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The “Phi” (ผี): Ghosts and Spirits in Thai Culture

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Beliefs in ghosts and supernatural spirits exist in almost every culture. In Thailand ghosts and spirits are known collectively known as “*phi*” (ผี). General translation of *phi* equates the term to “ghosts” (as in spirits of the dead, or spectral entities). The term, however, has a deeper meaning that encompasses a wide array of spiritual and natural forces. *Phi* is not simply a subject of campfire stories, but are an active part of Thai culture and belief

system. From spirit houses to superstitions, *phi* interacts with the lives of Thai people on daily basis.

The belief in *phi* originated in the animistic religion of the local people. When Brahmanism and Buddhism came to Thai, *phi* became absorbed into the Buddhist-Brahmanistic religion. Through understanding *phi*, one can gain insights into the nature of Thai people, particularly our respect for natural forces and our ability to harmonize different spiritual beliefs. In this article, Phya Anuman Rajathon, a famous scholar in Thai folklore, walks us through the nuances of *phi*, from natural guardians and celestial forces to evil spirits and damned souls.

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