

## ANCESTOR VENERATION IN JAPAN

1. "More Japanese participate in the rites marking memorial observances for the spirits of the dead than in all other rites combined" (Smith 1974:vii).
2. **Ancestors and Primitive Shinto:**

Hori shows that there were two foundations of primitive Shinto:

  - 2.1 ujigami based on family or clan (uji) system.

"Each family had its own shrine as a central symbol of its solidarity, dedicated to the ancestral spirit who had been enshrined and worshipped by its ancestors. This type of belief system is characterized by particularism and exclusiveness from other families, so that its main function is to integrate all the members of the family into a patriarchal hierarchy" (Hori 1968:30).
  - 2.2 hito-gami based on a close relationship of an individual kami (god) with a religious specialist such as a shaman or a medicine man. Hito-gami means human-god. This system was characterized by the strong individuality both of the kami and its transmitter who lived for a long time in the memory of the believers. This was the more prominent type as can be seen that 80% of Shinto shrines are of man deified after they died.
3. **Ancestors and Folk Buddhism**
  - 3.1 Buddhism came to Japan via China. In China it had incorporated the Confucian ancestral rites and filial piety as central to its beliefs.

- "Over time the association of ancestral rites with institutionalized Buddhism became so complete that for most Japanese today Buddhism has come to mean ancestor worship and little more" (Smith 1974:2).
  - 3.2 During the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868) ancestor veneration became associated with the Buddhist temple.

"For the parishioners the temple became primarily the place where the ancestors worshipped, and the priest the chief officiant at ancestral rites. What had until then been more or less household-centered ancestral observances, requiring no priests at all, provided the raw material for a structured Buddhist formulation of practices requiring the services of temples and priests for their proper execution" (Smith 1974:22).
  - 3.3 The doctrine of Extinction and Nirvana was reinterpreted.

"...ordinary people, finding the doctrine of nirvana difficult, likened it to physical death. So from the idea that those who have entered nirvana are hotoke (buddha), all the dead were called 'buddha' regardless of whether the persons had any affiliation with buddhism during their lifetime, and regardless of their character" (Takeda 1957:232). As a result, many Japanese have no statues of Buddha on their ancestor selves, only ancestors.
  - 3.4 Few Japanese take karma and transmigration seriously (Ooms 1967).

- 3.5 Japanese find it hard to think of their ancestors in hell. They also have little concern with heaven. They are concerned with this world.
- 3.6 Folk spirits contined. The response was that boddhisattvas such as Jizo protect village communities from devils and evil spirits.  
 "At the borderline of the village people raised long stones which they called 'the god of the grave.' Shaped as a linga they resembled the statues of Jizo, and the buddhist popular preachers (*hijiri*) adapted their preaching to popular beliefs, and reinterpreted the stone-lingas to be Jizo." (Gorai 1984:30)
- 3.7 The Bon festival. August 13-15. The most popular Buddhist festival. This is no longer an offering to the priest, but an offering to the ancestors and a welcoming of them home for a time.
- 3.8 Nembutsu: Reciting the sacred name of Amitabha (Amida in Japan) that is believed to enable humans to reach the Pure Land. Under Japanese influence it expanded to be a memorial service to the spirits of the dead, either dead family members, or wandering spirits that can harm the living.

#### 4. Ancestor Veneration

##### 4.1 Collective memorial services:

Four seasonal holidays: New Year (Jan. 1-3), Bon (Aug. 13-15), and spring and fall equinoxes (Mar. 18-24, Sept. 20-26). On Bon the Buddhist altar is opened and offerings placed before the tables. Sometimes a fire is prepared at the entrance of the house to guide the spirits back home. The next day the grave is visited and offerings made. A community dance is often held.

##### 4.2 Rationale for ancestor veneration:

4.21 Welbeing of the living: There but not dominant. "A straight rejection of the idea of protection is rare, but its wholeharded acceptances seems equally rare" (Ooms).

4.22 Success and prosperity: Not dominant. Most people do not anticipate direct intervention by ancestors. Life is determined by the initiatives of the living. Ancestors are to be enjoyed as generally passive and overseeing the actions of the living in the manner of tutelary deities (Smith).

4.23 Entertainment: One common theme.

##### 4.24 Meaning of Life:

- ancestor veneration deals not so much with the problem of individual death and continuity, but the continuity of the *ie* or household. "through ancestor wroship the membership of the *ie* is enhanced to such an extent that true membership is never lost: it transcends death and lasts forever" (Ooms 1967:286).
- "The prosperity, unity, harmony and nonor of the house is considered the summum bonum. The ultimate ethical criterion, therefore, is neither to found in universal standards transcending the social group nor in individual happiness and edification. Whether the interests of the family, including living and dead, are served or not is ultimately the standard applied for a proper distinction between moral and immoral conduct. Since the ancestors are regarded as 'living' members of the family, the

- We need a theology of worship.

6.2 Must deal with ancestor veneration.

- Smith concludes it is both memorialism and worship. "The Family of God may be the family,... I have no doubt that the family's dead are its gods. Like all gods they are worshipped and petitioned."
- need a theology of resurrection, and of ancestors
- must deal with communion with the dead. Gehman (1985) notes in O.T. "Scripture suggests that it is impossible to communicate with the dead" (1985:485). He also deals with necromancy (1985:495).
- we need rituals to maintain solidarity of the household (ie). This must maintain sense of respect for parents (~~ho-on~~ redefined). It must also include a teaching of the new family of God (familia Dei - see Shedd 1958).

### Bibliography

- Cullman, Oscar  
1958 Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? London: Epworth.
- Gorai, Shigeru  
1984 Folk religion and the cult of the ancestors. Japanese Religions 13:26-32. July.
- Hori, Ichiro  
1959 Japanese folk beliefs. American Anthropologist. 61:405. June.  
1968 Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Kitagawa, Joseph  
1965 The Buddhist transformation in Japan. History of Religions 4:319-336.
- Iwao, Munakata  
1976 The ambivalent effects of modernization on the traditional folk religion of Japan. Japanese Journal of Religious Studies. 3:100-124.
- Maeda, Takashi  
1976 Ancestor worship in Japan: facts and history. in Ancestors, W. H. Newell, ed. Hague: Mouton.
- Ooms, Herman  
1967 The religion of the household. Contemporary Religions in Japan. 8:201-333. Sept. Dec.
- Plath, David  
1964 Where the family of god is the family: the role of the dead in Japanese households. American Anthropologist. 66:300-317.
- Smith, Robert J.  
1974 Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press. Yanagita, Kunio  
1970 About Our Ancestors: The Japanese Family System. Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

## SPIRITS IN THAI RELIGION

1. "Several observers of village Buddhism have pointed out the elaborate richness of the religious fabric: the diverse threads of the buddhist and Brahmanic traditions interwoven with the indigenous tradition of worship of spirits and a host of supernatural objects, the whole presenting a complex array of religious, magical and divinatory emphases" (Ingersoll 1966:51).
2. "One reason Buddhist cosmography fitted so well into mainland southeast Asian societies is that it included a place for the creatures of animism" (Reynolds 1977:207).

There are three worlds (log):

- **phommalog**: world of the highest gods (**phom**) - made up of 4 levels. This includes Brahmanical and Buddhist gods.
- **thewadalog**: world of the gods - sixteen levels.
- **manudalog**: world of humanity and other beings - made up of eleven levels. This includes spirits.

### 3. Types of spirits:

- 3.1 **Winjan**: the soul that lives in the heart of a person. This leaves at death and goes either to heaven (**sawan**) or hell (**bnarok**). It is the source of thought, consciousness and will. It is the soul of transmigration. Some believe that some reborn in heaven become gods, and some of those in hell become spirits (**phi**). A **winjan** that remains disembodied is a **phi** or ghost. These remain until their life impulse is exhausted and their component parts are scattered abroad.
- 3.2 **Khawn**: composed of 32 parts which reside in various locations in the body.
- 3.3 **Khwan**: variously described as "free soul", "ego", "morale", "grace", "prosperity", "essence of life", "soul stuff", "guardian spirit", and "spirit of life."

It is:

"A thing which does not have a body of its own, generally thought of as being associated with the life of a person from the time of birth; if the **khwan** is with the person, everything is in excellent condition, the person is happy and well, has a steadfast mind; if a person is frightened or sorrowful, [their] **khwan** has left [their] body. . . It is in all ways considered as something excellent" (Kingshill 1965:154).

**Khwan** are associated with various senses and faculties. There are **khwan** of the eyes, mouth, hair, hands, legs, etc.

- 3.31 **Tham Khwan**: A ceremony to call back the **khwan** when it is frightened or disorganized, or wandered away. The rite is of Brahmanic origin. This ceremony is present at 1) rites of passage, 2) pregnancy, 3) threshold ceremonies before starting an enterprise, 4) ceremonies of reintegration 5) rites for those suffering from prolonged illness, and 6) rites for dispelling bad luck.

Most **tham khwan** ceremonies have 1) waving of lights, 2) trays of offerings, 3) cotton threads to conduct blessing and tying the wrists of the candidate to tie the **khwan** to the body. The triple gems are also invoked.

4. **Phi**: a large variety of spirits that appear largely at night in patches of dark vegetation. These include spirits, ghosts, demons and deities. They fall into three types: 1) ghosts of the dead and astral bodies of the living, 2) spirits who exist in their own account (nature spirits), and 3) other-worldly spirits who are never seen or heard. They are capricious, and may become malicious if not properly propitiated.
5. **Phra phum chao thi**: spirits that control or inhabit certain geographical locations. Guardian spirits that may have been previous owners of the land. Propitiated by erecting a spirit house in the yard on a pole facing north. Every morning offerings of food, flowers, incense or candles are made. They inhabit houses, camps, doors, ladders, stables, barns, food storage areas, festival structures, fields, forests, places of worship, gardens and bodies of water.
6. **Preta**: other spirits, not particularly dangerous. Tall with small heads and very small mouths, but large stomachs so they are never satisfied. They are to be pitied rather than feared.
7. **Jag**: merciless giants that live in Tibet. Have large bodies and long protruding teeth. Have magican power and can fly. Require sacrifices.
8. **Agricultural Spirits**: Rice goddess, mother earth goddess, giant subterranean snake (naga) and spirits of six cardinal directions. Must be propitiated for good harvests.
9. Spirit Doctors:
  - 9.1 **Maw phi** - doctors who deal with spirits. They exorcise by means of beating it out with a stick, or reciting holy texts, or cutting and puncturing the body with a tiger's tooth.
  - 9.2 **Maw khwan** - ritual specialists for **khwan** ceremonies.
  - 9.3 **Maw khaosong** - shamans

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Attagara, Kingkeo  
1968 **The Folk Religion of Ban Nai**. Kurusapha Press.
- deYoung, John E.  
1966 **Village Life in Modern Thailand**. Berkley: U. Calif. Press.
- Heinze, Ruth-Inge  
1982 **Tham Khwan: How to Contain the Essence of Life**. Singapore: Singapore Univ. Press.