



REGARDING RELIGION IN CAMBODIA, the CIA World Facebook reports that 97% of the country is officially Buddhist. But my 6 weeks in Cambodia in April/May told a more complex story.

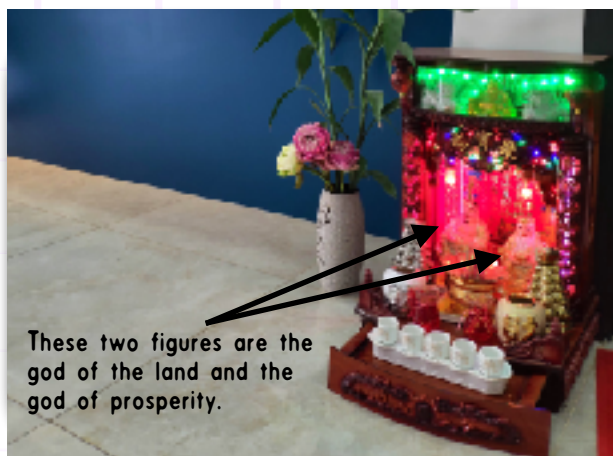


In our last newsletter, we mentioned spirit houses, which J.P. became particularly curious about when he happened upon a "spirit house street," with shop after shop (pictured left) selling them. J.P. was fascinated to learn more about them by asking Peter, a pastor and core leader of the Cambodia Lutheran Church. Spirit houses are a distinctly Southeast Asian form of animism, arguably the world's oldest religion, which believes in a spirit world animating all things in the material world.

According to Peter, most Cambodians have a spirit house, placed in an auspicious location just outside the home (pictured below right). The structure is believed to house spirits, which can be either benevolent or malevolent, and thus must be appeased.

One never knows for sure which spirits reside in the house, but some families place the bones of ancestors in the house to indicate it as a home for that spirit in particular. In this way, the spirit house becomes an expression of filial piety and ancestral veneration.

To appease the spirits, who are believed to be able to influence the material world, spirit houses are maintained throughout the year, and usually replaced with newer houses once per year. Offerings of food and incense are made at specific occasions, especially the Lunar New Year or death anniversaries. Prayers are made to the spirits for the success, health, safety, and prosperity of the family. Failure to uphold these duties might bring a malevolent spirit that causes bad fortune for the family.



These two figures are the god of the land and the god of prosperity.

Even businesses have altars. Pictured left is an altar at a popular national bank. According to Peter, these altars exist to worship the spirit of the building, in order to bring prosperity and avoid failure.

We are excited to learn how Christians handle these beliefs in their witness. The Bible reveals a God who demands nothing for appeasement (Psalm 40:6-8; 50:9-13; 51:16; Isaiah 1:11-13), but rather offers everything in His Son (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-11; Ephesians 2:4-10; 1 John 4:10), not so that we might build spirit houses, but rather that we might be built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). At the same time, God himself upholds the value of honoring families in the 4th Commandment (Exodus 20:12). What might a faithfully Christian expression of Southeast Asian filial piety look like? That's a question we are excited to learn more about!

Wanna help us impact the people of Cambodia? We need your help! Give online [here](#), or mail a check to P.O. Box 66861, St. Louis, MO 63166-6861 (checks payable to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, memo: Cima family-Cambodia).

WE LEAVE ON JULY 19 FOR CAMBODIA! It has been a long journey, but we are thrilled to finally get to our next placement. **THANK YOU** for your constant prayers and encouragement. Please give thanks for the time we have had in the United States, including successful coursework for J.P. in June. Please pray for our safe travel, for our first weeks of getting settled, for the kids as they start at a new school, and for our whole family as we learn how to be a blessing to the local ministry. Please pray for J.P.'s dad and grandmother, both battling cancer, and also for J.P.'s sister as she gets married on July 14.

