The Value of the Belief in Phi Poota for the Isam Catholics

Mr. Thaiwat Nikhet

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies

Graduate School of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Assumption University of Thailand
May 1998
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ABSTRACT

The belief in Phii Poota is a cultural belief which has been contextually benevolent to the Isarn villagers for a long time. It holistically enhances the quality of the Isarn villagers to be ethical persons in their community according to ancestral authority under the influence of invisible supernatural entity. It helps villagers form their ethical attitude, their authenticity without juridicial officers. In addition it is a transcendental means which the Isarn sages use to form solidarity within their communities. It is based on the perception of ancestorship which molds the Isarn villagers to be grateful since Phii Poota is not meaningless but it carries the concept of the soul of a significant ancestor who has kept on taking care of villagers who are his descents to live happily since he was alive. This is the primary source of endless love which everyone requires.
But when the Isarn Catholics experience this belief they deny the essential value of the Isarn villagers because of the influence of extreme ethnocentrism and triumphantism which the Catholic Church under her concept of superiority influences her believers. This attitude does not exclude only native villagers of the Isarn region from knowing the spirituality of the Gospel but it also alienates their Catholic spirituality as well. It occurs as such because the negative attitude destructs the radical element which human being has to stand on for earning their concrete happiness in their life: the institution of the family.

Though the Second Vatican Council gives local churches the permission to apply worthy cultural factors in the form of contextual inculturation to improve their Catholic spirituality the Isam local church has not, so far, started seriously.

This research clarifies the contextual meaning of the belief in Phii Poota to promote the positive value as well as indicate implicitly the misunderstanding the Isarn Catholic local church has perceived. It also guides the local church to do contextual inculturation in looking for the value of the kingdom of God in local area. The research proposes the simple thought for Catholic faithful that those who want to reach the final goal of life which Jesus Christ has prepared for them they have to start from what they are. Therefore it is impossible to achieve real holiness without being a real and full human being.
Acknowledgments

This thesis "The Value of the Belief in Phii Poota for the Isarn Catholics" is a humble homage to the Isarn Catholic Church. Besides, this research study is also a tribute to Assumption University for her scholarship offered to me. I am obviously indebted to Lux Mundi Major Seminary, my Alma Mater, where my philosophical knowledge has been sparked; and where I could consult various documents from her library. I am obviously indebted to the department of Philosophy and Religious Studies and its professors who opened my academic sight to global world of knowledge larger than before. I would like to express my thanks to Associate Professor Dr. Seri Phongphit, my main thesis advisor for his kind guidance and suggestion during the period of thesis doing. My grateful thanks are also given to Assistant Professor Artha Nanthachukra, my co-thesis advisor, and his family who assisted me to look for cultural details of the Isarn region in my field study. My special thanks are also given to Professor Kirti Bunchua, my master and co-thesis advisor who facilitates me during my study. I am most indebted to Dr. Sebastian Vadassery who was not only the professor standing by me during my M. A. study but who also has assisted me in every step of my life both physical and spiritual since I have met him. I am deeply indebted to Professor Dr. Chou Norindr who helps shape and sharp my perspective and also coaches me in composing this thesis. Let me confess straight away that without his help and encouragement I would never have completed my studies. I owe special thanks to Dr. Warayutha Sriwarakul who encourages me to argue in philosophical attitude. I am greatly grateful to Subhavadee Numkanisor, Charun Mayot, Kajompat Tangvin, Samakkee Kitchareon and Chun Hanskul for their great encouragement and various supports. I am greatly grateful to Rev. Fr. Somoyt Phapromrit and Rev. Fr. Suksamfound Sonngam who sent me valuable documents from the Philippines. I owe special thanks to Rev. Father Boonlert Phromsena who sent me many Isarn traditional documents. I am greatly grateful to Rev. Bro. Louis Philippe Guimont who read ad corrected some errors. I am also indebted to the popular sages who shared with me the perception of Phii Poota. Without their kind help, I could not have completed this research.

Finally, I am deeply and heartedly grateful to the following persons: Rev. Fr Pius Aisawan Chanluechai, my grand father, and Jacob Kerd Soncharoen who do their graceful mission as Phii Poota to me though they are not Phii; Maria Nuporn Nilkhet, my mother who sacrifices everything in her life for me; and my family for their patience, sacrifice, and encouragement all through my study time.

I intend to dedicate this thesis to Benedict Sathian Nilkhet, my father, Augustine Pattana Nilkhet, my brother, Niti Narinrak, my uncle, Rev. Fr. Peter Leng Kathisened and Rev. Fr. Leo Thaweesak Boonsu. Let them rest in peace with God forever.
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The Books of the Bible

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<tr>
<td>Ac</td>
<td>Acts of the Apostles</td>
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<td>2 Corinthians</td>
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<td>Gn</td>
<td>Genesis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jn</td>
<td>The Gospel according to John</td>
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<td>Lk</td>
<td>The Gospel according to Luke</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 M</td>
<td>1 Maccabees</td>
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<td>2 M</td>
<td>2 Maccabees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mk</td>
<td>The Gospel according to Mark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mt</td>
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The Documents of the Church

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<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>Ad Gentes Divinitus (Decree on the Church’s missionary activity)</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>The Code of Canon Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Christus Dominus (Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishop in the Church)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DH</td>
<td>Dignitatis Humanae (Declaration on Religious Liberty)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DV</td>
<td>Dei Verbum (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation)</td>
</tr>
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<td>FD</td>
<td>Fidei Depositum (Constitution of Propagation of the Faith)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>Guadium et Spes (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HP</td>
<td>Humanae Personae Dignitatem (On Dialogue with Unbelievers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Lumen Gentium (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Nostra Aetate (Declaration on the relation of the Church to Nonchristian Religion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJBC</td>
<td>The New Jerusalem Bible Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Optatam Totius (Decree on the Training of Priests)</td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>Sacrosanctum Concilium (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The trumpet is going to sound,
and then the dead will be raised imperishable.
and we shall be changed...
this mortal nature must put on immortality.
1 Co 15: 52.

1. Background of the Study.

Catholic faith has been officially implanted in the Isarn region or the Northeast of Thailand since April 24, 1881 by two French missionaries of M.E.P. Congregation.¹ Fr. Constantine Jean Baptiste Prodhomme and Fr. Francois Xavier Marie Guego² according to the appointment of bishop Vey of Bangkok diocese on January 1, 1881. At that time the governor of Ubonrachathani province, Chao Promthewa Sadetnohkhram, was on his work in another town. After staying in the governor’s office according to

¹It is a Catholic male religious congregation which was established by a group of French missionaries in 1660 according to the policy of The Congregation of Faith (or Propaganda Fide, established in 1622) to balance the political power and authority of Spain and Portugal who were the Papal bulls during that time. The complete name of this congregation is Missions Etrangeres de Paris. See more details in Sarasasana Office (Ed.) History of Catholic Church and the Catholic Church in Thailand (in Thai). Bangkok: Sarasart Press, 1967), pp. 197-201, 571-577.

²Constantine Jean Prodhomme was born on January 24, 1849 in Gonon, Mayenne, France. He reached Bangkok in 1874 as the rector of a French missionary group. He was appointed Vicarius Apostolicus of the Isarn region in 1888. Francois Xavier Marie Guego was born on April 19, 1855 in Lanfains, Côtes du Nord, France also. He reached Bangkok as a French missionary in 1879.
the permission of the deputy governor for a few months, which was a good chance for observing and studying policy of officials in that town, they settled in the southern area of the Moon river closed to the office, which has been later called Ban Bung-ga-taew. That first Catholic community consisted of servants, patients who were cured by the two missionaries and former slaves¹ liberated by legal process or payment of the missionaries. As Claudius Bayet, a retired French bishop of Ubonratchathani diocese, records:

October 17, 1881 the Fathers went to live in the place which the leader of governor’s officials has assigned for them. They built a chapel and a prayer room by using materials from a Laotian-style house they had bought. It also served as a dormitory for the Fathers. Servants, freed slaves and the patients whom the missionary cured built their own huts around the chapel. This was the official settlement of the first Catholic community in Isarn. There were thirty in all (Bayet, 1984: 33).

From then on, Catholic faith began to flourish among the Isarn people. The faith of Catholic believers was continuously nourished through missionaries of the Church under the gift of the Holy Spirit by two factors as follows:

(a) The preaching of the Good News which is based on the absolute agape idea: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind and you must love your neighbors as yourself” (Mt 22: 37-39, cf. Mk 12: 29-31; Lk 10:27). This perspective was emphazisingly commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ before his ascension into heaven to evangelize the world:

¹ They were Laotians from the city in Laos named Puan, who were caught to be sold as slaves by the Kula (Burmese) people. See Robert Goste. “A History of Catholic church in the Isarn Region” in The Catholic Studying Committee for the Isarn Culture. Religion, Culture and Tradition in the Isarn Region (in Thai). (Bangkok: Earth and Art Press. 1992), p. 67.
All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I give you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Mt 28: 18-20; Mk 16: 15-16; Lk 24: 47).

(b) The reception of sacraments, the signs and means by which God sanctifies men through the Church, and builds up the mysterious body of Christ (SC 59). These two factors empowered the Isarn Catholics to grow in spiritual life and share their faith with others.

But as time went on, the Isarn Catholics’ spiritual life becomes very superficial because the emphasis of religious life of individuals has been put on external rituals and manners that are expected by the institutional Church rather than on their inner spiritual growth. They have to attend the celebration of the Eucharist every Sunday. It usually takes not more than two hours including sermon and information. It is a very short period of time to instruct theological knowledge to villagers who are not familiar with western philo-theological concepts to understand what the Church teaches about God that expresses in liturgy. If they do not attend a Sunday mass without serious reason, they commit a grave sin (c 1246-1253) because they violate the third precept of the Ten commandments. The consequence of committing a grave sin is either to be sanctioned publicly by other believers such as prohibition to join any religious activity that seems to be the death from his/her community in this world or to be in hell after death. They have often confessed their sins identified as the violation of the Ten commandments through the Sacrament of Penance according to the obligation of the third precept of the Church. Each confession of a Catholic takes a few minutes. This is the way that Catholic believers reconcile themselves with God. If they disobey the third precept of

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the Ten commandments they will be sanctioned by the Catholic community and will also face the following measures: the prohibition to receive any sacraments except the Sacrament of Penance; not to be buried in the cemetery of the Catholic community; and the obligation to participate in charitable activities in order to collect merits for their future life in the kingdom of God. But this way seems different from that of the early faithful community in Jerusalem which witnessed their discipleship of Jesus Christ from within through sincere charity and glorification of God from the bottom of their hearts in the Jewish context but with Jesus Christ's paradigm. The Isarn Catholic believers still behave themselves like the Isarn people and practice their religious life through religious obligations with very little contextual understanding of Christ's teaching. In short, it could be said that they are more passive than active in their spiritual life because of their mutual cooperation and assistance their economic life has been improved considerably.

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2 The atmosphere of the early faithful community was fraternal, charitable community that had been freely expressed in religious activities from within through their belief. They owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions voluntarily and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed (cf. Ac 2: 42-47).

3 It is a fact that there are more material facilities for both laymen and ministers of local churches nowadays. There are new modern-style churches which can enthuse faithful to be in heavenly atmosphere within Catholic communities. Ministers of the local churches have more comfortable means and equipment's for pastoral works than the past. There is the great example of being witness of Faith in Ban Songkorn, Mukdaharn province: the monument of the seven blessed martyrs of Thailand surrounded by the environments which, in Western paradigm, should motivate the Isarn faithful to improve their Catholic life. See more details in Samran Wongsa-ngiam et al. (Eds.). The Memorandum of the Consecration of the Shrine in Honor of the Blessed Martyrs of Thailand (in Thai). 1995.
Though they embraced Catholicism, yet the Isarn Catholics could not ignore the social, cultural and religious practices of other Isarn people because they have to earn their life in that social context. They usually study in their village-governmental schools which follow government policy. Therefore, psychologically speaking, they automatically assimilate the Thai-Isarn culture and the substance of various subjects as well as their teachers' and friends' examples. Due to the missionaries' influence, the Isarn Catholics tried to completely give away the past which isolated them from the main stream of life in the Isarn realm. It is a paradoxical pattern of human life in a certain way.

At present, all Catholics in the world are living in a new paradigm of faith. after Pope John XXIII opened the Catholic Church to a new world era. But the Isarn Catholics still continue to follow literally the Ten commandments and the commandments of the Church without contextual understanding of the meaning of being Catholics, particularly in the light of the Second Vatican Council which promotes the new way of life of Catholics vis-a-vis the Church, the gospel and the relationship vis-a-vis the Catholic hierarchy and the other religious believers and laymen. Thus, today there is a real dichotomy between faith and practice among the Catholics in the Isarn region.

From sociological viewpoint, the Isarn Catholic communities hardly welcome their non-Catholic neighbors who live among them. Generally they check their background before permitting them to settle in their communities. If the new comers practice their faith differently from their own traditional practices, they get very little cooperation from these communities. Moreover, most of the Isarn Catholic settlements are separated from other ethnic groups in the surrounding area. They have their own ghetto. Living among neighbors of different faith, they are afraid to have to mingle socially with them. They think that if they communicate with neighbors of other faith they may even loose their Catholic faith. This is another dichotomy. Jesus Christ and his representatives dogmatically taught us to love each other even our enemies. The Isarn Catholics behave themselves very carefully and treat their neighbors of other faith or cultures as their enemies or strangers.
The Isarn Church rituals still keep the traditional Roman Catholic style and use royal vocabulary, though they have been permitted by the Church to use local language and symbolism for enriching their spirituality (SC 36). The French missionaries, who were seriously molded by the pre-Second Vatican Council understanding of the faith, shaped the faithful accordingly, emphasizing the Ten commandments, reception of the Sacraments and other juridical aspects of Catholic life without having much contextual understanding. There are many difficult problems for them to understand through signs and symbols which seem to be strange matters imported from the Western world with which they are not familiar. Such matters cause misunderstanding or unclear perceptions to develop their spiritual life. Thus, in order to maintain their Catholic status as required by the Church, they follow the rituals rather than nourish their faith. This is opposed to the significant teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which states:

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the Body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs they

\[1\] Texts of catechism have been used in Catechetical teaching in dioceses in the Isarn region are the same as, or edited from texts used in previous four or five decades which based on the pure perceptions of Roman Catholic faith. See, Outline of Catechism Teaching Grade One to Grade Six (in Thai), Sakol Nakorn: Catechism center of Thare Nongsaeng Archdiocese, roneoed.; and The Outline of the Catechetical Intensive Course (in Thai). (Mukdaharn: Northeast Catechetical Center, 1997), (roneoed).

\[2\] There is an evidence to support this conviction: Samran Vongsa-ngiem concluded from his research in 1976 entitled “the Understanding of the Sacrament of Penance in Thailand” that some Catholics in Thailand do not know which are sins to confess, or do not understand the meaning of sin. He expects that if the teaching of the gospel through Catholic faith immerses in their lives and expresses its effects through their daily lives, the spiritual life of Thai Catholics as well as the Isarn Catholics will be improved within themselves gradually. See more details in Samran Vongsa-ngiem. Liturgy 3 (in Thai). (Saengtham Press, 1992), pp. 91-102.
also instruct. They are not only presupposed faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it. They do, indeed, confer grace, but in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace to their profit, to worship God duly, and to practise charity. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that the faithful should easily understand the sacramental signs, and should eagerly frequent those sacraments which were instituted to nourish the Christian life (SC 59).

This shows that the Second Vatican Council emphasizes on perception rather than performance, genuine understanding rather than keeping traditions, existentializing gospel rather than holding commands. It means that the language and symbols of the Sacraments should be so simple and clear that they can nourish their daily lives. They should be the means which lead believers to reach God. But most people in the Isarn region are illiterate and cannot interpret metaphysical and allegorical language of the rituals which have been based on Romanized-perception contextually. It is very easy to absorb meaning of signs and symbols in Catholic rites for those who used to learn and understand western paradigms. But for laymen who have not been familiar with western symbolic perceptions it is very difficult to perceive religious understanding properly. Moreover those symbolic elements useful to describe religious concepts, with which villagers have been familiar, have usually been disdained by ministers of the Church as superstitious elements, while the Second Vatican Council always pursues its followers to “acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture” (NA 2). This is another form of dichotomy. Consequently, the Isarn Catholics have still been passive and, it seems to the researcher that, the local churches in the Isarn region cannot perceive the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

The local culture of the Isarn people, contextually, has been based on the belief in “Phii” or spirits for a long time and has existed before the involvement of Brahmanism and Buddhism. The agent of this belief, Phii, dwells in everywhere and in everything. Even a temple still has its own Phii. Whenever the Isarn people have to
take part either privately or publicly such as birth, travel, marriage, death, etc., or a confrontation of any emergency case they have to tell or consult their Phi (Phongphit, 1986: 37). Phi with which villagers are respectively concerned are acknowledged as invisible good beings or good spirits. But each bad Phi, such as Phi Pob, Phi Pow, Phi Pong, Phi Prai and Phi Taiy Hong, is exorcised from the Isam communities (Pholsawadi, 1993: 45-58). Though there was an official declaration from the central government prohibiting people to believe in Phi (Wipakpojnakij, 1970: 559-587), the belief in Phi is as alive in the Isam communities as ever. The common evidence about the Phi is a residential figure shaped with various forms according to environmental circumstances and called Phi with whom people are concerned. A shrine is a normal symbol for Phi in the Isam region and elsewhere in Thailand. The belief in Phi in the Isam region, frankly speaking, has helped the Isam people to live together peacefully. The Phi is always considered as a super powerful entity of a village, a town or a community that affects people. More than that a good Phi is always acknowledged as a member of their community.

The Isam Catholic leaders as well as the faithful consider Phi of the Isam people as a demon, a devil, or evil spirit. In addition, any credence to Phi is considered superstitious. Consequently, most Catholic villagers of the Isam area communities live separately from other villagers for the purity of their belief. Moreover, those who accept paganism or the converts to other cultures must be excommunicated from the Church and Catholic community (Bayet, 1984: 142). Even dead body of each excommunicated person must be buried outside the Catholic cemetery.\(^1\) Commenting on this, Fr. Paul Srinuan Sriworakul said in his catechism, a kind of official catechetical text for the Isam Catholic communities, that:

> Participation in any activity related to Phi is sinful and prohibited. Since showing respect to Phi is to worship other gods than the Catholic God

\(^1\)The researcher experienced that a villager of his home town who changed his religion from Catholic faith to worship Phi was buried outside the cemetery of the village though that one was a relative of the pastor of that parish.
who is the only true God. Other gods cannot replace the real God (Sriworakul, 1965: 45-46).

This misunderstanding is extended to all annual celebrations of Isarn people like "Heed Sibsong Khong Sibsee" which is assumed as traditions originated from various perceptions of Phiī. The Isarn Catholics have no possibility to join any traditional feast or ceremony performed by their neighbors especially those concerned with the idea of Phiī. If they partake and join any secular feast, they are charged of committing a grave sin. They must repent publicly for that. This dichotomy between their belief and culture is a huge gulf separating the Isarn Catholics from their neighbors.

Frankly speaking, the Catholic Church herself has many conceptions in their faith as Phiī of the Isarn paradigm. She agrees with the conception of angels, of souls of the dead, and even of God Himself. All of them are invisible existence according to theologico-philosophical paradigm. The summary of Catholic faith which is described in the Creed or Credo is concerned with the belief of invisible existence. According to The Apostles’ Creed, it says:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. ...I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of

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1 *Heed Sibsong*, or twelve rituals, is the Isarn annual traditions of each month through a year. *Khong Sibsee* is a set of descriptions for ethical practices of each individual status in the Isarn tradition. See more details in The Assembly of the Isarn Monks in Seventeen Provinces. *The Isarn Heritage* (In Thai), (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn Rajavitayalai, 1990), p.35-82.

2 Catholic catechism teaches that each human soul will receive individual judgment after death and then the second judgment will take place in the paorousia moment.

saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit also known as the Holy Trinity in the Catholic
belief are invisible spiritual Beings. Besides, the Creed speaks of the communion of
saints. This perception involves not only the pilgrim faithful in this world but also the
souls of the dead staying with God in heaven or still being purified in purgatory. Each
of them is invisible as Phii in the Isarn context. Therefore there is equivalence between
the Catholic’s concept of soul and concept of “Phii” in the Isarn context.

God through the Church always instructs his people to obey and respect their
parents, relatives and ancestors. It is included in the fourth commandment: to honor
your father and your mother. The Church always prays for those who have gone to their
eternal rest. The celebrant (s) will officially set a part of the Eucharist prayer in each
Mass for the deceased. Moreover, the Church acknowledging the significance of the
soul dedicated the entire month of November as the praying period for souls in
purgatory. Besides, she also dedicates special days for remembering angels, archangels
and saints according to her belief.

The most popular Phii which has been very closed to the Isarn people, as well as
to local people of Thailand1 in general, is Phii Poota. Various experts discuss on this
ritual of the Tais, ancestors of the Isarn people, is the worship of ancestor’s spirit or the
spirit of thier hero in the past. Apichart Thongyoo’s description of the Isarn tradition in
“Ban-Phii-Wat” writes that Phii Poota is the ancestor spirit protecting and taking care of
their living relatives in their village so that they may have a safe-peaceful lives. He goes
on to say that each village has its own “Phii” living in symbiosis with that particular
community. This entity is the invisible governor and protector of the village promoting
the harmonious well being of the people (Thongyoo, 1986: 27). Seri Phongphit and

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1In the North this Phii is called “Poo Saè Ya Saè”, and “Phii Ta Phii Yay” in the
South; while the central part of Thailand calls “Phii Makesak Lakmuang”.
Kevin Hewison also qualify Phii Poota as a good Phii which is acknowledged to be the spirit of the person who founded the village and continues to care for their children (Phongphit & Hewison, 1990: 67-68).

Nevertheless, Chattip Nartsupha, describing the origin and growth of an Isam village, says that after finding a new fertilized area or “Din Dam Nam Chum” (literally means “black soil filled with water,” or fertilized area), the hunter or discoverer would persuade or invite his relatives or friends to come to the new area to settle down and build a real kinship and establish a mutual assistance and to improve their quality of life especially in economic trend. From this arose the basic belief of the local villagers in their ancestors. They believe that when a person dies the soul still stays within their relatives’ community to take care and help them. There will be a shrine built in the forest called “Don Poota” closed to the village. It symbolically means that the belief in [their] ancestor spirit which is the structure of tribal solidarity has been still firm in the Isam region (Nartsupha, 1984: 31-45, 89).

The Roman Catholic Church has beliefs and practices in spirits; yet it considers the belief in Phii Poota of the Isam people as opposed to the Catholic faith. But time has changed. The pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world “Gaudium et Spes” encourages the researcher to bridge the gap between Catholic faith and the local culture. It says:

Culture, since it flows from man’s rational and social nature, has continual need of rightful freedom of development and a legitimate possibility of autonomy according to its own principles. Quite rightly it demands respect and enjoys a certain inviolability, provided, of course, that the rights of the individual and the community, both particular and universal, are safeguarded within the limits of the common good (GS 59).

In addition, Pope John Paul II acknowledges that Thai culture contains ancient and venerable wisdom which is suitable for Thai people who are marked with the sign of
Christian faith necessary to enhance their spiritual life. He addresses his acknowledgment on this dimension in his homily while he celebrated the solemn Mass at the National Stadium in Bangkok during his visit to Thailand on May 10, 1984 that:

You [Thai Catholics] have the privilege of living in a kingdom whose citizens enjoy religious freedom, where men and women are free to worship God according to the dictates of an upright conscience... You find yourselves in a world where the majority of your fellow citizens embrace Buddhism, the complex of religious beliefs and philosophical ideas which is rooted in Thai history, culture and psychology, and which profoundly influences your identity as a nation... Your cultural heritage as Thai people are intimately linked to the indigenous Buddhist tradition, which provides a fertile terrain for the seed of God’s word, proclaimed by Jesus Christ, to take root and grow (Committee of Historical Record, 1984: 104-106).

The Federation of Asian Bishop Conference (FABC) expresses in its statement on the mission of the Church that to enrich spiritual life of Catholics in local churches there must be a dialogue with Asian realities, particularly local culture. Speaking of inculturation, it comments that:

It [inculturation] takes place when the local Church lives its faith and the Gospel in terms of the cultures of its people, the Church being enriched internally by these cultures and in turn transforming them from within, bringing them closer to the foreshadowing of the Kingdom of God (Rosales and Arevalo, 1992: 266).

The Catholic Studying Committee for the Isarn Culture which consists of bishops, priests, religious members and laymen has set many exposure-immersion programs of Isarn culture since 1987. Those participants experienced that there are many valuable components in the Isarn culture that can nurture the Isarn Catholic spirituality. One of the participants in such group, Bishop Joachim Payao Maneesap reflects that:
There is a hidden value in the basis [of the Isarn culture] which is unseen. Many concrete demonstrations in the Isarn culture reflect the relation between the Isarn people and institutions of their beliefs such as unseen person(s), supreme beings, supernatural beings, sacred entities. These values have moulded the Isarn people to perform virtuous conducts towards relatives, neighbors and nature. The Isarn people unite themselves with supreme beings, human being and nature harmoniously. It is the serene value of the gospel and the value of the kingdom of God in local culture (The Catholic Studying Committee for the Isarn Culture, 1992: 33).

Encouraged by these statements from the Church, phenomenal evidences of the Isarn culture having gradually formed its people for a long time, and his own experiences, the researcher who is an Isarn Catholic inhabitant attempts to bridge the chiasm between the traditional Catholic faith and the Isarn culture in this research by focusing on the value of Phii Poota. Since he is convinced theoretically that while "Roman Catholic" is a religion which has the same common standard of personal development to achievement of life as other religions, it should be a means persuading her members to reach their spiritual final goal as Jesus Christ proclaimed, the eternal life, in the contextual circumstances that each individual exists because of its Catholicity or universality (FD, 1994: 192). Moreover, each individual, including the Isarn people, has a right of freedom to make one’s own decision to develop one’s self in one’s social

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1 J. Clayton Feaver describes religion that “It [religion] implies an interpretation of the meaning of reality in terms of its value to and for human beings, implies a consideration of the meaning of the universe for human well being, implies reckoning with the possibility that something at the core of reality does respond and satisfy human demands for life and fulfillment of destiny” (Feaver and Horosz, 1967: 6). Then later, William B. Williamson, defines that it is the acceptance of a belief or a set of beliefs that exceed mundane, matter and concern; and the psychological conviction which motivates the relation of belief and morality in everyday living and consistent behavior (Williamson, 1976: 30-31).
context to reach the final goal of life for which is suitably rationalized. This perspective has been officially declared in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). It is issued that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (Ermacora, Nowak & Tretter, 1993: 15). He is further convinced that a necessary condition to be a saint, a holy one or a citizen of the kingdom of God in the Catholic perspective is to be a real human being within the spirit of Gospel in a particular space and time respectively. For Jesus of Nazareth suggested that every one who wanted eternal life had to act on his words not only to listen to (Mt 7: 24-27) according to one's status (Jn 7: 3-11; Mt 16: 24-28, 19: 16-22), as he himself exercised his life in Israel as the great model. The researcher dares to say that man cannot be a saint unless he knows who he is. In addition, that one has to start sanctifying himself from his own existence. It is impossible to build some thing up without knowing the nature and definite function of materials prepared for such a construction. To change oneself to being a holy one requires the transformation of the self into a holy one because a real development of human personality to achieve religious holiness is the process of a gradual explosion from within oneself assisted by the teaching of the founder of a religion that one believes. The Federation of Asian Bishop Conference realizes this status. It expresses implicitly about the vision of the Church to come in Asia that:

For the Asia Churches: the decisive new phenomenon for Christianity in Asia will be the emergence of genuine Christian communities in Asia- Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others. The consequences will be tremendous not only for the ministries of the Asian Churches which will have to perform but also for all aspects for their life. We should beware of seeing our future mission in categories that belong to the past, when the West shaped the Churches’ history. If the Asian Churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future (Rosales & Arevalo, 1992: 70).
Hence, this is appropriate to start to do asianization of the Isarn Catholic churches in the Isarn context.

2. Significance of Study

1) This study will decipher and philosophize the Isarn culture and its practices particularly the belief of and the respect given to Phii Poota.

2) It will also analyze the Christian belief in spirits, angels and saints.

3) It will look into contextual inculturation that will lead to full integrated life among the people of the Isarn region.

4) This will help the Isarn Catholics to enrich their Catholic spiritual life and to be part of the main stream of their authentic life. Thus they could be the “salt of the earth and the light of the world” (Mt 5: 13-16) by enriching the Isarn culture through the message of Jesus Christ.

3. Objective of Study

1) To know what Phii Poota is.

2) To understand the nature of the local belief in Phii Poota.

3) To realize the attitudes of the Catholic Church towards other cults.

4) To search for the value of the kingdom of God in the Isarn culture through the belief in Phii Poota.

5) To study how the value of the belief in Phii Poota can be recognized as the expression of the spirit of God in the light of the Gospel by the Catholic Church.

6) To promote the idea of ecclesial inculturation.

7) To enhance possibilities for Catholic believers to realize their faith in their own cultural context.

4. Status of the Question

To accomplish these goals the following questions are formulated:

1) Why were there bad impressions about local cults and traditions at the beginning of evangelization in the Northeast or “Isarn region” of Thailand?
2) Can there be a relationship between the Communion of Saints and Phii Poota?

3) Can the value of the belief in Phii Poota be inculcated into Catholic belief?

4) Can the Catholic Magisterium renovate the value of the belief in Phii Poota as a positive element to fulfill Catholic belief in the Northeast of Thailand? How?

5) Can rituals about Phii Poota be applied in the local Church liturgy?

5. Limitation and Scope

In this research, the researcher limits himself to the study of the influences of the belief in Phii Poota upon the Isam people from available literal documents and ritual practices of the Northeast of Thailand. Due to the dubious perception of Phii Poota which former experts described in their works the researcher has to discover the contextual meaning of Phii Poota from both demographical and cultural dimensions. Then he assesses the meaning of that belief for the Isam Catholics. He primarily focuses on the phenomena of the belief in Phii Poota and its ritual practices among four major ethnic groups who have been in that region for two thousand years at least. They are Thai-Lao, Phu-Thai, Thai-Yo, and Thai-Khmer groups.

Sampling field studies include four areas: Northern area (Loei and Udornthani province), Eastern part (Mukdaham province), Central area (Mahasarakham province), and Southern part (Surin province). The survey is based on both field surveys and documents.

To explore the value of the belief in Phii Poota as clearly as possible it is the duty of Chapter Two to describe the phenomena of the belief in Phii Poota. Chapter

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1. Experts usually describe the meaning of the belief in Phii Poota as a cultural heritage without contextually analytical and critical dimension.

2. Srisakara Valibhotama (Valibhotama, 1995: 23, 34-35) hypothesizes from his historical discovery of Isam by archeological method that the ethnic group to whom belonged the pottery materials in the ancient cites of Ban Chiang region was descendants of those who migrated from Nong-Sae region in Yun Nan territory two thousand years ago.
Three interprets the value of *Phii Poota* which illuminates in life style of the Isarn people. They are related to the impact of that belief toward individuals, communities and nature based on the contextual meaning of *Phii Poota*. The researcher uses Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics which is based on the idea of Bultmann’s Demythologization to identify their meaning and value.

The researcher touches inculturation through the Second Vatican Council’s documents and documents of the Federation of Asian Bishop Conference (FABC) to be his guideline for doing inculturation in the Isarn area. It is the object of Chapter Four. To contextualize the Isarn Catholics’ belief the researcher does enlarge his survey to the concepts of spiritual entities in the Church. He emphasizes on the perception of spirits from the Bible and other significant ecclesiastical documents. Then he reinterprets the value of *Phii Poota* by using the hermeneutic method of Paul Ricoeur in the light of the Gospel through the issues of the Second Vatican Council and FABC’s documents. The researcher contributes suitable understanding of the core entity of the Isarn culture for not only the Isarn Catholics but also for those who have misunderstanding about the belief in *Phii Poota* and about the *Phii Poota* as an entity.

6. Definition of Term

**Value** According to Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary’s (1994) definition the word is derived from the Latin root “valere” which means to be of worth, or the worth of a thing. In this thesis value will concern the significance of *Phii Poota* form in both sociological perspective and ethical perspective through the activities which the belief in *Phii Poota* exercises in Isarn society. It means a value enhancing the quality of human life in order to be successful in realizing its goal (Allen,1993: 3). It is essentially a positive meaning. This thesis focuses the value of the belief in *Phii Poota*.

**The Belief in Phii Poota** means the cultural expression which Isarn people perform to their ancestors’ spirit.
*Pliii* lexically, in Thai context, means "ghost or soul of a dead person" (Royal Thai Dictionary, 1982: 560). It also expands to a spirit to which is generally attributed the power over human being. It includes a wide variety of supernatural agents like those who are permanently existing as spirits and those who are transformed as such after their death.

**Poota** means grandparents or ancestors of villagers in local villages in the Northeast of Thailand.

**Isarn** literally means the northeastern direction. In this context it means the Northeastern of Thailand.

**Inculturation** means both an intimate transformation of the authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity and the implantation of Christianity into different human cultures.

**Hermeneutics** means the process of interpretation which shows that an existence arrives at expression, at meeting, and at reflection only through the continual exegesis of all the signification that come to light in the world of culture (Ricoeur, 1974: 22). It is a good method to search for objective meaning of a text which is said.

**Interpretation** means the work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning (Ricoeur, 1974: 13).

**Symbol** means any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first (Ricoeur, 1974: 12).

**Demythologization** means a process of interpretation which accepts the loss of all pretensions to direct rationality in symbolic discourse [which is considered as a text], but at the same time this loss is seen as the way toward a freeing, a recovery, of the symbolic-existential dimension (Ricoeur, 1974: xvii- xviii). To rationalize a text, a philosophical theory must be used for analyzing the details of the text. The frame and
Introduction

the scope of understanding is controlled by the philosophical theory used automatically. The interpretant has the controlled understanding of the text. Demythologization will draw the thought of interpreter from that controlled situation to be free by conscientizing the interpretant that he is using the philosophical method. He will do a reflection again to get the proper understanding of that text. It means that an interpretant must have his self-conscience and substantial understanding to the interpreted text from symbolic language[literal meaning] to individual faith [subjective understanding] then to the counterpart of suspicion and belief [philosophical discussion] and finally to new hope [new understanding under the perspective of hope for the future which is the eschatological approach].

The Isarn Catholics are the Christians who were baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. They live in the Northeast Thailand. According to the hierachical structure of the Catholic Church, the Isarn Catholics have been divided into one archdiocese and three suffrage dioceses as follows:

1. Archdiocese Thare-Nongseng consists of Catholics who live in the provinces of Sakol Nakorn, Nakorn Panom, Mukdaharn and Kalasin.
2. Ubonratchathani Diocese consists of the believers who reside in the provinces of Amnatchareon, Mahasarakham, Roi-ed, Srisaket, Surin, Ubolratchathani and Yasothorn.
3. Udornthani Diocese consists of the Catholics who are located in the provinces of, Khonkhaen, Loei, Nongkhai, Nongbualamphu and Udornthani.
4. Nakhornratchasima Diocese consists of the believers settled in the following provinces: Nakornratchasima, Caiyaphum and Buriram.

7. Methodology

To accomplish his intention to bridge the belief in Phii Poota which is one of the outstanding substantial roots of the Isarn culture to the stream of the Isarn Catholic life, the researcher emphasizes upon paradigm of: (a) people who live in Isarn culture and (b) people who have Catholic faith. The method which he uses is drawn from the
Hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, and especially Ricoeur’s appropriation of the concept of Demythologization.

Paul Ricoeur explains in his “Existence and Hermeneutics” (Ricoeur, 1974: 3-24) that hermeneutics is an interpretation which reveals a profound intention, that of overcoming distance and cultural difficulties and of matching the reader to a text which has become foreign, thereby incorporating its meaning into the present comprehension a man is able to have of himself. Within that process there are two elements: (a) interpretant, a representative of an interpreting-being, and (b) interpreted-being or a text. It looks like exegesis but it is not only exegesis. He observes that exegesis is not a proper means to draw out the essence of interpreted-being. For it considers only literal text which is based on the development of classical philology and historical sciences, or sometimes religious matrix; and comprehension of the text which is based on the broad sense of the clear understanding of a literal or symbolic sign. In this process contextual meaning remains suspended. In fact interpretation as hermeneutics is a work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the level of meaning implied in the literal meaning to perceive objective understanding.

Reflection is the only means that can lead an interpretant to accomplish that understanding. This reflection must be one that suppresses itself as reflection. Ricoeur writes that it is “by developing an archaeology, a teleology, and an eschatology that reflection suppresses itself as reflection” (Ricoeur, 1974: 24). It means that the process must discover the objective meaning of an interpreted text not only by both archaeological and teleological method but so do in eschatological method which is based on positive hope of the final end of life that text and the interpretant concern. An interpretant who uses this process can reach the essential meaning of the text he interprets because it expands broader than Bultmann’s demythology.

Hence to understand that text an interpretant should deconstruct literal or symbolic language [which may be considered a sort of symbolic logic] and then reconstruct a new understanding through reflection on a new base which should be transcendental logic (Ricoeur, 1981/1992: 165). The means is demythologization. It is
the process which breaks the mask covering a real entity. The technique of
demythologization is as distinct from all others as analytic techniques itself. It remains
within the dimension of veracity and not that of mastery of a philosophical method. It
does not belong to the enterprise of using oneself, nature and other men but to that of
knowing oneself better through the detours of desire (Ricoeur, 1974: 189-190).

It means that to interpret an object ontologically an interpretant should discover
the meaning through the literal text describing the symbolic text which in turn represents
that object not only in a lexical meaning but also in a contextual meaning.

The process of demythologizational interpretation consists in four steps:

1) Lexical understanding.

The interpretant’s literal meaning is what describes an object. One perceives the
concept of that object according to semantic description. It is ordinary information. It is
an understanding of an interpreted-being as it is described by symbolic language. The
interpretant perceives the meaning of a text according to the ordinary meaning which the
written text describes.

2) Subjective understanding.

The interpretant has a concept of what ordinary information clarifies in a
particularly subjective context. It is the level at which the interpretant’s thought gets the
idea through his intelligent initiative of deciphering and his own paradigm. He uses his
own experiences to figure out that perceived concept. It can be said that the interpretant
decodes the literal means by his own matrix or standard which may be objective or
subjective.

3) Philosophical understanding.

The interpretant uses philosophical process to analyze that concept to understand
it in its own context. This is the stage that the interpretant’s thought invalues the
technique of telling of its rationality. There is a general standard which helps the
interpreant understand the meaning of the text. But it is the methodical understanding because an interpreter still has the philosophical frame to understand. [It is, according to Paul Ricoeur, a theological level of the Church when she interprets the meaning of Evil.]

4) Contextualized understanding.

The interpretant perceives the objective understanding of an existence which the literal symbol clarifies. There is a coincidence. On the one hand, an interpretant conscientize himself. That is he has his own self-understanding. On the other hand, he has an objective understanding of the interpreted text as it should be. The interpretation does not use personal desire to justify the meaning. It depends on the context of the text. It is the process of respecting the original enigma, the hiddenness of symbol. An interpretant must discuss all processes of this method continuously. It can be figured out in a diagram as follows:

![Diagram of Contextualized Understanding](image-url)

**Figure 1. The diagram of Paul Ricoeur's Demythologization**
To apply the method to this research, first of all the researcher studies academic documents of *Phii Poota* to discover its perennial value. The researcher includes field studies and interviews with shamans or intercessioners, “Jam, Khaocham, Khawjam or Chao Cham” to objectify the understanding of the belief in *Phii Poota*. It will be the subjective-objective text for doing demythologizational interpretation for demonstrating its significant and positive value. Secondly, the researcher studies ecclesiastical teaching and documents concerning spirit beings as well as other cultures to realize the attitudes of the Church. Finally, the researcher will integrate the two dimensions to propose the renovation of Catholic life in Isam context through inculturation.

8. Expectation

1) This research presents the method of how to have contextual meaning of local Isarn cults through the studying of the value of the belief in *Phii Poota*.

2) It motivates and encourages the Isarn Catholics to acknowledge the value of the Isarn culture as their stream of life.

3) The researcher hopes to promote value of the Isarn culture to be worldwide well-known.

4) This pilot-project would be a means to arouse experts of Catholic believers to do researches in this field for their commitment of their belief.


The researcher divides literature which concerns this study into four groups as follows:

9.1. Documents on Culture.

Human beings all over the world cannot deny that culture is the substantial component of human planetal life which forms human beings to progress and develop both individually and socially. In fact, culture is a universal intellectual heritage which previous generations of human beings transmit to later generations to enhance their quality of life. However the process of transmission is not only empirical but also
metaphorical as well as analogical. Sometimes later generations have to interpret cultural heritage which is transmitted in an implicitly metaphorical form. Though there are many tribes and groups in different parts of the world, each particular culture, that every tribe has, always maintains and develops a life-style of its civilizations.

Kasem Uthayanin (Uthayanin, 1976: 64-78) describes from the sociological perspective that culture is the example which controls social life of human beings for successfulness in social value. It originates from human initiation. It is a dynamic process which is improved by creative capacity of human being. Human himself has to fertilize it to growth, to transmit to his descendents and adapt to historical situation. It can be classified into two groups:

1) Material culture. It is the cultural exhibition through material means such as housing, dressing, cooking etc. Each of them is not exactly culture but a representative of that human culture which is beneath that representation.

2) Nonmaterial culture is the cultural expression of thought, faith, ethics, custom and tradition.

Praya Anumanrachathon (Sathiankoses, 1981: 2-9; 1972: 63-114) elucidates that culture is the means in which humans sustain to civilize their life in society which can be realized to their social behaviors, languages, gestures, activities and their productions. It cannot be experienced directly. It is the stream of human life which origins from human thought to search for directions of surviving among natural circumstance and environment. Each culture contains communion products which human beings have learned and transmitted from the past to the later groups. It is the most worthful social heritage.

Charoen Wairawachanakul et al. (Wairawachanakul et al., 1990: 4-6) define culture as products of human thought which can be experienced through language and actions. It signifies to currents of human thought in history.

Thaweesak Boonsu (Boonsu, 1994: 11-12) summarizes from his study on the Nyoe’s beliefs from the structuralism of Claude Levi-Strauss that culture is the
categories or the frames of human thought in each society used to define relationships among themselves, between themselves and nature; between themselves and supernatural beings in different perceptions. Therefore each culture flourishes not only in meanings but also valuations of each human group.

9.2. Documents on the Belief in Phiis in the Isarn Region

Praya Anumarnrachathon (Sathiankoses, 1973: 162-164) wrote about beliefs in Thailand saying that Thai people have the same patterns of beliefs as other people in other countries. That is the belief in supernatural beings which have more power than human beings. People believe that Phiis can exercise benevolent or malevolent effects to human beings. It is animism. It can be divided into four groups: (a) a belief in guardian dhevas (natural Phiis worship), (b) a belief in ancestral spirits or souls of grand father and mother (ancestral worship). (c) a belief in hero spirits and (d) a belief in bad spirits. He says:

[S]ince village is a compartment of Thai society system, it can sustain itself. The primary sources of villagers’ morale and traditions are their professions and religions. Those villages usually build a house of spirit where they ask for help on a special day every year and in a ritual form. They always contact Phiis when they confront some problems which they cannot solve. In the North and the Northeast the influence of Brahmanism is not quite strong, but the concept of Phiis [belief in spirit] is significant (Sathiankoses, 1973: 164-165).

Thawach Poonnotok (Poonnotok, 1987: 369-392) wrote about the belief in Phiis of Isarn people that this belief is very significant in the Isarn society and also in Thai society because Thais believe that Phiis has its own world and has more power to exercise miraculous activities. Not only individuals exercise their belief in Phiis but so do governmental departments. There are several important groups of Phiis such as Phiis
Phaya Thaen\(^1\) which is the greatest Phii and the boss of supernatural beings. But there are not any explicit rites for this Phii except Boon Bang-fai which is the ritual request of the Isarn people for rain. The Isarn people pay more close connections to Phii Poota who, they believe, is their ancestral spirit that takes care of their village and Phii Mahesak-lakmuang, who, they also believe, is the spirit of the one taking care of the town or city as well as the inhabitants peacefully. There are special rituals for these two Phis.

S. J. Tambiah (Tambiah, 1970: 263-266), who studies the cosmology of the Isarn belief in Phii at Ban Praan Muan of Udornthani province, describes that Phii refer to spirits that have more power than human beings. A common perception of Phii is the soul or the consciousness of human being after death. Phis those have more miraculous activities toward villagers will be respected as chao phaus or the god fathers. Phis are separated from supernatural divine angels (thewada or celesti gent) and domain religious perspectives. Phii and Pra (spirit and monk) do not contact each other. They are independent from each other. There is an Isarn saying about this idea. It says “khon la heed khon la khong” which means they belong to each ritual and way of life.

Yukio Hayashi (Hayashi, 1991) describes the paradigm of Phii for Tai people in the mainland of Southeast Asia that Phii [spirit] seems to exist virtually somewhere, in forests, hills, water, animals, the earth and so on. There are many kinds of Phii in the Isarn region and most of them are acknowledged as the guardian spirits. Among them, Phii Poota is the popular guardian spirit which was or has been recognized by the Isarn people.

Seri Phongphit says that “Phii” is the most important factor of radical Thai paradigm. Radical Thai paradigm holds that human being is only a small factor of, not superior to, the cosmos in which life, society and nature have unity and balance. Hence the radical Thais’ attitude toward cosmos is respectful and humble. They have to

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\(^1\)This Phii is usually called in the Isarn region as “Phaya Thaen” without the adjective “Phii”.
assimilate themselves to the center of cosmos and eternity. Every activity of human beings should be conformed to the system of cosmos which expresses through rituals. Each Phii is important because Phii is a set of rules and disciplines of relations between each individual, individuals and community, and individuals and nature. Phii is the soul (spirit) of cosmos and society. Phii exists in every dimension of human life and cosmos. If a person violates rules or disciplines he disobeys Phii's command or he commits "Phid Phii". It means that one breaks the relation between himself and the Phii who issues the rule. Consequently, he must repent or perform a ritual of "Sia Phii" which is a kind of reconciliation. The belief in Phii has been in Thai paradigm before Buddhism or any religion was implanted in Thailand. It has been smoothly woven in the new belief which precedes that radical belief (Satha-anand and Boonyanatra, 1994: 64-75).

9.3. Documents on the Belief in Spirits in the Catholic Church

The authors of the Gospels inscribe the figure of spirits in the form of angel (Mt 1:11-22), devil (Mk 1: 12-13; Lk 3: 21-22), and demon (Lk 8: 26-39; Mt 8: 28-34). They did not write about the soul of the dead directly. However, there is one evidence which the Gospel recognizes ghost or Phii. It was described that while disciples were in a boat across the lake, they saw Jesus Christ walking on the lake. They were terrified. They thought that it is a ghost (Mt 14: 22-33; Mk 6: 45-52; Jn 6: 16-21).

The Act of Apostles also describes about the duties of angels to take care or bring messages to apostles. St. Philip was informed to prepare his journey at noon out of Jerusalem by the angel of the Lord. When he followed that information he could baptize a eunuch who was the chief treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia (Ac 8: 26-40). St. Paul commented many times about the resurrection of the dead which explicitly accepts that the soul exists. He responded to the problem of some Corinthians who were confused on resurrection of the dead that:

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ cannot have been raised either, and If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is without substance, and so is your faith... If the dead are not raised.
neither is Christ; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is pointless and you have not, after all, been released from your sins. In addition, those who have fallen asleep in Christ are utterly lost. If our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are of all people the most pitiable (1 Co 15: 13-19).

This convinces readers that souls of human being after corporeal death still exist and wait for the resurrection in parousia period. It persuades the believers to exercise the teaching of Jesus Christ in their daily works with hope.

The Church herself acknowledges the existence of the souls of the dead when she accepts the detail of the Apostles' Creed in the phrase "I believe in the communion of saints" (or the Nicene creed 'We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come'). The kingdom of God comes but has not been perfected yet. All citizens in the kingdom are in a pilgrimage. According to physical limitation, there is someone departed to live with God before the eschatological day. But to keep citizenship of the kingdom every member has to exercise fraternal charity to each other and each one has to communicate with each other. Therefore, it is impossible for the Church to reject the concept of the soul.

9.4. Documents on Inculturation

Fr. Paul Puthanangady (FABC: OESC, 1995: 3-25) has realized that there is no Asian Church even though there are many churches in Asia because churches in Asia are churches according to western tradition. Especially in liturgy which is the officially significant factor that believers use to understand the mysterious revelation of God and to communicate God as well. Moreover, there is no superiority of cultures any more. There is only the tremendous values of cultural heritage in which the owners have to nourish their lives. Therefore, Catholics should reculturate themselves in their own cultures to enhance their quality of life.
Felix Wilfred expresses his idea about the status of Catholics in Asia that they are alienated from their own cultures and are viewed as foreigners as well. He gives the reason for the Asian Catholic’s alienation that:

The local Churches in the countries of Asia have, by and large, kept themselves aloof from the mainstream of the life of the people, their history, struggles, and dreams. They have failed to identify themselves with the people, even though in terms of charity many praiseworthy services have been rendered. Since human beings need to develop themselves to be better every moment both spiritually and physically and the simplest process for human development is to be well-integrated into the larger community of people, it is the mission of the Church to do inculturation (Rosales and Arevalo, 1992: xxiii-xxx).

The researcher will use the concepts from these documents to search for the meaning of the belief in Phii Poota and contribute to those who want to enrich their life by using the Isarn culture as a model.
CHAPTER TWO

PHII POOTA:

THE SPIRIT OF A GREAT ANCESTOR OF THE ISARN NATIVES

เคียเด้ เคียเจียดิน

You will have a long life if you respect your ancestor’s spirit.

respect you master to enjoy a long life.

Isarn Proverb.

It is true that a necessary condition for doing interpretation one must analyze components constituting that object to be interpreted because such object attracts the interest of an interpreter through appearances. In the case of assessing the belief in Phii Poota which the researcher is doing, theoretical analysis of the concept of Phii Poota which is the primary agent of such belief must be held to unfold its characteristics properly. It is a compulsory duty of the researcher to manifest that the concept of Phii Poota in the Isarn culture is reliable because if such concept is not reliable it is worthless to keep the notion of Phii Poota as an important element in the Isarn culture.

The notion of Phii Poota is the cultural concept that has been dynamically acknowledged by the Isarn natives and gradually transmitted to younger generations by their ancestors; this is an important factor for the Isarn communities as an important element in the Isarn culture. It really has its own importance so that it has influenced the Isarn people until this present time. This chapter intends to elucidate the activities which the Isarn villagers carry out to Phii Poota for being an eyewitness
to support the reliability of the belief in *Phii Poota* requiring the feasible existence of the agent of the belief, that is *Phii Poota* itself.

Even though the notion of *Phii Poota* is not mentioned as the core element in the *Heed Sibsong Kong Sibsee* for it has been included in the tradition of *Bun Samha* (or *Bun Chamra* which means the feast of cleaning and abolishing malevolence out of the village) which is always exercised in the village through the cooperation of Buddhist monks; meanwhile a public ritual in honor of *Phii Poota* is exercised outside the village. However, the importance of *Phii Poota* for the Isarn villagers is obviously necessary. The Isarn villagers hold that paying a homage to their *Phii Poota* is a compulsory practical activity in each village as a necessary pattern of life or else they usually feel anxiously. They have such a feeling because they think that if their *Phii*

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1 The main intention of the traditional practice in the seventh month of each year is to deliver all malevolent conditions out of the village as well as paying homage to those invisible entities that protect villagers and village from any malevolent entities. On the other hand, there is a special intention to purify the misfortune destiny of the village according to some malevolent appearances during the past year. So the focus of the tradition directs to worshipping all guardian spirits such as *thewabuts* (Angel) and *Arhag* or *Mahesak Lakmuang* for requesting them to carry on their protection of the village. The regulation of the tradition describes “[A]nother rite, when the seventh month comes, worshipping celestial deities and lords as well as guardian spirits of a village, a town, and a city. People have to do this tradition for their well being in their daily life pattern as in the heaven without any trouble”. In the Isarn narratives it writes “สิ่งหนึ่งนั้น พอเมื่อถึงเดือนเจ็ด จะทำกันนุษฐาราช ทุ่งหมู่แห้งเหล่านี้ บุคคลผู้ถูก ต้องไปยังหลักอาชีพ อาศัยอยู่เหล่านี้ ที่เหล่าเมือง สุขอนุรักษ์ พักกันไว้ก็จะ ทำพนมิ่งกัน นิยมต้องจำจึง ท่า ทะเทียบเท่าแก่ ให้สุคนะเองนี้ ท่ากันย่อยได้ทำง สิ่งต่างจะเกี่ยวนี้ ต่างมีจริงสิ่งศิลป์ ทุกข์อยู่ร่วม ๆ ไม่ได้ให้สัมผัส นั้นสิ่งศิลป์ ศิลป์ต่าง ๆ จึงต้องไปยังเมือง นั้นสิ่งศิลป์ ศิลป์ต่าง ๆ ทำกับทำกันนี้ นามของสิ่งศิลป์ จึงสูญอยู่ด้วย สร้างพิษเกิดกัน ทุกข์ย่อมมีอยู่นี้ บัณฑิตามพาน เปรียบกันเมืองสรรพศาสตร์ สุดท้ายกันยอยได้” But the idea of *Phii Poota* is not mentioned directly in these official cultural pattern. However, it is a compulsory condition that villagers have to perform in paying respect to *Phii Poota*. See more details in *The Assembly of the Isarn Monks in Seventeen Provinces. The Isarn Heritage* (in Thai). (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn Rachavityalai Press, 1990), pp.35-81.
Phii Poota has been disappointed according to some activity of villagers, their Phii Poota will not help them to earn their life happily and may cause malevolent affectation to them and their properties. Many of the Isarn villagers have recognized Phii Poota's activities toward villagers either benevolent or malevolent; however, they always have positive attitude toward it. Though the agent of such activities cannot be proved scientifically as Phii Poota because it is identified as a spirit or imperceptible entity; but there is also no scientific process for verifying the evidence that Phii Poota is not the agent of such activities. Consequently, the notion of Phii Poota should still be acknowledged since it is a cultural belief though it cannot be directly verified by mathematical or experimental method for interpretation. Raphael J. Lawrence, when he discusses about angels, suggests that:

In fact, the honest philosopher must admit that, while one cannot prove from reason that such a world of spirits exists, unless that world manifests itself to us empirically, still one cannot approve that such a world does not exist, merely by reason of the nonempirical evidence form such a world (Gratsch et al., 1981: 83).

However, the meaning and value of Phii Poota, will be interpreted through the phenomena of the Isarn natives’ life styles which demonstrate actions of such a belief. It means that the focus of discovery must direct to cultural phenomena in which such belief plays its role. Paul Ricoeur states: “Hermeneutics presupposed that the true and the real cannot be reduced to what can be verified by mathematics and experimental methods but has to do with our relation with the world, to other things and to being as well” (Ricoeur, 1974: 145). It is the process which needs elements concerning the relationship in society to be considered for acknowledgment of its value. Hence it is suitable to analyze the notion of Phii Poota in social cultural contexts of the native communities in which Phii Poota is accepted.

To reach such objective, the researcher starts the process by deciphering the phenomena of the Phii Poota which indirectly appear in the forms of activity within the four main native groups in the Isarn region. However, historical background of
each group as well as the particular circumstances should be considered because they are primary elements to form the notion of *Phii Poota* in the Isarn contexts through lineage relationship of the four Isarn native tribes. Meanwhile, it seem to be out of the scope of the topic. Hence, the researcher collects the details of demography of the Isarn people for those who want to know more in the Appendix I.

1. Phenomena of the Belief in *Phii Poota* in the Isarn Villages

Practically, the belief in *Phii Poota* is an important institution in the Isarn mind. Though it seems to be a particular institution because each village has its own *Phii Poota* but this institution usually consist of four similar and necessary elements: (a) personality of *Phii Poota*, (b) Intercessioner [*Jam, Chao Cham* or *Khoaw Jam*], (c) Rituals, and (d) believers.

To interpret the Value of The Belief in *Phii Poota* the researcher thoroughly analyzes the institution of *Phii Poota* through the activities and factors concerning the belief in *Phii Poota* of only four major groups: Thai-Lao, Phu-Thai, Thai-Yo and Thai-Khmer because they are close to the Isarn Catholic communities and some of them have been converted to Catholicism; and their original beliefs still appear in daily-life practices. It is the only way to identify the value of *Phii Poota* contextually because that *Phii* can be recognized through activities of villagers who acknowledge him.

1.1. Personality of *Phii Poota*.

The personality of *Phii Poota* cannot be evidently conceived because it is invisible entity. However it can be comprehended according to villagers’ activities that are in contact with *Phii Poota* either privately or publicly.

*Phii Poota* of the Thai-Lao villagers in the Isarn region is perceived as the soul (s) or the spirit(s) of their ancestors or the spirit owner of the area in which each Thai-Laos group has settled. The phenomena of *Phii Poota* in each village are generally nominated by either the name of the most popular person in that village who
contributed good deeds during his secular life in the history of the village or the natural Phii which has been the owner of that area before villagers settled their village. The former notion occurs because recent villagers always recognize good deeds of the founder of their village otherwise they do not have any occasion to live in that village. This is the feeling of meritorious debt or the notion of gratitude. The later case is initiated because the acknowledgment of invisible owner of every natural thing. When the pioneers decided to settle in a new village on suitable area they would ask permission from the spirit-owner of that area or lord of the place (Mulder, 1985: 21-22). At the same time they assigned to anonymous spirit-owner to be their protector as Phii Poota who had particular name according to some significant surroundings such as swamp or forest with various kinds of huge trees, wild vegetables and animals for food (Interview, Kong Poosri. 1996).

Even though villagers use the word “Phii Poota” which seems to denote not only one particular entity but implicitly identifies the family of that Phii Poota or sometimes includes the invisible community of villagers who passed away and still stay with their living relatives. The behavior of Phii Poota and his community seems to be similar to a living human community. Sometimes Poota commits immoral behavior. For example “Poo So,” the Phii Poota of Ban Tamyae, Kantarawichai District, Mahasarakham province, whose wife is “Ya No”, has a minor wife that is the phii of the forest nearby Ban Tamyae (Interview, Home Chinwongsa, 1996). Sukunya Pattarawichai et al. confirm according to the saying of Mr. Sum Utha of Ban Ped in Khonkhen province that the Phii Poota of Ban Ped whose name is Chau Poo Thammmachakra “earns his life-pattern as a normal human being. He has his family, wife and kids. His figure is dark and tall. He never demonstrates himself to anyone” (Patrachai et al. 1985: 26).

Each Phii Poota is acknowledged as a powerful invisible entity which is either benevolent for those who recognize his authority or malevolent for those who disdain or do not pay filial piety to it. The indicators used by villagers for evaluating their conducts toward their Phii Poota are general ethical principles: Phii Poota’s norms. General details of the norms consist of the Buddha’s Dhamma and legal rules based
on justice and benefits of villagers. Disciplines can be classified into three domains. The first one concerns individual’s conducts toward Phii Poota. Each villager must not censure his Phii Poota but respects him as a kind ruler, benefactor and protector. The second one concerns reciprocal relationship among villagers. They have to live together peacefully and ethically. The third one concerns villagers’ conducts toward Phii Poota’s properties, especially his residence and dependenees. This implies that trees and natural materials in the forest dedicated to him must neither be destroyed nor beneficially earned without asking permission from him or his representative, the Chao Cham. If anyone violates any Phii Poota’s principle either intentionally or unintentionally, he must be directly punished by the Phii Poota as a warning measure if the violation is venial or unintentional or as a sanction to death penalty if it is grave or intentional.  

The representative of Phii Poota which everyone can see is the shrine called “Sarn Poota” or “Sala Phii Poota” or “Tub Poota.” There is normally only one unit in each village. It is usually built outside the village in the forest preserved for this phiī specially. It may be made of wood or any materials as a small fortifying house

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1 The punishment may be justified by the Chao Cham of the village. See more details in Sugunya Pattarawichai et al. The Components of Life of Ban Ped (in Thai), research, (Khonkhen: Khonkhaen University, 1985), pp.27-29; Tambiah categorizes the supernatural affliction of the Phiī Poota or Tapoo Ban in Ban Praan Muan of Udornthani Province. See more details in S.J. Tambiah. Buddhism and the Spirit cults in North-East Thailand. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.266.

2 The three words are normally used to call a shrine of Phii Poota in each village in the Isarn region. Sarn means the court; Sala means a place where any traveller can take a rest; Tub signifies a private residence covered with heaves of wild grass. See Apendix VI.

3 The amount of shrines dedicated to Phii Poota depends on the acknowledgement of villagers. If there is only one it means that villagers respect only Poota not his wife and/or his family. If there are two shrines or more it means that his wife or each family member is also respected separately. See appendix VI (Pictures # 2 and # 3).
Phii Poota: The Spirit of a Great Ancestor of the Isarn Natives

(Nuancan, 1986). It is pretended as a sacred residence of a respectful one. It means that villagers can go into the forest or walk near by the shrine but they have not to disdain these two important items. If a villager wants something such as mushrooms, wild vegetables, firewood from the forest he/she has to ask permission from the Phii Poota before taking it. But if it is identical to public property such as big trees for building house, the permission from community or the Chao Cham is a must otherwise that one will be punished gravely by the Phii Poota of that village. In addition, a villager who disdains or behaves unrespectfully towards the Phii Poota directly or indirectly such as scorning or refusing the Phii Poota’s authority, will be punished as well.

The Phii Poota in the Phu-Thai’s belief is quite fantastic because their Phii Poota is the soul of a royal member of their previous city-state princedom. So the name of Phii Poota in each Phu-Thai village has a royal title as “Chao” (Intaratrakul, 1992: 59), or “Chao Fa” or “Ming” (Warangrat, 1981: 37-38). Evidently, Phii Poota of each Phu-Thai village usually exercises his powerful authority as a ruler. Nowadays the Phu-Thais usually respect their Phii Poota royally as in the former time. Consequently they always instruct youngsters and their own kids to acknowledge and to respect the Phii Poota of their village who has pretentiously taken care of their relatives as usual though some youngsters do not pay official respect to him as before. From this point of view, Phii Poota of the Phu-Thai always has appropriate authority to control ethical conducts and behaviors of villagers. Surat Warangkarat categorizes Phii Poota of Ban Pannanikhom named “Fa Mungmuang” in the group of Phii Mahesak (Warangrat, 1981: 36-37). Winyoo Pholsawadi who is

1 There were a lot of stories in the past which villagers had experienced. See more further details in Suthep Suntornpesuch. “The Belief in Phii Poota in the villages of Northeast (Thailand), (in Thai), in Sociology of Villages in The Northeast. (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1968), pp.119-120.

2 According to the Phu-Thai dialect this terminology means the prince (Chao Fa) who rules or cover (Mung) the city (Muang).
also interested in the Phu-Thai group comments on the relation between the Phu-Thai people and their Phii Poota that

The Phu-Thai people believe that the souls or the spirits of their ancestors always protects their living relatives everywhere. Moreover, they invite their ancestral spirit to travel with them. One of authoritative Phiiis among ancestors' souls is their previous ruler or group leader who is venerated as Phii Poota (Pholsawadi, 1993: 76).

Normally there is only one Phii Poota in each Phu-Thai village except The Phu-Thai Dam such as The Phu-Thai Dam of Ban Panad in Leoi province who has four Phii Pootas. They are Chao of Muang Thaeng, Chao Anuwong, Chao Thii Paendin and Chao Phu Huadkhaew (Intaratrakul, 1992: 59-61).

Phii Poota of the Phu-Thais in each village always exercises impressive mysterious activities of protecting villagers from damages as well as taking care of their lives. Mr. Sakchai Chaichomphu¹ (Sakchai Chaichomphu, 1996) expresses his grateful impression about the mercy of the Phii Poota of Ban Pannanikhom named, "Chao Handaeng," while he lost his way home in the thick forest of the Phu Pan mountain. He lifted his mind to the Phii Poota to help him find his way home. Then he saw a deer that attracted him to follow until he reached the village where he lived. He was convinced that he found the way home because Phii Poota helped him.

In the case of Phii Poota of Ban Nongdok in Pannanikhom district of Sakol Nakorn province, that Phii Poota was rejected from human community of the village because his request was so cruel that villagers could not respond: the villagers had to sacrifice three buffaloes to him or else he would kill one member of the village every year. Before this request was raised up many villagers had died in abnormal conditions. Villagers concluded that their Phii Poota took them to be his food (Interview, Tong Narinrak, 1996).

¹He is 52 years old Phu-Thai who lives at 62/1 Ban Panna, Pannanikhom district of Sakol Nakorn province. He is one of the researcher's father close friends.
The empirical representative of the Phii Poota of the Phu-Thai is the same as that of the Thai-Laos. There is a “Ho Thada,” “Ho Thala” or “Ho Raksa.” It is a shrine usually made of wood. The Phu-Thai villagers usually build the shrine in a thick reserved forest for the Phii close to their village. Winyoo Pholsawadi (Pholsawadi, 1993: 97-99) describes components in “Ho Thada” of Ban Khamcha-li that it has, inside, a small shrine which is reckoned as the holiest sanctuary, a picture of a person who is venerated as the Thada or Phii Poota of the village, and some wood-made artificial weapons of an ancient king. The villagers recognize it as the place where their Phii Poota lives. They call it “Ho Duang Pii kong Kachatriya” or the place where the spirit of Phii Poota dwells.

That forest is also preserved as the sacred area where the Phii Poota lives as in the Thai-Laos. This place must be respected as well. If anyone does not follow the commands about the forest which villagers recommend, that one may be punished by having some physical pains or being possessed by the Phii Poota of the village himself.

The Phii Poota of the Thai-Yo has the same characteristics as the Phii Poota of other groups. Smith Sra-ubon (Sra-ubon, 1988: 63-64) has found that Phii Poota still keeps its importance in the second rank in the Thai-Yo perspective. He is inferior to only Phii Ta Haèk who has a main duty of taking care of villagers’ planting rice process. The Phii Poota in Thai-Yo’s mind is their heroic ancestor’s spirit. His nature is a human being who is under humane sensual influences due to his status.

1 “Ho”, according to the etymological dialect of the Phu-Thai means altar, and Thada means stupa or a pagoda which is derived from Pali word “Thatu.” Prof. Dr. Chou Norindr defines this word “a stupa altar” (Interview, Chou Norindr, 1997).

The abbot of Wat Chareonphol, Prakru Udomrattanakhun in Ban Thakhonyang of Kantarawichai district in Mahasarakham province told the researcher about his experience of contacting a Phii Poota while he was performing meditation in Don Poota of Ban Bung Chum near Ban Thakhonyang saying that Phii Poota is a person like us (Interview, Prakru Udomrattanakhun, 1996). He also ordained the Phii to be a vegetarian religious after giving him his sermon because of the Phii's request.

It is not necessary to acknowledge only one Phii Poota in a village. Thai-Yo group in Ban Thakhonyang has three Phiiis Pootas. They are: (a) Chao Pao Pilù, whose shrine is built closed to governmental clinic of the village, has to take care of villagers who have to go outside the village; (b) Chao Pao Samran, whose shrine is at the entrance of the village, has to protect villagers from damages; and (c) Songnang-Pi-Nong, whose shrine is close to the bank of the Shii river, has to guard villagers from the danger of the river. They are classified in the group of Phii Mahaesak Lakmuang because they are reckoned as rulers of the cities in which ancestors of contemporary villagers used to live. Moreover, this village used to be a city named “Muang Thakhonyang” in the ancient time (Wiparkpojnakij, 1970).

Not only the shrines and forests of the Phii Poota are of important significance but also the rules which the Phii Poota propose to villagers through Chao Cham as other groups. Villagers have to follow rules for their welfare as obeying the Phii Poota. If a villager breaks the rules of Phii Poota he will get misfortunes or punishments from the Phii Poota.

Phii Poota of the Thai-Khmer people in the Isarn region is called kamoy “Nia Ta” according to the dialect of this group. However there, sometimes, may be pronounced differently such as “Ya Jua” in the Nyoe tribe (Boonsu, 1994: 72), “Ar Ya” in Kuay tribe (Wongthes, 1996: 86), “Ar Ra” in Khmer tribe or “Yiang Ta” in the So tribe (Warangrat, 1981: 35). Etymologically “Nia” means a male person who used to be a monk and know about traditional and religious perceptions. “Ta” means grand or great-grand father of villagers (Interview, Mongkol Jatkul, 1997). Hence, according to historical background of each Thai-Khmer village, Phii Poota is the soul or spirit
of the heroic or benevolent ancestor of that village. Thaweesak Boonsu (Boonsu, 1994: 72) describes that the *Phii Poota* of Ban Nong Raviang in Mahasarakham province is the soul of Praya Katasila, whose primary shrine was located in Muangkong subdistrict of Rasrisalai district in Srisaket province, who has kept on taking care of migrant members from other previous settlements; and the spirit of the lord of the place, where the village has settled. The spirit of the lord of the place will be dealt later.

Pranee Wongthes (Wongthes, 1996: 86) describes that the *Phii Poota* of Kuay villagers in Ban Truem of Surin province was the spirit that primarily dwelt in the wild pig which was the good material of meal cooking. And then it has changed the object to dwell in to a *takuad* (*varanus bengalensis*) because wild pigs in the forest near the village were hunted totally. After knowing that their *Phii Poota* was angry and went to dwell in a *takuad*, elders of the village went to invite their *Phii Poota* to stay with villagers by bringing the *takuad* to the village. Therefore there are plenty of takuads in that village because the villagers assume that takuads in their village are their *Phii Poota's* or their patronizing ancestor's relatives.\(^1\) On the other hand villagers are afraid of punishment which is not for destroying but for warning to reconcile. Though takuads in this village are the representative of *Phii Poota*, they have built *Phii Poota's* shrine, in which there are two pieces of wood in penis-like figure as the representatives of their *Phii Poota*, in the forest close to a swamp outside the village for exercising *Liang Phii Poota* festival. It implies that a takuad is only a symbol of the spirit of *Phii Poota*. It implicitly indicates that their *Phii Poota* still stays with villagers.

*Phii Poota* of the Thai-Khmer group is observed as the best guardian of the village who does not only protect the village and villagers from disasters but also

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\(^1\) Villagers laso observe the color appearance on the tails of takuads in the village to predict the amout of raining water for agriculture of the comming rainny season. See further details in Pranee Wongthes, “Adoration to Takuad,” *Art and Culture* (in Thai). 11 (September 1996): 84-91.
enriches betterness of members and peaceful life in that village. He also is the one on whom villagers rely especially while they are confronting to urgently malevolent situations. On the other hand, he has authentic-legal power to control behaviors of villagers under the influence of their own ethical codes automatically according to fearful respect to powerful invisible authority (Boonsu, 1994: 71-72; Wongthes, 1996: 86). Moreover, Phii Poota has special capacity to know every situation happening in the village and all activities of villagers (Warangrat, 1981: 38; Suporn, 1989: 64-67). This is another element that makes the villagers fear their Phii Poota.

1.2. Chao Cham: The Intercessioner of the Phii Poota.

There are various dialectal words which are used to call an intercessioner of the Phii Poota in the Isarn region such as “Jam,” “Tao Jam,” “Kajam,” “Kaowjam”. But the official word used in this research is “Chao Cham”. All of them have been originally derived from the word “Chao Cham”. It is contextually derived from two perceptions: (a) Chao which generally means a leader, a lord or a boss; and (b) Cham which means an action that a person rapidly put something on a surface of another thing. When these two words are combined as a compound word, it practically signifies to the person who uses a molded sticky rice to touch the skin of sick person. This is an obligative mission for an intercessioner.

A Chao Cham of Thai-Lao villagers is usually male. He is generally an elected man by villagers or by Phii Poota of that village to work as official minister for the Phii of the village. He is recognized by villagers as the one who has capacity to intercede between villagers and the Phii Poota of the village due to his ethical personality. He who is a common villager, on the one hand, will be the spokesman when Phii Poota wants to communicate with villagers either privately or publicly. A private communication will take place after any violation of the Phii Poota’s rule. A public one will take place in annual rituals for the Phii Poota. On the other hand if a villager wants to contact Phii Poota that one has to inform what he wants of Chao Cham and the Chao Cham must inform the Phii Poota of the village. This coincident
function is performed officially in the *Liang Phii Poota* ritual of the village. The *Chao Cham* of a village has to take care of the shrine as well as to pay respect or homage to the *Phii Poota* instead of other villagers every “*wan sil and wan pra*” [the half moon and full moon days].

Albeit, he is automatically also a healer. The background of this position is that of the particular belief of the Isarn people. The Thai-Lao villagers usually believe that damages occurring to either each individual or community of villagers are always caused by the supernatural power of their ancestors according to the disciplinary violation of villagers to the *Phii Poota* rules or “*Phid Phit***” (Deesuankok, 1983: 27-28). The *Chao Cham* will be invited first whenever there is any sick person in the village, before sending that patient to hospital, especially the one who was expected to be possessed by *Phii*. The general process which a *Chao Cham* uses to heal a sick person is called “*Kuad Kao***.” Because of that performance, the minister of the *Phii Poota* is called “*Chao Cham***.”

“*Chao Cham***” of a village is not the position which anyone can obtain easily. Each candidate for a *Chao Cham’s* position must have an outstanding conduct or important virtues in his life that both villagers and the *Phii Poota* approve. This position obviously requires wholeheartedly an ethical expertise or “*Tamma-Tammo***” person and a fair-mind person. So those whose behaviors conform general moral standards could be candidates automatically even though they are voluntary or not because the person who earns that position must be selected by the *Phii Poota* himself through his possession (Sunthornpesach, 1968: 121). The possession by *Phii Poota*

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1 Seri Phongphit and Kevin Hewison define this word as to offend *Phii’s* rules. See further details in Seri Phongphit and Kevin Hewison. *Thai Village Life: Culture and Transition In the Northeast.* (Bangkok: Mooban Press. 1990), p. 69.

2 The process is as follows: the *Chao Cham* will mold sticky rice in an egg size and put it on the body of the patient where there is a pain (Patrachai et al., 1985: 24).
can be categorized into two types: the first one is the "Soon"\(^1\) and the second one is the special ritual process called "Xiang Khong"\(^2\) as Mr. Hiang Nakhok was elected among appropriate candidates (Patrachai, 1985: 24-25).

The outstanding characteristics of an appropriate candidate which should be elected a Chao Cham of a village are (a) maturity of age, at least thirty years old and (b) maturity of mind which equivalent to ethical man. Sukanya Patrachai summarizes what a Chao Cham is expected to be:

He has to support of public welfare in the village. He can sacrifice his privacy for others and forgive those who made wrong things. His speech must be smooth and without scroll but powerful. He must be honest. He must be a popular sage of a village to whom villagers obey and respect because he never breaks the rules of ancestors, or Heed Sisong Kong Sibsii. Respectful personality is another required character for being a Jam [Chao Cham] because the leader of villagers both internal and internal personality must have physical influence toward other as well. (Pattarachai et al., 1986: 27).

\(^1\) The dialectal meaning of this word is touching. But it contextually means “to be possessed” by a Phii (because a villager breaks its rules through a medium, or a Phii wants to contact human beings). However it may mean the action through anger of a Phii when someone breaks its rules. See more definitions in Preecha Pinthong. The Isarn-Thai-English Dictionary. (Ubol Rachthani: Siritham, 1989), p.304.

\(^2\) It is a mystical ritual which those who have mystical power such as a Cham or those who know mystical words can invite unseen entity to possess a prepared fish basket, or a hand made human robot to perform any action according to the command of the one who has used the mystical power. It was very popular in the Isarn region in the past. See further details in Sugunya Pattarachai et al. The Components of Life of Ban Ped (in Thai). (Khonkaen: Khonkaen University, 1985, Unpublished research), pp.31-34; Chob Deesuankok. “Hidden Dimension of The Isarn” (in Thai). Word. 3 (May 1983): 29-31.
The Chao Cham of each Phu-Thai village carries out the same task as the one in Thai-Laos. But some extraordinary qualities are required. Winyoo Pholsawadi describes such qualities of such a person as follows:

That one must be a descendent of the former royal dynasty of the Phu-Thai principedom. He has to be a virtuous person especially honest virtue. Moreover, he must not only be a respectful person for villagers in that area but villagers of the village must also approve of his duties as well (Pholsawadi, 1993: 131-133).

Another significant function of a Chao Cham in the Phu-Thai culture is that he has to perform the ruler's missions of the group actively both in rituals of Phi Poota and public services. Winyoo Pholsawadi also describes the particular duty of Chao Cham, in the annual feast of Liang Phi Poota, that he must be in a uniform of their great former ruler, "Chao Fa". It consists of a traditional red overcoat, long sword and short knife. Moreover, in the process of offering Chao Cham behaves as the ancient ruler himself whom villagers respect as their Poota, or ancestors (Pholsawadi, 1993: 109-125; 132-133).

To be a Chao Cham of the Phu-Thai community is not quite easy. Each Chao Cham must be selected by the Phi Poota of the village or elected by members of that community. If that Chao Cham is selected by the Phi Poota himself he will possess that one and announce through the mouth of the possessed to the assembly of the community publicly. If the Phi Poota uses selecting process, he will possess a "Tiam" and the tiam will select a candidate for him or villagers will select the Chao

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1 "Tiam" is any villager who is usually possessed by Phi Poota of each village. When Phi Poota of a village possesses that one, either male or female, he/she will change his/her own personality to another one’s who is expected their Phi Poota because the possessed one introduced himself that he/she is Phi Poota of the village. See more details in Winyoo Pholsawadi. The rituals for Ancestral Feeding of the Phu-Thai in Khamcha-ii
Cham by themselves according to their recognition of ethical personality of candidates. Each Chao Cham usually keeps on this position all his life. However, this position sometimes can be changed while the Chao Cham is still alive if the Phi Poota wants (Pholsawadi, 1993: 131).

The requirement for being “Kwan Jam” or Chao Cham in Thai-Yo people which is different from other group is that a woman or a man can be Chao Cham. It depends on the agreement among villagers and/or the Phi Poota itself according to the “tiam” or possession. However, male Chao Cham is more preferable. But the most important quality of Chao Cham must be an ethical person who can instruct and suggest as well as guide and lead villagers how to satisfy their Phi Poota and earning their life in their community ethically. It is better if that one uses to be in monkhood for long time and acknowledges the Phi Poota.

A male Chao Cham of the Thai-Khmer group is elected by villagers of the village or by Phi Poota of the village himself. The candidate must be a person of good moral knowing both ethical and religious disciplines. Mongkol Jatkul (Interview, Mongkol Jatkul, 1997) describes that the one who will be selected to be Chao Cham used to be a monk in Buddhist religion. He must be a person of good moral. He will be called “Ar Jar” which etymologically means teacher. But for the So tribe called “Neau-Yiang” (Warangrat, 1981: 36) who has the extraordinary mission to invite the Phi Poota to meet villagers in the annual feast of Liang Phi Poota. More than that he can consecrate material prepared for the feast such as cotton string for binding villagers’ wrists. This activity is the symbol of blessing from the Phi. Each Chao Cham has charismatic characteristics more particularly than other


1 Binding with cotton cord string is an authentic activity of the Isarn tradition. It identifies to “togetherness”. It means that those who are binding are united to be in the same community as members of a family. See more details in Seri Phongphit and Kevin Hewison, 1990, Ibid., pp. 72-74.
villagers. He has to preserve virtues of traditional ethics all his physical and spiritual personality. He must be also honest, charitable and helpful to all villagers. So, to be a Chao Cham is very significant for a candidate because it indicates a public acknowledgment of his ethical qualities to which villagers and/or the Phii Poota himself recognize obviously.¹

1.3. Rituals toward Phii Poota.

Rituals toward Phii Poota are the means which the Isarn villagers use to contact their Phii Poota in various processes according to tradition of each group. Villagers can contact their Phii Poota only through these rituals.

Ritual toward the Phii Poota of the Thai-Lao group can be divided into two kinds: (a) public ritual and (b) private ritual. Each ritual leads to the encounter between villagers and their Phii Poota. The Chao Cham of the each village will be the officiating minister of each ritual.

Practically, each village will set two public rituals (Liang Phii Poota) toward their Phii Poota. The first one is the post harvesting ritual and the second one is the pre-rice-planting ritual. However, the post harvesting ritual is not compulsory but the pre-rice-planting ritual is a must for villagers.

The post harvesting ritual will take place within the third lunar month of a year because villagers want to thank their Phii Poota who, during the past year protected their lives from any kind of damages and troubles or problems as well as nurtured their properties especially their valuable properties including rice and vegetables. In addition this Phii protected their cattle and all domestic animals from disaster. More

¹The recent Chao Cham of Ban Nong Rawiang, Mr. Gunha Katasila, was elected by the Phii Poota of the village directly. See further details in Thaweesak Bunsu. Nyoe’s Beliefs: A Case Study of Ban Nong Rawiang, Mu 4, Tambon Viengchai, Amphoe Payakkhaphumphisai, Mahasarakham. Master’s Thesis, (Mahasarakham: Srinakharinwirot University, 1994), p. 81.
than that they can gain products from rice field as usual without malevolent effects from any evil source. So to pay gratitude to the one who helped them is suitable to an ethical people. This is the main objective for such a ritual.

The ritual will usually be celebrated on Wednesday because people in the Isan region believe that their good luck usually comes during this day.\(^1\) It is not compulsory for villagers, however, they prefer celebrate this ritual on this day.

The Chao Cham of a village is the most important celebrant on that day. He, usually in the morning, leads villagers gathering together in front of the shrine of Phii Poota with some offerings aiming at thanking the Phii for helping them to be still alive with something from their paddy fields. At the same time he makes a public apology to Phii Poota for improper behaviors that villagers may have performed unintentionally or unconsciously. The important elements of the prepared offerings are boiled-chicken, sauce, rice in a small basket, pa wan (rice mixed with sugar), betel nuts, tobacco and bottles of liquor or jars of Satho, [fermented rice-beer], khan ha or khan paed (a bowl or plate with five or eight pairs of flowers and candles, sometimes, with coins) etc. Some villagers prepare special offering “Pa Ba” for the Poota because the Phii Poota satisfied them what they had expected [according to their opinions] (Tambiah, 1976: 270). When the ritual is over, participants can eat the remaining offerings after the Chao Cham’s permission (Pattarachai et al., 1985: 29).

The other ritual is a pre-rice-planting celebration. It will take place also on Wednesday during the sixth lunar month of the year. The researcher had a chance to take a field study of such a kind of the “Liang Phii Poota” ritual in Ban Nasrinuan of

\(^1\)Most of the Isam people accept that Wednesday is a “Wan Loy” which etymologically means floating day. It is interpreted that good luck will float to them or enter the village without any sheild. See more details about the appropriate occasion for gaining good luck in The Isam Monks Assembly of Seventeen Provinces. Isarn Heritage (in Thai). (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrachwitayalai Press, 1990), pp. 86, 171-191.
Tambol Nasrinuan, Kantharawichai district, Mahasarakham province.¹ It took place on April 24, 1996. Most of villagers in this village have descended from those who migrated from Vientiane city of Laos. They are Laowiang (Interview, Artha Nantachukra, 1996). From early morning of that Wednesday a representative of each family brought a set of offering to the Chao Cham’s house. A set of offerings usually consists of some amount of cash, one boiled whole-body chicken, one bottle of liquor, one egg, one small basket of sticky rice and some pieces of knotted coconut leaves used to represent all domestic animals of each family. About nine o’clock of that Wednesday morning “Pao Kong Poosri,”² the Chao Cham of the village, leads villagers, who are sometimes representative of each family in the village, walk to the Sala Phii Poota with baskets of offerings. At the Sala where is already prepared and cleaned by the Chao Cham the days before, the Chao Cham leads villagers to perform their offerings placed on the altar prepared for this feast by reciting some religious words of Buddhism. The intercessioner firstly invites supernatural beings, such as Buddha, Indra, and all holy entities in the world whom villagers respect, to be witness to this ritual.³ Then he invites their Phii Poota to dwell among them. After having reported the situation in the village during the past year he made a public apology for wrong things that villagers had made. The last step is the request he makes for the

¹See Appendix VII.

²He was elected to be a Chao Cham since he was thirty seven years old. He is at 50/1 Ban Nasrinuan, Tambol Nasrinuan, Kantharawichai district, Mahasarakham province.

³After reciting some Bali words, the Chau Cham, Pau Kong Poosri, invited whole sacred supernatural being to be in the ritual and finally the Phii Poota. He says in Laotian dialect “... ขออิ่มท้องแล้วก็ตั้งวง พระอินทรา พระพระ เจ้าที่ เจ้าบ้าน เจ้าเมือง ปุ ญา ฟู่คำ๊มาไห้กัน ฟู่คำ๊มาฟู่ไห้ผู้ ให้มาเป็นพื้นฐาน ให้ผู้อับฮิจิยน้อยหักแม่พิศิตศักเตแม่มาด้วยใหม่ยืน.” It means that we [villagers] invite deities and all Dhevas, Intra, Brahman, the owner spirits of these areas, city ruler’s spirit, village ruler’s spirit, grand father’s spirit and grand mother’s spirit, who prepare water for drinking and dedicating some piece of land for living, please come to receive all offerings which their clanish relatives bring to them today.
welfare of the community of the village by emphasizing the peace among villagers and good conditions for their agricultural careers. After reciting the speech of offering, Chao Cham and his assistants divide some offerings brought from the village and put them on the shelves set as the seat of their Phii Poota. Then he, later, places some food and a half glass of liquor beside the Sala for assistants of Phii Poota and anonymous spirits. After that he forecasts the amount of raining water in the coming rainy season by measuring the Chao Cham’s arms with a standard stick prepared. “If there will be good rain the stick must be longer than the Chao Cham’s arm,” the Chao Cham raises the expective request publicly before performing the measurement. He did the measurement three times. Fortunately, after checking, he officially announced that there will be much rain water because the stick is longer than his arms. (The researcher found later that fortune-telling was true.) Finally, the feast concludes by having agape meal of the rest offering together Sala of Phii Poota.

In some village Phii Poota possesses really his Chao Cham or other person either male or female as a “Tiam” during the feast in order to proving his existence, power and authority. At the same time villagers have occasion to communicate with their Phii Poota frankly. Suthep Sunthornphesach (Sunthornphesach, 1968: 127-133) describes his experience of the Phii Poota’s possession that after the Chao Cham of the village had recited offering words and submitted offering materials to Phii Poota already, Chao Cham himself and villagers requested their Phii Poota to possess him for exciting discussions on their own fortune either within the present or the future or even in the past of their life. These discussions are relevant to the weather of the coming year and the causes of both private and public problems during the past year. They desire eagerly to know the weather forcast for the coming year as well. The atmosphere of the discussion is very frank, fair, friendly according to the pattern of discussion between elder and young brothers.
Another kind of a ritual toward Phii Poota is a private rite. It is divided into two forms called “Ba”\(^1\) or “Bon”\(^2\) (Solicitation), and “Kae-Ba” or “Kae-Bon” (propitiation). *Ba* and *Bon* are personal ritual performance when a villager eagerly requests help from Phii Poota such as to find a lost property, to pass an entrance exam, to get good luck while working outside the village, or to avoid the enrolment in the army etc. “*Khan Ha*” [a basket which contains five pairs of candles and of small bushes of flowers] or “*Khan Paed*” [a basket which contains eight pairs of the same materials as *Khan Ha*] must be prepared and then submitted to the Chao Cham of the village by the requirer then put on an altar. After that the requirer said what is needed humbly. If there will be some feasts or celebrations in the village the Chao Cham and/or the host of the feast must inform Phii Poota otherwise they will have some troubles.\(^3\) Before an annual military recruitment of young men, those who want to be exempted from military service have to preform a “*Ba*.” It implicitly shows that whenever a villager confronts any delicate problem he always requests and consults the Phii Poota of his village with the aim to get from him help enabling him to overcome obstacles or to protect him from any malevalence.

To perform the propitiation according to the promise is a must for those who had requested after getting success otherwise there will be punishment that the Phii Poota may ask for during the task.\(^4\) If someone has no time to propitiate the Phii

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\(^1\) This word dialectically means to request supernatural being to prohibit the situation happens.

\(^2\) This word dialectically means to request supernatural being to give an expected thing.

\(^3\) There are plenty of details about the actions of Phii Poota toward those who brake his taboo. If a visitor asks some elders about their experiences of their Phii Poota in an ethnic village in the Isarn region, that one will have various exciting details. See more details in Sugunya Patarachai et al. *The Components of Life of Ban Ped*, Khon Khaen: Khon Khen University, 1985), pp. 27-29.

\(^4\) If anyone does not follow what had promised with Phii Poota, according to the belief of the Isarn villagers, Phii Poota will remind that one directly or indirectly. See some
Poota privately, he/she can offer special offerings that he/she had promised to the Phii during the annual feast. This is an implicit process shaping the villagers to be grateful. It is not the process in which the villagers are compelled by external force to be grateful but it is a process of their gradual training according to their own decision.

The rituals toward Phii Poota of the Phu-Thais are commonly similar to the Thai-Lao group except the process of preparation, components of offering and celebrating process.

Winya Polsawadi (Polsawadi.1993: 76-129) describes the process of Liang Phii Poota feast which is formally prepared a week before as follows:

a) The Chao Cham and his assistants have to clean the shrine and surrounding area. Some of them prepare the ritual cloths and inform the villagers the date and time of the coming ritual.

b) Villagers donate some money (at least two Baths) to any Chao Cham’s assistant for buying ritual materials: a cow or a buffalo, betal vine, tobacco, candles, joss sticks and red clothes. Both Chao Cham’s assistants and villagers prepare Satho, fermented rice-beer which is the favorite drink of Phii Poota. In addition, local music band is another necessary factor for the ritual as well.

c) On the celebrating day, the local band starts Phu-Thai music while Chao Cham invites Chaopoo [or Phii Poota] in his home to stay with him by presenting some offerings such as a pair of Champa flower (Michelia champaca), garlands, a bowl of perfume water mixed with powder of Mai Jan (Aglaia pyramidata hance or Dracaena loureiri Gagnep), and a bottle of (governmental) liquor, and, then informs the Chaopoo about the ceremony at the shrine (Sala). After that the Chao Cham drinks a glass of liquor, puts on the Chaopoo’s dress and brings along with him a sword with its tool box and a short knife. At that moment, the Chao Cham is fulfilling two roles: Chao Poo of the village and the Chao Cham himself. After that

he leads all participants to the Don Poota where both male and female assistants had previously prepared special offerings for the ceremony.

At Don Poota the Chao Cham starts the ritual by paying respect to “Ho Duang Pee” where, according to the Phu-Thai belief, the Phii Poota or the Chao Poo lives; and then he offers a pair of garlands. He, then, lit a pair of candles and two pieces of joss stick for Chao Poo as well as lighting another eight pieces of joss sticks for paying respect to other ancestor spirits traveling from eight directions to join that ritual. Then he invites Chao Poo in Phu-Thai language. The details of invitation is expressed simply to request their Phii Poota to receive four sets of offerings: sacrifice and food which consists of meat, liver, bones and hoofs of the cattle killed for this.

1 There is a picture of a person whom villagers assumed as their Phii Poota. There are also some artificial weapons made of wood. This is the sanctuary of the shrine. See Appendix VII, picture # 4.

2 The inviting speech which the Jam says in Phu Thai dialect is ... “wannii pen wan leng Chao Poo la ma hab kong tii lulaan dai leng her Chao Poo dai kin chon im mee kham suk kwam charoeon her mee kwam im ok im jer per lulaan ja dai dee ok dee jer. Pok lu laan tang lai ja dai mee kwamsuk mi dai mee sadtu ma bed bang. Laew her Chao Poo pokpak raksa lulaan her lulaan dai yoodee kindee ya her dai padpai. Kaenmaen Cha Poo mi pao-ok pojer singler hu yua dai piler ja lulaan laew kow her Chao Poo ma singtiam bo her lulaan hujak nai mu nee.” It means that... today is the day which your kids and grand-children come to feed Chao Poo. Chao Poo please receive and take offering satisfyingly because we are happy also. We request Chao Poo not only to protect us from malevolent events and any damage but bless us to have better life as well. Please inform us through the “tiam” of any disappointment or any requirement.” (see Pholsawadi, 1993: 120).

3 It consists of candle and joss sticks for inviting spirits; and another necessary item: red flower (Ponsawadi, 1993: 83)

4 It consists of following elements: (1) Drinks: (a) a bowl of perfume made of fragrant perennial wood-powder, (b) a chang (elephant) or a pot of fermented rice-beer, c) Ma (horse) or a bottle of liquor; 2) Food: 2.1) Pa Kaw which consists of (a) raw meat, (b) Laab Luad or Laab Daeng (raw-chopped meat cooked with various kinds of seasoning and
ceremony. After that he offers, on the left side of the Sala, three sets of offerings to the ancestral spirits that still stay in the original homeland. Then, on the right side, the Chao Cham offers another three sets of offerings to ancestral spirits of the present hometown.

Killing a cow or a buffalo in front of the shrine and cook the favorite food "Laab Luad"¹ and meat curry, or Laabdaeng and Kaeng Ron, for the Phii Poota on the celebrating day are necessary obligations for the feast. The other necessary offering is the local and governmental liquor, called Ma daeng [Red horse] or Ma Khaoow [White Horse] due to the color of the liquor or a jar of fermented rice beer (Warangkarat, 1981: 37-38). All special offerings are specifically prepared and contained in leaf hand-made vessels prepared by Chao Cham's assistants (Polsawadi, 1993: 77-97). The official ritual is concluded by the communication between the Phii Poota through the possessed Chao Cham or a Tiam and villagers and agape meal on remain-offered matters.

The purpose of the Liang Phii Poota ritual is not only paying respect and homage to their ancestors but to thank them for taking care of their life peacefully and successfully as well as apologizing to them for some wrongdoings of the villagers as well (Polsawadi, 1993: 76-77).

For the private rituals called Ba and Bon, the Phu-Thai usually perform as the Thai-Lao's practice. Yet it requires another ritual for the Phu-Thais. It is a "Kob"² ritual. This ritual will be set according to two conditions (a) to propitiate a solicitation

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¹ A kind of Isarn food cooked with chopped raw meat, fresh blood, onion, garlic fired stewed chilies and rice.

² It means direct information.
and (b) to inform the *Phii Poota* when there is a new comer live in the village form other village according to marriage or new migrants which requires intention to accept the authority of *Phii Poota* (Polsawadi, 1993: 151-153).

The rituals toward *Phii Poota* of the Thai-Yo people are the same as other groups. But the main offerings are a boiled head of pig, *Pawan*, and the most important kind of food: meat curry and liquor. These two elements will be the means to predict the future situations of the village and villagers; and the amount of rainy water during the rainy season to come for rice cultivation. Beside villagers who intend to offer some special presents due to the former promise made during the past situations they wanted help from their *Phii Poota* particularly according to their solicitation can bring the promised offering in this ritual.

In the case of Ban Thakhonyang (Kedthes, 1991; Thawaro 1997) the Public ritual for *Phii Poota* of the Thai-Yo is always on a Wednesday of waxing moon in the fourth lunar month. *Chao Cham* will inform villagers and collect money and materials for offering to the *Phii Poota*. When the proper time comes all villagers gather in area of the *Chao Pao Samran*’s shrine firstly with various kinds of food and drinks to offer the *Chao Pao Samran* the prepared-boiled head of a pig, *Pa Wan*, and the most important kind of food: meat curry and bottles of liquor. And then they go to *Chao Poo Pilue*’s shrine and offer this *Chao Pao* the same kind of offering. Finally, they go to present another kind of offering to *Songnang-Pi-Nong* with *Pa Wan* because liquor and non vegetarian food are not suitable for the female *Phii*.

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1 The prediction of the agricultural abundance depends on quantity of liquor and liquid of curry offered to the *Phii*. If there is still more liquor and liquid of curry, the *Chao Cham* will interpret that there will be enough or more than enough rainy water for agricultural abundance; but if there is little there will be drought. See more details in Boonyong Kerdthes. *The Thai-Yo Culture: A case study of Ban Thakhonyang, Kantarawichai District of Mahasarakham Province* (in Thai). (Mahasarakham: Srinakarintarawiro University, 1991), p 44.
Private rituals are the grateful expression of a villager who propitiated the Phii Poota on particular purpose. The villagers perform them when they are confronting serious malevolent conditions either officially or privately. They perform them officially when they need help from the Phii Poota and Chao Cham. Therefore the villager goes to see Chao Cham with a “Khan Ha” or a “Kham Paed” and informs him what kind of help the villager wants from the Phii Poota. Chao Cham will perform his own mission later. According to a private-personal ritual, the villager will set his own intention aiming at making the contact with the Phii Poota himself with the view to bargain the Phii with some condition such as the offering of some favorite objects in the case of successful wishes.

Thai-Khmer people establish the contacts with their Phii Poota through two ritual forms similar to the other three groups. The public rituals are exercised twice a year. The first occasion is dialectally called “San Ta.” This word etymologically means to adore a grand-father. This meaning can be applied to grand-parents of both mother and father. However, it implies in a “strictu sensu” only one important person to whom all villagers pay their greater respect in guise of gratitude due to his good deeds which mostly impressed the villagers.

On the day scheduled by the Ar Jar of the village, the members of each family accompanied by the Ar Jar go to the shrine located outside the village bringing with them offering materials such as a cooked pig’s head (Warangrat, 1981: 36), a boiled turtle (Wongthes, 1996: 89) or a boiled whole-body chicken (Boonsu, 1994: 80), a bottle of liquor, pa wan, some sets of mark and plu (betel nut or Areca catechu linn and peper betel linn), tobacco sets, pairs of flowers and candles from each family. In front of the shrine, the Ar Jar of the village and the villagers placed the offerings for Phii Poota by reciting some magical words. After having performed the offerings the forecast of the rain during the coming season will be made according to the propitiatory signs which appear on the back part of the maxillary bones of the boiled chicken.
offered to the Phii Poota. Then their Phii Poota will entertain himself with the participants about the situation of the village through the Chao Cham who is possessed by him. Therefore Chao Cham himself instructs and suggests the participants of his own intention based on ethical codes. Before going home all participants will have a common meal consisting of the returned portion of the offerings together.

The purpose of this ritual is, on the one hand, to inform their Phii Poota what villagers are going to do as well as asking for abundance of their coming hard-work: rice planting. It implies that the Phii Poota has to nurture plants as well as to cause rain falling according to its natural procedure. On the other hand, villagers want to recharge their inner energy for the coming hard work that depends on water natural resource.

The procedure of the post-harvesting ceremony follows the same pattern after annual harvest which usually takes place within the first and the third lunar months. It is called “San Sa-Rer-Wa-Reong-Yoong.” This ceremony emphasizes on “gratefulness” expressed by villagers who account the abundant input of their ricefields and much of satisfactions they received within the past year. They reckoned that all abundant materials they received were derived from the power of their Phii Poota. There is a significant part implying the uniqueness of the villagers. It is the

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1 The status of raining water for agricultural planting in the rainy season can be predicted from the feature of the back part of maxillary bones of the boiled chicken. If it is straight it means that there will not be enough rain because the chicken lifts its head direct to the sky waiting for rain and this action causes it straight. But if it has a curve form it means that there will be enough rain because the chicken keep on seeking for food as usual without worrying about rain and then it causes that organ bends. See further details in Pranee Wongthes. “An Adorartion towards Takuad: The ritual of the Kuay in Ban Truem” in *Art and Culture* (in Thai). 17 (September 1996): 88.

2 It means, according to the Thai-Khmer context “the adoration toward Phii Poota during the period of bringing rice to the barn.”
"Puk Kho Mue" or the binding wrists of villagers with the consecrated cotton string by the Chao Cham in the name of their Phii Poota in the ceremony.

The private ceremony which villagers perform themselves toward their Phii Poota called "Ba and Bon," and "Kae Ba and Kae Bon" is usually practiced in the same pattern and process as those of other three groups.

1.4. Villagers.

Most of the villagers in local villages of the Thai-Lao in the Isarn region believe that there is Phii Poota who was an authoritative person in the history of their group. They always follow the rules of Phii Poota all the time especially while they are in the village and they are within the territory of "Don Poota" though they are Buddhists. The disciplines of Phii Poota must be observed seriously otherwise there will be some punishment. They will not bring any piece of wood from the Don Phii Poota without asking permission. They will not disdain their Phii Poota and his properties. They will not plough ricefield before the ritual of Liang Phii Poota takes place. Or in the emergency case, they will inform the Chao Cham of the village before ploughing their paddy fields.

From some empirical evidences such as an information toward Phii Poota before a villager goes to work outside or solicitation and propitiation, they signify that villagers respect their Phii Poota heartedly. They reckon the Phii as their respectedfully-beloved elders who effects their life according to their conducts. In addition, villagers need to feed their relatives who past away because they feel instinctually whether there are enough delicious food in the invisible world for their relatives or not. When villagers join the "Liang Phii Poota" feast, they voluntarily offer what they have prepared to the Phii as if they present a kind of gift to a distinguished one sincerely. If they do not have money to pay for the feast, they will share another properties. The most important matter of the feast is that they want to thank their Phii Poota [assumed as the one(s)] who help(s) them to live peacefully over the passed year. It is the performance which villagers can show to their Phii
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Poota evidentially that they still respect and obey Phii Poota’s taboos. This feast is a sign and a symbol through which villagers express their sincere gratefulness and filial piety toward those who take care of them as their parents. It is an implicit process, a popular wisdom which elders use to form their youngsters to realize and acknowledge the gratefulness of their elders especially their Phii Poota who has both supernatural power and authority to punish and to reward others. It implicitly indicates that the living and the dead still contact each other as in the same distance. Moreover, seniority still firmly influences in the Thai-Laos communities of the Isarn region benevolently.

The Phu-Thais respond to the Phii Poota as if the Phii is the powerful ruler who still keeps on his authentic authority. Every command of the Phii through tradition or particular requirement through their Chao Cham or the intercessioner will be followed respectively. In last decade, villagers of Ban Nongdok in Pannanikhom district of Sakol Nakorn province attempted to satisfy their Phii Poota’s requirement: to sacrifice three buffaloes a year before they gave up the belief because they could not be patient enough for the selfish requirement (Interview, Jamnong Narinrak, 1996).

Thai Yo people reckon their Phii Poota as if the one of important institution for their life though they are Buddhists as other ethnic Isarn groups. It means that the leadership of the Phii while it was the leader of the village or of that group in the past still influences in the community of recent villagers who are descendants of the previous ruler who is the Phii. They sincerely recognize that the Phii can protect them from malevolence, or prohibit disasters from destroying villagers and their properties. Yet they also expect to gain benefits in their life if they follow and obey the interdictions of this Phii sincerely through verbal informations and guidance of the Chao Cham of village. Details of Phii Poota’s norms concern to ethical conducts as well as interdictions of each villager toward others, natural resources and invisible beings. Consequently there is no robbing, or quarreling in the village. The interrelation between the villagers and their Phii Poota is a fraternal activity. However, respect or homage must be observed in the part of villagers because they
always feel that they are inferior to the Phii while the Phii is always superior: who has supernatural power affect villagers. The Phii seems to be the imperial protector while villagers seems to be filial surrenders.

If there is any violation of Phii Poota’s disciplines, the one who commits that violation will get physical punishment from the Phii. It is the obligation of the Chao Cham to perform the process of healing the patient directly by his apologizing words and Khan Ha or some pairs of both flowers and candles offering to the Phii. He also asks for a contrition which the Phii wants from the patient sincerely.

Villagers of the Thai-Khmers, especially those who join the ceremonies recognize the authority and supernatural power of their Phii Poota, and pay filial piety to such kind of Phii as their great benefactor who is very authoritatively merciful. Phii Poota of each village is an important person who can dictate and control the future of villagers authoritatively. Those who do not want to get any problem in life must avoid all interdictions. Those who violate any Phii Poota’s command have to express their sincere penitence and pay expiation. All damages occurred in their life are effects caused by their behaviors which dissatisfied the Phii Poota of the village. Those who observe his commands and prohibitions in their life will be under his patronage. They will have a benevolent life. Those who do not follow the commands and interdictions or commit “Phid Phii” will be punished according to the hierarchical penalty set in the form of material expiation by the Phii Poota through the Chao Cham and/or elders of the village.¹ Saengphet Suporn (Suporn, 1989: 66) describes, according to his field study in Ban Nong Yang of Mukdarn province, that there are three levels of guilty villagers usually committing as well as three types of expiation.

¹ Phii Poota of each village will observe conducts of each villager. He, according to a traditional belief in the Isarn region, will express his disappointment when a villager violates his command or interdiction through possessing that villager to inform the guilty he committed, or either Phii Poota himself causes physical pain to someone then that one informs the public after being diagnosed by the Chao Cham or the Phii cause that one a physical pain directly.
A minor level or "Phid Noi" is a traditional violation of respective conducts which juniors should behave towards seniors especially in familial-hierarchical status. The expiation which the offender has to pay is a (boiled) chicken as the popular Thai-Khmer's proverb puts: "Phid Noi Gin Kai" which means "If anyone committed a minor fault, the one who fines must be offered a (boiled) chicken." A middle level, "Phid Laiy," is the guilt about adultery or fornication which requires a pig as expiation as their popular saying "Phid Laiy Nae Gin Mu" which means "if there is a greater mistake the one who fines must be offered a pig." The highest one is "Phid Kru Ba Ar Jarn" or violation of behavioral etiquette toward their master which implies to any patron of the offender. It requests a cow or a buffalo as expiation as it says: "Phid Kru Ba Arjarn Gin Wua Gin Kwuaiy" which means "If there is a conflict with a Kuru or a master, there must be a fine with a cow or a buffalo." It can be said that, in the researcher's opinion, the sincere recognition of Phii Poota's authority as their patron penetrates in the impulse of the Thai-Khmer people.

2. Summary.

The notion of Phii Poota in the Isarn culture from phenomenological appearances has to be considered holistically from the activities of villagers who express their acknowledgment to the existence Phii, though it is invisible, within their daily-life activities and the rituals through the missions of intercessioner. It is the relational performance of the Isarn villagers who integrate their abstract perspective of invisible authoritative entity to ethical perspective for enhancing qualities of individual's life and solidarity of their community in the village. That invisible one is figured as the great ancestor of the village personified as the authoritative ancestor whose beneficiaries are still impressed either in physical or spiritual dimension, or the lord of the area whose presence should be recognized and respected (Mulder, 1979: 21). The effect of such recognition is to empower the village's ethical norms. That invisible one is recognized as a spatial cosmic invisible entity. Moreover that invisible one is a powerful person who can dominate residents and natural circumstances and environments for the goodness of community. Consequently he
has his own territory in a jungle close to the village according to the selection of villagers. That territory is a sacred place where the respect from people in the village and others people must be requested. He always has a shrine. This shrine is the representative of the presence of Phii Poota whose function is assumed as a ruler who sets ethical disciplines, or special interdictions (Tambiah, 1970: 265) for enhancing qualities of the villagers’ life. If there is any violation of any rule, there must be a particular punishment according to the quality and quantity of the violation.

The moral issue which is implicitly inserted in this concept is gratefulness. This concept is part of their tradition that Isarn people have to transmit to their heirs. Hence this spatial cosmic invisible entity still lives among villagers with caring of them as parents take care of their kids.

The intercessioner, Chao Cham, Khajam, Kuanjam or Ar Jar is a particular name used to call Phii Poota’s officiant for each tribe in the Isarn region. Each one has a common significance of life: an ethical person. Such character is approved by villagers and the Phii on Chao Cham election. It effects the great voluntary obligation on service of Phii Poota as well as villagers heartedly. In addition, he is a healer in the function of Phii Poota as well as the sage to whom villagers have to pay respect and obey absolutely. He sometimes is possessed by the Phii to suggest and guide residents especially in the ritual of Liang Phii Poota. However according to the given obligation each one gives services to public equally. It is an astonishing position because the one in this position has no salary or any special income from his position but that one has to sacrifice himself: time, privacy and energy.

Rituals about Phii Poota are performances which villagers exercise towards Phii Poota personally or publicly. Each ritual is exercised because villagers wants to contact Phii Poota due to their own sakes. The purpose of annual rituals concerns gratitude toward their ancestors who always protect them from malevolence and help them to sustain their better life especially in agricultural production and apology to their ancestors because of their mistakes. Moreover, they want to offer food to their ancestors because they are afraid that their ancestors may have not enough food to eat
or have not delicious dishes to consume. Private rituals mean that villagers prefer to ask for help from their ancestors. It is an innocent activity which a weak wise man has to do while confronting any unsolvable great troubles. This is an implicit expression of self realization. They are means which motivate villagers to behave more ethically. They also form villagers to have solidarity and help each other as members of the same family.

Villagers are those who accept Phii Poota of their village as their ancestor and impact them either good or bad according to their daily conducts and manners based on ethical standard. They have been formed by relatives to recognize that Phii Poo is not only an authoritative person but it is the notion of an institution in which they are members. They must obey the disciplines which Phii Poota issues through the instructions and social formation of their elders and especially the intercessioner. If they break any rule they have to ask for forgiveness to Phii Poota otherwise they will be punished. From the activities which villagers exercise toward Phii Poota institution, they recognize that the Phii is a very important member in their village because the Phii has supernatural power to help villagers to reach their normal target of life.
CHAPTER THREE

THE VALUE OF THE BELIEF IN PHII POOTA FOR THE ISARN NATIVES

If the house spirit is not good, a forest spirit will intervene. (If the house is not united, a third party will come in and take over).

The Isarn Proverb.


1. Rationality of the Belief in Phii Poota in the Isarn Context

The previous chapter describes the phenomena of special activities that concern the life-pattern of the Isarn people being held as the consequences from the belief in Phii Poota. Those activities affect villagers by two traits: good effects and bad effects. To identify the value of something there must be evidence to indicate that thing has quality of being good or bad. Albeit, there must be the agent of such quality. In the case of the belief in Phii Poota which is generally considered that Phii Poota is the agent of the belief which such descriptions concern, it implicates that Phii Poota is the primary source of various effects usually encountered by villagers. If villagers can identify the source of each consequence, they will not think of Phii Poota; but if the consequence of any unknown cause which concerns the welfare of villagers, Phii Poota of the village will be thought of. It means that the Isarn villagers recognize that there is Phii Poota because each belief is normally based on the acknowledgment of the agent of the knowledge which is the foundation of such belief; and it should be justified by a means

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'The philosophical meaning is “If there is familial disunity, there is a danger of external interference”.'
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(Russel, 1992:129-135). Moreover, such belief is reasonable in the Isarn context because it has been gradually accepted by the Isarn villagers either implicitly or explicitly in their own context. The Isarn villagers experienced some phenomena which their sources cannot be proved by empirical evidences though those phenomena are related to their former requests toward their Phii Poota. It is a traditional practice for the ethnic Isarn villagers, who have to take an adventure in life patterns in which they have not a certain conviction in a particular situation, to request the Phii Poota of their village to assist them to be successful. It follows that in the scope of their rational thought there is no other source that gives them success. But in their daily life practice when they beg their elders, they usually receive what they want. Though villagers work in a town as taxi drivers or in other jobs they usually call for help from their Phii Poota if they think that they may not get success from what they expect to do. It is impossible for them to request some help from any stranger. The closest one who is powerful enough, in their opinion, is their Phii Poota. Hence, it is common to see taxi drivers from the Isarn region buy garlands and hang them on the rear-view mirror of their cars. One of the reasons why they have to behave as such is to request help from their Phii Poota (Interview, Boonyang Pholmeebun, 1996). It can infer in the villagers' viewpoint that there is Phii Poota in the Isarn villagers' paradigm; and their own Phii Poota can take care of them though they live or work in remote areas.

The assumption seems to be superficial in scientific trends because to assess the role of Phii Poota in the Isarn context as the agent of such belief from such references without objective existence of Phii Poota is fallacious in the sense of scientific knowledge. This belief seems to be inconsistent because there is no sensory evidences that human can verify the existence of Phii Poota scientifically. The process of proof considered from the consequent part to affirm its antecedent part is not absolutely valid in deductive viewpoint. For, in the case of Phii Poota there are only evidences from villagers perspectives in oral forms about the consequential effects form an unknown cause. Yet that cause is recognized as Phii Poota. They are only intersubjective viewpoints. If the argument of the existence of Phii Poota sets its hypothesis on scientific theory which requires sensory objects to approve the existence of each cause-
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effect notion by empirical process, the notion of the existence of Phi Poota is nothing, meaningless and absurd. And it follows that the belief in Phi Poota is superstitious. For there is neither academical record on sensory experience of each Phi Poota nor any result of laboratory tests to approve such existence except some unofficial tales or stories and subjective experiences described in some monthly or weekly journals. But no scientist approves such individual evidences academically even though there is parapsychology which concerns the force of human spirit or the aura that affect other thing (Phongphit, 1979: 133-140); but it does not evidentially approve the existence of Phi. Hence, according to empiricism, there is no sufficient evidence to validate the notion of Phi Poota which is the core element of an important Isarn culture from only such references.

The researcher expects that there should be some feasible resources beneath the perception of Phi Poota that vindicate its existence so that it is a core element of the Isarn culture as a belief even though there is no concrete evidence (through sensory agents) to approve such existence directly. Moreover, this belief has been transformed from one generation to another generation of each village continuously as an important genetic heritage. It should implicitly implicate that there must be something hidden beneath this phenomenal expression which scientific knowledge cannot discover. On the one hand, empiricists are outsiders or heretics of the Isarn culture who do not

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1. Mysterious stories about Phi’s activities either good or bad that affect human beings are described as if Phii really exists in the world. See some examples in Phanida Chobvanijcha. (Ed.), The Mysterious World (Lok Lee Lab, in Thai). Bangkok: Srisayam press.; Daeng Bangkruay. (Ed.), Horrific Stories (Ruang Khonhualuk, in Thai). Nonthaburi: Khonhualuk press.

2. Parapsychologists can experience only the effects that persons who have supernatural power exercise their energy to have telephaty, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, paradagnosis etc.; but they cannot absolutely approve that the primary cause of the occurred effects is the performers. See more details in Seri Phongphit. “Magic and Thai Society” in Sukhothaidhammathirat University’s Text: Unit 8. Beliefs and Religions in Thai Society (in Thai). (Bangkok: Sukhothaidhammathirat University press, 1992), pp.333-339.
comprehend the notion of *Phii Poota* contextually because their criterion of self-justifying to identify the truth of knowledge is based on sensory organs and physical objects passively. On the other hand, the belief is the consensus of villagers of the Isarn region which cannot prove by sensory organs directly as scientific method requires. It needs hermeneutic process to reveal the agent of such belief which still exercises its role in the Isarn region.

In order to have a feasible conviction on the notion of *Phii Poota* which is insensible, on the one hand, there will be another academic process to vindicate this notion because the object of human inquiry which is the primary agent of human knowledge for justifying his belief is not only a physical object that man can experience directly but there are meta-physical entities which human sensory organs cannot experience directly. However, on the other hand, human intellect can intuit such knowledge from some evidences that human intellect can justify such belief. Alvin I. Goldman has described a status of a belief which should be justified that “[T]he justificational status of a belief is not only a function of the cognitive processes actually employed in producing it; it is also a function of processes that could and could be employed” (Kornblith, 1994: 126). He also sets a principle to identify a justified belief that:

If S's belief in *p* at *t* results from a reliable cognitive process, and there is no reliable or conditionally reliable process available to S which, had it been used by S in addition to the process actually used, would have resulted in S's not believing *p* at *t*, then S's belief in *p* at *t* is justified (Kornblith, 1994: 126).

That is the principle of inference. However such process requires some physical evidence that man can link his conviction to the primary agent which is insubstantial by a base-clause principle. Hence to set a conviction on any perception which will be the knowledge of human intellect the researcher is convinced that it does not depend on only sensory perception of the primary source but human intellect can also consolidate a consistent knowledge from secondary sources for identifying the primary source of each
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Bertrand Russell (Russell, 1948/1992: 439) confirms that knowledge is categorized into two groups: (1) knowledge of fact and (2) knowledge of the general connections between facts. That is a notion intuited from some original sources of material beings. Sorayuth Sriworakun (1985) also discusses on the problem of human knowledge. He also distinguishes the existence which are the primary sources of knowledge used to approve the truth of knowledge into five levels. He puts:

[W]e may distinguish the existence of beings [which are the objects of human intellect] as follows: (1) An absolute unnoticeable existence even there is the best [scientific] equipment either at present time or in the future; (2) An unnoticeable at this moment because of contemporary equipment does not have enough capacity [to verify]; but if there is [scientific] equipment that has high technology enough in the future it may be noticeable; (3) A noticeable existence because of highest quality equipment; (4) A noticeable existence because of high quality equipment; (5) A normal noticeable existence by sense organs (Sriworakun, 1985: 116-117).

To identify the value of the notion of *Phii Poota* in the Isarn cultural context as a belief and to recognize its valuation, an appropriate comprehension of the meaning of *Phii Poota* which is a discourse, a text in the Isarn cultural paradigm that represents an insubstantial entity\(^1\) and influences the Isarn villagers is a must. Because the researcher is sure, as Donald Davidson is convinced, that if we understand what a person says, we can know what he believes (Davidson, 1984: 143). The researcher assures that every discourse described in the linguistic form has its own existential source according to semantics but it is not necessary to be sensible or it cannot be sensible because of its insubstantiality according to the condition of space and time, and physical condition;

\(^1\) The researcher relies that *Phii Poota* is what is symbolizable found initially in nonlinguistic reality considered in its effective and representative agents as Ricoeur proposes. See more details in Paul Ricoeur. *The Conflict of Interpretation: Essays in Hermeneutics.* James M. Edie (Ed.), (Evanston: Northwestern University press, 1974), p.66.
and it is also incapability of human intelligence according to circumstance and environment. If somebody rejects the existence of unperceiveable object to which linguistic elements signify and can be rectified through historical condition, that one is self contradictory. This will be identified in psychological fallacy of Ignoratio Elenchi (Bachhuber, 1957: 185-188).

As Phii Poota is a significant element of the Isarn culture that has been sustained from generation to generation; and this notion has offered peaceful atmosphere to the Isarn society for long time (Duck et al., 1985: 376; Som-In, 1991: 182), a comprehender should use a socio-cultural anthropology's viewpoint for perceiving an appropriate and justified knowledge of Phii Poota. It holds on holistic consideration of a life pattern of the Isarn people in the form of belief that endorses demands of human incentives. In the case of the notion of Phii Poota it is an element of a belief which is an important element in the Isarn culture for the Isarn people because they have to adapt themselves to their physical, social and ideational environment as Louis J. Luzbetak comments on components of culture. He puts:

[It] consists of a set of norms, standards, and associated notions and beliefs for coping with the various demands of life shared by a social group, learned by the individual from the society and organized into a system of control (Luzbetak, 1988: 156).

It follows that the explication of the notion of Phii Poota has to start from its root in the Isarn context as a cultural means that has impressed the Isarn people as a belief which means that the object of their knowledge “There is Phii Poota” is true (Soonthornphesach, 1968; Nuancan, 1997) until it forms a special tradition that influences the life pattern of the Isarn people according to Paul Ricoeur’s method: demythologization. And then the evaluation of the belief in Phii Poota by the process which R.T. Allen (1993) proposes on practical or technical value\(^1\) in the scope of

\(^1\) A.T. Allen explains that these values arise from activities of bringing something else about, which include activities of removing or preventing other things, and as the standards
performer-performance or action valuation will clarify the value of that Phii respectively.


To decipher an appropriate comprehension of the belief in Phii Poota in the Isarn context the researcher interprets the meaning from its root. The word "Phii Poota" is derived from three words: Phii, Poo and Ta. These three words are the genuine Thai-Tai dialect used in the Isarn region. The researcher analyzes those three words distinctly; then he synthesizes their meaning through villagers' activities in order to propose their contextual meaning as a belief.

2.1. The Paradigm of Phii in the Isarn Context.

Phii, generally indicates any invisible being that exists in the world; and it can contact living human being but human being cannot contact it directly as the Thai Royal Dictionary (The Royal Institute of Thailand, 1982: 560) defines Phii that "it is what a human being believes that it is invisible being or spirit, or soul of a dead animal, especially human being. It can appear to human sight." This word is a radical ethnic term of Thai language. Roongtham Sujithammarak (Sujithammarak, 1990: 318), who condenses Praya Anumarnratchathon's idea of Phii in the Thai context, describes that Phii is a radical Thai word which has equivalent meaning to spirit in indianized context. It signifies what differs from and has more power than human beings because of its invisibility. It can effect human beings either benevolently or malevolently. Chalermkiat Pheownuan (Pheownuan, 1990: 88-89) also notices on the word "Phii" referred to the evidence in Bradley's Dictionary (1873) which did not have the word which guide performance of those activities; and any performance which is guided by them is to that extent a practical or technical one of bringing something about, or removing it or preventing it through the process of grasping the point of meaning of the object in question and relating it to the relevant activity and its standards. See more details in A.T. Allen The Structure of Value. (Aldershot: Avebury, 1993), pp. 42-52, 84-99.
“vinyaan” (soul) in that dictionary but there is the word “Phii” instead. It implies that “Phii” ought to be a radical Thai word used in Thailand [or in Thai society] before the popular word “vinyaan” (soul) which is contemporary word under the influence of Brahmanism and Buddhism; for the Thai-Lao ethnic groups have their own history older than the discourse recorded in geographical or historical texts which has been limited according to the experts’ concern. The meaning of “Phii” which denotes an invisible entity according to its definition should concern the dynamic movement of each ethnic group as noticed in its own language (Nartsupha, 1989). It needs a prudent interpretation before an obvious justification that it is false or feasible knowledge. Moreover, there is a difference between these two words due to its usage because the word vinyaan signifies the personship or individuality of immaterial human person while “Phii” indicates the status of the existence of the soul. Therefore the word “Phii” is the original Thai word that has been used to represent an invisible entity that cannot figure concretely as a sensible being.

In the Isam context the word “Phii” has been used very often for signifying every invisible being. But this word is usually used in a noun form to be modified by a particular entity’s name as a compound noun to express the notion of that one which used to be visible or invisible with either good or bad attributions able to infect human beings. It is also used to signify any unknown cause that affects the human being. According to Preecha Pinthong’s perspective (Pinthong, 1989: 535), the word “Phii” has two categories: Phii Dib and Phii Suk. Phii Dib or raw ghost signifies a dishonest living person who deceives others. This quality of such person terrifies other people who are afraid of deception from the Phii Dib. The Isam people do not want to contact people that have such quality. It implies that the Phii are vested with faculties capable of possessing a man who in turn can threaten the others with its supernatural power. Hence, Phii Dib is an invisible entity in that man.

Phii Suk or a ripe ghost is a genuine Phii which the Isam people always mention. This notion consists of three categories. The first one is any dead body of a human being. It is nominated as Phii because it is not alive. If any animal dies, it will be called “Phii” automatically because the notion of Phii is opposite to any living human being.
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This is a common acknowledgment in the Isarn region until there is a saying about the status of death that: "[Anyone] who dies must be Phii, and that one seems to flee [form his own group] for being another person as a stranger [who lives far way]" or it, in Laotian dialect is expressed "Tai Pen Phii Nii Pen Poen." The living cannot know about the dead as an Isarn proverb comments: "Thinking of death can no way solve the problem as when there is no more light one cannot know where to go"1 (Pinthong, 1989: 359). This status does not involve only mankind but all animals as well. Hence this word can be identical with "ghost" in English context lexically2 but it is not absolutely evil.

After death, according to the Isarn tradition, the dead body will be cremated on funeral pyre. Henceforth that gives birth to the notion of Phii Suk or Ripe Phii. However the human substance of that body seems to be intact due to the existence of its spirit or soul (vinyaan) which is not palpable. Pattaraporn Sirigarnchana (Sirigarnchana, 1990: 6-9) commenting on the notion of soul’s existence deriving from animism and Brahmanism in the Thai [-Tai] culture stresses that “death is the end of human physical body but human soul (vinyaan) still exists” [because it is immortal]. The remained soul (vinyaan) is also nominated as Phii. He, according to such popular belief, is waiting for new rebirth3 and still lives with his relatives because (a) he still worries about troubles

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1 The Isarn dialect says : อหังการณ์มาขึ้นไป คิดไปทางหลังแล้ว ไม่สู้ในการ.

2 Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary (1994 :595) defines “ghost” as the soul of a dead person, a disembodied spirit imagined as wandering among or haunting living persons.

3 There are a lot of prehistorically archeological evidences of the corpses buried with some weapons and ornaments that were expected to be tools and equipments for another life in the northeast site of civilization in Ban Chiang and surrounding area. These evidences prove the belief of life after death that prehistoric people had. Hence death is not the final end of human life but it is the threshold between the present life and the life to come. See more details in Fine Art. *Ban Chiang: A World Heritage in Thailand*. (Bangkok: Prachachat press, 1995), pp. 16-18. It is worthy to compare this Isarn popular belief about the ultra life with the belief of Egyptians in Ancient Age leading them to mumify their Pharaohs and to bury them in pyramids.
of his living relatives and (b) he, however, cannot earn his living due to non-physical condition while he still has human consciousness.

This notion expands to the Phi (vinyaan) of the person who lived in the area where the contemporary inhabitants who are not real Phi's relatives live. It is usually called Phi Chao Thii (the spirit lord of the land or genius loci). This Phi usually requires to be satisfied by the contemporary villagers through their respect that can be expressed in various forms of activities. Otherwise he may annoy them because he wants to have a rebirth thanks to their merits obtained through offerings.¹

The last one is natural Phi who is an invisible entity the origin of which source cannot be identified concretely. It can affect other things especially human beings either benevolently or malevolently. This Phi also has its own belonging especially its own compound. It is common for the Isarn people to admit that everything in this world has its owner.² This assumption is derived from the comparison of their own psychological feelings which prefer to possess something as well as the others should possess their own properties. For some places that have no official owner, they belong to anonymous

¹ Many researchers describe this kind of Phi. They attempt to approve the existence of this Phi from their own experiences or those of villagers as their protectors based on the needs of betterness in life and protection from disasters. It implicitly signifies that vinyaan or soul of each dead body is still alive and exists in this world; but, sometimes, he annoys someone to beg merit because he cannot increase merit which supports him to have another life. See more details in Poonpis Amartayakul, “The Belief of The Spirit of The Land Lord in Mahidol University, Salaya Campus” in Journal of Language and Culture (in Thai). 2 (July-December 1991): 27-43.

² There is a popular didactic verse which reflects this perspective as follows: “ต้นไม้ใหญ่ บัวกริ๊ซ ชมนี้ก็สิ้น ตายก็ไป ตายก็ไป ต้นไม้ใหญ่” It literally means “[If] A big tree has no Phi, a beautiful lady has no fan, then the earthland should be quaked, as if Phi Tahaek dislikes boiled chicken, then there will be drought.” This can be interpreted that every thing has its owner [if it does not happen, it opposes natural rules]. See further details in Nittaya Pukdeebundit. An Analytical Study of Phaya Phasit, Isarn Didactic Verses (in Thai). (Master’s Thesis, Srinakharinwirot University Mahasarakham, 1989), p. 63.
owners such as *Phii* (interview, Niti Narintrrak, 1996). This is an adaptation of general knowledge of *Phii*.

The notion of *Phii*, which is either natural spirit or individual soul (*vinyaan*), according to *Phii*’s activities experienced by villagers, can be categorized into two groups: (a) a benevolent *Phii* and (b) malevolent *Phii*. The first group of *Phii* exists in the universe by its nature. Those *Phii* are usually in the sky such as *Paya Thaën* (the supreme celestial deity that is identified as the creator of the universe in the Isam paradigm), *Phii Fa* (celestial genus who is a healer), and *Thewada* (literally means angels, however, this kind of *Phii* can be divided into two groups: *Theptida* which means female inferior divinities and *Theppabutr* or masculine inferior divinities; both of them are protectors of cosmic properties). Their duties are to take care of the whole well-being of mankind. Villagers usually experiment good activities of these celestial geni in their daily life through natural phenomena [according to their paradigm]. There is rain in rainy season for agricultural works. They have various natural kind of food from forest near by their villages, getting fishes from rivers etc.

Another group of *Phii* is in the planetal world, such as *Phii Pa* (a forest genus who is a forest protector), *Phii Ta-Haék* (a rice-field genus or a facilitator of rice growing) and *Phii Dong* (a jungle genus, a jungle protector). The status of each *Phii* is the owners of each identical material concerns. Their origin may be from nature or from human soul. This group of *Phii* are benevolent because they assume their patronship to men and the universe, though there are some signs that villagers perceive as effects of their unsatisfied actions towards *Phii* or its properties. Some *Phii* in this group may disturb or annoy human beings when someone disturbed them, i.e., someone cuts a tree in the forest making loud noise disturbing *Phii*’s kids and doing this without asking their permission, or urinates in the homeplace of that *Phii* (Interview, Somphong Intarapanich, 1996). Each activity bringing bad reactions from *Phii* will be interpreted as disdaining that *Phii*. As a result of the reaction of the *Phii* as its punishment aimed at warning villagers for not causing destruction of its homeplace.
Malevolent *Phii* also abides either in the sky or on the earth; but they are intentionally malevolent to human beings such as *Phii Ha*, *Phii Haiy*, etc. This kind of *Phii* is usually identified to the cause of illness or damage that affects mankind. Any time villagers cannot diagnose the source of malevolent effects affecting their lives, they automatically charge the *Phii* as the agent of those effects. Some of them have self-existence and exist in such as *Phii Pob* because they are awakened by occult magical formulae or mantras (Phongphit & Hewison, 1990: 51-56, 67-71).

Another group of Malevolent *Phii* bothers human beings because they are annoyed by incantation of mantras made by "Mor Phii" or shamans. This group of *Phii* is mastered by human beings. Generally everyone fearing bad *Phii* attempts to avoid them and those who can manipulate them will cause them to become angry. Komart Jungsathiansap (Phongphit, 1993b: 32) describing some serious effects of this kind of *Phii* said that the latter so frightens villagers that they get fever, possesses someone and then causes some diseases or eats some inner parts of their body until they die.

Though there are various kinds of good *Phii* in the Isarn context,¹ they are not classified in official religious categories. Some entities such as *Thewada*, soul and saint seem to have the same qualities as *Phii*. The reason for distinguishing good *Phii* out of religious category is that they are in different paradigm. They are normally inferior to the Lord Buddha and each religious sacred entity² (Tambiah, 1976: 263-264) or they

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¹ Experts in this field divides *Phii* into two categories: good *Phii* and bad *Phii* according to their activities dealing with living human beings. Each one has many kinds of Phii. See more details in Chalardchai Ramitanont. in "Ghost and God" in Sukhothaidhammathirat University’s Text: Unit 5. *Thai Mind* (in Thai). (Bangkok: Sukhothaidhammathirat University Press, 1990), pp. 261-269; Seri Phongphit. in “Ghost” in *Kham: The Blueprint of Thai Thought and Belief* (in Thai). (Bangkok: Chulalogkorn University Press, 1994), pp. 68-75.

² Tambiah (Tambiah, 1970: 263-266) clearly describes these two different domains of *Phii Poota*, the guardian of a village and Chao Phau Phraa Khao, the guardian of the temple. He also differentiates *Thewada*, (supernatural divine angel) from the other two. Referred to the perspective that *Phii* is in different heed (rite) and khong (tradition) [*khon la heed khon la khong*], he elucidates that *Phii* cannot enter religious realm.
may inferior to those who have magical art of manipulation of sacred power (Phongphit & Hewison, 1990: 51). But each bad Phi is absolutely considered as the enemy of religious people. However each Phi imposes his own rules to villagers or those who respect him for their own benefits; on the other hand, he gives penalty to those who violate him. Albeit there may be some petitions or bargainings between villagers and Phi. A set of Phi’s rules will be one of evidences enabling any researcher to affirm the existence of Phi as Seri Phongphit usually comments: “Phi is a kind of disciplines and rules in the villagers’ paradigm. For if there is any behavior violating a Phi’s discipline it is identified as ‘Phid Phi’ or to be against Phi” (Phongphit, 1993: 38).

Hence the Phi himself, in the Isarn paradigm, has his own category. It is an entity that used to have human-like attributions that other persons can contact. When he has been transformed by natural law of death, he is beyond space and time. But he can be in space and time if he needs. He also exists in the planetal world and lives with whom he wants to contact.

Albeit, the Phi normally has various fearful qualities as significant characters for human beings. No one, in general, wants to see or to stay with the Phi because each one is afraid of Phi due to his invisibility because there is no objective inference to justify the possible effect from such an invisible cause. The Isarn people cannot expect what will result from Phi’s decisions. However, even though they do not want to see or live with the Phi, they want to contact them for some help as their protector because they believe that if they satisfy them, the latter will in turn help them when requested.

2.2. The Origin of the Notion of Phi

The notion of Phi has been recognized in the Isarn region before official religions such as Brahmamism, Buddhism or Christianity were implanted. It can be found evidently in various folklore, local tales and proverbs, didactic verses and annual
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It has appeared in the Isarn paradigm because the Isarn villagers recognize animism and the perception of Karma. The later is the source of rebirth perception while the previous one has been initiated by environment and circumstance. These two perceptions have been initiated radically from the concept that after present life there will be various physical status of one’s own existence which may be in either better or worse status according to one’s previous activities that cause bad karma, “Bab” (or sin), or good karma “Bun”. In addition, they attempt to increase merits or “Bun” during their present life for another next-better-life status by practicing good conducts (Phongphit & Hewison. 1990: 62-63) and accept all occurrences in current of life calmly because, in their perception, they cannot have any other choice to choose according to the effects from past activities. Somehow it is their own predestination. There are many Isarn Proverbs recording this perception as well as annual traditions. Apisak Som-In

1 The annual Isarn traditions are especially connected to Phi Poota as in the seventh month of each year as summarized that “[A]nother rite, when the seventh month comes, worshipping celestial deities and lords as well as Guardian spirits of a village, a town, and a city. People have to do this tradition for their well being in daily life.” In the Isarn narratives it is written “ติ่งหนึ่งนี้ ปลอดภัยจิตใจแล้ว จงเห็นแก่ความเป็นเป็นานุภาพ ดูตัวเองอย่างไรต้องก็ได้ ถ้าตัวเองทำผิดเมื่อก่อน ต้องทำให้ดีขึ้นในวันนี้ เพราะถ้าจะเป็นดี จึงจะเกิดเป็นผู้สุจริตได้” See more details in The Assembly of the Isarn Buddhist Monks in Seventeen Provinces. The Isarn Heritage (in Thai). (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrachvityalai, 1990), pp. 56-58.

2 Apisak Som-in comments that merit and karma effect the future life of all animals to get a rebirth as an expiation of past-life actions. It is one opinion of local predestinationism. This opinion arouses planetal humans to collect merit for better life in the rebirth to come. This notion expands to various chronicles in the Isarn region such as Tamnan Khun Borom, Tamman Tao Hung Tao Juang etc.; or in folktales such as Khulu Nang-Uoa, Sang Sinchai, Campa Sii Ton etc.. See more details in Apisak Som-in. The Cultural Landscape of the Isarn Region (in Thai). (Kalasin: Prasarn Press, 1990), pp.133-145.
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1991: 144-154) collects this perception from various sources such as in *Ya Sorn Larn* (Grand Mother Teaches Her Grandchildren), which is a popular local poem. A verse of the poem writes “those who do good deeds goodness will take care; those who commit sin need expiation”.

It is possible to recognize such notion due to contemporary experiences of activities which seem to be the effects of previous activities of their performer. Everyone emotionally recognizes such condition even though it needs long period of time to demonstrate effects. The effect of each action will consequently appear either psychologically or actually. Therefore it is very impressive. Yet it also challengingly signifies the Isarn villagers to behave well so as to reap good effects and to avoid misbehavior. This perspective, later, has been gradually transformed into ethical instructions and discipline in their villages especially when it has been integrated in the notion of Phii.

Another cause which sustains the notion of the superpowerful force of Phii is illiteracy because of poverty and lacking of education. This is another great problem of the Isarn villagers as Buasri Srisoong comments in “The Direction of the Isarn Village” that “There are three significant problems in the Isarn region: poverty, illness and uneducation (Phongphit, 1993a: 103). The popular work of villagers is agricultural career (Nartsupha, 1984: 13) which expects fertility of good products to solve the problem of poverty. But such products depend, on the one hand, on natural supports

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1 There are a lot of proverbs and didactic verses reflect this notion. Apisak Som-in collects as follows: If there is merit (*bun*), there will be goodness [in life]; if there is no merit, malevolence will come. If you have merit, you will be a boss who manipulates others; lacking of merit, others manipulate you. If you have merit, you are the boss that can support others; without merit, many attempts are useless. If there is no merit, the very close seems too far; if there is merit, the very far seems to be very close. Merit and sin look like man’s shadow: they absolutely go along with man without exception.: บุญมีแล้ว แถวติดออกไป บุญก็ได้ แถวข้าง แต่ใน บุญไม่มี เป็นนาย ได้เหนื่อน บุญปุ๋ย ทำตัวให้ แต่ใน บุญมีได้ เป็นนาย ให้ตายมา บุญก็สว่าง แสบสั่งนี่ แล้วหลักอาศัย... บุ-ปุ๋ยได้ แสบสั่ง อีกจะต่าง บุญก็สว่าง แต่ใน บุญข้ามวัน บุญยามนี้ เป็นจังค์ต้องมา หน้าพวกไปผ่านสิ่ง ชุดนะวัน.
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(Nartsupha, 1984: 21-22) from (a) the sky, where celestial genii who able to manipulate regional climate reside, is rain which is a necessary source for life and plants, and (b) earth, where various invisible lords of the places dwell, is fertilized area. On the other hand, human labor is another important factor for agricultural process of production. There is no high technological equipment and technical manpower depending on education. But the methodology of governmental schooling and the officials as well as school teachers do not focus their interest on the importance of education. Therefore, the education is not so much well assessed and even disdained by the masses. To sum up the status of the education in the Isarn region is viewed as to “write, to read and to calculate” (Phongpit & Hewison, 1990: 102-104); or Lake. Kad. Lerk (calculating, writing, going home) instead of providing modern knowledge that can improve their conditions of living. Consequently, the Isarn villagers still attempt to request those who have supernatural power to fertilize their plants and their lives as well. In practice, man’s labor is the secondary means that complete the process of working in the realm of earning life conditioned by nature and supernatural beings which is observed as the primary source. Hence instead of studying scientific theories for improving their life style and facilitating themselves, the Isarn villagers still put their destiny on Phii’s manipulation.

1 Teaching profession, according to the researcher’s opinion, is not a popular career in Thailand especially in the remote area of the Isarn region. It is merely the last choice for graduates to choose in job application list. Moreover, most of students in teacher training program are not the great geniuses. It is practical for high school pupils who want to continue their study to choose the faculty from which they can expect for the job that offers more money especially in scientific or physic faculties but not educative faculties especially faculty of Science of Education which offers fewer amount. There are a lot of evidences in Thailand that those who work in business professions get more salary than being teachers and instructors. Hence, the quality of teachers in the Isarn region is not of a very high standard of the ideal teacher status which is the primary academic resource for total human development. Consequently, contents of teaching pupils in each day are only to train them to know how to read and how to write or Arn Ok and Khian Dai, which are necessary evidences for being evaluated by their boss; and let them go home.
Moreover, there are many problems and unexplainable events affecting villagers (Poonnotok, 1987: 350-392) like in the Western world (Garden, 1976: 10) that they cannot solve in their daily life especially those caused by nature which requiring scientific knowledge in order to clarify its source and select a proper process to solve. But leaking education and traditional formation, there is, finally, villagers resort to the sole refuge such as the Phii, a superpowerful entity for requesting their help and consulting them in order to gain betterment of life. It is normal for mankind in the psychological viewpoint to search for superior powerful refuge. According to empirical experiences, sensible things are not capable enough to protect them from invisible and unpredictable disasters. On the contrary at least a Phii has equivalent powerful quality to this end. Hence, the Isarn people have to search for more powerful authority able to help them to survive as well as to overcome all problems through natural activities.

When each Phii is personalized as an invisible human-like with more power than planetal human beings according to his invisibility, he behaves like a normal human being according to his own status. The Isarn villagers as well as other ethnic groups in the Indochinese peninsula have such perception of Phii. Therefore it is suitable for man to satisfy Phii for his sakes otherwise man may not be satisfactory in his life pattern. This perspective ignites the feeling that Phii inspires fear to human mind. It is frightening because of its invisibility. Psychologically it causes fear to the living as well as psychological effects to physical activities of men (Jungsathiensap, 1990: 611-612).

The notion of Phii vested with such qualities mentioned above derives from the Isarn paradigm created by circumstance and environment in higher land and tropical forests (see appendix. II and III). The Isarn villagers usually settle close to a river or a forest for economy sake (Phongphit & Hewison, 1990: 6-7). Sathiankoses, in the past, also had the same concept. He describes that geographical environment that surrounds human beings is a core element for inventing culture for earning their lives because they have to adapt themselves to live in particular environment (Sathiankoses, 1973: 5-6). However such kind of environment and circumstance usually provides the villagers with good conditions such as natural water resources, various kinds of raw materials, and wood for housing as well as bad conditions due to dangerous diseases such as malaria.
and diarrhea. Most of villagers could not make balance between advantages and disadvantages they get from the natural resources although they alternately appeared to them. In both cases they attribute to the Phi's role. Due to fatalistic senses the Isarn villagers are compelled to accept any condition for living as they think that it is a natural process of life. Kanchana Kaewthep (Kaewthep, 1987: 19-21) elucidates the phenomenon of the Isarn paradigm quite clear when she does a deep reflection from various rural exposure immersions that she had participated. She summarizes that the Isarn paradigm consists of three dimensions which are necessary elements for living. They are (1) supernatural beings that effect planetal beings either good or bad; (2) nature that belongs to supernatural ones as well as that feeds human beings; and (3) other individuals who surrender to supernatural power and influence each individual. Each Isarn villager inserts himself in the unity of universe as interdependence in the form of mutual relation. Rural people are integrated for shaping humanship of each individual like a spider's web which links each particular element to each other hierarchically while each individual is the center of the web.

2.3. The Existence of Phi in the Isarn Context.

According to the theory of knowledge, each linguistic term which is a signifier must represent an apprehension which has been conceptualized from a particular object which is a signified entity because language presents itself as a system of sign; though sometimes it does not give correct definition to a reality it concerns respectively. It is not the mistake of language but it is of the user. However, language is saying something about something (Ricoeur, 1974: 87). In the case of Phi which is an element of language in the Isarn paradigm because it stimulates the one who reads or hears it to have an apprehension. That apprehension must relate to a particular cosmic entity which the modified adjective has to elaborate. It must be the saying that is used as a linguistic-symbolic means to represent an invisible entity. That invisible entity causes a particular effect that villagers had experienced without knowing its concreteness. If an Isarn villager knows what is the concrete cause of the effect that he confronts, he will not use the word Phi to call such a cause. This entity in the past may be visible in the
perception of the one who experiences the effect because it has been expected to be in
the planetal world. It is beyond capacity of language to objectify by a proper word
because it is an extra-linguistic reality (Ricoeur, 1974: 65). It can be classified in the
group of a natural kind as Ellen Markman proposes "...categories that are found in
nature, such as various categories of plants and animals" (Kornblith, 1994: 77).¹ It is
practically used when it concerns the notion of causal object that a villager attempts to
identify the primary cause of the unidentified effect he meets. It implies that this word is
intersubjectively meaningful because Phii, indicates an existing object that human sense
cannot perceive or cannot identify directly. Factually the effect appears, as a result of a
cause. But that cause cannot be concretely objectified by that perceiver because of his
lack of broad scientific knowledge Therefore, it is suitable to rely the unknown cause to
the Phii in such a condition.

In the psychological viewpoint, the Isam people who have a chance to know
somebody who died (Phii) either directly or indirectly kept in their memory his previous
activities as a part of their history. But this seems to be impossible because it is different
from the economic relation.

According to the opinion of orthodox externalism (Bilgrami, 1992: 2), it is
impossible to have a self-knowledge from nonmaterial perception. For, the notion of
Phii does not relate to any external thing. It will be held as Freudian illusion (Ricoeur,
1974: 145). The researcher agrees with such opinion if it bases on the place where
dwells the Phii.

¹ The researcher expects that the term used to identify each particular object may not be
directly relevant to such object but by a causal chain as Markman analyzes natural kind terms.
He puts: "For natural kind terms, speakers will typically select a prototypical exemplar to label
at first, and they may provide a description of the natural kind to identify the relevant category.
The description does not define the category, however, but serves as a way of helping speakers
to fix the referent, that is, to identify what is being labeled". See more details in Ellen Markman
in "Natural Kinds" in Hilary Kornblith (Ed.). Naturalizing Epistemology. 2nd., (Cambridge,
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The notion that invisible entity exists in the Isam paradigm and the word *Phii* which is composed in the Isam context from the cumulative experiences have been transmitted from generation to generation about (1) the feasible causes of unexplainable problems\(^1\) which villagers usually confront; and (2) the immaterial personship of human being after death. In the previous one, according to the Isam context, "Phii" is used to denote a cause or an agent of what the one experiencing an effect to which that one cannot rectify its concrete cause. It is common to recognize that whenever there is an effect there must be a cause. In the Isam context the cause of an appeared effect cannot be rectified but the one who experiences such effect realizes that it is sufficient to be convinced that there must be a cause. So to keep his conviction contingent the general cause for such effect must be "Phii" which is anonymous. This logical conviction is not a particular event but it is a gradual transmission of an entity that used to exist in planetal world and to affect to mankind at present time. It is a matter of a particular culture.

Generally, *Phii* obviously represents invisible entity that concretely exists whereas the human being cannot prove scientifically. The notion of each *Phii* will not be set from or for nothing. Each *Phii*’s invocation has been invented by villagers for calling the primary cause of unexplainable effects or problems. Such that leads villagers to make inquiries enabling them to clearly understanding the origin of *Phii*. When they cannot find out any palpable cause of visible manifestation they resort to the *Phii*. According to their paradigm they consider *Phii* as a very suitable explanation of every invisible fact that cause such an effect. Although there is no lexical word used for signifying that unknown cause; from the causal chain, and the great intelligence of wise men in the Isam region the word "*Phii*" is used appropriately.\(^2\) It is an enigma. This

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\(^1\) Experts usually recognize that the cause of unexplainable problems of effects are supernatural being which human cannot contact concretely. Some experts identify the cause of good effects to deity while for bad effects to demons or evil. See Nancy Garden. *Devil and Demons.* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1976), pp. 9-11,15-16.

\(^2\) The researcher thinks that it is the great wisdom of the Isam ancestors to use this word because if they use some proper name to indicate the unknown source of current effect
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word is neutral. It can apply to every invisible entity. Hence an invisible cause of a sensible effect is always nominated as Phii according to contextual semiotics because of its relationship to the world; to other things and to being as well (Ricoeur, 1974: 79, 145).

Whenever the word "Phii" is in taxonomic process according to unexplainable problem in a particular suitable circumstance and situation, it has special authentic attributions due to the meaning of the word used in each particular situation of human life. It does not vindicate readers or listeners to accept only the existence of being but it is implicitly in the realm of empirical approval according to the continuity of events about the notion of the meaning of Phii.

The researcher considers the cultural notions of the unnoticeable existence of Phii in each particular situation of villagers’ life in the Isarn region. He is convinced that in the particular circumstances and conditions of the Isarn context Phii is conceptualized because of its meaningfulness as a cause of an effect met by the Isarn people in each special event of life according to their culture. It seems to the researcher that it is similar to the problem of the existence of God that Hartshorne tries to defend (see Sriewarakul. 1997: 28-38).

According to the villagers’ behavior vis-a-vis the Phii, it is rarely used as common noun as in English language; but it is usually used to modify a particular entity that concerns a special effective situation related to unknown cause appearance. Each Phii exists in the Isarn paradigm not because of its physical appearance in the sense that it can directly be perceived, but because of its meaningfulness through natural

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1 This notion should be acceptable according to Paul Ricoeur when he explain culture. He says: “culture is indeed made up of all the procedures by which man escapes in the imaginary mode from the unresolvable situation where desires can be neither suppressed nor satisfied” (Ricoeur, 1974: 157-158).
conditions concerning their normal life-patterns. It signifies to a particular entity which had been in the planetal world in the past. That entity has some attributions related to the activity that the villagers expect to happen. The word “Phii” will be mentioned only when villagers confront some obstacles of which they cannot find its concrete cause or when villagers want to contact such Phii for any particular purpose. *Phii Phaya Thaën* in *Bun Bang Fai* or the rockets festival is endorsed because villagers want to implore the supreme celestial deity in order to get rain for rice cultivation. *Phii Poota* is concerned with *Liang Phii Poota* ritual in order to request fertility of life because this *Phii* is close to villagers according to clanship. Before starting their rice cultivation, they organize the *Liang Phii Ta haêk* ritual in order to get *Phii*’s protection on their crops. Generally villagers succeed in having their pleas exauced. Therefore, in the Isarn villagers’ paradigm, the *Phii* exists with its attributions relevant to mankind in a particular problematic situation. It is usually the final refuge for villagers. Seri Phongphit impressively puts: “*Phii*, in [the Isam] villagers’ paradigm, exists not because of scientific approval but it is meaningful for their survival” (Phongphit, 1997: 28). It is the intuitive abstraction from phenomena that villagers cannot identify their primary causes directly. Hence, it should be *Phii* due to its invisibility. Each particular effect, that man had experienced but could not know and identifies its real cause, is presumably derived from particularly invisible source. Such source is nominated as *Phii* in each meaningful context.

Villagers always use inductive method for proving their conviction. *Bun Bong Fai*, as example, is symbolized as a request made by villagers in order to get rain necessary for their rice cultivation. But because of drought caused by nature, there is not enough water for rice cultivation. *Bun Bong Fai* is one of psychological compensation to reduce the stress in human mind because it gives them some hope when villagers compare the present situation to the past one. Even though there is no rain-fall after the feast villagers do not lose their hope. Consequently, they are compelled to carry out
another traditional ritual such as "Haè Nang Maèw" necessarily to request rain water persuasively from *Phii Phaya Thaèn*.

Considered in the field of causal relation theory, the request for rain water for agriculture is the first in-put evidence and the falling rain after request is another in-put element which is the evidence that *Phii Phaya Thaèn* responds the request. It can be concluded that *Phii Phaya Thaèn* exists. It is suitable to rationalize that, even though there is no direct sensory witness of *Phii Phaya Thaèn* as the primary cause of the rain but according to the causal theory, the effect appeared evidently from their request. Hence it is possible that there must be the primary cause. Due to the popular wisdom in the Isarn region expressed in the Chronicle of *Lanchang* and the Chronicle of *Khun Borom*, it gives the particular name to the person who can produce rain water as *Phaya Thaèn*, a kind ruler lord and creator of the universe, able to send rain water, the most necessary element of agricultural works. Moreover this name "*Phaya Thaèn*" appears in both the Isarn chronicles, proverbs and history. Consequently the descendants in the

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1 It is a popular local rite that villagers carry a cat in a cage around their village and pour water to it. The villagers believe that if someone does the paradoxical activity the celestial genus will pay his intention. For a cat normally dislikes water it will attract *Phii Phaya Thaèn* to pour rain water to the world. See more details in The Assembly of The Assembly of the Isarn Monks in the Seventeen Province. *The Isarn Heritage* (in Thai). (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrachawityalai, 1990), p.160.; and Seri Phongphit. “Occultism in Thai Society” in Sukhothatidhammathirat University’s Text Unit 8. *Beliefs and Religions in Thai Society* (in Thai). (Bangkok: Sukhothatidhammathirat University press, 1992), pp. 308-309.

2 According to the great relic of *Tao Hung Khun Jueang “Thaèn”* refers to (1) an ethnic tribe in the upper northern part of Vietnam who settled in *Muang Thaeng* or the *Thaèn* city or Dien Bien Phu (of nowadays); they usually elevated themselves superior to others, and (2) the celestial lord that the ethnic Thai-Lao tribes recognize as their great tribal *Phii* who used to rule Thaèn city. This two domains can interweave together to set a human lord of the Thai-Laos tribes. See more details in Sujit Wongthes. “Introduction of the Great Relics of The Northeast, *Tao Hung Khun Jueang: The Heroes of the Mekong River*” in Sujit Wongthes. (ed.)
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Isarn region like to agree with this concept even though it is relevant to Phii because of its physical qualities which has to die and transform to be Phii. Psychologically this concept has been memorized in the mind according to the tradition. It can be inferred that there is Phii Phaya Thaën.

On the other hand, when this notion is considered in the natural condition, there is rain in the period of rainy season but sometimes because of drought or the uncertainty of the world climate situation. the beginning of rainy season may be late, and when after Bun Bang Fai there is some rain according to natural process of geographical monsoon condition. The relevant relations among the villagers’ request, the notion of Phii Paya Thaën which is very simple and the rain falling caused by nature have been consecutively formed implicitly on inductive method of Agreement. Hence when there is the requested effect as the in-put data it feasibly supports the meaningfulness of Phii Phaya Thaën’s existence. Albeit, according to the a priori acknowledgment of villagers of the Phii Phaya Thaën and illiteracy, sensory evidential effects almost incites villagers to accept the supernatural power of invisible entity causing the effects they face. That is Phii.

Hence the word Phii represents the invisible entity producing the effect that the Isarn people can face and and get corresponding activities. These entities cannot be authentically identified because of its invisibility but there are some phenomena in nature implicitly revealing the Phii’s existence. Moreover it conforms the natural process in each activity and responds the request of villagers (according to their perspective formed by popular wisdom). It can be said that Phii has its own meaning in each particular context. The word “Phii” will not be used purely but it normally be a


1 If an arguer uses genetic argument form in social context (Pollock,1986: 53, 190-193) the conviction of Phii is feasible. Because each particular Phii has it original source in the planetal world.
main element for other modifier has to modify for expressing a particular quality of a matter intensively. It is not only purely verbal (Russel, 1992: 163) but it has a particular physical matter inferred. It follows that the Phii exists accordingly. Seri Phongphit (Phongphit, 1992: 336; 1997: 28) summarizes from his rational analysis of the existence of Phii through deductive comparison by saying that Phii exists independently from the will of the Isarn villagers. The notion of Phii is based on the sustainable mutual and social relationship. It means that Phii is not meaningless but meaningful. He comments that:

...Those who believe in Phii should never see Phii. But they follow the previous experiences of others and their own which are not sensible or concrete but they believe in Phii because “it is meaningful for their holistic pattern of life: it satisfies them; it causes them live together happily and peacefully. This meaningfulness is not derived from only axiom but from the radical experiences of normal life within the abundant nature (Phongphit, 1992: 336).

3. The Paradigm of Phii Poota in the Isarn Region.

The status of Phii Poota in the Isarn context is an outstanding cultural institution that influences the Isam people in both private and public dimensions. But it is difficult to describe the content of this institution clearly because there are various perceptions of the notion of Phii Poota. It has various meanings according to its own context and the opinion of each one who defines it. Most of specialists define Phii Poota as the spirit which have been handled down from their ancestors within the specific village history (Hayashi, 1991: 12). Most of definitions of Phii Poota present that such Phii seems to be a general concept which refers to all ancestors of the inhabitants of the village (Sunthornphesach, 1982; Poonnothok, 1987; Phongphit, 1990, 1993, 1997). Phenomenologically, this term should signify to only one important person in each village history. The researcher attempts to elucidate the radical perception of this term and its institution for identifying the value of Phii Poota according to its context. It is
not necessary to analyze the meaning of Phii in this part but the meaning of Poota must be analyzed obviously.

3.1. The Meaning of Poota

Poota is a compound noun between: “Poo” and “Ta”. “Poo” lexically means father of one’s father. It is always used with the word “Ya” which means grand mother in father’s lineage. The complete form is “Pooya.” However its meaning extends to all relative ancestors of one’s father-lineage such as elder and younger brothers and sisters of one’s grand father when it is used in clanic conversation.

“Ta” lexically means father of one’s mother. It is usually used with “Yaiy.” the mother of one’s mother as “Tayaiy.” It also extends to all relative ancestors of one’s mother as father’s. When they are combined to be one word “Pooya Tayaiy” it generally signifies to elderly people of each clanic family who indirectly give birth to later descendants according to genetic system. It is the compulsory obligation for each younger to identify his relative status correctly to whom he is talking with otherwise he as well as his family may be fined.\(^1\) It is quite different from western culture that has no serious obligation to request this etiquette. Everyone can call another by personal name directly which seem to be dishonorable expression which is an element of respective humbleness.

3.2. The Importance of Poo-Ya, Ta-Yaiy

Giving life is the great virtual deed for the Isam people because life is the essential matter for human beings. So they are psychologically conscious of

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\(^1\) According to the Isam tradition, it is an obvious obligation of a daughter or a son-in-law to call relative status of each clannish member correctly even if someone is younger than the daughter or the sister-in-law must be called grand-father, grand-mother etc. due to the clannish status of each one toward his or her couple. If a daughter or a son-in-law does not use the title to the one being called correctly he or she may be fined [hmar].
gratefulness toward their ancestors respectively because ancestors have been primary genetic source for each family member. This notion is an inner bond which ties all members in each line of kinship to be fraternal. It sets up a close society based on loyalties and common identities welding together neighbors and the stuff of alliance between relatives dwelling in the same area. It also seals a bond among the generations, uniting each person with his forebears and defying the carnage of history until there is a saying “blood relative” or “blood is thicker than water” which effects to each clan member emotionally (Murphy, 1979: 88-90). In addition, contemporary descendants receive a lot of merciful interrelation and interaction from their ancestors as well as material heritage. Hence, gratitude is recognized as one of the main virtues of the Isarn people.

Ancestors of each family or clan in the Isarn region usually train their young members to seek for better life (because of their own previous sufferings), familial love, good wish and the fearful of losing family fame in public in the case that their youngsters misbehave themselves. They have to instruct, train and form their young members seriously through the suitable condition of extended family in order to sustain good conditions of life according to the traditional perspective of the community in which they live as well. The Isarn villagers are concerned with this tradition accordingly to what says a didactic proverb: “The [teaching] words out of one’s parents’ [as well as of ancestors] mouths as heavy as the earth. Those who obey them will get flourishing life in the future.”

Lessons given to their children consist of both suggestions and

1 Old-age members of an Isarn family usually have duty to kindly rear their kids at home while adults work in the field. This is a good time for elders to educate ethics to their kids. It is common that grand-children love their grand-parents more than their parents.

2 The value of the elder’s respect has been held as a significant tradition for the Isarn villagers. Such didactic verse is translated from the Isarn source that claims that “ข้ามพาผู้พันพะทำผาน ผันผันทานใน ผันผันทานผาน ผันผันทานผานผาน”. See more comments in Khamkhan Daenlaogaow. in “Didactic and Social Service Role” in Chumchonpatanna (in Thai). 1, 3, (Sept.-Oct. 1986), pp. 70-77.
interdiction which are always implemented because of the respect inspired to the children by parents enjoying the authoritative and experimental power due to their seniority. Consequently, conclusive assessment of previous actions leads to suggest to do or to prohibit to do for the common good of people in society. As results these previous experiences are transformed automatically into tradition or culture of that village for happy and peaceful life in that community. This process will be observed as the great contribution from ancestors to the later generations. It is the indebted attitude which will not be forgotten because of general effects which have been impressively transmitted in particular situations. 1

It follows that ancestors should be the most respectful persons in contemporary situation as the second lord for later generations. Youngsters should respect them because of genetic heritage and meritorious deeds that have affected beneficially in the present situation of this recent generation as well as increasing their merit for future life.

In the Isarn region the acknowledgment of meritorious deeds of ancestors of village which mostly were the same group of ancestors of villagers have been still in high level. Those good deeds still impress descendants fluently in life pattern as good examples and ethical norms. Sunthareeya Komin (Komin, 1990: 139-143) also finds statistically that gratefulness is still a high appreciate value in Thai society either in religious or non-religious group especially in rural regions in the perception of Bunkhun which characterized two groups: Roo Bunkhun which means to be grateful, to know, to acknowledge, or to be constantly conscious and bear in heart of the kindness done; and Tob Thaën Bunkhun which means to reciprocate the kindness whenever there are

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1 There are various Isarn didactic verses describe about this perspective such as Nittaya Pukdeebundit records: clannish members, grand-parents and parents should be respectful persons that should be honored; doing like this brings more merits and it will be benevolent for gaining success (พ่อพันธุ์พ่อ ต่ายพันธุ์พ่อ ค่ายที่พ่อเอก ฤทธิ์ที่พ่อเอก ย่าต่ายพันธุ์ย่า ที่พ่อเอก ยายที่พ่อเอก ฤทธิ์ที่พ่อเอก) See more details in Nittaya Pukdeebundit. *An Analytical Study of Phaya Phasit, Isan Didactic Verse* (in Thai). Master’s Thesis (Srinakarinwirot University Mahasarakham, 1989), p. 46.
opportunities. She indicates after comparing the Thai's to American culture which has no rank of gratefulness that "[T]he Thai have been socialized to value this grateful (Katanyuu) quality in a person. A person should be grateful to persons who render Bunkhun (goodness, helps, favors, etc.) to him" (Komin, 1990: 139).

The acknowledgment of the authority of familial ancestors has been sustained in the Isam region firmly because the family institution as extended families are quite firm in both external and internal interrelationship for mutual aid (Nartsupha, 1984: 31) as well according to the wilderness of environments. This type of family factually forms an inner enclosure of kinship for survival and solidarity. Rachaneekorn Sedtho, when she compares the relationship amongst member of rural family to that of urban society, also agrees with such notion. She summarizes that:

The close relationship which occurs gradually among familial members produces radical love and attachment to the role of family and each family has more chances to plan and take care of their youngsters to absorb ethical roles and behave according to the elders' instructions which are the behavioral disciplines (Sedtho, 1985: 133).

Reciprocal help among villagers has been necessary for survival. Moreover, they have been either consanguineal or affinal relatives which gradually increase inner relationship of mutual help. Elders have always been expected instinctually for betterness of their descendants’ lives because they have experienced the difficulty of their current life and they do not want their descendants get the same difficulty as theirs but happiness.

When the youngsters live with the elders especially grand-father and grand-mother the youngsters receive and absorb hospitality from elders especially during their childhood impressively as inner warmness. Moreover they have been instructed from their parents to obey the instruction of the elders politely because the youngsters rely that the elders have had more experiences on various dimensions of life and always have good wishes for their children; they are also relatives who, in general, should sincerely love other familial members and search for better way to facilitate and to satisfy them.
Elders are usually considered as the refuge of youngsters in each family. On the one hand, elders expect to have gratitude from their kids because they increase their properties and spend their whole life for their youngsters. This is the psychological reciprocity of the Orientals recorded in various important ethical norms. The Karp Pra Muni suggest youngsters to recognize the importance of gratefulness:

[Remind yourself the ancient traditions, listen to and remember, my niece, keep in mind (put it upon your head) the gratefulness of your father, and also remind yourself of the gratefulness of your mother. Don't disdain the gratefulness of the three gems, its effect is no merit but grave sin. (Ariyanuwat, 1990:3)]

The notion of gratefulness towards ancestors is very important to form human beings in each society, to form peaceful and charitable atmosphere because youngsters have experienced appreciative examples of elders through warmly charitable activities according to relations. They do not want to disappoint their elders. This is the great means to shape consciousness of youngsters to have a virtuous perspective of charity and

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1 Chinese tradition emphasizes on gratefulness toward their ancestors. It is important until there is a didactic verse says: Meritorious indebtedness must be responded and infliction needs revenge (Bunkhun tong tod taen khæn tong chamra or บุญคุ้มต้องทดแทน แล้วยึดฝ่าด้วย). There are many rituals set for their ancestors yearly.

2 This lyric poem is one of various records of the sages of Lanchang kingdom composed and nailed on palm leaves in the minor Thai alphabets. Its details concern about general practices of virtuous person. Pra Ariyanuwat edits it into modern Thai alphabets but still keep the essential details and formal written alphabets. The Thai alphabets record is as follow: ให้จึงให้ นั้นก็จะถูก, ฟังคำสาส์น ซึ่งอยู่อย่าง เล่า, บนโลกสี คุณหนักใจ, คุณมารดา บทความ, อย่าประมาท คุณ แต่จะถูก. See more details in Ariyanuwat, Pra. Karp Pra Muni (The Lyric Poem of a Hermit) (in Thai), (Mahasarakham: Apichart Press, 1990), pp1-27.
hospitality. It is the best means to form ethical discipline to human being effectively because this process needs cooperation between body and mind, academic and practical methodology. The authoritative influence of ancestors is more impressively powerful. Prasobsuk Ritthidach (Ritthidach, 1997: 13) proposes that any ethnic group, that can arouse its members to love and respect their ancestors, has qualified members who can found a responsible community which is on the process of total human development.

Ancestors have authentic, imperative authority to control and train their descendants acceptably according to their seniority or leadership positions. Familial seniority is a very important rank in the Isam paradigm. Seniority is acknowledged as a powerful position according to familial hierarchy. A greater senior position is a more powerful authority which can enforce other juniors according to discipline issued in that village or community for common good according to their opinion. The greatest is “Chao Khot” or clan chief (Phongphit & Hewison, 1990: 11). It is normal to accept that elder’s activities are the best exemples for the youngsters. Moreover their instructions which usually in the form of didactic verses are very authoritative because each instructive discourse bases on concrete evidences in the past concern the cause-effect condition either good or bad direction as Nittaya Pukdibundit (Pukdibundit, 1989: 28) describes that the didactic verses in this type were derived from religious beliefs and facts. The details concern the concepts of suggestion according to which one should behave suitably according to one’s own role and status in society through, primarily, the familial institution. This perception motivates members of that group to have solid unity which initiates mutual help in every situation of life because they have the same inner center. Thongdee Nantha reflects on the historical atmosphere of the village in which he lives where elders or those who are the same age as parents of youngsters can frankly instruct the younger generation of the village in the proper way (Phongphit, 1993a: 229).

3.3. The Meaning of Phii Poota.

When the word “Poo” and “Ta” is lexically used as an adjective for the common noun “Phii” in epistemological perspective, it lexically means souls of male grand-parents or male great-grand-parents of each clan who passed away. However, it
extends to all relatives who were in the same ranks of grand-parents of each one. This kind of *Phii* in a cultural viewpoint must be identified to *Phii Chuer*, or clan ancestor spirit. It follows that the complete semantic meaning of this notion should be "*Phii Pooya Tayaiy.*" But there remains only *Poo* and *Ta* in practical usage; and it means another particular *Phii*. The researcher recognizes the speciality of this general proper name which promotes only patriarchy. It is different from common perspective of the Orientals who prefer to praise matriarchy to patriarchy. A particular name of one's home land "*Matriphummi*" is more preferably used than "*Pituphummi*". Moreover in the case of ancestor's respect the Southern as well as the Northern part of Thailand praise both genders. The former one call their ancestor's spirit "*Phii Tayaiy*" that emphasizes material group while the later calls such kind of *Phii* as "*Phii Poosaë Yasaë*" which implicitly prefers to patriarchal domain; however both genders are concerned. If it is justified the name used to call ancestor's spirit of a family or of a village as common should be "*Phii Pooya Tayaiy*". Usually, villagers' perception of *Phii Poota* practically concerns to both "*Pooya and Tayaiy*"; but there must be some important conditions that omitted female gender in lexical dimension. It seems to the researcher that male gender cannot be superior to female gender in familial practices (which are preserved for female duties) even though leaders of each group have been male. It may be true that to be superior to female gender due to linguistic means *Poota* is used intentionally to show male authority in ritual practices implicitly.

But when "*Phii Poota*" (sometimes the word "*Phii*" is also omitted to avoid fearness and to make a close relation) is used in the Isarn cultural context it is transformed to a new perception that has more particular figure of the previous notion. However, some general characteristics of ancestorship have been kept on such an authentic authority, superiority and ethical supervisorship that it officially identifies itself to only one particular significant ancestor of each village who passed away (for being a *Phii*) and had done significant deeds as the great gratefulness to villagers who

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have been well known in that village. It generally focuses on the one or some significant persons, normally the family members of such Phii, who had did the great outstandingly meritorious deeds and they impressed others among their group while he was alive so that others recognize as unforgettable grateful deeds. When that one used to be the person in whom villagers seek refuge during one’s life time it is normal for that one to keep on the previous function even though he had died because the existence of that one still remains except his visibility. It is evident that every Phii Poota of each village has its own proper name mentioned in the previous chapter such as “Poo So” and “Ya No” of Ban Tamyaè, “Chao Hang Daeng” of Ban Panna, “Poo Pili” and “Poo Samran” of Ban Thakhonyang, “Poo Dantiing” of Ban Kham-Cha-li etc. It does not too seriously concern only the one who used to live in the village. It may represent the ancestor who lived in other estate before the present settlement of villagers; or even the owner spirit of the location the village has been settled (Boonsu, 1994: 71-72). However it implicitly includes ancestors’ souls of the families in that village who are honored as the great ancestors because when an intercessioner recites inviting words to Phii Poota in Liang Phii Poota ritual he invites not only the Phii Poota of the village but all ancestors of the villagers.

Hence, the general perception of Phii Poota which some researchers define as the soul of ancestor is not quite clear. For it does not specify to the group, clan or tribe. According to this research, the researcher identifies that Phii Poota is the soul of the native villagers’ ancestor who has outstanding attributes which have impressed villagers so that villagers acknowledge that one as one of their refuge to help them achieve their approaches. Those attributes usually concern the ethico-political authority which directs to peaceful atmosphere of the village. It is not absurd but feasible because the researcher and villagers can investigate the primary sources of such knowledge as true according to historical evidences that villagers of each village witness.
4. The Paradigmatic Existence of *Phii Poota* in the Isarn Region

There are a lot of private and natural evidences explaining the existence of *Phii Poota* in villagers' perspective such as (a) his possession of a “Tiam”, (b) his intercessioner's activities, or (c) a villager who was possessed by the *Phii* according to his conduct which dissatisfied the *Phii*. But they cannot witness the existence of the *Phii* empirically. There were only passive activities that other villagers experienced and subjective descriptions of the one who contacted such *Phii*. Frankly speaking, no one has ever seen *Phii Poota* directly. However, there are empirical evidences supporting the acceptance of the existence of *Phii Poota* in the Isarn paradigm through which villagers demonstrate their conviction as follows: (a) the shrine of *Phii Poota* or *Sarn Phii Poota*, (b) *Don Phii Poota* or the donated forest where the shrine is located, (c) the intercessioner, or *Chao Cham*, and (d) rituals towards *Phii Poota*. These four elements have been considered as factors establishing the institution of *Phii Poota* (Poonothok, 1987: 381) and signifying that there is a *Phii Poota* in each village.

If an outsider observes the four elements, they do not indicate anything else except their own existence. But they exist in every native village of the Isarn region. They also have been transferred to other generation continuously as a necessary heritage. This phenomena indicate that the Isarn natives' conviction on *Phii Poota*'s existence is very strong so that there is nothing which can abolish this notion out of their mind. Besides, this notion is worth not only for villagers but also for the Isarn society and its natural environment. Therefore it can be identified as an element of cultural belief.

If anyone considers the concept of *Phii Poota* of each village in a scientific trend, it is a false and fake knowledge. Such perception cannot be directly derived from any physical agent that such term denotes. It can be held only a perception referred to a particular historical person which anyone cannot prove its physical object at this present time. The concerned elements about each *Phii Poota* remain only some written documents or verbal informations about the history of the village. Yet, this perception sometimes cannot identify its real identity (in the case that *Phii Poota* as the former lord of the land which villagers later occupy). However, villagers still assure themselves
that there must have been someone using to be in the compound where they have settled down.

Critically speaking, it does not suffice to justify that such abstract idea is false knowledge. For there is not only a sensible entity that can verify the true knowledge. There may be nonsensical entities existing in the world that human knowledge can infer to for setting its own conviction from sensible entities concerned. Kirti Bunchua summarizes that there are various methods to discover true knowledge. It depends on its paradigm. To find a truth of each case is to discuss within such paradigm (Bunchua, 1995: 68-73). In the case of Phii Poota, if anyone considers the concept in the trend of history and culture of the Isam natives, such knowledge is acceptable because it has its own historical evidences that can investigate its primary source. The agent of the knowledge of Phii Poota can be discovered through the process of reflection on history and culture of the Isam natives by using historical elements and contemporary symbols which are inititatively invented to signify the existence of the Phii though sometimes it seems to be mystical for outsiders. But for the Isam native villagers they generally recognize such Phii as a member of their community. Consequently it is sufficient to discuss about this Phii rationally from representatives that signify to such Phii. As a result, the sensible entities concerned as symbols of such matter should be the primary objects for doing reflection because they can reveal implicitly the existence of Phii Poota which is mythical. Paul Ricoeur emphasizes through John B. Thomson's comments about interpretation of mythical text that

I am convinced that we must think, not behind the symbols, but starting from symbols, ... that they constitute the revealing substrate of speech which lives among men. In short, the symbols gives rise to thought (Ricoeur, 1981: 6).

Hence, though the symbols do not obviously, naturally, or necessarily connect to what they symbolize, it is suitable to start reflective interpretation for identifying the existence of such matter form those symbols (Kottak, 1991: 40). In the
case of Phii Poota it is suitable to identify its existence from symbols concern in the villagers paradigm.

4.1 The Shrine: The Phenomenon of Phii Poota’s Residence

According to the shrine or Sarn of Phii Poota, it indicates a residence of a human being. It is psychologically true that everyone wants to have a residence to rest and abide. This is also a natural characteristic of animals in the world. It is a natural basic need of human being in the psychological perspective. The following evident perspectives can be sufficient to infer the existence of the Phii Poota of each village.

Due to the form of a “Sarn” or a shrine it is usually built in a human house pattern. Besides it is so serious that there must be the strict process of building the shrine in each village. It is not only date and time of construction that must be considered for benevolence in the future according to astrology but also both the species of wood and directions of the settlement as well as location. Kittima Nuancan (Nuancan, 1996: 102-145, 174-193) describes that the front part of each sarn Phii Poota in Thakonyang subdistrict of Mahasarakham province always direct toward the village it belongs to. The location of settlement of each Sarn is always on a higher area and close to fertilizing environments such as a river, or a stream or a swam. The villagers expect that their Phii Poota can see all occurrences in the village directly; and then the Phii can take care of villagers immediately if there is any problem. In the case of date and time of a construction of a Sarn, it depends on guidance and suggestions of astrology which usually introduces followers to select only the duration that concerns to good luck. Besides, kinds of wood used to build a shrine has been selected properly according to the tradition of house construction in the Isarn region. The wooden material from Afzelia xylocarpa Craib or, in Thai-Lao pronunciation expresses, “Tae” is prohibited because its verbal meaning is “to depress” which is not creative but destructive because it is not comfortable if anyone is under depression. Each process seems to be simple. But beneath the process it implicitly reveals that villagers want the one whom they respect to have the best residence and peaceful circumstance so that one can satisfactorily help villagers to get success in their life. It implies, in the researcher’s
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opinion, that villagers unfold some perceptions of their belief of the existence of a particular important person whom they respect. If there is a construction of a house the intention of such construction should focus on the residence of or for someone. It is not general for a community of people to build a house for the one who is unknown. It is not a normal exercise of human being also to construct a house for other purposes which are not residencial. Therefore this shrine or "Sarn" which is in the shape of a house must belong to whom villagers intend to offer it to. Preecha Pinthong states about the purpose of building a shrine for Phii Poota that it is derived from the belief that there is a Phii Poota whom villagers respect and they want to build a residence for such Phii to stay with them (Pinthong, 1970: 46). Moreover, if anyone finds that there is a house in some where else, he or she will immediately justifies that there must be someone to live in. This is the hypothesis which archeological anthropologists use to identify human settlement for their field study.¹

4.2. Don Poota: The Estate of Phii Poota

In addition, the shrine has its private compound. It is a Don or a Dong Phii Poota. Each compound of Phii Poota has been selected at the fringe of each village by its pioneers and donated to their Phii Poota. Such compound consists of large amount of big trees, various kinds of wild vegetables and animals; and if it is possible it is usually close to natural water resources. This indicates that villagers selected the best place, according to their wish, for the best one or else other villagers would occupy such location for themselves. It is true that no one has owned or even intend to occupy it though it is the best location for settlement and there is no empirical owner. This means that villagers voluntarily offered the best place for the best one because they wanted their Phii Poota to stay in the satisfied location that consists of food, scenery and healthy atmosphere. If the villagers realize that the location does not have these qaulites there will be someone occupying that place. Therefore, it is sure that the villagers recognize

that these properties belongs to the one who lives in that compound legally. That one also has his own right to show his authority over all that belongs to him.

To link the events in their communion history together and to indicate authentic privacy for their Phii Poota villagers invent symbolizable means to remind themselves of their own unique identity. The shrine had been built up on the particular estate of residence selected for this Phii in a forest near the village called Don Phii Poota before the ritual of invitation toward their Phii Poota set, is another symbol to indicate the existence of such Phii as a member of the community of the village, even though it is invisible but still to be with villagers and ready to help them. It is easier than perceiving only abstract information about such matter without sensible impression for those who have poor scientific knowledge. This is a psychological motive to live which villagers can gain from their intelligence through their cosmic vicinity. Consequently, other persons who need materials from such compound must ask permission from the owner before taking anything from such compound. Even though villagers do not see anyone in the compound they have to say the requesting words toward the invisible owner. It is an etiquette through which villagers recognize the proper right of Phii Poota as a person. This action seems to be superstitious in empirical point of view; but in the Isarn paradigmatic point of view, it is reasonable.

Due to these two material elements concerning the notion of Phii Poota, they, on the one hand, automatically shape the Isarn villagers’ mind to recognize that Phii Poota exists. On the other hand, they reveal the greatness and authority of the person who mostly had outstanding activities that impressively contributed to villagers as their hero in various qualities in their particular historical period such as the founder of the village, the leader of villagers’ ancestors. Those notions qualify the one who protected the village and its inhabitants from any dangerous conditions. Such activities have been excitingly transmitted to new generation continuously in oral form. It indicates that the historical personship of that one has still been with recent villagers. This kind of impressive expression is a historical reflection that implicitly educates descendants to know and to realize who they are and from where they were.
4.3. Chao Cham: The Representative of Phii Poota

To keep the notion of the existence of the Phii Poota of each village, the status of intercessioner is established to be the active spokesman for such Phii because if there is speech of someone it indicates that that one still is alive or stays among others. The Phii Poota’s speech always describes ethical norms which villagers have to follow for the sake of each individual as well as their own community. An intercessioner to each Phii Poota is usually a male, also a good example for every villager who is approved by the popular selection and/or the Phii Poota of each village according to ethical behavior of such a person. Besides, the intercessioner behaves as the Phii Poota of the village when there is a Liang Phii Poota ceremony. This is the great advocate to support the recognition of the existence of such Phii of each village.

In addition, this person is an official executive of Phii Poota’s norms as well as a healer of patients who are sick presumably because of their violations to some Phii Poota’s norms. It is common for the Isam villagers to recognize that the phenomenon sickness of each patient that requires the healing of the intercessioner of the village is normally caused by the patient’s violation of some Phii Poota’s norms. This implicitly indicates that Phii Poota is a genuine good Phii who wishes good to all villagers. Chob Deesuankok illucidates that the sickness of a villager signifies that Phii Poota does not protect that one because the patient violated some Phii Poota’s norms of the village which is implied that that one does not respect the Phii Poota (Deesuankok, 1983: 28). The sickness happens to that one because that Phii wants the patient to be conscious that he misbehaved. The intercessioner is only the medium to set an official reconciliation between the patient and the Phii. The most important point is the self reconciliation which the patient has which consists in accepting the invitation of the intercessioner and the confession of violation through the process of healing. This is a simple strategy that the local sages initiated to motivate their descendants to survive in such particular circumstance and environment of the Isam region. This is the most important starting point to reach a sustainable development of a human being to reach self-realization because it starts from its existential root, its genetic hereditary heritage that based on historical fact, as king Bhumiphol the Great calls it “implosion” (Phongphit, 1993a: 4).
4.4. Rituals toward *Phii Poota*: A Communication among Relatives

And according to death, the one who dies does not leave from this world but he let to living people the impression to be a particular person vested with supernatural power. Then the villagers imagine that *Phii* can help them to overcome obstacles of their lives as in the past. On the other hand, death is the gate to go beyond place and time. It initiates the idea of omnipotential status for such a kind of *Phii*. Patharaporn Sirigarnchana describes the concept of immortality in the Thai traditional society that villagers do not recognize the status of nonexistence of the soul after death. She emphasizes that the Thai villagers believe that death is the end of physical status but the soul of that one still exists for rebirth (Sirigarnchana, 1990: 6). Moreover, Roongtham Sujithammarak describes that the Thai Idealism has its own authenticity. He comments:

> For the Thais, they do not separate spirit or *Phii* from physical matter absolutely as the condition of space and time in the western paradigm. Spirit does not have mass because of physical condition but it is in time because it is a substance which may be in the space as well (Sujithammarak, 1990: 313-315).

Therefore *Phii Poota* exists among villagers forever in the Isarn context because of the duty of clanship. It means that *Phii Poota*, as the elder of the villager, has to take care of them according to the status and its *Phii*'s nature which is not dependent on space and time; but it can be in space and time according to nonmaterial condition.

When villagers want to contact *Phii Poota* they have to set a ceremony either private or public. Those ceremonies are not sacrificial rites. The intention of villagers while they are setting a ceremony to their *Phii Poota* is to have a communication with their *Phii Poota* for their own business either to thank or to request help. They will not disturb this *Phii* if they do not want some help from him. They sometimes want to get success but they are not sure whether they themselves can do it or not. So, to encourage themselves to have more strength they set a ceremony to request the assistance from
their heroic ancestor who used to help other ancestors to get success. It is surer to ask refuge from their relative whom they are familiar with than request help from a stranger or other unknown one. On the other hand, to pay a visit to the one whom villagers are familiar with is a good etiquette as well even for some particular purpose. It is also a common behavior to bring something as a present to a householder.\footnote{There is a popular Isam proverb says “\text{There will be some presents if anyone go to see a monk; and there should be some gifts while visiting a boss}.”} Hence, when villagers prepare some materials to offer to their \textit{Phii Poota} it does not mean that they offer sacrifice as holocaust to their God. They just present a gift to the one whom they visit. Or in the case of annual ceremony to \textit{Phii Poota}, villagers knot coconut leaves to represent their domestic animals, they just intend to inform their \textit{Phii} the total amount of their properties which need the care of \textit{Phii} as well. Moreover, if a villager had promised to give some thing to their \textit{Phii} he has to fulfil his promise or he will feel unsatisfactorily. This is a trick which the sage initiated for training the consciousness of the villagers to be ethical persons leading them to produce good deeds for their own society.

In the traditional viewpoint, it is incumbent to living members of each family in a village to make offerings for their relative \textit{Phii} as well as another natural \textit{Phii} because it is a mankind tradition to afford the \textit{Phii} with foodstuffs for maintaining them alive according to popular acknowledgment and enabling them to fulfil their patronship duties. They also have to satisfy other good \textit{Phii} for their better life.

4.5 Solidary Community: The relation between Visible and Invisible members

It is exactly true that the Isam villagers accept as a common belief that there is \textit{Phii Poota}. It seems to be that their \textit{Phii Poota} still dwells among them as a substantial person but is invisible even though, historically that person had lived in the history of villagers for a long time before he died. This perspective is an authentic characteristic of the Isam people. Seri Phongphit (Phongphit, 1991, 1992) describes quite clearly about
this perspective. He explains that the radical paradigm of the Thai people toward life, social and natural especially in the Isarn region is that they have their unity and balance. Everything either material or nonmaterial relates to and depends on each other. They are holistic organism but not independent mechanism. He comments about the local belief in Phiit very seriously in “Ghost, Angel and Philosophy of Life” saying:

...in villagers’ belief, the existence of ‘Phiit’ is not the matter that has to be proved by scientific method or the method of separation [between soul and matter]. The logic of villagers is that ‘Phiit exists because it has meaning.’ the meaning for survival. The agent of the villagers’ belief in Phiit is mutual relation... Phiit is a symbol, it is a principle of social relation between an individual and another one, the living and the dead, and human beings and environment (Phongphit, 1997a: 28).

According to sociological perspective, if there is a rejection of the existence of Phiit Poota there will be denial of the familial institution of which ancestorship is its fundamental basis. It is the destruction of the nuclear unit of a society. It is universally acceptable that the familial institution is one of important cultural elements that helps the society to be solid and unique. George Theodorson and Lucille Theodorson emphasize that “The family is a primary agency of socialization. The form of the family and the relative impact on the child of various family members vary not only from one culture to another but also within the same culture” (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1990: 112).

Thus if such expectation occurs in any society, that society will not exist in this world because it will not consider the importance of the members of each family. But human beings want to live in this world as long as possible in peaceful conditions; and they need close members who can share mutual help to support each other, for they are in physical limitation. So there must be a process to preserve the institution of the family. Phiit Poota can be a significant element as a base of such process.

Moreover, that Phiit is the spirit of the ancestor who contributed great goodness through both activities and commands for the village which has been impressed on
villagers. Yet, his commands, which have been crystallized from a great amount of former direct experiences, have still been effective in the role of Phii Poota’s rules as ethical codes. That is the immortality of the Phii Poota who still be with his relatives for ever. Any time that villagers deal with the principles of Phii Poota it seems that the Phii himself expresses such disciplines. Besides those who follow such codes get beneficial results but those who violate any rule, or “phid Phii” get punishments. Each punishment which each villager gets may occur because of psychological effects\(^1\) or social sanction through public mistakes which others can notice. This impressive feeling is still in the mind of villagers as well as in practice [because of psychological effects]. Therefore villagers recognize that Phii Poota still exists amongst them.

It is worth saying that the one who recognizes that the Phii Poota of the village exists has the notion of its existence impressed on his mind of villagers to which ethical rules for daily life practices are recognized as the permanent standard. It is the inside perception. Consequently, authoritative qualities of that one has been initiated for setting peaceful community through the disciplines of Phii Poota. From this point of view, Phii Poota exists meaningfully for villagers who recognize its influence and authority through ethical rules. It is genetically in the impulse of the Isarn villagers.

\(^{1}\) Each form of punishment affects the physical condition of the one who thinks that he/she does not follow some discipline of Phii Poota of the village. Each one usually gets pain such as stomachache, headache or, sometime he or she has abnormal behaviors without physical, reasonable cause. According to the scientific notice of Sa-ngan Suwananlert, a psychoanalytic doctor who has more experiences about sickness of cultural villagers in the Northeastern of Thailand, explains that it is a kind of Mass Hysteria or Collective Behavior because a patient has a tension or frustration from the feeling of guilt from Phii Poota’s rules; and/or that patient has weak spirit condition. See more details in Seri Phongphit. “Special Interview of Dr. Sa-ngan Suwannalert” in Chumchon Pattana (in Thai). 1 (Sep.-Oct. 1986), pp. 48-53.
5. The Value of the Belief in Phii Poota for the Isarn Natives.

According to the effects or activities which appear in the realm of villagers’ life, the belief in Phii Poota influences villagers in various positive points of view. It is valuable because its attributes are conformed to the concepts which R.T. Allen proposes when he says

Valuable attributes fall into two classes: (a) that in which the terms for the attribute explicitly mention the value attributed, and (b) that in which they do not but refer to that which, in one way or another, is thought to give rise to a value (Allen, 1993: 43).

Such valuable attributes should have the following sub-categories: correctness, rightness, success, fulfillment, satisfaction, sufficiency, adequacy, suitability, appropriateness, and fittingness. They should be its or his effectiveness which successfully operates in serving the whole and bringing about the goals that are relevant to end-products (Allen, 1993: 19-41). And it satisfies human being or else there will not be worthy. It is not absolutely necessary to prove the existence of the agent that such value for confirming its reliability because values are shared sentiments about what is good, worthy, and just (Brinkerhoff, White and Ortega, 1992: 40-41).

Phii Poota himself as a significant ancestor who has gratified villagers must be valuable forever in the Isarn paradigm because of, on the one hand, his virtues and good deeds in the past have always impressed his descendants. This is the intrinsic value of Phii Poota. It is not only symbolic institution that is benevolent for villagers but it has its own mystical history in the history of each village. Though the content of Phii Poota of each village may not be clear as scientific knowledge but it has firm background in mythical form to fortify the belief. If such historical person is not significant for recent descendants, that person will not be recorded in the history of such village or villagers’ memory. There are a great amount of villagers who used to live in that village but all have not been selected to be the protector of the village after their death. There is only the one who is Phii Poota still be recognized in the village history and can be their
spiritual protector forever because of his significant deeds. On the other hand, his ethical codes and authoritative strategy of training villagers to be ethical even though punishment included are worth for villagers. Hence he is a valuable historical person.

To demonstrate the value of such Phii who is the agent of the belief that entices villagers to reach good end-products, the researcher distinguishingly elucidates its values through activities into three domains as follows:

5.1. The Value toward Each Individual

To discuss on the value of Phii Poota toward individual the researcher proposes two points as follows: (a) the value of ancestorship, and (b) the value of ethical protector.

Just in case that each individual is a member of a village in which Phii Poota is one of core cultural element, he either directly or indirectly receives influence of the belief in Phii Poota because his or her parents has to educate them to conform the pattern of life in such a society for survival even though that one voluntarily acknowledges such concepts or not (Sathiankoses, 1972:220-221). Rather the Isarn culture proposes that value and dignity of humanity as the center of its culture (Kaewthep, 1987: 100) though each individual is a small matter usually depends on others in the universe (Phongphit, 1994: 64). Hence to form each individual to be a real human being, the conformity of the cultural requirement in the Isarn context is a must. That is each one has to be an ethical man. For to be an ethical man is to be a good man; and to be a good man everyone has to show the value and dignity of humanity. To reach this approach the ancestors of the Isarn region have attempted to form their descendants to behave for attaining the approach. They usually set a process according to their own context.

First, each individual, as a member of a close family in each village has been trained since his birth in order to perceive what community wants him to be and to know how to be a genuine member of such a community through both biological and cognitive imperatives, which are components of socialization of sociobiology (Plog &Bates, 1980:
235-236). The contents of behavioral performance are normally implanted to newborn for conformity of life-pattern for survival in a particular community in the form of enculturation. Geroge F. Kneller emphasizes in “The Impact of Culture” that:

[H]aving been absorbed from the most part unconsciously in the process of enculturation, these values have entered into the personality of the mature of man and have done much to mold it (Kneller, 1971: 52).

The content of Heed Sibsong and Kong Sibsee, that has usually been adopted to Phii Poota’s discipline (Deesuankok, 1883: 27-28), has been applied for instructing a newborn automatically for being a member of society though villagers may not understand completely why they have to obey. But villagers accept such discipline because they are significant and benevolent patterns of life for each one’s social status in the Isarn region which senior members have experienced its effects for a long time.

Each individual has been trained to be ethical according to the disciplines and interdictions issued under the influence of Phii Poota. On the one hand, details of disciplines in requesting forms and interdictions in prohibiting forms describe about the procedure to accomplish common good in villagers’ life in both private and public sectors. It is common to recognize that all ethical codes have been observed as Phii Poota disciplines automatically (Interview, Kong Poosri, 1996). On the other hand, the details of interdictions of Phii Poota’s which Stanley J. Tambiah describes may make readers have more clearer understanding of the approach of such disciplines. He sets the diagram of some interdictions of Phii Poota of Ban Praan Muan who is usually called "Tapooban" as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interdictions which cause punishment</th>
<th>Kind of illness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Norms concerning village citizenship</td>
<td>In extreme cases madness or death may occur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1. Extending command fence on to roads or lanes in the village.</td>
<td>Fever</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A.2. Going to live in another village without informing and getting permission from Tapooban [Phi Poota] via the Cham [Chao Cham].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. Wan Phraa Taboos (Buddhist Sabbath)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B.2. Taking cart into or out of the village (male task).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.3. Cutting and carrying firewood into the village (usually female task).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C. Tapoobaan Taboos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C.1. Cutting down trees or bamboo, or gardening in the vicinity of Tapubaan's spirit house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.2. Eating turtle of a special kind (this is associated particularly with the spirit of the swamp (Chao Phau Tong Kyang).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to learning theorists each individual behaves as such because that one has been shaped by environment. Franken summarizes the idea of this theory in that way: “We are what we are because our environment shaped us in a particular way” (Franken, 1994: 4). In the case of Phi Poota’s institution it is an environmental element in the Isarn context. Villagers have to search for refuge when they confront current
The Value of the Belief in Phii Poota for the Isarn Natives

problem of life. Lacking of academic knowledge and the strong respect of ancestorship entice the sages of the Isarn region to invent means for fortifying villagers in life struggle. The main point is to form people to be ethical. Consequently, there is a set of practical code of ethics which has the senior authority as its foundation. This authority which is popular in the Oriental world influences junior descendants directly according to the agrarian family form which emphasizes social harmony (Boonyasing & Sirisawadi, 1990: 52-53). It has a duty to shape the people in the Isarn region as well. The content of each Phii Poota's prohibition in Ban Praan Muan, for example, concerns the process of holistic individual formation. It focuses on prohibiting each person independently for the sake of either individual or public. On the other hand, punishment is a means that helps each individual to realize one's self on ethical pattern of life. Besides it is the means that temporarily forms each individual to be honest through punishment. It means that when a villager gets a punishment he may be conscious that he violated a Phii Poota's rule. It is the great maturity for human being. However, to install spirit of ethical codes in human mind is very difficult. Naturally man wants to be free but ethical codes require from him to surrender for his betterness of life. If there is external enforcement to control him to be ethical he instinctly attempts to violate according to the nature of free will. But if there is internal enforcement about that process he will accept voluntarily. However, to accomplish such an aim man needs internal authority to train him kindly without avoidance because from the beginning of life man has only capability to reach such an aim, and he needs someone to help him reach such an aim concretely according to the standard of each culture (Kneller, 1971: 53). In the Isarn region the sages use Phii Poota as the great authority to encite villagers to absorb the spirit of ethical codes because of his invisibility and senior juridical ancestorship which youngsters have to respect according to their own tradition.

Considering the political conditions which uses juridical codes to oblige citizens to keep society in peaceful atmosphere, there are a lot of violations. For juridical codes have not been implanted in citizens' mind. All obligations depend on external commitment based on punishment due to the capture. If there is no capture from juridical officers, they are innocent even though they violate some rules. Moreover
juridical supervisors are another persons whom citizens identify as employees. They work for business. There is no inner relationship between supervisors, or juridical officers and citizens. Consequently, there are few sincere followers.

For those who belief in Phii Poota, the codes which such Phii issued have to be observed heartedly. For villagers feel that they are close to the author of the codes as their senior relatives. They do not want to dissatisfy their own relative who always takes care of them since they got birth. Besides the supernatural powerfulness according to his invisibility stimulates villagers to follow his rules for their own benefits under the influence of penalty fearfulness.

To perceive more understanding of essential meaning of each discipline the researcher interprets the content of the above disciplines that Stanley Tambiah summaries briefly as follows:

The A.1. has been set for forming each villager’s mind to be charitable and to concern for public sake. It implies that there may be selfishness which may cause quarreling with other people who use the road or lane if there is someone extends compound fence. It protects a good sake for public as well as shaping the mind of each individual.

The A.2. implicitly takes care of an individual, who leaves for another village, may get a serious condition during traveling without help. It is practical for each villager who has to travel to other place to inform the leader of his own village; and when he reaches the other village he has to inform the leader of that village as well. But if it is only the command of human being it is not an obligatory duty to do even though for one’s sake except the command of the most respective one: the Phii Poota’s. In political practice if there is any information about each individual, the leader of the village can investigate as well as protect such individual if there is any suspicion about that one. This is a good political trick which each villager has to obey because it is the command of his/her respective one.
The B.1., B.2., B.3. are regulations which have been issued for the sake of each individual as well as public. Each individual should be fair without taking advantage of other villagers. Taking a cart out or into the village in the past implicitly indicated that the owner of the cart wanted to take something earlier than others. Normally all natural properties belong to all villagers but each one should have equal right to take. While others go to the temple to earn merit as usual because it is Buddhist Sabbath, someone should not take a chance to get something before other.

The C.1., C.2. are the regulations to protect public properties from prohibiting each individual to do such activities though there is no empirical owner. Besides each individual should acknowledge the property right of the others especially Phii Poota's belongings.

The notion of gratitude is one of important virtues which senior group trains their juniors through the perception of Phii Poota because of the recognition of virtuous deeds of Phii Poota under the influence of fearfulness of the Phii. Each villager will be taught about the activities of Phii Poota toward villagers since they were children in each particular situation. Somphong Intharaphanich describes that:

My elders usually prohibit me not to have any unethical behavior and persuade me to behave well by inferring to the preference of Phii Poota: punishment or reward. So I have to obey what they suggest because I want reward from Phii Poota and I do not want any punishment (Interview, Somphong Intharaphanich, 1996).

Each ceremony toward Phii Poota is the implicit obligation which form each individual to absorb a spirit of gratitude. Sometimes villagers themselves receive what they requested from Phii Poota unexpectively. They will conclude immediately that Phii Poota gives them even though such matter occurs naturally such as rain or successfulness of working or doing business.

It is sufficient to identify that the institution of Phii Poota, which has the belief in Phii Poota as the center, is a good institution to do intrinsic ethical formation for each
individual because it is, firstly a gradual process of sustainable training program which each villager has to conscientize in every step of life-process. It is not in the form of enforcing to learn as academical process but the form of in-training and implanting ethical codes which trainees have experienced effects by ones’ selves directly. It is impressive to provide instruction to a trainee giving him more practical knowledge than theoretical knowledge. Theoretical knowledge does not impress a learner so that one can keep on such theory in mind for making ethical judgment. But the training process can entice the trainee to enable to achieve his/her goal of life in each particular condition and to persuade everyone to search for each own way to earn one’s life according to his own behavior. In the case of the Isarn context, the Isarn villagers can have their own standard for evaluation to justify that the Phii Poota's disciplines are suitable to follow or not due to common good. Any unethical requirement from Phii Poota can be rejected from villagers. It may happen in the case that Phii Poota is abolished from the village if its behaviors are unethical as the case of Ban Khum-Ya-nang.¹

Second, Phii Poota is an authoritative means to control behavior of each individual in ethical realm. Each villager will consider whether each behavior will violate any rule of Phii Poota or not. Thawat Poonnotok summarizes that the Phii Poota controls the behavior of each villager. The Phii Poota's codes prohibit each one to behave contradictorily to the cultural tradition of society (Poonnotok, 1987: 382). This is the primary step of teaching ethical codes to people effectively because it is the training process enticing each one to achieve his life by one's own consciousness. This is a serene process which forms people to be really mature. It is noticeable that each patient who called Chao Cham of the village to relieve him sincerely confessed himself

¹ A group of participants in Exposure Immersion program in the Isarn area set by The Catholic Council of Thailand for Development during 21st -30th September 1987, found that the belief in Phii Poota of Ban Khum-Ya-Nang in Wang Maidaeng subdistrict of Pratai district in Nakornrachasima province was abolished because there were a lot of damage in the village without protection of Phii Poota. See more details in Catholic Council of Thailand for Development. The Report of the Exposure Immersion : Cultural Tradition of the Isarn Region (1987, Roneo).
that he committed violation of a *Phii Poota's* rule; and he wants to reconcile such *Phii* by a set of propitiation consisting of *Khan Ha* or *Khan Paèd* (Deesuankhok, 1983: 28; Interview, Khong Buasri, 1996). There is no verbal or empirical evidence witnessing that a virtuous person has been punished by *Phii Poota*.

The researcher would like to comment that when a person infringes a *Phii Poota*’s rule he himself feels guilty. This feeling as a big pressure weakens spiritual strength and affects his physical body due to the serious conflict between his ethical consciousness and his guilty feeling. This is a type of hysteria occurring form inner conflict of the patient. It happens when that one is confronting a situation that has never occurred before. That situation confuses the patient because of the strangeness of the new experience (Suwanalert, 1986 : 53; Jüngsthiansap, 1986 : 58). So he feels sick. He reminds himself what he had done. He realizes that to confess his guilt to the *Chao Cham* is the only way to relieve his sickness. So the *Chao Cham* is invited to relieve that one. But factually, the Chao Cham does his duty as a mediator or a witness to acknowledge the reconciliation between the patient and *Phii Poota*. Finally that patient is recovered. This is the appropriate means to form people to recognize one’s mistake bravely because it is the starting point to carry good activity heartedly. It is not suitable to form people to be ethical by instructing them ethical codes without absorbing their values because they do not realize their real value. They just attempt to run away from punishment without responsibility. Seri Phongphit (Phongphit, 1992: 310) comments about this conduct of new generation that the standard of right or wrong is the duty of political law which is only extrinsic but not intrinsic. It is not in the consciousness of human being. The new generation does not feel guilty if there is any legal violation without arrest. Even though being caught, that one sometimes does not accept such violation by inferring innocence. But if there is a strategy like *Phii Poota* institution has trained people in the Isarn region, villagers will intrinsically realize the value of ethical activities effectively. It is not necessary to spend a lot of money to employ inspectors to protect properties.

Besides, villagers also have been trained to have virtue of gratitude implicitly. Gratitude is always recognized as a good virtue of human being that forms each
individual to know how to depend on others as well as to know how to depend on one's self. Everyone wants to be gratified when he behaves himself correctly. Man, as a social being, needs another person who has capacity to help him to do something that he himself cannot do. Parents, relatives and ancestors are the first group that he thinks of for help respectively because he is familiar with automatic help to which parents or their relatives usually offer.

When there is a new pattern of civilization. Western consumerism attacks cultural society. Each individual changes his mind and obeys no more the instruction of Phii Poota’s commands to liberal decision based on human right of equality. There is no seniority and ancestral respect. New civilized values entice each individual to be far from inner maturity. Consequently, each one confronts economic problems because he has to work harder than before to get more financial income. Other persons are, for him, the clients from whom he has to gain money. There is no mutual help and charity does not exist anymore. For each one’s energy has been evaluated in price not in value. Kamchana Kaewthep elucidates the reflection which the villagers of Ban Soknamkhaeo express on lacking of Phii Poota and his ethical disciplines: Heed Sibsong Khong Sibsee, and traditional beliefs that:

[V]illagers now believe to what outsiders propose. Clothes are from outsiders and they are expensive. They do not obey ethical codes because juridical laws are supreme. In the past they respected Thewada. There was inner honesty in the past which sometimes just only drank water as swearing the truth has been clarified. Nowadays, there are a lot of thieves and robbers. Besides, there is little natural water. There is only few rain and it is not on its procedure because many trees [where Phii Poota and other Phiis lives] were cut (Kaewthep, 1987: 111).

She records more about the malevolent effects occurring from the change that villagers consider that:
Nowadays, children have been caught with television...They imitate actions from TV...If there is a favorite TV program for children, they go to watch TV without response to their parents’ command. This influence causes children not to respect elders. In the past, if children made loud noise while entertaining local drama \( (\textit{Mho-Lam}) \), they obeyed to be quiet when some elder prohibited them. But nowadays they do not obey (Kaewthep, 1987: 115).

From this reflection it implicitly clarifies that when villagers lack of their own spiritual center, they lack of real happiness. New pattern of civilization gives them only pseudo happiness but hides great burdens of debts and isolation. But after renovation of the traditional values that they used to have in the past their real happiness exists in their community (Kaewthep, 1987: 118-134).

5.2. The Values toward Society

Every human community is expected to be a peaceful group. To form each society to be peaceful there must be values, norms, mores and laws to set a conformity of each individual for common good in each society (Brinkerhoff, White, and Ortega, 1992: 40-42). But if there is no conformity of a set of popular principles, it is very difficult to set a peaceful community. George Theodorson and Lucille Theodorson comment that"When people share social norms, they know what to expect of one another, and behavior is predictable. When people do not share social norms, however, their actions seem strange, confusing, and possibly even dangerous" (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1990: 66). Therefore, the conformity to social norms is necessary to set a peaceful atmosphere in each society.

In the Isarn society, every village respecting \textit{Phii Poota} can maintain peaceful atmosphere among the villagers’ community because \textit{Phii Poota} is the spiritual center of the community through his discipline. The influence of \textit{Phii Poota}, as ancestral \textit{Phii} can control everyone in the village because villagers have fearful respect to such a \textit{Phii}. Rather, this atmosphere covers such village because its inhabitants feel that they are
from the same kinsgroup which has *Phii Poota* as the center. Though someone, before living in such a village as a son-in-law, factually is from other village, traditionally, must be adopted as a kid of *Phii Poota* by the “Kob” ceremony. Consequently, villagers have clanic feeling which is an inner motivation to set a spiritual unity. This feeling is expressed externally in mutual help among villagers.

Chattip Nartsupha discovers that the system of local beliefs of peasants which concentrates on the belief in ancestor supports internal relationship among their members, self-governing, sustainable economics and identity of village community (Nartsupha, 1984: 45). It means that the belief in ancestral *Phii* is still important for local villagers; and it sets a uniform of conformity through principles of each *Phii*. He emphasizes that the belief in ancestor is very important in local society. He says:

> The belief in ancestral spirit indicates that the radical belief of villagers is the belief in genetically relationship. Genetics gathers the livings together and links the living to the dead. The belief in grand fathers and mothers indicates to the importance of the relative system in Thai villagers’ perspective. It indicates that each village has kept relative system. Villagers of each village belief in the same ancestral spirit as the protective spirit of the village. This belief has been originated within the village to shield their village from outside matters. When the ancestral spirit is initiated by villagers it means that villagers recognize and honor the relative system and village community. This system brings solidarity among villagers. And as the descendants of ancestral spirit, they have to observe the discipline of such a spirit or else the spirit will be angry with them. Consequently, such spirit may

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1 Winyoo Pholsawadi describes in his thesis that there are two kinds of the “Kob” ceremony, a propitiation and adoption of oneself as a member of *Phii Poota*’s community. See more details in Winyoo Pholsawadi. *The Ancestral Feeding Ceremony of the Phu-Thai, Kamcha-li Subdistrict, Kamcha-li District, Mukdaharn Province* (in Thai). Master’s Thesis. (Srinakarinthrawirot University Mahasarakham, 1993), pp.151-153.
not protect them from disasters, instead it may punish them (Nartsupha, 1984: 47-48).

It implies that the importance in Phii Poota, which is identified as the ancestral spirit, is important for the Isam villagers. Such an importance can be observed through the implicit attributes of the Phii through the villagers’ behavior. The attributes of the belief in Phii Poota have been demonstrated through disciplines of Phii Poota. Though the ethical discipline of Phii Poota emphasizes on each individual’s discipline according to his or her status but it always implies to common welfare. Suthep Sunthomphesat reflects his analysis of the belief in Phii Poota citing “Such belief implicitly relates to social structure, politics and economics of each village obviously” (Sunthomphesat, 1968: 117).

As the great ancestor in the past Phii Poota has been observed as the protector of the villagers in their as good father of a large family. He, on the one hand, has to take care of all people, all domestic animals in the village as well as villagers’ properties outside boundary of the village. Besides he can manipulate villagers to observe his commands for the sake of villagers through Chao Cham, Tiam and any particular possessed person. If it is his command, villagers have to obey unconditionally. On the other hand, every villager recognizes that he is in a solidary community because he has the same Phii as the others. Pramuan Dikkinson reflects that the Isam villagers feel to be interdependent of the same community. She elucidates the importance of the ancestor spirit which is identified as Phii Poota in the Isam region as the symbol of familial solidarity of the Isam villagers. When some Isam people say that they have the same Phii or they can call their Phii for another one, this implies that they are in a same group (Dikkinson, 1983: 142-143). This is the great manifestation of common solidarity which has Phii as the center. From this point of view, villagers share their labor to help each other in hard working without payment when it is necessary.

The influence of Phii Poota obliges villagers either directly or indirectly to observe his regulations voluntarily. Each village that has Phii Poota institution will have a committee of elders, led by the Chao Cham, whose duties are to observe the life
movements of the villagers for the common good according to the Phii Poota’s discipline based on Heed Sibsong Kong Sibsee (Interview, Kong Poosri, 1996). If there is any problem this committee will consider the matter and make a judgment based on forgiveness and self-improvement through self realization. This is a moral set in villagers’ concept. Karnchana Kaewthep describes such concept:

"It has wider meaning [than its lexical definition]. It contains the primitive beliefs, traditions, cultures that have been transmitted from villagers’ ancestors toward the recent generation; and it includes Buddhist Dhamma as well" (Kaewthep, 1987: 104).

If there is a set of discipline of Phii Poota, the contents of discipline will concern the community’s sake as well as of individual. There is no obligation of Phii Poota’s discipline that enforces villagers to behave unethically. It concerns the process of political governing which is based on nonviolence. It promotes only harmony and forgiveness. It establishes mutual concern in the form that each one helps the other to realize oneself through understanding each other with the spirit of forgiveness. Karnchana Kaewthep also elucidates an impressive example of problem solving process based on Heed Sibsong Khong Sibsee about fornication of a young couple. It is factually a “Phid Phii” guilt which can be prosecuted in court. But they do solve such problem among themselves. The process begins through the meeting between senior relatives of both man and woman. Then each accused must be investigated by the same sex senior relatives of both part to investigate the truth. After that there will be a fine amounting to at least one boiled hen and a bottle of liquor of the male accused depending on tradition of each village. After that they will share together a meal. This implies that they are unique because they eat together the same meal and the same set of food. According to the Isarn tradition, whenever one has been invited to have a meal with another, it means that the guest has been accepted as a member of that group.

1 The is a didactic of the Isarn region says about this tradition that “เพื่อได้เป็นพี่น้องต้องกินข้าว ข้าวใหญ่ กินน้ำ จะกินข้าวหน้า” It means that if we are relatives we should have the same meal, the same dish of curry and the same branch of bananas.
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From the detail of annual ceremony obligation “None can plant rice before the ceremony or there must be a permission from the Chao Cham of the village” before annual plantation begins which villagers obey respectively, it implies that villagers have to start planting at the same time to share all necessary natural materials for the plantation. Water is the most necessary element for agriculture. When villagers start agricultural work together there will be a just distribution of water as well as other necessary materials. Besides there will be mutual exchange of information among themselves in the annual ceremony. Meanwhile in the annual ceremony villagers share some amount of their properties as offering to their Phii Poota according to their capacity and join that ceremony voluntarily. After the official contact with Phii Poota villagers have meals together with what they offered to the Phii. Having meals together means sharing, acknowledging and knowing each other as well. This means that they have a chance to communicate to each other and plan for their future life. Besides, it expresses the spirit of unity and solidarity as mentioned above.

On the contrary, those villagers who do not keep Phii Poota in their communities confront not only ethical problems but also political and economic problems as well. Kamchana Kaewthep demonstrates the dissatisfied effects in the village which rejects Phii Poota or does not keep the traditional institution of such a Phii. The reflections from various dimensions of Ban Soknamkhaw case study after changing to contemporary industrial civilization evidentially support the significant values of Phii Poota. Outsiders of Bansoknamkhaw said that villagers of this village are poor. They are also gamblers. Consequently, there are a lot of thieves who steal cattles of others. This situation occurs because the traditional system of beliefs has been destroyed (Kaewthep. 1987: 121-135). Hence, it is worth to say that Phii Poota is a sufficient condition for enhancing the quality of villagers’ lives according to the ethical discipline which form villagers to have the spirit of respect and obedience under that influence of their Phii Poota.
5.3. The Values toward Nature

The belief in Phii Poota is also benevolent to nature which consists of the natural environment of the village where Phii Poota dwells. Forests and trees in each Don Phii Poota are protected because of Phii Poota’s authoritative influence through his discipline “No one can cut or bring any thing out of the Don Phii Poota without any permission asking, or else that one must be punished.” The authority of this Phii covers also natural stream of villagers as well as others natural entities (interview, Kong Poosri, 1996). Consequently, no one destroys natural environment. This is the strategy which ancestors set to protect natural resources for their descendants.

Everyone recognizes that, on the one hand, environment is the most significant source that feeds human being. Scientists discuss about numerous benefits of the environments (Chiras. 1988). Chemically, every forest is naturally known as the primary source that keeps the balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide gas affecting human beings conditionally. Trees produce oxygen for human health and consume carbon dioxide which is not good for health. If there is no oxygen men cannot live, or if there is only carbon dioxide men also cannot live. To produce oxygen and to decrease carbon dioxide, trees or forests are sufficient and necessary factors. Because there are forests and trees there will be an increase of oxygen and decrease of carbon dioxide.

On the other hand, forest is an important element for rainfall and food chain of biomass. For it concerns the ecosystem of biosphere in the world which is useful for human beings. For the Isarn villagers, rainfall is the most important for agriculture. If there is no rainfall, there has not enough basic elements for their survival such as fish and wild animals. Chattip Nartsupha describes the situation of life pattern of villagers in the past by affirming that rice cultivation in Thailand depends on rainfall; and if there is no rain farmers are confronted by a great problem because they cannot plant rice which is the only main food for villagers. Rather, the Isarn villagers usually seek food from natural forest (Nartsupha, 1984: 21-24). One of the Isarn proverb that reflects the significance of rice says: “If there is a trouble due to homeless we can bear, but if there
is no rice and food in our stomach no one can bear." It is true that one condition for having enough rainfall is to have thick forests. The command of Phii Poota is to reserve thick forests providing the villagers with raw materials. Villagers can seek for some kinds of wild vegetables and wild animals after asking permission from the owner: Phii Poota. For the forest where the shrine of Phii Poota locates are always nutritious.

But when the belief in Phii Poota has been attacked by new value of materialism, nature has been destroyed. New concept of civilization incites villagers to cut trees for money. Villagers are no more afraid of the authority of Phii Poota and his punishment. Moreover, some swamps or natural ponds which ancestors' of villagers donated to Phii Poota have been also occupied by someone who does not respect such Phii. Consequently, most of natural resources of villages have been destroyed. Villagers of Ban Soknamkhaw have lamented on their wrong decision to abolish the institution of Phii Poota out of their village that they are confronted to various troubles when the Don Phii Poota has been destroyed because they do not have any area capable of providing them natural food freely. Nowadays they have to spend money for buying food and even though water for drinking. In the past when the forests of Phii Poota were still thick there were a great amount of wild vegetables and animals for their meals (Kaewthep, 1987: 123).

The beloved king of Thailand, King Bhumipol, always emphasizes in his philosophy of development that if there is no human a tree can grow naturally, but if there is no tree man cannot live. This reflection indicates that trees are very important for human beings.

Besides, the forest always remind villagers, in symbolical viewpoint, to conscientize them that there is one authoritative person who whatches over their behavior whether they follow his commands or not. This is the external means that motivates internal drive of ethics to form villagers' mind to avoid unethical exercises. Symbolic means is a necessary factor to pursue those who have not enough capacity to get abstract idea about ethical codes.

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1 The proverb says dialectically that “พุธอภิมิพินแห่ง สามารถมีได้ พอลื้อ พุธอภิมิพินแห่งที่สวยงาม ยังเป็นอยู่ในปัจจุบัน.”
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Hence, it can be said that the authority of Phii Poota can protect nature and when there is no Phii Poota nature has been destroyed easily. Bad effects belong to villagers themselves.

However, it can be said that the worthiness of the belief in Phii Poota does not focus on the existence of the Phii absolutely but it involves and concerns more the effects from such belief which observers can evaluate. Phii Poota is one of the means that motivates villagers to form themselves to be ethical for their own sake. Such Phii as an invisible authority, an ancestor, a guardian and a ruler implicitly enforces villagers to behave ethically and smoothly. Ethical principles will be only proposals without activities for human beings if there is no authority to watch over the observance of such principles. Then reward or punishment will be decided accordingly. The invisibility of the Phii motivates villagers to alert themselves on ethical frames for they are conscious of his transcendence in space and time: and according to his nonsubstantiality he can omnipotentially view their activities everywhere. Senior ancestorship influences them to acknowledge the patterns of ethical codes without any question according to the reliability that their relatives will not wish them get bad luck. Besides there are many evidences confirming implicitly that those who follow those disciplines always get benevolent results. Consequently it is good to follow the disciplines for their own sake and the sake of others. For they receive what they expect satisfactorily. Therefore it is sufficient to conclude that this is the most significant value of the Phii Poota for the Isarn villagers.


According to the humane ideological origin of Phii Poota mentioned above as an invisible and powerful entity and an authoritative ancestor, Phii Poota also has its particular status and function in a village in which villagers welcome it to be their protector. It implies that Phii Poota is their refuge. It is worth to say that Phii Poota is a core element of such belief. However there may be a confusion about the status of Phii Poota whether it is the content of belief in religious or cultural domain.
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The qualities as being Phii (the genus) of dead ancestors which consists of (a) invisibility and (b) supernatural powerfulness modify the concept of Phii Poota as if it is a god. Besides the activities which villagers perform toward such Phii seem to be activities in a religious ritual. Moreover, the influence of such belief indirectly initiates uncertainty of either satisfied or unsatisfied effects from villagers’ contact due to normal etiquette. It also influences villagers to be afraid of and obey its commands for gaining reciprocal good effects as well as persuade villagers to be submitted to it.

Ancestor persuades villagers to accept behavioral codes which mostly concern the ethical perception of either religious or nonreligious requirements that are orally transmitted to later generation. It is very easy to accept those requirements because of the authority of senior perspective which are usually based on good wishes for their juniors. There is no doubt about the existence of the ancestor who is the Phii Poota of each village because villagers can investigate from the history of that village.

Therefore it is very common to motivate the Isarn villagers to be conscious and to behave in conformity with ethics. In order to persuade them to have ethical perceptions some empirical representatives of authority of Phii Poota who has been enhanced for being merciful and strict commander are required for most of them are poorly educated. Consequently, the shrine is built as Sarn Poota in a particular area of the forest has been preserved and dedicated to that Phii named Don (or Dong) Phii Poota. They are also the means or symbol which popular wisdom invented for compelling the villagers to follow such a discipline themselves. When villagers see those symbols they can remind themselves the appropriate codes for their behavior at the present moment either to suggest or to prohibit without other means. It is the process of practicing self-realization. This is the great strategy to form human beings to be ethical authentically because if any individual has no such duty there may be quarreling or conflict according to misbehavior of such person to which other persons may compete.

The status of leadership of Phii Poota as the outstanding authoritative individual in the past initiates the legislative function of that one, in villagers’ viewpoints, as a ruler who issues ethical rules and interdictions for members of the
village through its belongings: the shrine and the forest or Don Phii Poota. The rules and interdictions have been issued for the good of recent villagers either directly or implicitly.

At this moment the researcher dares to indicate that Phii Poota exists in the Isarn villages because it is the object of villagers’ knowledge and perspective based on historical elements that used to live in the vicinity of those villages. Moreover, as an ancestor of villagers it has to be their great refuge for every serious trouble as well as ethical code protector or ethical disciplinarian who is just and kind. Finally it is suitable to recognize Phii Poota as a means to persuade and motivate villagers to keep their life in an ethical pattern which is the primary source to build a heavenly society on earth.

In a cultural viewpoint, Phii Poota is not an element in religious realm even though there are some rituals set to contact that Phii. Stanley J. Tambiah indicates this distinction clearly when he writes

In relation to Buddhism, the villagers view Tapooban [Phii Poota] and Chao Phau cults as belonging in a separate and even opposed domain of religious action.... Thus it is clearly recognized that Buddhist monks do not take part in the Phii cult, for they belong to a separate party (Tambiah, 1970: 264).

Those rituals are performed by initiation of villagers based on psychological creative process that can initiate the structural form of communication between living human being and invisible entity that is their beloved respectable people whom they will never forget because of good deeds and should have more power to eliminate all damage which may occur during the year to come as in the historical period when the leader used to live. Therefore the activities of villagers perform toward their Phii Poota are to contact the person who is Phii Poota. They are communicative activities between two persons.

When villagers pay a “Wai” or a “Grab” to the shrine of Phii Poota they do not pay a worship to the shrine or the Phii Poota but that is a respective greeting to such
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Phii as a younger one greets an elder one. The Thai-Lao tradition in paying respective
greeting is only a “Wai” (to bow) for common people or a “Grab” (to prostrate) to a
significant one. Those actions are not the adoration or sacrifice toward any god. They
signify that villagers recognize and respect their ancestors. The object of those activity
is Phii Poota. And each Phii Poota is the spirit of the significant heroic person of the
village. It means that this recognition is firmly approved by historical evidences of each
village. The form of performance is observed as ritual because it is so easy that villagers
who are poorly educated can express what they think simply. It is evident that every
performance for communicating with Phii Poota is similar to what villagers usually do
in their daily life while they communicate with other people.

According to the invisibility of Phii Poota the perception of sacred supernatural
entity is configured and links to the status of leadership their Phii Poota used to be.
There may be an imagination of sacredness of Phii Poota in secular level but it is not
elevated to religious level. The sacredness is only the superpowerfulness of the Phii
Poota because of its Phii’s status. This status, in villagers’ perspective, can produce
some phenomena appear extraordinary. As results, the, villagers can take this Phii as
their refuge for their better secular life. Hence, when villagers confront any serious
problem which they think they themselves cannot solve, the Phii Poota of each village
can be their first refuge. They are reliably convinced that their Phii Poota can help them
as he used to help their ancestors in the past. This type of activity which villagers
perform looks like a child who always call for help from its parents when it is afraid of
something. It signifies that villagers keep on the concept of internal relative unity
between ancestors and themselves.

The definition of “belief” in the English context, on the one hand, describes
that it is a confidence in the truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible
to rigorous proof (Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary (1994:135). And on
the other hand in Thai context, “ความเชื่อ” (Khwam Chuer)” which has the same meaning
as belief, has its own definition as abstract noun that it is agreement, conviction,
reliableness or respect (The Royal Institute of Thailand, 1982: 276). This two lexical
definitions can sustain the notion of the belief in Phii Poota. Since the notion of Phii
Poota is a recognition of the great ancestor of each village. That primary source from historical evidences of such person can be discovered even though sometimes it has been elucidated by mythical concepts. Villagers are convinced that the person, whom they respect as Phii Poota, was a person in the history of the village. But it cannot be the final element of any religious belief as the supreme element of faith because each Phii Poota has not been sanctified or canonized to be fragmented of religious faith. It is only the object of human memory that concerns to a person in their history; and the spirit or soul of such person still stay with them. It is only the content of sociological perspective that bases on historical evidences under the influence of a particular culture. Meanwhile it is the means which villagers INITIATIVELY form to compensate their uncertainty in life. It concerns only the sociological atmosphere. It does not concern delusion but a historical fact.

When a villager contacts his Phii Poota he behaves as doing contact with his relative who can help him to achieve his expected approach. It is sure that there is bargaining between the villager and the Phii. It is only expectation because after setting any request, each villager starts doing what he intends to do. He sometimes gets success but sometimes fails; however, his respect toward Phii Poota still be constant without any complain. But if there is a success, there will be an expiation according to the previous bargaining. It can be said that the activity of the contact between villagers and Phii Poota in each situation is good for villagers because it can motivate and pursue villagers to earn their life courageously.

From such a point of view, the activities involved in the realm of the belief in Phii Poota is contextually not a religious belief which requires devotion of one's life to the object of belief absolutely. It is only an activity of ancestral recognition that villagers prefer to behave for expressing their gratitude toward the grateful one. This recognition is meaningful because it persuades villagers to have grateful perspective toward their ancestors that can motivate villagers to enhance peaceful atmosphere of society in their village in cooperation with religious perspectives.
Hence the belief in *Phii Poota* is only an acknowledgment of the great ancestor who had great virtues that villagers have recognized. According to ancestorship he has been enhanced as one refuge in each village. This acknowledgment is not malevolent because it does not lead villagers to be unethical but ethical. It does not seduce villagers to commit sin. The great evidences which support his goodness are his disciplines that cover holistic process of villagers' life pattern. If there are some punishments, those punishments are not of *Phii Poota*'s bad attributes toward villagers but they are *Phii Poota*’s good intentions to warn villagers to realize the quality of such conducts as parents punish their kids.

From such an idea, someone may think that *Phii Poota* is a devil, evil or Satan or bad *Phii* because of misunderstanding of the word used as class name “*Phii*” which usually has negative point of view. It has opposite meaning of a religious spirit “*Thewada*” or an angel. Because devil is normally qualified as enemy of God or goodness. Therefore *Phii Poota* which has the same class name of enemy of God or goodness must be evil. Moreover, anything that is malevolent toward man not only metaphysically and physically but also morally are considered as devil, evil or even though Satan (Mohapatra, 1990:58-89).

*Phii Poota*, according to the Isarn oral tradition, sometimes gives pain and causes physical sickness to human beings. But those attributes do not urge and guide human being to do bad activities or to commit sin. On the contrary, it always obliges villagers to be ethical. It implies that *Phii Poota* who has this quality of goodness must not be the member of evil or devil which is badness either as a means or as an end.

Finally a general understanding of belief for villagers who are still in the dichotomy of convictions which one domain based on scientific knowledge and another one based on tradition or culture of each community Seri Phongphit (Phongphit, 1990: 314) proposes that both of them are useful for villagers. However the influential domain is traditional belief. It is the primary source of energy of life which is the origin of knowledge that links to life and maintain their survival in the rule of universe which involves all surrounding to be unique. It gives them the sense to realize meta-linguistic
object which enhance their qualities of life even though they are not intelligent in the paradigm of civilized society. A pattern of knowledge that villagers have is not necessary to be scientifically true. If it seems to be true from their feeling, it can be acknowledged as true without any camouflage. They are as simply sincere as they feel. Seri Phongphit agrees with this concept when he analyzes the popular belief. He describes it in this way:

The knowledge of ancient people has two domains. The first one is from empirical experiences and reflections which need not to have belief.... The second one is from belief. The belief occurs because of feeling which is different from a normal process. They believe because there is some extraordinary occurrence. And such extraordinary occurrence used to be experienced in normal process in the past at least through oral traditional process (Phongphit, 1994: 100-101).

Hence it is worth to acknowledge the concept of Phii Poota as a worth element in the Isarn culture. It is a simple expression of local villagers who earn lives through natural surrounding guided by a pure natural knowledge. It does not support only ethical codes, preservance of environment but the significant contribution which it proposes to the Isarn society is that the spirit of gratitude which is appreciated by all people over the world. It also enhances spirit of charity and solidarity in the practical level of the Isarn villagers so that such attributes are of significant identities of the authenticity of the Isarn villagers. It is the serene perception of the Isarn villagers which other people can apply to enhance one's quality of life successfully.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE VALUE OF THE BELIEF IN PHIPOOTA FOR THE ISARN CATHOLICS

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness:
they shall have their fulfill.
Blessed are the merciful:
they shall have mercy shown them.
Blessed are the pure in heart:
They shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemaker:
you shall be recognized as children of God.

Mt 5: 6-9.

1. Historical Background of Catholic Church and Other Cultures

The Isarn Catholics look out for their final goal of life as other Catholics in the world when they decide to live in the Catholic paradigm. That is to be people of God in His kingdom in heaven eternally when they leave this secular world from where they receive, through Sacraments, the salvific grace (LG 9). They have such perspective because they have been traditionally obliged themselves to the requirements of God according to the plan of salvation through the Catholic Church by Baptism (c. 204). Rather they also have been gradually catechized what the Magisterium of the Catholic Church teaches for achieving the final goal in their own ghetto through sacramental participation (c. 214), The Isarn Catholics normally start learning catechism when they are about five years old. This program starts in the morning every working day until they finish their primary level of governmental education program. However, the Catholic Church traditionally proposes to her faithful to accomplish the final goal of life, they have not only to follow the teaching of the Gospel through the guidance of the Holy Spirit; but they also have to apply
themselves to the obligation of the Catholic Church inaugurated by Jesus Christ\(^1\) (cf. LG 5; c. 747).

The official obligation for all Catholic faithful to accomplish the final goal is that they have to behave according to their own perception of understanding the teaching of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 19: 16-22; Mk 10: 17-22; Lk 18: 18-23) and through the authority of the Catholic Church. For each one has one’s own authenticity and also needs some help from others. It implies that each one, on the one hand, has to use his/her own potentiality and capacity to reach that goal assisted by the teaching of Jesus Christ in the Gospel and God’s grace. That is the subjective activity. On the other hand, each activity has to be conformed the regular requirements issued from the Catholic Church or else the one who performs the activity cannot be a living member of Catholic community. Moreover, the performer of the activity cannot be with God in heaven even though he has good qualities. That one has to go to hell when he dies. St. Francis Xavier expressed his conviction on the after-death destiny of his beloved servant who had not professed the same religion as his that “We could not reward him for his goodness of heart, for he died without knowing God. We could never help him or pray for him even after his death, for he is in hell” (cited in Atitya, 1989: 121). The traditional perspective still influences religious practices of local churches in the Isarn region. In recent decades, though the spirit of the Second Vatican Council has been well-known, there still be practices as such. Moreover, those who were baptized but did not participate in the sacramental rituals of the Church cannot have a funeral Mass. Since each individual has to perceive the ideal of final goal and applies oneself to the process which the Catholic Church sets for her members to go along with; and he or she has to behave as a good Catholic. Otherwise that one cannot be an active member of the Church; and that one cannot receive any treasure of the Church. That is the discrimination of those who do not accept God from the official community of

\(^1\)Those who decide to be members of the Church have to follow the instructions and obligations of this Church (cc. 212, 214, 751, 865).
the Church. That is a subjective-objective integration of the teaching to the Gospel and the Catholic Church for enhancing quality of life for Catholics.

To complete the requirements for reaching the final goal, a subjective individual has to know and understand what the primary source requires clearly before performing every activity for reaching the final goal. Considering logically, if there is no conformity of the pattern set for such activity the final goal cannot be reached. It means that if anyone wants to reach the final goal, he has to understand the pattern of conformity to such a pattern. Because a correct understanding of each pattern will guide anyone to reach the goal easily. There will not be any trouble for believers to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ in the Gospel if there are following conditions. First, the one who has to understand the meaning of the Gospel lives in the same context of the Gospel. Second, there must be direct encounter between the one who has to understand the context and the context of the Gospel. In this case there will be a direct contextual explanation that sets a mediator who may produce misunderstanding about the contextual meaning as an assistant or a consultant. It should be possible for a subject’s perspective because the teaching of Jesus Christ has been observed as theistic and universal pattern that can be applied to each particular context of life. It can be interpreted by each individual for one’s own sake to enhance one’s quality of life. Rather it is also obviously possible if human beings have the same pattern of understanding because they can perceive the same materials of economy of salvation. However, a mediator is only an assistant who guides each individual to interpret the context suitably. For, accomplishing the fulfillment of religious life is the process that each individual develops oneself to reach the goal of life gradually through the suggestions of each religion. Rather, each individual has a legal right to be free in his living pattern.

But, factually, many believers who attempt to fulfill the obligations of the Catholic Church confront confusions on contextual understanding of the Gospel in practical situations. For, the agent of the obligations: the Catholic Church, on the one hand, which is identified as the only official inaugurated institution from Jesus Christ, has set universal obligations that all believers in the world who have been formed by
various cultures have to follow for achieving the final goal. But, on the other hand, the Catholic Church has been organized hierarchically by those who have been formed from the ecclesiastical tradition in the atmosphere of Western philosophy either in direct process from the academic institution in Rome or in indirect process through institutions affiliated to Rome in local churches all over the world (cf. OT 4, 5, 8, 9). It follows that the influences of Catholic Romanization will shape the mind of those who work for the Roman Catholic Church according to general methodology of religious formation; and those who are under her responsibility will absorb the spirit of such perspective automatically through her supervisions. Consequently, all believers implicitly have to conform themselves in the culture of Catholic Church. It implies that the Church is not a kind of merciful assistant but rather is a kind of a dictatorial manipulator in the interpretation of the context of salvation under the influential concept of St. Cyprian “Extra ecclesia nulla salus” which means “there is no salvation outside the Church” ; and the concept of “the True God” which derives from the perspective of Church’s superiority (Phongphit, 1982: 6.).

It is not wrong for the Church to protect her rights in managing her institution as such because she has been inaugurated officially to build the mystical Body of Christ in the form of an institution which must be in solidarity and uniformity. It is also valid for the Church to oblige her faithful to follow her requirements in the name of God because both the Church and the faithful have free will to make one’s own

1 The Catholic Church declares obviously that her ministers have to unite in the unity and solidarity of the Roman Catholic Church both activities and spirituality. See more details in “Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishop in the Church” (Christus Dominus) and “Decree on the Training of Priests” (Optatam Totius). Austin Flannery. ed. *Vatican Council II*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1984), pp. 564-590; 707-724.

2 Hans Kung has described that the Church used to hold this perspective literally. He elucidates that “the axiom was therefore taken literally and it was assumed that not only the pagans outside the Church, but also Jews, heretics and schismatics would finish up in hell.” See more details in Hans Kung. *The Church*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1976), pp. 403-405.
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decision to do for their own sake which focus on the same aim by using the same pattern. That is to be with God through the Church. But there are complicate conditions according to the concerned groups of various cultural believers. It is true that each group has its own cultural context which may differ from the Church culture according to geographical environments. It is not just that the Magisterium of the Church obliges a particular group of her faithful to follow the declaration of the Church without applying to such particular cultural context for proper understanding about the requirements for salvation. Since to improve each individual as a genuine human being until achieving the final goal of life, each individual has to develop oneself from within and through one's context. It means that he or she has to know the detail of improvement for achieving the final goal of religious life as clearly as possible in one's own context; and after that he or she applies such understanding to his or her atmosphere of self development. In practical level, it is not fair for the faithful of the Church who are not familiar with Western culture to follow the obligations without clear understanding of each obligation for reaching the final goal of eternal life especially in theological teaching and practices objectively as in the past.

It is true that Catholic believers are from various paths of life that may have different cultural backgrounds. It implies that they may have different frames of thought to understand the teaching of the Church in the economy of salvation which is the way to reach the final goal of life. For the contents of salvific documents have been historically revealed firstly to mankind in linguistic form under the Greco-Western-philosophical culture. It may differ from other cultures in other remote distances of the world in either practical and theoretical or literal and mental viewpoints especially in terminology and apprehensions of content of the teaching. There may be misunderstanding about the objective salvific teaching of the Church in different contexts of believers because there may be wrong interpretations according to wrong perceptions of each individual through linguistically translated process. It means that it is not fair for the contents of salvation to be distorted through subjective interpretation. It is not fair as well for each individual to perceive details of salvation
which cannot be understood clearly. For man is not a mechanism which can be controlled as a robot but he is an organism that can grow by itself. Rather if he has been nurtured by fertilized elements that match up to one's own nature through proper understanding, he can develop himself faster than through normal process of growing to be mature in the teaching of Christ through the Church. Therefore, there must be a suitable process of cultural contextualization of the teaching of the Church in each particular culture. In addition, the Church should realize that her great mission is to bring mankind to the kingdom of God in doing evangelization: to make others know God. That is to bring the Good News of God or the contents of the economy of salvation to mankind. To achieve that aim, on the one hand, the agent has to make mankind know God in its own language. So the Church has to contextualize the contents of the Good News into each particular context. The only possible method is to figure the Western Catholic perceptions of salvation in each local culture through valuable cultural elements which such culture has. It means that there should be a concrete study of cultural value of each cultural factor for further application. On the other hand, it is not a proper way to devaluate other cultural elements immediately without any consideration. For it is the devaluation of that cultural people who are God's property as well. That means the Church makes a self-contradiction to her mission.

To achieve the process of cultural contextualization, there would be a universal objectivity of the contents of the economy of salvation in various cultural contexts if there is a proper process of interpretation for believers. That is to denote the matter of salvific context from the primary source to other particular cultural perceptions properly by contextually inculturation of Catholic perceptions to each particular cultural context. It can be identified as a contextual inculturation (Luzbetak, 1988: 238-243). Each individual should understand each foreign perception (or other paradigm) which have been imported from outside through comparison to what is similar to their own perception (one's paradigm with interpretive similarization). It is impossible for a foreigner of a particular culture to perceive and understand any other cultural perception directly without one's own
metaphorical description for distinctive information of the same matter between two different cultural contexts. It means, in doing evangelization, that there must be a process of unfolding, properly, the universal-objective truth of God for eternal life for each cultural context through the means which belongs to them. And that means has the same semantic connotation of what the Catholic Church wants to clarify especially through symbolic language of catechism and liturgy. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy realizes this problem. Hence it is suggested that:

With the passage of time, however, there have crept into the rites of the sacraments and sacramentals certain features which have rendered their nature and purpose far from clear to the people today. Hence, some changes are necessary to adapt them to present-day needs (SC 62).

Consequently, it is possible for each individual who wants to follow the salvific route which God gives to human being through the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ which has been in action through history of mankind supervised by the Roman Catholic Church to reach the final goal if there is correct understanding of the contents of such teaching. Rather each individual can absorb and apply complete content of salvation to enhance one's quality of life to reach the final goal from the essence of each individual through proper understanding of the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Factually, that is the proper methodology which has been emphasized by Jesus Christ when he proclaimed the Gospel in Israel through his historical life. It concerns the human cultural contextuality that is based on human authenticity. That is Jesus Christ inculturated himself to the particular culture of Israel to reveal the will of God to them. He manifested his activities to be example for others through the historical person named Jesus of Nazareth to evangelize the Gospel. For example, he told the lawyer who asked him how to inherit the eternal life parable of the good Samaritan which the lawyer understood clearly “Go, and do the same yourself” (Lk 10: 37). It can be applied that anyone who wants to achieve the final goal of life has
to search for such a thing by himself; and it must be the conduct incumbent upon a
member of God’s chosen people (NJBC, 1990: 702). Rather anyone has to understand
clearly how to behave for accomplishing that goal as the lawyer understood what
Jesus of Nazareth had described. That is there must be correct understanding of the
details to assist anyone to reach the final goal of life. Therefore, to similarize the
materials of economy of salvation for each particular culture there must be an
objective transfiguration of what the Church has perceived to each particular context
of other cultures. To complete that process properly those who do the perceptive
transfiguration have to understand the concepts of each culture objectively, otherwise
there will be misunderstanding according to subjective bias or prejudice of interpreters
because of wrong perceptive transfiguration. Consequently there still be
misunderstanding about that thing forever. Since, to have any proper understanding of
each object between two different cultures there must be similarization of the same
object through a concrete interpretation.

In the historical practices of the Church, there are various ecclesiastical
conditions that have obstructed believers in local Catholic communities to form
proper understanding of the contextual meaning of the Gospel according to wrong
interpretations in each particular cultural context, especially in the Oriental world,
through strict supervisions of the Magisterium of the Church due to the Catholic faith
apologetic protection. For example, the Magisterium of Rome denied the proposal of
Bishop Lambert de la Motte about the exemption of the Friday Fasting according to
cultural celebration of the Thai New Year’s day; and prohibited Bishop Louis Laneau
to adapt Laotian culture in Catholic practices in the region.¹ It implies that other
cultures and other opinions are not suitable for salvation because “[It] does not
connect to the Church and does not concern to Catholic faith” (cited in Phongphit,
1984: 19). It implicitly signified that the Magisterium of the Church devaluated local
cultures. Besides, it also implied that cultural elements that differed from Catholic

¹See more detail in Seri Phongphit. Catholic and Thai Society (in Thai).
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Church would be denied automatically in official practice, even though, in local practical situations, the missionaries realized positive contextual value of such elements. It happens as such because the Magisterium of the Church denoted cultural elements in local churches from her own viewpoint which may not be the same as the authentic meaning of its cultural context. Moreover, they have never experienced such cultural elements directly. They justified from only their own perspective supported by some fragments of the Gospel which specifies the way to God only through Jesus Christ (Jn 6: 25-56). That is to be a member of the Catholic Church only. Even though there were some positive perspectives of the Church toward other cultural elements but they had not been published. So there was still no positive opinion towards other cultures in practice. For example, a document named “The Instruction of 1659”¹ or “Monita” (Phongphit, 1984: 14) proposed positive opinions towards local cultures. It said:

Do not try or do not in any way persuade the peoples to change their rites, customs and practices provided they are not evidently contrary to religion and morality. What is more absurd than to import France, Spain, Italy or any other part of Europe into China. Do not import to these countries but the Faith which does not reject or injure the rites, customs, of any people provided that they are not corrupt but wishes, rather, to preserve them in their integrity. Since it belongs to human nature itself, should prefer their own things and especially their own nations to others’. There is no more powerful source of hatred and

¹It was the special instruction of the Church during the period of Pope Innocent XI given to the Vicars Apostolic of M.E.P. missionaries on doing mission works in missionary land. But it were forbidden to publish at that time. See its Latin source in Jareon Atitya. The Marriage of Catholic and Buddhist: Its Celebration and Dissolution in the Pastoral Circumstances of Thailand. (Doctoral dissertation, Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis Accademia Alfonsiana, Rome, 1989), pp. 119-120; The details of this instruction concerns other fields of mission work also. See more details in Seri Phongphit. Catholic and Thai Society (in Thai). (Bangkok: Komol Keemthong Foundation, 1982), pp. 15-18.
alienation than to change the customs of the fatherland, especially those which men have preserved from the memory of their ancestor, and especially if in their place you substitute and import the customs of your own nation. Therefore, never change the practices of those people with those of Europe; in fact accommodate yourself to the former with great diligence. Admire and praise those things which merit praise; those things which do not merit praise, do not flatter them but prudently do not judge them or certainly do not rashly and excessively condemn them. Those things which are evil eschew with a gesture of silence, so that in time they will become disposed to accept the truth (Atitya, 1989: 119).

Moreover, condemnations of various popes in the past witness this observation. Jaroen Atitya also cites in his dissertation that

Centuries ago Pius V, Innocent XI, and Clement XI condemned the following frightening theological opinions: All works of non-believers are sin and the virtues of the philosophers are vices; pagans, Jews, heretics and others are doomed to perdition because they are under the dominion of vice. They are outside the Church, and God’s grace does not work outside the Church (Atitya, 1989: 118).

It implies that there were some positive viewpoints from the Catholic Church toward other cultures to form contextual understanding for enhancing spirituality of the faithful; but there were no effective activities because of dogmatic influences and political conditions. In orthodox perspective the Catholic Church always clarifies that she serves all mankind with true love and “...acknowledges, preserves and encourages the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also the social life and culture (NA 2). But in practice, there are still rejections of manners of life and conducts, of the precepts and doctrines of cultural groups in local churches. The researcher intends to limit the scope of discussion about the case only in the Isarn Catholic situation. The focus of discussion will be the traditional belief of Phii Poota.
2. The Isarn Catholics and *Phii Poota*

In the history of the Isarn Catholics, their leaders both priests and laymen have not accepted cultural heritage that had formed the Isarn people to be an authentic cultural group which other foreign cultures cannot delete out; the inner essence of the Isarn villagers, is really the cultural heritage of the belief in *Phii*. The missionaries working in that area attempted to prohibit the Isarn Catholic faithful to recognize the belief in *Phii* of the Isarn natives because they were afraid that their believers may lose their Catholic faith. They were also afraid of the fact that their faithful would believe in *Phii* which was, in the Isarn Catholic perspective, superstitious. It may be the servant of evil or Satan. Moreover, the Gospel classified any category of *Phii* in the group of God's enemy: Satan or Beelzebub (Mt 12: 22-32; Lk 11:14-23). It follows that any perception which concerns to "*Phii*" is categorized to what Catholics have to avoid.

In the context of Isarn region, the Isarn natives believe in *Phii* because they have been familiar with this thinking since their birth. They also sometimes receive benevolent effects from such belief as well. They do not have any other choice to choose for enhancing their own life in their own perspective. They really need actual help. Though they have Buddhism as their religion but it cannot give answer to some life problems concretely. Moreover, Buddhism does not emphasize on perception of *Phii* directly but it describes and discusses about the rebirth of soul which implies that it does not prohibit villagers to contact their *Phii*. It follows that the Isarn villagers can contact their *Phii* freely.

When, practically, villagers are confronted by some troubles they usually contact and ask some help and protection from their *Phii* for they feel that *Phii* has been close to them as their relatives especially their *Phii Poota*. It seems to be easier to contact *Phii* than Buddha. Even though some groups reject benevolent activities of the belief in such *Phii*. For they got some burdens from the belief in the *Phii* according to the *Phii’s* requirements through Chao Cham, the intercessioneer who may set the requirements himself i.e. the case of *Phii Poota* of Ban Nongdok (Interview,
Kian Narintrak, 1986). But they could not abolish the belief in Phii out of their mind totally (Interview, Niti Narintrak, 1996) for they recognize that Phii is the soul of a dead person still living among them.

From a general observation of the researcher, he considers that each primitive local Catholic community in the Isarn region extremely settled separately from any “gentile” group who believed in Phii or other religious people. For, in the case of belief in Phii Poota, those converted people did not want to be members of the community that believed in Phii Poota any more since they had to propitiate that Phii very often with their properties. Moreover, they thought that Phii disturbed them so much (Bayet, 1994: 78). Besides some of the converts used to be the one whom Phii Pob possessed according to the opinion of other native villagers (Bayet, 1984: 89). Hence they did not want to be with Phii any more. Bishop Claudius Bayet criticized such phenomena that those are not only for protecting their Catholic belief from gentiles, but they wanted to leave from the society that believes in Phii. He writes:

Unforgettably, whole village or big clannish families would like to convert to learn catechism for leaving from the disturbance of malevolent Phii. Within last century, it can be said that most of people in the Isarn region and Laos believe in Phii and are under authoritative influences of Phii. If villagers found any trouble they have to bring a chicken or a pig or even a buffalo to offer to Phii for propitiating him and request such Phii to stop doing malevolence to them. Any activity that may disappoint Phii will be prohibited. Villagers think that this is a great burden for them. ... But they

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1 This word was usually used to call those who were not Catholics especially those who believed in various spirit. The researcher used to hear this word very often from conservative Catholics in the Isarn region. Its traditional meaning is a person who is not a Jew (Ac 9:17). But when the Church used this word in the past, it usually expressed negative viewpoint toward those who did not believe in Catholic God. It denoted a pagan who did not know God as well as a companion of devil.
experienced that those who were Catholics never bring any holocaust to any Phii. Moreover, they were never afraid of Phii. Hence, there were many villagers and various clannish families requesting to learn catechism to become Catholics. (Bayet, 1984: 73-74).

Besides, many Catholic communities have settled in the location to where other people indicate a resident compound of malevolent Phii. This perspective includes Phii Poota as well. Other people could not live in such an area because of dangerous diseases [if it is considered in the medical viewpoint]. But for villagers in the Isarn at that time, they could not have this scientific understanding. Any effect either benevolent or malevolent that affected them through any unknown cause must be the effect from Phii. Even though there was no empirical evidence to approve the existence of Phii. But the Isarn Catholics are people of God who are not afraid of Phii. It is Phii that has to be afraid of them because they belong to God. And God is superior to Phii. Hence they have lived in the location as such peacefully. Consequently, Phii, in the Isarn Catholic perspective always has negative value according to malevolent activities toward the Isarn villagers such a possession of some Phii in villagers. Besides the notion of Phii has been proved by the Isarn Catholics that there is no malevolent effect from Phii toward them from their empirical proof. When they confront Phii by settling their ghetto in the area where others believed that Phii dwells they had not been annoyed by any Phii. Hence, it is sufficient to conclude that there is no Phii; and if anyone believes as such they are superstitious because it is meaningless.

References which the Isarn Catholics have used to identify that belief in Phii as superstitious and cannot be benevolent elements for Catholic faith are as follow:

1). Catholic Church, practically, always thinks that other cultures were not suitable for salvation. She always emphasizes that Roman Catholic religion is the only true religion in this world. This concept has influenced the Isarn Catholics as well. The first group of missionaries and their descendants always informed the Catholic faithful that “There is only one true religion in this world that can lead
mankind to eternal life. That is the Catholic Religion” (Sriworakul, 1965). Other cultures did not describe about the only true God. Besides, they formed people to behave differently from Catholics.

Rather, the activities towards Phii were manifested in the form of worshipping some profane materials which, in the Catholic opinion, was prohibited for it opposed to the first commandment of God (FD, 1994: 459 [2110]). That activity must be a mortal sin (Sriworakul, 1965: 44).\(^1\) In the case of belief in Phii Poota the Isarn villagers pay a “Wai” or a “Grab” to the shrine of Phii Poota. It means that they worshipped secular materials which did not signify the Catholic God. This performance cannot be accepted by genuine Catholics because it is either superstition or idolatry ((FD. I 994: 459 21 II 12)). Rather, if they pay the worship to Phii Poota, it is the grave sin for Catholics because they recognize other things which are not the True God to be their God. It means that God is not their God any more. Therefore they cannot be any more part of the kingdom of God obviously.

The only malevolent dimension of Phii in the Isarn Catholic perspective has been also formed from various descriptions of Phii in the Gospel. There are descriptions about unclean spirit which manifested explicitly as the opposite part of

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\(^1\) Rev. Fr. Paul Srinuan Sriworakul, the pioneer local priest of Tharae Nongsaeng Archdiocese, introduced a reader by using apologetic style in his catechism text that described the belief in Phii as follows:

158. Can we worship and depend on Satan? (น่างไว้พ่อเท้าเหลี่ยมอัตระเดยาอยู่?)

Not at all! (อย่างใดอย่า)

159. What kind of a sin in committed for having participated in or consulted Phii?

(เสี้ยร์ผ้อยเป็นนับologically)

Mortal sin (เป็นบาหลัก)

Commentary: Satan is God’s enemy as well as ours. If we contact it, it will seduce us to hell. Any contact with Phii is sin (อิสระ ผ้อยเหลี่ยมเป็นคดีของตัวเราเอง แล้ว ผ้อยเหลี่ยมผู้สัมผัส เที่ยงช่องผ่านผู้ ๆ ต้องให้เป็นผู้นี้ เที่ยงผ้อยผ่าโรคซึ้งเป็นบาหลัก)}
Jesus Christ and also hurt the one it possessed (Mk 1: 21-28; Mt 8: 28-34; Lk 5: 20). There are also records about the existence of *Phi* in bad activities towards man and other animals it possesses (Mk 5: 1-20; Lk 8: 26-39).

Moreover, in the leader’s perception in the Catholic churches in Thailand in the past about *Phi* was also negative. Bishop D.J.B. Pallegoix defined the traditional Thai terminology about *Phi* and activities toward *Phi* in only negative dimension (Pallegoix, 1854: 553-554) as follows:

1. *Phi* (*Phi*), which is usually used in neutral perspective, is a devil malignant genius (L. *Diabolus, genus malevolent*).
2. *Phi* Rai (*Phi Rai*), which is used in negative perspective is demons hostile to mankind (L. *Daemones hominibus infensi*).
3. *Phi* Deesard which signifies Satan in [the Isarn] Catholic viewpoint is malignant genii, man eaters (L. *Genii malevoli, anthropophagi*). Another name is *Phi* Desard, which also signifies Satan [in the Isarn context] is malignant genii, man eaters, demons.
4. *Sen Phi* and *Sia Phi* have the same meaning. That is to sacrifice to the devil, to offer to the demon (L. *Sacrificare diabolo, offerre daemoni*).
5. *Phi* Khao means “possessed by the devil” (L. *Possessus a diabolo*).

*Phi* Poota has been categorized in the group of *Phi* lexically. Besides, *Phi* Poota of each village usually disturbs villagers when they break *Phi* Poota’s rules. Therefore it must be bad *Phi* automatically according to the categorization of terminology of its class and its activities.

Moreover, there are still negative reflections of Catholic tradition towards other cultures. The local churches’ instruction describes dubious about the relation with other cultures. Chatchawan Saengkaew recorded from various catechetical teaching texts that “In contact with other religious persons, Catholics have to avoid any activity that is dangerous to their belief or is scandalous or cause misunderstanding toward Catholicity” (Saengkaew, 1984: 94). Moreover, the Isarn Catholics and their ministers also valuate cultural elements in the Isarn region in a
negative point of view. Thai texts of Catechism used in Thailand always emphasize that a Catholic who violates the first commandment of God behaves as follows:

(a) Do not pay interest to God; (b) pay respect in the form of "Namasakara" to any object which is not God; (c) belief in the power of other entity that is not God's and (d) sacrilege. For having refuge of other elements except God such as magical material, occultism, fortune teller etc. is to dishonor and disdain God (Saengkaew, 1985: 90).

The reason for identifying the fact of paying respect (Namasakara) is that "Namasakara" means 'wai' but in Catholic Church it means supreme respect reserved to God, the Creator only. It implies that Catholics cannot pay respect to any person even though this is the cultural practice in the Thai both in the central and the Isarn regions. Senior people always teach juniors to say good bye before leaving and pay respect for greeting other one as the Isarn proverb says "Pai La Ma Wai." The cultural tradition of paying respect to another one is to perform a "Wai". But there are different forms of "Wai" and even "Grab" performance. Each form of the performance depends on the object of such activity. It cannot be general for every object.

Besides, the instruction of the Bishop's Conference of Thailand does not clarify objectively about contextual inculturation. It suggests only the general subjective criteria for making decision when a Catholic has to participate ritual of other religion which can apply to do contextual inculturation. It writes:

Before making any decision to participate in any activity either in active or passive form a Catholic has to learn about that activity and consult oneself whether such activity can be practiced or not through the following two questions: (a) Am I rejecting and violating the Catholic teaching?; and (b) Does my activity scandalize either other
Catholics or other religious people? If the answer is "No", he can participate in and practice such ritual (Sirisuth, 1995: 165).

It implies that the Magisterium of the Thai Catholic Church cannot identify objectively which activity of other religion or even though of other cultures a Thai Catholic can participate or not. It follows that the Thai Catholic are in anxious situation to live with their neighbors who have different cultural practice generally.

Those elements mentioned above convince the researcher that the Isarn Catholics reject the notion of Phii and anything related to Phii because it seems to violate the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church. Therefore Phii Poota which is the core element of the Isarn culture must be rejected automatically, since it is also classified in the group of Phii literally.

That is the great mistake and a serious misunderstanding done by the Isarn Catholics toward the worthy Isarn culture that form the Isarn people to be authentic for a long time. Besides, the Isarn Catholics have not followed the suggestion of the Second Vatican Council. If the Catholic religious atmosphere still be in this condition the Isarn Catholics have hardly task to leap across the dichotomy between their authenticity and the real Isarn Catholics. For they cannot develop themselves to be Catholics from what they have according to the rejection of cultural heritage that can be applied to enhance their Catholic religious life. And it is impossible as they cannot have concrete understanding of the Message of God in their own context. D.S. Amalorpavadas argues in his issue about inculturation in India which confronts the problem of inculturation that:

Just as the Spirit chose the body of Christ’s disciples as the sign and instrument of his active presence and transforming power so also the Gospel which is the power of God for salvation of all who believe (Rm 1:16) will be abstract and notional unless and until it is manifested in the history of the world, in the life of the Church and in the culture of society. Just as Jesus was endowed with the power of
God and manifested this power in words and deeds, in signs and wonders. (DV 4) so the power of the Gospel, the saving influence of the Word, needs manifestation, concretization and visibilization. Finally the values of the Gospel and of the Kingdom or the reality of the new era and new creation are to be translated in an embodiment and communicated to others by visible and concrete media. This structure ...... is called integration of the Church in socio-cultural-religious milieu, incarnation of the Church in a place, time and people (Amalorpavadass. 1978: 20).

That is the Gospel must be indigenous to local people in their own context. It implies that the massage of God has to vest the garment of each local context through contextual interpretation. It implies that the Gospel perceptions have to keep their own identical meaning, but the process of explanation to other context must be figured out in the symbolic language of each particular culture. It means that there must be cultural concepts that have the same quality as the Church concepts. They will be the sufficient and necessary elements to link two different contexts together for proper understanding of the universal concepts of another culture.

3. The Contextual Value of Phii Poota for the Isarn Catholics

The researcher has observed for long time that the Catholic perception toward the belief in Phii Poota emphasizes only negative viewpoint. There are a lot of positive viewpoints which Catholics have not recognized in the cultural context. This part of the thesis proposes the positive dimensions which Phii Poota has in its context. Those positive dimensions can help them to understand the content of the Good News for salvation through their own cultural elements. The Federation of Asian Bishop Conference (FABC) has realized in general perspective of doing the localization of the Church. It emphasizes that:

"The Church must be local in its songs... its thoughts and language, in its way of life. As God became one of us - to make us His own -
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His Church in Asia must be Asian” (Rosales and Arevaldo, 1992: 22).

3. 1. Phii Poota and a Catholic Soul

Phii Poota has been acknowledged by the Isarn villagers and cultural experts that it is the soul or the spirit of the great heroic, historical person who used to help and protect villagers from danger in the past. When he died, he changed his status from physical condition to non-physical condition. Though there are some mystical characteristics of such Phii through oral tradition but it is still recognized as a soul that still be with villagers. Moreover, it still has kept good intention to push contemporary villagers to be ethical persons within their own society.

This perception reflects the notion of the existence and immortality of human soul in the Catholic perspective. The content of the third part of the Apostles’ Creed declares that “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” It implicitly confirms that after death the righteous will live for ever with the risen Christ (FD, 1994: 225-226 [989, 991]). That is the existing status of the soul. The fifth Lateran Council defined the Catholic doctrine on the individuality and immortality of the human soul in that way:

The soul is not only truly, of its own nature and essentially, the form of the human body.... but also it is immortal and corresponding to the number of bodies in which it is infused, is capable of being multiplied in individuals, is actually multiplied, and must be multiplied (cited in Hardon, 1975: 104).

There is a grand Eucharist celebration in each liturgical year of the Catholic Church on November 2 to pray for all souls. The Catholic Church also dedicates the whole month of November to be the period of praying for the souls of those who passed away. It indicates that the Catholic Church recognizes the relation between the living and the dead.
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Therefore it is not proper to deny the existence of Phii Poota. For Phii Poota is the historical human soul of an Isam village. Though history of each Phii Poota is so mystical that it sometimes seems to be a pseudo reality, but it still based on historical fact of each local village. If the Isam church acknowledges the belief in Phii Poota, it will be the means of explaining the existence of human soul in Catechism. But if there is a denial of the existence of Phii Poota, it is very difficult to explain the existence and immortality of human soul. Since there must be self conflict within one’s perception of soul. For Phii Poota and human soul in phenomenal substance are the same because they are derived from the same physical primary source, the Isarn humanity, which is naturally classified in the universal group of created man in the world. Though in the transcendental source of the soul of Phii Poota cannot identify definitely. However, when all mankind who is good, in Catholic perspective, have been created both body and soul by God the creator (Gn 1: 1-2: 24), Phii Poota in the Isam historical context is the soul of a man. It must be in the group of human soul obviously.

If Phii Poota has been discussed in the ethical perspective of good or bad according to activities concerned, there are a lot of evidences supporting that Phii Poota is good. The conditions in which its rules can identify the good intention of Phii Poota concretely are rewards and punishment. Those cases were recognized by inhabitants in that village. Though there are some painful effects of possessions or punishments but villagers comply with the conditions of such rules. They accept that these Phii Poota’s rules aimed at warning and serving the public welfare through personal care, not killing or severely harming. God in the Old Testament had carried out various punishments towards His chosen people, the Israelites (cf. Dt 9: 12-14, 2 K 17: 14 ff.). He has still been recognized as a merciful God. Phii Poota should be accepted as good entity as well, though it is not equal to God for it is only created entity in the form of human being.

If there is an acknowledgment of Phii Poota as a good Phii and good soul, it is very easy for the Isarn Catholics to form suitable explanation of Catholic catechism of the Isarn faithful when it mentions the human soul. It will also motivate the Isarn
believers to keep good attitude towards the ancestor’s spirits. That is the positive viewpoint set for mutual understanding and evangelizing the Catholic perspective towards other people.

3.2. *Phii Poota* and Ancestorship

The status of *Phii Poota* in the Isarn context is identical to the soul or the spirit of an outstanding villager who had done good deeds for descendant people of each village. It is a common tradition of the Isarn culture that descendant must pay respect and be grateful to ancestors because if they can enjoy happy life they do it thanks to their ancestors.

According to the status of being the spirit of an ancestor of villagers *Phii Poota* is a necessary element in the Isarn culture to be recognized because this is a worthy traditional value compelling villagers to be grateful and to recognize the value of their ancestors as human beings as well as the ancestral heritage in cultural form which manifests their identify. Besides, it provides the perception of familial relationship. This is one of significant values which forms people to be in solidarity. For the feeling of familial membership motivates each participant to acknowledge other persons as their relatives. Consequently, there are firm inner relationship so that they can share their properties with another with sincerity. In addition, it also gradually strengthens the inner relationship towards mutual responsibility of each other according to the perspective of being from the same clan.

If the Catholic Church denies the value of *Phii Poota* due to its mystical perception which is not the same as the concept of the soul in her own context, she denies the familial institution which she herself recognizes through the fourth Commandment. Traditionally it writes: “Honor your father and your mother, then your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.” This perception is the radical tradition for the people of God since the period of the Old Testament (Ex 20: 12; Dt 5: 16). Jesus of Nazareth also recalled the force of parent’s respect (cf. Mk 7:8-13). Moreover, Paul the Apostle emphasized this perspective as
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well. He wrote “Children, be obedient to your parents in Lord—that is what uprightness demands” (Ep 6:1).

According to the fourth commandment which emphasizes on the ties of kinship between members of the extended family in the perspective of honor and gratitude towards elders and ancestors (FD, 1994: 475), the Catholic Church does not interpret the concept of honoring parents to only particular family that each one has but it also extends to other relationship in society. She describes:

In our brothers and sisters we see the children of our parents; in our cousins, the descendants of our ancestors; in our fellow citizens, the children of our country; in the baptized, the children of our mother the Church; in every human person, a son or daughter of the One who wants to be called “our Father.” In this way our relationships with our neighbors are recognized as personal in character. The neighbor is not a “unit” in the human collective; he is “someone” who by his known origins deserves particular attention and respect (FD, 1994: 477-478).

The Catholic Church recognizes the significance of this perspective not only because of God’s command but because she knows its benevolent effects. She wrote that “Respecting this commandment provides, along with spiritual fruits, temporal fruits of peace and prosperity. Conversely, failure to observe it brings great harm to communities and to individuals” (FD, 1994: 475).

Therefore it is sufficient for the Church to recognize the value of the belief in Phii Poota. For it is beneficial to all members of society in physical and psychological and mundane and religious dimensions of the Isarn people. If the Church does not accept the belief in Phii Poota she does not agree with the fourth commandment.
3. 3. The Institution of Phii Poota and the Communion of Saints

Considering of the contextual belief in Phii Poota holistically, it does not only oblige villagers to keep ethical principles but it has instituted the solidarity and the unity of both dead and living in each village in a firm unique ghetto. A set of components that composes each community of the Isarn villagers that have Phii Poota as their members consists of (a) visible entities: villagers who know each other on account of having the same ancestors and intecessioner who is the mediator between villagers and Phii Poota, (b) codes of popular ethics, and (c) invisible entity through a symbolic representative of a shrine and a forestry compound dedicated to such Phii. This kind of community is a dynamic movement in the Isarn region that pilgrims towards welfare of their own community as well as one’s particular expectation for having concrete happiness. Both Phii Poota and villagers concern the popular ethical codes as the criteria for justifying behavior. Hence Phii Poota is not the aim of life but the disciplinarian of the codes and protector of the villagers.

The harmonization of peaceful living together between human beings who are respectively afraid of the invisible and nonsubstantial entity having kindly supernatural power able to affect villagers has been manifested in concrete situation. They communicate together when they have business of life. They share all conditions of living to each other. When villagers misbehave, Phii Poota warns them in the form of a venial punishment for their self-realization not as the Lord but as an ancestor who has good wish to his descendants. Besides when villagers need help from the Phii they set their petition for that as children do toward parents without any enforcement to the Phii except a request. They do not seriously pay expectation on successful request but they are tolerant to receive failure. However they hope for help and still keep on taking their daily life works as usual. This is the great significant authenticity which implicitly witnessing its value of heaven on earth. Through charitable influences of Phii Poota people have been formed to be mature in both political and ethical, and supernatural and natural dimensions. Villagers acknowledge Phii Poota as one of sufficient conditions for their living to earn happiness. Though they have Buddhism as their religion but they do not request protection from Buddha.
instead *Phii Poota* has to take care of villagers according to patronship. This figure demonstrates the coexistence between villagers and the soul of their own ancestor.

In the Catholic perspective the concept of the Communion of Saints can be similarized to such perspective. Communion of Saints consists of both those who live in this world and those who died in Christ (cf. FD, 1994: 218-219). These two groups can contact each other and help each other to achieve the final goal of life which God has prepared for them. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) states:

But at the present time some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Other have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating "In full light, God himself triune and one, exactly as he is." All of us, however, in varying degrees and in different ways share in the same charity towards God and our neighbors, and we all sing the one hymn of glory to our God. All, indeed, who are of Christ and who have his Spirit form one Church and in Christ cleave together (Ep 4: 16). So it is that the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who sleep in the peace of Christ is in no way interrupted, but on the contrary, according to the constant faith of the Church, this union is reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods. Being More closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness, add to the nobility of the worship that the Church offers to God here on earth, and in many ways help in a broader building up of the Church (cf. 1 Cr 12: 12-17) (LG 49).

This ecclesiastical attitude affirms the coexisting between the living and the dead. Besides each group helps each other to accomplish the final goal of life. Hence it is suitable for the Church to recognize the institution of the belief in *Phii Poota* in the dimension that the living and the dead live together. The researcher does not state that the society coexisting with *Phii Poota* is the same as the Communion of Saints in the theological perspective of the Catholic Church. He proposes that such society has
raw material that can be interpreted as the Communion of Saints. Such society does not have God as its approach. It manifests only coexistence between living and dead groups. If the Catholic Church adapts this perspective to explain the theological perspective of Communion of Saints which is one of metaphorical terms of the Church and the kingdom of God to the Isarn people, they can perceive the Mystical body of Christ of the Church in both form of visible and invisible much easier than rejecting the perception of the society that has Phii Poota as its member.

3. 4. Rituals toward Phii Poota and Catholic Attitude

The practical purpose of either public or private rituals which the Isarn villagers perform towards Phii Poota is to communicate with Phii Poota but not to worship Phii Poota if the meaning of worship is identical to the reverence or the devotion to a deity: religious homage or veneration. Such a worship requires total surrender to God absolutely. The researcher is convinced that the rituals toward Phii Poota which is usually classified to the activities of worship do not have characteristics of paying reverence toward a deity. They are communicative activities in reverential attitudes toward the outstanding ancestor's spirit of the village due to the phenomena of the components of the institution of Phii Poota. According to Phii Poota's personality he is an outstanding ancestor, that is relative, who still lives with his descendants. In such a case Phii Poota is personified though he is invisible. Hence he can be contacted and communicated with. It is a valuable tradition of the Oriental people and even that of the Westerners to visit or to contact their relatives. In the case of communication with Phii Poota who is invisible and also is the ancestor of all villagers, it is necessary for villagers to set a form of ritual for convincing themselves that the invisible one lives among them. The details of inviting speech which the intercessioner expresses in an annual ceremony describe the intention of the villagers through the intercessioner to invite Phii Poota to be among them and to receive the

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1 It is practical etiquette for the genuine Isarn tradition that a junior has to invite the senior to participate in a ceremony otherwise it will be considered as "Phid Phii" which the senior can fine or "mai" the junior accordingly.
presents of their own products of which Phii Poota had helped taking care of. This is the activity of gratification which villagers exercise towards their beloved ancestor.

When villagers pay a “Wai” or a “Grab” in the rituals such activities are not worshipping the shrine or forest but they pay a respect to their ancestor which is imagined behind the material form of the shrine. This is a normal behavior for the Thai-Tai tradition. So it is not a supreme worship but it can be an activity of “Bucha” or normal respect toward a venerable person or entity. This activity can be divided in various levels. For in this case it is a recognition of value of that person or that entity. It is not superstitious activity towards any idol or gods. For Phii Poota is a soul of a historical person of that village. This ritual performance cannot bevaluated as a bad activity. For it expresses the feeling of gratitude which is one of important virtue that forms people to recognize the value of their ancestors. When they join the rituals toward Phii Poota they want to contact and communicate with Phii Poota. Therefore, since the aim of performing the rituals is to contact, it is identical to a communicative activity. This is the means that can help establishing social solidarity.

The rituals toward Phii Poota cannot be identified as a supreme worship in the sense that worship is the activity which man acts toward the object reckoned as God or the Supreme Being for that one. For the final object of performing rituals toward Phii Poota is a spirit of human being who is significant in the history of those villagers. The spirit is not a God or a Supreme Being to whom villagers have to pay supreme worship. But if worship is categorized to various levels such as veneration, devotion and respect, the performances toward Phii Poota can be classified in a sector of worship for the villagers who join in the ritual toward Phii Poota respect Phii Poota and recognize his valuable activities in the past.

Besides, villagers spend this occasion to inform Phii Poota what is going on in their society. It is a normal manner for children or juniors to report to their authoritative senior about their present life. In addition villagers consult Phii Poota to solve their troubles either public or private while the Phii suggests them by a proper process for each particular case through the intercessioner. Moreover villagers
together apologize such Phii according to their misbehaviors during the past year that may have been dissatisfied. They also promise their Phii Poota to improve themselves to be good descendants. This commitment is the great spirit of the villagers which has been expressed naturally and it signifies to self-realization and self-reconciliation that villagers have. This is the great significance for achieving maturity.

One significant point of the annual ritual is to predict the weather situation of the year to come. This is not the serious case for the villagers because even the prediction is good or bad they also keep on working as usual. There may be special preparation for the possible occurrences according to the perdition; but villagers do not believe absolutely the detail of prediction. If it is considered in a positive viewpoint, the prediction motivates villagers to be alert together to face the coming occurrences either benevolent or malevolent. It can be inferred that this is a simple exercise of communication between villagers and their ancestor which is not strange or scandalous for them. But they oblige themselves to perform this activity to encourage themselves for earning their life. Hence the rituals toward Phii Poota are only the performances of communication, and paying respect to Phii Poota; but they are not a supreme worship as in the Catholic perspective.

If the Catholic Church recognizes the value of sign and symbol in creature forms that can become means of expressing the action of God who sanctifies men, and the action of men who offer worship to God (FD, 1994: 263), she should have positive attitude towards the rituals which the Isarn villagers exercise toward Phii Poota for it is beneficial to the Isarn villagers. If the Catholic Church denies the value of the local tradition, she denies one of the life-patterns of local people in such society as well. That is the discrimination of some parts of God’s property. It implies that she denies the creature of God. It follows that the mission which the Catholic Church has received from Jesus Christ to proclaim the Good News to all people until the end of this world (Mt 28: 19-20) cannot be achieved.
The researcher would like to summarize that the belief in Phii Poota is a benevolent belief. For it enhances the quality of life of the Isarn villagers. They can use only the means which they have in their context. It is impossible for the Isarn villagers to use Catholic means for improving their quality of life because they have not received the message of God yet. It is the mission of Catholics to share the spirit of Christ to them if Catholics want them to know God and through their cultural means for mutual understanding. The possible way that the Catholics can proclaim the Good News to the local Isarn villagers is to explain the details of the Good News in the paradigm of the Isarn villagers. Those are to adapt and to apply the Good News perceptions in terminology of the Isarn context objectively. The starting point of this mission for Catholics is to understand the meaning of elements in the Isarn culture contextually. From this starting process, the Good News' proclaimers can objectify the perceptions of the teaching of Jesus Christ in the Isarn context concretely. Then the further step will be the process of descriptive interpretation of the message of Good News through Isarn terms. This process helps not only the proclamation of the Good News but also helps the Isarn Catholics to understand the message of God through their own context. From this point of view, the Isarn Catholics can absorb the essential meaning of the Good News to improve their spiritual life fruitfully. That is the genuine incarnation of Jesus Christ, the redemptor, in the life of local Catholic community of the Isarn region has occurred. That is the imitation of Christ for the Isarn Catholics to be genuine, active faithful of Christ in the modern world.
CHAPTER FIVE

A NEW PARADIGM OF THE ISARN CATHOLICS

TOWARD THE BELIEF IN PHII POOTA

No one can be a saint without being a real human being.

So far the researcher has analyzed the phenomena of the Belief in Phii Poota which plays its roles as local culture in communities of the Isarn natives by the demythologization theory of Paul Ricoeur. He has found that the belief is beneficent for not only each individual but also for all the members of each community that accept Phii Poota as a core element of their belief. Besides, it is benevolent not only in the spiritual dimension but in political point of view. Because this belief has formed native villagers to be ethical under the mystical perspective of Phii Poota which is traditionally perceived as the soul of their outstanding ancestor who has been grateful to villagers’ relatives in the past as well as to themselves at present. From that particular characteristic, contemporary villagers are grateful and respect that Phii as an elder member of the village. It follows that villagers have to obey the instruction of such a person according to his seniority. Those suggestions have been formed in ethical principles which guide villagers to behave ethically themselves. Those suggestions also influence villagers politically because some parts of the suggestions involve the process of governing due to the seniority of Phii Poota and its representative, the intercessioner. This process has not been authorized by only juridical authority but transcendental authority to respect to invisible ruler. That is Phii Poota who is their ancestral grateful person. Hence, it is sufficient to infer that this belief nourishes and nurtures the solidarity of each community. Moreover, it is also benevolent not only to human beings but for nature and environment surrounding of the villagers’ community of the Isarn culture as well. According to the ancestral
authority villagers are usually aware of personal properties of *Phii Poota* in the form of public belongings.

This belief can be identified as a necessary and beneficent element for the native Isarn community if it is considered in the perspective that if a belief is not good it will not produce any good effect. When this belief has been abolished from some villages, villagers of those villages face many problems in their own communities and each individual also is confronted by various difficulties in his life pattern. For there is nobody who implicitly obliges them to obey ethical principles any more. Hence it is appropriate to justify that the belief in *Phii Poota* is beneficial for the Isarn villagers. Because of the belief in *Phii Poota* the villagers are in peaceful atmosphere in their community. But when there is no *Phii Poota*, there is no peaceful atmosphere in such a community. There is very few mutual help done among a kin group. The concept of selfishness replaces the perspective of mutual help. Each one also attempts to isolate oneself from others; for each one is afraid of sharing their properties to others. Most of activities are counted in financial property on account of the material consumerism. The native Isarn villagers themselves carrying out their activities deriving with *Phii Poota* believe that *Phii Poota* is beneficial to them (Kaewthep, 1987:104-106). It implies that the effects of the belief in *Phii Poota* are good. Hence it is sufficient to preserve such belief in the Isarn society.

Moreover, some Catholics who take part in exposure immersion program for the Isarn culture have realized concretely that the belief in *Phii Poota* is also benevolent for the native Isarn villagers (The Catholic Studying Committee for the Isarn Culture, 1992: 18-24). Therefore such assessment saying that *Phii Poota* is not good for Catholics is not acceptable because it does not conform with the fact occurring in real the society of the Isarn region. As results this belief should be preserved in the Isarn community and promoted to the outside world.

Frankly speaking, it is unfair for the belief in *Phii Poota* of the Isarn natives having been interpreted by Catholic Church as superstition. For the belief does not have attributes of superstition which the Catholic Church defines in both
accidentality and substantiability. The belief in *Phii Poota* is not an objectively groundless, futile and absurd belief and a practice consisting of quasi-magic abuses of genuine religious beliefs and practices. And, in the narrow sense, it does not consist of futile beliefs and practices occasioned by the credence in imaginary powers. Though it is not strictly rational but it is the belief consisting of rites and customs possessing meaning as symbols and conventional signs which give visible expression to spiritual realities and have genuine meaning for such belief bases on the notion of the soul of historical person in each Isarn village history. And such belief is not classified in the group of deistic belief, but it is the conviction of the Isarn people on the existence of the soul of their ancestor. This is the perception which the Catholic Church also confirms. Hence, Catholics have to change their attitude towards the belief in *Phii Poota* from a negative to a positive viewpoint.

Even though there are many cases of those who used to be in the community that believes in *Phii Poota* and have been converted to Catholicism, they still have peaceful tone in their lives. They may argue that the belief in *Phii Poota* of the Isarn culture is inferior to the belief in God of the Catholics. The researcher would like to discuss that we cannot discuss this argument in such a form of comparison. But we have to contextualize the different paradigm of each source. To discuss about the case frankly, the arguer should remind himself that the community believing in *Phii Poota* has its particular ethical principles compelling villagers not to do harm or else *Phii Poota* will punish them. The community of the believers in God also has particular ethical codes in the form of Catholic moral principles compelling the faithful to live in peaceful surroundings. Though *Phii Poota* has its status as God in the context of such belief but it is not the same as God. The Isarn villagers themselves only hold *Phii Poota* as their ancestor but not as the supreme Being in their Buddhist religious life. When the Isarn villagers are converted to Catholicism they replace the status of *Phii

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Phii Poota with the status of God. And they accept the obligations of God instead of the obligations of Phii Poota. But ethical behaviors show they are still faithful to both beliefs by comparison. So it is impossible to say that a Catholic community is better than Phii Poota's community or that the belief in Phii Poota is not good for Catholics, for they belong to different contexts.

Therefore it is not appropriate for Catholics to have any subjective opinion to keep on the wrong perception of Phii Poota as superstition. But it should be better for Catholics to consider the belief in Phii Poota as a cultural factor enhancing secular life of the Isarn people to reach their own final goal. The Second Vatican Council, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World recognizes, respects, and realizes the value of mankind cultures. It writes

[Culture must be subordinated to the integral development of the human person, to the good of the community and of the whole of mankind. Therefore one must aim at encouraging the human spirit to develop its faculties of wonder, of understanding, of contemplation, of forming personal judgments and cultivating a religious, moral and social sense.

Culture, since it flows from man's rational and social nature, has continual need of rightful freedom of development and legitimate possibility of autonomy according to its own principles. Quite rightly it demands respect and enjoys a certain inviolability, provided, of course, that the rights of the individual and the community, both particular and universal, are safeguarded within the limits of the common good. ...The scope of public authority extends, not to determining the proper nature of cultural form, but to building up to environment and the provision of assistance favorable to the development of culture, without overlooking minority groups in the nation. This is the reason why one must avoid at all costs distorting culture from its proper purposes and its exploitation by political or economical force (GS 59).
It implies that the Isarn Catholic churches has to convert themselves from their own triumphal egocentricism that discriminates other cultural people who are also creatures of God and their neighbors to be the ones who live together peacefully in the same cultural context with a different perspective. In a human viewpoint, we can affirm that it is impossible for a cultural man to live in a different culture perfectly without knowing and understanding the pattern of the other culture. Moreover once a man is impregnated with one culture he continues to be so forever. Therefore the Isarn Catholics have to live in the context of the Isarn culture but with the spirit of Catholicity which they decide to integrate in their lives.

To concretize this perspective the leaders of the Isarn Catholic churches, the bishops, priests, and religious should be the first to lead others. According to the tradition of the Catholic Church, Catholic faithful humbly obey and sincerely follow the suggestions of consecrated ministers whose mission be shepherds of the flock of God’s sheep in the status of priest, prophet and leader. If the leaders make suggestion to their followers according to the given status they are followed by their subjects.

Moreover if we consider the development of religious life in each person, there must be real integration between holistic individual and the teaching of the religion in which the individual involves for achieving the final goal of life that such religion proposes. For being a genuine religious person, one has to nourish his life with the doctrine of the religion in which he is involved for achieving the final goal of life that such religion proposes. It means that the individual has to apply the doctrinal teaching of the religion into such individual concrete life. And the doctrinal teaching of such religion nurtures that individual has his own context consisting of his own culture and other environment surround him.

To be a Catholic in Catholicism for an Isarn Catholic is not exempted from such perspective. Hans Kung summarizes the concept of being a Christian including the Catholic that a Christian must be a real human being. He writes

Being Christian cannot mean ceasing to be human. But neither can being human mean ceasing to be Christian. Being Christian is not an
addition to being human: there is not a Christian level above or below the human. The true Christian is not a split personality.

The Christian element therefore is neither a superstructure nor a sub-structure of the human. It is an elevation or---better---a transfiguration of the human, at once preserving, canceling, surpassing the human. Being Christian therefore means that the other humanisms are transfigured: they are affirmed to the extent that they are rejected to the extent that they reject the Christian reality, Christ himself; they are surpassed to the extent that being Christian can fully incorporate the human, all-too-human even in all its negativity (Kung, 1974: 601-602).

The researcher agrees with Hans Kung. For, in Baptism from which a man is marked officially as a Catholic the recipient must declare publicly that he wants to be a Catholic. It means that he intends to modify himself to be what Catholic religion wants him to be that is to be a holy man, to be another Christ, that is to be a saint. From this step, he starts forming his mundane human to be transformed to the Christian human who has Jesus Christ as his model and keep on such process until his mundane life is ended by death: that means to be another Christ completely. However, the human nature of each one must be gradually recognized otherwise one may deceive one’s self. He cannot reach the final goal really because he does not really live with the concrete development of one’s self but with the delusion which he himself imagines. That is one of superstitious attributes. Besides, it is impossible for each one to reach the final goal of life by only speaking or teaching without doing. Jesus Christ expressed this perspective concretely while he confronted scribes and Pharisees who only taught and preached God’s words but did not practice what they were teaching “You serpents, brood of vipers, how can your escape being condemned to hell?” (Mt 23: 33 ff). But to live religious life effectively one has to practice his religious life in his own context. Therefore the teaching of religion must be localized in the life of local people.
An Isarn Catholic is a Catholic who wants to be a holy man like the other Catholics all over the world but he cannot be a European Catholic or an American Catholic in for he does not have the physical environment as those who are in other particular context. He has to be a Catholic, in particular, as an Isarn native for he is a person who has been created to be an Isarn person by the Isarn culture. However he can be similar to those Catholics with transcendental perception of the universal teaching of the Gospel.

To reach such a level of understanding which is possible for the content of Catholic faith which, in theoretical viewpoint, is universal, but in practical context, bases on Western perception, must be inculturated in the Isarn paradigm by transforming the Catholic faith into the Isarn linguistic means. This process will nourish the Roman Catholic faith which the Isarn Catholics have received since their baptism to improve their spirituality until they can accomplish the final goal of life which Jesus Christ promised to give them. This is a prominent movement that each particular Catholic can understand the content of Catholic faith objectively.

In a particular concrete situation, there may be some difficulties for the Isarn Catholics to adapt themselves to the teaching of the Gospel in the Isarn context for religious language of Catholic bases on Western perceptions. However it is not absolutely impossible for, even though they are limited by their natural capacity of understanding other cultural perceptions which the teaching of Gospel has been recorded they can transform the other cultural perspectives of the teaching to be their own context by contextual inculturization of the documents. It means that there must be a process of contextual interpretation which similarizes elements of the two different cultural contents by using cultural symbols and signs of each context. From this process those who are not in the primary source of the teaching of the Gospel can understand the universal transcendental teaching of the Gospel contextually. Later, those who can understand the gospel in their own particular context through their own perception can develop one spiritual life contextually.
To realize this proposal, there must be serious analytical studies of each local culture and define the meaning of symbolic language of each culture contextually for inculturating the teaching of the Gospel in such a particular culture. The researcher demonstrates an example while he contextualizes the belief in *Phii Poota*. He also similarizes the elements of the belief in Catholic perspectives as well. Moreover he keeps on culturally valuating the belief. He finds that the belief is benevolent for both the Isarn native people and the Isarn Catholics.

It should be, for the Isarn Catholic churches, an urgent program. For the Isarn Catholics are, now, in the chaotic period of decision making for earning religious life in their own context. They cannot assure themselves of a process of conducting religious practices in the realm of Roman Catholic Church. In real situation, nowadays, it is difficult to apply the westernized perceptions of the Church teaching to particular understanding of local faithful who are not familiar with the Catholic perceptions. Consequently, the Isarn Catholics are anxious to enhance their religious life. Because they do not have clear understanding of the teaching of the Church that they can apply for their own contextual life. If the situation has been kept, the Isarn believers can be only passive Catholics. The Good News which the Church attempts to proclaim cannot holistically nourish religious life of the Isarn faithful because their faith exists only on lexical understanding not self-actualized understanding. In general the Magisterium of the Catholic Church obliges faithful to follow the ecclesial instructions on being a Catholic for achieving the final goal of life freely. She suggests her faithful through various declarations, especially in the Second Vatican Council, to accept what is good in each one’s culture to enhance their Catholic life in the form of inculturation. This aspect has been stated officially in the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*).
spirit of the lay apostolate might pervade the whole of society (AG 15).

She also emphasizes on the necessity of applying Catholic faith to social responsibility. This perspective is proclaimed in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes) that:

The Council exhorts Christians, as citizens of both cities, to perform their duties faithfully in the spirit of the Gospel. It is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities: this is to forget that by our faith we are bound all the more to fulfill these responsibilities according to the vocation of each one. But it is no less mistaken to think that we may immerse ourselves in earthly activities as if these latter were utterly foreign to religion, and religion were nothing more than the fulfillment of acts of worship and the observance of a few moral obligations. One of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many [believers] profess and the practice of their daily lives. As far back as the Old Testament the prophets vehemently denounced this scandal, and in the New Testament Christ himself with greater force threatened it with severe punishment. Let there, then, be no such pernicious opposition between professional and social activity on the one hand and religious life on the other. The Christian who shirks his temporal duties shirks his duties towards his neighbor, neglects God himself, and endangers his eternal salvation. Let Christians follow the example of Christ who worked as a craftsman; let them be proud of the opportunity to carry out their earthly activity in such a way to integrate human, domestic, professional, scientific, and technical enterprises with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are ordered to the glory of God (GS 43).
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If each local church attempts to actualize the ecclesiastical suggestions local Catholics in all over the world will have contextual understanding of the teaching of the Gospel. They will abolish misunderstanding of the teaching of Gospel and increasing various processes that can improve their religious life until other people who have not been Jesus Christ’s followers decide to accept Christ as their lord because of witnessing activities which faithful behave in life pattern transfigured by the Gospel.

Suggestion for Further Research

The researcher would like to propose that the Isarn Catholic churches should do more researches on their own worthy culture such as the belief in Phii Phaya Thaen, the belief in Phii Tahaeg, and even though cultural proverbs. For this is only the means which the Isarn Catholic churches can nourish spiritual life of the Isarn Catholics fruitfully through their own cultural symbolic language. From these process the Isarn Catholic can reach self-actualized or contextualized understanding of the Gospel. Finally, they can be the Isarn holy men in context of the Isarn culture.
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List of Interview

1. Mr. Kong Poosri, 51 yrs.. 50/1 Ban Nasrinuan Nasrinuan subdistrict, Kantrawichai district, Mahasarakham. Date: April 23, 1996.


3. Mr. Sakchai Chaichomphu, 58 yrs.. 61/1 Ban Panna Pannaikhom Subdistrict, Panna Nikhom district. Sakol Nakorn province. Date: April 11, 1996.

4. Mr. Somphong Intarapanich, 63 yrs.. 77 Ban Koksuwan, Pannaikhom Subdistrict, Panna Nikhom district. Sakol Nakorn province. Date: April 11, 1996.

5. Prof. Dr. Chou Norindr. Graduate School of Philosophy and Religious Studies. Assumption University, Bangkok. Date: June 10, 1996.


7. Mr. Monkol Jatkul, 37 yrs..57 Moo 2, Sadao subdistrict, Puplachai district, Burirum. Date: June 22, 1996.


10. Mr. Niti Narinrak, 72 yrs.. 99 Ban Panna Pannaikhom subdistrict, Panna Nikhom district, Sakol Nakorn province. Date: April 11, 1996.

11. Mr. Boonyang Pholmeeboon, 30 yrs.. 24/1 Ban Nanang of Nanang subdistrict, Phopisai district, Nongkhai province. Date: May 19, 1996.
Appendix I

Demography of the Isarn People

According to the discovery\(^1\) of Jitra Phoomisakdi (Phoomisakdi, 1976) in the content of the ethnic Thai tribe who lives in Thailand especially in the Northeast and Laos nowadays through the analysis of sociology, history and anthropology, it identifies that they have their own origin in South China.\(^2\) He considers from the meaning of the word “Thai” that has been used in various ways in social context. He puts:

I believe that the meaning of the Thai-Tai race’s name has been originated and developed step by step according to the social context. [It is not the lexical term which is selected by user of a particular purpose.] (Phoomisakdi, 1976: 610)

From the cultural phenomena either social trend or Buddhist religious perspective, the Isarn people have special traditional performances and life styles merely not similar to people in the central part of Thailand according to the influence of western-civilizing transmission. It generally looks like the life styles of the Laotian people that has kept their originality. They have their authentic characteristics which can harmonize with every culture without losing their own dignity and authenticity. They can maintain and preserve their authentic identities as the Isarn natives.

Thawach Poonnotok, from his research about history of the Isarn region, agrees with what Coedès has found. He writes:


\(^2\)There is another tendency which does not agree with him such as Samerchai Poolsuwan’s perspective which is based on population genetics. See further details in Samerchai Poolsuwan. “Where did the Thai Ancestors Come from: An Analysis and Interpretation from New Evidences of Genetics,” *Thamasat University Journal* (in Thai). 20 (May-Aug 1994): 74-95.
People in the Isarn region have been accepting the culture of Lum-namkhong [the Maekhong basin culture] and also have the same lineage with the Tai or Thai in Lanchang [Laos] as well as having the same style of language, poetry and beliefs ...and according to political development of the Isarn region it is found that the majority of residents in new towns settled during the reigns of king Rama I to Rama IV were captives from the East bank of the Maekhong River [Laos] (Poonnotok, 1987a: 353).

Term Wiparkpojnakij (Wiparkpojnakij, 1997: 8, 86-95. 122-150), through his field experiences, also elucidates that after the reign of Khun Borom,1 the god-father of the Tai-Lao group, the great migration of the Ai-Lao tribe which is the main tribe of the Tai who preferred to earn their life on agriculture, were from their homeland in the Southern China to both banks of the Maekhong River. Their migration can be divided into three parts. The first one was the migration according to the flood in their primary settlement. The Chronicle of Lanchang described that there was a great flood because people in that area did not offer their new agricultural products to their Phii who took care of them and nurtured their products after the annual harvest. Some members, at that time, may flee the flood to the Southern part of the mainland. The second one was the migration of Pra Wor and Pra Ta group2 in 1778. The last

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1 It is recorded both in various historical documents and mythical palm leaves inscription of Lanchang Chronicles and Urangkathat Chronicles that he was the great leader of the Thai group who could govern large region of Indochina peninsula. See more details in Term Wiparkpojnakij, A History of Laos (in Thai), (Bangkok: Dhammasart Press, 1997), p. 5-16.

2 Pra Wor and Pra Ta were the royal members of the Chaichedtha dynasty of the Laos kingdom who supported the enthronement of king Siriboonyasarn. But they quarreled with each other because of the political or personal conflict. Pra Wor and Pra Ta together with their followers decided to flee to their father's city "Nongbua Lum Pug" located in Nongkhai province. They then travel to Champasak. Some followers settled their residences along the way to Champasak such as in Roi-et and Ubonrachathani provinces. For further
massive migration to the Isarn region of the Ai-lao was the captivation after Anu rebellion in 1826. The less great scale migration of the Laotians was in 1945 due to the conquest of Laos by French troops.

Nowadays the Tai, or the Thai natives in the Isarn region consist of various tribes: Thai-Lao, Phu-Thai, Yo, Yoy, Saék, and Khmer descendants that composed of Kha, Kuay (Suay), So and Kaloeng (Hongpan, 1979; Culture Center of Surin province, 1990: 120-121).  

1.1. The Thai-Lao

The Thai-Lao people are the major ethnic communities in the Isarn region. They live in various provinces: Udonthani, Loei, Nongkhai, Mahasarakham, Amnatcharoen, Ubonratchathani, Nakornrachasima, Yasothon, and Roiet (Boonsu, 1992: 62). They usually live in plain areas or low land near natural water resources such as swamp, river, and lake. They speak the same dialect as the other Thai-Lao in Vientiane, Luang Prabang or Champasak. Boonyong Kedthes (Kedthes 1993: 112-113) divided this ethnic group into four minor groups according to their former settlement in Laos. They are Lao Wiang, Lao Gaow, Lao Puan and Lao Korat.  

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1 See the settlement of each tribe in the Isarn region in Appendix III and IV.  

2 Term Wiparkpojnakij (Wiparkpojnakit, 1987: 372) describes the concepts originated from those names as follow: The word “Wieng” signifies to Wiangchan or Vietiane which is the previous settlement of the Lao Wiang group. They live in Udonthani, Chaiyaphoom, Nakornrachasima, Mahasarakham, Roi-et, Ubolrachathani and Srisaket provinces. Lao Gaow means the old Lao. It is the Chinese pronunciation of the word. They live in Udonthani, Roi-et and Ubonrachathani provinces. They migrated from Muang Xieng Kwang. Lao Puan people live in Roi-et and Udonthani provinces. They migrated from Muang Puan in Laos. Lao Korat people live in Nakornrachasima province. This group has its origin form the southern of Laos close to the upper part of Cambodia.
Most of them were politically deported to the Isarn region after the Thai seizure of Luangprabang and its colonies by King Taksin and King Rama I as well as the seizure of Vientiane by King Rama III following the prince Anuwong Rebellion (Wipakpojnakij, 1970a: 9-140).

The Thai-Lao have still acknowledged *Phii* (geni) as one of the significant elements in practical-spiritual life because some desired expectations cannot be satisfied by religious teaching but the perception of *phii* sometimes compensates them psychologically. The beliefs in *Phii* from the Thai-Lao group according to the research of Thawatch Poonnotok (Poonnotok, 1987: 350-392) and Pra Ariyanuwatra Kemjareethera (Ariyanuwat, 1987: 1-60) can be contextually categorized as follows: (1) *Phii Phaya Thaen* or *Phii Fa* (celestial geni) who is accepted as the creator of the universe; (2) *Phii Poota* who is considered as the ancestors of villagers who after his death still stay with his descendants as the best guardian of that village; (3) *Phii Mahesak-lakban* identified with *Nang Thorani* (genius terris) who is considered as the hero of a town or a village; (4) Natural *Phii* which indwell in natural entities such as mountains, swamps, big trees, etc.; (5) Bad *Phii* that is always malevolent to people or other things such as *Phii Phaed, Phii Paow, Phii Phong, Phii Kongkoy* and *Phii Pob*.

1.2. Phu-Thai

Certain experts of Phu-Thai history such as Surachit Chantarasakha (Chantarasakha, 1986), Thongkhun Hongpan (1979), find that the Phu-Thais in the Isarn region who mostly live in Sakol Nakorn, Nakorn Panom, Kalasin, Mukdahan provinces, have their primary tribal homeland in the Black River basin of Sibsong Chuthai region as princedoms which were ruled by princes before migrating to Luang Prabang kingdom of Laos and then to the Isarn plateau. This conviction is supported by sufficient evidences of dialect, culture, as well as oral-mythical beliefs and historical background. This tribe can be divided into two groups according to their dress color: The Phu-Thai *Dam* or Black Phu-Thai, and Phu-Thai *Khaow* or White
Phu-Thai (Pholsawadi, 1993: 61-63). Sometimes Phu-Thai Daeng and Phu-Thai Laiy\(^1\) are considered as other different Phu-Thai groups (Sribussara, 1979: 12-20).

The Phu-Thais initially migrated from Lanchang Kingdom (Luang Prabang, Laos) to the Isarn region officially during the reign of king Taksin of Thonburi and King Rama I of Chakri dynasty. And then the second migration happened during the reign of King Rama III after prince Anu Rebellion. Winyoo Pholsawadi (Pholsawadi, 1993: 67) describes that many regions were established as colonial cities to Ratanakosin kingdom.

The Phu-Thai is the best well-known ethnic group which has not only highest cultural level in the Isarn region but also conduct good and polite etiquette both speech and manner to others. Damrongrachanupab describes the Phu-Thai characteristics during his royal visit to the Isarn region in 1906 that “this group has more civilization of culture and life patterns than other groups in this region because they used to live in the previous civilized community in Sibsong Chu-Thai. They are not only farmers but also merchants” (cited in Vallibhotama, 1995: 287).

The belief in Phii, which is an invisible human-like entity, has been very strongly accepted among the Phu-Thais but not very strict in their daily-life practices (Sribusara, 1979: 21) because they are afraid of unsuccessfulness in daily life according to Phii’s disappointment affected by unethical human conducts. Pennipa Intaratrakul (Intaratrakul, 1992: 65) elucidates that there are five types of Phii in the Phu-Thai’s belief. They are as follows:

(a) Phii Fa or Phii Thaen (celestial geni) is the most powerful geni in the sky whose function is to protect human beings and their properties.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) They were classified according to their daily dress especially in festivities and funeral ceremony of each group. See more details in Thongkoon Hongphan, *Ethnic Groups and Languages in Mae Khong Basin of Thailand* (in Thai). (Document in the Isarn Heritage Exhibition in Sakol Nakorn Teacher College, 1979), p.5; Mo Sribussara, *The Lamentation of Thai Dam* (in Thai). (Bangkok: Bannakich Press, 1979), p.16.
(b) Phii Ban-Phii Muang or Phii Chaoban, or Chao Cham Phii Ban.\(^1\) is the spirit of their great ancestor taking care of a town, a city or a village and inhabitants as well. It also concerns the living process of those who live in a village, a town, or a city. This Phii is classified in the group of Phii Poota.

(c) Phii Banpaburut, or “Phii Chuer” [clannish Phii] or “Phii Dam” [initial-clanish Phii], is the spirit of dead elders of each clan which is kept in the bed room of each family on a special shelf. If one of her members has troubles the family will consult this phii.

(d) Phii Pa [forest geni] is the spirit that dwells and owns natural matters such as forest, trees, or mountains who requires permission begging from a villager before taking its properties.

(e) Phii Mod and Phii Montra. These Phis stay with a person who has to learn from his master (guru) to heal a sick man by reciting magic words for inviting Phii Mod and Phii Montra to heal that one.

The Phu-Thais recognize that a Phii is still a member of their society. Death, which physically transforms human being from corporal to non-corporal condition, does not give up the functions and status of that person in every Phu-Thai community. The one who dies still keeps on his/her functions as usual but not complete because of the natural limitation of noncorporal condition (Intratrakul, 1992: 55).

1.3. Thai-Yo

“Yo” or “Yoy,” which means Minor Thai, is a migrated tribe form the left side of the Mae Khong river to the Isarn region. Surachit Chantrasakha (Chantrasakha, 1992).

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\(^1\)Pennipa Intratrakul used this word according to the dialect of the villagers which is proper according to the function of the Phii who behaves as the owner of the village (genius loci). See further details in Pennipa Intratrakul, The Respectation to Phii of the Phu-Thai Dam in Ban Panad, Tambol Kaokaew, Chiangkhan district, Loei province (in Thai). Master’s Thesis, (Mahasarakham: Srinakarinthawiroth University, 1992), pp.58-59.

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Boonyong Kerdtues (Kerdthes, 1991: 10-12) and Suthat Tansuwan (Tansuwan, 1993: 17-23) describe that they migrated from Hongsawadee city of the Xayburi region in the upper Northern of Laos nearby Luang Prabang in 1808 and from Muang Kamkeurt and Kammuan in 1828 before some from Muang Pungling settled in Tha-Uthane district of Nakorn Panom province in 1833. Finally the group of Muang Kamkeurt's governor who surrendered to Bangkok settled at Ban Thakhonyang of Kantharawichai district in Mahasarakham province in 1839. Term Wiparkpojnakij who has found the document which confirms the lineage of the Thai-Yo in the Northeast and Laos (Wiparkpojnakij, 1970a: 308-314) describes their recent settlement:

The settlements of the Thai-Yo in the Isarn are not only in Ban Thakhonyang but also in Ban Nayoong of Kumpawpee district: Ban Kudnangdaeng. Ban Namthaeng of Pannanikhom district: Ban Champa. Ban Donno, Ban Boungpao, Ban Nasinuan of Wanornniwas district; Ban Sim, Ban Nongwaeng, Ban Sa of Yangtalad district in Kalasin province... (Wiparkpojnakij, 1970a: 257).

Boonyong Kedthes (Kedthes, 1991: 54-57) describes the unique character of the contemporary Thai-Yo that they still strick to their authentic cultural patterns as their ancestor used to earn their lives in the past. Though they accept Buddhism as their official religion, they still preserve the belief in supernatural beings and integrate Buddhism in their traditional beliefs (Thawaro, 1997: 68) because Buddhism does not absolutely help them to solve contemporary problems. Phii Poota is considered as a significant institution of their community (Nuancan, 1996). It is the Phii of the village. The next one is Phii Ruen which is in "Hong Poeng."1 This is the Phii of each family. This idea automatically formats the perception of each family's members in order to establish a close relationship with the Phii and at the time to show their

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1 Every conservative Thai-Yo family will set a special private room prepared for the Phii of real hereditary members of each family. A daughter and/or son-in-law and another people has no right and chance to go in that room otherwise they must be fined.
gratitude toward their ancestors. They also keep on their authentic traditions of marriage and funeral. However the twelve annual rites of the Isarn people, "Heed Sibsong," are still kept as their main stream of private and communion life.

1.4. Thai-Khmer

The Thai-Khmers are another major group who have lived independently in the lower part of the Moon-Chii basin since the prehistoric period (Saraya, 1995:12-28). This tribe consists of many minor groups such as Khmer, Suay, Kuay, Khamu, Khaloeng, So, Boor and Kha. Their well-known names are Khmer and Suay. This identification is categorized from the similarity of their dialect (Suporn, 1990: 18; Waiwachanakul et al., 1990: 23-80) which is part of the Mon-Khmer language. Cheun Srisawadi in "Culture of Elephant Feeding of the Thai-Guay (Suay) in Surin Province" also confirms that "the Kuay's dialect and the Kha's have the same radical meaning of words which can be used to contact each other without any translating means" (Cultural Center of Surin Province, 1990: 127). Most of them live in Srisaket, Surin and Burirum provinces. Some are in Mahasarakham, Sakol Nakorn, and Mukdaham provinces (Boonsu, 1994: 38-42). They had been independent as civilized chieftdom in the central part of recent Cambodia where Muang Attapue and Muang Saenpang have been settled. They also settled in the southern part of Laos before surrendering to Siam Kingdom (Phoomisakdi, 1976: 435; Sariya, 1995). They have been called Suay according to their status as vassal citizens who had to pay some fees to the king of Bangkok (Wongthes, 1996: 84).

George Coedès comments that this group was influenced by the Indian civilization under the ideal of Brahmanism since the sixth century (Coedès, 1968: 73). It was demonstrated in archeological evidences in various areas of the Isarn region such as Prasart Hin Phimai, Prasart Khao Phanomrung, and Parsart Khao Prawiharn. It implies that Brahmanism influences the paradigm of the Isarn people also.

The belief in Phii which is supposed to indwell everything in the world influences the Thai-Khmers'life. Some groups of Phii are good by nature because
they are ready to help villagers who ask for help. But some are bad because they seem to prevent people from achieving successfully their aims according to their nature or khaathaa, or mantras (magical formulae). The other significant characteristic of this group is its skill in training elephants living in wild forest. Cheun Srisawad describes that they always ask Phii to help them catch wild elephants as well as training them (Cultural Center of Surin Province, 1990: 149-152).

Man of magic is the well-known stereotype of the Thai-Khmer people because various of them are skillful of magical duties. See more details in Cultural Center of Surin Province. The Culture of Mool River Basin: A Case Study of Khmer, Laotian and Suay in Surin Province (in Thai). (Bangkok: Sarnmuanchon, 1990), pp.162-200.
Appendix II

Geographical Diagram of the Isarn Region
Source: Study Committee of the Isarn Culture, 1992
Diagram of Ethnic Tribes settlement in the Isarn region
Source: Study Committee of the Isarn Culture, 1992.
Appendix IV

Four Dioceses of The Isarn Catholic Churches.

1. Ubolrachathani Diocese
2. Thare Nongsang Arch Diocese
3. Udornthani Diocese
4. Nakornrachasima Diocese
Appendix V

Catholic Population of the Isarn Churches 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dioceses</th>
<th>Amount of Population</th>
<th>Amount of Catholics</th>
<th>Amount of Parish</th>
<th>Amount of Priest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nakorn Ratchasima</td>
<td>5,050,570</td>
<td>5,149</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thare-Nongseng</td>
<td>3,365,850</td>
<td>46,629</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udon Thani</td>
<td>5,122,961</td>
<td>14,917</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubol Ratchathani</td>
<td>7,474,375</td>
<td>23,429</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21,023,756</td>
<td>90,124</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. percentage of population growth: 0.43

Source: The secretariate of Bishop Conference of Thailand, 1996.
Appendix VI.

Picture 1: The forest donated for the Phi Poota of Ban Huakhua Kantarawichai district, Mahasarakham.

Picture 2: The Phi Poota’s shrine of Ban Huakhua, Kantarawichai district, Mahasarakham.
The twin Phii Poota's shrines of Ban Tamyae, Kantarawichai district, Mahasarakam.

Artificial weapons which villagers of Ban Tamyae, made for their Phii Poota.

Picture 3: The twin Phii Poota's shrines of Ban Tamyae, Kantarawichai district, Mahasarakam.

Picture 4: Artificial weapons which villagers of Ban Tamyae, made for their Phii Poota.
Appendix VII
The Liang Phii Poota ceremony
Of
Ban Nasrinuan, Kantarawichai district, Mahasarakam.

Picture 5: The Phii Poota's shrine of Ban Nasrinuan, Kantarawichai district, Mahasarakam.

Picture 6: Villagers of Ban Nasrinuan place various kinds of Food in front of the shrine of Phii Poota.
Picture 7: A special set of food prepared for only Phii Poota.

Picture 8: A set of food offered separately for anonymous Phii Beside the Phii Poota Shrine.
Picture 9: A traditional set of necessary offerings to Phii Poota
In the Thai-Laos group: shells of rice seed, pairs of flower
And knotted coconut leaves.

Picture 10: Knotted coconut leaves left behind the shrine of
Phii Poota after the Liang Phii Poota ceremony.
Picture 11: Kong Poosri, the recent intercessioner of Ban Nasrinuan, Kantarawichai district, Mahasarakham starts The ceremony.

Picture 12: Kong Poosri begins the rite of prediction with the standard stick.
Picture 13: Kong Poosri measures his arms with the standard stick for weather prediction of the coming rainy season.

Picture 14: Villagers receive food from the intercessioner's assistant after the ceremony to eat together.

Picture 15: A part of the agape party after the ceremony.
Thaiwat Nilkhet was born on July 4, 1959, in Sakol Nakorn province. He was a seminarian in the Catholic Seminaries for 16 years. He graduated B.A. in Philosophy in 1982 and B.D. in Theology in 1984 at Saengtham College consecutively. He was accepted into the M.A. program at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies in 1993. He used to work in Catholic missionary program in the Archdiocese of Thare Nongsaeng for four years. He has been a full-time lecturer in philosophical courses at Assumption University since October 15, 1991.