Memories Displaced by Ritual : Cognitive Processes in the Spirit Cults of Northern Thailand

Memories Displaced by Ritual:
Cognitive Processes in the Spirit Cults of Northern Thailand

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儀礼によって排除された記憶
——北タイの精霊祭祀における認知過程——

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This paper is an attempt to examine cognitive processes involved in religious notions and ritual, which most anthropological studies have hitherto seen as culturally constructed phenomena. It draws on the recent theory of cognitive psychology to elucidate the relationship between a schema —an active perceptual organisation of an individual subject— and culturally constructed ritual and discourses. The work is based on ethnographic observations of Khon Müang spirit cults in northern Thailand. For the Khon Müang, the 'person-spirit schema' is an abstract perceptual framework that constitutes the unstable relationship between body, soul (*khwan*) and external forces, particularly spirit (*phi*). It is argued that the schema is evoked by particular events and situations in everyday life. This schematic experience of individual subjects is articulated with the culturally constructed actions and representations of ritual. The discontinuity between the schema and the ritual process is further revealed in spirit-possession and animal sacrifice, violent acts often inserted into ritual sequences. Examination of the spirit cults shows that ritual is a system of actions to construct an imaginary relationship between the self and the world, removing individual subjects from the perceptual schemata and personal episodic memories that organise everyday experience.

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この論文は，これまで多くの人類学研究において文化的に構築された現象と見なされてきた宗教的概念や儀礼にかかわる認知過程を考察する。そこで論文は近年の認知心理学の理論に依拠しながら，認知主体の能動的な知覚組織であるスキーマと文化的に構築された儀礼や言説との関係を明らかにすることを目指す。その分析は，北タイにおけるコンムアンの精霊祭祀についての民族誌的観察に基づいて行われる。コンムアンにとって抽象的な知覚の枠組みとしての《人・精霊スキーマ》は，身体，魂（クワン）および，とくに精霊（ピー）など外的力との間の不安定な関係によって構成される。このスキーマは日常生活における特定の出来事や状況において経験されることが明らかとなる。主体のこのスキーマ的経験は，儀礼において文化的に構築された行為や表象と分節される。スキーマと儀礼過程との間に存在する不連続性は，精霊憑依や動物供犠などの儀礼場面にしばしば挿入される暴力行為においてさらに明らかとなる。このようにして精霊祭祀の分析から，儀礼とは日常経験を組織する知覚的スキーマや私的なエピソード記憶から主体を乖離することによって，自己と世界の間の想像的関係を構築する特異なシステムであることが示される。

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Practical memory is regulated by the manifold activity of *alteration*, not merely because it is constituted only by being marked by external occurrences and by accumulating these successive blazons and tattoos inscribed by the other, but also because these invisible inscriptions are "recalled" to the light of day only through new circumstances.

(Michel de Certeau 1984　*The practice of everyday life*)

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I intend to explore some cognitive aspects of religious notions and ritual actions that have long been one of the central fields of enquiry of modern anthropology. The privileged status of anthropology here has recently been seriously challenged by a different line of research that sees cultural phenomena as being determined by the basic human cognitive processes as much as by the historical and cultural specificities that most anthropological studies have revealed (Quinn and Holland 1987; D'Andrade 1994). The challenge, indeed, requires anthropologists to adopt a new formulation to deal with religious notions and ritual, which hitherto have been shrouded in a cultural construction previously shared by the people involved (cf. Geertz 1984).

One of the anthropological responses to this is to establish a theory of articulation between the cognitive processes and culturally constructed phenomena such as religious notions and ritual. The point was put forward more than a decade ago by Maurice Bloch who sees the prevailing 'anthropological theory of cognition' as untenable, because it fails to distinguish the human cognitive processes revealed in psychology from the culturally constructed system of representations and actions (1985). His claim also echoed an attempt by Dan Sperber to see cultural phenomena as needing to be studied in terms of their ecological patterns, or what he called the 'epidemiology of representations' in the light of the premises of cognitive psychology (1985).

Although this paper does not respond to all the problems raised by these writers, it intends to clarify the particular question of how a people perceive and act both as an individual subject and within a culturally constructed system of actions. For this purpose I shall investigate the relationship between cognitive process and ritual in the context of the spirit cults long practised among the Khon Müang in northern Thailand. First, I shall try to identify the notion of spirits in relation to their construction of the 'person', in the light of a concept of 'schema' as a perceptual structure. The arguments will then focus on the way in which the person-spirit schema is articulated in a particular type of action enacted in spirit cult rituals. Since the ethnographic data presented here may not be fully attested in strictly psychological terms, my arguments must remain speculative. I hope, however, that the paper will explore some significant aspects of ritual, which have been somewhat ignored in many anthropological studies.

The analyses draw on ethnographic accounts of the spirit cults of Khon Müang in northern Thailand. These people are lowland wet-rice cultivators and live in major intermontane basins in the ten northern provinces bounded by Laos and Burma. They number approximately eight million people, about fourteen per cent of Thailand's total population of fifty-seven million. The religious notions and practices of the Khon Müang are characterised by a unique combination of Theravada Buddhism and a variety of spirit beliefs and rituals (Tanabe 1991; 1992; 1993; 1994; Davis 1984; cf. Tambiah 1970).

THE PERSON-SPIRIT SCHEMA

In dealing with religious phenomena anthropological formulations have often supposed that an overarching conception such as folk theory or collective representation would govern a people's experience and cognition. In this conventional idea religious notions are supposed to be acquired by the people rather passively through a vague process of 'socialisation' without any consideration of cognitive constraints being imposed on them. The ignorance of such cognitive processes in conceptual construction has naturally prevailed in

anthropological studies of ritual in general. The conventional view thus leads us to see ritual as a manifestation of the ready-made conceptual structure, cosmology, or system of meanings rather than of the actor's experience. However, such an anthropological view of religious phenomena, largely underpinned by a variety of theoretical traditions, Durkheimian, intellectualist, or structuralist, has been seriously questioned by the recent arguments mainly inspired by cognitive psychology and more generally by cognitive science (Bloch 1985; 1992b; Boyer 1990; 1993; 1994a; 1994b; Toren 1991; 1993). One such attempt is to understand religious notions and their relevant acquisition, transmission and conservation in a more convincing way in terms of human cognitive processes.

In this paper I intend to illustrate how these actions and interactions are involved in some of the Khon Müang religious notions, and how these notions are linked to a particular system of action, namely ritual. In doing so, a complex frame of perception associated with spirits is seen as a 'schema', through which the actor is able to comprehend the relevant events. A schema is a perceptual structure internal to the perceiver enabling him/her to pick up information and comprehend the relevant events, but it is always activated in response to the environment (Bartlett 1932: 201). The schema, as Urlic Neisser puts it, 'accepts information as it becomes available at sensory surfaces and is changed by that information; it directs movements and explanatory activities that make more information available, by which it is further modified' (1976: 54). What Neisser suggests is that the schema is constructed not only neurobiologically as a nervous system, but more significantly through interactions with the environment, physical or social.

It is also pertinent to note that most of the activation processes of a schema occur automatically and without awareness on the part of the perceiver or actor. In a broad sense, schemata are thus similar to Bourdieu's 'habitus', a matrix of perceptions, appreciation, and actions, which can, integrating past experiences, generate improvisations that are almost automatically regulated and produce practices perpetually (1977: 82–83). Both a schema and habitus that enable the people to evoke inferences and reasoning are neither rigidly structured by culturally constructed rules, nor fully unconstrained as self-interested individual actions; they are flexible and plastic so as to be able to respond to renewed and diversified contexts.[1]

Here I take up a particular schema, which consists of a complex relationship between the person and spirits, because it recurs among the Khon Müang in everyday situations such as anxiety, affliction, and illness, and it is also significantly associated with their spirit-related ritual scenes. What I call the person-spirit schema is an abstract organisation of experiences concerning the notion of the person, which consists of body (*khin, tua*) and soul (*khwan*), and its relations to external forces, often represented as spirits (*phi*). The

fundamental significance and recurrence of this schema among the Khon Müang is explained by the fact that their inferences about illness, affliction, misfortune, anxiety and other critical moments are often, if not always, linked to an attack on the body-soul relationship by spirits. Certainly, spirits are not seen as the only agents to cause physical and mental afflictions; Buddhist karma (*kam*), astrologically defined destiny (*chata, khrɔ*), and violation of customary practices (*khüt*) are also considered as vital causal agents and there are, therefore, many related rituals and healing remedies (Davis 1984; Irvine 1985; Tanabe 1991). Nevertheless, spirits have a more explicit link with what constitutes the person, because the attack by spirits involves direct destruction or destabilisation of the relationship between the soul and body, causing physical afflictions and mental disturbances.[2]

The person-spirit schema is thus construed as a bounded entity consisting of the body and soul, which is under threat from spirits. In a normal and healthy state, the soul resides at proper places within the body, but it is liable to leave the body when the person is severely frightened, attacked by spirits, or faced with any other forces, and this causes illness and other afflictions. The soul, which is sometimes translated as life essence, resides not only in human beings but also in some domestic animals like water buffalo and elephant. The vulnerability of the soul is a key element in most healing rituals and rites of passage. These are in many cases concluded with practitioners calling the soul back to the body (*hɔng khwan*) by tying white cotton threads (*mat mü*) to the wrists of patients or participants. The schema is thus a set of interrelated abstract representations, in which the person exists as a critically maintained equilibrium always under threat from external forces. In other words, the person-spirit schema, reflecting the most immediate and apprehensible manifestation of the human existence, is primarily activated in critical moments in individual life of the Khon Müang.

Khon Müang utterances associated with critical situations like fright and spirit-possession often refer to bodily movements and physical manipulation of the body; when one is severely frightened 'the soul disappears from the body (*khwan hai*)'[3]; the state of getting possessed is generally expressed as 'spirits get into the body (*phi khao*)'; an acute, violent spirit-possession is explained as 'spirits trample the body (*phi yam*)'; and when getting out of a possession state, 'spirits get out (*phi ɔk*)'. These representations of the person in crisis indicate that the person-spirit schema is deeply constrained by a more universal and abstract framework concerning human bodily movements. Mark Johnson calls such perceptual abstraction an 'image schema' or 'embodied schema', distinguished from individual, particular mental images and pictures on the one hand, and from a propositional schema containing statements on the other (1987: 2–4, 23).[4] He takes up, for example, the *in-out* schema or the *container* schema, which organises our experiences and comprehension of the

spatial and temporal states of interior, exterior, and boundary in terms of physical containment, boundedness and the associated in-out orientation (1987: 21–22). Image schemata, based on bodily perceptions and movements rather than linguistic properties, thus function to connect a wide range of different experiences and events within the same recurrent structure.

However, it would be misleading to see the person-spirit schema as simply an 'image schema' itself. This is because while the latter denotes the most basic kind of schemata derived from human bodily experiences, perceptions and movements (D'Andrade 1994: 133), the former, under consideration here, is a culturally constructed schematic structure enriched with particular representations and notions among the Khon Müang. The person-spirit schema should, therefore, be explained from our ethnographic descriptions, but it nevertheless retains recurring image-schematic structures. The person-spirit schema is constructed and transmitted in particular ways in the society, but it has structural relations that emerge at the level of human bodily perception and movement, and constrains inferences in certain basic ways, as an 'image schema' does (Johnson 1987: 38).

Thus what I call the person-spirit schema has the basis of universal image-schematic structures on the one hand, and it underlies a variety of culturally constructed knowledge on the other. It is necessary then to look ethnographically at ways in which the schema is activated among individual subjects, and is related to the construction of religious conceptions, which are often acted out in ritual and inscribed in more discursive forms. Many anthropological studies, however, particularly the intellectualist tradition, have failed to account for this, because of their assumption of a ready-made system of thoughts or conceptions governing individual experiences and interactions. Another anthropological way of explanation relies again on a quite vague conception of 'socialisation', in which cultural knowledge is indeed acquired by individuals but rather passively from generation to generation without any cognitive constraints. Both the intellectualist and socialisation theses are almost entirely ignorant of individual access to culturally constructed knowledge. We need to investigate the process of activation of the schema, by looking at experiences actually undergone by individual subjects involved in an encounter with spirits, the consequences of these encounters and the subjects' memories of them, before assuming the existence of any related shared image among the people.

Careful ethnographic accounts often detect minute differences between the experiences of individual subjects in such critical moments. Let me take some instances of memories of encounters with spirits. A man working in the forest near his village in Chiang Mai was crushed by a falling tree and fainted as if, he said, his soul has left the body through an attack by a spirit. He later realised he had been assaulted by the forest spirit (*phi pa*), when a spirit-doctor (*mǫ*

phi) told him the true cause of the incident. In the same village, when a wo-
man suffered an acute pain in her stomach and went into convulsions, she felt
that she was being attacked by a fearful power and she lost control of her body.
Her symptoms were relieved when a spirit-doctor cast a spell on her body,
which he detected was possessed by a witch spirit (*phi ka*), and when he urged
her to name a fellow villager who might be the spirit's host. These are typical
cases of violent possession by malevolent spirits, but there are other examples
concerning professional mediums, in whom an encounter with spirits is kept as
a more durable long-term memory. Many professional mediums (*ma khi*) in
Chiang Mai talk about their memories of prolonged chronic afflictions (in
many cases regarded as psychosomatic disturbances), which they suffered be-
fore they became a spirit-medium. Their stories describe different symptoms
of disturbance and affliction, but they often talk about similar processes: that
they repeatedly felt the soul leaving and something entering into the body, and
in some cases they dream of something wanting to control the body (Irvine
1985; Wijeyewardene 1986; Tanabe 1994). This suggests that the mediums
perceive the diverse afflictions they experience through a certain types of bodily
relations and movements.

    These instances of encounters with spirits indicate that individuals intui-
tively comprehend the critical event, perhaps some time later, as a complex
process in which something powerful destroys the self, causing the soul to leave
the body. It is thus possible to hypothesise that they comprehend intuitively
the specific event through the person-spirit schema before the concrete image of
assault by specific spirits is consolidated through specialist inferences or
through conversations with other people. The Khon Müang specialists, such as
spirit-doctors and spirit-mediums, again make inferences which principally
depend on resemblance to their own or other persons' experiences, not on any
previously defined conceptions existing within the society, as Boyer points out
clearly in relation to the Fang examples in Cameroon (1990: 35–36). This
entire means that the individual memory of the event, constructed instantly
through the loosely organised abstract schema, has a primary role in shaping
the knowledge of what the spirit really is. Such an occasion-bound memory of
individual events is, in terms of Endel Tulving's formulation, 'episodic me-
mory', to be distinguished from 'semantic memory', which concerns the
generalised knowledge of the world and is essentially acquired in linguistic
forms (1983). That the two types relate to different memory systems, as
Tulving's thesis implicitly indicates, is psychologically controversial.
However, it is useful in explaining the significance of cognitive processes con-
cerning the encounter with spirits, in which personal, episodic experiences ini-
tially form the relevant knowledge, though it may later be objectified in more
linguistic fashion, with defined conceptions and discourses like mythology.
Thus, the significance of episodic memory is, as Boyer puts it, that people use

'their memories of singular occasions inductively, to modify the semantic memory and build a representation of the world', as opposed to most anthropological studies which assume 'their general representations about the world to organise and understand particular situations' (1990: 43–44).

The individual episodic memory can, therefore, potentially modify and even subversively disrupt the well-defined conceptions and discourses in a society. In fact, this has actually occurred in rebellions in northern Thailand, in that the peasants' conception of justice was directed against the orthodoxy of the centralised Buddhist sangha and its allied state power, as I have described elsewhere (Tanabe 1984). Yet what we more often come across in Khon Müang society is the opposite, in which episodic memories are linked to the defined conceptions and discourses established at various social levels. I would suggest that this linkage of the individual episodic memory is derived from its articulation to semantic memory mainly acted out in ritual. Here it is, however, important to look closely at the person-spirit schema to be instantiated by relationships at different social levels, far away from its human bodily basis of physical and kinaesthetic movements. The studies of the role of metaphor by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1984; 1987), and Johnson (1987) reveal the way in which we make use of patterns as 'image schema' based on physical experiences to organise more abstract understanding, as opposed to the standard theories of metaphor that see it as occurring mainly at a propositional level. In Khon Müang religious discourses the embodied schema of the person and spirits has a far-reaching effect in shaping vague conceptions of the relationships between the centre and its bounded entity, basically homologous to the level of the individual person.

Let me take some ethnographic instances. The structure of a house, the most immediate spatial framework of the Khon Müang, contains a pair of important posts called *sao phaya* (or *sao ek*, primary post), the male post and *sao nang*, the female post. The male post is normally planted at the centre and the female post inside the inner bedroom on the north or north-east side, the room in which the shelf of the ancestor spirits (*hing phi pu ña*) is set up. During the house-building ritual an expert exorcises the holes in which the two posts are to be placed, and later when structure of the house is completed he conducts the rite of tying the soul (*khwan*) of the two posts (Turton 1978: 116–117). The spatial structure in which a house, like a person, has its own soul(s) at its centre and its bounded entity is further projected to the conception of a village. A Khon Müang village has its own territory where people live, bounded normally by groves or forests. The forests continue to the next village, throughout the central part of the Chiang Mai basin. Most villages have their own spirit house at one boundary, where the tutelary spirit of the village (*süa ban* or *pǫ ban*) is annually propitiated. Likewise, some traditional *müang* (state) domains, most of which were transformed into modern ad-

ministrative units like provinces and districts early this century, still have their own material symbol at the centre called *lak müang* (the pillar of the *müang*), or, in the case of Chiang Mai, Sao Inthakhin (the pillar of Indra). The traditional rulers held propitiation rituals to the *müang* spirits (*phi müang*) at these places, and local administrative bodies continue to do so. In Chiang Mai the Inthakhin pillar is identified as the soul of the *müang* (*khwan müang* or *ming müang*), which is the centre not only of the domain, but also more specifically of the square fortification of the city (with walls 1.6 km. long, running north to south and east to west, and five gates). This central part of the city is said to have its own life and the northern gate is identified as the head of the *müang* (*hua müang*), with the centre at the Inthakhin pillar, and the arms and legs being at the other four gates in the other three walls (Sarasawadee 1991: 104; cf. Swearer 1987). This anthropomorphic city plan indicates a metaphorical projection from the original schema constructed around the human bounded body. The house, village, and state are thus an instantiation of the person-spirit schema, in which a subtle equilibrium between the soul and body should be maintained because of the threat of external forces, like wild animals, enemies, natural calamities, and even 'communist forces'.[5]

The homology appearing at these different levels reflects the related discourses prescribed in mythology and narratives rather than what people directly experience. The discourses have been crystallised in historical documents and Buddhist texts as well as everyday conversations, and most characteristically have been acted out more dramatically in relevant rituals. In their recent important work on the house Janet Casten and Stephen Hugh-Jones remark that 'the body and the house are the loci for dense webs of signification and affect and serve as basic cognitive models used to structure, think and experience the world' (1995: 3). As in Bourdieu's study of the Kabyle house in Algeria (1990), they seem to assume that bodily interactions with the environment like a house build up a practical mastery and cultural meanings that are conveyed by ritual and explicit discourses. However, it would be misleading to see ritually and discursively constructed meanings directly derived from cognitive processes working through everyday interactions. That the house is personified as a body with its soul(s) and that the state is projected as a bodily image with life are certainly instantiations of the person-spirit schema, but these occur, as Casten and Hugh-Jones suggest (1995: 45), in ritual contexts separate from everyday interactions. This means that the representations appearing at the different levels reflect not the experience the actors actually undergo through their own perception, but proliferated projections through which the actors are directed to recognise the hierarchical order. I would suggest that this relationship between experience and imaginary projections could be explained in cognitive terms, that individual experience and its particular episodic me-

mory tend to be linked with more socially defined semantic memory.

RITUAL ACTIONS

The person-spirit schema significantly relates to rituals such as healing, exorcism, and the propitiation of tutelary spirits. But it is linked to rituals in a way different from that in which a wide range of representations occur in conversations, narratives, mythology, and other literate traditions. More precisely this means that the schema functions in a special way in ritual, as distinguished from discursive representations in which semantic meanings are conveyed and inscribed. This is mainly because ritual is a culturally constructed system of actions, though it does contain meanings which may be thought of or talked about by the participants and even be interpreted within the anthropologists' sphere of enquiry. One of the significant enquiries into ritual should, therefore, be focused on the way in which the perceptual and schematic structures of individual subjects are articulated with ritual as culturally constructed actions.

Modern anthropological ideas that ritual can be seen as action rather than the transmission of meaning are put forward, in different ways, by Leach (1968), Tambiah (1981), Gell (1980; 1985), Bloch (1974; 1986), Barth (1987), Whitehouse (1992; 1995), to mention only recent works. The arguments of Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (1994) become focused on the particularity of ritual actions, or more specifically ritualised actions, as distinguished from everyday actions, in order to understand the cognitive processes involved. In dealing mainly with Jain liturgical rituals (*puja*) in India, they identify the stipulated, prescribed actions the Jains repeatedly follow, despite the fact that individual subjects have their own intentions and attach particular meanings to their actions, which may be derived from the defined discourse of Jain theology or more personal wishes. The ritualised action is, for Humphrey and Laidlaw, defined as 'archetypal action', in that, on the one hand, it is not the act that it mimics, but, on the other, it is no longer just that action. The ritualised action, totally distinguished from everyday action, is now treated as a token of its stipulated type, which is rather a separate 'thing' or 'object', each with its own essential, historically formulated character (1994: 150–151).

The view of ritualised acts as 'archetypal action' also explains the reason why they cannot be reduced to the process that people know the world through schemata in their everyday experience. There is a significant distinction between schemata and ritualised actions, or what is acted out in ritual, though the two are related to each other. I would emphasise here that schemata enable people to react flexibly to new situations and contexts and to organise memory, inferences and reasoning, but these functions are, instead, actively suppressed

in ritual. Thus, according to Humphrey and Laidlaw, 'ritual is a decontextu-alising context'; in ritual people are normally unable to connect what they see and what is acted out with the schemata they have about the way the world is (1994: 145). This occurs even when the people are provided with sufficient discursive knowledge or more fragmented quasi-theoretical interpretations by ritual specialists.

However, despite the apparent difference between schemata and ritualised acts, both are articulated in ritual process. Bloch points out a complicated ritual process, in which fundamental human categories such as labour, reproduction, and the linear conception of time are negated in order to con-struct a vague timeless picture of the world, whereby the established authority is legitimated (1986; 1992a). Bloch and Jonathan Parry also argue that an unchanging order transcending human experience and action can only be created by the symbolical devaluation of human mutability through dramatic contrast with what is experienced. For this, ritual inevitably involves a con-tradiction, because it creates a transcendental order and authority in antithesis to life. Therefore, the symbolical drama in ritual introduces the reality, such as death, the duration of time, exchange and power, into the ideal world where these are replaced by unchanging order (Bloch and Parry 1982: 1, 42). Cer-tainly this formulation elucidates some significant universal features involved in ritual, and, in fact, the same process does fit in well with the Khon Müang rituals, particularly those associated with spirits, as I have analysed elsewhere (Tanabe 1991; 1992). However, what Bloch and Parry argue concerns the dramatic process of symbolic representations linked to linguistic and non-lin-guistic actions, which enable anthropologists to carry out so-called structural analysis. Yet this kind of analysis needs further investigation into the cognitive conditions under which such a ritual process takes place, putting the compli-cated representations together.[6]

To deal with this question, I shall return to the relationship between schemata and ritualised acts. But before that I examine a series of sequences and some details of prescribed acts that form part of major Khon Müang rituals. These include: (1) the propitiation of Pu Sae Ña Sae spirits held at a village south-west of the Chiang Mai city area, which was performed as a royal spirit cult at which a priest from the Chiang Mai court officiated, and which from early this century became a village cult; (2) the *phi meng* spirit cult, one of the domestic cults propitiating the ancestor spirits attached to a particular matrilineal descent group; and (3) the cult of professional spirit-mediums for healing and divination, which have proliferated since the 1970s, particularly in the city of Chiang Mai itself.

These instances cover quite a wide range of social units and a variety of forms of ritual performance. Five villages currently hold the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult around the spirit house in the forest to intercede for rain at the beginning

of the rainy season. The ritual involves the sacrifice of a water buffalo, and spectacular performances by several spirit-mediums possessed by the spirits of the aboriginal Lawa. The Lawa who currently live in the hills are believed to have widely populated the Chiang Mai lowland area before the expansion of the Khon Müang. The *phi meng* spirit cult is held annually or once every few years among the people within the matrilineal descent group for the health and well-being of the members. It is held at a temporary ritual pavilion constructed in the compound of the female head of the group. The ritual, which lasts for two or three days, involves a series of complicated sequences, including the sacrifice of a pig and chickens by a medium, and repeated sessions of dancing by mainly female members possessed by the ancestor spirits. The theatrical composition of the *phi meng* cult also includes several ritualised skits and games, the winners of which, it is prescribed, must be women possessed by the ancestor spirits. In the final example of professional spirit cults, a spirit-medium is possessed by her own tutelary spirit in more routinised fashion in her own spirit house, and gives healing treatments and divination to her clients. The professional cults are in many cases cut off from traditional community relations and personally provide healing, divination and other counselling services to individual clients mainly from the middle and lower classes in both urban and rural areas.

All of these rituals contain certain common ritualised acts associated with the interactions between the spirits and participants. First is the invocation to the spirits, which is enacted by a male priest or a spirit-medium, worshipping by making certain offerings, namely a tray containing candles, joss-sticks, and flowers. Secondly, the invocation act is often followed by sequences of spirit-possession and/or animal sacrifice that reveal the presence of the spirits, which is detectable from a variety of performances by mediums, priests, and other participants. The presence of the spirits, invariably truly tutelary powers, is represented by many linguistic and non-linguistic acts. The spirit, speaking through the medium's tongue, gives oracles and blows on the afflicted parts of a patient's body. In the sacrificial sequences of most rituals, the killed animals are offered to the spirits as uncooked blood and raw meat, together with cooked foods, at the spirit house. The priest ascertains, by divination, whether the spirit is actually present and satisfied with the offerings, before the feast among the participants starts. Finally, mediums, priests or other elder people giving a blessing to the participants or clients conclude most rituals. This act of blessing consists of tying the wrists of the person with white cotton threads to symbolise protection by the tutelary spirits, thereby securing his/her health and well-being.

The series of ritual acts marked by the invocation to the spirits, the presence of the spirits, and the act of blessing certainly indicates an ontological status of the spirits in relation to the human body and soul. Yet it would be

totally wrong to suppose these ritual acts to be identical to what I call the person-spirit schema. This is because while the schema is an abstract framework to be activated in everyday experiences, the ritual acts are a pattern of prescribed actions to be traced by the actor who is already detached from his own experiences. In the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult, the medium possessed by the spirit (Pu Sae) tells a story of an encounter with Lord Buddha thousands of years ago. Her movements and speech are, whether under altered states of consciousness (ASC) or not, already prescribed by constitutive rules that determine the whole ritual process. And she, therefore, engages in these acts, which are external to her own experiences (cf. Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 89). Indeed, the Khon Müang ritual acts associated with the spirits may be 'scripted' as a series of stereotyped sequences apparently similar to the schemata I described above. But they are a different type of action, disconnected from individual episodic memories and actions engendered by the schematic structures.

However, the superficial similarity between the schema activated in individual experiences and the ritual process of the spirit cults has a significant implication in understanding the relationship between the two. Certainly, the schematic relationship of the person always threatened by spirits as external forces underlies each ritual act and the ritual process as a whole. All the rituals associated with spirits are invariably concerned with stabilising the vulnerable relationship of the person through the complicated ritual acts. As shown in a healing session for a patient held by a professional medium, the Khon Müang rituals are bounded by the practical intention of the actors, the explicitly prescribed purposes ranging from curing, ensuring well-being, rainmaking, to getting a winning number in a lottery draw etc. These intentions are to be attained not by normal everyday inferences and reasoning, but by attending to and acting out a series of scripted ritual acts, which bring about a particular result for the participants. The ritual process is prescribed to stabilise the relationship between the person and external powers by transforming the original schema. In a sense, the ritual process draws on and transforms the person-spirit schema, with the intention of leading to specific intended solutions.

It is then necessary to look at the way in which such transformation occurs in ritual. What is evident in most Khon Müang spirit cults is that while the schema involves the unstable state of a person threatened by spirits, it is reorganised by means of certain violent actions such as sacrificing animals and being possessed by spirits. These actions make the entire process different from the original schema. The people often explain the act of possession as a violent intrusion of the spirit into the female medium's body, whereby she is transformed into, in most cases, a male tutelary divinity capable of giving divination, curing and oracles. Most mediums assert that the spirit forcibly

enters their bodies, as if they were being ridden or trampled by something powerful external to them. Thus, although the possession is a stylised and stipulated action, like most other ritualised acts such as invocation, making offerings and giving a blessing, it conspicuously involves psychosomatic changes of the actor, and should therefore be distinguished from those acts. The animal sacrifice is a violent action incorporated within the ritual process, though it occurs not to the actors themselves but to animals. In the sacrificial sequence, the animals are an offering to be killed and consumed by the spirit. In many cases, the sacrificer possessed by the spirit kills the animals, as happens in the *phi meng* domestic cult.[7] Certainly, the animal sacrifice does not involve any direct psychosomatic changes of the actors or participants. But its apparent violent action brings about a sharp discontinuity within the flow of the whole ritual process.

The violent acts are not only different from the ordinary ritualised actions, but moreover bring about a transformation of the person-spirit schema. In the schema, spirits are abstract external forces affecting the body-soul equilibrium, enabling people to perceive flexibly a variety of dangerous incidents and critical situations. In the ritual process, however, these forces are completely transformed into a specific concrete image of the tutelary powers that provide well-being, health and wealth to the participants. I would suggest that the violent acts have a crucial role in this transformation by making discontinuity, which creates tutelary deities that transcend the world of experience. Here, the rituals are no longer concerned with the schema, and the actors, therefore, are naturally directed to follow a series of stipulated actions that make up the whole ritual process.

The disconnection between the schema and the ritual process is further evident in spirit-possession, when we look more closely at the stylised bodily, kinaesthetic movements involved. The possession is, of course, seen as an embodied process, and is conspicuous in an 'image schema' and in more culturally imbued schemata like the Khon Müang person-spirit schema. But spirit-possession further involves a particular type of patterned and 'directed' actions (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 235), which is detached from the experiential basis of the schema. In his study of religious practices among the Muria in India, Alfred Gell focuses on just such a type of directed action that leads to a particular psychological state associated with the assault on the sense of equilibrium. Most of the ritual acts in Muria religion, such as swinging, communal dance, and spirit-possession, are linked to the pursuit of vertigo, which is, according to Gell, neurobiologically derived from voluntary disruption of the vestibular system, as indicated in recent studies of childhood autism (Gell 1980: 225, 241–246).

Although I am not in a position to make any comment on Gell's hypothetical formulation of the vestibular theory of possession trance, there

are ample ethnographic instances in Khon Müang spirit cults that seem to verify the validity of such a line of analysis. In the spirit-possession sequences of most Khon Müang rituals, a medium invokes her own tutelary spirit, holding the tray of offerings above her head and then lights candles and joss-sticks at the altar. Then she sits on the floor, maintaining a rigid upright posture, stretching her neck and staring fixedly at one point. Her arms and hands start to tremble, and she experiences other symptoms such as yawning and feeling nauseous. In many cases the medium then lies down with her head on a pillow for a while, before she becomes completely possessed and changes her clothes to display herself as genuinely transformed into a tutelary spirit. Slightly different and more explicit vertigo-inducing acts are detected in the mass spirit-possession of the *phi meng* cult, where its tutelary spirits possesses many female members of a matrilineal group successively. The female members, who are mostly not professional mediums, gyrate their bodies, while holding on to a red cloth rope hanging down from the central beam in the ritual pavilion. In this moment of greatest excitement, they spin and rotate the body clockwise around the cloth rope in time with orchestral music, which is played faster and faster, so as to induce trance. Becoming giddy, they then let go of the cloth rope and leap up in the air all around the ritual ground in the pavilion, stretching their arms high and shaking their heads quickly, before becoming fully entranced and dancing for their ancestor spirits.

Thus the possession trance is obviously induced as a result of particular types of directed actions, such as the maintenance of certain rigid postures like staring, stretching neck and other upper parts of the body, and more dynamic kinaesthetic movements such as gyrating the body and leaping up in the air. It is also evident that such directed actions are accelerated through dependence on music and on material devices like the gyrating rope and the pillow. These voluntary acts are virtually a cultural construction particular to the Khon Müang society, but at the same time they share certain common features with those of other cultures described by Gell. I would then suggest that these directed actions are completely different from ordinary motor actions that underlie most schemata activated in everyday experiences. The trance-inducing acts are the complete antithesis of the actions derived from the schema. Since the schema consists of the ever unstable relationship between the soul and body threatened by external forces, it reflects a critical state of the ordinary sense of equilibrium. The directed actions in possession trance are enacted to suppress voluntarily the sense of equilibrium, leading towards a disruption of the spatial and temporal structures maintained in ordinary acts.

However, ritual actions, no doubt, do not always lead to disruption of the sense of equilibrium. What distinguishes the directed acts like possession trance from other ritual acts is that the former involves a psychosomatic transformation of the actor who adopts particular kinaesthetic movements and

other culturally stipulated devices. Yet the directed actions still have features in common with ritual actions, because they are totally prescribed, making the actor's body an object itself, and detached from the intentions in everyday actions, although they make use of extraordinary manipulation of the body. It would be pertinent therefore to see the directed actions as an extreme form of stipulated ritual action. Finally, I would suggest that ritual is a system of actions designed to construct an imaginary, therefore potentially ideological, relationship between the self and the world, removing individual subjects from the perceptual schemata that organise our everyday experiences by continuous interactions with the environment. And this aim of ritual is attained through a unique combination of stipulated actions ranging from simple worshipping acts to body-based transformations like possession trance, often punctuated by discontinuity introduced by violence.

CONCLUSION

In concluding, let me recapitulate some major points. Many anthropological studies have assumed that people perceive and act through culturally ready-made conceptions and discourses, particularly in the domain of religious beliefs and practices. The ethnographic accounts of the Khon Müang spirit cults prove rather the opposite, in that people initially experience their incidents as occasion-bound personal episodes before these are incorporated and rearranged in more institutionalised systems of actions like ritual. The function of the person-spirit schema, as an abstract, perceptual framework, illustrates one way in which personal episodic memories are constructed individually, hence diversely, rather than moulded in the existing explicit conceptions and discourses.

In this connection my arguments have focused on seeing ritual as a particular type of action that is detached from the actor's schematic structures. To understand the Khon Müang spirit cults in terms of the cognitive processes, we have to look closely at this disconnection between experience and ritual actions. One of the significant aspects of the ritual actions of the Khon Müang spirit cults is that they always involve violent acts, animal sacrifice and spirit-possession, which create a concrete image of deities by radical displacement of the normal perceptual structures embedded in the participants. It is this 'alerting' effect, to use Gilbert Lewis's term (1980: 30) that removes the whole process of ritual from experiential grounds. The disconnection is further emphasised by certain directed actions in spirit-possession, which lead to the voluntary disruption of the sense of equilibrium. What interests anthropologists in ritual is, I believe, the way in which these ritual actions are differentiated, universally and culturally, from the process of knowing in other activities, rather than any meanings that these actions may transmit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

NOTES

1) Naomi Quinn and Claudia Strauss point out that while a schema is basically an organising cognitive frame of individual mental representations which may or may not be shared by the people, habitus stresses its shared nature in society with no clear relation to motivation and emotion (quoted in D'Andrade 1994: 147–148). Although I basically agree with their statement, what is more problematic about Bourdieu's formulation is that he sees habitus as a general matrix, engendering a shared, unified culture, ignoring the distinction between and articulation of human perceptions and a way of constructing knowledge in particular cultural settings.

2) A typical case is violent spirit-possession (*phi khao*) caused by the forest spirit (*phi pa*), the spirit of bad death (*phi tai hong*), and the witch spirit (*phi ka*) etc. Similar disturbances are also found among patients suffering from the grossly called 'wind illness (*pen lom*)', which encompasses to quite a wide range of disease categories from organic pathology to psychosomatic disturbance (Muecke 1979).

3) For Thai (Siamese) cases, see Anuman 1988: 229. For changes in the lexical meaning of 'soul' (*khwan*) in Siamese (Standard Thai), see Wilaiwan and Placzek 1986.

4) For a special sense of 'proposition', see Johnson 1987: 3–4.

5) Tambiah puts forward, in a structuralist fashion, the grandiose notion of 'galactic polity' as founded in the Buddhist cosmology, which defines a spatial mapping of political powers exercised from the capital (1976). The metaphorical projection referred to here is quite different from his formulation, which deals mainly with historically and ideologically constructed conceptions.

6) In fact, Bloch's study of the Merina circumcision ritual contains substantial analyses of ritual communication, particularly various uses of language such as spells and singing, as well as non-linguistic actions including dance and other performances (1986). Yet in doing this his theoretical emphasis is laid on the twofold linguistic nature of ritual communication; the ritual communication diminishes the propositional quality, becoming performative actions on the one hand, but it still uses language developed from ordinary language, yet modified in a certain way, on the other. For this reason Bloch identifies ritual as a particular type of knowledge, distinguished from everyday knowledge. Thus Bloch defines ritual mainly in terms of its linguistic nature, but does not fully deal with the wider cognitive conditions involved in it. His recent works are, however, devoted specifically to the cognitive processes involved in the formation of cultural knowledge in general, but do not particularly focus on ritual (1992b; 1998).

7) In some recent cases, the sacrificer has been replaced by professional butchers or ordinary villagers not in a possession trance, as in the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult (Tanabe 1992).

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