

The Lua manuscript of divination by chicken bones at Huay Nam Kun Village, Mae Fah Luang District, Chiang Rai.

Abstract

A divination by chicken bones was widespread in the Greater Mekong Sub regions including Southern Yunnan province, China, the northern region of Laos, Shan State in Myanmar and the northern region of Thailand. The belief in divining chicken bones was widely practiced by many ethnic groups and it was written down in a manuscript. In Huay Nam Kun, a village in Mae Fah Luang Commune, Mae Fah Luang District, Chiang Rai a manuscript to divine chicken bones was kept. The manuscript itself belongs to Lua ethnic group who immigrated from Southern Yunnan province in China. There are all 7 pages written in Lanna script which is a little different from the one in Thailand.

The manuscript is divided into three main parts. First, an introductory part called “Suan Nam Tak” is used to predict character attributes of the people who wish to know about the loss. Second, a main divination “Suan Tamnai Luk” is used to divine chicken bones and it was found that there are 160 predictions in number. Third, an incantation part “Suan Kaataa” is used for animal taming. Most of the divination is about illnesses, spiritual violation, contextual taboos and trading. In the manuscript it tells about the 34 types of spirits that mostly are household spirits and land spirits that cause illness and bad trading and 20 contextual taboos.

The divination practices don't appear in the manuscript but from the interview it was found that the sacrificed chicken must be only from the house whose people want to perform the divination. It will be boiled before bringing to the diviner who will look at the thigh-bones of the chicken. The divination is mostly done in some special occasions for instance marriage, house warming, long journey from trading or moving or mental and physical problems.

From the findings the divination results, the divination procedures and the divination chances reflect the relationship between the chicken's owner and home which refers to “space”. The space can be either the place of one's own home with household spirits and ancestor spirits or the place of the city with land spirits and any surroundings in the town which are brought into use in the household.

The divination by chicken bones also reflects the ways of life of the owner whose space is going to be changed in some ways such as marriage, long moves and trading.

Introduction

The divination has been believed and practiced in many cultures. It is, however, different in terms of process and value by individual culture and social context. There are many ways to predict the fortune. One of them is to predict from the chicken bones which is mostly found in many areas in the northern region of Thailand and some areas in the Greater Mekong Subregions which are Southern Yunnan province, China, The northern region of Laos and Shan State in Myanmar

From Chiang Tung bible the divination by chicken bones was recorded in 1813 about the predictions, the auspicious occasions and the appearances of the city in the 19th century as follows; (Tawee Sawangpanyakul, 2533:33)

“ Till 704 era The King Sai Nan died after the 18 years of long corruption. Since then Chiang Tung City has been abandoned for a long time because of the evils. Therefore the King Pha Yu have Kamriang, one of the two shamen practice the divination by using chicken bones and the results were exactly correct.”

While celebrating Chiang Tung City, the offerings were ready prepared. They included elephant shaman, horse shaman, chicken shaman, diviner, priest-doctor, assistant chef and head chef. The word “chicken shaman” was defined by Tawee Sawangpanyakul for the one who divines the chicken bones. (Tawee Sawangpanyakul, 2533:33)

The divination by chicken bones was widespread and became a belief from the city to Lanna kingdom. At present people in the northern part of the Greater Makong Subregions have got some changes from the internal factors such as the war and kinships to the external factors such as colonialism, the results of Cold Wa and political conflicts. With these factors they are affected by the long and complex immigration process. This results in merging different cultures for life adaptation. It would be said that the belief of divination by chicken bones has existed constantly in some ethnic groups in this particular area especially in Huay Nam Khun village, Mae Fah Luang District, Chiang Rai.

Huay Nam Kun is a village where many ethnic groups live. They are Shan ,Tai Lue, Tai Kheun, Lua, Lahu, Akha and Tai Yuan. It has ever been a settlement of Nation Guard Troops of Shan State named as “Klum Num Han Suk”, a group of young soldiers. They were placed along the borders between Thailand and Myanmar in 1963 (The group decomposed because the leader died). In 1970 Lua ethnic group who immigrated from Southern Yunnan province, China settled in Thailand because of its politics problems. They came to Thailand by crossing the border in Mae Sai District and in Hua Mae Kum village, Mae Fah Luang District. They have known that there are three Lua houses in Huay Nam Kun village and one Tai house. They therefore settled their houses. From then Shan ,Tai Lue and Tai Kheun, were gathered and became a bigger community which consists of a total of 377 people nowadays. (the data in 2004).

The literature review of the manuscript of the divination by chicken bones

In Huay Nam Khun village, the divination by chicken bones was believed among two ethnic groups that are Tai Lue and Tai Lau (having interviewed Mr. Thongkum Brijid and Mr. Singkum Tasai, 2004). For Tai Lue and Tai Lau, the divination was explained by looking at the chicken bones, its blood and its movement in many ways for the predictable results. The information is from group interview led by Mr. Thongkum Brijid. In November 2005 the data was collected again in the same area and was found that Mr. Singkum Tasai (died in March 2006) has a manuscript to divine the fortune by using the thigh-bones of the scarified chicken. The manuscript was written by black ink on 20 x 20 cm. square Sa paper. It was recorded by Lanna script and some words were Lau language. The book totaled 7 pages and was stitched with other manuscripts. They were therefore copied and translated in Thai by พระมหาอนันต์ จ.ทปช. โขโต . Huay Nam Kun's abbot . It was found that the divination by chicken bones has three main parts as follows;

1. The introductory part

It will tell about the characteristics of the person who wishes to perform the divination for example touching the lips or the legs. It can divine the loss and illness. There are 10 divination results called “Suan Nam Tak”

2. The middle part or the main divination

It will predict the thigh-bones of the chicken by explaining its holes which will be put by a small stick in 160 ways. The divination results will be shown in two cylinders (rectangular) referring to the left side leg and right side leg of the chicken. To explain the configurations, a small stick on the upper and the lower ends of each bone is illustrated with the word “Kai Koh Tai”. 160 divination results can be categorized into 8 groups as follows;

1.	Group of Illness from wrongdoings and spiritual violation	70 predictions
2.	Group of Illness from wrongdoings and spiritual violation and trading	43 predictions
3.	Group of wrongdoings and spiritual violation	20 predictions
4.	Group of trading: good luck or bad luck	19 predictions
5.	Group of wrongdoings and spiritual violation and trading	3 predictions
6.	Group of divination results to perform something	2 predictions
7.	The divination about enemies	1 prediction
8.	The divination for no good or bad results	2 predictions

Among the eight groups of contents, it's found that the spiritual violation is classified into 4 groups according to the predictions, three are about trading, two are about illnesses. Mostly the illnesses predictions due to spiritual violation are cited; group 1 and group 2, there are about 113 predictions altogether. The focus on divination by chicken bones is about spirits; since they cause illnesses and affect the trading.

The second group is concerned with the “spiritual soul” or “Khwan” in Thai, and 13 predictions are related to illnesses due to soul loss. Others are startle because of animals and the most serious cause is the death due to taking the spiritual soul away by the spirits.

The last part or incantation

The incantation is the combination between Bali and Sanskrit languages and used to recite incantations to the chicken bones three times; which means tames.

Though the prediction is about spirits and illnesses, but it's written in Brahma (sometimes it's understood to be Buddhism) in the last part.

3. Procedure and chances of divination

From the interview with Mr. Singkham Tasai (2006) about the divination by the chicken bones of Lau in Huay Nam Khun village it was found that he had to sacrifice a cock or a hen, by washing its thigh bones and sticking them tightly with its head and its body. After boiling them, they will be taken to the diviner. If he's there, he can perform the divination. If not, you can leave a message and come back to pick up the divination later.

The divination by chicken bones can be done on various auspicious occasions; wedding, misfortune, or long journey from trading. The appropriate time for the divination is during the crescent moon, and each month there are about 14-15 people asking for divination. Approximately each person asks for chicken bone divination three times (an interview with Singkham and Sukaew, 2006)

4. Spirits and Lau society from the divination by chicken bones

Belief in mystery is created in more concrete form, and one is spirit. This is a traditional belief in an early Buddha era. However most frequently, the belief in spirits is found in many cultural groups. Clearly the belief in spirits lies in the divination by chicken bones of Lau, Huay Nam Khun village where there are many kinds of spirits as follows:

Ancestor spirits	Forest spirits	Land spirits	House spirits	City spirits	Other spirits
1. Grandfather's uncle 2. Grandfather's Grandfather 3. Grand uncle 4. Mother 5. Grandfather, grandmother 6. Mother's	1. eagle 2. Termite 3. Wood	1. Watercourse 2. Highland 3. Irrigation ditch 4. Rice	1. Top stairs 2. Space 3. Lower stairs 4. Stove 5. Household guardian 6. House	1. City guardian 2. Highland 3. city pillar 4. Cemetery 5. City 6. North spirit 7. Bridge 8. Highway or river 9. Guardian 10. Dame	1. Pad Tee Neung 2. Devil 3. Bad 4. Feast
Total = 34 spirits					

According to divination by chicken bones, spirits can be divided into 6 groups, 34 spirits. Mostly they are about the "spiritual violation" or "Phid Phee", and the spirits living in the house such as the household spirit and ancestor spirit, the spirits who live outside and related to city. Both groups are found more than land spirits or wild animal spirits like falcon.

In the predictions, the cause of illnesses due to spirit violation is described in 2 main types of wrongdoings.

The violation in a house: at lower stairs, beside the stove, gate, stairs, bedroom, guardian's house, etc. The significance of wrongdoings is made upon the gate, stairs, bedroom, guardian's and stove, but there are no relations between dwellers and their habits.

The wrongdoings outside a house: well, barn, bamboo, pier, forest, highland, sticks pile. The origins are outside the house, but they are used in the house such as water, water source and woods. The relations between dwellers and their habits are not shown.

Another type is unclear wrongdoings which excludes wrongdoing about the gate, since the meaning is as same as the wrongdoing with the door's house.

The violation of spirits and mistakes (not from spirits) are believed to be social rituals in the Greater Makong Subregions to control happiness in society. And that reflects the harmony, environment, behaviors, social hierarchy, and etiquettes. These can be indicated into three aspects as follows:

1. The divination only occurs in some communities or some countries. The spiritual violation and wrongdoings in Lau community are about houses and cities. Therefore there will be some spirits to prevent bad things from happening and also to explain illnesses because of doing some bad things to the environment for example making pollution such as throwing the rubbish in the river or cutting too many trees.

2. The divination involves with spirits and wrongdoings in illnesses and trading that occur in the city. Some predictions can be solved for example, rebuilding or worshipping.

3. Since the sacrificed chicken for the divination live in the house which is a part of the city, it can be said that the chicken bones can be divined only in the place where the chicken live and the divination can only reflect the power of spirits and land spirits and as well as wrongdoings inside the house and wrongdoings in bringing bad things to house.

5. Conclusion

From the data collection it was believed that hens/ clocks are sacrificed and used in divination in ritual ceremonies even though some ceremonies take place in the forest. However the ceremony and the divination by wild chicken was not found.

In the Lau manuscript of the divination by chicken bones at Huay Nam Khun village it can be inferred about the hens/ clocks in relation with the house and city areas. Any city that is going to be a more complex society is needed to have household spirits, land spirits and ancestor spirits to detect bad things and to explain the cause of illnesses and the complexity.

It also inferred that in the complex society the trading is not only from the agriculture but also bartering. Especially many cities in the Greater Makong Subregions mostly expand their commercial routes to the sea in the South such as Chiang Tung city in Shan State in Myanmar.

From the manuscript the divination by chicken bones found at Huay Nam Khun village can be inferred as follows:

The sacrificed hens/ clocks are used to reflect the illnesses happening in the house area of the hens/clocks' owners through household spirits, ancestor spirits and wrongdoings in the house. They also reflect the behaviors of the hens/clocks' owners on the city area by land spirits and wrongdoings in bringing bad things to house. This is all about the city society.

The changes of the life space

Many auspicious occasions such as marriage, rebuilding, long journeys or moves especially for trading are needed to be divined and these cause the changes in people's space called "own space". Since for trading they want to ensure that it will be successful because of some commercial dependence. And if the trading doesn't go well, it will reflect the changes in their family or themselves. This reflects the way of life of the people in the developed society.