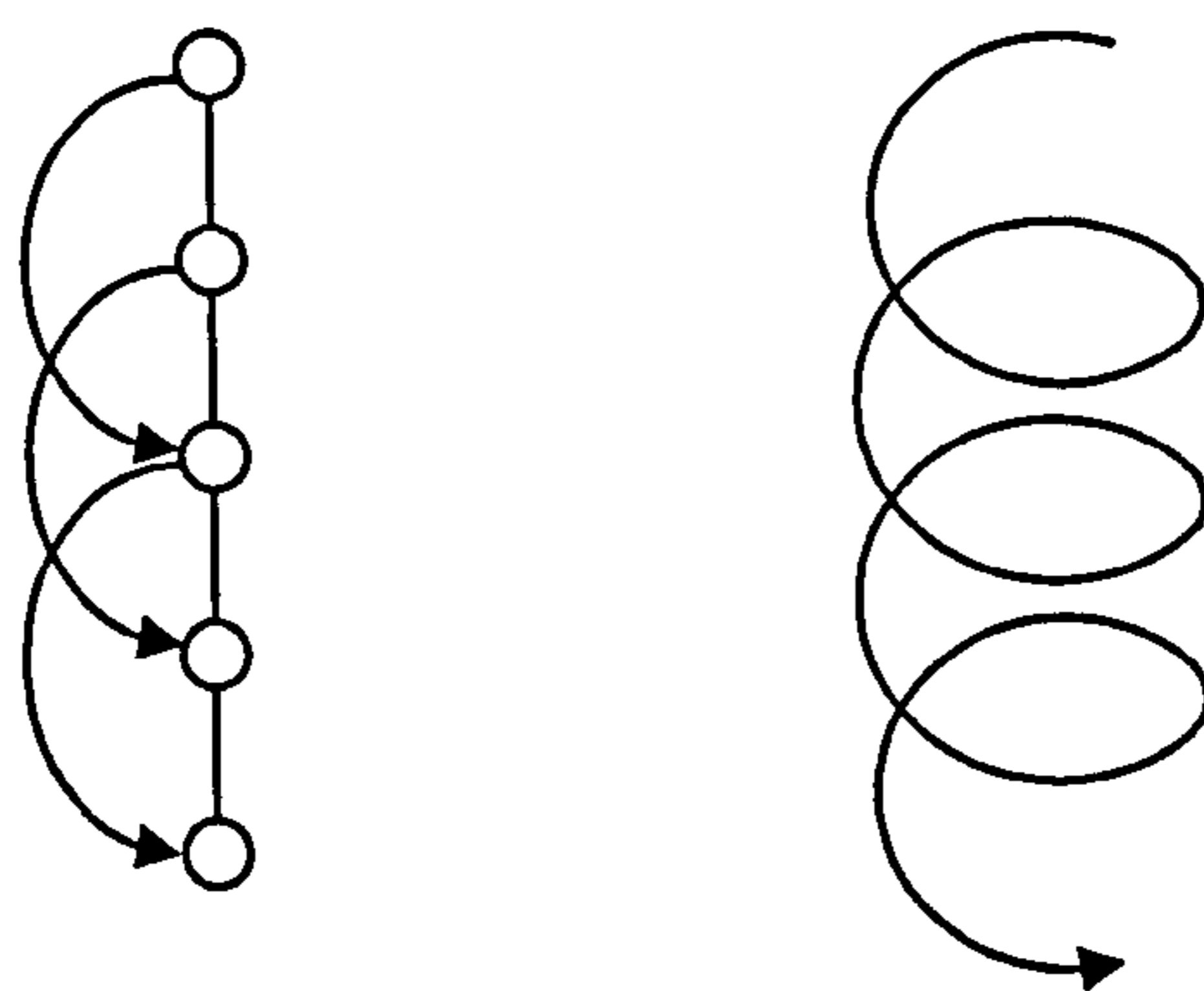


Diagram 5.2 Reincarnation cycle

The tangible bodily substance and intangible bodily essence are not sharply distinguished. A boundary between the corporeal body and the abstract soul is blurred,

as well as that between individual and dividual self, and notions of bounded and unbounded person. The uncertain characters of *khwan* (life essence), *phii* (spirit) and *sangkar* (age, body or life) constitute a fluidity of self and relationship not only among persons, but between persons and spirits and other nonhuman beings as well.

A different logic and perspective is needed to understand the abstract and imaginative form of relationships in Mae Chaem. Their kinship is not embedded in the biological body and physical substance, but created through the dynamic and uncertain spiritual essence. The boundary of “self” and relationship is thus beyond the individual entity but extends to the other world, the world of spirit. Through the ongoing cycle of spirit-*khwan* transformation, spirit and human are related to each other all the time, in some way or another. The spirit-outside-the-body may catch, kidnap, harm, or govern and protect the spirit-inside-the-body. Humans need spirits to protect and ensure prosperity, while spirits need offerings and merit from humans in order to be reborn. The spirit may attack humans for any reason while human may intimidate by “cutting the tie” with spirits (exorcism) or persuade the spirit by a bribe to ask it for help. The spirit-human relationship is an important part of the ideology of kinship in Mae Chaem.

Lived through Illness, Learned through Healing:

A Study of Reincarnation as a Process of Becoming Kin

Introduction

This chapter examines the complex relations between illness, kinship and personhood in reincarnation ritual. I find Mae Chaem people use illness and their healing systems as an opportunity to negotiate, transform, create, and reproduce their personhood and kin relationships. In other words, illness is framed by and partly composed of discourses or languages of social relatedness and personhood. Therefore, it is important not to view illness and healing entirely in medical terms, i.e., view health based on physical or mental states, for people do not talk about illness exclusively as a problem of health or body; rather illness and healing embrace their complex, dynamic, and uncertain world. I am interested in Pollock's argument that illness conceptions are closely linked to the processes through which personhood is acquired, expressed, and transformed (Pollock 1996, Roseman 1996). However, whereas Pollock finds, among the Kulina Indians of Amazonia, direct relations between illness and domestic or public conflicts, I conversely argue that illness does not have to be conceptualised negatively; it can also strengthen kinship ties. And this can be clarified through the study of reincarnation.

Ethnographic study of reincarnation, conducted in Mae Chaem district in Northern Thailand, illustrates the ongoing process of becoming kin by which people live and learn through complex discourses of health and illness. Gupta (2002) suggests an interesting angle to understand concepts of childhood through cases of reincarnation in Tibet. He finds reincarnation implies complex notions of childhood which challenge Western ideas of growth and development which entail as well the ethnocentric concepts of evolution and nation development. I agree with Gupta that the understanding of childhood is complex particularly in societies and cultures where

reincarnation is a common belief. In Northern Thailand, adulthood is also conceptualised as a complex stage. Therefore, it would be more interesting to study further how Reincarnation rituals are practised in everyday life among the adults. This will lead us to understand how children and adulthood are related, and how reincarnation is central to the authority and hierarchy of kinship systems.

***Khwan*: the Dynamics of Life Essences**

Before discussing the ethnography of reincarnation, it is helpful briefly to recapitulate the Northern Thais' concept of "*khwan*": the life essences¹. In the Northern Thais' understanding of life essence, the social and the individual are mutually related through the sharing of corporeal substance and spiritual essence. In Mae Chaem, as elsewhere in Thailand, it is believed that each person has 32 *khwan* associated with particular parts of the body, i.e., head, ears, eyes, cheeks, shoulders. *Khwan* are the important part of the human body for it gives "life" and brings about blessing and creates a sense of balance in one's life. Separation of one or more *khwan* from its corporeal anchor results in illness, weakness, susceptibility to spirit possession, and possible death, necessitating a rite to recall the departed elements (Davis 1984a, 1984b, Sriwongrach 1998, and Tambiah 1970). When a person dies, it is believed that all the 32 *khwan* leave the body via the feet. After that the 32 *khwan* separate and go to 32 different places depending on one's karma. Some may go to heaven or to hell, some may be sent to be reborn while some wander around in the human world.

Concepts of Reincarnation in Mae Chaem

Reincarnation is a common belief in Thailand especially among Buddhists, as they believe in *samsara*; the eternal cycle of death and reincarnation. Each life has a direct influence on the next according to the doctrines of karma; the sum and the consequences of an individual's actions during the successive phases of his existence.

¹ See chapter 5 for further details of the concept of *khwan*

Buddhists may escape this cycle only by achieving enlightenment or “nirvana”². According to Darlington (1990), Buddhism has different levels of apprehension: the “nibhanna Buddhist” and “kammic Buddhist”; the first aims for salvation from the cycle of suffering, and the second regards life as central to the continuing of karma. Mae Chaem people place little emphasis on the achievement of nirvana as a final state after many rebirths. They do not aim for salvation. To live long, for them, does not mean to live until old age, but to be repeatedly reborn. An individual moves through a life cycle of statuses from newborn to elder, to ancestor and back to child many times. What is hoped for is an improved condition in this life or the next. To this end they make merit by doing good deeds, for they believe that evil acts have evil consequences for those committing them, and good acts yield good consequences, not necessarily in any one lifetime, but over the inevitable cycle of births and deaths.

Each “life” or existence is called “*chart*”. The words “*chart ghon*”, “*chart nee*”, and “*chart naa*”, mean previous life, this life and next life, respectively. People usually make a wish to be born into a good and rich family in the next life. A phrase of blessing which the villagers frequently use to each other is, “May you live long until attending 120 (*pansa*) Buddhist Lent³”, “may you be reborn in a Chao’s (noble’s) family”. The ideal life they aim for is to be reborn eternally until the era of the Phra Ariyamettraiya, which is believed to be a peaceful and egalitarian Age. Mae Chaem people, as elsewhere in Northern Thailand, believe that there are, in all, five Buddhists Ages; each will last for 5000 years.

At present, we are in the 4th Buddhist Age in the year 2547. If we are born again and again one day we will reach the year 5000 which is the beginning of Mettrai

² Buddhists believe that existence is suffering; suffering is caused by desire, so the elimination of desire leads to a state of perfect non suffering and non existence called *nibbana* (nirvana).

³ The Khao Phansa Buddhist Lent is the official day for the beginning of the rains. It originates from Buddhism's early origins in India when people stayed in permanent dwellings during the rainy season to avoid stepping on and destroying newly-planted seeds. It falls on the day after the full moon on the eighth lunar month (July) and is an important religious event. Monks take up permanent residences for the next three months and many males choose to enter the monkhood during this time. Buddhist Lent lasts as long until the rains retreat (three months) and during this time, many choose to give up smoking, drinking alcohol or other forms of inappropriate behaviour as a symbol of their faith. Laymen also spend more time listening to sermons at temples and in meditation during this highly religious period.

Age. We believe the Age of Mettrai Buddha is the age of calm, peacefulness and equality.

Life and death are conceptualised as a continuous journey. A villager explained to me that;

Life is like a long journey, when our *poh kerd mae kerd* (Parent Spirit) send us to the human world they give us a pack of rice, when the rice is finished we have to go back to where we are from; to our *baan gao* (previous home)⁴. Just like when I go out to work in the rice field, my wife prepares a pack of rice and food for me. In the evening, I have already finished the food and feel hungry so I have to go back home. At our *baan gao*, we wait to be sent to be reborn in the human world again.

At birth, everybody's lifetime has already been given by the Parent Spirits (*poh kerd mae kerd*). The villagers often give simple explanations of death as "finish his time"⁵ (*ayu peun mee ma tao-an*), "finish her age" (*tai pue ayu mun*), "ending one's destiny" (*siang karm*), "finish his rice pack" (*haw kao siang*). Death is not an ending but a movement out of the human world into some space. They say a "dead person is going forward" (*pai tang naa*), while the living is referred to as "*khon tang lang*" which means "(a person) who is left behind", implying that the living is following the dead. Sometimes they refer to the dead as a person who "*baw mee laew*" which literally means a person who "does not exist now" or as a person who "*sin buun*" which literally means has "finished his *buun* (merit) or his karma". To refer to the dead person, a specific pronoun is added as "*phii tai* ..(name).." , which literally means "spirit of the dead..(name).." . On the other hand, "*kerd*" means to be born. Reincarnation or rebirth is called "*klub maa kerd*" or "*klub chart maa kerd*", which literally means "returning to be born in another life".

4 The world of dead is sometimes referred to as "the previous house (*baan gao*)" from which everybody came. Correspondingly the Trobriand's soul of a sub-clan member goes to the island of the dead, settles down as a ghost among its kin and returns again to the land of the living, into the womb of a woman of its own sub-clan (Malinowski 1948 cited in Bloch and Parry 1982: 8).

5 People who die on the same day and the some month they were born are confirmed to die from the "ending of their life time".

For the Thais in general, reincarnation is a common ideology with no specific ritual or practice. It is simply taken for granted. In contrast to case studies of reincarnation among the Tibetans (Gupta 2002), Thais believe that normally one cannot remember one's previous life. Although there are some persons who claim that they can recall their previous life; they are rather seen as unusual and may have magical power.

However, in Mae Chaem and some parts of Northern Thailand, reincarnation belief is very much grounded onto the practical level. They believe that everyone is reborn by one's ancestor. After a child is born, it is important for the child's parents to find out which ancestor reincarnated into the child. If a correct ancestor is named as the child's Reincarnation Spirit, and a proper welcoming ritual is performed, the child will be healthy. This can also be seen as a process of social birth for a child, which involves a negotiation between the child's parents, relatives and traditional diviners. Therefore, reincarnation in Mae Chaem is not a matter of recognising one's previous life. They believe that every child forgets his or her previous life since he or she turns the head upside down inside the womb before birth. However, almost everybody is told, by their parents or relatives, the name of his or her Reincarnating Spirit.

Reincarnation Ritual (*taam kerd*)

Almost every child in the village wears a thread bracelet on his wrists. Each child has different objects hanging on the thread; it could be a silver coin, copper coin, a small white shell or plain yellow thread. To tie the wrists is believed to be a symbol to keep *khwan* (the life essence) firmly inside the body (Tambiah 1970, Terwiel 1994) because children's *khwan* are not yet strong, but easily lost. The more one grows up the stronger one's *khwan* becomes. Therefore, villagers believe that young children should keep wearing the bracelet until they are grown enough—some said until they could walk, or go out to play by themselves. Some parts of the body are more vulnerable to the loss of *khwan*, and therefore are emphasised in the rites intended to reunite *khwan*. For instance, neck, wrists and ankles, are the parts where the healers usually tie sacred thread in order to keep *khwan* intact. The head is the most vulnerable part of the body. *Khwan* is believed to reside in or enter and exit the body at the tuft of hair at the top of

the head (the crown). Children are vulnerable to the loss of *khwan*, therefore, their heads should always be covered with hats when going out.



Fig. 6.1, 6.2 Almost every child wears a thread bracelet on his wrists.

The wristlet reveals further that the thread is not only a symbol to strengthen the individual's life essence, but also a symbol of kin ties. The particular object hung on the child's wristlet, and the particular person who should give and tie the thread for the child are defined through the Reincarnation ritual.

It is believed that everyone is reborn from an ancestor called *poh kerd mae kerd* (Reincarnating Spirit)⁶. In general, reincarnation seems to be a return of alternate generations. For instance, the generation of one's children is a returning of one's grandparent's generation. Basically, one is reborn into the same matrilineage as in the previous life. In other words, the ancestor who is reincarnated in the child normally is the "people of the same spirit" (*phii diaw kan*) or "people of the same lineage" (*sueng diaw kan*). Nevertheless, it is not impossible that one is reborn by an ancestor from the father's matrilineage.

Almost everyone knows who was reincarnated into him/herself. To find out the Reincarnating Spirit, a ritual called "*taam ha poh kerd mae kerd*", or "*taam kerd*" in brief, which literally means "finding out the Reincarnating Spirit", is performed. To

⁶ There are two different kinds of spirit which Mae Chaem people call them with the same term: *poh kerd mae kerd*. One is the Reincarnation Spirit which is the particular ancestor that reincarnated into the baby, and another one is the Parents Spirit: the couple deity who sent all human beings to be reborn in the human world. They are, however, differentiated by the referential context.

make it simpler, I shall call the ritual “Reincarnation ritual”. However, it has to be noted that, this is not a compulsory process for everyone to find out their Reincarnating Spirit. It is only performed for a newborn baby or a young child (less than about 2 years old) when they are ill. The “correct” or “matching” Reincarnating Spirit has to be identified and welcomed for the child to be healed.

The most common illness in infants is continuous crying. When a child appears to cry continuously, during the day or night, the villagers often suspect that it may be caused by any kind of spirits. And the most common explanation is that the illness is a sign from the child’s Reincarnated Spirit, asking for a welcoming ritual. Therefore, the child’s parents need to find out which ancestor is reincarnated into their child. Then, the Reincarnation ritual (*taam kerd*) is performed.

The ritual can be performed by any elder who has learned the performance and the chant. If nobody in the family is able to perform the ritual, the child’s parents, grandparents or close relatives will consult a diviner. In this case the ritual will be performed at the diviner’s house. It does not require any participant; only a cloth of the baby is needed.

The diviner hangs a small piece of cooked glutinous rice above the child’s clothes while chanting and asking questions. If the rice turns around uncontrolled it is a sign of the right answer, on the other hand it remains still for the wrong answer. The questions normally asked are:

“Are you the spirit from mother’s side?”

“Are you the spirit from father’s side?”

“Are you the spirit of recent death?”

“Are you the spirit of former death?”

Then he will call a name of a deceased person from the particular side, which (he thinks) is possibly the baby’s Reincarnating Spirit, one by one. The correct name of the Reincarnating Spirit is identified when the rice moves. The same procedure is used to identify the welcome gift. After finding out the spirit, the diviner further asks “what do you prefer, the white or yellow gift?” White gift could be silver, stainless lace, a small

white shell (as it was used as money in ancient times) or simply a Thai baht coin tied with thread. Yellow gift could be golden lace, a copper coin or simply yellow thread. The final question is to name a particular living relative who has to find the gift for the baby; “who you want to receive the gift from?” Normally a close relative of the Reincarnated Spirit, for instance, his or her children or spouses, is mentioned. Only after the Reincarnating Spirit receives a welcome gift, and indeed from the particular person, is the child completely healed. The gift is tied on the child’s wrists, by the relative of the Reincarnating Spirit, as a symbol to welcome the *khwan* of the ancestor as well as to ensure the *khwan* to reside inside the child’s body.

The Complexity and Dynamics of Reincarnation

One can be Reborn before One has Died

There are two stages of life, the very young and the very old, when the human’s *khwan* are seen to be the most vulnerable, i.e., susceptible to harm, loss, or attack by spirits, because they are closet to the unseen world. The younger the child, the more vulnerable the *khwan*; and the older the elder, the weaker the *khwan*. When people are getting old they should be careful not to step over anyone’s clothes, in particular those of a pregnant woman, for some of their *khwan* may enter such a woman’s womb. In other words, some of their *khwan* may be reborn before they have died. The person who loses *khwan* into a woman’s womb will then become sick, and if he or she fails to restore the *khwan*, he or she may die soon.

Furthermore, a person with a severe or chronic illness is susceptible to lose *khwan* to a newborn baby or a young child. The ethnography presented below can clarify this point.

A man suffered from a chronic illness and laid on his bed long before he died. Before the man died, a baby, whose house was located near to that man, was getting ill. The baby’s parents were engaged in a long process of healing. The most common healing procedure for a baby is to find its Reincarnated Spirit.

After an ancestor was named the child had still not completely recovered. It was then suspected that a wrong ancestor might be identified as the child's Reincarnated Spirit. Later, after the sick man died, the two illnesses (of the sick person and of the child) turned out to be connected. For instance, the baby's parents tried the Reincarnation ritual again and this time the diviner revealed that the sick person who had just died was the Reincarnating Spirit of the child. After a relative of the sick person performed a welcoming ritual for the baby (which was also a welcome for the sick person's *khwan* inside the baby's body), by giving a gift and tying a thread on the baby's wrists, the child recovered from illness.

The villagers explained that while the man was sick some of his *khwan* had already left his body and was reborn in the child before he died, while the rest still remained inside his body. Therefore, during that time both the sick person and the baby were not regarded as "complete" persons. After the sick person died, all his *khwan* left his body and entered the baby's. Then, the *khwan* of the sick person and the baby finally became one. The sick person's name was then revealed as the right Reincarnating Spirit of the baby. This kind of illness explanation is relatively common in Baan Yang Luang, and the process in which parents searching for their child's Reincarnating Spirit may take time until the child is nearly one year old or even older.

From the example recounted above, we can see that reincarnation in Mae Chaem is not only a matter of continuity of an individual's lifetime, but of the interrelation of the two kinsmen's lifetimes. In other words, the cycles of life of the two kinsmen are overlapped and interdependent. While the sick person needs the baby to continue his cycle of rebirth; the baby needs the sick person's *khwan* to be socially and symbolically born.

Normally people avoid giving the explanation that the sick person's *khwan* has already entered the baby's body, when he or she is still alive, because it is regarded as inauspicious and can be seen as a curse. It is, however, mentioned after the sick person has died. For example, Mae Nue (63 years old) told me that she observed a sign of connection between her mother and her granddaughter before her mother died;

That time when my youngest granddaughter was less than a year old, I remember she never let my mother hold her or play with her. She always cried when she saw my mother. Later my mother was sick and finally died. We found afterwards that my mother was reborn as my granddaughter. That is why she was always scared of my mother.

This is an example of the local notions of overlapping of life and death between two persons. Mae Nue's mother and her granddaughter shared, partly, the same *khwan*. According to Bloch and Parry (1982: 8), death is a source of life, as they put it, "every death makes available a new potentiality for life, and one creature's loss is another's gain".

Reincarnation by the Same Spirit

Many persons are reborn from the same Reincarnating Spirit, as *khwan* are conceived as multi-souls. In other words, although the particular ancestor has already been reborn, it is not impossible to find out later that he or she is reborn as another person as well.

At first, according to my different logical understanding, I was confused when I found that many villagers have the same Reincarnating Spirit. I thought if one is already reborn, this means that all his or her *khwan* come back as a whole single person, whereas the villagers have a rather complex and flexible conceptualisation. For example, Pan (Nee's mother) was reborn as Onn, as well as Ha (Nee's daughter) and Oii (Ha's daughter, Nee's granddaughter) (see diagram 6.1). When I asked Mae Nee, she was surprised at the question and said, "I don't know. May be because there are 32 *khwan*?"

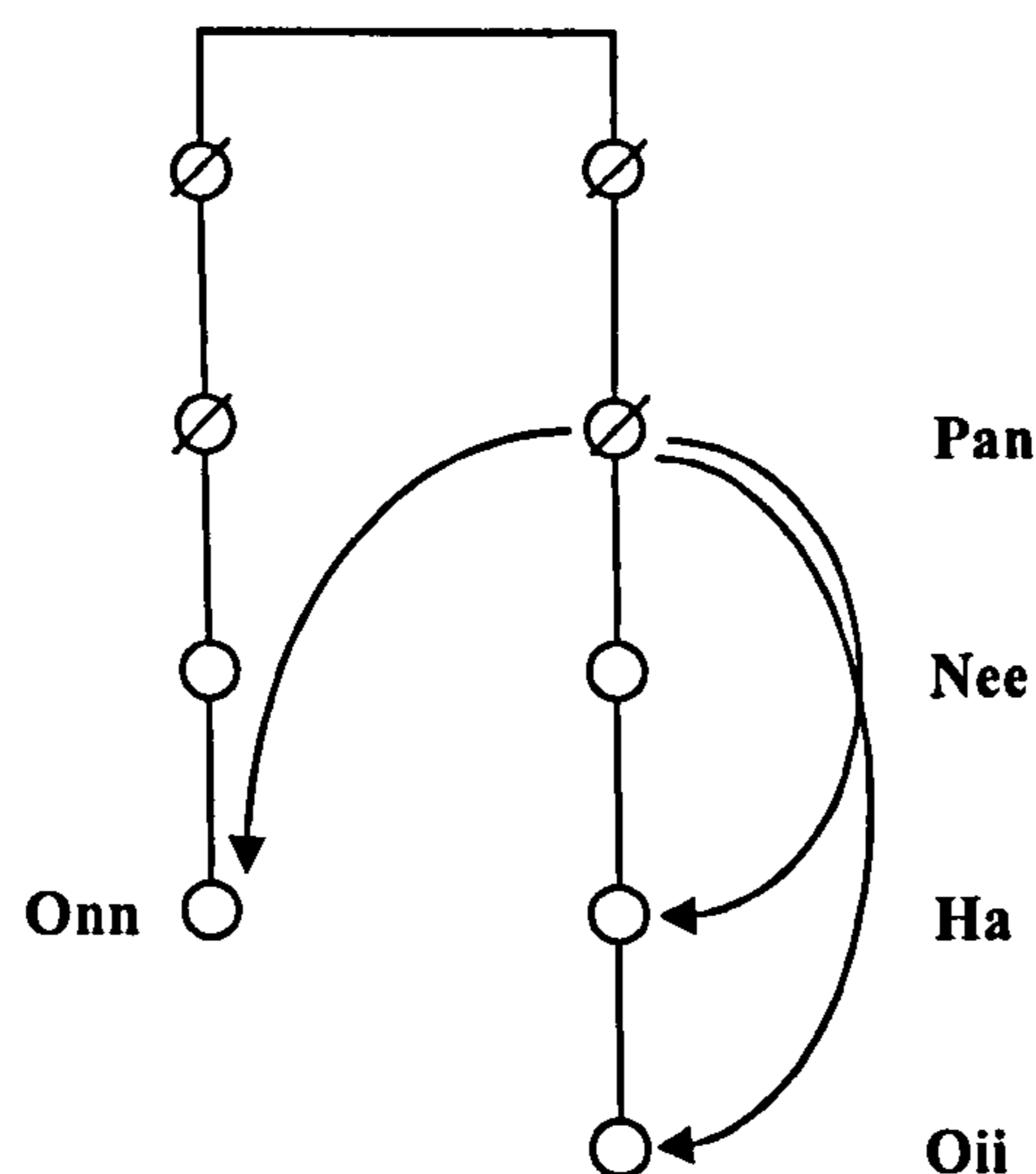


Diagram 6.1: Reincarnation in Nee's family

As with Beng reincarnation (Gottlieb 1998) and Sumbanese name-giving (Forth 1983), even after the dead relative is reincarnated into someone else, the spirit nevertheless continues to exist independently of the child, as an ancestor which the living relatives should continue to respect and constantly make merit for them. Forth (1983) sees this as a “replacement” of an ancestor rather than a strict sense of reincarnation, meanwhile, Gottlieb (1998: 123) views it as a “double existence rather than an either-or conception”.

Reincarnation and the Negotiation Process

The Reincarnating Spirit may or may not be accepted at once. Indeed, the child's illness is a sign for the decision. As stated above, Reincarnation ritual can only happen if the child is sick. And only if the child has illness again the decision can be made whether the Reincarnating Spirit should be accepted. The process may go on for a long period (usually not beyond one year). Studies on reincarnation hardly discuss the possibility of the Reincarnating Spirit changing. On the other hand, I find such ambiguity from the Sumbanese name conferring ritual similar to that of Mae Chaem, for the child is renamed in a regular sequence until it is determined that a particular name is the correct

one. Moreover, if a child is constantly ill or slow in his growth, this may be thought to be the result of his name having been incorrectly divined (Forth 1983). However, Forth (1983) did not discuss in detail the process of such negotiation.

If the Reincarnating Spirit has already been accepted, although the child becomes sick again, the Reincarnation ritual (*taam kerd*) would not be performed. In that case his or her parents or grandparents would not ask the diviner to perform the Reincarnation ritual, so the diviner would find a different explanation. For example, it might reveal that the child's *khwan* is lost, or has fallen into water. The usual explanation is that the child's *khwan* fell into water while taking a bath and the calling *khwan* ritual is needed. Another traditional diagnosis likely to happen to children is related to the Parent Spirit: the divine couple who sends human beings to be born in the human world and decides one's fate. The ties between the Parent Spirit and humans are lesser when one becomes older. However, sometimes the tie between the child and the Parent Spirit is too close and it can cause the child to be ill. It is said that the Parent Spirit wants the child to return to the spirit world. In that case, an exorcism is needed⁷. The child's illness can also be explained as a punishment for their parents' neglect of ancestral spirits (*phii puu nyaa*). In that case their parents have to make an offering to their ancestral spirit.

Nevertheless, if the child's parents still suspect that the Reincarnating Spirit of their child may not be the correct one, they ask the diviner to find out again, so the Reincarnating ritual is re-performed. The case study of Tui, a baby boy, presented below, illustrates the process of how his relatives try to negotiate for the "correct" ancestor.

Case One

Tui's family lives in a matrilineal residence, although he has been brought up by both father's and mother's sides. Both his father's and mother's houses are located in the village. Every morning his father brings him to his parents' house but his MM never

⁷ The tie between the Parent Spirit and children is discussed below in more detail

allows his FM to take Tui overnight. Nevertheless, Tui usually cries every morning to persuade his father to bring him to his FM's house.

When Tui was about one-month-old, his umbilical cord was infected. His FM visited a diviner to find out his Reincarnating Spirit. It turned out to be Tui's FMF (no. 1 in diagram 6.2). Tui received a welcome gift (thread tying) by his FM. A couple of months later Tui had a flu, this time his MM visited another diviner and asked him to perform another *taam kerd* ritual and found that it was her elder brother (Tui's MMB) (no.2 in diagram 6.2). This time Tui's MM gave Tui another gift, to welcome her brother. By doing this, it can also be seen as an indirect strategy to reject the previous Reincarnating Spirit which was an ancestor of Tui's father's side.

Nevertheless, the process had still not ended. When Tui was almost one year old, he frequently experienced a cold. His mother visited a modern medical doctor many times and had got several medicines, while his MM applied traditional herbs on his head. Finally Tui's MMZ (lived in the same house) wanted to try the *taam kerd* ritual again. This time it revealed that Kam, who just died a week ago (in his sixties), was Tui's Reincarnating Spirit. Kam is also Tui's MFB (no.3 in diagram 6.2).

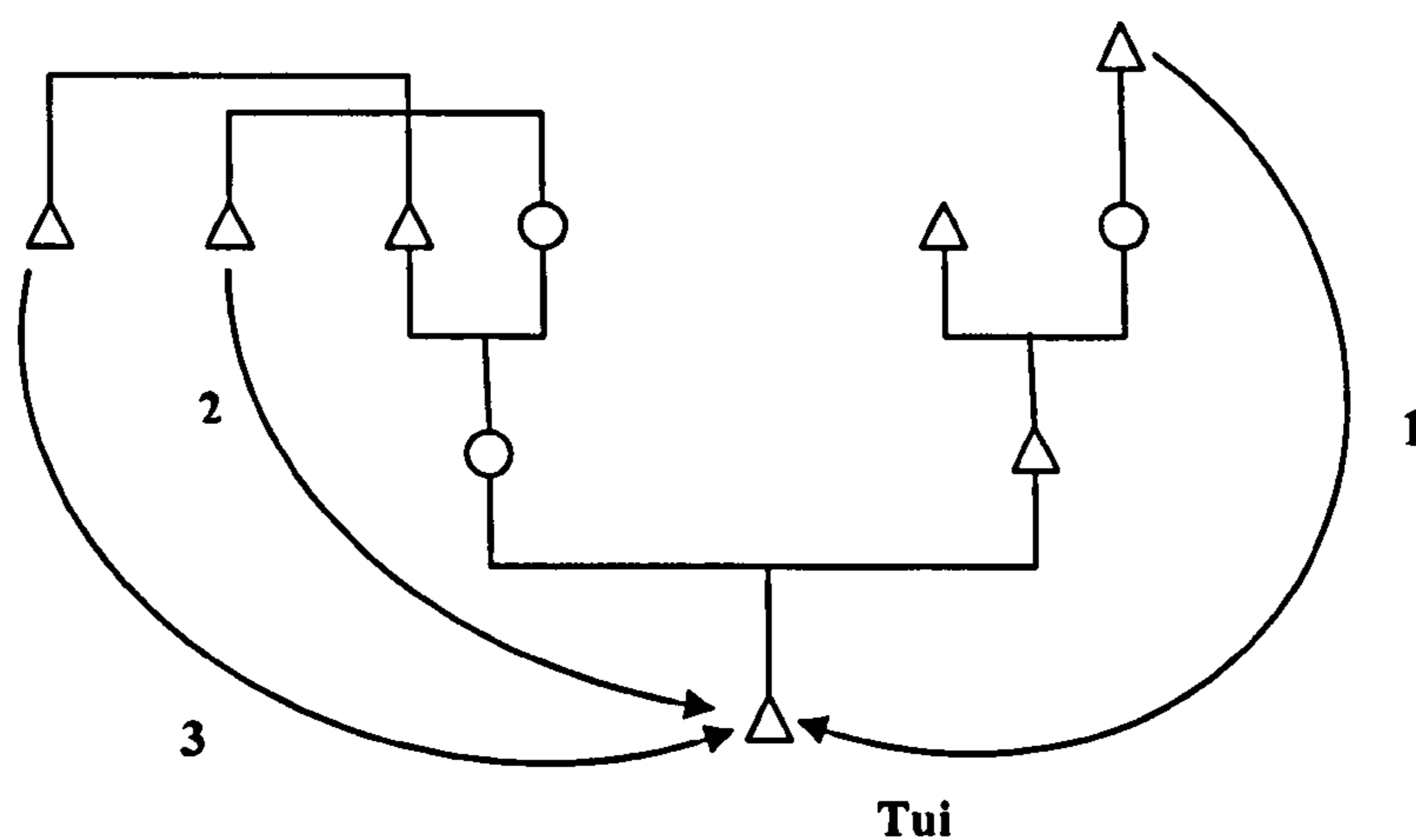


Diagram 6.2: Sequence of reincarnation process in Tui's case

This case also illustrates the example of how a person is reborn before his death. Kam lived next to Tui's house. He had been sick and so just lay on a bed in his house for a

couple of months. It was believed that while Kam was sick, he already had lost some of his *khwan* to Tui. In other words, some of his *khwan* had already been reborn before he completely died. Although it is inauspicious to say that someone's *khwan* has already been reborn when he or she is still alive, it is, however, not considered to be a negative or unusual event. It is rather regarded as a normal process of a cycle of rebirth. When Kam was suffering with the chronic illness before he has died, Tui and Kam shared parts of each other's *khwan*. They both had incomplete *khwan* for some periods. Until finally both of their *khwan* settled into one body.

Tui's MM, however, seemed not quite happy with the finding. Although her house was next to Kam's (her husband's brother), they were not so close. Furthermore, she did not get along well with Kam's wife. She still believed that it was her brother who was reborn in her grandson. As she finally develops her own explanation:

Well...it could be possible. If you look at my grandson's head, he has got two "*khwan*" (in this context *khwan* refers to the whorl of hair on top of the head). So, he might be reborn by two ancestors.

Case Two

In the case of Mae Porn, we could see how she tried to negotiate through her grandson's illness to "make" her youngest son reborn. A couple of years after Mae Porn's son died with HIV/AIDS, her grandson (her elder son's son) was born when I was in the field. Mae Porn noticed his skin rash at birth, so she was convinced that it must be a sign of her youngest son being reborn for it resembled the skin lesion he had before died. However, her elder son, a father of the baby, did not simply agree. He suggested the result should rather be revealed through a proper *taam kerd* ritual. Mae Porn asked the diviner and found out that it was not her youngest son; instead, it was her brother's son. Her brother gave a "white gift" to welcome the baby. However, a couple of months later, Mae Porn excitedly told me that after the baby was sick again she finally found from a different diviner that her youngest son had been reborn. To die of HIV/AIDS was to some extent regarded as a stigma among the villagers. This might

be a reason why Mae Porn was happy when she found her son reborn. It was a way to convince others that her son could also be reborn normally.

Children's illness is a sign that may be interpreted in many different ways. It may be a sign of weak *khwan*, too close relationships with the Parent Spirit, conflicts within the family, or a sign of reincarnation. According to case studies illustrated above, it could be seen that illness offers a "chance" or possibility to change the Reincarnating Spirit. Consequently, a correct Reincarnating Spirit can be confirmed when a child is healed. However, this is rather more complex than merely physical healing. The story may not end although the child is physically healed from his previous illness. If the Reincarnating Spirit is not accepted, the child's latter illness will be explained relating to the previous one. For instance, the latter illness is a recurrence of the previous and both of them occur by the same cause related to the Reincarnating Spirit. Illness is thus seen as a sign indicating the incorrect divination of the previous Reincarnating Spirit.

According to the villagers, the spirit inside the baby "speaks", through illness, to the child's parents that they have welcomed the wrong spirit. It may also be explained that the baby itself does not accept the previous Reincarnation Spirit. On the other hand, if the Reincarnating Spirit is accepted the explanation for the latter illness will be very different from that of the previous one. A decision whether the Reincarnation ritual (*taam kerd*) needs to be performed again, in other words, whether the Reincarnating Spirit should be accepted, is central to the power of kin relationships. The acceptance of reincarnation of a particular spirit is struggled over in the relationship between the child and adults, as well as among adults themselves (relatives and also diviners). While it is adults who determine which ancestor should or should not be present in each family, the autonomy of the child is not ignored. The villagers explained that it is actually the child himself who decides which ancestor he likes, and he tells us through the illness:

If the child does not accept his or her Reincarnating Spirit we have to ask the diviner to find the right one again. As long as we cannot identify the right one, the child's illness cannot be completely healed. The child will be sick again and again. On the other hand, if the baby agrees with the Reincarnating Spirit, his or her illness will not recur.

Implications of Reincarnation

Why does it matter who is “coming back” to the human world anyway? I noticed that reincarnation is not so interesting for the child as for the close relatives of the “reincarnated ancestor”. When I chatted with villagers about their relatives, they liked to talk about their relatives’ histories and if they died, they frequently told me who their dead relatives are in the present or, in other words, whom they were reborn into.

It could be argued that Reincarnation ritual also functions psychologically as a relief for one’s grief from the death of loved ones by reproducing such relationship ties with the newborn child. In many cases, one was reborn from one’s elder sibling who died young.

In the case of Nee presented above (see Diagram 6.1), her mother, Pan, died when Nee was very young (about 2 years old). Her grandmother looked after her and her sister. Onn’s mother told me that when they found Pan was Onn’s Reincarnating Spirit, Nee’s grandmother brought Nee (at that time she was about 15 years old) and her sister to welcome the baby, Onn. When Nee had her own daughter (20 years old), her mother, Pan, was reborn again, and later was also reborn as Nee’s granddaughter. It could be seen as a recovery for Nee’s earlier loss of her mother. Similarly, Mae Porn, whose son had died with HIV/AIDS, found relief after her son was reborn as her grandson.

Another villager, Mae Tem, used the *taam kerd* ritual, or put in another way, used her grandson’s illness as a means to confirm her elder brother’s death.

My elder brother had disappeared after he went to trade in the west. Nobody knows what had happened to him. Now I find out that my elder brother was born as my grandchild, so I think he is dead already.

Reincarnation is also a means to claim, maintain, or strengthen relationships with kin. To claim that someone’s ancestor is reborn as one’s child is to create a spiritual tie with that family. For example, Mae Got’s family and Mae Nee’s family have created long relationships with each other. They are people of the same lineage. In the past, both

families were rich. They owned large plots of rice-field and had big houses. Later, however, Mae Got's family became poorer after some of their sons had been using drugs and sold the properties for drugs. Mae Nee's family, on the other hand, could maintain their economic status. Nevertheless, the two families still maintained mutual relations with each other, for example, they share foods and goods, their children exchange labours for rice harvesting, sometimes Mae Got borrowed some money from Mae Nee, and when there was a flood Mae Nee offered a place for Mae Got's family to stay. When Mae Got gave birth to her daughter, it was revealed that Mae Nee's mother was reborn as Mae Got's daughter. This can be seen as a strategy to maintain the relationship between Mae Got's and Mae Nee's families. Therefore, it can be argued that reincarnation can be seen as a discourse of the adults for their own interests.

The Quality of Death Affects the Quality of Life

To go beyond psychological relief, however, the ideologies of life and death should be understood. Many studies tend to stereotype Thailand as a Buddhist country, and presume their ways of life. Therefore, the lay understanding of Buddhism and Buddhist practice in everyday life are ignored. According to Darlington (1990:114),

...rather than orthodox Buddhism controlling village life,...it has blended with the religious traditions of Brahmanism and animism, and with secular ethical standards to form the Northern Thai moral system.

Interestingly, although villagers do have concepts of karma, in which one's behaviour defines one's future, the most important and critical time that determines one's future life, however, is thought to be the way of death. In other words, the villager's future life does not count as much on one's practice during his lifetime as on the quality of one's death.

The Kaliai in Papua New Guinea consider a death under the control of the dying person as good death, and as a natural process of aging. On the other hand, bad death is more common and implies a rupture of social relations (Counts and Counts 2004). Similar to those of Thai Buddhism, when a person is dying, he or she should fix his or her mind

on the Buddhist scriptures or repeat some of the names of the Buddha. If the last thoughts of the dying person are directed toward the Buddha and his precepts, the fruits of this meritorious behaviour will be repaid to the deceased in the next incarnation.

In Mae Chaem, death from illness is seen as normal and acceptable. The most preferable way is to die of aging. On the other hand, bad death includes all those who die in an inauspicious manner; from a bullet or knife-wound inflicted in anger, accidents, or suicides. If a person dies unprepared and very much against his or her own will, he is believed to become a Violent Death Spirit (*phii tai hong*). Unlike general ancestors who are believed to be reborn some time in the future, the Violent Death Spirit has difficulty in getting reborn. People believe that because of an unprepared mind at the moment of death the spirits cannot leave the human world and stay at the place they died for a long period of time, consequently, disrupting the life-death cycle. Moreover, their anger will harm living relatives. The spirit of the violent death itself is believed to be extremely fierce. If one has a relative who died violently, one is susceptible to illness caused by such a spirit. Furthermore, anyone who thoughtlessly hangs around places where the spirit dwells can also be harmed. To put it in another way, the Violent Death Spirit tends to “stick” in people’s minds. Interest is focused on the place and the way it died and the possibility that it may harm the living rather than the question of whether it will eventually be reborn.

There is a certain stigma attached to the person who has died inauspiciously. While the funeral for an ordinary death is warm, respectable, and carefully performed, the funeral for a violent death is lonely, poor, brief, inauspicious and full of taboos. Furthermore, Violent Death Spirits are prohibited from entering Buddhist sacred space. While the temple is a place where people give offerings to their ancestors, Violent Death ancestors can only receive offerings outside the temple boundary. Sometimes a diviner suggests to someone that they give an offering to the Violent Death Spirit in order to be healed. In that case, one has to invite the monks to receive the offerings outside the temple fence. It is believed that the Violent Death Spirit cannot enter the temple. If they give offerings to the monks inside the temple the spirit may not accept them and will be angry and further disturb the descendants.



Fig. 6.3, 6.4 Normally, offerings are made inside the temple, but the Violent Death ancestors can only receive offerings outside the temple boundary.

Violent death is considered to be a serious issue, which is related to inauspicious and bad karma of the dead and the living relatives. It is a distress for the family and the living relatives if someone in the family dies violently. Furthermore, they are afraid that the tragic death will happen again to somebody in the family. Therefore, it is essential for the family to perform the exorcist ritual immediately after the cremation, to cut the tie between the spirit and its relatives. The cutting tie ritual is done to ensure that the relationships between the dead and the living relatives are ended. It is done to let the dead go ahead (*pai tang naa*) and prevent them from bothering anybody left behind.

If a wife dies violently, people urge her husband to be ordained as soon as possible, and he remains in the monkhood at least 3 months so his wife cannot follow him and take his life. If a husband dies violently, his wife and children have to attend the exorcist ritual right after they finish the cremation. The exorcist ritual is performed to symbolically cut the kin ties, particularly in this case the ties between husband and wife, and father and son are cut, so the man's spirit cannot return to the human world and take his wife's or children's life.

Nevertheless, to cut the tie with close relatives who die inauspiciously is ambiguous. The death of a woman in childbirth is regarded as the most violent kind of death, and therefore the most malevolent spirit. Pia's mother died when she gave birth. He had cut the relationship ties with his mother after the cremation, since then he never made any merit for her. He said;

I have already cut the tie with my mother's spirit, so I should not contact it, otherwise it could come back and bring harm. To cut the ties means to let the spirit go further on its way, not bother to return, or have any worry about its past life. That is why I never make an offering to my mother.

By contrast, some villagers constantly give offerings to their violent death relatives on the occasion of every Buddhist ritual behind the temple wall, usually to their close relatives, i.e., children, or spouse. While Pia can completely cut the tie with his mother, some other villagers still hesitate to ignore their offspring or spouses even though they died inauspiciously. They believe their children or spouse will not harm them. Nevertheless, there are many people who disagree with them.

Now we can further understand why it is important for the villagers to identify the Reincarnating Spirit. For instance, if one can convince others that his or her dead relatives are coming back into the human world, as new born babies, it means their relatives have a properly ordered life cycle. Therefore, those whose relatives have died inauspiciously can deny the accusations of their relatives becoming the Violent Death Spirits by claiming that they have already been reborn. In short, to be reborn is a sign of a proper rebirth cycle, and a symbol of well-being. Furthermore, through the welcoming ritual, the tie with the violent death ancestor, which has been cut in the previous life, can be reconnected. Therefore, I argue that the baby's illness is used as a chance or means to recreate a tie with the ancestors as well as to confirm the well-being (continuity of the cycle of rebirth) of the ancestors.

Regenerating of Life after Death

Life and death are parts of each other; several ritualised behaviours imply a connection or overlap between death and birth. For example, the coin which is given to a new born baby as a welcome gift is also given to a dead person before mourners have finished wrapping the corpse. It is believed that a dead person needs money to pay for the messenger of death, who will help him cross a "river" to the spirit world. Villagers also relate pregnancy to death. During the mourning ritual, usually practiced for three days inside the house, a small pot filled with water is put near the corpse's feet (the pot is

called “washing spirit’s feet pot”). After the mourning has ended, the corpse is brought to the cremation field. At the time the corpse is brought out, somebody pours water from the pot to wash away the foot-prints of the dead, then the pot has to be thrown down to earth to break it into pieces. It is said the broken pot symbolises disintegration of *khwan*. Interestingly, the pieces of such pots finally link death with birth. It is believed that if a pregnant woman drinks water boiled with a piece of the broken “spirit pot”, it will ease her delivery. Therefore, the pot symbolises the ideology of the life cycle; at death the pot is broken to symbolise the disintegration of *khwan*, then the pot is “eaten” by a woman who later gives birth to a human with intact *khwan* again. Moreover, the case of a person who is reborn before he dies presents the overlapping of life and death, while *khwan* gradually detach and accumulate into the new body.

Woman and the Reproduction of Ancestors

Reincarnation implies a valuation of woman as more than just one who reproduces living humans but also gives birth to ancestors, and so reproduces social ties. In other words, the vital essence passes between the dead and the living through a woman. In addition, the villagers believe that after death the ancestors come to take offerings only from their daughter, not their son, at the temple, therefore a woman has to make merit for them. So, as well as feeding a baby, a woman also feeds the ancestors. In other words, women have been the living fulcrum between the past and the future, between ancestors and descendants, and between the dead who are to be reborn and the living who are to die⁸. According to Muecke (1984), for the peasants in Northern Thailand, a greater number of children is evidence of a larger store of merit. Her informants interpreted childbearing in the moral terms of Buddhism, saying that bearing a child “improves a women’s karma both by providing a *winyan* (“life principle”) with a body and home for its reincarnation as a human being, and by assuring a woman’s merit, when aged or deceased, through the acts of her children” (ibid.: 462).

⁸ Similarly, Ngubane (1977) found the Zulu women deliver the individual into the world of living at the beginning of life cycle and deliver him symbolically into the world of the dead where he is reborn as an ancestor, for women are the chief mourners at a funeral and will place the body in its burial space in the foetal position.

Reincarnation and Identities

In some contexts people mention some characteristics or behaviours of their child as influenced by or resembling a Reincarnating Spirit. For instance, Thee, a 12-year-old boy, wishes to be a monk after he finishes primary school. His grandparents and mother once talked to me about his wishes; “he is a reincarnation of Noi Som⁹, who was very fond of Buddhist practices. That might be the reason why Thee wants to be a monk after school”. Nevertheless, the Reincarnating Spirit may also be referred to in quite a negative way, like a case of the 16 year-old girl who has a problem of stuttering. Sometimes she is teased that she follows her reincarnating spirit’s speech behaviour. Moreover, relationships between two persons can also continue from the previous life. For example, Ken (a 11 year-old-boy) and Noot (a 12 year-old-girl) were friends and neighbours. When they were young, they often quarrelled with each other. Adults said the two children resembled their reincarnating ancestors. When both of the ancestors were alive they always quarrelled with each other as well.

The Northern Thais also believe that reincarnation can determine a person’s fate. For example, villagers were shocked when a young male villager died in car accident. His death was regarded as a violent death and his spirit was conceived as a Violent Spirit. The conflict over how his death should be explained continued for a long time, in particular among his close relatives, in order to solve the problems of his bad death, one of which was that his death resembled his Reincarnating Spirit’s life history, as one villager said

In his previous life he also died young and left his young children behind, and then in this life he did it again although it seems to be younger than the previous time.

Likewise, in the ritual of conferring an ancestor’s name upon a newborn child in eastern Indonesia, it is expected that the child will in some ways resemble the ancestor whose name he shares, consequently, certain names, for example, epileptics, lepers, witches and women who died in childbed, should be avoided when reciting ancestral names (Forth 1983).

⁹ Noi is a title for a man who was a Buddhist novice

However, this does not imply that the reincarnated child should fully assume the personalities, characteristics or identities of the ancestor he bears. Reincarnation is always ambiguous and uncertain.

Nonetheless, the only certainty is that nobody is reborn from any person outside their kin's line, therefore it is impossible to find non-Mae Chaem people reincarnated in the village. Even though people do marry non-Mae Chaem from different towns or different ethnic groups, if they still live in the village or give birth in the village, their child will be reborn from a relative of the particular parent who is native to Mae Chaem. As an infant is socially accepted as a "human" after the welcome gift is given, it is also accepted as "Mae Chaem person".

Binding the Tie and Cutting the Tie: Becoming a Person

Many studies concern reincarnation at a particular moment of life, i.e., birth. For instance, Gottlieb (1998) and Gupta (2002) are interested in complex notions of childhood linked to reincarnation which help us understand more about religion and human development, whereas Morgan (1990) examines how different cultures understand infancy during the period between biological and social birth, implying different perceptions about "when life begins". Consequently, decisions about abortion, miscarriage, or stillbirth, are involved with ideologies of life and childhood. My arguments, however, extends beyond the limited time of childhood. Reincarnation in Mae Chaem has to be understood as part of an ongoing process of personhood and kinship creation throughout life. Mae Chaem people consider a person as a multi-self entity, including the bodily and spiritual selves, whose interrelations are changing throughout life. The process of personhood is a process of binding and cutting the tie between the bodily and spiritual self all the time.

As in many Southeast Asia cultures, during his early years a child is tentatively considered as a "spirit", or closer to the spirit world than older children and adults. In the past when the villagers still gave birth at home with help from a traditional midwife, after the child was born the midwife put the baby into a basket and brought it to the

front stairs, calling the spirit of the stairs and saying “if this baby is yours come and take it right now, otherwise it belongs to us!”, then she would carry the baby and run back into the house as fast as possible so the spirit could not catch it. If the baby dies there is no funeral as it is not yet seen as a person. During the early years, the main concern with a newborn baby is to find out which ancestor it has incarnated. Not until the welcome gift is given is the baby socially and symbolically accepted as a human.

Everybody is believed to be sent from the spirit world by the divine couple: the Parent Spirits (*poh kerd mae kerd*). During childhood the tie between the Parent Spirits and a child remains close and gradually declines as he or she grows up (cf. Gottlieb 1998, Morgan 1990). If a child gets sick, a common explanation is that the Parent Spirits want to take him or her back to the spirit world. In other words, the tie between the child and the spirit is over tight, thus needs to be cut. The Parent Spirit Exorcism is called “*tad poh kerd mae kerd*”, which literally means “to cut the tie to one’s Parent Spirits”. The villagers normally called it briefly as “*tad kerd*”¹⁰. Through the *tad kerd*, the tie of the child with the spirit world will become weaker, which is symbolised by the cutting performance in the ritual. The “spirit healer”¹¹ cuts the thread tied between the child’s feet and the spirit’s offering tray. Immediately after the thread is cut, the child has to run away as fast as possible to his or her bedroom. At the end of the *tad kerd* ritual, the child is tied with a sacred thread to strengthen and ensure his or her *khwan* to be intact inside the body, and also to symbolise the tie with the human world.

An exorcism is recurrently performed when a child is sick (depending on the divination). The more children grow, the stronger their *khwan* becomes after cutting the tie with the spirit world. The final occasion a woman attends the exorcism is before her first delivery. Accordingly, it could be viewed as a rite of passage for a girl to become a grown-up woman. On the contrary, boys tend to participate in monkhood, which is then seen as their rite of passage. After a woman gives birth, and after a man passes his

10 See also chapter 5 and 7 for further detail of the ritual

11 In Northern Thailand, the traditional healer is generally called *moh muang*, which literally means “the doctor of the *muang*”. Normally, each healer has learned various healing techniques, i.e., diagnosis, expelling the poison by blowing or scratching, and dealing with the spirits, either to exorcise them or make an offering to them. Each healer, however, may specialise in a particular technique. In general people call those healers *moh* but some healers who specialise in blowing the poison are called *moh pao* (blowing), and those who specialise in diagnosis are called *moh muea*. Nevertheless, those who specialise in dealing with spirits do not have any specific name. They are simply referred to as *moh*. For analytical purposes, I will use the term “spirit healer” to refer to the traditional healers who specialise in dealing with spirits.

monkhood, the *tad kerd* ritual is no longer considered as an appropriate way to heal illness.

While Reincarnation rituals construct the tie between the children and the spirit world, exorcisms deconstruct the tie. The relationship between the bodily and spiritual self is fluctuating. The tie between humans and spirits is constantly being affirmed and then cut throughout life to maintain equilibrium and well-being. One may need to create a new tie with the ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) of another matrilineage (see chapter 7 for the detail), or one may have to cut the tie with one's relatives if they die inauspiciously.

When one becomes old, one is believed to be close to the spirit world again. Villagers often say they become "half human and half spirit"¹² (*khon gueng phi gueng*) in their old age. An old woman complained to me while she was dyeing cotton threads:

I am getting older and older. I am now half human and half spirit (*khon gueng phi gueng*). I often forget where I put things. And now I often make it wrong when I dye the thread.

The elders spend time in old age preparing personal clothes and other utilities ready to return to the spirit world. They are believed to live with their parents after they die, waiting to be reborn in their matrilineage in the human world again.

12 For some people who have some physical or mental abnormality, the villagers also say they are half human and half spirit. When a woman introduced a girl who was mentally ill to me, she said "that girl is just a half human and half spirit." Another example was about a 10-year-old boy who liked to follow me and be a company when I visit other families. He had got polio since he was young, and developed deformed legs so he could not walk properly. A woman who lived next to his house and was close to his family, made a joke to him:

"You are a ghost"

"No I'm not (the boy laughing)"

"Yes you are a spirit"

"No I'm not"

"You should go to die. And don't you follow her, you are so smelly."

"But I'm helping her."

The woman laughed and called him to take some banana but the boy refused and said "I am full". "What do you mean you are full? What did you eat? Come, take this." Then the woman put the banana into his hand and he ate it.

Morgan (1990: 29) argued that the transition period from biological birth to social maturity implies a “division between the marginal, uncertain status of the foetus and the secure, protected status of a person”. Conversely, if we view reincarnation as part of a long process of becoming a person, we can understand that in Mae Chaem the process of the life cycle is an ongoing transition from one uncertain status to another.

Reincarnation in the Changing World

At present, influenced by industrial development and modernisation, kin ties in Mae Chaem, as elsewhere in Thailand, are weakening (see Yoddumnern 1985). Young people go out to find work and live in the city rather than inherit their rice fields. Rice field inheritance cannot efficiently maintain the relationship between parents and children as in the past when children cultivated rice on their parents’ field, took care of their parents and finally owned the field. The population in the village is predominantly composed of elders and young children. Moreover, young children spend most of their time in school. Young people do not know how to grow rice and seldom participate in agricultural work of their family. After they graduate from school they tend to find a job outside the district. Rice fields are gradually changed into fruit gardens, for they do not need much care, and selling the fruit brings enough money to buy rice instead of cultivating rice for one’s own consumption. Villagers, in particular the elders, are dismayed by the weakness of family relationships.

We have children so they can take care of us when we are old. But nowadays, we look after them until they grow up but finally they just leave us behind. What does it mean to be kin then? Are we just kin when there is a celebration?

Having a daughter is better than a son. When they are 9 or 10 years old you don’t have to get up early to steam rice anymore, they will do it for you. Any domestic work you can ask them to do. Sons will do nothing. But nowadays children are only in school, just studying. I still have to do all the domestic work for them while they are always busy with their homework.

Whereas concepts of ancestors are still used when people get ill thus maintaining social solidarity to some extent, beliefs in supernatural beings are gradually weakening. The concepts of the supernatural are regarded with more scepticism. Villagers often said that in the past spirits were more powerful than these days; “they are not that strong anymore. After the road was constructed the spirits seem to have disappeared.” Although it is dangerous to insult or challenge the spirits, sometimes villagers indirectly deny the spirit’s power by avoid the divination. As a villager once said, “you go to look for it so you find it”. This implies that if you do not go to ask the healer for a diagnosis, you will not need to perform any spirit rituals.

Reincarnation rituals are then used as the indigenous strategy to keep kin ties strong as well as maintain the importance of ancestors. Kin relationships are strengthened by emphasising the previous ties. People are not relatives only because of their relationships in “this” life, but their connections have been created in their previous lives. Reincarnation is also a discourse of elders to challenge the impact of modernity: the weakening of social relationships.

I have noticed an interesting sign of transformation in Reincarnation ritual with regard to gender. It reflects a change of gender notions in Mae Chaem. Usually a Reincarnating Spirit is understood to be reborn in the same gender; a female ancestor is reborn in a baby girl, while a male ancestor is reborn in a baby boy. While I was in the field, however, there was a sign of change. A baby boy was reborn from a female ancestor and another baby girl was reborn from a male ancestor.

Case Three

When Gong was born, the diviner found that his Reincarnating Spirit was his MMMMBS (no.1 in diagram 6.3); later Gong was sick again and his parents asked the diviner to repeat the Reincarnation ritual. This time they found that it was his MMMMZS (no.2 in diagram 6.3). Not until Gong was 2 years old did his parents find the “right” Reincarnation Spirit. In other words, it took 2 years for Gong’s family and relatives to find the reincarnating ancestor that everyone could accept. When Gong was 2 years old he had a cold; his mother asked the diviner to find out his Reincarnating

Spirit again. This time it turned out to be his MM who had died 3-4 years ago. The final finding of Gong's Reincarnating Spirit brought joy and surprise to his MMM (no.3 in diagram 6.3).

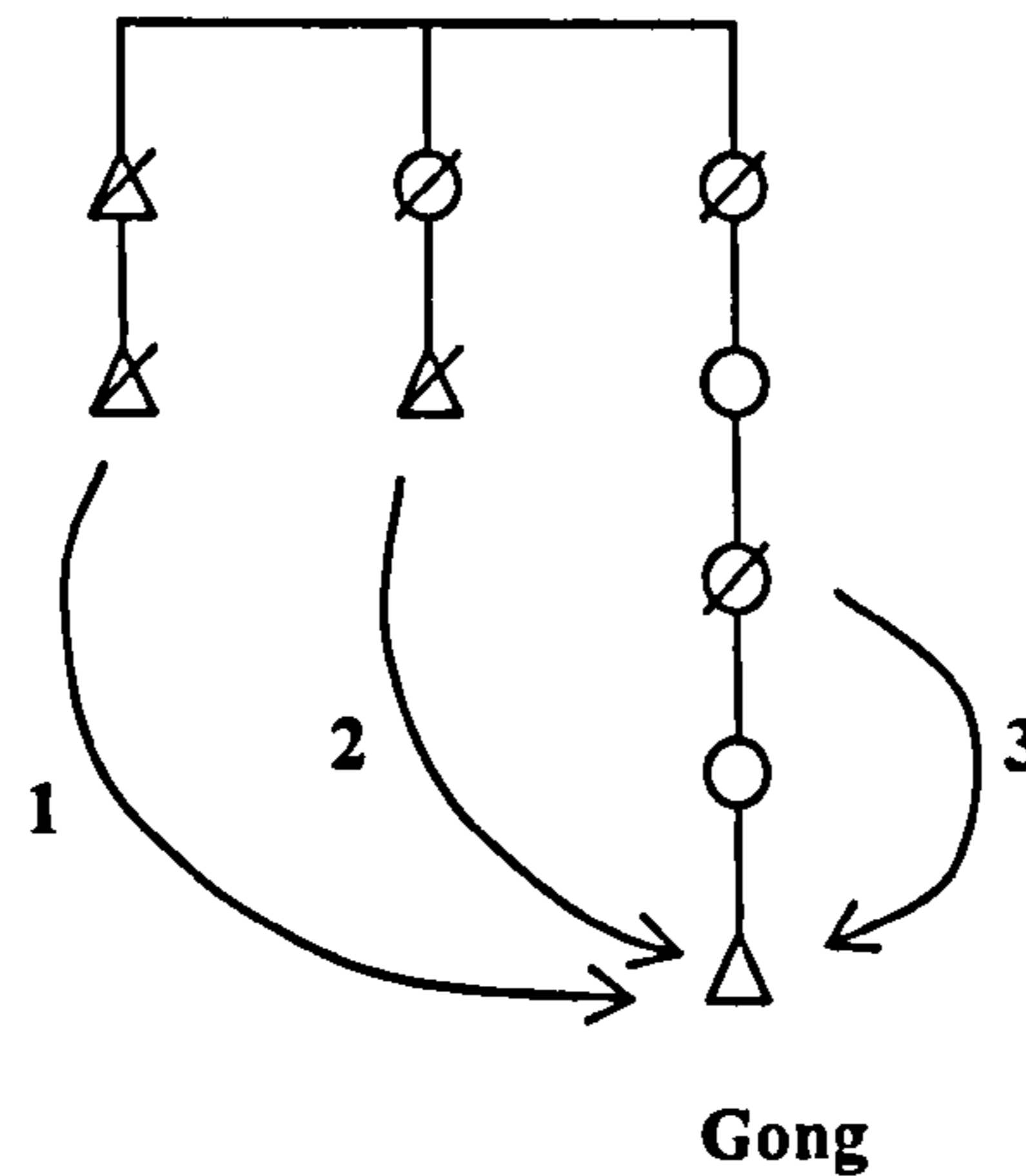


Diagram 6.3: Sequence of reincarnation process in Gong's case

Look at my great-grandson. He has got a slightly female looking face hasn't he?
His grandmother, my daughter was reborn as him!

When I asked how this could happen, one of their neighbours told me that

Maybe she was not happy with her previous life. Her husband (who is still alive) often gets sick, and seldom helps her in any work. Who knows, she might have prayed before she died to be reborn as a man.

Since then, even when Gong was sick again nobody requested the diviner to find his Reincarnating Spirit.

This ambiguity of gender in reincarnation is uncommon but sometimes forms a topic of discussion:

“Do you know, Poh Luang Sao (a man) has just been reborn as a girl?”

“Really? Mae Thip (a woman) was also reborn as a boy. She was reborn as her grandson.”

“Yes. And Poh Laa New (another man) was also reborn as a girl.”

“The world nowadays is getting more confused. Don’t you think?”

What is interesting here is the changing of gender ideologies; the possibility of rebirth across gender. The notions of gender are more opened, flexible, and ambiguous. In other words, an overlap in the social category of genders is now accepted. Influenced by macro-social change where the boundary between sex and gender are questioned and blurred, the local ideology of gender is transformed and is revealed through the changing practice of reincarnation.

Conclusion

The ethnography illustrates how reincarnation is practiced in everyday life; how kinship is negotiated, and transformed. The negotiation process to find the Reincarnation Spirit for one’s child creates kin relationship, as well as the child’s social identity and personhood. The identity of the Mae Chaem person could be said to be partly given at birth and partly acquired through life, along with kin relations, which are also given and acquired. Moreover, it is continually changing, transforming, negotiating throughout life. Therefore, reincarnation can be seen as a part of an ongoing process of becoming a person or kin.

Reincarnation illustrates the multi-level ties between the living and the dead, and among the living themselves, for instance, (1) a tie between children and their reincarnated ancestors, (2) a tie between the child and the ancestor’s living relatives as they tie the child’s wrists to welcome their ancestor, (3) a relation between the reincarnating ancestor and the child’s parents, and finally (4) a relation between the ancestor’s living relatives and the child’s parents.

The negotiation of the child’s Reincarnating Spirit, therefore, is related to and influenced by the social and power relationships of the multi-level ties stated above. The relationships between kin, either living or dead, are dynamic as they are formed

and dissolved throughout life. It can be argued that Reincarnation ritual is an adult's discourse to confirm and deny relationships between relatives.

On the one hand, the *taam kerd* ritual (Reincarnation ritual) is regarded as a healing ritual for a child (normally up to 1 year old), as well as a ritual which symbolises the child's social birth following the biological birth. On the other hand, the child's illness is used as a means or a strategy, by his or her parents and relatives, to construct and dissolve their kin ties. Therefore, the process of transformation of self and personhood as well as kinship, among the Mae Chaem people, has to be understood through their explanation of illness and their healing practices. Through the construction of illness discourses, the ideologies of life, personhood and kinship are created and transformed.

By understanding reincarnation as a process of learning, constituting and reconstituting personhood, kinship, gender, and identity, illness does not only have to be a sign of social relational disorder as many studies have argued (Darlington 1990, Lewis 1986, Pollock 1996), but it is also seen, in Mae Chaem, as a sign of creating, recreating and maintaining social relations. The thread tied to newborn wrists is therefore a symbol to strengthen the ties among kin, in other words, among Mae Chaem people. In conclusion, considering reincarnation as a process of becoming a person helps us understand the dynamics, ambiguity and uncertainty of life in Northern Thailand.

Chapter Seven

Dynamics of Kinship and the Uncertainties of Life:

Kinship Transformation through the Process of Healing Management

Introduction

From the 1970s to the present, contemporary kinship studies have moved away from a focus on social organisation to an emphasis on cultural symbols and meanings, incorporating ideas of social process and human agency (see Peletz 1995, 2001; Holy 1998; Carsten 2000, 2004; Brettell 2001; Lamphere 2001; Stone 2001; Parkin and Stone 2004).

Carsten's works, in particular "*The Heat of the Hearth*" (1997 see also 1991, 1992, and 2000), are good examples of a processual approach to kinship. According to her, the Malay way of building kin relationships involves time, and is a process of becoming. For Malays, kinship is not so much based on blood or flesh as on cooking, feeding and house composition. A number of studies collected in Carsten's *Cultures of Relatedness* (2000) also analyse kinship using a processual approach. To mention some, Rita Astuti (2000) finds that Vezo notions of kinship change throughout life, even after death, from "cognatic kindreds" to "cognatic descent group" to "patrilineal descent group". Similarly, Charles Stafford (1995, 2000) finds that by viewing kinship as a process of becoming, kinship in Chinese daily life is more dynamic than is recognised in conventional formal analysis. Social morality and kin relationships are constituted through the mutual obligations between parent and children. Understanding Chinese kinship through the ongoing cycle of life (the cycle of *yang* (to care for)) brings us to see the flexibility in their kinship, in contrast to previous analyses which present Chinese kinship in terms of a rigid and bounded lineage structure. Viewing kinship as a process of "becoming" rather than "being" emphasises dynamic aspects of local practices and discourses of relationships, which recognises the possibility of change and flexibility and even the potential for destruction.

A further trend has been for anthropologists to connect kinship ideology with practice. This is not to look at how kinship constituted the social organisation of a particular group as in earlier kinship analysis, but to understand how human actors use local concepts and practices of kinship to reinforce or challenge structures within their own society (Stone 2004). The emphasis shifts from seeing kinship as a social system to focusing on individual strategies or agency, with respect to local conceptions of kinship (Schweitzer 2000:9). The basic premise is that humans are born into a pre-existing social world and they re-create this world through their actions (Eriksen 1995). Stafford states that “people *make* kinship—it is never simply “given” to them by birth” (2000: 52).

In addition, the central question in anthropology moves from how societies remain stable to new questions about social inequality and conflict (Carsten 2000). That is to say, a change in how kinship is conceptualised, from the structural and functional to the processual viewpoint, brings more space for the political economy approach, corresponding to wider concerns in anthropology with social inequality, power and history.

Following this line of argument, I am interested in the process of kinship in Mae Chaem through which people define, create, extend, limit, sever or transform their relationships with others within and over generations.

Kinship in Mae Chaem is based on the relationships between humans and ancestral spirits or lineage guardian spirits. It has to be investigated within the local cosmology and spiritual ideology in order to understand basic categories and concepts about life and the way people interpret and make sense of their world. Furthermore, poor relationships or conflicts among humans or between humans and spirits often cause illness. To heal, the relationships have to be reformed, reshaped, and reconciled. That is to say, the process of kinship transformation in Mae Chaem occurs through the struggle of illness and healing management.

Interestingly, Louise Lamphere (2001) finds a similar relationship between illness and kinship among the Navajo. She stresses that the Navajo’s cultural beliefs about death

and illness influence the decisions about where to reside rather than the abstract residential rules. She argues that a narrative approach is important to investigate the dynamics of family interaction, and gives different perspectives on the developmental cycle of domestic groups. Moreover, she asserts that the conventional analysis of matrilineality misses the importance of land or place in the constitution of the person and those who are relatives.

Corresponding to wider concerns in anthropology, medical anthropology focuses on illness as a lived experience. That is to identify the patient as an actor, an experiencer and a feeler, to investigate how life is lived, how actors reflect upon their experiences, and how the framing of these experiences changes over time (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1986). Mimica (1996) suggests that sickness and pain, like any other human situation, has to be understood as an intersubjective experience and communication within a shared cultural understanding of what constitutes and what is proper sociality. It is a fluctuating field between self-possession and self-decentering. The afflicted live in relation to and detachment from, the experiences, responses, and expressions of others. According to Mimica, every self is a relational being whose existence is vitally determined by others who share a common meaning of life and death.

Taking Mimica's suggestion, I investigate how illness is experienced and how the meaning of health and illness is negotiated among the patient, his or her family, relatives, friends and neighbours, biomedical practitioners and healers, as the illness progresses through time. Furthermore, this chapter presents the process of healing management which involves multidimensional aspects, for instance, diagnosis and the negotiation of illness identities, the selection and evaluation of healing choices or options, the assessment of healing efficacy, and all other kinds of support given to the afflicted (see Janzen 1978; Nicther 2002).

Viewing illness as lived experience helps us to understand how kinship is used as a healing strategy. At the same time, viewing kinship as a process and practice in everyday life helps us to understand how illness is used as a means to create and transform kinship. In other words, how kinship is transformed through the process of healing management. My aim is thus to investigate the mutual relationship between the two processes: kinship transformation and healing management.

However, in order to go beyond the individualising, meaning-centred discourse of the symbolic and phenomenological perspective, illness has to be conceptualised as a power relation within a changing structure of political economy and social relationships. According to Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1986), illness and health have to be considered with both the phenomenology of suffering and the political economy of health. Correspondingly, Singer and Baer (1995:38) suggest that a “critical” approach to medical anthropology should be concerned with the embeddedness of “webs of meaning” in “webs of power”.

Placing kinship and illness in the context of a changing political economy, this chapter also looks at the power relationships which influence meaning and explanation of illness, defining the choice of healing strategy, and consequently, transforming kinship. This will help us to understand why kinship is created, reshaped, contained and transformed in a particular way, why illness is explained in a particular direction, and why a particular healing strategy is chosen. Finally, we can understand how Mae Chaem people cope with and live through the changing world.

Illness Experiences and Healing Management: A Case Study of Totae's Burn

This is a story of a five-year-old boy, Totae, who lived with his mother, Mook, and father, Nud, in a grocery shop in Baan Yang Luang village, next to the house I stayed in during my fieldwork. In total, there were four little grocery shops in the village. Mook's shop was the biggest one among the four. Everyday while Nud worked in the longan¹ garden, Mook took care of her son and her shop. Sometimes Mook went to work in the cornfield and left Totae with her mother, Pang, who lived in a house nearby. Pang normally helped looking after the shop if her daughter had to work in the field. The shop was a place where people liked to gather for chatting, gossiping, and taking a rest after a long day's work in the field. Sometimes a group of women hung around there chatting while feeding their babies.

¹ One of Thailand's greatest fruit export, mainly grown in Northern Thailand, particularly in Chiang Mai and Lampun

Compared with other villagers, Mook's family were relatively rich. Her husband, Nud, inherited large gardens from his parents where he grew longan. Mook herself owned a large field where she grew corn and potatoes which were the main cash crops. She used the ground floor of her house to open a grocery shop and sold fresh vegetables and meat in the morning and evening. In the rear garden she fed pigs for sale and breeding. Not many villagers had pigs for breeding, so Mook earned a lot from this. Furthermore, she opened a small manual-control petrol station in the front of her house for motorcycles and tractors.

During the harvest period, Nud and Mook could hire a large amount of labourers from among the young men in the village to work in their field or garden. There was a rumour that they paid those young men with drugs. When the government declared the national drug clampdown, Nud was investigated and sent to the drug therapy camp. Since then the villagers noticed that the young men ceased to work for Nud and Mook, because they could not pay them with drugs anymore. The truck in which Nud carried labourers to work in his field was then full of elders rather than the young men.

Mae Chaem, 40 years ago, was a relatively closed village because of a transport difficulty, as it is located behind Mount Inthanon. However, after the road was built, the population increased. Many shops were opened, and many people migrated from other districts. Furthermore, it became a place where tourists came to see the traditional lifestyle. Life in Mae Chaem began to change from being an agricultural-based and self-sufficient economy to a more commercial based economy. The agriculture changed from a multi crop field to a single crop, such as corn and potato, for supplying industry.

Mook and Nud are the example of a middle age family which is trying to take part as much as possible in the business world. They both work hard to earn more and own more businesses. Their ideas are that the more businesses they open, the richer they will be. They buy more land, extend their land, and hire a large number of labourers to work in their field so they can save time to do some other business. This is certainly related to the use of drugs as a payment to hire the young male labourers. Furthermore, they have a large amount of debt to run their businesses. Some villagers, especially the elders, see Mook's way of living as "greedy". A villager gave me his opinion about

having a debt. “Debt is “hot”. It makes us *kin kao boh lum* (lose appetite: a local expression of worry).” “I prefer feeding my cattle rather than dealing with a “hot” issue like business”. Life in the changing society certainly influences and affects their son’s illness interpretation which I will discuss later on.

Let me present here an account of the long process of Totae’s illness and healing, which I observed during my fieldwork. The process of explanation for each case illness is very complex. It is not only the healer who has power to define the cause of illness, but the sick person, his family, relatives and neighbours are all the co-constructors of illness narratives and meanings.

Today (14 October 2002) Totae came back from hospital after having been treated for burns for nearly three months. Last summer Totae accidentally fell into a pile of burning ash in the village temple, while playing with friends. At that time the temple was being reconstructed, therefore many construction tools and residues were left on the ground in the temple, including the burning ash. By instinct, after Totae fell down into the burned ash, he jumped immediately into the small canal behind the temple to cool down the wound and ran back home. His legs, bottom and hands were burnt. A neighbour nearby helped him to the nearest hospital, while Mook, his mother, was in the field. His parents went to the hospital immediately after they received the news. At Mae Chaem hospital, the nearest district hospital, the nurses and doctors immediately cleaned Totae’s wound with normal saline and curetted the burning skin before referring him to the provincial hospital in Chiang Mai where he had a number of skin graft operations.

During the first night at the provincial hospital, Totae stayed in a shared room where Mook was not allowed to stay with him. She was extremely worried for she wanted to sleep near her son and take care of him. Nevertheless after that night, the nurses let her sleep in the shared room with her son because Totae was very naughty and cried for his mother all night. Mook felt much relief to stay with Totae all day and night. However, Mook was worried about the sterilisation in the shared room. She was afraid the patients in the shared room might affect Totae’s skin cleanliness as she noticed her son’s wounds became swollen and red. She thus requested a private room. In this room

Mook and Totae felt more comfortable and relaxed with the television and the air conditioner.

Nevertheless, in the private room, Totae frequently had nightmares. He could not sleep well and was often startled during the night. He told his mother and the nurses that he saw a ghost in his dream. The nurse asked Mook if she would like to change rooms. Mook did not want to disturb Totae anymore, therefore she called back home to tell her mother and her husband about Totae's symptoms. Finally, over the phone, Mook got a short incantation from the spirit healer² in the village. She wrote them down and chanted it before Totae slept. Mook said that after she chanted the incantation, Totae slept well and did not have anymore nightmares. Moreover, she chanted the incantation into drinking water to make it sacred and let her son drink it as a medicine. However, she had to hide the water from the doctors and nurses because they might think the water was non-sterile and would not allow her son to drink it.

Normally the incantations are exclusive to men, while women are inhibited from learning any magical chants. It is said that if a woman learns an incantation she will become a malevolent ghost after death. Magical incantations are powerful (*hang*) so that only men can efficiently use them, because they are supposed to possess stronger *khwan* than women³. In the case of Totae, however, it was urgent to chase away the spirits disturbing him. Therefore the healer decided to recite a magical incantation to Mook and let her try using it to protect her son while they were away from the village. The power can be transferred from the healer over the telephone.

The villagers believe that whenever they are away from the village they need to prepare an incantation to protect themselves from unknown spirits. Hospital is a place which is believed to have a large number of spirits, and most of them are believed to be fierce.

² see footnote 11 in chapter six pp 192 for the discussion of the term used for the traditional healers

³ Some women, especially those who are midwives, secretly learn some incantations by hiding themselves behind a door or window while listening to a man chanting magical incantations and try to remember as much as possible. They call these the "*katha laud paung*", which literally means the incantations through the window. The midwife explained to me that she needed to know some chants to protect herself and the mothers when helping them to give birth because it is regarded as the most critical time that one (either the mother, the child or the mid wife herself) can be harmed by the spirits. Nevertheless, midwives cannot learn the incantations directly or openly.

Furthermore, when a person is ill, his or her *khwan* becomes weak, that is why it is easy to be harmed or frightened by a ghost.

At Home

Although Totae was in the hands of a modern medical doctor, behind him at the village, his grandmother, Pang, was busy performing a number of traditional healing rituals concerning spirit causes.

The ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) was the first spirit Pang ever thought of for help. As soon as Totae was sent to the hospital, Pang made an offering to her ancestral spirit which was also Mook's and Totae's spirit for it is inherited matrilineally. The ancestral spirit is the closest guardian spirit in the family. It is believed to be a collective matrilineal ancestor who governs, protects and supports family members. I asked Pang whether the ancestral spirit worship was performed because of any suggestion from the diviner. She said;

Following our ancestors, we, Mae Chaem people, respect and believe in spirits (*tue phii*). When something bad happens in our family, the first thing we think of is our *phii puu nyaa* (ancestral spirit). It is simply a common idea for us. I know I should make an offering to the *phii puu nyaa* (ancestral spirit) without asking the diviner. I persuade the *phii puu nyaa* to help Totae and ask for their forgiveness if we have done anything wrong.

Divination through Spirit Possession

Later, Pang wanted to find out the specific cause and remedy for her grandson, so she asked the Officiant of her matrilineage cult to arrange the spirit possession ritual. In the possession rite, she asked the medium of her Poh Chao Luang (the Guardian Spirit of her lineage) to explain Totae's accident.

Through the possession, Poh Chao Luang indicated that the Temple Spirit⁴ (*phii chao wat*) got angry at Totae because he was a stubborn boy, therefore it let the Violent Death Spirit (*phii tai hong*), which was believed to be a fierce spirit, push Totae into the fire.

The villagers were familiar with Totae's stubbornness. They often complained, commented, and gossiped about his naughtiness, and sometimes referred to him as a "yak" (a demon). Compared to other children in the village, Totae was relatively stubborn, spoiled, and aggressive. One day Totae was brought to the temple to attend the Buddhist ritual with his grandmother. In the temple hall, he intentionally hit the elder's head, which was strongly held to be a morally wrong behaviour. The young must respect and thus cannot hit any elder. Furthermore, the head is the highest part of the body therefore it is a taboo to touch the elder's head. Totae was scolded for his bad behaviour. Not surprisingly, when the villagers heard that Totae fell into the hot ash in the temple, they immediately connected the accident to his previous misbehaviour in the temple. Some even suspected that he might have been punished by the Temple Spirit.

Correspondingly, the spirit medium, through the possession, also revealed that the Temple Spirit caused Totae's accident. Nevertheless, Poh Chao Luang defined the explanation in more detail. Although Totae was punished by the Temple Spirit, as everybody suspected, it was precisely the Violent Death Spirit (the common malevolent spirit in Mae Chaem⁵) which pushed Totae into the fire. Normally the Temple Spirit is regarded as a guardian spirit, therefore it is implausible that the benevolent spirit should be accused of the accident. The Violent Death Spirit was thus blamed for the aggressive action. Nevertheless, the Violent Death Spirit was not simply mentioned because of its ferocity in a general sense as any malevolent spirit can harm a person. Rather, this was related to the events that happened in the village about 50 years ago. Those who were in their sixties or seventies could remember that there was a Karen man who died under the Bodhi Tree inside the temple. It was regarded as an inauspicious death because the

4 According to Mae Chaem spiritual cosmology, inside the temple there is a spirit which governs and protects the temple and the members of the temple called the Temple Spirit (*phii chao wat*). A small spirit shrine is built for the Temple Spirit at the South-east corner of the temple wall. At every Buddhist ritual, food must be offered to the Temple Spirit to pay respect.

5 See chapter 6 for a further detail about the Violent Death Spirit.

man did not die at home and it happened suddenly and unprepared. They believed the soul of the dead man still wandered around inside the temple, could not reincarnate and thus became the Violent Death Spirit, and it was this particular spirit which caused Totae's accident. Apparently the hot ash which Totae fell into was located near the Bodhi tree where the Karen man had died.

This is how the illness explanation is created. It is a multi-layered explanation in which the relations between the cosmology, history, and the incident are considered, as well as the ill person's personality, life history, and behaviour relating to the accident: what the person has done, contacted, or related to the place. All these are regarded as the sources of illness explanation. Based on those sources, a web of illness causations is created.

Furthermore, the meaning of the illness is mutually created through the interrelationships in society. Certainly, I do not say that everyone shares exactly the same cosmological knowledge or history, therefore different persons may give different explanations. However, to some extent, they do share some concepts in common. These meanings are discussed, shaped, and re-created all the time. In other words, the explanation of illness is an ongoing and negotiable process. Nevertheless, there are some particular explanations which are more efficient than others. For instance those meanings defined by the person who has a higher reputation, such as the spirit medium and the diviner, are regarded as a more powerful explanation. Furthermore, the circumstances of revealing the explanation through spirit possession or divination rituals make the meaning even more powerful. However, it should be noted that the medium or the diviner also get those ideas from public gossip and rumours, which they used as a source of their divinations. At the same time, after the medium or the diviner identify the illness cause through the possession rite or traditional divination, their explanations become another source for the villagers to gossip and create further rumours and explanations.

Different people had different views concerning the reason for Totae's accident. Most of the villagers quickly connected his naughtiness with the accident and said he was punished by the Temple Spirit. Mook, however, was not quite happy about it. Therefore, she tried to change the issue to focus on the Violent Death Spirit rather than the misbehaviour of her son.

Totae told his mother that on the day he had the accident, he brought his new toy gun to the temple to play with his friends. Then there was the unknown man who tried to grab the toy gun from him. He pulled his gun back and fell down into the hot ash which was left nearby. Mook was surprised to hear the story from her son. She believed the unknown man might be a spirit not a human. She even confirmed to me and neighbours that she could not find the toy gun in the temple when she searched afterwards. She thought it might have already been taken by the spirit.

What did Totae understand from his accident? He learned from his illness experience that there might be some kinds of spirit wandering around in the temple and they might have caused him the burning accident. Since then he was scared to go to the temple. He never went to the temple again on his own. Some of Totae's friends were also scared to walk by the temple alone at night. After he came back from the hospital for a couple of months, his mother brought him to the temple to attend the Buddhist rite. He did not want to go. He held his mother's hand so tight, hesitated and got scared to walk, he tried to run away to his home. He looked as though he would cry. His mother kept telling him it was fine, and pulled his hand to the temple.

Stress in the Hospital

Totae suffered physically and psychologically during his three months in hospital. He was stressed out, and fed up with the medical treatments and a number of operations. During the first couple of weeks, he was nervous and struggled to adapt to the unfamiliar atmosphere. This was evident from his nightmares: a dream of a ghost, etc. He cried aggressively and rejected all the nurses and medical doctors. It took time for him to get used to the treatments, surgery and medical staff. Gradually he felt more comfortable and could make friends with the nurses and allowed them to clean his wounds.

On the other hand, the longer Totae was in the hospital the more Mook felt depressed. She found the hospital an unpleasant place full of suffering patients.

I had never been that long in hospital. Everywhere I looked I just saw people with suffering faces. I don't know how doctors and nurses can work there. I think that may be a reason why doctors and nurses seldom get married. I was so bored and depressed. I was also worried about my shop. The nurses must have noticed that. So they suggested that I go home a while. This time I asked my husband to stay at the hospital instead.

Mook's depression was not only because of her son's accident, but she was worried about her grocery shop and all her businesses. She asked her mother (Pang) to look after the shop for her, though Pang could not help her much with the other businesses. Nud had to maintain the economic life in the family. Usually the family businesses were mainly run by Mook, as she was more energetic and active. Therefore, when she was away, her shop became quiet, and the businesses were going down. Mook was a talkative, energetic woman, but during the time when Totae was in hospital she looked tired and worried all the time. She could not smile and often had arguments with her husband. She told me she tried to persuade the doctor to discharge Totae as soon as possible. She wanted her son to recover as soon as possible so she could return to her normal life and run her business.

While Totae was suffering from pain, the operations, and fear of ghosts, Mook worried about her business and the time and money she was wasting, as well as the depressed atmosphere in the hospital. Pang, (Totae's grandmother (MM)), on the other hand, paid more attention to the spirit healing rituals. She tried to reconcile the relationships between the spirits and her grandson, as well as her family. A number of worship rituals, exorcisms and divinations were performed while Totae was in the hospital.

Exorcism of the Violent Death Spirit

According to the divination through the possession rite, it was believed that the Violent Death Spirit in the temple (the spirit of the Karen man who died inauspiciously 50 years ago) had pushed Totae into the fire. In order to protect Totae from further suffering and speed his recovery, the Temple Spirit had to be worshipped and the Violent Death Spirit exorcised. It was explained that when the Violent Death Spirit caused any illness,

it would hold the sick person's *khwan* (life essence) thus making one feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, it would be difficult to heal if the spirit did not let go of the *khwan*. In general there are two options to manage the Violent Death Spirit, positive or negative. The choice is normally defined by the diviner. In some cases the diviner suggests that the patient make an offering to the Violent Death Spirit, whereas in other cases the patient has to perform the exorcism, which means "to cut the relation tie" between the Violent Death Spirit and the patient. In Totae's case, it was the exorcism that needed to be performed.

Normally the suffering person has to be present at the exorcism. After the spirit healer symbolically "cuts" the tie between the sufferer and the spirit, the person runs through the symbolic door, made from bamboo, use in the ritual to separate the spirit space from the human world. The spirit is then caught behind the door, and the relationship between the spirit and the sufferer is cut. On the top and the bottom of the door, knives are hung to cut off the spirit. Four taboo indicators (*talaew*⁶) are tied to the door to protect the spirit from passing the border.

At the beginning of the ritual, the sufferer sits behind the door carrying a shirt and pants, pretends to wear them. After the spirit healer worships his teacher and the deities, the sufferer rubs his body with rice dough and gives it to the assistant to mould it into a human figure and place it on the spirit offering tray (*satuang*⁷). Then the spirit healer starts chanting while holding his magic sword above the offering tray. At the same time, he sprinkles sacred water onto the sufferer and the surroundings. The dough human-figure is a representative of the sufferer. It is referred to as "the white man". The spirit healer persuades the spirit, through the incantation, to exchange the "white man" with the sufferer (which is referred to as "the black man"). The main body of the chanting says "the white man is yours, while the black man is mine. Take all these offerings and let my black man go". Finally the spirit healer pours the sacred water on

⁶ It is a protection symbol made from bamboo, woven in a six-angle-star shape. It is believed to protect the area from malevolent spirits.

⁷ *Satuang* is a square-shaped dish made from a banana trunk. It is a symbol used for making offerings to malevolent spirits, filled with raw foods and cooked seeds and grains. As the cooked grains and seeds cannot grow, so they prevent the spirit from developing its power. At the end of the ritual, the *satuang* must be cast away from the inhabited areas for it is regarded as an inauspicious symbol. Therefore when found one must ignore it.

the sufferer's head, to wash down his "impure" self into the offering tray. Then the sufferer has to run through the symbolic door, leave the dress behind, and never look back to the ritual site again. The ritual is to deceive the spirit that it still manages to hold the sufferer's *khwan* but actually the dough human-figure (the white man) and old dress are given instead. The rice dough rubbed all over the sufferer's skin, the sacred water washed from the head into the offering tray and the old dress left at the ritual site are symbols that represent the sufferer's impure self. After the impure self is sloughed, the sufferer is believed to be cleaned and saved as he walks through the symbolic door into the safe human world. Finally the spirit healer ties the sacred thread around the sufferer's wrists and neck to protect him from the spirit. All the symbolic devices and spirit offerings must be left untouched at the ritual site. They are regarded as taboo, inauspicious and dangerous. Therefore the exorcism is normally performed outside the inhabited areas to prevent others from taboos.

In Totae's case, he was at the hospital so he could not participate in the ritual. Nevertheless, his grandmother felt it was urgent to expel the Violent Death Spirit so he would get better sooner. The spirit healer decided to use a banana trunk as Totae's body and wore Totae's dress on it as his representative. After the spirit healer cut off the spirit, he left the dress behind the symbolic door.

Second Exorcism of the Violent Death Spirit

After the exorcism was completed, Totae still felt uncomfortable and had nightmares. Pang asked Poh Chao Luang again, through the medium, to find out why Totae had not yet recovered. The answer was that the Violent Death Spirit refused the food it was offered in the previous ritual (they were live chickens) thus it kept holding Totae's *khwan* (life essence). As a result, she had to perform the exorcism again but this time the offerings were changed for a pair of boiled chickens with a bottle of whisky.

Parent Spirit Exorcism (*tad kerd*)

When some unusual events happen to children, such as an accident or any unfortunate incident, or if they show unusual signs such as continuous crying, the Parent Spirit is

suspected to be the major cause because it is the closest spirit to the children. It is believed that everyone has a Parent Spirit of their own who protects and supports them during childhood. Normally, the relationship between a child and his or her Parent Spirit gradually becomes weak as he or she grows up. Nevertheless, sometimes the Parent Spirit wants to take the child back to the spirit world so it makes the child sick. If the spirit succeeds, the child will die and return to the spirit world. The common expression is that “*phii tang bon hang*”, which literally means “the spirit up there is too powerful”. The “spirit up there” refers to the Parent Spirit. In that case, the tie between the Parent Spirit and the child is understood to be “too strong” and thus has to be cut. The ritual needed to be performed is called *tad kerd* (the full name is *tad poh kerd mae kerd*, which literally means cut the Parent Spirit).

Detail of the Ritual

The ritual is normally performed in the hallway of the house, where the sick child sits with his or her legs stretched out pointing to the main front door. The *satuang* (a spirit’s offering tray) is placed near the door in front of the child. A sacred thread is tied between the child’s ankle and the *satuang*, symbolising the relation between the Parent Spirit and the child.

At the beginning of the ritual, the spirit healer worships his teacher spirit. The child is rubbed with rice dough all over his body. The dough is then made into a human figure and put into the *satuang*.



Fig. 7.1 A child is rubbed with rice dough



Fig. 7.2 The dough is made into a human figure

After that the *satuang* is tied to the feet of the sick child with a sacred thread. The spirit healer holds his magic sword while chanting the incantation and sprinkling the sacred water onto the *satuang* and the child. He persuades the Parent Spirit to exchange the child with the “human figure” (the rice dough), which is referred to as the “white man”

...we offer all the foods to you, asking you to take the “white man” and let the “black man” go. The “white man” is yours but this “black man” [pointing at the child] is ours...



Fig. 7.3 The spirit healer sprinkles the sacred water onto the *satuang* and the child while chanting.



Fig. 7.4 The spirit healer chops the thread

At the end of the ritual, the spirit healer forcefully chops his sword in the middle of the thread, symbolising the cutting of the relationship between the Parent Spirit and the child. It is believed that the spirit is chased through the sacred thread to the *satuang*. The child has to run away immediately into his or her own bedroom, while the *satuang* is taken away from home. It has to be thrown outside the inhabited area for it is regarded as inauspicious and taboo. Finally the spirit healer makes a new sacred thread and ties it to the child’s wrists and neck to protect them from the spirit and strengthen their *khwan*, and ensure that they are safely resided in the body.

It should be noted that although the Parent Spirit has already been “cut”, the villagers still pay respect to the spirit by making offerings at every major Buddhist rituals. This is different from the exorcisms performed for the malevolent spirit, which aim to cut the tie completely, and no further relationships are maintained. For the Parent Spirit, on the other hand, the villagers still want to keep some relationships. They still respect the

spirit as it has sent them to be reborn. Therefore it can be said that the exorcism is done rather to loosen the tie.

The Parent Spirit is the only guardian spirit that can be exorcised. Normally exorcisms are considered to be inauspicious, impure, and taboo, therefore they should be performed outside the inhabited areas. However, the Parent Spirit Exorcism is the only inauspicious ritual which is performed inside the house. After the spirit healer has “cut” the tie between the child and the Parent Spirit, the child has to run into his or her bedroom. As stated in the previous chapter, a house is regarded as an extended “self”. Therefore, the ritual is performed to symbolically confirm the safety of one’s spiritual life. When one loses *khwan* the recalling ritual is held in one’s bedroom so it is ensured the *khwan* return to reside in a closed and intimate space, like *khwan* is protected in the bounded body. Correspondingly, the exorcism is performed in the hallway in front of the main door, which is the border between the outsider and the insider world, the spirit and the human world, and the other and the self. Immediately after the spirit healer cuts the thread, tied between the child and the spirit’s offering tray, with his sword, the child has to run as fast as possible to his or her bedroom: the bounded and protected self. The spirit’s offering tray is right away thrown outside the inhabited areas. This is to emphasise the strength of relations between the child and the family (represented by the house) while the Parent Spirit is expelled from the house.

Although holding similar theories that, during childhood, children are susceptible to illness because the Parent Spirit wants them to return to the spirit world, people of different lineages have different strategies to manage the Parent Spirit. Exorcism (cutting the tie) is one among other strategies performed in Mae Chaem. Some lineages do not use such an aggressive approach to the Parent Spirit, but, on the other hand, persuade the spirit to let the child recover by making an offering. This is called “*wan*”, which literally means persuasion, begging or asking for something.

Not surprisingly, in Totae’s case the Parent Spirit was immediately suspected. The family assumed that the accident might be a sign of the Parent Spirit attack. They thought the spirit might want to take Totae back to the spirit world so he was harmed. They had to exorcise the Parent Spirit (*tad kerd*) as soon as possible therefore the ritual was conducted in the hospital. The spirit healer went to the hospital to perform the *tad*

kerd ritual. However, the spirit healer said he had to apply the ritual conforming to the situation. Therefore the ritual was not performed as completely as when he performed it in the village. Nevertheless, it is a positive sign that the medical staff allowed them to perform the traditional ritual in the hospital.

Biomedical vs. Local Healing

After three months Totae was discharged from hospital. The doctor gave Mook the instructions about how to take care of her son at home and suggested that Totae have his wound washed and checked up regularly at the district hospital near his home (Mae Chaem Hospital). Moreover, as he still could not walk properly and fully use his right hand, he needed further physical therapy.

As soon as Totae arrived home, his house was always full of visitors: the neighbours, relatives and friends. They came to welcome Totae and Mook and checked how Totae was, whether he could walk, how severe his wound was, etc. They enjoyed chatting and listening to Mook about the stories in the hospital. Mook looked very relieved as she could smile and became talkative as usual. She liked sharing her experiences in the hospital with others which helped her relieve the depression. However, I noticed that Totae was very upset when his mother showed people how his wounds were, and opened his back and legs to show them. The neighbours kept touching his wounds, wanted to check how many wounds he had got. Some even annoyed him when they tried to take off his pants to check whether his genitals were burned. Totae got angry and annoyed, so he cried and scolded them. But, unfortunately he could not run away from them, he just pretended to concentrate on his toys while being the focus of the conversation.

Some villagers recommended herbs which are efficacious for burnt skin, and some advised Mook to inform and make an offering to the ancestors. Totae's MF tied a blue sacred thread around his neck while chanting a protecting incantation. It is believed to protect the child from harm and malevolent spirits. His FM, on the other hand, performed the Reiki healing ritual, which fashionably spread into Thailand two decades ago. Many people attended the course for practicing Reiki at that time. It was called

Yo-Rei in Thailand⁸. She placed her hand above Totae's wound in order to release energy onto it. Other villagers surprisingly watched his FM perform the rite for they had never seen it before. Some quietly told others that, "it is called Yo-re. She had learned and practised it". Totae's FM lived in another village near the Mae Chaem town. Her family emigrated from another district with different customs. For instance, she did not hold any ancestral spirit and did not belong to any lineage in Mae Chaem. A villager said to me, "she does not believe in the spirit like us". Her family is relatively distant from others, as they have a different background and do not have any spiritual link with others.

According to the modern medical doctor, Totae was already healed, or at least reached the acceptable stage, at which to be discharged. On the other hand, according to the local concept of health, Totae's burn had not been treated yet, because the "poison", which is the primary concern with burns, had not yet been expelled. It was suggested to perform a blow healing ritual for Totae; the most efficient healing ritual which can expel the "poison" and "hotness" after burning.

⁸ Yorei is the Thai pronunciation of the Japanese word „Johrei.“ „Joh“ means purifying, and „rei“ is spirit (Yoshihide 2001). Johrei was originally revealed to and developed by Mokichi Okada (1882-1955) in Japan during the 1920s, through the religious movement called Sakai Kyuseikyo (The Church of World Messianity). In the new freedom of postwar Japan, Okada carried out his work with great success. According to Johrei followers, Mokichi Okada received revelations and was empowered to be a channel of God's Healing Light (*johrei*) to eradicate illness, poverty, and conflict from the world (Crim 1989:670 and Wilson 1991).

For a member of the Sekai kyuseikyo, diseases result firstly from the pollution and weakness of their spirits, secondly from toxic materials contained in foods contaminated by chemical substances and agrichemicals. To cure disease, they practice both 'Yorei' and consuming agricultural products made from natural farming (Yoshihide 2001). Yorei is a method of channeling divine light into the body of a patient through the palm of the administrator. To do this, the administrator holds his/her hand about a foot away from the area to which the spiritual power is purported to be directed (The Johrei Institute 2003).

Sekai Kyuseikyo has about one million members, a growing number of them in the west and the Third World, especially Brazil and Thailand (Clarke 1993: 208). Johrei was introduced to Thailand in 1969, by Kazuo Wakugami who is the President of Sekai Kyuseikyo Thai Headquarters. Sekai kyuseikyo has strengthened their missionary work in recent years, not just as a new religion, but as an agriculture supporting group, especially by EM (Effective Microorganisms) farming (Yoshihide 2001 and Saradthathat 2003). The Kyusei Nature Farming Center (The Asia Center for Personnel Creation on Kyusei Nature Farming) was established in 1988. The purpose was to promote the research, education and extension of Kyusei Nature Farming and scientifically validate the technology of EM and enhance its use in the country. The major centre is located in Saraburi province from where it later extended throughout Thailand (Muangnil 2002). According to Saradthathat (2003), in 2002 there were 380,000 members of Sekai kyuseikyo in Thailand.

Expelling the Poison

The concepts of illness in Mae Chaem can be classified into two domains: human-centred illness or bodily illness (*rok tang kon*) and spirit-centred illness (*rok tang phii*). The human-centred illness or bodily illness is an illness which is caused by an imbalance of the bodily substances, for instance the wind-blood equilibrium, the hot and cold status and the stability of the 32 *khwan*. This may be caused by any intervention of material or immaterial agents alien to the human body, which requires herbs to heal.

When the wind and blood substance are imbalanced, the most common consequence is that the body, or the blood in particular, becomes poisonous (*pid*)⁹. The villagers normally say,

I have poison inside my body.

My knees hurt. I wonder if there is any poison inside.

I am going to ask the healer to expel the poison in my leg.

The poison is believed to cause fatigue, muscle pain, or bone pain. There are many traditional healing rituals which can expel the poison, for instance, scratching with a cow horn, rubbing with warm oil, and blowing incantation into a burnt wound. Different treatments are suitable for different kind of illness.

Apart from the imbalance of the bodily substances, the poison can also be caused by some foods which are considered to be poisonous. This is, however, different from the general notion of poison. Foods which tend to be poisonous in the local concept are chicken and beef. However, they are not poisonous for everyone but depend on the health status of the person. For instance, when one is ill or has a wound one is advised not to have chicken because it is considered to be poisonous for a weak body. Beef is poisonous for somebody. If one is ill or has any unpleasant symptoms after consuming beef then it is thought that beef is poisonous to one in particular so one must avoid eating it.

⁹ see chapter 5 for a further detail on a local concept of a poison (*pid*).

Nevertheless, the most common cause of the poison is believed to be a spirit. If the illness is caused by any type of spirit it is regarded as a spirit-centred illness (*rok tang phii*). Spiritual illness is an illness associated with spiritual beings such as gods, goddesses, ancestral spirits, demons, animal spirits, and spirits of locales such as rivers, mountains, or forests. These spiritual beings are part of a moral order that includes human beings. Common forms of spirit attack include holding the *khwan*, biting the human (*phii kob*), eating the human or asking for foods (*phii taung gin*), and inserting poison into the body, which then makes the blood poisonous. In short, if the body becomes poisonous because of food intake or the imbalance of the bodily substances, the illness is regarded as a bodily illness (*rok tang khon*). On the other hand, if the poison is found to be inserted by a spirit, then it is considered to be a spiritual illness (*rok tang phii*).

Nevertheless, it is possible, and often the case, for one illness to be caused by both bodily and spiritual causes. Normally, after one suffers from any illness, the diviner or the spirit medium are consulted to define and find out whether the illness is either a bodily or spiritual illness or both. If the spiritual cause has not been successfully managed, the bodily illness is not completely healed. In other words, to be healed means to recover from both the bodily and spiritual illnesses.

In Totae's case his grandmother had already performed a number of rituals regarding the spiritual cause. But what Totae had not been treated for yet was the poison inside the body. It is believed that the most important harm from the fire is its "poison" (*pid*) which can only be released by the blowing ritual: a ritual in which the healer blows an incantation on the wound to expel the poison and cool down the hotness from the fire.

According to the villagers, the earlier the patient visits the blowing healers the more efficient the healing will be. Some even said it is unnecessary to go to see any biomedical doctor in the event of burning. It is enough that the poison is successfully expelled by the blow healer. On the other hand, if the patient visits the biomedical doctor without performing any blowing ritual, it is more difficult to release the poison

afterwards because after the wound is healed the skin will be “blocked” so the hotness and poison will be stuck inside.

It is said that the biomedical doctor can only treat the burnt skin, and heal the wounds outside the body.

The doctors merely can treat the “outside” part of the body (*tang nauk*), but not the “inside” (*tang nai*). They do not understand about the poison (*pid*) inside the body, and they know nothing about the spirit.

However, for some diseases, modern medicine is believed to be more efficient. For example, traditional healers admit that they can only treat skin cancer but not cancer inside the body. They cannot see what is going on inside the body, in terms of physiology.

....a medical doctor can x-ray so he can see the inside of the body, but we cannot, we only can expel the “poison” and apply herbs to the lesion. However, we can manage with the “spirit” which doctors do not know about. When we go to the hospital the spirit tends to leave the body immediately, but when we arrive home, the spirit returns. You can see a child who is caught by a spirit, he or she will cry for no reason and continuously. But when you bring the child to the hospital, suddenly he or she will stop crying as if there is nothing wrong. When the child returns home, he or she cries again like mad. This is the sign of spirit. Maybe the spirit is scared of the hospital? [Laugh]. But I can find out what kind of spirit makes you sick and what it is asking you to do. Doctors do not know anything about the spirit so they cannot treat it. If you cannot find and manage the spirit, you will not be completely healed....

The power of modern medicine is that they can see the inside part of the body. According to the villagers, the “insider” part of the body which is invisible is regarded as a mysterious space. Therefore, the villagers are satisfied if the doctor diagnoses by x-ray. It is a criterion of a “good” and efficient treatment.

Sometimes I think I want to ask the doctor to x-ray all over my body. I want to know what is inside my body. It would be great.

Similarly, the diviner and the spirit medium legitimise their power by showing that they know what is going on inside the body when one becomes sick. However, the insider part they see is not physical but spiritual. Through divination and spirit possession, the diviner and the medium define whether the illness is caused by any spirit, if so, what kind of spirit it is, what it does with the body inside, and how to treat or manage it. Therefore, it can be seen that the villagers assess the power of healing, either of the traditional healer or biomedical doctor, in terms of the ability to see the “invisible” worlds.

The local concepts of the body which are based on the equilibrium of “hot” and “cold” conflict with biomedical physiology. After Totae fell into the ash he immediately jumped into the small river behind the temple with his instinct to cool down the wound. The biomedical doctor told Mook, “luckily Totae jumped into the water, it cleaned his wound”. On the other hand, it was said among the neighbours that Totae should not have jumped into the water at that time. One villager said;

His inside becomes very hot after a burn. Although water can cool down his wound, it cannot release the heat inside. Instead, the water will block the poison (*pid*) inside his body which will make it even hotter and will be more difficult to heal. He should have gone to see the blowing healer to release the poison inside and cool down the body before seeing the doctor.

Even though the ideal concept of treating the burning wound is to blow away the poison, Totae was immediately sent to the district hospital by a neighbour who found him. At that time Mook was in her cornfield, Nud was working in his garden, and Totae’s grandmother was in the shop. It was the neighbour’s decision to take Totae to the hospital as soon as possible. A villager explained to me that,

In the past there was no hospital here, the only thing we could do was visit the blowing healer. Now we still believe in the blowing healer. But since the hospital was built near our village, it is more convenient to go there.

Pang, Totae's MM, prepared a pair of *suay* (an offering device) for the traditional blow healer to ask him for help¹⁰. The blow healer that they chose lived in another village nearby. He was said to be the most efficient blow healer in Mae Chaem. Normally a traditional healer learns and practises various healing rituals, but each has his own area of specialty. Although he knows how to practise a number of healing rituals, he may not be able to use them all efficiently. It is explained that each healer is “good at”, “right for”, “matched with” or “compatible with” (*tuuk*) only some specific techniques. The healing efficiency depends on the matching between the characteristics and identity of the healer and the healing technique. Each healer knows many incantations, but cannot use them all efficiently. In other words, the identity of the healer affects the success of the healing rituals. That is to say, the power of the healing knowledge is subjective, for it depends on the quality of the person who practises it.



Fig. 7.5 The healer blows at Totae's wound to expel the poison.

Totae visited the blow healer every day at his home to attend the performance. Some days he was brought to the Mae Chaem hospital for a check-up. His ability to walk was not yet fully recovered therefore he needed physiotherapy. He did not like to go to Mae

¹⁰ Bringing the offering device to the healer is a proper manner for a customer to ask him for help. The *suay* must be given to the healer before the healing is arranged. If the healer agrees to perform the healing ritual he would take the *suay*. The healer uses the *suay* to worship his “teacher” (*wai kru*). The villagers know that Tuesday is regarded as a “strong day” (*wan hang*) which is suitable to perform any “powerful ritual”, for instance, exorcism or any rituals related to spirits. Therefore, people normally bring the *suay* to the healer on Tuesday if they want the healer to perform any ritual related to spirits. On the other hand, Monday is regarded as a “weak day” (*wan onn*) therefore is suitable to perform the auspicious rituals such as house celebration and prolong fate rite (*sueb chata*). Healing rituals which are not associated with spirit in particular, can be performed on any day, except Thursday which is considered to be a “*wan muay mor*”, which literally means “a death day for a healer”. If a healer performed any healing ritual on Thursday he could be harmed. The villagers should know the quality of the day and bring the *suay* to the healer on the appropriate day.

Chaem hospital because he was not familiar with the nurses there and he said he was in pain when they cleaned his wounds. On the other hand, he felt more comfortable with the blow healer because the procedure was painless, quick and was performed in a familiar atmosphere. The healer chanted while he blew the air all over the body to expel the poison (*pid*) and the hotness under the wound. It took around 10 minutes each time. Totae would lie down easily, and played with his toy, letting the healer perform the healing rite.

Failure after the Blow Healing

After he had been visiting the blow healer for a few weeks, Totae's wounds seemed to get worse. They were swollen and had turned red. Most of all, his mother was worried about his ability to walk, she was afraid he could not walk again because after being discharged for nearly a month he was still not able to walk properly. He could only crawl inside the house. His mother suspected an imperfect sterilisation in everyday life. She said;

It is hard to sterilise his wounds as well as when he was in the hospital. Here in the village it is not that clean. The doctor told me to keep his wounds clean but it is difficult. I do not know how to do it, just let it be...

Mook and Nud were occupied with their businesses after Totae was discharged. He was left at home, watching television, playing alone in the house because he had not fully recovered his ability to walk. His MM looked after the shop and Totae. Mook said she did not have time to clean the wound nor practise physiotherapy at home for her son, as the doctor had suggested.

I can't clean his wound nor massage his hand and legs. He always cries, and never lets me touch his wound. I am busy and tired from my work, so I can't be bothered to catch him all the time. Sometimes I have to ask my husband to take care of him. I'm so tired.

When Poh Uh, the healer in the village, offered the herbs which he believed might help to heal the wound, he asked Mook if she was interested in it, because it might not be sterile according to the doctor's standard. Mook told Poh Uh that,

Anything that may help Totae I want to try. Could you please let me try? I don't care about what the doctor says about sterile. I want my son to be healed as soon as possible.

However, many villagers thought that Totae was not "matched" or "compatible" (*tuuk*) with the previous blow healer. Not because the healer was not good, but the healer and the patient were not "matched", therefore the healing was not a success. In other words, the quality of the patient and the healer affect the efficiency of the healing as well. Mae Nee, my host mother, explained that if the patient felt cool since the first time the healer blew at him, it showed a positive sign otherwise one should change the healer. Finally, Totae's parents decided to bring him to another blow healer in the village but his symptoms still did not improve.

It was a hard time for Totae and his family. Although Mook was relieved from the stressful atmosphere in the hospital, she was still frustrated at home because of her son's negative progress, in particular his inability to walk. Totae got bored at home because he used to go outside to play with friends and his mother could not be with him all the time like when he was in hospital. Moreover, he was annoyed with himself for not being able to walk or to use his hands properly because he had to wear a movable cast over the little finger on the right hand which he often took off by himself. These made him stressed and so he became more stubborn. What Mook wished was that Totae could walk and go to school so she could go to work without any worry. After he came back from the hospital she and her husband were all the time busy in the field. It was the beginning of the new agricultural cycle of the year. Therefore, she felt too tired to look after her son after the fields and often had an argument with her husband. Mook's mother, Pang, helped her to look after the shop and kept an eye on Totae while Mook was in the field and carried out a number of traditional rituals on a behalf of Totae.

The Second Exorcism of the Parent Spirit

Finally Pang decided to ask the diviner in the village to find out if there was any other spiritual cause. The diviner found that the previous Parent Spirit Exorcism was incomplete, and needed to be performed again. Therefore, the family asked Nan Ta, another spirit healer who lived in a village nearby, to perform the “cutting tie ritual” (*tad kerd*) again. The spirit healer explained that the Parent Spirit still disturbed Totae even though the tie was cut in the previous rite, because one person has many Parent Spirits.

As you continue to be reborn eternally, you have a number of Parent Spirits. When you cut the tie, you never know which Parent Spirit in particular makes you sick. It can be the Parent Spirit of this life, or of previous lives. Therefore, it is possible that we miss the right one.

Therefore, it is common for a child to perform the “cutting tie ritual” (*tad kerd*) more than once during his or her childhood. When a child experiences further misfortunes or harm, even after performing the exorcism of the Parent Spirit, the first to be suspected spirit would again be the Parent Spirit. The complexity of reincarnation and the Parent Spirit is often raised in this context. Nevertheless the *tad kerd* ritual is only performed during childhood. After one is regarded as a grown up person one does not need such a rite anymore. For a girl, the last occasion she needs to “cut the tie” is before she gives birth. For a boy the borderline between his childhood and adulthood is when he gets married. Therefore, after getting married, if a man becomes ill, the *tad kerd* rite is not required. In other words, a girl becomes a woman after she gives birth, whereas a boy becomes a man after getting married.

Egg Divination

Let me illustrate here the divination performance, which is commonly practised in Mae Chaem. The ritual is called Egg Divination (*ched kai*, which literally means rubbing with an egg), practised when a person wants to find out the cause of the illness whether there are spiritual or purely bodily causes. The patient has to bring a boiled egg with an

offering tray to the diviner. After taking the egg yolk out, the diviner wraps the white boiled egg with a small cotton cloth. Inside the egg white he inserts his metal coin, which is used as an indicator of the divination. The egg is rubbed all over the patient's body and focused more where the pain is located, while an incantation is chanted softly.



Fig 7.6, 7.7 The diviner rubs the white boiled egg all over the patient's body.

After finishing the first round, the diviner takes the metal coin out and reads the sign appearing at the figure on the coin. The metal coin changes its colour from silver to blond after being rubbed with the egg. If the coin turns blond evenly or smoothly, it is interpreted that there is no poison (*pid*) inside the body, which also implies that the illness is not caused by any spirit. On the other hand, if there are black marks left on the coin it indicates poison. The position of the black mark determines different causes of the illness. For instance, if there is a black mark above the head figure on the coin, it means the Parent Spirit is the cause, if the sign appears behind the head near the neck it indicates the Violent Death Spirit, etc.



Fig. 7.8, 7.9 The diviner interprets the signs on the metal coin.

The boiled egg white is rubbed on the body three times, each time with different metal coins. The divination comes from integrating the results of the three coins. If the three coins confirm the same signs exactly the cause is clear. However, if the three coins reveal different results it means the illness has various causes. It is common that an illness is caused by many kinds of spirit.

After the particular spirit causes are defined, another ritual is performed to investigate in detail what the spirits request the patient to do. The healer feels the pulse on the forearm while chanting and listing the possible rituals which the spirits may request. If the pulse rests while the ritual is thought, it means the spirits want the patient to perform that ritual in particular.

Thaen Ritual

After Totae's family tried a number of healing rituals, they found Totae's symptoms were not improving enough, and most of all he was still not able to walk. So they asked Poh Uh, the diviner in the village, to perform the Egg Divination. Poh Uh was the most popular diviner in the village. He had a number of patients visiting from the same village and others. He was a specialist in divination as well as other traditional healings such as herbal massage and poison scrubbing. Although there are many healers who can perform the Egg Divination, the villagers believe that Poh Uh is the best person who can "read" the signs from the coins. Some healers, after performing the Egg Divination, even suggest that the patient bring the coins to Poh Uh to confirm the interpretation.

The result of the Egg Divination indicated that Totae had to register as a new member of another maximal lineage, which is his MMF's spirit cult. Inherited from his mother, Totae is a member of the minimal lineage a1, and a member of Poh Chao Luang A. However, the maximal lineage in which he had to register (his MMF's spirit cult), was the lineage B (see diagram 7.1). The diviner explained that Totae's MMF made Totae ill because he wanted Totae to be repositioned so the relationship with his matrilineage cult could be continued. Totae's worsening symptoms were understood as a message from the ancestor (his MMF) to show its requests.

Registering into another spirit cult is called "*thaen*" or "*myad*". The word "*thaen*" can be translated in various ways. For instance, it can be translated as "replace", "in place of", "to act for", "to repay an obligation to" (*tot thaen, top thaen*), or "a representative" (*tua thaen, puu thaen*). In this context the word *thaen* is used in a sense that one's dead relative is calling him or her to worship the ancestral spirit and Poh Chao Luang of the dead relative, on one's dead relative's behalf. Therefore I suggest the word is best glossed as "replace". It should also be noted that the lineage in which one has been requested to "replace" will be considered as his or her additional lineage rather than a substitute.

The common explanation of the *thaen* ritual is that the dead relative wants one to replace (*thaen*) his or her position in the matrilineage cult to continue the tie or to prevent relations from being cut off (*boh heu saiy phud*). The villagers say,

I have to "*thaen*" (replace) Poh Meen, my grandfather.

Many of his children have to "*thaen*" in my lineage.

To register into another lineage, one has to sacrifice to the Guardian Spirit (Poh Chao Luang) of that lineage with a slaughtered pig at its shrine. After that one is accepted as a "*thaen*" (replacing) member. One has to give an offering to the "new" Poh Chao Luang at every traditional New Year, Buddhist Lent, and has to pay money when that lineage perform their annual or triennial spirit worship.

After Totae's family informed Poh Chao Luang A (Totae's matrilineal guardian spirit) and made an offering, they went to the shrine of Poh Chao Luang B which was the spirit that Totae needed to register (his MMF's spirit). There, a black pig was slaughtered to pay respect and register as a new member on a behalf of Totae. It was performed while Totae waited at home. Normally the patient should be presented at the shrine but Totae's family did not want to disturb him for he had difficulty with walking at that time, also they were afraid Totae would not be able to concentrate during the ritual.

In the evening, after performing the *thaen* ritual, Totae's symptoms were surprisingly improving: he could walk whilst before that he could only crawl. Mook was very excited and happy. She kept telling everyone that Totae could walk on his own and could then go out to play. I used to hold Totae's hand to help him walk, so Mook excitedly told me that I could let go of his hand for he could walk alone.

This is a miracle! I'm so surprised. Believe it or not, exactly right after we performed the sacrifice to Poh Chao Luang at Mon Kuum (the shrine of the spirit B), in the evening my son could walk! I was worried and depressed for such a long time. His wound was getting worse and worse even though we did bring him to see many blow healers. We did perform a number of rituals but it seemed we had not yet found the right cause. We kept searching and trying many healings until we got the right answer. I am so happy that he can walk on his own now, so he can go out. I was worried if he could not walk anymore. Soon he will be able to return to school.

A week later Totae could ride a bicycle. Moreover, three weeks later he could return to school which he had postponed for nearly a semester. Everybody was surprised that Totae's symptoms rapidly improved compared to the couple of weeks before performing the *thaen* ritual, by worshipping Poh Chao Luang B. This certainly strengthened the villagers' beliefs and respect to Poh Chao Luang. In other words, the power of the spirit is legitimised through healing ritual. Moreover, performance of the diagnosis and healing rite effected a reconfiguration of kinship.

Totae still visited Poh Uh, the healer, every evening to have the blow healing performed. As presented above, Poh Uh could perform many healing rituals although he was a specialist in the Egg Divination. His wound seemed to be getting better than before, the redness and swollen gradually disappeared. It is believed that if the spiritual problem is completely solved, the other bodily causes are healed easily. In other words, the spirit cause is more crucial than the bodily cause. For instance, before the precise spirit which caused Totae's illness was found, many blow healers failed to expel the poison from the body. However, after Totae worshipped Poh Chao Luang B, the blow healing seemed to be more efficient: the wound soon improved which meant the poison had successfully been expelled.

Nevertheless, Totae himself did not appreciate or understand the spiritual rituals in the same way as the others. He insulted Poh Uh, the diviner, while I and other villagers were chatting at Poh Uh's house. Totae said, "You did nothing for me. I did not heal because of you, but the doctors in the hospital, they helped me a lot". Poh Uh was angry for his loss of face before a 5-year-old boy, in front of others, so he replied, "You are such a demon. If your parents are not rich you would have died already." Poh Uh meant to say that Totae was just lucky because his family is rich enough to afford the hospital expense, whereas others who do not have as many choices as him would understand how important the local rituals are.

Exploring the Story behind the *thaen* Ritual

After the *thaen* ritual was performed, Totae became a member of two maximal lineages: lineage A which he inherited from his mother and lineage B in which he was requested to replace his MMF's position. He has to worship both spirits and share the worship expense for both of the lineages. Why was lineage B chosen for Totae to be a replacement member? And why was the *thaen* ritual selected as a healing ritual for Totae? The family history and historical relationship between lineage A and B need to be considered.

Family History as the Sources of Illness Explanation

Pang's (Totae's grandmother) family, matrilineage A, had a long relation with lineage B through marriage since her parent's time. Pang's father was a person from lineage B. Pang's husband was also a person of lineage B.

A couple of years ago Pang (66 years old) was sick. She petitioned Poh Chao Luang (through the spirit possession ritual) and found that she had to "*thaen*" (replace) her father's position (membership) in matrilineage B. Pang was requested to register into her father's matrilineage by offering a pig to his spirit (spirit B) at its shrine. After that

at every traditional New Year and Buddhist Lent, she had to make an offering to her father's spirit (**B**) as well as her own (spirit **A**).

Some of Pang's relatives were also assigned to perform the *thaen* (replace) ritual after they were ill. Pang's elder sister's daughter had to enter Pang's brother-in-law's matrilineage (lineage **B**) and worship the spirit **B**. Totae, Pang's youngest daughter's son, had to enter the matrilineal cult of his great-grandfather, which is Pang's father.

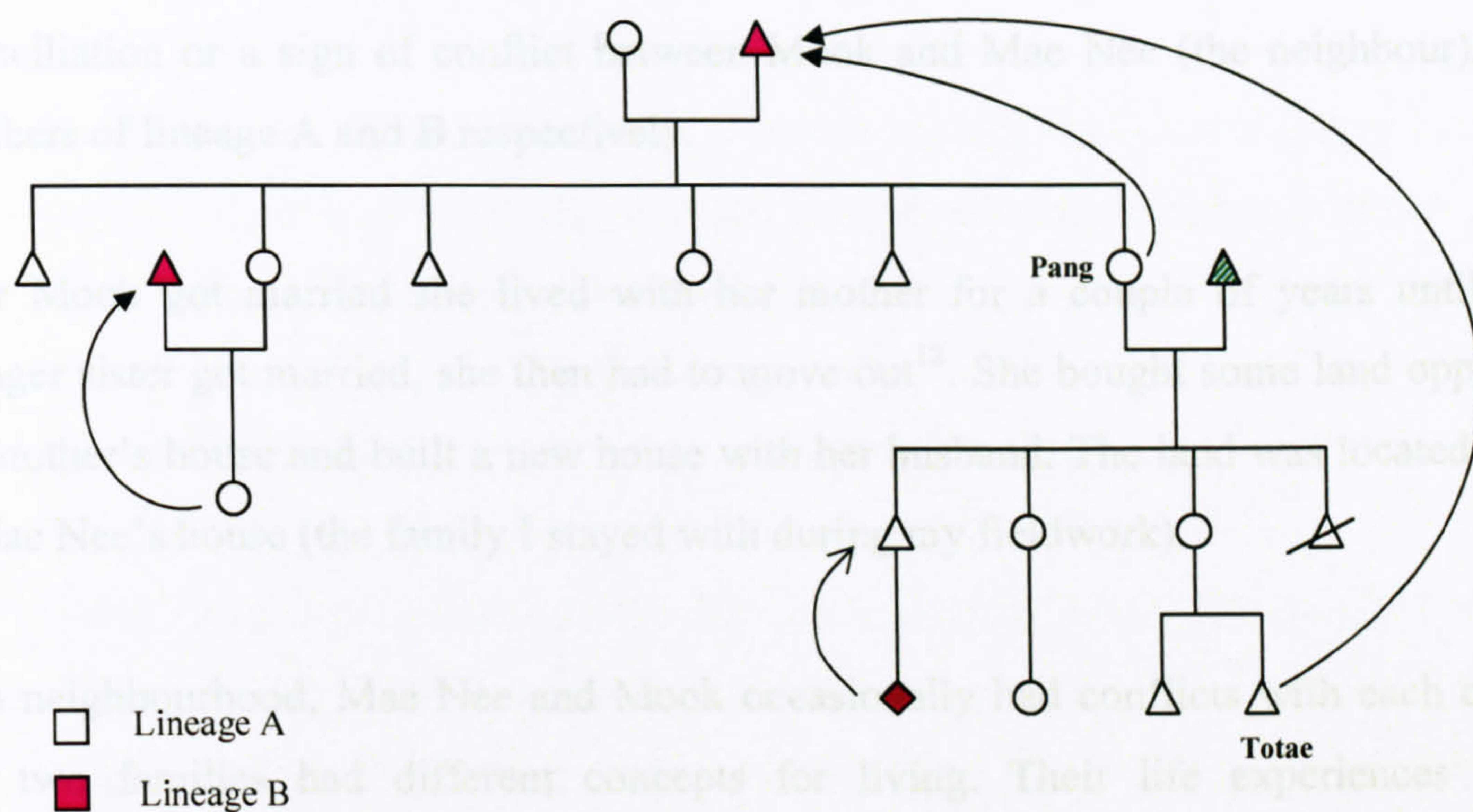


Diagram 7.1: Kinship genealogy of Pang's family and the "replacement" members

On the other hand, Pang son's child had to register into her lineage (lineage **A**).

My grandson (SS) was severely sick. While he was brought to hospital I asked Poh Chao Luang and found that he has to enter my spirit cult. Right after I

worshipped my ancestral spirit (spirit a1¹¹) with a small offering device (*suay*, a flower with candles and popped rice), my son's child was healed immediately. They didn't have to go to hospital anymore. That was the most instant result I have ever seen. Later, he performed the *thaen* ritual at the shrine of my Poh Chao Luang (guardian spirit A).

Conflicts between Totae's family and his neighbour, to some extent, affect the illness explanation and the choice of healing strategy. The *thaen* ritual may be seen as reconciliation or a sign of conflict between Mook and Mae Nee (the neighbour), the members of lineage A and B respectively.

After Mook got married she lived with her mother for a couple of years until her younger sister got married, she then had to move out¹². She bought some land opposite her mother's house and built a new house with her husband. The land was located next to Mae Nee's house (the family I stayed with during my fieldwork).

As a neighbourhood, Mae Nee and Mook occasionally had conflicts with each other. The two families had different concepts for living. Their life experiences were different. Mook and Nud were in their thirties, grown up in the time when a cash economy and Western style education had already developed in Mae Chaem. They sent their elder son to school in Chiang Mai city, like many other rich families normally do, to let their children have better opportunities for work and education. They managed their time to run as many businesses as possible to find more money. To stop working, for them, means losing time and money. Their agriculture was commercially based. They had a large longan garden, a big field for any cash-crop such as sweet corn, peanut, potato, and onion, a pig farm, a grocery shop, and a manual control petrol station. On the other hand, Mae Nee and her husband, Poh Pia, were in their sixties.

11 Spirit a1 is the spirit of the minimal lineage a1, under the guardian spirit A, the head of maximal lineage A (see diagram 2.1 which illustrates the relationship of lineages A, B and C in Bann Yang Luang village).

12 According to the matrilineal residence practice in Mae Chaem, after a daughter gets married she continues to stay with her mother until her younger sister gets married she will move to a new house she builds with her husband in the same compound. The youngest daughter is normally the latest one who gets married, in other words, the last one who stays with the parents and finally inherits the house. A son, on the other hand, leaves the family after getting married to live with his wife. Therefore, the relationship between a mother and a daughter remains strong even after marriage.

When they were in their thirties the social and economic context in Mae Chaem was very different. Most people lived entirely by agriculture. It was a self-sufficient economy. Rice was the main crop for consumption during the year. After rice harvesting, it was regarded as a time for rest. Men went out hunting in the forest. Some went for trading in another district. Women took care of children and the house so they had time to weave traditional skirts and other garments at home. Therefore, Mae Nee and Poh Pia got used to and prefer the self-sufficient agricultural lifestyle.

Mae Nee gossiped with me said,

You know what? Although Mook seems to be rich, she is never happy. Look at her, she is tired (*hew*) all the time and always worried about her cash flow. She does not have much money, but lots of debt.

Poh Pia supported his wife,

I don't like to have debt. Debt makes our heart "hot" and I will *kin kao boh lum* (literally means eat rice without taste; a local expression of stress similar to lost appetite). I prefer feeding cattle, working with plants and land. I can't be a merchant. I am not good at selling because I am not "greedy" (*kee lope*) enough.

According to Mae Nee, Mook was a greedy person (*kee lope*) because she wanted everybody to be her customers. One day, there was a pick-up car parked in front of Mook's shop that carried brooms to sell to Mook and other villagers¹³. Mook bought a lot of brooms from the salesman, so she could retail them later. She was annoyed that many people bought brooms from the merchant because she was afraid she could not sell those she had just bought. She complained that the merchant stepped in her business. Mae Nee thought everybody had the right to choose their goods, and Mook was wrong to complain about the merchant or other villagers. Sarcastically, Mae Nee bought a dozen brooms from the merchant to show that she did not have to listen to her or be under her control.

13 The village is located in the mountains far from the lowland market therefore various direct sellers occasionally carry commodities to sell in the village, such as medicines, fruits, plants, utensils, and groceries. Some sellers walk from home to home to sell bags, mats, or medicines. Some buy, or even steal if nobody is at home, antiques and hand made utensils to sell in the city.

Not only did they have conflicting ideas about living, but there were also problems about the land Mook bought to live with her husband.

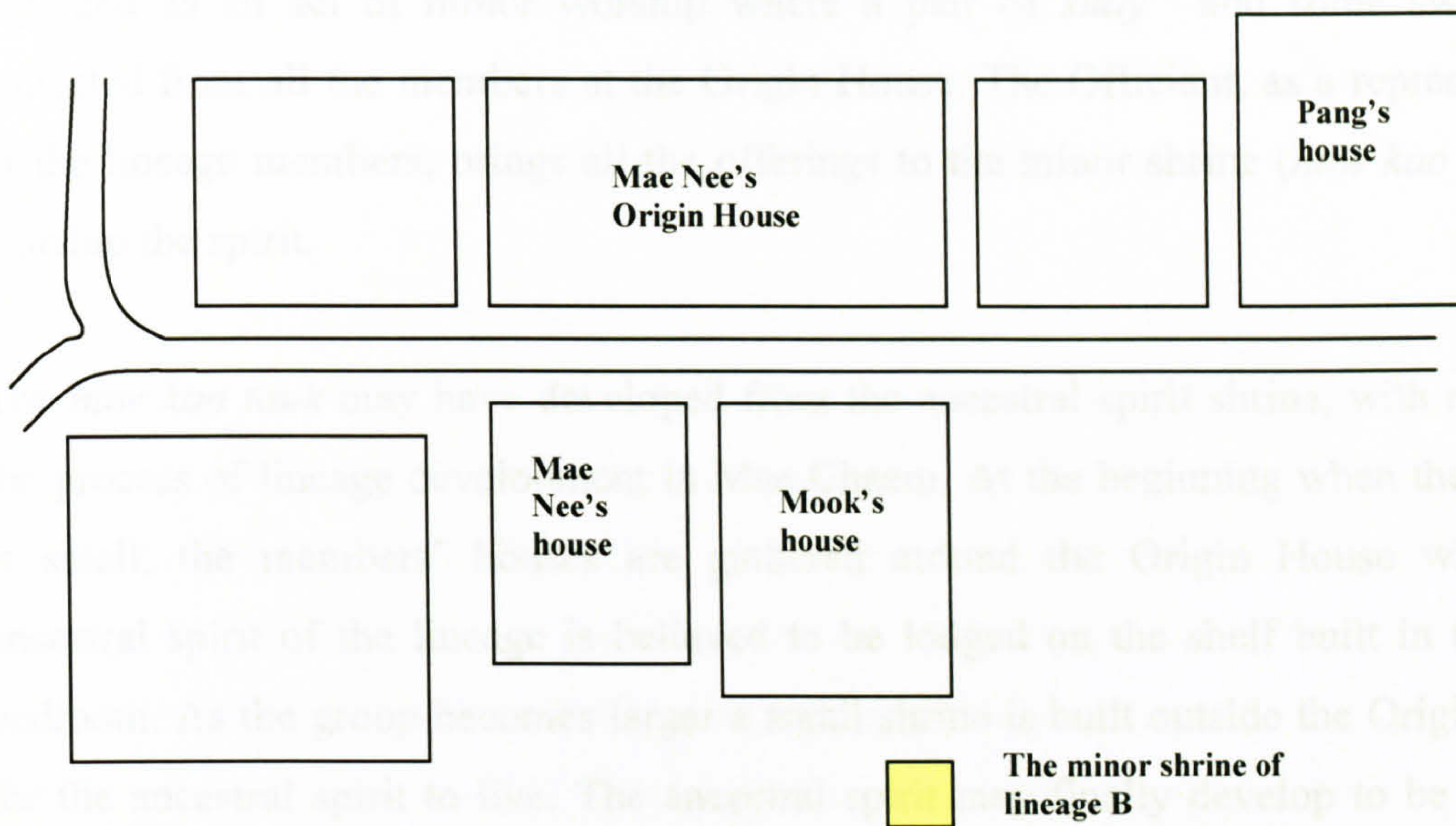
After they married, Mook bought the land next to Mae Nee's house and built a new house with her husband. The land belonged to Mae Nee's MM before her uncle (MeB) inherited the land.

In her grandmother's (MM) time, Mae Nee's family was one of the rich families in the village and had a higher status compared to others. Her ancestor was a noble (Chao Kan) of the village, who is now believed to be one of Poh Chao Luang, the Guardian Spirit in the village. Their Poh Chao Luang (spirit B), however, is submissive to the highest Guardian Spirit of the village (spirit A). It is regarded as a younger brother spirit.

The house where Mae Nee's MM used to live was regarded as the Origin House (*hyan kao*)¹⁴ of lineage B. Mae Nee's MM had a large plot of land around the Origin House as well as a number of rice fields.

Mae Nee's mother died when Mae Nee and her sister were young. They were raised by their grandmother in the Origin House. Mae Nee's mother was the only daughter in the family with five elder brothers. After her grandmother died the land was divided between her descendants. Mae Nee's only sister inherited the Origin House, some pieces of land opposite the house and some rice fields. She also automatically continued her position as head of lineage B. Mae Nee inherited a small piece of land opposite the Origin House and some rice fields. The rest of the land belonged to Mae Nee's uncles (her MeB), included the piece next to Mae Nee's house which Mook had bought.

¹⁴ The Origin House (*hyan kao*) is the house where the leader of lineage lives. It is normally inherited matrilineally together with the position of the lineage leader (*kaw phii*). Inside the Origin House in the main bedroom there is a spirit shelf built for the ancestral spirit of the lineage to stay and protect the household. Every year the members of each minimal lineage will gather at the Origin House to perform the worship ritual for their ancestral spirit.



Map 7.1: Location of Mae Nee's and Mook's land

Mae Nee told me that since her mother died when she was young, some of her uncles (MB) took the opportunity to get as much land and cattle as possible from their mother (Mae Nee's MM). All of her uncles lived with their wives after they got married. Nobody lived on the land they inherited from their mother. Most of her uncles used drugs, as the business of opium planting was widespread throughout Mae Chaem during that time (in the years 1947-1957). Later, the uncle who got the land next to Mae Nee's house sold it to Mook because he needed money for drugs.

The land Mook bought used to have a small shrine of lineage **B**. It is called *haw kao tauk*, which literally means “a popped-rice-shrine”¹⁵. It is not a shrine where the annual or triennial worship ritual or sacrifice are performed. The shrine is pretty small, only big enough for one person to climb up. It is for the Officiant to give offerings that the members made for the spirit at the traditional New Year and Buddhist Lent. These are

¹⁵ This is related to the offerings normally made at the shrine, for instance popped rice, candles, flowers and sweets are given to the spirit at the minor worship ritual.

regarded as an act of minor worship where a pair of *suay*¹⁶ and some sweets are collected from all the members at the Origin House. The Officiant, as a representative of the lineage members, brings all the offerings to the minor shrine (*haw kao tauk*) to worship the spirit.

The *haw kao tauk* may have developed from the ancestral spirit shrine, with regard to the process of lineage development in Mae Chaem. At the beginning when the lineage is small, the members' houses are gathered around the Origin House where the ancestral spirit of the lineage is believed to be lodged on the shelf built in the main bedroom. As the group becomes larger a small shrine is built outside the Origin House for the ancestral spirit to live. The ancestral spirit may finally develop to be a higher reputation spirit, the Guardian Spirit, which in Mae Chaem is called Poh Chao Luang. The Guardian Spirit has its own medium and officer. Furthermore, a bigger spirit shrine is built in the forest at the border of the village. Its size is similar to a normal house with a small compound around the shrine. It is believed to be a place where the Guardian Spirit lives. The ancestral spirit becomes a collective name for ancestors, while Poh Chao Luang is the particular founder of the lineage. While Poh Chao Luang is believed to live in the main shrine in the forest, the ancestral spirit is believed to be lodged on the shelf inside the bedroom in the Origin House. Now, the small shrine in the compound outside the Origin House is then changed into a minor shrine used for making an offering to the Guardian Spirit at only some particular occasions, such as the traditional New Year and the Buddhist Lent. The shrine is then called *haw kao tauk* (a popped rice shrine).

When Mook moved to live on the land she bought from Mae Nee's MB, she asked the members of lineage B to move the shrine further back into a garden out of her land. She was a person of different lineage (lineage A), so it is not appropriate to have a shrine of different spirit on her land. After she built a house to live in with her husband, she opened a grocery shop on the ground floor and fed pigs in the rear garden near the shrine of spirit B. This annoyed Mae Nee, as well as the other members of lineage B. They felt that it was not suitable for a minor shrine to be there.

¹⁶ a cone-shape container made of banana leaf contain flowers, joss-sticks, betel leaves, and slices of areca nut, use as a basic set of offering device for almost every spirit ritual

I'm not happy with that and I know Poh Chao Luang won't be happy either. Mook never respected our spirit. She feeds the pigs near the shrine which make it dirty and smelly. She should pay more respect to our spirit.

Furthermore, according to Mae Nee, Mook tried to move the fences of her house further to the side into Mae Nee's land to extend her boundary. Mook told Mae Nee that she needed a bit more space for transferring the pigs from the rear garden. Mae Nee complained that her land had already been taken since her uncle was the owner as he extended the fence before. Therefore Mae Nee allowed the land office to define the exact landmark between the two lands according to the title deed.

Although Mae Nee was not happy with Mook, they never had arguments. According to the age hierarchy practice in Mae Chaem, Mook should pay respect and listen to Mae Nee and Poh Pia as they are the same age as her parents. On the other hand, as elders, Mae Nee and Poh Pia should avoid having arguments with the younger generation. It is expected that the elders are calm and rational, thus it is shameful for elders to fight with the young. In general, people try not to complain to each other openly or directly. They rather say or show their anger indirectly or talk through others to let the person realise. For example, Mae Nee intentionally bought a dozen of brooms even though she did not need that many to make a point with Mook. Sometimes Mae Nee intentionally talked with a loud voice while having dinner, complaining about the smell of the pigs from Mook's farm. She knew that Mook could hear her complaint because she chose the time when Mook went out to feed her pig.

Nevertheless, the two families helped each other. The husbands of both families were part of the village representation, while Poh Pia (Mae Nee's husband) was the head of the temple (*gae wat*)¹⁷, Nud (Mook's husband) was the accountant of the temple. While Nud worked under Poh Pia, as an elder and the head of the temple, Nud had a higher economic status by which he could support the temple and the village as a whole. Moreover, Nud once helped Poh Pia's son get a job.

¹⁷ The head of the temple is a position elected by the village members to be the representative of the Buddhist community in the village to organise the activities held in the temple such as Buddhist rituals, daily merit making, as well as to manage and develop the temple physically and spiritually.

Nevertheless the two families have never fully trusted each other. When Nud was charged in connection with drugs, he came to consult Poh Pia. Mae Nee told Poh Pia afterwards that she suspected that Nud wanted to check whether they had told the police about his business.

Creating Kinship through Illness

The *thaen* ritual in which Totae, Mook's son, had to register in Mae Nee's lineage, lineage B, can be seen as a way to reconcile and at the same time to indicate the conflicts between the two families. Regarding moral concerns in Mae Chaem, people try not to complain directly to one another, in order to maintain mutual social relations. Therefore illness explanation serves as a discourse to reveal conflicts. That is to say, in the case of Mook and Mae Nee, the conflicts over land, the spirit's shrine, and the lineage's reputation were expressed through Totae's illness explanation.

Nevertheless, this has to be considered in a particular time and context. Not everyone has to register in another lineage. It depends on the results of divination. In other words, registering in another cult is not a decision of the patient or any of his or her relatives but always a choice of the diviner. It is not a matter of the sick person finding help from the spirit of another lineage, but a responsibility that one has to maintain one's dead relative's position in their lineage. However, it has to be noted that the villagers do not always go to see the diviner and the *thaen* ritual is only one healing strategy among others. Depending on the coin indicator which the diviner uses in the Egg Divination, different strategies are suggested for the patient for each illness.

While this does not imply that whenever one is sick one's lineage relationship will change, it can be argued that the transforming of a lineage can only occur after one experiences illness. At first I misunderstood that the *thaen* ritual was performed for a husband who needed to change his spirit to his wife's after getting married. Once I asked Mae Nee if her son needed to enter his wife's lineage after getting married, she replied that,

It depends on the spirit. If the spirit “calls” you, then you have to enter. When my daughter’s husband, Yan, had a car accident last year at the bridge near the village, it was because my spirit wanted him to register into my lineage. But my son does not need to enter his wife’s lineage, because her spirit never calls him.

The *thaen* ritual is more complicated as it depends on the dynamic of illness explanation and the result of divination. Illness is a common tool the spirit uses to communicate with the living. It may use illness as a message to warn the person, ask for something, express its anger or call the person to replace its position in the lineage.

However, what we have to keep in mind is that the choices of lineage in which one can be asked to register after illness are those of one’s F, MF, MMF. In other words, the possible choices are the matrilineage of the affinal relatives in the ascending generations, although in some cases one has to register into the matrilineage of one’s spouse. (The systematical analysis of the *thaen* ritual is presented in the following section). Therefore, the choice of lineage may or may not conform to the lineage of the conflicting families. One may ask, if the choice of replacing kin is bounded to the affine in the ascending generation, then how can the conflicts between Mook and Mae Nee be relevant for the analysis? Or is it merely a coincidence that the lineage in which Totae has to register is Mae Nee’s lineage? What I would rather ask is why the *thaen* ritual has been chosen in the first place, when there are several other healing rituals which the diviner could have suggested for Totae’s illness.

Although illness explanation does depend on the sign on the metal coins in the Egg Divination, it is actually the diviner who has a legitimate power to “read” the signs. He can interpret the sign on the coin conforming to the context of relationships in everyday life. Living in the same village, the diviner knows what is going on among the villagers. Gossip is the most crucial source to gather information from others. Precisely, Poh Uh, the diviner, lives near Mae Nee and Mook, so he knows about the conflict between the two families, in particular the issue about the spirit shrine of lineage B on Mook’s land. When the black sign on the coin showed that Totae had to perform the *thaen* ritual, why did Poh Uh choose lineage B (which is Totae’s MMF’s) whereas he could have chosen the other lineages, such as the lineage of Totae’s father, or MF?

Totae's father's family emigrated from another district near Chiang Mai city where the spiritual lineage system is disappearing. Nud does not belong to any spirit cult in Mae Chaem, in other words, he is not a member of any lineage. The villagers said "his family does not have any spirit", "they do not believe in spirit". Because the reason for performing the *thaen* ritual is to "continue the tie" of the affinal relative's spirit cult, therefore Totae's father is not a relevant choice. However, according to the "rule" of the *thaen* ritual, the lineage of MF is a possible choice. I do not know exactly why his MF's lineage is not chosen. But there is a possibility to explain why lineage B, which is his MMF's lineage, is chosen.

Although, the lineage into which one has to register is defined by the diviner, normally there is a reason that lies behind the choice. For instance, social relationships in everyday life are the most crucial influences over the decision of the diviner. In other words, it is the microhistorical relations in daily life which create the dynamic transformation of lineage relationships in Mae Chaem. Leslie has noted that "moral conflicts dispose people to different interpretations of illnesses" (1992:205). Conflicts may involve the moral identity of the patient as well as members of the healing management group. The moral issues may be related to the aetiology of an illness as well as to therapeutic modalities followed and not followed (see Nichter 2002: 92).

In Totae's case, the long history of relationship between his lineage (A) and lineage B as well as the conflict between his family and his neighbour influenced the choice of a replacement lineage through the divination. The rapid growth of commercial society in Mae Chaem and the spread of opium plantations caused Mae Nee's uncle, a member of lineage B, to lose an important piece of land which he inherited from his mother to Mook as he was short of an income. Consequently, this also made him and a member of his lineage lose the prestige of his ancestor, because a shrine of the ancestral spirit of lineage B was located on the land Mook bought from him. As a member of a different lineage, Mook had to move the spirit shrine of lineage B from her land and used all the space on the land to run her businesses. A spirit shrine is a symbol which represents a lineage's reputation. Therefore, when Mook built a pigsty in the rear garden next to the site where the spirit shrine had been moved, it was, to some extent, regarded as an offence to lineage B. As a result, when Mook's son had an accident, Mook confronted a social challenge, in the form of illness explanation, which forced her to pay respect and

make an apology to spirit B, by performing a sacrifice on a behalf of her son. Moreover, by registering into lineage B, Totae became a person of the same spirit (*phii diaw kan*) as Mae Nee (his neighbour) which is a common idea of being kin in Mae Chaem. Therefore, it can be seen that Totae's illness was used as an occasion to restore the relationship, and the *thaen* ritual was used as a strategy to reconcile the conflict between the two families. All this is clear, despite the fact that the conflicts were not directly pointed out, as the motivation for Totae's MMF asking him to replace his position.

Well Being, Good Relationships

Social relationship is at the core of consideration in Mae Chaem health and the analysis of illness causes and explanation. Illness is understood to be a reflection of one's relationships to various supernatural beings, or to other individuals, both living and dead. One's well being, in other words, is seen to be part of a whole web of relationships that impinge upon one in everyday life. Illness is therefore a symptom of disharmony between the sick person and his or her wider universe of relationships. Healing, therefore, involves restoring harmony, correcting behaviour, rebuilding fractured relationships with gods, ancestors, or the living. Nevertheless, illness can also be caused by a too close relation between the sick person and the spirit, thus, the relationship needs to be "cut". It can be seen that the concept of health in Mae Chaem, as well as in other cultures, tends to be related to morality (see Kinsley 1996).

At the beginning of the accident, the relationship between Totae and the elders was considered. The characteristics of the sick person, his behaviour at the site of the accident, the village history and cosmological beliefs were brought into the interpretation of Totae's illness. With regard to a moral concern and an obligation of the young towards the elderly, Totae's burn was justified as a punishment for his naughtiness. For instance as the accident happened inside the Temple, it was said that the Temple Spirit, the deity which governed the temple, punished Totae by letting the Violent Death Spirit, which was the wandering spirit of a man who died inauspiciously at the site of the accident a long time ago, pushed Totae into the fire. While the Temple Spirit was paid an apology with an offering, the Violent Death Spirit was exorcised. To

some extent, the “punishment” made Totae scared of ghosts. He did not dare to enter the temple after returning from the hospital because he understood that he was pushed by the malevolent spirit there.

The healing management also involved the relationship between the patient and his personal guardian spirit. For instance, the ancestral spirit had to be worshipped, and the Parent Spirit which was believed to be a common cause of children’s illness was exorcised.

Later the relationships between lineages were considered. This time, Totae was not considered only as an individual self, but a part of the lineage, a member of matrilineage A. By performing a *thaen* ritual, Totae became a replacement member of lineage B, and to some extent, became a “person of the same spirit as B” (*phii diaw kan*). Therefore, it can be said that his illness was used as a chance to heal the conflict between his family and his neighbour, as well as between his lineage and another. Moreover, the importance of lineage relationship in relation to health is emphasised in the local explanation for the *thaen* ritual, as the villagers normally say that the *thaen* ritual is performed to prevent the tie from being cut (*boh heu saiy phud*).

The balance of social relationships, towards the living and the dead, also relate to and influence the equilibrium of substances inside the body. The common understanding in Mae Chaem of a burn lesion is that the blood will turn into poison and cause an imbalance of the substances inside the body. However, the explanation can be more complicated than that because the poison can be inserted by a spirit, therefore, if the relationship between the patient and the spirit has not been restored, the poison cannot be successfully expelled. That is to say, the process of healing manages the equilibrium inside the body as well as the relationship towards others.

Put in another way, one’s well being is a harmonious balance of one’s multi-selves. For instance, a physical self (an equilibrium of the substances and the 32 *khwan*, life essence), a spiritual self, (a correct relation to the personal guardian spirits, such as the Reincarnated Spirit and Parent Spirit and all other spirits in the cosmological world), a family self (a correct relation towards family members), a lineage self (a correct

relation towards others who share the same spirit (*phii diaw kan*) as well as a correct relation to the people of different spirit, in particular the affines).

All the relationships stated above can be readjusted throughout the healing management process if the healing fails to take effect. The efficacy of the ritual is reconsidered, either concerning the accuracy of the ritual, for example the offering made to the spirit, or the ritual may be performed again by a different healer because the compatibility between the patient and the healer may affect the efficiency of the healing.

Through the illustration of the complication of illness experiences and a long process of healing management, I have presented the way in which social relations or kinship is used to explain illness and influence decisions in healing, as well as the way in which illness and healing, the *thaen* ritual, is used to reconcile conflicted social relationships. In the following section I will move the focus of analysis to the process of kinship transformation through the *thaen* ritual, and investigate the meanings and consequences of being a replacement member.

The Concept of *thaen* Ritual

Normally one can only perform the *thaen* ritual once in a life. In other words, one can be a member of no more than two lineages: (1) the matrilineage one inherits from one's mother at birth and (2) if one is required, the *thaen* (replace) lineage one registers in after being ill. The matrilineal spirit, or the matrilineage one has inherited from the mother at birth is held eternally even after death. When one reincarnates, one always returns to the same matrilineal cult. For a woman, the spirit or the lineage is transmitted down to her descendants. For a man, on the other hand, his matrilineage cannot be transmitted to his children, for they belong to his wife's lineage.

The lineage one has joined after illness, however, is only an individual matter and is only a matter for this life. For instance, if a woman has to register as a replacement member of another lineage, her children only inherit her matrilineal spirit and lineage, not the "replaced" one. In terms of payment at the annual or triennial spiritual worship,

one has to pay for one's matrilineal cult, as well as the *thaen* (replace) lineage. One's children, on the other hand, only pay for their matrilineal cult.

Continuing the Tie, Containing the Cycle of Rebirth: The Cosmological Explanation of the *thaen* Ritual

The principle explanation the villagers give for the *thaen* ritual is that the ritual is to maintain the matrilineal tie of the dead relatives to their spirit cults. The common saying is "*boh heu sai y phud*" which literally means "to prevent the tie from being cut". A villager explained to me that,

The *thaen* ritual is needed so the spirit tie is not cut. It is important to continue the tie. Otherwise one may lose the relation to the lineage. Our ancestors have realised that, so they ask us to replace their positions.

Normally a living kin in the descending generation from a different lineage is chosen to continue the tie. How can the tie be continued? The chosen kin has to "register" into the dead relative's lineage by worshipping the spirit of that lineage with a slaughtered pig and by continuing to be a "replacement" (*thaen*) member. For instance, the replacement member has to continue making an offering at the traditional New Year and the Buddhist Lent, and shares the expense at the annual and triennial spirit worship of the dead relative's lineage.

What does it mean for the tie to be continued? When alive, one continues attending the worship ritual of one's ancestral spirit and guardian spirit (Poh Chao Luang), as well as sharing the expense of the sacrifice, etc. As the spirit is inherited matrilineally, after a man dies, his wife and children cannot continue to worship his spirit or pay any expense for the spirit for they hold different spirits from him. Therefore, his tie with his matrilineage will be cut, and the *thaen* ritual is created to maintain such a position and role.

Considering the local spiritual ideologies, the meaning of "continuing the tie" relates deeply to the meaning of life and the cycle of rebirth. To be sure that one's ancestors

are “living” well in the spirit world (the world of death) and will eventually be reborn, one has to make an offering to them regularly. It is believed that after death the ancestor lives in the spirit world parallel to the human world, waiting for a time to be reborn. At every Buddhist ritual (once a month) the ancestors come to the temple to receive offerings which are made through the monks. If the ancestor has been ignored, it is believed that they will transform into a fierce ghost called *phii ka*, which tends to harm the living¹⁸. Consequently, it cannot be reborn. Therefore, making an offering is an important practice in the mutual obligations between the living and the dead. While the ancestor ensures the well being of the living, the living enables the dead to be reborn, in other words, maintaining the eternity of the cycle of rebirth.

The villagers believe that dead parents return, from the spirit world, to receive offerings only from their daughters. As they put it, “the dead return to “eat with” their daughters. They never “eat with” their sons”. Therefore, a father is regarded as a part of his daughter’s family. Diagram 7.2 presents the local system of making an offering. The circle represents a unit in which the offering is made. After a father and mother die, they return to take food offerings only from their daughter, not their son. The daughter and her husband, after death, will take an offering from her daughter. The son, on the other hand, does not have to make any offering for his parents. And after he dies, he will return to “eat with” his daughter.

18 Any ancestor or guardian spirit which has been ignored is believed to become *phii ka*. At the site where an unoccupied temple was located, the Temple Spirit (*phii chao wat*) had transformed to be a powerfully furious spirit called *phii ka yak*. It is believed that the temple belonged to the Lawa, the hilltribe who occupied the land in Bann Yang Luang village before the Muang. After they left the land the temple became unoccupied and so the Temple Spirit was ignored. Nobody worshipped or make any offering for the spirit for a long time. At present the temple was demolished, except the shrine of the Temple Spirit. Very often the *phii ka yak* at the shrine is accused for causing an illness for the villagers, in particular young children and a postpartum woman.

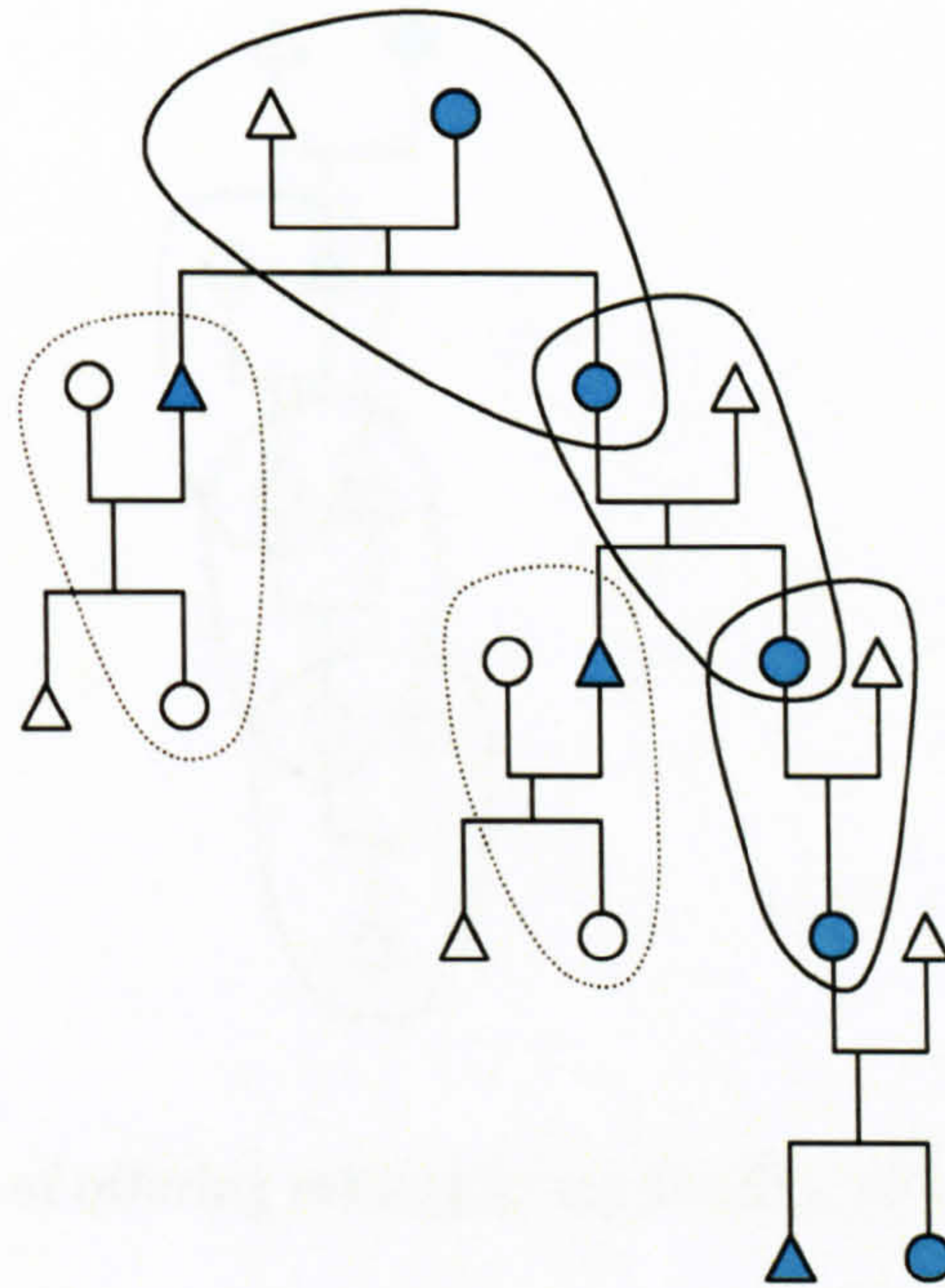


Diagram 7.2: The local system of offering making

Therefore, we can see that the tie to the ancestors has to be maintained even after death, but making an offering for one's ancestor with the *thaen* ritual. If a family does not have any daughter, there is no-one to make an offering for them after they die (see diagram 7.3). Eventually they become a *phii ka* (a malevolent spirit). Furthermore, it can be seen that the lineage will finally be cut. As a result, there is an opportunity for some of their son's children to be asked to continue the responsibility of making the offering and maintaining the tie. That is, to be a replacement member after illness through the *thaen* ritual.

The *thaen* Ritual: A Systemic Analysis

The *thaen* Ritual as a Late Compensation for Illness

The lineage one can be asked to 'replace' can be asked to be a replacement member of MF, MNF or may be one's spouse or a child of one's spouse. The lineage one can be asked to replace may be ego's mother, mother's spouse, spouse, or spouse's spouse.

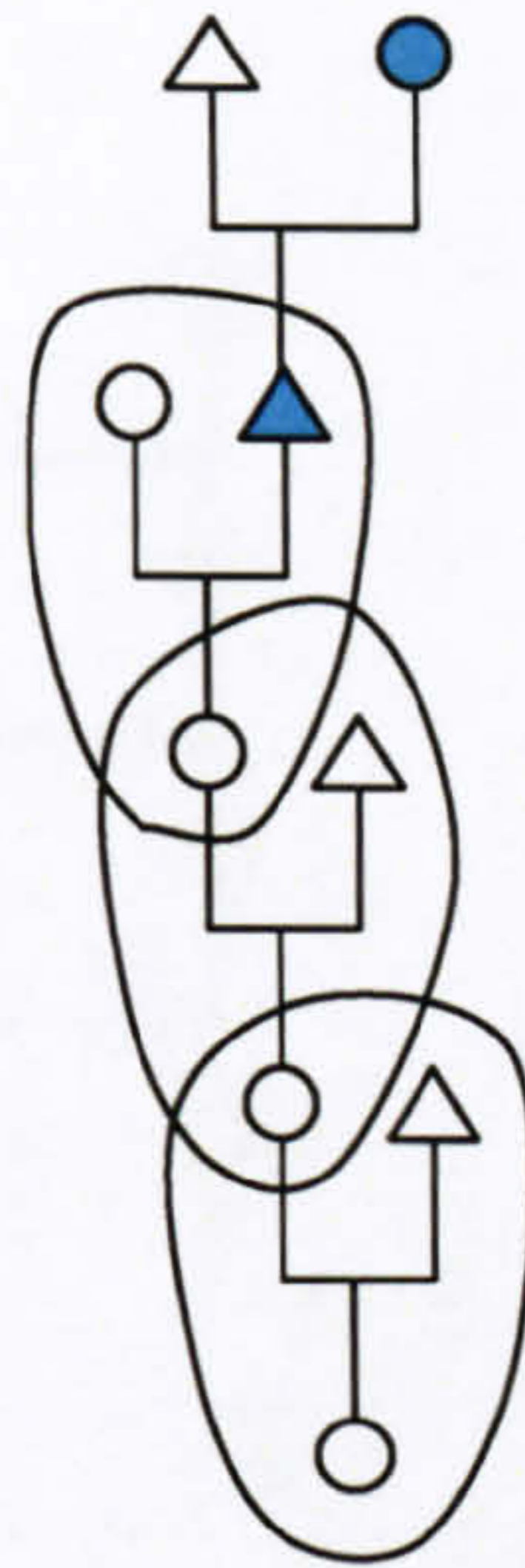


Diagram 7.3: A system of offering making in the family that lacks of a daughter

Therefore, we can see that the tie to one's lineage is very important for the villagers. It has to be maintained even after death. To ensure that there is someone to continue making an offering for one's ancestor even after one dies, the *thaen* ritual offers a chance for one's lineage to have a replacement member who will take responsibility for making the offering. Moreover, the continuity of the offering making is important for the ancestor to be reborn. A neglected ancestor will become a *phii ka*, a neglected spirit, and in consequence cannot be reborn. As a result, the *thaen* ritual can maintain the cycle of rebirth: the core meaning of life and personhood in Mae Chaem.

The *thaen* Ritual: A Systematic Analysis

The *thaen* Ritual as a Late Compensation for Bridewealth

The lineage one can be asked to "replace" (*thaen*) is either the matrilineage of one's F, MF, MMF or may be one's spouse in some cases. These are the affinal lineages of ego and ego's mother, mother's mother and the higher generations (see diagram 7.4).

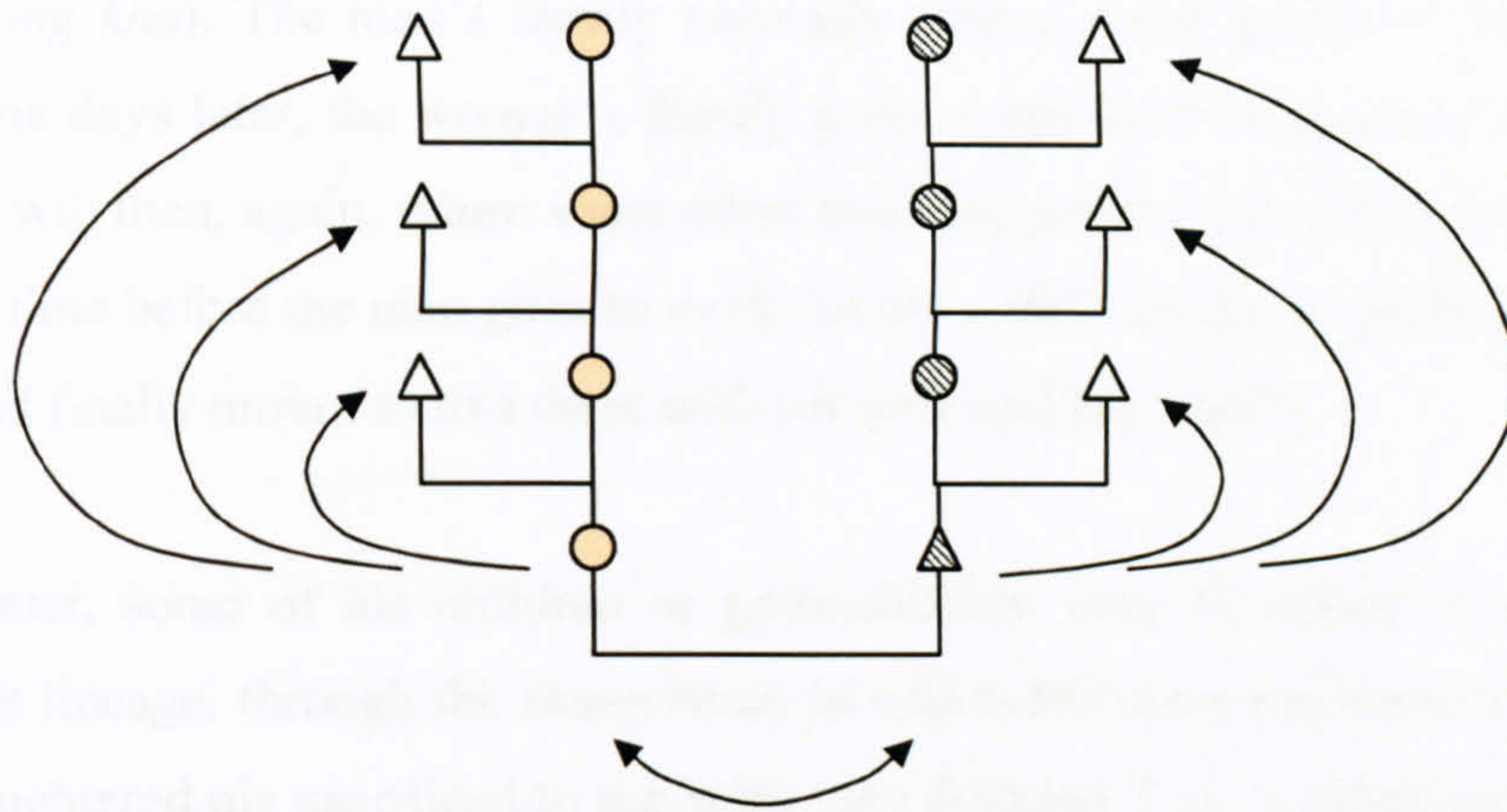


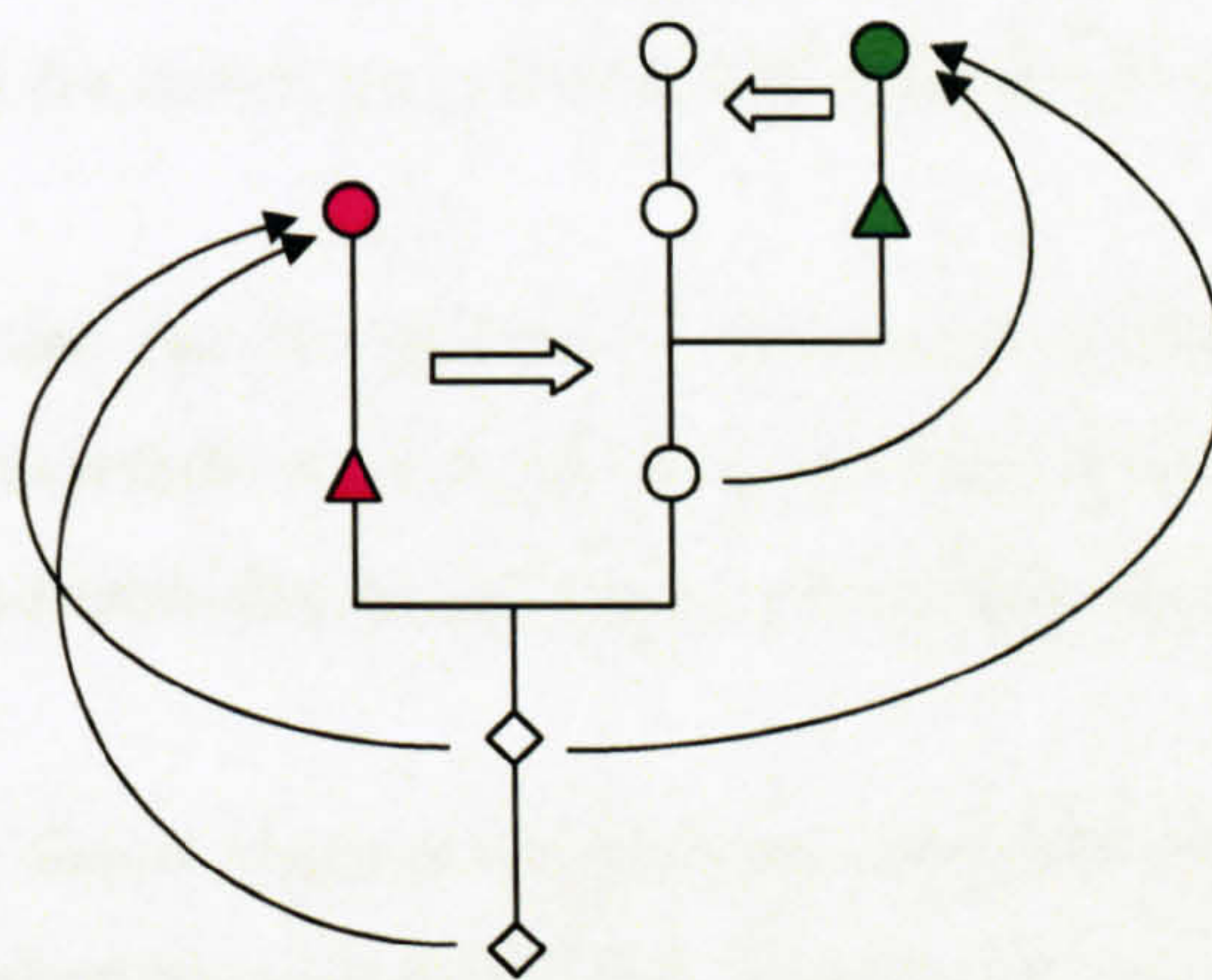
Diagram 7.4: The possible choices of the *thaen* (replacement)

The *thaen* ritual can be seen as a compensation for the worship payments between the affinal lineages. In a matrilineal system, if the focus is on the husband's reproductive capabilities, then the husband's lineage provides the wife's lineage both with a man (and his reproductive capabilities) and with a bridewealth payment, whereas they have no primary rights to his children other than a man's rights as a husband (Bolyanatz 1996:84). After one loses a son to another lineage through marriage, there is an opportunity to take the son's children or grandchildren back to one's lineage, regardless of their gender, through the *thaen* ritual.

In Mae Chaem, at marriage, bridewealth is paid to the wife's family to organise a worship ritual for their ancestral spirit (*phii puu nyaa*) by slaughtering a pig at the Origin House (*hyan kao*). It is called *kaa sai phii* which literally means "payment to a spirit". In the past, to pay court, a man visits a woman at her home during the night. If he happens to have a sexual relation with the woman, she may then be blamed for wronging her ancestral spirit (*phid phii*). Accordingly, the man has to take responsibility by paying money (*kaa sai phii*) for the woman to organise a sacrifice for her spirit. The sacrifice is regarded as an apology the woman pays to her ancestor for her wrong doing, otherwise a member in her lineage could be punished by the spirit.

After a pig is slaughtered, the food is shared among the woman's lineage. The leg-
 portions, however, are sent to the man's family. This exchange is called a "leg
 delivery" (*song kha*). The man's family normally returns some goods or food to the
 woman. Some days later, the woman's family gives some food or goods to the man's
 family, who will then, again, return some other food and goods. The gift exchange goes
 on for some time before the man goes to work for his wife's family, in particular on the
 rice field, and finally moves to live there with his wife and her family.

Sooner or later, some of his children or grandchildren may be asked to return the
 money to his lineage, through the *thaen* ritual in which the same payment is required,
 that is, a slaughtered pig sacrificed to the spirit (see diagram 7.5). In other words, a pig
 which his wife's lineage has owed him is paid back by her children or grandchildren.
 For instance, some of their children or grandchildren may become ill and may have to
 enter their father's lineage. It should be noted that this is not a replacement on one's
 patrilineal side, but in the matriline of their father, MF, or MMF, etc.



- ⇨ Pig slaughter at marriage (*kaa sai phii*)
- Pig slaughter at *thaen* ritual (the compensation)

Diagram 7.5: The exchange cycle of the pig

It is not only a pig that the “replacement” member needs to repay to the affinal lineage. Once a year, at least, the replacement member also has to share the expense of the annual and triennial worship of that lineage. It costs 50 baht per “roof” (a local unit, used when collecting money from the members). For example, if lineage A is performing a worship, every house (roof) which has at least one person who is a member of the lineage, either a genealogical or replacement member, has to pay 50 baht, regardless of the number of members living in the house. Nevertheless, some lineages have a different system of sharing the money. They collect money individually and it generally costs 20-25 baht per person.

The larger the amount of lineage members, the more money they can collect, thus the better the food they can offer to their spirit and share among the members. Furthermore, the money is also used for refurbishing and maintaining the spirit shrine and the surrounding area where the ritual is performed. For example some lineages spend the money on building a toilet and a hall near the spirit shrine, buying cooking utensils and dishes to use in the sacrifice, etc. Therefore, it can be seen that the replacement members are important for developing and maintaining the lineage.

In short, the *thaen* ritual can be seen as a chance for a husband’s lineage to get a compensation for the worship ritual expense at the man’s marriage. Furthermore, this also maintains the tie between the consanguinal and affinal lineages.

Why do they need the *thaen* ritual to compensate the spirit worship payment when the marriage itself is an exchange system? The answer can be found by looking at the changing pattern of land inheritance in Mae Chaem.

The *thaen* Ritual in the Changing Pattern of Land Inheritance

Social dynamics of households, extended kin groups, and larger social networks influence the changes in illness response, diagnosis knowledge, and treatment choice (Nichter 2002). Approximately 60 years ago, the practice of land inheritance in Mae Chaem changed. Beforehand, the land (the house compound and rice field) was passed down only through daughters. A son, on the other hand, received no land but a small

token at his marriage. When he moved out to live with his wife's family, cushions and bedding were the common gifts he received from his family and relatives. Such inheritance pattern, together with a preference for uxorilocal residence practice, prevented the lineage from losing land and properties.

Nowadays, however, the land is divided equally between children, regardless of gender although the youngest child, who lives with and takes care of the parents until they die, still gets a larger piece of land and is the one who inherits the parent's house. In the commercialised world in which one searches for greater profits, tries to increase production and capture new markets, a man needs a plot of land to start his own family life.

The piece of land which a son has inherited is normally passed down to his children, not a sister's son as Standard Matriliney Theory, to use Bolyanatz's (1996) term, would have suggested. Therefore at present, a lineage tends to lose land to other lineages. In some families, however, sons finally sell the pieces of land they have received to their sisters, particularly in a case where the son moves to live with his wife outside the village.

According to Mae Tem, a 72-year-old woman, the *thaen* ritual was not performed so often in the past compared to now.

When I was young, I never heard about the *thaen* ritual. It occurs more often in the present time. I think maybe the spirit is changing, like a human being changes. We are now changing. After getting married, a son used to simply leave the family without taking anything. Nowadays they ask for land and money, equal to their sisters. The spirit these days also asks for more replacement members. The spirit and humans are similar.

The villagers usually talk about social change through a discourse of spirits. For instance, they often complain that, "The spirit nowadays is not powerful anymore (*phii ba deaw boh hang*) like in the past". This implies that the patron-client relationship

between spirits and humans was become less efficient. As the villagers often complain that the more people become “modern” or “developed”, the less they believe in, listen to, and respect the spirit. The severity of spirit punishment is diminishing compared to what happened in the past. A villager told me, “In the past, even a step of the stairs could make one die”. This means, in those days, if one breached the social rules, such as cut wood from a prohibited forest where the spirit shrine was located, one could be punished to death, even if one simply fell down the stairs, for a single step can turn out to be fatal. A common observation is that, “After the road comes, the spirit has gone”. The road construction in the year 1962 was the crucial evident for Mae Chaem people. The modernised and commercialised world was introduced to Mae Chaem from that time on. Consequently, the social changes affected their ideological and cosmological world view. As the villagers said, “the society changes, so does the spirit”.

Thus ritual directed to the spirits changes through time, reflecting changing social circumstances. While a son asks for more land inheritances, the spirit of the affinal lineage asks for more replacement members. Therefore, it can be seen that the *thaen* ritual is now used as a strategy to compensate the loss of land and property to another lineage through the son. Furthermore, by making some of the son’s children or grandchildren “replacement” members, the relationship between the two lineages becomes closer. As stated above, kinship in Mae Chaem is based on spirit. People consider kin as “*phii diaw kan*”: people of the same spirit. Therefore, because a replacement member has to worship the same spirit, they become *phii diaw kan*, in other words, members of the same lineage.

Bolyanatz’s (1996) studies among the Sursurunga challenge what he calls the “Standard Matriliney Theory” which contained certain assumptions about what matrilineal descent groups do (such as control the inheritance of land), what human motivations are (for instance, why men would attend to their sisters’ children rather than their own), and intrinsic conflict (for instance, authority in the jural-political realm versus in the domestic realm). While Gough (1961) argued that the decline of matrilineal inheritance of land is a sign of the demise of matriliney among the Tonga, Ashanti and Mayombe, Bolyanatz finds that even though social changes in Papua New Guinea have altered dimensions of land transmission among the Sursurunga they do not disturb other

aspects of society considered to be central to matriliney. I agree with him that matrilineal society cannot be understood according to a rigid theory. In Mae Chaem, there is also a change in patterns of land transmission, and it seems that the *thaen* ritual is used as an occasion for the lineage to receive compensation for the loss of land to another lineage.

Nevertheless, things are more complicated, for the system does not work that simply. As seen from the long process of healing management, the *thaen* ritual can be performed only after one has been ill. Moreover, it can be performed only if the result of the divination suggests so. It is only one alternative strategy among a number of other rituals, and only one illness explanation among others. That is to say, not every time that illness occurs, kinship has to be changed. Therefore, not every lineage that loses their son and pieces of land to another lineage will get the compensation. Only if a member of another lineage is sick and only if he or she is recommended to perform the *thaen* ritual, then one's lineage is paid back. In other words, without an illness the compensation cannot be made. As a result, the *thaen* ritual cannot be seen as a direct compensation. And I argue that it depends on the power relations in the society to create the illness explanation, healing strategy and reshape kinship. Therefore, it is insufficient to analyse a kinship system from a structural and functional viewpoint for it ignores the power relations between the lineages which influence the transformation of kinship through the process of healing management.

“The Spirit is Greedy” or “The Spirit Only Wants to Maintain the Tie”

Moral concern in the society, to some extent, prevents over-compensation in the lineage. The lineage which has too many replacement members is subject to complaints, by people of other lineages, that “their spirit is greedy” (*phii tee*).

Their spirit is greedy (*tee*). No matter where its relatives (*luuk-laan*) are, it calls all of them back, and asks them to register (*thaen*) into its cult. All relatives are counted.

At the same time, the member of such a lineage normally claims that the *thaen* ritual is being performed because his or her ancestors simply want to “prevent the tie from

being cut” (*boh heu saiy phud*). The continuity of the tie is related to the ideology of life in Mae Chaem. For instance, the offering that the replacement member makes to the ancestors of the replacement lineage ensures their cycle of rebirth. The justification for the *thaen* ritual is dynamic, depending on the position one holds.

Once, the Officiant of lineage B expressed this contradictory point,

At the time many people had to register into my lineage after becoming ill. I felt uncomfortable. I wondered if the spirit of my lineage was greedy as others often complained. I was not happy to hear that kind of gossip. So one day I asked my Poh Chao Luang (guardian spirit) in the possession ritual in front of all the members. The spirit explained that it was not because he was greedy but because he did not want the tie to be cut.

The Development Process of a New Lineage

Considering the history of a new lineage can help clarify the development process of spirit-based kinship in Mae Chaem. Moreover, it can help clarify how the *thaen* ritual is used to strengthen the reputation of the group.

Mae Tem’s (72 years old) family immigrated from Lamphun, a province in Northern Thailand and a neighbour of Chiang Mai, more than a hundred years ago. They escaped from the war between the Siamese and Lanna Kingdoms to settle down behind Inthanon Mount in Mae Chaem district. That is the reason why their house is located at the bottom of the village, far from the temple which is regarded as the centre of the village. Her great grandmother built a small ancestral shrine behind the house. As they migrated from another province, their ancestral spirit did not have any relation with the guardian spirit (Poh Chao Luang) in Mae Chaem. Nevertheless, later her spirit was accepted as one of the younger brothers of the eldest Poh Chao Luang (the highest guardian spirit in Mae Chaem). Since then, her lineage had to worship the eldest Poh Chao Luang (spirit A) and became minimal lineage a4 subordinate to the maximal lineage A.

In the past, we did not perform a sacrifice to our ancestral spirit (*liang phii soom*) like other clans. Our ancestors came from a different province. Later we followed them, performing the ritual whenever the eldest Poh Chao Luang do. Finally Poh Chao Luang (the eldest one) declared, through possession, that our ancestral spirit was also one of his brothers.

The way in which Mae Tem's lineage was accepted as a subset of maximal lineage A was complicated. Her family was accused of being a witch lineage. Any person in the witch lineage is believed to possess a witch substance (*cheau phii ka*), which is handed down to descendants through the mother (see chapter 5). The only way to expel the witch substance is to register into the spirit cult under Poh Chao Luang. By doing that the witch has to practise a food taboo for 3 years, 3 months and 3 days and finally perform a sacrifice to Poh Chao Luang.

Compared with other lineages, Mae Tem's lineage is smaller and has less power. In particular, Mae Tem's family, the head of the lineage, is relatively poor. Most of her relatives moved to a more distant village because it is difficult to find land in Baan Yang Luang village. Once a year they all gather at Mae Tem's house, the Origin House of the lineage where the shrine of their ancestral spirit is located, to perform the annual worship ritual.

Her lineage is one in which many people are called to register as replacement members (see diagram 7.6).

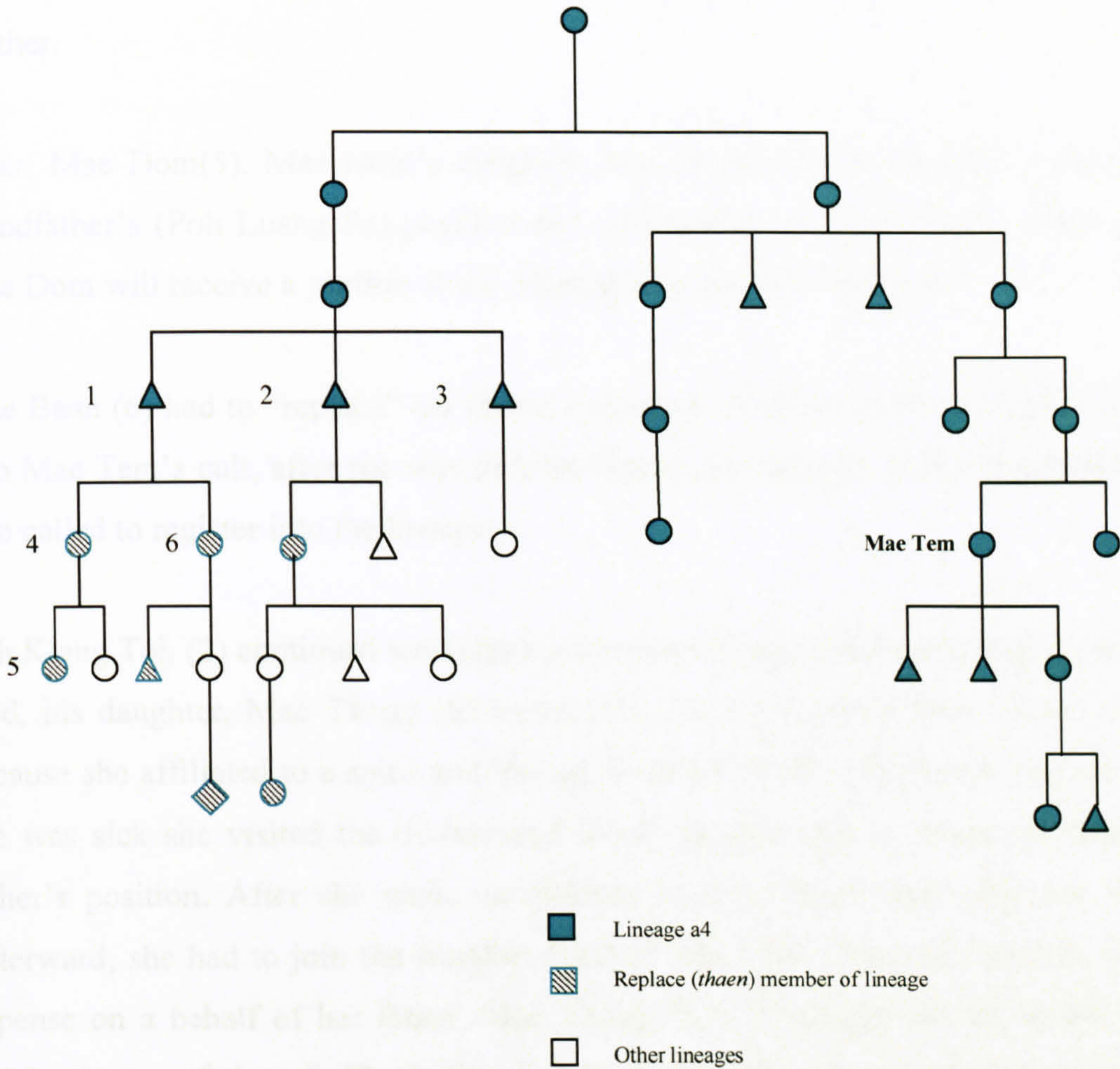


Diagram 7.6: The genealogy of Mae Tem’s family and its replacement members

Poh Luang Pa (1), Poh Klang Toh (2) and Poh Laa New (3) inherited a “*kan*” (an offering tray), which is a symbol of the right to receive a portion of the offering food made to the ancestral spirit, from their mother. Poh Laa New also held the position of an officiant of their ancestral spirit.

One day Mae Hom (80 years old), Poh Luang Pa’s daughter (4), had unusual symptoms on her mouth. It was distorted to one side. She gave a bribe to Mae Tem’s ancestral spirit, (which was her father’s spirit cult) and promised if her symptoms improved she would slaughter a pig for the spirit. Finally she was healed and so she slaughtered a pig for the spirit at the shrine in Mae Tem’s house. Before she had the illness she never

worshipped the spirit because she holds a different spirit which she inherited from her mother.

Later, Mae Dom(5), Mae Hom's daughter, was ill and had to "replace" (*thaen*) her grandfather's (Poh Luang Pa) position and continue to hold the "*kan*", which means Mae Dom will receive a portion of the offering food made to the spirit.

Mae Baan (6) had to "replace" her father's position. In other words she had to register into Mae Tem's cult, after she was ill. Mae Bann's son as well as her grandchild were also called to register into the lineage.

Poh Klang Toh (2) continued worshipping his matrilineage spirit until he died. After he died, his daughter, Mae Thong (45 years old), did not worship Mae Tem's ancestor because she affiliated to a spirit and lineage from her mother. However, one day when she was sick she visited the diviner and found that she had to *thaen* or replace her father's position. After she made an offering to Mae Tem's spirit she was healed. Afterward, she had to join the worship ritual of Mae Tem's clan and pay the worship expense on a behalf of her father. Mae Thong said, "I thought the tie would simply finish after my father died". Furthermore, Mae Thong's granddaughter (4 years old) was also asked to perform the *thaen* ritual.

It can be argued that illness and the *thaen* ritual in particular are used as a means for a small lineage to strengthen and maintain the status, power and prestige of the lineage and its guardian spirit. For instance, by receiving more replacement members, the new, small or poor lineage obtains a larger number of *phii diaw kan* (a person of the same spirit), which in consequence strengthens a reputation of the lineage guardian spirit as well as the power of the lineage economically and politically.

The Dynamics of Kinship and the Uncertainties of Life: A Discussion

Two overlapping areas of discussion are considered through the process of healing management of Totae's burn accident. On the one hand, viewing illness as lived experience through time brings us to understand the multidimensional concepts of

health and a dynamic process of healing management. Healing management is influenced by cultural values, social roles and institutions, power relations and economic circumstances. They influence the ways in which illness is responded to in the context of coexistence with other people over time. Therefore the health care system for Mae Chaem people cannot be divorced from the socio-political power relations which direct every facet of their lives. They do not live an isolated, independent existence but are part of a stratified socio-political entity.

On the other hand, taking kinship as a focal point, this chapter argues that the kinship system in Mae Chaem is dynamic. The boundary of the lineage is fluid and changes through time. Precisely, the open-ended process of kinship creation and transformation occurs through the dynamic of illness explanation and healing management. In other words, illness is central to the process of kinship creation. Illness is a critical occasion for villagers to build kinship and identity. Studying kinship through the processes of learning, experiencing, practicing, living and constituting meaning, will help us understand what it means for personhood.

In Mae Chaem, notions of illness and kinship overlap. Illness is explained in terms of kin relationship, at the same time kin relationships are also expressed through discourses of illness and healing. To understand the villagers' perceptions of health, it is very important to understand their spiritual and kinship ideology. On the other hand, to understand their kin relationships, one also needs to understand their concepts of health and illness.

The ideology of kinship and health are created and re-created all the time through power relations in the society. People use the dynamic aspects of the kinship system to interpret and manage illness, at the same time, illness is used as a means to reform and create the fluidity of kin relationships. The process in which illness and kinship are lived and created depends very much on power relations within the society. In conclusion, the dynamic systems of health and kinship enable people to create, choose, negotiate and participate in the transformation of social relations and identity, in order to cope with a changing society.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions

The thesis is a study of the dynamics and uncertainties in kinship ideology, illness and health conceptions, and the notions of personhood and identity at the local level, through the analysis of matrilineal spirit cult practices in Mae Chaem. It presents, in other words, the links of illness, social relations and social identity through the study of Mae Chaem spirit cults, kinship, ritual, religion and health care.

While many studies consider changes of matrilineal spirit cult practices in the urban areas in Northern Thailand (Irvine 1982, 1984, Muecke 1984, Tanabe 1991, Morris 2000 and Ganjanapan 2003), I am interested in the transformation and maintaining of matrilineal spirit cults at village level. Spirit cult practice in Mae Chaem can be seen as a means of responding to the ambiguities of modernity in Northern Thailand. The villagers often complained that modernity in the society (*baan muang samai*) caused changes to their life. For example, they often said “the forest has been destroyed after the introduction of cash crops agriculture” (“*tua ma pa mhod*” which literally means “the beans come, the forest disappears”); “the spirit’s power becomes weaker (*phii boh hang*) and lesser in amount after the road construction”; “the children nowadays are naughty and do not listen to their parents because they drink cow milk instead of breast milk and when they were born their navels were cut with scissors [by the doctor, in the hospital] instead of a bamboo stick [by the midwife, at home] as in the past”. Moreover, the elders often complained to their children for ignoring the traditions. On the other hand, the young villagers said “we do not have time to rest. After the rice harvesting, we have to plant corns, potatoes, or beans. Also we have to look after the orchard. We never have a holiday. If we do not do this, we will not have enough money for paying debts.”

To challenge the social changes, the villagers attempt to maintain the traditions and emphasise them in rituals. A common sentence in the chants used to pledge the spirit is,

“*luk boh la heed leum hoī*”, which literally means “[we], your children, will not abandon our traditions or forget the old track”. In addition, the spirit cult practices, which are central to their kinship systems, are maintained. These are to strengthen the sense of security which is rooted in kinship relations, locality, religion and tradition. Illnesses, disasters, and misfortunes are the crucial opportunities that the villagers use to reproduce, create and recreate the significance of Poh Chao Luang and the spirit ritual practices. The powers of spirits are emphasised and legitimised in those critical times. The villagers insisted that “Poh Chao Luang will never leave us. If you ignore him, he will call you back [by causing you illness]”.

The reproduction of spirit cult rituals is not only a means for women to affirm their status and power in the lineage, as analysed by several anthropologists (Irvine 1984, McMorran 1984, Tanabe 1991, Ganjanapan 2003), but also a means for Mae Chaem people to maintain and express their identities. After the administrative reform in 1892, Mae Chaem lost its autonomy and independence as a state (*muang*). Furthermore, the reigning princes of Muang Chaem remained as figureheads until their offices were abolished in the 1930s (Wyatt 1982, Rhum 1994). Moreover, the nationalisation, in particular through the strategic deployment of a national education system, affected the changes of Northern Thai values and identities. For example, the Northern Thai dialect called *kam muang* was made to be inferior to the Central Thai dialect which was established as the language of both government and schooling (Morris 2000: 6). Nevertheless, the power of the prince or lord (Chao) and the identities of Mae Chaem as a domain (*muang*) within the galactic cosmology were reproduced in the spirit cult organisation. For instance, the spirit cult organisation in Mae Chaem paralleled Northern Thai traditional political history. The lord of *muang* Chaem was believed to be reincarnated as the guardian spirit of Mae Chaem, called Poh Chao Luang. Its power was legitimised by the efficacy of healing and divination through spirit possession.

The relationship between spirits and spirit cult members is performed via patron-client relations. As long as one pays respect to the spirits, makes offerings regularly, and performs the spirit worship, the spirits will protect and ensure one’s well-being. Nevertheless, the spirit’s power is only temporary so the contract with it needs to be continually renewed (Mulder 1985). On the other hand, one will be punished if the spirits have been ignored or offended. The spirits can also cause harm if they are not

satisfied with the offerings. However, “clients” are not always submissive to the spirits. They have power to negotiate with the spirits. In an attempt to control the spirits, villagers often bribe them and persuade them to help and promise them offerings in return. Furthermore, if the spirits request too many offerings or, in other words, the sick person has been asked to perform the worship ritual (*liang*) too often, people will lose their trust in the spirits as well as the spirit medium and the diviner. The villagers commonly use gossip as a means to control those who manage the divination. It can be seen that power and morality are central to the interaction and negotiation of the healing process. In short, I argue that the spirit cult beliefs and practices in Baan Yang Luang village are maintained and expressed through the way in which people deal with the uncertainties of illness and suffering. While the spirit’s power is needed to manage their struggles with the crises of life, illness is a crucial chance to legitimate, maintain, and strengthen the power of spirit and the spirit cult organisation.

We cannot understand the spirit cult practices in Mae Chaem without considering the process of kinship. Kinship is organised in a form of spirit cult. People of the same lineage worship the same matrilineal spirit, and are called “people of the same spirit” (*phii diaw kan*). Therefore, the second part of the thesis focuses on the practices of kinship in everyday life.

Kinship ideology in Mae Chaem is not conceptualised in terms of blood or substance, but the spiritual essence, called *khwan*, which is intangible and immaterial. In the cycle of rebirth, *khwan* and spirit are interchangeable. *Khwan* transforms into spirit (*phii*) at death and the spirit (*phii*) transforms into *khwan* at birth. One is believed to be a reincarnated soul of one’s matrilineal ancestor. In other words, one receives *khwan* from one’s ancestor. Moreover, the ancestor’s characteristics are transmitted through *khwan*, so one is believed to have some characteristics of the reincarnated ancestor. People of the same lineage are those who are reincarnated by the matrilineal ancestors of the same origin. Personhood and identity are therefore transmitted through *khwan*.

Khwan is dynamic and transformable, especially in illness. It can be lost, flight away and reside in other’s body. It can also be caught by the malevolent spirits. Therefore, Mae Chaem person is subject to health status. It is permeable in illness but intact in well-being. The intangible and invisible quality and the uncertainty of *khwan* give an

opportunity to the diviner, neighbours, families and the sick person to negotiate and identify the cause of illness and find the healing procedures. While medical doctors can investigate the entire physical body, they do not know about the spiritual essence which is, for the villagers, the most important part of their life. This is the area in which the villagers have power and autonomy to manage, control, and define their health, personhood and identity. Similarly, pragmatic principles of negotiation and trying out are also common in dealing with other invisible agents such as spirits. Dealing with the agents that you cannot see such as Poh Chao Luang (guardian spirits), *phii puu nyaa* (ancestral spirits), and other malevolent spirits, one has to find out what they want and negotiate the exchange offerings which are possible for and satisfactory to them.

Illness diagnosis and the healing process involve power relations in negotiation and debate among lay therapy managing groups including the afflicted person, their kinsmen and friends, professional healers, spirit mediums and diviners who try to make practical sense of what is going wrong and decide what can be done about it. Furthermore, these are the social processes through which people define, create, extend, limit, sever or transform their personhood and relatedness with others. Bodily sickness and health is understood to be largely a reflection of one's relationships to various supernatural beings, ancestors and lineage spirits, and other individuals, both living and dead. While illness is a symptom of disharmony between the sick person and his or her wider universe of relationships, healing involves restoring harmony, correcting behaviour, rebuilding fractured relationships (with gods, ancestors, or the living), all of which have moral implications. Relations to kin, neighbours, and spirits are therefore at once the source of security and uncertainty. In short, the unpredictability of illness is tied to uncertainties about relationships and both matters must be considered together. On the one hand, I find people use the dynamics and fluidity aspects of kinship systems to interpret and heal their illness. On the other hand, illness itself is used to create, recreate and transform kin relationships.

In reincarnation ritual (*tam kerd*), parents identify the precise ancestor who reincarnates into the newborn baby. The process through which the reincarnated ancestor is identified involves a negotiation among the relatives. The ritual may be repeated if the parents of the baby are not satisfied with the reincarnated ancestor, or have a poor relationship with such ancestor or its relative who has to bring a gift to welcome the

baby (and at the same time welcome the reincarnated ancestor). Nevertheless, in order to switch reincarnated ancestors the baby must be sick so the parents can take this chance to find a new ancestor. In case that the parents and relatives are already satisfied with the reincarnated ancestor, the reincarnation ritual (*tam kerd*) will not be repeated even the baby becomes ill again. Instead, they will search for other kinds of healing. Therefore, reincarnation is a crucial process in which kin relationship can be created and reshaped.

Conflicts between lineages can be reconciled by performing the *thaen* ritual where the sick person has to register into another matrilineage in order to recover. The ethnography of Totae, a five-year-old boy whose leg was burnt, clearly shows that the long term processes of healing and diagnosis are related to and depending on various aspects. The processes involved the modern medical system, a number of traditional and spiritual healing rituals, a rite of passage for a child (through the *tad kerd* ritual), and a punishment for Totae's misbehaviour towards the elders. The purpose of Totae's family was not simply to ensure his physical health but also to pursue a quarrel with others. Furthermore, the negotiation among Totae's family, relatives, neighbours, and healers during the diagnosis and healing was not only for Totae to recover but to reconcile conflicts between Mook and Mae Nee regarding the land, spirit shrine, lineage pride, and the gap between traditional and modern concepts of living. In addition, the *thaen* ritual can be seen as a strategy, for a small lineage in particular, to strengthen and maintain the solidarity of the lineage and its economical status. For instance, a larger number of spirit cult members mean a higher potential to develop and manage the lineage.

Therefore, the processes of attention, perception and valuation of illness and its manifestation have to be understood as micro-political processes through which spirit cults are expressed and maintained, kinship ties are created and transformed, and modernity is contested. I find illness is an opportunity for the villagers to debate social relationships, identity, traditional practices and rituals, modernity, and social changes. Illness is thus a social performance rather than an individual subjective state (see Pollock 1996, Roseman 1996). According to Kleinman (1980), Brown (1995), and Kleinman and Kleinman (1996), illness should be recognised as a communication and interpersonal interaction of experience. And the individual body should be seen as the

immediate space where social truths and contradictions are expressed. The ambiguities and uncertainties in the process of questioning, doubting, negotiating, and trying out in the alleviation of suffering are not only about individual disorders, but also the social relations and agents that affect them as well as changes in social structures (see Whyte 1997). In short, uncertainty about the outcome of adversity and the ambiguity of invisible agents become a power for everyone to negotiate, claim, create and maintain kinship, personhood and identity.

The thesis has been concerned with agency and action in response to suffering and uncertainty in relation to the processes in which identity, kinship and ideology are constructed. Taking Jackson's argument (1996) into account, I consider illness experiences as a field of intersubjectivity and inter-experience situated within cultural meanings and historical changes. Merleau-Ponty states that practice is seldom a matter of individuals acting alone but shared. People build up commonsense knowledge of their everyday life through their experiences and make sense of the society in their interactions with others (see Langer 1989). At the same time, however, social interactions are defined largely by the dominant structures of the society, as Eriksen (1995) indicates that humans are, at birth, thrown into a pre-existing social world, and they recreate this world through their actions. Therefore, individuals produce and define themselves, at the same time, as agents and person, subjects and objects, and act both as products and producers of the society.

Focusing on the power relationship practising in everyday life, I find Mae Chaem kinship ideologies, identities, and personhoods are transformed over time through the negotiation in healing management. Persons are not simply born but are created over time and kin relationships are not given but are constructed, shaped, contained and transformed over time. Furthermore, kinship and personhood are constituted through social interaction over a lifetime of human and spirit relationships, through lengthy processes of growth, sickening and healing, reproduction and dying (see Turner 1995). While Carsten (1991, 1992, 1997, 2000) finds Malay kinship is a process of becoming through sharing substances, eating and living together, I argue that in order to understand Mae Chaem kinship, we cannot overlook the social interaction and power relations in healing.

In conclusion, Mae Chaem spirit discourses, kinship ideologies, personhood and identity are negotiated, debated, and contested all the time through the uncertain processes of healing management which shape and are shaped by broader social and moral concerns. Through the micro-politics of healing, kinship is created as well as transformed, and spirit beliefs are maintained as well as reproduced. Furthermore, the ambiguity of invisible agents opens the way for villagers to interpret, debate and contest modernity and changes in society. People of Ban Yang Luang use their spirits to “talk” about well-being and health as much as kinship identity, locality, morality and power. This is one reason why the spirit cults continue to flourish: the villagers do, after all, see themselves as “people who believe in spirits”.

References

- Aporn, W., (1998). "History of the Community in Mae Lu valley, Mae Chaem, Chiang Mai". **M.A Dissertation**. Chiang Mai University.
- Astuti, R., (1998). "'It's a boy,' 'It's a girl!' Reflections on sex and gender in Madagascar and beyond". In M. Lambek and A. Strathern, (Eds.). **Bodies and Persons: Comparative perspectives from Africa and Melanesia**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____ (2000). "Kindreds and descent groups: new perspectives from Madagascar". In J. Carsten, (Ed.). **Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 90-104.
- Bamford, S., (2004). "Conceiving Relatedness: non-substantial relations among the Kamea of Papua New Guinea". **Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute**. Vol. 10 pp. 287-306.
- Bentley, G.C., (1986). "Indigenous States of Southeast Asia". **Annual Review of Anthropology**. Vol. 15. pp. 275-305.
- Bloch, M., (1989). "The past and the present in the present". In **Ritual History and Power: Selected Papers in Anthropology**. London: The Athlone Press. pp. 1-18.
- _____ (1992). "Birth and the Beginning of Social Life among the Zafimaniry of Madagascar". In G. Aijmer, (Ed.). **Coming into Existence: Birth and Metaphors of Birth**. Institute for Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology. pp. 71-91.
- Bloch, M. and Parry, J., (1982). **Death and the regeneration of life**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boddy, J., (1998). "Afterword: embodying ethnography". In M. Lambek and A. Strathern, (Eds.). **Bodies and Persons: comparative perspectives from Africa and Melanesia**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bodenhorn, B., (2000). "'He used to be my relative': exploring the bases of relatedness among Inupiat of northern Alaska". In J. Carsten, (Ed.). **Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship**. Cambridge University Press. pp. 128-148.

- Bolyanatz, A., (1996). "Musings on Matriliney: Understandings and Social Relations among the Sursurunga of New Ireland". In M.J. Maynes et.al, (Eds.). **Gender, Kinship, Power: A Comparative and Interdisciplinary History**. London: Routledge. pp. 81-100.
- Brettell, C.B., (2001). "Not the Lineage Stuff: Teaching Kinship into the Twenty-First Century". In L. Stone, (Ed.). **New Directions in Anthropological Kinship**. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. pp. 48-70.
- Brown, P., (1995). "Naming and Framing: The Social Construction of Diagnosis and Illness". **Journal of Health and Social Behaviour**. Vol. 35, Extra Issue. pp. 34-52.
- Brun, V. and Schumacher, T., (1994). **Traditional Herbal Medicine in Northern Thailand**. Bangkok: White Lotus Co.
- Busby, C., (1997). "Permeable and Partible Persons: A Comparative Analysis of Gender and Body in South India and Melanesia". **The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute**. Vol. 3 No. 2 pp. 261-278.
- Carsten, J.,(1991). "Children in between: aspects of sharing and mediation between houses in Palau Langkawi". **Man**. Vol. 26 pp. 425-443.
- _____ (1992). "The Process of Childbirth and Becoming Related among Malays in Palau Langkawi". In G. Aijmer, (Ed.). **Coming into Existence: Birth and Metaphors of Birth**. Institute for Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology. pp. 20-46.
- _____ (1995a). "The Politics of Forgetting: Migration, Kinship and Memory on the Periphery of the Southeast Asian State". **The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute**. Vol. 1 No. 2 pp. 317-335.
- _____ (1995b). "The substance of kinship and the heat of the hearth: feeding, personhood and relatedness among Malays of Palau Langkawi". **American Ethnologist**. Vol. 22 pp. 223-41.
- _____ (1997). **The Heat of The Hearth: The Process of Kinship in a Malay Fishing Community**. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- _____ (2000). "Introduction: cultures of relatedness" In J. Carsten, (Ed.). **Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship**. Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-36.
- _____ (2004). **After kinship**. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

- Chandrangaam, S., (1980). "Lanna Thai Kingdom and Its Religion". In S. Chandrangaam and N. Iddhichiracharas, (Eds.). **Buddhism in Northern Thailand**. Chiangmai: Thippanetr Publishing Company. pp. 87-99.
- Chokdeesrisawas, S., (2004). "Chao Luang Kam Daeng and Doi Luang Tourist Lift". **Prachatham News**. 18-24 July.
- Clarke, P. B., (1993). **The Religions of the World: Understanding the Living Faiths**. USA: Marshall Editions Limited.
- Cohen, P.T. and Wijeyewardene, G., (1984). "Introduction: Spirit Cults and the Position of Women in Northern Thailand". **Mankind**. Vol. 14 No. 4 pp. 249-262.
- Condominas, G., (1975). "*Phiban* Cults in Rural Laos". In G.W. Skinner and A.T. Kirsch, (Eds.). **Change and Persistence in Thai Society**. New York: Cornell University Press.
- _____ (1978). "A Few Remarks about Thai Political Systems". In G.B. Milner, (Ed.). **Natural Symbols in South East Asia**. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Counts, D.A. and Counts, D., (2004). "The Good, the bad, and the unresolved death in Kaliai". **Social Science and Medicine**. Vol. 58 pp. 887-897.
- Crim, K., (1989). **The Perennial Dictionary of World Religions**. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Damrikul, S., (1999). **Lanna: Environment, Social and culture**. Bangkok: Moradog Thai.
- Darlington, S. M., (1990). **Buddhism, Morality and Change: The Local Response to Development in Northern Thailand**. Michigan: The University of Michigan.
- Davis, R.B., (1984a). "Muang Matrifocality". **Mankind**. Vol. 14 No.4 pp. 263-271.
- _____ (1984b). **Muang Metaphysics: A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual**. Bangkok: Pandora.
- Eriksen, T.H., (1995). **Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology**. London: Pluto Press.
- Errington, S., (1989). **Meaning and Power in a Southeast Asian Realm**. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Evers, H., (1979). "The Formation of Social Class Structure: Urbanization,

- Bureaucratization, and Social Mobility in Thailand". In C.A. Neher, (Ed.). **Modern Thai Politics: From Village to Nation**. Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company.
- Forth, G., (1983). "Blood, Milk and Coconuts: A Study of Intra-Cultural Ritual Variation". **Man**. (N.S.) Vol. 18 pp. 654-668.
- Galvin, K.L., (2001). "Schneider Revisited: Sharing and Ratification in the Construction of Kinship". In L. Stone, (Ed.). **New Directions in Anthropological Kinship**. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. pp. 109-124.
- Ganjanapan, A., (1984). "'The Idiom of Phii Ka': Peasant Conception of Class Differentiation in Northern Thailand". **Mankind**. Vol. 14 No. 4 pp. 325-329.
- _____ (2003). "Globalization and the Dynamics of Culture in Thailand". In S. Yamashita and J.S. Eades, (Eds.). **Globalization in Southeast Asia: local, national and transnational perspectives**. Oxford: Berghahn Books. pp. 126-141.
- Geertz, C., (1980). **Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali**. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gibson, T., (1985). "The sharing of substance versus the sharing of activity among the Buid". **Man**. (N.S.) Vol. 20 pp. 391-411.
- Gottlieb, A., (1998). "Do Infants Have Religion?: The Spiritual Lives of Beng Babies". **American Anthropologist**. Vol. 100 pp. 122-135.
- Gough, K., (1961). "The Modern Disintegration of Matrilineal Descent Groups". In D.M. Schneider and K. Gough, (Eds.). **Matrilineal Kinship**. London: University of California Press.
- Gupta, A., (2002). "Reliving Childhood?: The Temporality of Childhood and Narratives of Reincarnation". **Ethnos**. Vol. 67 pp. 33-56.
- Hale, A., (1979). "Reassessment of Northern Thai Matrilineages". **Mankind**. Vol. 12 pp. 138-50.
- Hank, L.M., (1962). "Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order". **American Anthropologist**. Vol. 64 No. 6 pp. 1247-1261.
- _____ (1975). "The Thai Social Order as Entourage and Circle". in G.W. Skinner and A.T. Kirch, (Eds.). **Change and Persistence in Thai Society**. London: Cornell University Press. pp. 197-218.

- Holy, L., (1998). **Anthropological Perspectives on Kinship**. London: Pluto Press.
- Husken, F. and Kemp, J., (1991). "Cognatic Kinship in Southeast Asia". in F. Husken and J. Kemp, (Eds.). **Cognition and Social Organisation in Southeast Asia**. Leiden: KITLV Press. pp. 1-14.
- Iddhichiracharas, N., (1980). "The Northern Thai Peasant Supernaturalism". In S. Chandrangaam and N. Iddhichiracharas, (Eds.). **Buddhism in Northern Thailand**. Chiangmai: Thippanetr Publishing Company. pp. 100-109.
- Inge-Heinze, R., (1977). "The Need for Tham Khwan: A Psychocultural Study of Animist Tenets in a Buddhist Society, The Case of Thailand". **Berkeley Working Papers on South and Southeast Asia**. Vol. 1 pp. 321-428.
- _____ (1982). **Tham Khwan How To Contain the Essence of Life: A Socio-Psychological Comparison of Thai Custom**. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Irvine, W., (1982). "The Thai-Yuan "Madman" and the "Modernising, Developing Thai Nation" as Bounded Entities under Threat: A Study in the Replication of a Single Image". **Ph.D. Dissertation**. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
- _____ (1984). "Decline of village Spirit Cults and Growth of Urban Spirit Mediumship: the Persistence of Spirit Beliefs, the Position of Women and Modernisation". **Mankind**. Vol. 14 No.4 pp. 315-324.
- Ishii, H., (1995). "Caste and Kinship in a Newar Village". In D. Gellner and D. Quigley, (Eds.). **Contested Hierarchies**. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 109-157.
- Jackson, M., (1996). **Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology**. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Janzen, J.M., (1978). **The Quest for Therapy: Medical Pluralism in Lower Zaire**. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Kemp, J., (1982). "Towards a Comparative Analysis of Thai Kinship". In E.E. Boesch, (Ed.). **Thai Culture: Report on the 2nd Thai-European Research Seminar**. University of SAAR.
- _____ (1991). "Process of Kinship and Community in North-Central Thailand". In F. Husken and J. Kemp, (Eds.). **Cognition and Social Organisation in Southeast Asia**. Leiden: KITLV Press. pp. 91-108.

- Keyes, C.F., (1975). "Kin Groups in a Thai-Lao Community". In G.W. Skinner and A.T. Kirsch, (Eds.). **Change and Persistence in Thai Society**. London: Cornell University Press.
- Kinsley, D., (1996). **Health Healing and Religion: A Cross-cultural Perspective**. London: Prentice Hall.
- Kleinman, A., (1980). **Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture: An Exploration of the Borderland between Anthropology, Medicine, and Psychiatry**. London: University of California Press.
- Kleinman, A., and J. Kleinman., (1996). "Suffering and Its Professional Transformation: Towards an Ethnography of Interpersonal Experience,". In M. Jackson, (Ed.). **Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology**. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. pp. 169-195.
- Kuper, A., (1982). "Lineage Theory: A Critical Retrospect". **Annual Review of Anthropology**. Vol. 11 pp. 71-95.
- Lamphere, L., (2001). "Whatever Happened to Kinship Studies? Reflections of a Feminist Anthropologist". In L. Stone, (Ed.). **New Directions in Anthropological Kinship**. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. pp. 21-47.
- Langer, M.M., (1989). **Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary**. London: Macmillan Press.
- Leslie, C., (1992). "Interpretation of Illness: Syncretism in Modern Ayurveda". In C. Leslie and A. Young, (Eds.). **Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge**. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 177-208.
- Lewis, G., (1986). "Concepts of Health and Illness in a Sepik Society". In M. Stacey, (Ed.). **Concepts of Health, Illness and Disease: A Comparative Perspective**. Leamington Spa: BERG. pp. 119-135.
- Lyon, S.M., (2002). "Power and Patronage in Pakistan". **A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology**. Canterbury: University of Kent.
- Mckinley, R., (2001). "The Philosophy of Kinship: A Reply to Schneider's *Critique of the Study of Kinship*". In R. Feinberg And M. Ottenheimer. (Eds.). **The Cultural Analysis of Kinship: The Legacy of David M. Schneider**. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. pp. 131-167.

- McMorran, M.V., (1984). "Northern Thai Ancestral Cults: Authority and Aggression". **Mankind**. Vol. 14 No 4 pp. 308-14.
- Mimica, J., (1996). "On Dying and Suffering in Iqwaye Existence". In M. Jackson, (Ed.). **Things As They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology**. Bloomington and Indiana Polis: Indiana University Press. pp. 213-237.
- Morgan, L.M., (1990). "When Does Life Begin?: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on the Personhood of Fetuses and Young Children". In E. Doerr and J.W. Presscott, (Eds.). **Abortion Rights and Fetal "Personhood"**. Centerline Press and Americans for Religious Liberty.
- Morris, R.C., (2000). **In the Place of Origins: Modernity and Its Mediums in Northern Thailand**. London: Duke University Press.
- Mougne, C., (1984). "Spirit Cults and Matrifocality in Northern Thailand". **Mankind**. Vol. 14 No. 4 pp. 300-7.
- Muangnil, K., (2002). "Enhancement of Agriculture, Environment and Human Attributes Through Kyusei Nature Farming in Thailand". **7th International Conference on Kyusei Nature Farming**. January 15-18. Christchurch: New Zealand.
- Muecke, M.A., (1984). "Make Money not Babies: Changing Status Markers of Northern Thai Women". **Asian Survey**. Vol. 24, No. 4 pp. 459-470.
- Mulder, N., (1985). **Everyday Life in Thailand**. Second Edition Bangkok: Duangkamol.
- Murdock, G.P., (1960). "Cognatic Forms of Social Organisation". In G.P. Murdock, (Ed.). **Social Structure in Southeast Asia**. Chicago: Quadrangle Books. pp. 1-14.
- Nantayana, W., (2004). "Talew: Local Wisdom of Thai Lue at Sridonchai Sub-district, Chiangkhong District, Chiang Rai Province". **CRU Journal**. Vol. 2 No. 1 pp. 25-35.
- Ngubane, H., (1977). **Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine: An Ethnography of Health and Disease in Nyuswa-Zulu Thought and Practice**. London: Academic Press.
- Nichter, M., (2002). "The social relations of therapy management". In M. Nichter and M. Lock, (Eds.). **New Horizons in Medical Anthropology**. London: Routledge. pp. 81-110.

- O'Connor, R.A., (2000). "Who are the Tai?: A Discourse of Place, Activity and Person". In Y. Hayashi and G. Yang, (Eds.). **Dynamics of Ethnic Cultures Across National Boundaries in Southwestern China and Mainland Southeast Asia: Relations, Societies, and Languages**. Chiang Mai: Ming Muang Printing House.
- Ongsakul, S., (1995). **The Anniversary of 700 years Chiang Mai: History and Movement**. Chiang Mai.
- _____ (1997). **Cultural confictions between Bangkok and Chiang Mai: A decade before the 700th anniversary of Chiang Mai (1985-1995)**. Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University.
- _____ (1999). **Lanna Culture and Politic**. Chiang Mai: Ton Aor Press.
- Ottenheimer, M., (2001). "Relativism in Kinship Analysis". In R. Feinberg and M. Ottenheimer, (Eds.). **The Cultural Analysis of Kinship: The Legacy of David M. Schneider**. Urbana : University of Illinois Press. pp. 118-130.
- Parkin, R. and Stone, L., (2004). "General Introduction". In R. Parkin and L. Stone, (Eds.). **Kinship and Family: An Anthropological Reader**. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. pp. 1-24.
- Payomyong, M. and Gesphrom, S., (1996). "Taleaw". In **Encyclopaedia of the Northern Thai Culture**. Bangkok: The Encyclopaedia Foundation Thai Commercial Bank. pp. 291-300.
- Peletz, M.G., (1995). "Kinship Studies in Late Twentieth-Century Anthropology". **Annual Review of Anthropology**. Vol. 24 pp. 343-372.
- _____ (2001). "Ambivalence in Kinship since the 1940s". In S. Franklin and S. McKinnon, (Eds.). **Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies**. London: Duke University Press. pp. 413-444.
- Peltier, A-R., (1991). **Pathamamulamuli The Origin of the World in the Lan Na Tradition**. Thailand: Amarin Printing.
- Penth, H., (2000). **A Brief History of Lan Na: Civilizations of North Thailand**. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Phromsao, K., (1996). **Chiang Mai Today at the 700 years anniversary**. Chiang Mai: Withinbooks.
- Pollock, D., (1996). "Personhood and Illness among the Kulina". **Medical Anthropology Quarterly**. Vol. 10 No. 3 pp. 319-341.

- Pongsapitch, A. and Kuwintarapanta, P., (2002). **The patron-client system**. Third Edition. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Potter, J.M., (1976). **Thai Peasant Social Structures**. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Rabibhadana, A., (1975). "Clientship and Class Structure in the Early Bangkok Period". In G.W. Skinner and A.T. Kirsch, (Eds.). **Change and Persistence in Thai Society**. London: Cornell University Press. pp. 93-124.
- Rajadhon, A., (1962). "The Khwan and Its Ceremonies". **Journal of the Siam Society**. Vol. 50 pp. 119-164.
- Ramithanonta, C., (2002). **Phii Chao Naiy**. Bangkok: Kledthai Press.
- Reynolds, C.J., (1995). "A New Look at Old Southeast Asia". **The Journal of Asian Studies**. Vol. 54 No. 2 pp. 419-446.
- Rhum, M.R., (1987). "Tutelary Spirits of a Northern Thai Village". **Ph.D. Dissertation**. Harvard University.
- _____ (1994). **The Ancestral Lords: Gender, Descent and Spirits in a northern Thai village**. Northern Illinois University Centre for Southeast Asia Studies.
- Roseman, M., (1990). "Head, Heart, Odor, and Shadow: The Structure of the Self, the Emotional World, and Ritual Performance among Senoi Temiar". **Ethos**. Vol. 18 No. 3 pp. 227-250.
- _____ (1996). "Of Selves and Souls, Bodies and Persons, Individuals and Societies: A Commentary on Donald Pollock's "Personhood and Illness among the Kulina". **Medical Anthropology Quarterly**. Vol. 10 No. 3 pp. 342-346.
- Samawatha, F., (2003). **Lao Khan Thamnan Muang Chaem**. Chiang Mai: the Council of Cultural Affairs and Muang Dek Witaya school.
- Saradthathat, I., (2003). **Yorei and Thai Society**. [online]. [Accessed 4th September 2006].
- Available from World Wide Web: <library.rits.ac.th/journal/johs/jour461/yr.pdf>
- Scheper-Hughes, N. And Lock, M., (1986). "Speaking "Truth" to Illness: Metaphors, Reification, and a Pedagogy for Patients". **Medical Anthropology Quarterly**. Vol. 17 pp. 137-140.
- _____ (1987). "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology". **Medical Anthropology Quarterly**. Vol. 1 pp. 6-41.
- Schneider, D.M., (1980). **American kinship: a cultural account**. 2nd ed. Chicago:

- University of Chicago Press.
- _____ (1989). **A critique of the study of kinship**. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Schweitzer, P.P., (2000). "Introduction". In P.P. Schweitzer (Ed.). **Dividends of Kinship: Meanings and Uses of Social Relatedness**. London: Routledge. pp. 1-32.
- Scott, J.C., (1972). "The Erosion of Patron-Client Bonds and Social Change in Rural Southeast Asia". **The Journal of Asian Studies**. Vol. 32 No. 1 pp. 5-37.
- _____ (1977). "Patron-client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia". In S.W. Schmidt Laura Guasti, C.H. Lende and J.C. Scott, (Eds.). **Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism**. California: University of California Press.
- Singer, M. and Baer, H., (1995). "Medical Anthropology and its Transformation". In **Critical Medical Anthropology**. New York: Baywood Publishing Company. pp. 11-58.
- Soontornpesuch, S. (2000). **Khon muang: the conscious and creation of the northern Thai ethnic identities in the context of historical political and social change**. Faculty of Sociology Chiang Mai University.
- Spiro, M.E., (1977). **Kinship and Marriage in Burma: A Cultural and Psychodynamic Analysis**. London: University of California Press.
- Sriwongrach, Y., (1998). **A Philosophical Study of "Khwan" in Lanna Ceremonial Literature**. Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University.
- Stafford, C., (1995). **The Roads of Chinese Childhood: Learning and identification in Angang**. Cambridge University Press.
- _____ (2000). "Chinese patriliney and the cycles of *yang* and *laiwang*". In J. Carsten, (Ed.). **Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship**. Cambridge University Press. pp. 37-54.
- Stone, L., (2001). "Introduction: Theoretical Implications of New Directions in Anthropological Kinship". In L. Stone, (Ed.). **New Directions in Anthropological Kinship**. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. pp. 1-20.
- _____ (2004). "Introduction". In R. Parkin and L. Stone, (Eds.). **Kinship and Family: An Anthropological Reader**. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. pp. 241-256.

- Strathern, A. and Lambeck, M.,(1998). "Introduction Embodying sociality: Africanist-Melanesianist comparisons". In M. Lambeck and A. Strathern, (Eds.). **Bodies and Persons: Comparative perspectives from Africa and Melanesia.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-28.
- Strathern, M., (1988). **The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia.** London: University of California Press.
- _____ (1992). **Reproducing the Future: Essays on anthropology, kinship, and the new reproductive technologies.** Manchester University Press.
- Sucksawat, S., (1990). **Gitchaguud of Yang Luang Temple: The role of Burmese-Lanna arts in Mae Cham.** Thailand: Chiang Mai University.
- Sutthisirikul, W., (1985). **Chiang Mai before the "Monthon Thesabhiban" (1846-1899): A Study of Political and Economic Structure.** Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.
- Tambiah, S.J., (1970). **Buddhism and the spirit cults in North-east Thailand.** London: Cambridge University Press.
- _____ (1985a). "Animals Are Good to Think and Good to Prohibit". In **Culture Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective.** Cambridge: Harvard University Press. pp. 169-211.
- _____ (1985b). "The Galactic Polity in Southeast Asia". **Culture, Thought, and Social Action.** London: Harvard University Press. pp. 252-286.
- Tanabe, S., (1988). "Spirits and Ideological Discourse: The Tai Lu Guardian Cults in Yunnan". **Sojourn, Social Issues in Southeast Asia.** Vol. 3 No. 1 pp. 1-25.
- _____ (1991). "Spirits, Power and the Discourse of Female Gender: the Phii Meng Cult of Northern Thailand". In M. Chitakasem and A. Turton, (Eds.). **Thai Constructions of Knowledge.** London: SOAS University. pp. 183-212.
- Tannenbaum, N., (1992). "Households and Villages: The Political-Ritual Structures of Tai Communities". **Ethnology.** Vol. 31 No. 3 pp. 259-75.
- Terwiel, B.J., (1994). **Monks and Magic: An Analysis of Religious Ceremonies in Central Thailand.** Bangkok: White Lotus.
- The Johrei Institute, (2003). **Johrei.** [online]. [Accessed 4th September 2006]. Available from World Wide Web: <<http://www.johrei-institute.org>>
- Thomas, P., (1999). "No Substance, No Kinship?: Procreation, Performativity and

- Temanambondro Parent-Child Relations”. In P. Loizos and P. Heady, (Eds.). **Conceiving Persons: Ethnographies of Procreation, Fertility and Growth**. London: The Athlone Press. pp. 19-46.
- Thonman, T., (1971). *Thamnan Peun Muang Chiang Mai*. Bangkok: the Prime Minister’s Office.
- Tong, C.K. and Lian, K.F., (2003). “Cultural Knowledge, Nation-States, and the Limits of Globalization in Southeast Asia”. In S. Yamashita and J.S. Eades, (Eds.). **Globalization in Southeast Asia: local, national and transnational perspectives**. Oxford: Berghahn Books. pp. 42-64.
- Tooker, D.E., (1996). “Putting the Madala in its Place: A Practice-based Approach to the Spatialization of Power on the Southeast Asian “Periphery”—The Case of the Akha”. **The Journal of Asian Studies**. Vol. 55 No. 2 pp. 323-358.
- Toren, C., (1999). “Compassion for One Another: Constituting Kinship as Intentionality in Fiji”. **Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute. (N.S.)** Vol. 5 pp. 265-280.
- Turner, T., (1995). “Social Body and Embodied Subject: Bodiliness, Subjectivity, and Sociality among the Kayapo”. **Cultural Anthropology**. Vol. 10 No. 2 pp. 143-170.
- Turton, A., (1972). “Matrilineal Descent Groups and Spirit Cults of the Thai Yuan in Northern Thailand”. **Journal of the Siam Society**. Vol. 60 No. 2 pp. 217-56.
- _____ (1978). “The Current Situation in the Thai Countryside”. In A. Turton, J. Fast and M. Caldwell, (Eds.). **Thailand: Roots of Conflict**. Nottingham: Spokesman Bertrand Russell House.
- _____ (1984). “People of the Same Spirit: Local Matrikin Groups and their Cults”. **Mankind**. Vol. 14. No. 4 pp. 272-285.
- Vadathanaphuti, C., (1984). “Cultural and Ideology Reproduction in Rural Northern Thai Society”. A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in **Anthropology**. Standford University.
- Vandergeest, P. and Peluso, N.L., (1995). “Territorialization and state power in Thailand”. **Theory and Society**. Vol. 24 No. 3 pp. 385-426.
- Watson, C.W., (1991). “Cognatic or Matrilineal: Kerinci Social Organisation in Escher Perspective”. In F. Husken and J. Kemp, (Eds.). **Cognition and Social Organisation in Southeast Asia**. Leiden: KITLV Press. pp. 55-70.
- Weiner, J.F., (1982). “Substance, sibblingship and exchange: aspects of social structure

- in New Guinea". **Social Analysis**. Vol. 11 pp. 3-34.
- Whyte, S.R., (1997). **Questioning misfortune: the pragmatics of uncertainty in Eastern Uganda**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wijeyewardene, G., (1977). "Matriclans or Female Cults: A Problem in Northern Thai Ethnography". **Mankind**. Vol.11 pp. 19-25.
- _____ (1984). "Northern Thai succession and the Search for Matriliney". **Mankind**. Vol. 14 No. 4 pp. 286-292.
- _____ (1986). **Place and Emotion in Northern Thai Ritual Behaviour**. Bangkok: Pandora.
- Wilson, A., (1991). "The World Religions and their Scriptures". In **World Scripture**. International Religious Foundation. [online]. [Accessed 4th September 2006]. Available from World Wide Web: <<http://www.unification.net/ws/wsintr4.htm>>
- Wyatt, D.K., (1982). **Thailand: A Short History**. London: Yale University Press.
- Wyatt, D.K. and Wichienkeo, A., (1999). **The Chiang Mai Chronicle**. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Yamashita, S., (2003). "Introduction: "Glocalizing" Southeast Asia". In S. Yamashita and J.S. Eades, (Eds.). **Globalization in Southeast Asia: local, national and transnational perspectives**. Oxford: Berghahn Books. pp. 1-20.
- Yanagisako, S.J. and Collier, J.F., (1987). "Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender and Kinship". In J. F. Collier and S. J. Yanagisako, (Eds.). **Gender and Kinship: Essays Toward a Unified Analysis**. Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp. 14-52.
- Yoddumnern, B., (1985). **Continuity and Change in a northern Thai village: Determinants and consequences of fertility decline on northern Thai Family Structure**. University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.
- Yoshihide, S., (2001). "The Tasks of NGOs in Rural Development in Northeastern Thailand: The Debate on the Formation of Civil Society". **Thai Studies**. Vol. 1 pp. 1-18

Appendix A

Thai Traditional Lunar Calendar

The Thai lunar calendar is divided into twelve months, like the western calendar, but the months are determined by the phases of the moon, not the position of the earth in relation to the sun. Being based on the phases of the moon, half of the lunar months are 28 days long and the other half are 29 days long. Thai lunar months are divided in half, based on the waxing and waning of the moon, called Keun and Raem respectively. Thais express the lunar date by naming the date of the waxing or waning half of the month followed by the number of the month.

The only problem with lunar reckoning is that the lunar year of 354 days is ten days too short. The Thais compensate for this by adding an extra month in the calendar every two or three years depending upon how out of sync the seasons and lunar months are.

The Northern Thai lunar calendar starts two months earlier than the Central Thai version -- the fifth month in Bangkok was the seventh in Chiang Mai.

The Thai lunar New year also signals the transition from one year to the next in the cycle of twelve animal named years which have astrological connotations. The Thai system is much like the Chinese except in Lanna where the year of the Elephant was substituted for the year of the pig in the Chinese and Central Thai systems.

Twelve-year cycle terms compared

Year of Cycle	Animal Associated	Calendar Name	
		Lanna	Siamese
1	Rat	Cai	Chuat
2	Ox	Pao	Chaolu
3	Tiger	Nyi	Khan
4	Rabbit	Mao	Tho
5	Dragon	Si	Marong
6	Snake	Sai	Maseng
7	Horse	Sa-nga	Mamia
8	Goat	Met	Mamae
9	Monkey	San	Wok
10	Rooster	Lao	Raka
11	Dog	Set	Co
12	Pig/Elephant	Kai	Kun

Twelve-month terms compared

Modern Thai Solar Months	Lanna lunar months	Thai lunar months
October	Dyan keang (1)	Dyan sib ed (11)
November	Dyan yii (2)	Dyan sib son (12)
December	Dyan sam (3)	Dyan aiy (1)
January	Dyan sii (4)	Dyan yii (2)
February	Dyan haa (5)	Dyan sam (3)
March	Dyan hok (6)	Dyan sii (4)
April	Dyan jed (7)	Dyan haa (5)
May	Dyan paed (8)	Dyan hok (6)
June	Dyan kao (9)	Dyan jed (7)
July	Dyan sib (10)	Dyan paed (8)
August	Dyan sib ed (11)	Dyan kao (9)
September	Dyan sib son (12)	Dyan sib (10)

The inauspicious day (*wan sia*) in each Lanna lunar calendar month

Dyan keang (the 1 st month), Dyan haa (the 5 th month), and Dyan kao (the 9 th month)	Sunday and Monday
Dyan yii (the 2 nd month), Dyan hok (the 6 th month), and Dyan sib (the 10 th month)	Tuesday
Dyan sam (the 3 rd month), Dyan jed (the 7 th month), and Dyan sib ed (the 11 th month)	Saturday and Thursday
Dyan sii (the 4 th month), Dyan paed (the 8 th month), and Dyan sib son (the 12 th month)	Friday and Wednesday

One should avoid performing rituals and do the major agricultural practices such as planting or harvesting on these inauspicious days. For example, the rituals performed in November (*dyan yii*, or the 2nd lunar month) can be done on any day except Tuesday.

The day that the ritual of recalling or restoring *khwan* (*hiak khwan* rite) can be performed

The 2nd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 11th and 14th of Waxing day of every month
The 1st, 3rd, 5th, 9th and 11th of Waning day of every month

The spirit's consumption day (*wan phii gin*)

Waxing day (<i>dyan aug</i>)		Waning day (<i>dyan ram</i>)	
1	ghost	1	pig
2	dog	2	dog
3	chicken	3	buffalo
4	pig	4	elephant
5	dog	5	dog
6	cow	6	human
7	buffalo	7	chicken
8	elephant	8	duck
9	horse	9	pi
10	human	10	dog
11	ghost	11	cow
12	chicken	12	buffalo
13	duck	13	elephant
14	pig	14	horse
15	dog	15	ghost

The table illustrates the “spirit consuming day” (*wan phi gin*). The villagers believed that spirits consume “food” according to the lunar day. It is important for a person to check with the healer what kind of “food” the spirit will accept on a given day before performing a worship ritual. One must offer food conforming to the spirit’s schedule to please the spirit and thus recover from illness.

Interpretation of the table:

On the 1st waxing day, a spirit consumes ghost

On the 2nd waxing day, a spirit consumes dog

Etc.

If a person wants to offer chicken to a spirit he can only do so on the 3rd and 12th waxing day and the 7th waning day.

Lanna Kingdom Dynasty

The Kings of Lanna

Mengrai the Great, 1259-1317

Saen Phu, 1318-1319

Krüa, 1319-1322

Nam Thuam, 1322-1324

Saen Phu (second reign), 1324-1334

Kamphoo, 1334-1345

Phayaoo, 1345-1367

Kuena, 1367-1385

Saen Muang Ma, 1385-1411

Sam Fang Kaen, 1411-1441

Tilokaraj, 1441-1485

Yotchiangrai, 1485-1514

Phraya Kaeo (Mueang Kaeo), 1514-1525

Sai Sethathirath (Ketklao), 1525-1535, 1543-1545

Queen Chiraprabha, 1545-1547, 1564-1578

Mekuti, 1551-1564

In the Reign of Burma (1578-1774)

Sawati Noratra Mangsosri 1578-1607

Pra Soy 1607-1609, 1613-1615

Pra Chaiyathip 1609-1613

King of Nan 1615-1631

Phraya Luang Thippanet 1631-1655

Phra Saen Muang 1655-1659
King of Phrae 1659-1672
Viceroy Ungsae from Ava 1672-1675
Cheputrai 1675-?
Mang Raenara 1707-1727
Thepsingh 1727
Ong Kham 1727-1759
Chan 1759-1761
Keehood 1761-1763
Po Aphai Kamini 1763-1768
Po Mayu Nguan 1768-1774

Chao Chet Ton (The Seven Kings) Dynasty

Kawila, 1775-1813
Setthahattiraja (Dharma Langka), 1813-1821
Maha Suphathrarat (Mahawong), 1821-1840
Phuttawong (Suriwong), 1840-1870
Inthawichayanon 1870-1897
Intawarorot Suriwong 1897-1909
Chao Keo Naovarat 1900-1939

Appendix C

Hiak Khwan Rite (Recalling Khwan)

There are many rituals performed among Northern Thais concerning the loss of *khwan*. The most powerful ritual used when a person has a serious sickness is called “*hiak khwan yaa moa nueng*”, meaning “the recalling of life essence [by] the Mother of the Rice Pot”. It is believed that the most important and sacred spirit in the house is the Mother of the Rice Pot (*yaa moa nueng*) and a rice pot represents the healthiness of a family’s members.

The rice pot is dressed up with a newly made traditional skirt and shirt to represent the rice pot as a woman or mother. This indicates the close relationship between the rice pot and a woman. Then it is put near the head of a person with several kinds of fresh flowers which are believed to have a power to recall *khwan* of the person when it can sense the smell. Moreover, many tools such as a net, hoe, sickle, hammer, and knife are put next to the pot. These tools are miniaturised and made from wood. They are prepared for the Mother of the Rice Pot to use when searching for the *khwan* of the sick person.

The person who performs the ritual must be a man. It was explained by villagers that men had stronger *khwan* than women and to heal the person with weak *khwan*, one must have a stronger *khwan* and health so he will not get harmed. However, the healer has to be a “ripe” (mature) man who has already entered monkhood and has learned the performance and chanting during his monkhood.

The Chanting (translated from the local Palm-leaf Manuscripts)

Ohhmmm.....

Today is a perfect, more auspicious and brighter day than any other day. We have prepared bunches of flowers, as well as many tools such as a boat, fish nets,

pliers, cane, shoes, stone, steel, fire, knife, sickle, hoe, spade, shovel, chisel, drill, axe, and hammer. They are prepared for you, grandma. Please use them to search for your grandchild's *khwan* and take it back.

Please take these foods and drink until you are full, then I will ask you, grandma and grandpa, to search for the *khwan* quickly, don't be slow. Grandma, you are brave and you have a strong power, please go to bring those *khwan* back.

If your grandchild's *khwan* hide in a huge stone or in a big rock, you should use a hook and hammer to hit it out.

If *khwan* escapes into a woman's womb or is caught by any spirit in the forest, could you please cut them by the knife?

If *khwan* falls into a mine, please use a hoe to dig it up.

If *khwan* flies away and hides under a bole of a tree, you may use a chisel and an axe.

If *khwan* falls down into a river please dive for it.

If *khwan* is stuck in a mud, please take it out.

If *khwan* is trapped please use the pliers to pull it off.

If *khwan* is trapped in a cliff please try your best to bring it back. You may use a cane to search for it.

If you feel tired please take a rest then continue the search. Please search carefully everywhere possible, on every single grass and leaf, in every corner, every hole. Please look everywhere on earth. You may seek where tigers stay, in a deep jungle where spirits live, in a mountain, in a teak forest, in a stream, cliff, river, waterfall, banana garden, in a forest where monkeys live. Could you please search where there are *Phii Sang*, *Phii Sia*, *Phii Pai*, (names of ghosts) in the demon world. The *Phii Pai* often takes *khwan* away from humans and hides them. Please ask the guardian spirit, the spirit of the dam and canal for help.

I ask you to go to the *Phii Khen* and *Phii Yen* with big eyes, to the spirit of elephant, the white teeth spirit, a spirit with long nose and wry mouth. Those spirits like to bite, eat and swallow humans. Please go where spirits like to walk around. It might be caught by the guardian spirit or the eternal spirit. You

should find it at a spring or pond where spirits are living or where the Two-Women spirit is sitting and watching.

You may dive into the ocean, up into the sky between the moon and stars, in the air where the fogs and dews come down. Or you may go to the world of Karudha, Naga or Visanu. Please search all over the other worlds, even under the earth, in hell.

Please look at every single blade grass, and leaf.

If *khwan* happens to be in the moon or the sun, please take it back.

If *khwan* is trapped into the elephant's stomach, please let it out.

If *khwan* ends up bathing in the Kongka River in the wide Himmapan forest, please call it back.

If *khwan* gets lost in the saliva of an elephant, a lion, or a cow, please bring it back.

If *khwan* is caught by Vesuwanna the malicious demon, please take it away.

Second episode:

Sali Sawasdee Mahalapang Visuttamo [A Pali-Sanskrit chant]

Listen! You the three-stone-stove, tomorrow morning who will light the fire?,
You, my dear Rice Pot, tomorrow morning who will place you up on the stove?

Ohmmm Sali Sawasdee Mahalapang

Today is the greatest auspicious day I would like to talk to you, the elder grandpa and grandma. You have such longevity endless ages. If you walked only in one day you could reach a million Yoja (an old unit of distance, equal to about 16 kilometres). If you went up into the sky you could reach heaven, if you dived under the water you could reach the Karuda and Naga world. You are the most proficient one in the world. You know best how to talk and make friends all over the world far away.

At the moment I have such a worried mind, grandma. My relatives named “.....” if his/her *khwan* has escaped into the big forest, or is with the guardian spirits could you please give them these offerings. If they need a pair of elephants, horses, or cattle please exchange them with his/her *khwan*. Wherever you find the *khwan* please don't miss to bring it back. I would never ever regret to give you all these offerings and bribes. If *khwan* runs away into a cave or clear water please net it, tie it tight and bring it back, my dear.

If *khwan* gets into a woman's womb please take it out with the sickle.

Please bring *khwan* back and protect it until 100 years old.

If *khwan* is caught and hurt by evil spirits, you should bring with you myriads of warriors to help you bring *khwan* back and tie it tight. And I will then give you a boat-full of offerings with a pair of chickens.

If *khwan* runs away anywhere on earth, please negotiate in the ancient way.

You have such a great power don't give up helping us. You have over a million guards who are waiting for you.

Please hurry up.

If anyone does not let go of *khwan* you just snatch it away.

When you get *khwan* you should bring it back at the auspicious time of the day, so *khwan* would recover from illness, free from worry, and escape from fever. Grandma, please hurry up, and tell me when you get it.

You already have everything; a cane, a shoe, shovel, knife, hammer, axe, net, boat, raft, clothes, ring, pin as well as rice and sweets. So please go searching and asking for *khwan* in every possible place, in the jungle, under the water, in the cave, in the river and in the spirit world. Please negotiate, build a friendship and ask for a clue about your grandchild's *khwan*. If *khwan* becomes a divine, may the *Karuda* or *Naga* bring these offerings for its relatives and friends and try to persuade.

If they require millions please give them the ring.

If they require hundred thousands, please redeem *khwan*.

We have priceless wealth don't be mean to us.

But don't go for too long.

Please come back to take your golden lace, ring, hairpin and earrings. All relatives and siblings are here helping each other prepare those offerings and waiting for the 32 *khwan* to return at a good time.

Please, grandma, bring all *khwan* together, all those *khwan* of the ears, the eyes, the nose, and the heart. *Khwan* of the head return to the head, *khwan* of the shoulder return to the shoulder, *khwan* of the ears return to the ears, *khwan* of the eyes return to the eyes, *khwan* of the nose come to smell those flowers, *khwan* of the cheeks return to the cheeks. *Khwan* of the feet do not walk away, *khwan* of the hands do not wander around in a forest. May *khwan* don't go away, don't go anywhere, don't be afraid, and don't be frightened, please return to your body, and recover from illness and safe from harm. May *khwan* come back to stay in the big warm house, return to live with all your relatives who are now sitting and waiting for you. ...[Name] ...I wish you getting well, healthy, longevity until 120 years

Jattalothamma Vattunthu Ayu Wannu Sukkhang Palang.

The recalling of *khwan* by the Mother of Rice Pot requires at least 3 full days to complete. However, it is only carried out in the evening of each day. On the first day, the ritual takes the longest time as the healer enters the bedroom of an ill person's house and puts all tools and offerings beside his or her head and gives a full version of the chanting whereas a shorter version can be given on other days. The healer then will start the ritual by praying for the Mother of Rice Pot to search for the patient's *khwan* as described in the translation of the chanting. At the end of the long chanting, the healer picks up a handful of rice grains and counts them to predict or indicate the status of *khwan*, for example, an odd number indicates that *khwan* is not back and the same ritual must be performed on the next day. The ritual is performed every evening until the rice is picked with an even number which means that *khwan* has successfully been recalled and returned to the patient's body¹. *Khwan* should later be given a warm

¹ It is considered to be "too early" if *khwan* return on the first day. It seems to be "too quick". The best time *khwan* should come back is on the third day. If the ritual takes too many days to recall the *khwan* back is also a bad sign.

welcome by offering some food consisting of fish and rice to the person. He or she should “eat with the *khwan*”, for instance, taking a small amount of rice and fish from the offering dishes. The healer and elder relatives then tie a sacred thread onto the person’s wrist to welcome his or her *khwan* and ensure the *khwan* stays in the body. The left over foods will later be shared among families, the healer, relatives and neighbours who attend the ritual on the day.