

Spiritualism of Urban Middle Class in Thailand

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1. Introduction

Part of an attempt to understand the behavior and lifestyles of the people in Thailand has been carried out to a certain extent through the lens of their religious-cultural background. Literatures on religions and beliefs in Thailand were found voluminous, contributed by Thais and foreigners. This is particularly the case of those on Buddhism in modern time.

Previous literatures shared the notion that Thailand is characterized with complex syncretism. The late, eminent scholar on the culture of Thailand, Phya Anuman Rajadhon was the first Thai scholar contributing a serious and extensive study on

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Thai folklore. A collection of his English articles entitled "Essays on Thai Folklore" was published as the first edition in 1968 by the Social Science Association of Thailand to celebrate his 80th anniversary. In more than 400 pages, Phya Anuman Rajadhon (1968) discusses about cultures, languages & literatures, folk tales, Buddhism, as well as rites and rituals in Old Siam and Thailand. His work reflects the complexity in the Thai religious system, a notion shared by other scholars, Thai and foreigners, later on. Among the latter are Gambian (1970), Terwiel (1976), and Kirsch (1977). They identify such a complexity in the Thai religious system with a component of Theravada Buddhism, folk Brahmanism and animism. The notion of the "parade of supernaturals" is made by Gambian (1970: p. 351-366) in his book entitled *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northeastern Thailand* published by Cambridge University Press.

Recently, a few scholars have noticed emerging changes in the Thai religious system. Rather than the popular notion of syncretism, the late Kitiarsa (2005) proposes the term "hybridization" to characterize the popular religion in the post-modern Thailand, when a rise of supernatural cults emerged along with materialism. According to him, this has been the case since 1980s. This was partly attributable to religious commodification.

A decade has passed. As part of globalization, the lately proliferation of social networks and E-business have impacted the Thai society, particularly among the urban middle class. The notion of Thailand to shift from a double-income-no-kid (DINK) society to a SINK (single-income-no-kid) in less than a decade to come is attributable to a changing lifestyle among the urban middle class (Wongboonsin 2011). A look at the Thai people from the perspective of their belief system will help contributing to a better understanding about them during this millennium era.

This study accordingly investigated into the realm of spiritualism of urban middle class in Thailand after 2015 along the approach of mix methods. The manuscript is structured as follows. After a brief review of the objectives of the study, the manuscript presents the methodological strategy employed and the data source for the study. Subsequently, the resultsof the data analysis are provided through descriptive

statistics and a multiple binary logistic regression to indicate the significant predictors. The summary and discussion of the study results are provided in the conclusion.

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were two-fold:

- 1) To identify the components and degree of spiritualism through the lens of the belief, attitude, and practice in spiritualism in Thailand.
- 2) To identify differences and commonality of spiritualism among the urban middle class in Thailand, as well as their predictors.

3. Methods

This study limited itself to the case study of the middle class at the working age in Bangkok Metropolitan Area. To do so, the study relied upon a mixed methods research design along a triangulation approach. It started with an archival research, followed by a quantitative and a qualitative research. The data source of the quantitative research was an on-line survey carried by the authors during September-November 2016. The questionnaire contained items designed to elicit information on.

The survey adopted a respondent-driven sampling (RDS) approach, which combined snowball sampling with a mathematical model that weighted the sample to compensate for the fact that the sample was collected in a non-random way so as to get access to people who met these basic sampling criteria: educated people in the working-age population (18-60 years old) who had good jobs and were neither very rich nor very poor in Bangkok Metropolitan Area. The RDS started with 40 individuals who met such basic sampling criteria and were willing to respond to the questionnaire while belonging to a different age group, different occupations, and different levels of education attainment. Each of the respondents then referred to five other prospective respondents who met the sampling criteria. In total, the survey

covered 200 middle-class respondents at the working-age working in Bangkok Metropolitan Area.

For the qualitative research, the study relied upon an ethnographic approach of participating observation and a face-to-face in-depth interview with ten anonymous resource persons of different characteristics as the basis of selection: religious; atheist; having an experience of practicing such a Thai blessing ceremony as พิธีสู่ขวัญ [*pi-tie su kwan*] (*phithīsòo kwǎy*) and/or พิธีทำขวัญ [*Pi-tie Tham Kwan* (*phithītam kwǎy*)] ; having an experience of the practice of installing a shrine of the household god [ศาลพระภูมิ (सानพระ-พุม) (*sǎan prá-poom*)].

4. Results

Descriptive analysis

Characteristics of the respondents

The on-line survey covered six (6) basic characteristics of the respondents. They were their gender, age, geographical background of their hometown, religion, education, and occupation.

As shown in Table 1, of the total 200 on-line survey respondents in BMA during September-November 2016, from the perspective of demographic background most of the respondents were female (68%), 30% were male and only 2% were intersex. In term of age, more than half of the samples were in the middle working-age group (ages range from 36 to 45 years old) and nearly half of the respondents were the young working-age, between 18-25 and 26-35 years old.

From the perspective of socio-geographical background, or their hometown, the study found majority of the online respondents having been born and being still living in Bangkok and vicinity (60%). The rest of them had migrated from Central region (13.5%), Southern region (10%), Northern region (6.5%), Northeastern region (6.0%), Western region (2%), and Eastern region (1.5%), respectively.

Almost all of the respondents were Buddhist (94%). A few of them are Islamic (2.5%), Atheist (2%) and Christian (1.5%). The respondents of this study were

well-educated and professional workers. Most of them attained a postgraduate degree (56.5%), while some obtained a bachelor degree (39%). (See Table1)

From the perspective of occupational background, there are six (6) occupations reported by the respondents: Lecturer/Researcher/Academic; Engineer/Electrician/Technician; Medical Professional (Doctor, Nurse, etc.); Accountant/Finance and Banking; Lawyer; Artist; Human resource employees; Private business owner/Self-employed; Government service; and NGOs/Volunteer. The study found that the respondents belonged to the three main categories of occupation. They were Accountant/Finance and Banking (25%), Private business/Self employed (22%) and Lecturer/Researcher/Scholar (21.%). (See Table1)

Table1: Background of the respondents

Basic Characteristics	%	Basic Characteristics	%
Gender: Male	30.0	Religion: Buddhism	94.0
Female	68.0	Christianity	1.5
Other	2.0	Islam	2.5
		Atheism	2.0
Age: 18-25 Yrs.	2.5	Education:	
26-35 Yrs.	38.5	High school/Vocational	2.5
36-45 Yrs.	51.5	Certificate	
46-55 Yrs.	7.0	High Vocational Certificate	2.0
> 55 Yrs.	0.5	Undergraduate (B.A.)	39.0
		Postgraduate (M.A., Ph.D.,	56.5
		Post-doctoral)	
Hometown:		Occupation:	
Bangkok and vicinity	60.0	Lecturer/Researcher/Academic	21.0
Northern	6.5	Engineer/Electrician/Technician	6.0
Northeastern	6.0	Medical Professional (Doctor,	6.0
Central	13.5	Nurse etc.)	
Eastern	1.5	Accountant/Finance and Banking	25.0
Western	2.0	Lawyer	1.5
Southern	10.5	Artist	2.0
		Human resource officer	6.0
		Private business/Self employed	22.5
		Government officer	6.5
		NGOs/Volunteer	3.5

Religious Beliefs and Attitudes

To investigate into spiritualism among the middle class in BMA from the perspective of religious beliefs, the survey posed this question: Do you believe in supernatural powers/spiritual powers? The result of the survey identified those who believed in them as the majority (65%). This compared to 22% of the 200 respondents who were not sure, and 13% who didn't believe in supernatural power/spiritual powers. It is interesting to note that there were only 4% of the total respondents who considered the life of people in the society being determined by fate, while 23% believing in free will. This compared to the majority of the 200 respondents who didn't completely believe in fate nor free will (73%). There were only 3% of the total respondents who believed that a success or failure in work were determined by fate, compared to 68% reporting "Sometimes", and 29% "Never." (See Table 2)

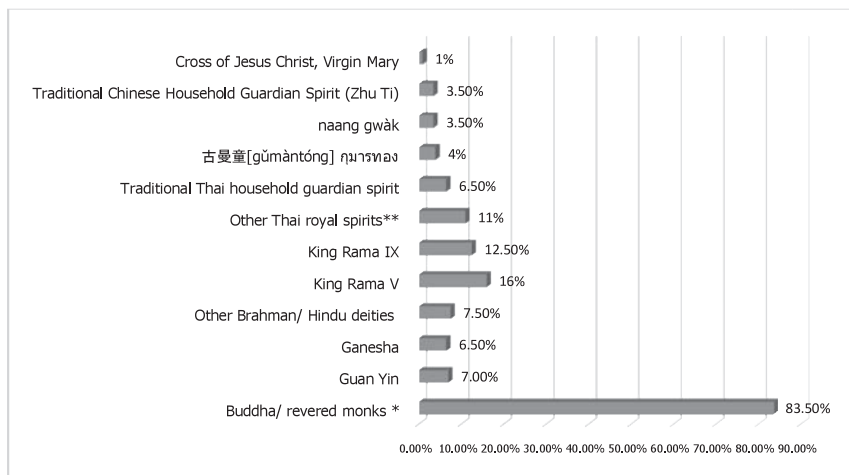
The survey also looked into spiritualism from the attitude of the respondents towards superstitious beliefs. It accordingly asked this question: Do you think that superstitious beliefs play an important role in Thai society? The survey result was that the respondents mainly thought so (83%) (See Table 2).

Practice of Spiritualism

Landscape of Worship Objects

To investigate into the realm or landscape of spiritualism, the survey asked the respondents to identify their objects of worship. Figure 1 lists the objects of worship reported by the 200 respondents in the on-line survey. It shows that the majority of the 200 respondents reported to have worshipped the Lord Buddha and revered monks (statue/ statuette/ images) (83.5%). This is followed by King Rama V (16%), King Rama IX (12.5%), other Thai royal spirits (11%), other Brahman/ Hindu deities (7.5%), Guan Yin (7%), Ganesha (6.5%), traditional Thai household guardian spirits (6.5%), gumantong [古 曼 童 (gǔmántóng)(กุมารทอง)] (4%), nang kwak (naang gawk) (3.5%), Traditional Chinese Household Guardian Spirit (Zhu Ti) (3.5%), and Cross of Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary

Figure1 : Objects of Worship



Source: Calculated by Authors, based on On-Line Survey of Spiritualism of the Middle Class Working in BMA during September-November 2016.

Note: * พระแก้วมรกต (พระ แก้ว มอ-ระ-กต. prá gâew mor-rá-gòt) or Emerald Buddha, พระพุทธรชินราช (prá pút-tá jin-naa-raat), amulet หลวงปู่ทวด (luang puu tuad), สมเด็จพระพุฒาจารย์ (สม-เด็จ-พระ พุด-ทา-จาน. sôm-dèt-prá pút-taa-jaan), amulet พระสิวลี (prá sívalī), etc.

** King Rama VI, สมเด็จพระเจ้าตากสิน (สม เเด็จ พระ เจ้า ตาก สิน. sôm dèt prá jão dtàak sîn), Prince of Chumphon, etc.

In Thailand, all Buddha images, regardless of size and condition, are considered as sacred objects. Even so, this study found these images of the Buddha to be very popular among the respondents participating in the on-line survey: พระแก้วมรกต (พระ แก้ว มอ-ระ-กต. prá gâew mor-rá-gòt) or Emerald Buddha and พระพุทธรชินราช (prá pút-tá jin-naa-raat). Others are revered monks, both in the Lord Buddha' s and contemporary period. The former was พระสิวลี (prá sívalī). The latter included หลวงปู่ทวด (luang puu tuad) and สมเด็จพระพุฒาจารย์ (สม-เด็จ-พระพุฒ-ทา-จาน. sôm-dèt-prá pút-taa-jaan). They were reportedly ascribed with the power or พุทธคุณ (พุด-ทะ-คุณ. pút-tá-kun) to bring good fortune and prosperity to those who worship or pray for their blessing. Among them, the amulet Luang Puu Tuad, amulet sôm-dèt-prá pút-taa-jaan were also believed with the power to protect the owner from danger or harm, including harmful spirits.

The above-mentioned Buddha statues and those of the revered monks worshipped by

the respondents were found to situate not only in BMA but also in other parts of Thailand, both near and far from BMA. For example, the Emerald Buddha, is housed in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew. Wat prá gâew) on the grounds of the Grand Palace in BMA. It is generally considered a potent religio-political symbol and a protective image of Thai society. Meanwhile, พระพุทธชินราช (prá pút-tá jin-naa-raat) is housed at Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat (วัดพระศรีรัตนมหาธาตุ: Temple of Great Jewelled Reliquary) in Phitsanulok Province in lower northern Thailand, rather than in Bangkok.

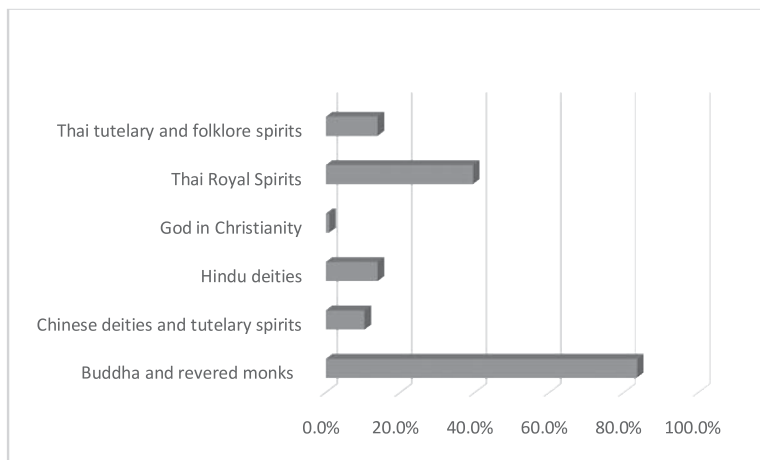
The statue of Söm-dèt-prá pút-taa-jaanis situated in a relatively small temple in BMA. Having lived during the period of B.E. 2331- 2415, he was a very revered Theravada Buddhist monk in Bangkok during the period of King Rama I – V. He is known for the popular incantation คาถาขันธ์ (Chinnabanchorn) - Jinapanjara Gāthā (The Cage of the Conqueror) for people to chant for a safe and secured life. He is also known for the so-called King of Amulet Phra Somdej Wat Rakang. For Luang Puu Tuad, his statue can be found in a few temples across Thailand, except in Bangkok.

Among royal spirits, the popularity of the spirit of King Rama V was found to outgrow. One may note that the notion of the spirit of King Rama IX as a sacred object of worship has turned relatively noticeable after October 13, 2016, the day on which he passed away. The incidence of his death has remarkably changed the landscape of spiritual beliefs in royal spirits in Thailand - as revealed in this study's on-line survey of the middle-class people in Bangkok. However, the worship to King Rama IX is more of an idol of remarkably and admirably good deeds than the belief in a supernatural power, when compared to the belief in other royal spirits.

To come up with a better understanding of the landscape of spiritualism, from the perspective of the objects of worship among the middle class working in BMA during the period of investigation, the study roughly regrouped the objects into six (6) main categories: Buddha and revered monks, Chinese deities and tutelary spirits, Hindu deities, God in Christianity, Thai royal spirits, and Thai tutelary and folklore spirits. The study found that in overall the category of Buddha and revered monks remarkably dominating the landscape of spiritualism for the middle class working in

BMA, followed by Thai royal spirits, and Thai tutelary/ folklore spirits. It also implies that Thai objects of worship outweighing that of non-Thai objects. Among the latter, worship to Hindu deities slightly exceeded that of the Chinese, while that to the God in Christianity is minimal.

Figure2 : Main Categories of Worship objects



Source: Calculated by Authors, based on On-Line Survey of Spiritualism of the Middle Class Working in BMA during September-November 2016.

Spiritual Anchors

One may note that, except for the Thai royal spirits, which also included King Rama V and King Rama IX, the main objects of worship identified in Figures 1 and 2 were not the major spiritual anchors of the respondents. They were rather in the category of other spiritual anchors, which was a marginal of 11.5% in Figure 3. Figure 4 further identified the components of the other spiritual anchors. The study found revered monks to prevail the list, followed by amulets at a slightly higher proportion than Ganesha/ Hindu deities. Certain public figures can be idolized and served as their spiritual anchors, as seen in the notion of movie stars and singers, despite at a very marginal extent as shown in Figure 4.

According to the respondents, their major spiritual anchors included the followings in the respective order of proportion from high to low: parents, teachers, former kings of Thailand/Siam (78.5%); myself; religious doctrine; prophet; and others. It is also remarkable that myself shared a similar proportion (59%) as religious doctrine.

Figure3 : Spiritual Anchors

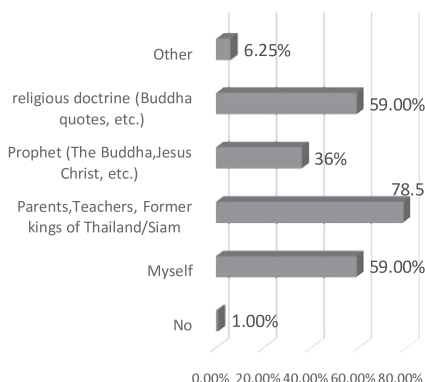
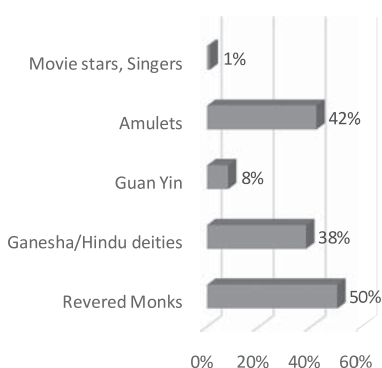


Figure4 : Other Spiritual Anchors



Meditation Practices and Spiritualism

Given the earlier notion of Table 2 identifying 13% of the respondents not believing in supernatural power/spiritual powers, the study carried out an interview with resource persons both involving and participating in 2 courses of Buddhist meditation retreats, one in BMA and the other in the northeast, to identify if there existed a practitioner of what Vesser (2008) called nibbanic Buddhism. The study found some of them among those participating in the courses, both in BMA and the northeast. They were mainly female with a decent career in BMA. It surprisingly found few participants in the northeast course having quitted their decent jobs to be active meditation practitioners along the nibbannic path, while sharing these comments about themselves: "I am a student of the Lord Buddha;" "I am a follower of the Lord Buddha." They were neither interested in fortune telling nor amulets. They also practiced meditation routinely at home.

When the BMA course was over, the study found many participants in those medication courses resuming wearing amulets against harmful spirits and/or for good fortune. These people may be considered as the practitioners of folk Buddhism. Some of them were said to also worship Hindu and Chinese deities while also considering the Lord Buddha and their own parents as their main spiritual anchor. One may also consider this kind of practice as syncretism. There were moreover people who practiced meditation upon a wish to get rid of illness they or someone they loved have had suffered. They considered the meditation practice a merit making, devoted partly to their so-called “protective divinity” and partly to their เจ้ากรรมนายเวร (Cêākrrmñāywer) or the spirit of human/non-human having beings suffered from their deeds whether intentionally or non-intentionally in a past life and making them ill then. This type of people may be considered as a follower of kammic Buddhism as Vesser (2008) called it.

Gender differences in spiritualism

As earlier mentioned, almost all respondents accepted that superstitious beliefs play a major role in people's lives. Even people who refused to believe in the paranormal, they thought that superstitious beliefs still persisted. Table 2, however, reflected that gender differences emerged with women tending to show higher levels of superstitious beliefs than men and intersex respondents. Meanwhile the intersex respondents totally believed in the spiritual power. Such a result from the quantitative study was found to be relevant to information provided by relevant resource persons in an in-depth interview.

As an example, a resource person, who was intersex in his late 30s of age and served as a medium as well as a fortune teller during the period of investigation, viewed that intersex people were more sensitive and complicated than women and men. They were seeking attention and acceptance from others. This was the case even though they accepted that seeking approval from others was a form of insecurity.

Comparing online respondents' opinions on destiny and free will, most of them don't believe in the complete fate or their own free will life, as earlier mentioned.

However, a number of female and male respondents who believed that they had free will were quite different. Male respondents tended to believe that they could live on their own free will (41.7%), while only 16.2% of female respondents answered in the same way. Yet, one may note that there was no significant difference in the relationship between the fate and work achievement. Most of them had the experience of praying or vowing for a successful life. One of the resource persons revealed in a face-to-face interview that even her boss (who owned a big transnational company) often went abroad to pray and vow for a successful working life and prosperity on his birthday.

Interestingly, from the perspective of a belief and worship to tutelary spirits, the survey revealed that there was up to 51.5% of the 200 respondents who reported to have a shrine of household god at home. Despite the fact that they were not the main person to perform a ritual of household god worship, but a participant among other household members.

Table2 : Superstitious beliefs and behavior by gender (%) (n=200)

Questions	Male	Female	Other	Total
1. Do you think that superstitious beliefs play an important role in Thai society?				
Yes	75.0	86.0	100.0	83.0
No	25.0	14.0	0.0	17.0
2. Do you believe in the supernatural power/ spiritual power?				
Yes	51.7	69.9	100.0	65.0
No	25.0	8.1	0.0	13.0
Not Sure	23.3	22.1	0.0	22.0
3. Do we have free will or are our lives determined by fate?				
Free will	41.7	16.2	0.0	23.5
Don't believe in complete fate or free will	55.0	79.4	100.0	72.5
Fate	3.3	4.4	0.0	4.0
4. Have you ever prayed for success?				
Always	21.7	25.7	50.0	25.0
Sometimes	68.3	66.9	50.0	67.0
Never	10.0	7.4	0.0	8.0
5. Have you ever vowed for success?				
Always	5.0	5.9	0.0	5.5
Sometimes	66.7	66.9	75.0	67.0
Never	28.3	27.2	25.0	27.5
6. Shrine of the household god				
Yes	45.0	54.4	50.0	51.5
No	55.0	45.6	50.0	48.5

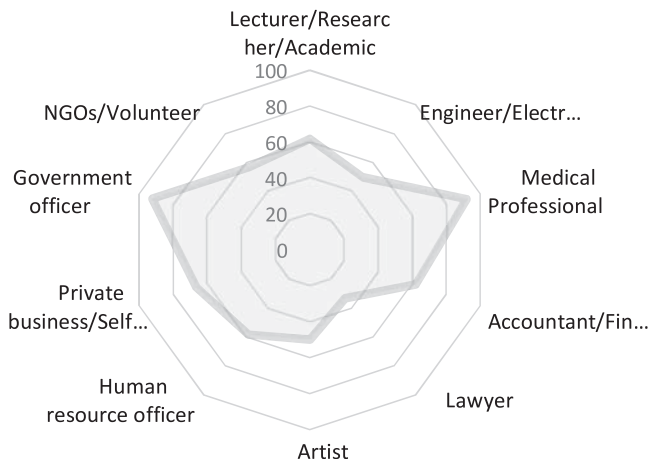
Source: Calculated by Authors, based on On-Line Survey of Spiritualism of the Middle Class Working in BMA during September-November 2016.

Occupational Difference in Spiritualism

Figure 3 shows that spiritualism varied greatly among people of different occupations. It is interesting to note that the survey revealed those practicing medical and nursing professions as well as other health care services as the most spiritualist,

followed by those providing government services, and private business owners/ self-employed. They were understood as people with secured jobs and respectable. This is particularly those in the first two categories.

Figure3 : Superstitious beliefs by occupation



Practice of Communication with Thai Folklore Spirits: Tham Kwan

According to the Ministry of Culture, *Tham Kwan* (ท่าขวัญ) refers to incantations used in the heartening rite to invoke the guardian spirit. Based on an interview with relevant resource persons who have practice the ritual of *Tham Kwan*, this study found their notion supporting what described by Phya Anuman Rajadhon (1962) in his article entitled “The Kwan and Its Ceremonies” published in Journal of Siam Society. The notion was that, according to a Thai traditional belief, there was *kwan* or ขวัญ, an invisible spirit residing in the physical body of all objects, whether living or inanimate objects. The former referred to human being, animals, plants. The latter could be such an important part of a house as the premier house post [เสาเอก]. The *kwan* was believed to be responsible for the well-being of the object in which it resides from the very beginning of life to the end. For example, the *kwan* was responsible for psychological and spiritual well-being of the person. It was also believed that if the *kwan* gets startled, it tended to

flee the body to seek refuge in the wilderness. It would not return to the body until it regained its normal self. During the period when a person loses the kwan (ขวัญหาย kwāyhay), physical or mental illness would incur to him/her.

Phya Anuman Rajadhon (1962: 144) noted in his article entitled “The Kwan and Its Ceremonies,” among the varied ceremonies of Tham Kwan in Central Thailand, the practice of พิธีทำขวัญนาค [pi-tee tham Khwan Naak (*phīthī tham kwāynâak*)] was still in force. This refers to a ceremony performed before ordaining as a monk. Meanwhile, the followings had turned rarely done by the early 1960s, except on the outskirts of Bangkok or in the rural parts of Central Thailand: 1) พิธีโกนผมไฟ [*phīthī kon phomfi*] : A ceremony to shave the so-called fire hair [ผมไฟ] or first hair of a one-month old baby; 2) พิธีโกนจุก [*phīthī kon cuk*]: A tonsure ceremony to cut the top-knot of a child

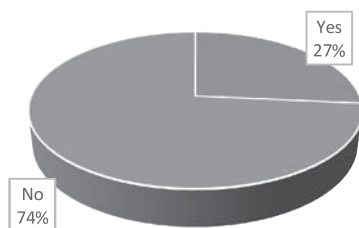
The ceremony to feast the *kwan* for the followings was also rare in Bangkok, except its outskirts and the rural parts of Central Thailand (Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1962 : 144) : 1) A bride and bridegroom in a wedding ceremony; 2) A person returning home after a long absence or after a recovery from a long illness; and 3) Certain domestic animals and inanimate things.

Phya Anuman Rajadhon (1962: 144-5) also noted that to feast the *kwan*, the ceremony may be elaborated or abbreviated in forms. The latter consisted of the tying of unspun white cotton threads [*phook kway*] and/or offering an elegant dish-border *bai si*. Meanwhile, the ceremony of the waving of lights was not in force. According to resource persons who had the experience of practicing a ceremony of *bai su kwan* [*phīthī bāi sī sūkway*] in an interview with the authors, offers cooked rice under a conical arrangement of folded leaves and flowers. While white symbolizes purity, the white thread is symbolic of peace, harmony, good fortune, good health and human warmth and community.

In the North and North-East of Thailand, the feast of the *kwan* was also performed as a ceremony for distinguished visitors who have been temporarily in their midst (Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1962: 144; 156-164).

This study found that the ritual of *Tham Kwan* was not an unknown ceremony in BMA. Figure 3 supports the notion.

Figure3 : Participation in Tham Kwan Ritual



In the on-line survey of 200 middle-class respondents working in BMA during September-November 2016, only 26% of the respondents reported to have had participate in the Tham Kwan ritual. In other words, the majority of the middle-class respondents working in BMA never did so.

Source: Calculated by Authors, based on On-Line Survey of Spiritualism of the Middle Class Working in BMA during September-November 2016.

Based on an in-depth interview with resource persons, the people in Bangkok may have come across with *tham kwan* rituals which originated elsewhere in Thailand in generally two occasions: a) a ceremony held by people who have migrated from elsewhere where the ceremony remains practiced and; b) taking a trip to join upon invitation in a ceremony held elsewhere where the ceremony is a common practice. It is noted that people of those traditions are now trying to conserve it as a unique ceremony and pass it on to the next generations.

Bai Sri Hong Kwan ceremony of Lanna tradition in the northern part of Thailand serves as an example. It is conducted when people have a change in their lives, have to go away from home or have important visitors coming to town as well as in case of illness and accident. It can be in a series of rituals, starting from ritual of bad luck elimination first, then life prolonging ritual and ending with spirit calling ritual. It also involves a dedicated *bai siwork* besides chanting.

Spirit Mediums

According to an interview with a resource person who served as a spirit medium, the study found that one may be capable of performing more than one type of rituals. As an example, a spirit medium who participated in the interview revealed that he had the experience of installing shrine of the household god [ศาลพระภูมิ (सानพระ-ภูมิ) (sǎan prá-poom)] as well as performing the *tham kwan* ritual.

It is interesting to note that the trend of household god installation and that of *tham kwan* ritual were on a decline during the 2015-2016 when compared to the past. This reflected in a decline in income earned such a service by the spirit mediums. Given a recession hitting the Thai economy, people reportedly relied upon temple services for merit making and a ritual to exorcise bad luck or karma [สะเดาะเคราะห์ (Sadeāa kherāah) rather than costly home-delivery ritual services.

Gumantong : Transformation in Figure, A Rising and Falling Fad

Despite Figure 1 showing that there were only 4% of the 200 respondents in the on-line survey worshipping gumantong [gǔmàntóng (กุมารทอง)], an ethnographic research in this study found that

Gumantong, originated in a practice of necromancy by a witch doctor who instilled desiccated fetuses of stillborn babies and provoked the spirits. There are two types of gumantong, evil and benevolent. The former is created to fight the enemies and for devious purposes. The latter is to bring good fortune to the owners.

"From the typical gumantong to *luk thep*, or a child angel of a western look is the key point to note here. Based on a personal observation and an interview with resource persons who own the *luk thep*, the authors found that one tended to own more than one *luk thep*, which costed from around TB4,000 to more than TB20,000 each. The owners tended to carry them around as their own children, cherished, fed, watered, and dressed them in the hope of receiving good fortune in return. They considered themselves modern, and that having and carrying a *luk thep* was a modern fashion. This is considered a very recent phenomenon.

ABC News reported in January 2016 that superstitious consumers embraced this latest doll obsession after a local celebrity reportedly praised the doll for its ability to bring their owners good luck. According to the Economist (2016), *luk thep* became a fad. A Time columnist Bachor (2016) commented that the phenomenon reached "viral status" in January 2016.

Given the rising fad of having a *luk thep* in possession and worshipping one, voices of criticism against such practices was heard loud. Among others, certain

people and social media questioned the psychological effects of the fad, as reflected in ABC News (2016). The Economist (2016) reported mental-health officials suggesting Thais who sought spiritual comfort to better adhering to established religions. By the time the on-line survey was carried out (September-November 2016), owning and worship luk thep turned much much less visible, probably reflecting such a fashion was fading.

Multiple Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

This section presents an analysis of the results of multiple binary logistic regression, which was performed to identify and assess the impact of these set of predictors on spiritualism, the dependent or the outcome variable. In this study, the predictors included these socio-demographic characteristics of the sample population:

- 1) Gender: male; female; intersex
- 2) Age: 18-25 years old; 26-35 years old; 36-45 years old; 46-55 years old; > 55 years old
- 3) Religion : Buddhism; Christianity; Islam; Atheism
- 4) Education : High school/Vocational Certificate; High Vocational Certificate; Undergraduate (B.A.); Postgraduate (M.A., Ph.D., Post-doctoral)
- 5) Occupation : Lecturer/Researcher/Academic; Engineer/Electrician/Technician; Medical Profession (Doctor, Nurse etc.); Accountant/Finance and Banking; Lawyer; Artist; Human resource employee; Private business owner/Self-employed; Government service; NGOs/Volunteer

As shown in Table 3, the results of the logistic regression analysis revealed the coefficient (B) of gender and religion factors to be able to predict spiritualism at the statistical significance of .05. Occupation was another predictor that made contribution to spiritualism, at the statistical significance of .10.

The study also found the possibility for the impact of the female gender to outweigh twice times that of male. Meanwhile, at a closer look from the religion perspective, the results revealed that the followers of Islam were less spiritualist than those who registered Buddhism as their religion.

In the occupational set of predictors, the results showed the tendency for those in medical professions and those working in governmental organizations to be 6-7 times more spiritualist than those in the lecturer/researcher/ academic category.

Accordingly, the results of the logistic regression analysis supported the above descriptive analysis that the respondents who belonged to these groups of the middle-class population working in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area were more spiritualist than others: female, Buddhist, those in medical profession, and those in government service.

Table 3 Results of multiple binary logistic regression analysis

Socio-Demographic predictors	Exp(B)	Sig
Gender:	====	====
Male [®]	2.298** (0.328)	0.011
Female	1.537 (2.006)	0.999
Intersex		
Age:	====	====
18-25 Yrs. [®]	0.536 (1.159)	0.591
26-35 Yrs.	0.396 (1.149)	0.421
36-45 Yrs.	0.927 (1.309)	0.954
46-55 Yrs.	omitted	omitted
> 55 Yrs.		
Religion:	====	====
Buddhism [®]	0.892 (1.271)	0.929
Christianity	0.097** (1.172)	0.046
Islam	omitted	omitted
Atheism		
Education:	====	====
High school/Vocational Certificate [®]	1.796 (1.550)	0.705
High Vocational Certificate	1.443 (0.995)	0.712
Undergraduate (B.A.)	0.887 (0.996)	0.904
Postgraduate (M.A., Ph.D., Post-doctoral)		
Occupation:	====	====
Lecturer/Researcher/Academic	0.615 (0.659)	0.461
Engineer/Electrician/Technician	6.769* (1.092)	0.080
Medical Professional (Doctor, Nurse, etc.) [®]	1.004 (0.431)	0.993
Accountant/Finance and Banking	0.308 (1.265)	0.352
Lawyer	0.615 (1.049)	0.644
Artist	0.862 (0.666)	0.823
Human resource employee	1.231 (0.448)	0.643
Private business owner/Self employed	7.385* (1.088)	0.066
Government service	0.821 (0.822)	0.811
NGOs/Volunteer		

® = reference group, * = significance level of 0.10, ** = significance level of 0.05

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study relied upon an archival research together with a qualitative investigation during 2015-2016, and a snap shot of a quantitative study based on an on-line survey during September-November 2016. Based on such a mixed method of research, this study argued that the landscape and form of spiritualism in Thailand were shifting rapidly among the BMA middle class during 2015-2016. It was also on the way of shifting from what one may have seen in other parts of Thailand, particularly in rural and remote areas, where local creeds of animism relevant to Thai folklore prevailed.

The result of the on-line survey of the middle class working in Bangkok Metropolitan Area during September-November 2016 showed that more than half of the 200 respondents believed in supernatural power/spiritual powers. The statue/image of Lord Buddha and revered monks was found remarkably dominating the landscape of spiritualism for the respondents, followed by that of former kings of Thailand/Siam, and Thai tutelary/ folklore spirits. They much outweighed non-Thai objects of worship, while worship to Hindu deities slightly exceeded that of the Chinese. Except for the Thai royal spirits, which also included King Rama V and King Rama IX, those main objects of worship were not the major spiritual anchors of the respondents. Parents and teachers, together with the former kings of Thailand/Siam were prioritized in the spiritual anchor list. Even so, religious doctrine and myself share a similar high proportion, and well above that of the prophet.

Spiritualism was found to differ greatly by gender and occupation. The female respondents and those engaging these three categories of occupation were relatively spiritualist: Medical Profession (Doctor, Nurse, etc.), government services, and private business owner/self-employed. Yet, their spiritualism may be at a rather moderate level, if one would take the notion proposed by MacDonald (1995) into consideration.

Contributed by religious commodification, the impact of globalized materialism,

and the notion that BMA is a hub of consumerism, animism was found to shifting in form towards more westernized while Buddhist amulets secured their place in the market. Despite the declining trend of tham kwan ritual practice, different forms of such a ritual could be experienced by people working in BMA. Besides BMA as a hub of migrants, an active promotion of tourism to all parts of Thailand were part of the explanation.

There also existed to a certain extent people who didn't believe in supernatural power/spiritual powers and those who believed in free will. Meanwhile, the revival of nibbanic Buddhism and kammic Buddhism were also trendy, contributed by social networks.

Yet, the above notion remains to be seen and further investigated if it will still be true in years to come and to what extent it may change.

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