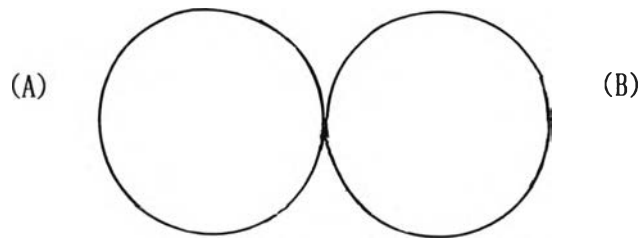
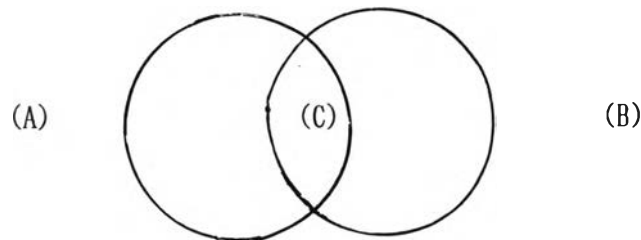


and Brahmanism, the indigenous people had their own beliefs and practices in Thailand. When two different religious elements meet each other, or a folk religion (indigenous religion) meets major world religion, what generally happens to the religious system? What kind of changes would occur in the beliefs and rituals of the religions by their encounter or the combination? The changes may vary according to a number of factors, such as the strength of native tradition, the way in which the major religion was introduced, and historical, social, political and economic factors. However, in the case that an indigenous folk religion (A) meets an imported world religion (B), generally, the following three patterns are the possibility.

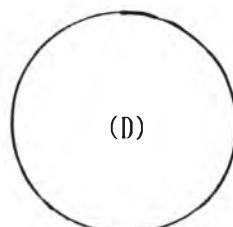
Pattern 1: (A) refuses (B), or vice versa. In this case they keep in minimum touch with each other. As a result they keep their own individualities.



Pattern 2: (A) incorporates (B), or vice versa. In this case they co-exist by sharing some parts (C).



Pattern 3: (A) and (B) merges together. In this case they syncretize into a single inseparable system or a new religion (D).



Although the three patterns are theoretically given on the former page, it seems to be impossible to classify every case observed in various countries into this neat scheme. It is especially difficult to distinguish between Pattern 2 and 3. Some cases even show both Patterns 2 and 3.

2.2 Examples of Phenomena of Religious Complexity

One can see phenomena of religious complexity in various countries in the world. Some examples of Asian or Southeast Asian countries will be given in this section.

In Japan one can make interesting observations of the rites of passage. It is very popular now for some Japanese couples to go to Christian church for their wedding ceremony. They get married in the Christian church and when they have a baby the baby is brought to a Shinto shrine around 30 days after his or her birth for them to pray for his or her happiness. When someone dies, they go to a Buddhist temple for his or her funeral because most funerals in Japan are conducted in the Buddhist tradition and the dead are buried according to Buddhist rites. To discuss Japanese religious faith is beyond the scope of this thesis, but when people ask "What is your religion?" perhaps they would answer "I have no religion." Instead when asked "What is the religion of your family?" they might mention one of the Buddhist sects: often it has little to do with their religious faith. It usually means worshiping their ancestors. In Japan after cremation the remains of the dead are placed in a grave at a Buddhist temple and his or her family becomes a supporting member of the temple. The example of some Japanese couples introduced above shows a phenomena of religious complexity in Japan. They can be Christian, Shintoist and Buddhist at different stage of their lives. This example does not talk about their religious faith but about the rites of passage practiced in Japan. In terms of rituals, one can see different religious elements co-existing in Japan. This

case is equivalent to Pattern 1 mentioned in the previous section.

Pattern 1 is often seen in the case where more than two world religions exist in a country. For example, Thailand is a Buddhist country but one can also see some Muslims and Christians. They were introduced into Thailand where Buddhism had already gained acceptance as a major religion. They are accepted by a small number of people. But they do not mix with other religions and keep their own individualities in the country.

Pattern 2 and 3 are often seen in the case folk religion (B) meets world religion (A). When a world religion (A) is introduced as a major religion and encounters folk religion (B), the world religion (A) adapts to the folk religion (B) to gain local acceptance and occupy major position in society. In this process local people reinterpret the world religion (A) to fit their own tradition. As a result the world religion (A) is transformed or modified into (C) of Pattern 2 or (D) of Pattern 3. Redfield calls (A) "Great Tradition", and calls (B) "Little Tradition". "Little Tradition" is, in other words, called "peasant religion" or "mass religion" by other scholars. As mentioned in the previous section, it is difficult to distinguish between Pattern 2 and 3 because some cases show both patterns.

For instance, one can see those patterns in Thailand and the Philippines. Both Thailand and the Philippines had their own indigenous beliefs (folk religion) before the arrival of a major world religion. Theravada Buddhism was introduced into Thailand and Catholicism into the Philippines as a major religion early in history. Imported Buddhism and Catholicism adapted to the indigenous Animistic beliefs to gain local acceptance and occupied major position in Thailand and the Philippines. In the process, elements of Buddhism and Catholicism filtered down to the local level. They were reinterpreted and transformed or modified to fit local traditions. As a result one can see both Pattern 2 and 3 in Thailand and the Philippines. In case of Thailand some scholars call (C) and (D) "Popular Buddhism"; in case of the Philippines, "Popular Catholicism" or "Folk Catholicism". Some anthropologists also report

the similar situations about Islam in Indonesia and Theravada Buddhism in other Southeast Asian countries such as Burma, Cambodia and Laos.

2.3 Phenomenon of Religious Complexity in Thailand

In this section the phenomenon of religious complexity in Thailand would be discussed in more detail and particularly focused on its historical background.

Complexity has characterized the Thai religious system since at least 1292, when the well-known inscription of Ramkhamhaeng was composed. This inscription not only celebrates the devotion of his people of Sukhothai to Theravada Buddhism but also notes a special relationship between the prosperity of the kingdom and reverence for Phra Khaphung, a "spirit-deity" living in a nearby mountain. Phra Khaphung is characterized as a *phi-thewada*, combining *phi* (an indigenous Thai form meaning "spirit," "ghost") with *thewada* (a form derived from Hindu-Buddhist cosmology and meaning "deity")." (Kirsch 1977: 241)

It is interesting to note that the situation of religious complexity, which has persisted throughout subsequent Thai history until now, had already begun during the Sukhothai period in the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great. When, why and how did such religious situations occur in Thailand? What is the process of merging three once-distinct religious traditions?

2.3.1 Animism in Thai culture

Animism in Thai culture is supposed to have two genealogies: firstly the pure indigenous Animism identified as pre-Buddhist and pre-Hindu, and secondly the blend of indigenous Animism and imported Indian religions.

Guelden (1995: 17) offers a definition of indigenous animism as follows;

Most anthropologists agree that before the arrival of Buddhism and Brahmanism (or Hinduism), the indigenous people living in what is now Thailand were animists who paid homage to their ancestors and to a variety of evil, nature and guardian spirits.

Animism has been called the world's earliest religion and is certainly the basis for much of modern religious philosophy. Central to it is the belief that a human soul survives after death, a precursor to ancestor worship.... The world is thought to be populated with good and bad spirits that can protect and destroy human existence. They give life and personality to animals and natures - to rivers, trees, mountains, rice, tigers, white elephants - and even buildings, boats and statues. The line between the living and the dead is blurred, as it is that between nature and supernatural. The power of nature and the power of magic are the same. Man is not powerful, but he can manipulate these unseen powers through strong ritual, meditation, sacred prayers and charms, making order out of chaos for a short time.

The origin of the indigenous animism in Thai culture lies in the Thai indigenous people's basic needs to cope with the crisis of everyday life such as mishaps, diseases and natural disasters.

One can see the remains of the indigenous animism or the phenomena called

indigenous animism identified as pre-Buddhist or pre-Hindu, for example, in the spirit cults (*phi*) practiced in present-day Thailand. The concept of "*phi*" refers to a wide range of spirits which affect human beings. Tambiah, an anthropologist who studied the spirit cults in a village in North-east Thailand interestingly distinguishes the guardian spirits of the village (good spirits) from the malevolent and capricious spirits (bad spirits). Generally the guardian spirits in Thailand seem to revolve around the following four kinds of spirits: "*Chao Phau*" (spirit of Great Father),

"*Lak Muang*" (spirit of City Pillar), "*Sua Baan*" (guardian spirit of village) and "*Phiruan*" (guardian spirit of house). In his study Tambiah mentioned *Chao Phau Phraa Khao* (guardian of the village *wat*) and *Tapubaan* (guardian of the village settlement) as the two guardian *phi* of a village in North-east Thailand.

A number of malevolent and capriciously acting *phi* are clearly differentiated from those guardian *phi* in the village by Tambiah. According to him,

The malevolent spirits are not guardians of moral values; to oversimplify somewhat, they attack capriciously or with reasons of self-interest when humans intrude into their marked-off domain. (1977: 312)

These spirits are malevolent, evil, uncontrollable and unpredictable. They come from the realm of immorality and wickedness. They can cause serious capricious harm.

Tanabe (1991) introduces cases dealing with beliefs and practices concerning the notion of *phi* and their relations to society. This includes the propitiation rituals of spirits practised among various social units such as lineage, village, the cult of city pillar, professional spirit mediumship and witchcraft. They are all thought to be studies treating or relating to the indigenous animism in Thailand.

Concerning the blend of animism within the Indian religions, the renowned religions of India, Buddhism and Brahmanism were introduced into Thailand by Indian traders, who brought with them scholars, Buddhist monks and Hindu

priests. In the process both religions had to adapt to the indigenous animistic beliefs in order to gain local acceptance. There were two possible ways that Brahmanism was introduced to indigenous animism in Thailand. One possibility is through the Brahmin court rituals adopted by the Thai Kings which filtered down to rural people. Another possibility is that Indian traders had brought their own Hindu magical and religious beliefs to the villages in the region.

The merchants most likely brought with them lower caste magicians to appease the spirits in this distant land and to cure disease. Dramatic performances of the *Ramayana* and other Hindu epics served to instruct villagers in Hinduism and to propitiate the spirits. (Guelden 1995: 18)

The local people adopted the most effective and powerful techniques from Indian traders and blended them with their indigenous animistic beliefs to assist those who were helpless in the face of recurring agricultural failures and epidemics. (However, some say that Brahmanism is primarily the religion of the elites and can never compete with animism at the "people's" level. Brahmanism at the court level would be discussed in the next section.)

Regarding the blend of the indigenous animism and Buddhism, Terwiel (1994) interestingly wrote that;

When Buddhism was introduced, it became subservient to magico-animism.... Buddhist monks were revered because their Pali chants warded off evil and their spells proved effective. The image of Buddha joined the ancestor shrine in the houses and Buddhist monastery occupied the place just outside the community where the shrine for the guardian of the village stood. In the course of centuries the role of Buddhism gradually became more prominent in village religion. Rural magico-animism slowly became magico-animistic Buddhism.

Despite Terwiel's description above, it is true that Buddhism has

paramount position as a state religion in Thailand. It was officially introduced into Thailand by the Thai Kings throughout history. This will be dealt with in a later section of this chapter: Buddhism in Thai history.

According to Kitsuwat (1988: 65-69), the Thai animistic world today can be seen in the beliefs and practices concerning the following supernatural notions: spirits (*phi*), charms and amulets, magic and spells, auspicious occasions, omens, premonition and dreams, '*kwan*' the spirit that resides in human beings and plants, natural phenomena and events, folk medicine, and physical appearance. They are often seen in relation to other religious elements: Buddhism and Brahmanism (Hinduism).

2.3.2 Hinduism in Thai history

Inscriptions indicate that Hindu (Brahmanistic) elements were present in early Thai states, along with Buddhist and indigenous elements. (Kirsch 1977: 252) By the late 12th century AD, the Khmer were deeply entrenched in regions of present-day Thailand. So it is possible that the area was already influenced by the Hinduized Khmer when two Thai states Sukhothai and Lanna gained dominance. Later in the late 14th century, especially after the Thai conquest of Angkor, a large number of Brahmins flowed into Thailand from the Hinduized Khmer as refugees together with their Hindu traditions. Then the Thai state of Ayutthaya was greatly influenced in important ways. For example, the Thai Kings adopted the Hindu ideas of *deva-raja*; they ruled as god-kings, used court Brahmins and Brahmanical ceremonies and adopted Hindu law.

When thinking of Hinduism in Thai religion, two main components can be distinguished. One, closely tied to royal institutions and the capital city is "court" Brahmanism; the other, more widely diffused throughout Thai society, Kirsch's terms, "folk" Brahmanism. Historically it is clear when the court Brahmanism was formally incorporated into the Thai religious system. In the previous section, two possibilities were mentioned of the route folk Brahmanism

took to reach villagers. Brahmanism was treated only in relation to the indigenous animism. However, Kirsch (1977) interestingly mentions three possibilities concerning this matter. Firstly, it could represent a survival from an early "Hinduized" period in Thai society. Secondly, it might be that these folk Brahman elements were difused from the elite to the mass after the court Brahmanism was institutionalized. Thirdly, this folk Brahman complex was introduced and spread along with Theravada Buddhism. He sees that there are extensive structural and functional links between the folk Brahman complex and Buddhism, which might support such a view.

The Hindu (Brahmanic) component that makes up Thai religion can be largely divided into the two Brahmanical systems; Court Brahmanism and folk Brahmanism.

The former is now still used for court rituals. The latter now remains in (1) the local events and festivals, e.g. Songkran festival originated in Hindu mythology, (2) local *Sangha*, e.g. Brahmin knowledge and astrologies stored in local *Sangha*, (3) regional specialists, e.g. Brahmin priests serving local *Sangha* and Village Brahmin priests (Buddhist laymen) such as *mau khwan*. It seems that (2) and (3) are closely linked to magico-animistic aspects in Thai popular Buddhism.

2.3.3 Buddhism in Thai history

From its beginnings on the eastern frontier of India, Buddhism has spread outside India to foreign lands. This continuing spread of Buddhism can be represented in Figure 1 on page 19.

As described in Figure 1, Buddhism had arrived in the regions of present-day Thailand in the eighth century B.C. In the 13th century, small Thai states developed in these regions. Previously, Cambodia and other Indianized states had influenced the area. When two Thai states Sukhothai and Lanna gained dominance, they were influenced by the Khmer and the Mon, who had extensive connections with Burma. Most importantly, the Thais accepted Theravada Buddhism

from the Mon. King Ramkhamhaeng the Great (late 12th and early 13th centuries) was a patron of Theravada Buddhism, and the inscriptions tell us that all the people were Buddhists. Sculptures and architectural forms both in Lanna and Sukhothai art were to find their ultimate expression in a vital Buddhist tradition of the Theravada school.

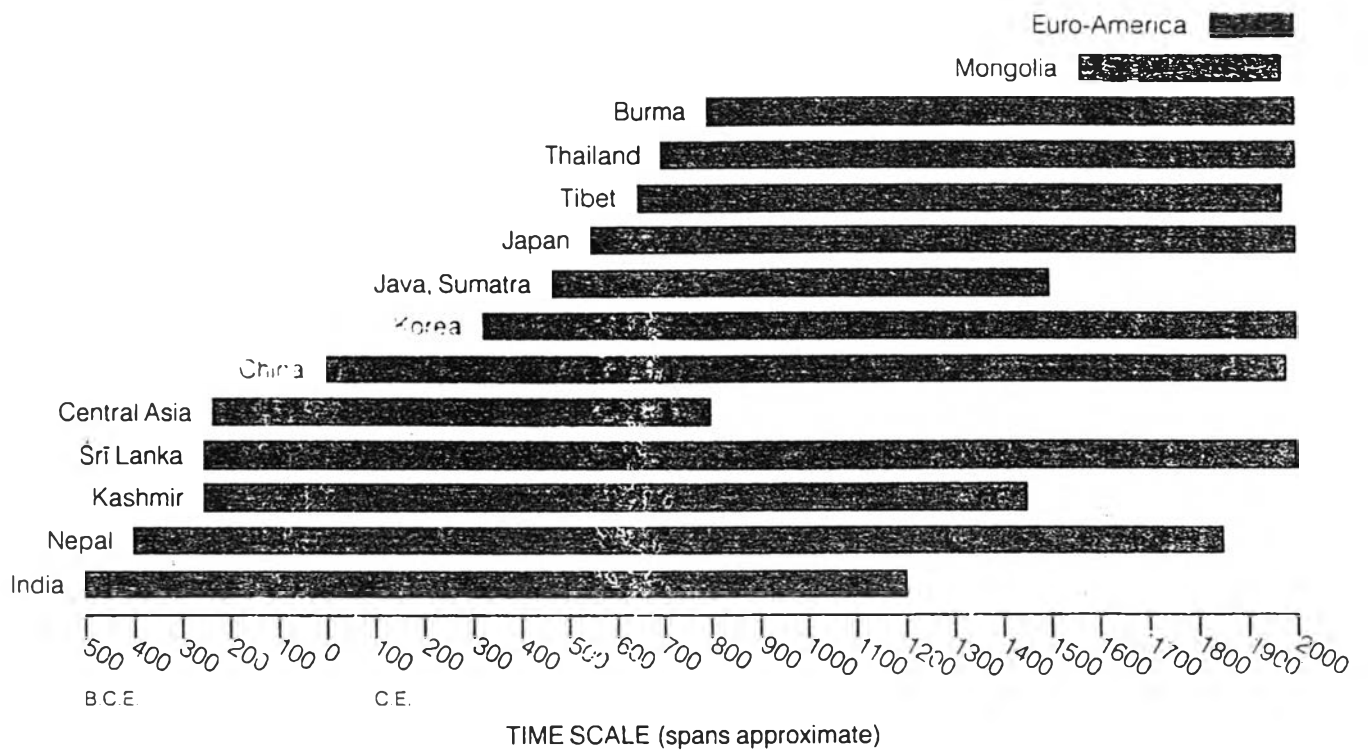
In the meantime, the Khmer and the Mon were deeply entrenched in the regions of present-day Thailand. By the late twelfth century AD, penetrating almost as far as the border between Thailand and Burma.

Kirsch continues the history of Buddhism in Thailand as follows:

From the fourteenth century on, the major center of Thai power shifted southward to Ayutthaya, which was influenced in important respects by the Hinduized Khmer, especially after the Thai conquest of Angkor in the late fourteenth century. Despite these Khmer influences, however, Buddhism retained its paramount position in the Ayutthayan religious system. In the eighteenth century, a further southward shift in Thai power took place, centering it on Bangkok. Rama I's inscription reiterates —at the very foundation of what was to become the modern Thai state— the centrality of Buddhism to the Thai. In contemporary Thailand, Buddhism is recognized as the state religion and enjoys special government support, although recent constitutions have guaranteed freedom of religion. The Thai king must be a Buddhist, to maintain his role as Defender of the Faith. The official sanction of Buddhism merely formalizes and affirms the commitments and attitudes of the Thai people generally. For them, there is a close link between being Thai and being Buddhist." (Kirsch, 1977: 245)

Buddhism is regarded as paramount in Thai religion now. It enjoys government support as the state religion. However one can also see phenomena of the combination of Buddhism and other creeds such as animism and Hinduism as discussed in this chapter. The following chapter will start decoding such religious complexity in Thailand.

(Figure 1) The Spread of Buddhism



Source: The Development of Buddhism Outside India

Richard H. Robinson/ Willard L. Johnson

"The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction"

1982 California: Wadsworth Publishing Company

This indicates Buddhism in a broad sense, not mentioning any of the schools.

Please refer to the map on the next page.

(Figure 2) INDIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



Source: The Development of Buddhism Outside India

Richard H. Robinson/ Willard L. Johnson

"The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction"

1982 California: Wadsworth Publishing Company