

The First Augury Chicken in Tai Myth: Its Relations to Power and Wisdom

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Abstract

Even though several Tai ethnic groups have used chickens in divination, there have been only a few Tai groups that have inherited chicken divination from the Mao Kingdom: the *Tai (Shan)*, the *Ahom* and the *Dehong Dai*, whose myths of origin and chronicles depict the roles of the augury chicken. This paper aims to study the story of the first augury chicken collected from Tai myths and to offer new perspectives on their interpretation. The deciphering of the mythic code reveals the importance of the first augury chicken as a symbol of power and wisdom leading to the finding of the ancient Tai scripts.

Introduction

Chickens have been used in sacrifice and divination by several ethnic groups in Southern China, Northeastern India, and Southeast Asia. B. J. Terwiel² pointed out that divinations are performed by examining different parts of the chicken's body: first, the liver (the *Ahom*, the *Khamyang*, *Laotians*, the *Kasi*, and the *Akha*); second, the tongue bone

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² เตอร์วิล, บี.เจ., เอกสารอาหม วิถีอ่านและผลที่จะช่วยส่งเสริมไทยคดีศึกษาเชิงเปรียบเทียบ เอกสารประกอบการสัมมนาเรื่อง คนไทนอกประเทศ พรมแดนความรู้ [Proceeding on the Tai Outside of Thailand: Frontier Knowledge] (จัดโดยสมาคมประวัติศาสตร์ ณ มหาวิทยาลัยเกษตรศาสตร์ 28-29 มกราคม, (เอกสารอัดสำเนา), 2532) 65-120.

(the *Ahom*, *Northeastern Thais*, the *Siamese*, *Laotians*, the *Lahu*, the *Kammu*, the *Hmong*, and *Khmers*); third, the chin bone (the *Hmong*, the *Chinese*, *Laotians*, and *northeastern Thais*); fourth, the head (the *Hmong*); fifth, the feet (the *Hmong*, *Khmers*, the *Tai Muong*, and the *Red Tai* in Vietnam); sixth, the lines in the chicken's eyes (*Khmers*); and seventh, the holes in the chicken's thigh bones (the *Ahom*, the *Tai Nue* in Yunnan, the *Chuang*, the *Akha*, the *Lahu*, the *Pu Noi*, the *Hmong*, and all tribes of the island of Hainan). Suwanna Kriengkraipetch³ found that 13 ethnic groups speaking Mon-Khmer languages in Xaekong Districts: the *Tariang*, the *Ngae*, the *Laven*, and the *Alak*, use the chicken entrails in divination. The *Tariw*, the *Ngae*, the *Alak*, and the *Suai* use chicken chin bones, the *Dakkang* use the chicken's bronchi, the *Ngae* use the head and blood of the chicken, and the *Kaseng* use only the chicken blood.

In the Human–Chicken Multi-relationships Research Project (HCMR),⁴ the author found that several ethnic groups in Chiang Rai, including the *Hmong*, the *Lahu*, the *Yao*, the *Lue*, and the *Tai Yai*, use chickens in their divination rituals, especially the *Akha*, who kill chickens most for their divination. The *Akha* use the thigh bones, the head, and the liver in the divinations before starting their journey or requesting important answers from their ancestors. Egg yolks are used to find a location to establish a new community, build a new house, or locate a funeral place.⁵ The divination technique of examining the positions of holes in the thigh bones is performed by the *Akha*,

³ สุวรรณ เกรียงไกรเพชร, 13 เผ่าในลาวตอนใต้ วิถีชีวิตและวัฒนธรรม (กรุงเทพฯ: โครงการวิจัย ภาษาและวัฒนธรรมของชนเผ่าในสาธารณรัฐประชาธิปไตยประชาชนลาว, 2544) 32-512.

⁴ HCMR was a joint study between Thailand and Japan (2004-2007). This project used an inter-disciplinary approach in Humanities, Biology, Ecology and Geography. The author was responsible for the aspect of folklore of the ethnic groups in Chiang Rai Province of Thailand.

⁵ Sukanya Sujachaya and Chomanard Sithisarn, "Significance and Role of the Chicken in the Akha Worldview" *MANUSYA : Journal of Humanities*, No. 9 (2005): 69.

the *Lahu*, the *Yao*, the *Lue*, the *Lua*, and the *Tai Yai* residing in Chiang Rai. This inherited ritual has been passed on from generation to generation. At Ban Huai Nam Khun (บ้านห้วยน้ำขุน), Mae Fa Luang District (อำเภอแม่ฟ้าหลวง), chicken bone divination is still practiced by the *Lua* (*Tai Doi* [ไทยดอย]) and the *Lue* who migrated from Sibsongpanna. However, only the *Lua* have chicken bone divination manuscripts, with 160 diagrams.⁶ Since this manuscript is written in the Lanna alphabet, with some *Lua* language, it is probable that the *Lua* adopted this idea from other Tai ethnic groups.



Figure 1 Chicken bone divination Manuscript from the *Lua*, Baan Huay Nam Khun.

⁶ พลวัฒน์ ประพัฒน์ทอง, ตำราการทำนายกระดูกไก่บ้านห้วยน้ำขุน อำเภอแม่ฟ้าหลวง จังหวัดเชียงราย, ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างมนุษย์กับไก่จากพิธีกรรมและคติความเชื่อในกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ จังหวัดเชียงราย [The Relationship of Human and Chicken from the Ritual and Beliefs of the Ethnic in Chiang Rai], (เชียงราย: โครงการจัดตั้งพิพิธภัณฑ์อารยธรรมลุ่มน้ำโขง สำนักวิชาศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยแม่ฟ้าหลวง, 2549) 25-29.








ลำดับ	รูปกระดูก	ชื่อเรียก	คำทำนาย
93.		มั่งปัดกัน	ค้าขายดี
94.		มั่งเสียวคงละ	โช้ ขวัญหนี
95.		โกม้งปึก	โช้ มีผลิ์ รุ่งลา คำขายดี
96.		สนธิก	(ไม่มีคำทำนาย)
97.		โกส้งม้งด	โช้ผิดประทุบกัน
98.		หล้าปัดกัน	ค้าพิณมาประชิดใกล้
99.		ใบยักมึน กันกอบ	โช้คนเล้าตาย ชื่อโช้ แต่ขายไม่ดี

Figure 2 Example of prediction using chicken's thigh bones from a manuscript.

The Tai ethnic groups are the only groups that have recorded chicken divination in written literature, such as myths, chronicles, and literary works. For example, the rituals of chicken bone divination have been practiced and recorded in myths, chronicles (Buranji) and small texts (Sanji) among the *Tai Ahom*.⁷ Several chicken bone divination manuscripts can be found in the *Ahom* priestly clan.⁸ Renu remarked that these manuscripts are the primary documents indicating the

⁷ เติร์วิล 57.

⁸ Gogoi Puspaddhar, *Tai of North-East India. Dhemaji* (Assam : Chumpra Printers and Publications Ltd, 1996) 40.

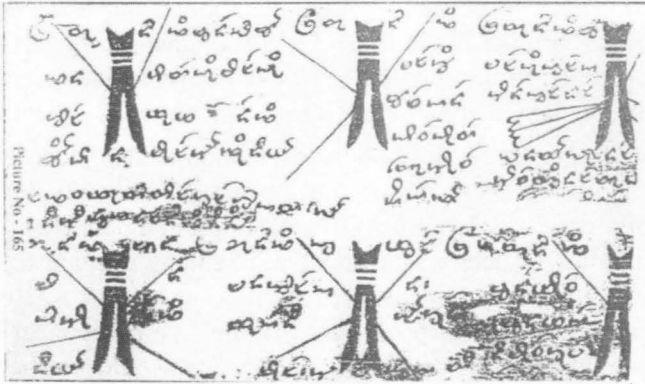


Figure 3 The Ahom Chicken Bone Divination manuscript (from Gogoi Puspadhar, *Tai of North-East India*).

traditional beliefs in divination and forecasting. Chicken bone divination is also a prime factor in decision making. According to *Ahom* history, there were cases where *chaofa* (เจ้าฟ้า), king, could not make decisions, and required chicken bone divination to find the date to start battles, to choose the strategy during the battles, to decide whether a location is suitable for establishing the town, and to foretell the fate of *chaofa* after an accession ceremony. The chicken bone divination was last recorded in the *Ahom Chronicles* in 1800 during the reign of Chao Luang Sue Hing Fa (เจ้าหลวงเสือหึงฟ้า), after which it started to fade out when the *Ahom* adopted Hinduism.⁹ The manuscript Renu studied contains 132 diagrams written in the *Ahom* script, with both the alphabet and the language being that of the *Ahom*.

The Tai Phake (ไทพากะ), residing in Muang Kong (เมืองกอง) and Shintawin Basin in Burma, migrated to Assam, India in 1760. Their chicken bone divination manuscript is called *Phe Kai Luang Fa* (เผไทหลวงฟ้า), written in their own language, which is similar to that of

⁹ เรณู วิชาศิลป์, พงศาวดารไทอาหม เล่ม 1 [*The Tai Ahom Chronicles*], Vol I (กรุงเทพฯ: บริษัท อมรินทร์พริ้นติ้งฯ, 2539) 97-98.

the *Tai Yai*. This manuscript is a part of their horoscopic text, containing 59 diagrams.¹⁰ Similar to the *Tai Lue* in Sibsongpanna, there is *Pap Mo Duk Kai* (ป๊อปหมอดูกไก่), the book of chicken bone divinator, printed in the old *Tai Lue* language in Lanna script, containing 112 diagrams.¹¹

For *Tai Lao*, the chicken bone divination is also recorded in the *Epic of Thao Hung Thao Chueng* (มหากาพย์ท้าวฮุ่งท้าวเจือง) In this epic of *Lan Chang* (ล้านช้าง), Thao Suem (ท้าวซุ่เม) requested defense assistance from Thao Hung. There was a ritual called “liang phi tam (เลี้ยงผีตัม)” or ancestor’s worship and chicken divination by Mo Kai (หมอไก่), chicken master. *Mang Fu* positions came up five times meaning that the war would be long lasting, but the enemy would not be able to take the town.

Renu also noted that the *Tai Zhuang* used to have 18 types of chicken bone divinations. For *Tai Yuan*, there is no chicken bone divination today, although this ritual appears in their literary text called *Chao Suwat* (เจ้าสุวัตร).¹² In *Chao Suwat*, Phya Athit requested Mo Hora (หมอโหรา), an astrologist, and Mo Duk Kai (หมอดูกไก่), a chicken divinator, to foretell Chao Suwat’s fate. The rite was performed by dipping dried chicken bones in water and sticking sharp bamboo into the holes of the bones. This was repeated five times before he foretold Chao Suwat’s fate. Since the divinations were popular among the Tai ethnic groups outside Thailand rather than Siamese, it could be assumed that this belief and the ritual are of the ancient traditional Tai before spreading out to other areas.¹³

The author found that the myths of some ethnic groups are in accordance with the remarks of Renu. This study, therefore, aims to examine the story of the first augury chicken collected from Tai myth and to offer new perspectives on its interpretation.

¹⁰ เตอร์วิล 101-102.

¹¹ เตอร์วิล 105.

¹² เตอร์วิล 92.

¹³ เตอร์วิล 110.

The First Augury Chicken in the Tai Myth

Although several Tai ethnic groups used chickens for divination, only some Tai groups have inherited such divination from the Mao kingdom. These groups are the *Tai (Shan)*, the *Ahom*, and the *Dehong Dai* or *Tai Nuea*, whose myths of origin depict the roles of augury chickens.

Chinese scholars believed that the Muang Mao Kingdom was established around 568 A.D. in the western part of Yunnan and Khai Nan area in the southern part of Yunnan. This kingdom is believed to have developed from the Tien Yeh Kingdom ruled by the ancestors of the Tai in Yunnan and the Tai in Burma. In the Tai myth, the Muang Mao Kingdom is called '*Muang Hlong Mhok Khao Kochamphi* (เมืองโหลงหมอกขาวโกจាំผี)',¹⁴ "*Muang Kosampee* (เมืองโกสัมพี) '*Muang Mhok Khao Mao Luang* (เมืองหมอกขาวมาหลวง)".¹⁵ After the fall of the Nan Chao Kingdom in the 13th century, the Tai of the Mao Kingdom became dominant and disseminated to Upper Burma and Brahmaputra Basin in Assam, India.¹⁶

The *Tai* or *Shan* was the ethnic group that used Tai dialects spreading along three river basins: Kong River or Salween, Kaew River or Irrawaddy, and Dao Phee River or Brahmaputra, which are now separated by the boundaries of China, Burma, and India. Every group called themselves '*Tai*', such as *Tai Phake*, *Tai Khamti*, *Tai Muang Khon*. Their language was called '*Kam Tai*' and the habitat was called '*Muang Tai*'. The history of Tai was recorded in myths and chronicles for each state, recorded in Tai languages such as the *Muang Mao Chronicle* and the *Saen Wee Chronicle*.¹⁷

¹⁴ บรรจบ พันธุเมธา, ตำนานเมืองเมจบบั๊วไตฟ้าเก และ ตำนานอาหม, สมเด็จพระเจ้าพี่นางเธอ เจ้าฟ้ากัลยาณิวัฒนา, ยูนนาน [Yunnan] (กรุงเทพฯ: วัฒนาพานิช, 2529) 219.

¹⁵ หวง ชู่ยฺ คุณ, การค้นคว้าเกี่ยวกับอาณาจักร "สยาม-ไต" โบราณ" [*A Research on Ancient "Siam-Dai" Kingdoms*], รสสุคนธ์ ชันธนะภา, ผู้แปล., (รวมบทความทางประวัติศาสตร์, 10 (ก.พ.) 2537) 148-157.

¹⁶ สมพงษ์ วิทยศักดิ์พันธุ์, ประวัติศาสตร์ไทใหญ่ [History of Tai Yai] (กรุงเทพฯ: สร้างสรรค์, 2544) 117-122.

¹⁷ สมพงษ์ 55.

The *Ahom* was the Tai group that moved from the Muang Mao Luang Kingdom into Assam, India in 1300 A.D. There were myths of creation recorded in *Ahom* script such as *Lik Ko Muang* (ลิกกอเมือง) and *Ahom Buranji* (อาหมบุราณจี).¹⁸ Renu¹⁹ suggested that the *Ahom* should have had their own script before settling down in their kingdom in Assam, India.

Dehong Dai (ไทใต้คง) or *Tai Nuea* or *Tai Khae* were the Tai in China who lived around the Mao River (Shaveli) and along part of the Salween River. The majority are in Dehong, Paosan, Lin Shang and Suemao. Even though the *Tai Nuea* and the Tai shared common early historical documents, the old script of *Tai Nuea* was older than the Tai script.²⁰

The myths used in this study likely appeared in the form of oral narratives before they were written down as chronicles. In this study, the author used the documents that were already translated into Thai. These documents can be divided into seven versions: three versions are from the *Tai (Shan)*, which include the *Tai Yai Chronicle* (N. Elias version), the *Muang Mao Chronicle* (Bunchuay Srisawad version), and the *Myth of Muang Mao* (Phakae version); three versions are from the *Ahom*, which include the *Ahom Myth* in *Ahom Buranji* (Banjob Phandumetha version), the *Ahom Buranji* or the *History of the Ahom* (G.L. Barua version), the *Ahom Buranji* or the *Ahom Chronicle* (British Library version); and one version is from the *Tai Nuae*, which is *Khruea Muang Ku Muang* (เครื่องเมืองกูเมือง)

¹⁸ รณี เลิศเลื่อมใส, ฟ้า ขวัญ เมือง จักรวาลทัศน์ดั้งเดิมของไทย ศึกษาจากคัมภีร์โบราณไทอาหม [*Fa Kwan Muang: Ancient Tai Cosmview from the Ancient Ahom Scripts*] (กรุงเทพฯ: โครงการวิจัยพรรณ, 2544) 29-31.

¹⁹ เรณู วิชาศิลป์ 1.

²⁰ รณี เลิศเลื่อมใส 119.

Story 1. The *Tai Yai Chronicle* (N. Elias version)

This *Tai Yai Chronicle* was printed in Calcutta in 1876, translated into Thai by Prince Narathippraphanphong and published by Khurusapha Business Organization in two booklets in 1962. The story relevant to augury chicken is in the beginning of Book 1.²¹

- In 1111 B.E., Khun Thung Kham (ขุนทุ่งคำ) of the heaven sent his two sons, Khun Lu (ขุนลู) and Khun Lai (ขุนไล), and two astrology masters named Khun Tun (ขุนตุน) and Khun Phun (ขุนพุน), to climb the gold bridge down to the Mao River.
- Khun Tung Kham gave a chicken and a knife to his two sons telling them to kill the chicken with the knife as soon as they arrived at the earth. He also told them to return the knife immediately, and they must eat the chicken's head before giving the chicken to their people.
- The two Khuns forgot to do as they had been ordered. The chicken and the knife then disappeared.
- The two Khuns sent Chao Ti Kan (เจ้าติแกน) or Long Khu (ลองคู) or Lau Wu (เลาหวู), who had devoted himself to be their follower, to bring the knife and the chicken back to heaven.
- Chao Ti Kan came back and told the two Khuns that Khun Tung Kham wanted them to kill the chicken and eat some parts of it. The head of the chicken was given to Chao Ti Kan, and the eyes were given to other followers.
- Chao Ti Kan demanded some reward. The two Khuns, thus, granted him the kingship of Mithila Nakorn.
- Chao Ti Kan became king of Mithila or Yunnan because he ate the head of the chicken. Then he established Muang Phae (เมืองแพ) or Kayae or Sae Luang (แสนหลวง) or Nong Sae (หนองแส) in 1111 B.E. It is believed that Chao Ti Kan was Chinese.

²¹ กรมพระ นราธิปประพันธ์พงศ์, *พงศาวดารไทใหญ่ เล่ม 1 [The Tai Yai Chronicle Book I]* (กรุงเทพฯ: องค์การค้าของคุรุสภา, 2505) 99-101.

Story 2. The *Muang Mao Chronicle* (Bunchuay Srisawad version)

Bunchuay Srisawad narrated the story in a book called *The Tai in Burma*.²²

- Khun Thung Kham (ขุนตึงคำ), the god, gave one chicken and one sword to Khun Lu and Khun Lai before they descended to rule the Mao. The god ordered them to kill the chicken with this sword and offered him the head of the chicken when they reached the earth.
- Both Khuns forgot the god's order; so the chicken and the sword returned to heaven.
- When they remembered the god's order, they sent Chao La Wu (เจ้าลาว) or Ti Kham (ตีคำ) - the *Ahom* call him Chao Lang Khu, their servant, to climb up the ladder to heaven and bring the chicken and the knife back.
- Chao Ti Kam told them that the god was angry and commanded Khun Lu and Khun Lai not to eat the chicken's head, but give it to a servant.
- They all accepted and ate only the chicken meat, and Chao Ti Kam got the chicken's head.
- Because he ate the head of the chicken, Chao Ti Kham became the ruler of Muang Mek Thila (เมืองเมกธิลา), Mithila or China. There, he founded his capital named 'Ka Ye (กเย)' (Boonchuai remarked that it should be Muang Chae Luang [เมืองแจ้หลวง] or Sae Luang [แสนหลวง]).
- Both foolish Khun Lu and Khun Lai ruled only Tai kingdoms and always competed for power.
- Later on, Khun Lu abdicated the throne of Muang Mao and brought his followers to settle in the Southwest. Then, he founded a new capital Muang Kong Muang Yong (เมืองกองเมืองยอง) near U Yu Nam River. That was the Chindawin River, the habitat of *Luk Tai* (ลูกไท) or *Tai Khamti* (ไทคำตี้) today.

²² บุญช่วย ศรีสวัสดิ์, *คนไทยในพม่า [The Tai in Burma]* (กรุงเทพฯ: โรงพิมพ์รามินทร์, 2503). 524.

Story 3. The Myth of Muang Mao (The *Tai Pha Kae* version)

Professor Banjob Phandumetha was told this myth by the villagers of the *Tai Pha Kae* in the state of Assam, India. Then, she narrated the story in a book called *Yunnan*, which is supposed to have plots and themes from G. Chandra Barua's *Ahom Buranji* written in 1930.²³

- When the world was created, there were only human beings and animals. Since there was no ruler, the world was chaotic because the strong bullied the weak. No one lived until they reached their full ages.
- Ya Saeng Fah (ย่าแสงฟ้า), the Wise, had sympathy for the human beings. She went to see Laeng Lon (แล้งหลอน), (the god), with four other elderly: Thao Lao Kae (ท้าวลาวแช่), Thao Nip Ning (เผ่านิปนิง), Thao Muak San (ท้าวหมวกสาน) and Thao Ma Kang (เผ่ามากาง), asking the god to send down his descendant to rule the earth.
- Thus, Laeng Lon sent them Ai Khun Lu (อ้ายขุนลู) and Yi Khun Lai (อีขุนไล), who climbed down the ladder from heaven to Muang Hee Muang Ham (เมืองฮีเมืองฮา) to rule and teach the *Toe Phah* (*Tai Fa* [ใต้ฟ้า]), or *Muang Lum* (เมืองลุ่ม) people.
- The *Lum* people were delighted and built a chamber for the two Khuns as their residence. Ai Khun Lu appointed Khun Lai to rule Muang Mao, Khun Saew to rule Muang Pong, Lakhoi to rule Muang Kae (China), and Tai Pha to rule Muang Yon (Lao).
- God provided one chicken, Kai Saeng Fa (ไก่แสงฟ้า) or the Skylight Chicken, with a lighted comb to use for its bone divination.
- When the chicken was killed, the head was given to Ai Khun Lu in order to become the ruler of the overall kingdom. The wings were given to Ngai Khun Lai in order to help his brother rule the kingdom. The neck was given to Khun Khruea Chao Hua Suek (ขุนเครือเจ้าหัวศึก) in order to watch over the kingdom. The liver

²³ บรรจบ พันธุเมธา 220-221.

was given to the Right Khun in order to cope with important problems. The stomach was given to the Left Khun in order to look after general administration. The feet were given to Chao Phu Joe, or the servant, in order to collect information and report to the ruler. Finally, the meat was given to the people who came under their protection.

- The god taught the ruler to rule people with care and taught them the method of cultivation: such as the way to grow rice in the lowland and rainy season, and the way to grow other crops.

Story 4. The *Ahom Myth* in *Ahom Buranji* (the printed version)

The beginning of this myth is similar to the myth of the *Tai Pha Kae*, but there are differences in naming: Kung Lung, Khun Lai, and Laengdon.²⁴

- Laengdon (แลงดอน) sent Khun Lung and Khun Lai, Thaen Kam's descendants to the earth. He also gave them a chicken, Kai Saeng Muang (ไก่แสงเมือง) or The Luciphorous Chicken of the City, and a sword.
- When they climbed down the iron ladder to the earth, both Khuns realized that they had forgotten the sword and the chicken.
- They asked for volunteers to climb the iron ladder back to heaven.
- Only La Ngu (लगู), the forester, volunteered and asked for a reward to be the ruler of Muang Khae (เมืองแขก) - China.
- Ya Saeng Fa (ย่าแสงฟ้า) or The Skylight Godmother gave La Ngu a message to warn both of them not to eat the chicken leg bones. La Ngu intentionally changed the message by telling Khun Lu and Khun Lai that they and the ruling class should eat the meat and the liver. The head and the legs were forbidden. So they gave the head of the chicken to La Ngu.
- La Ngu therefore became the king of Muang Khae.

²⁴ บรรจบ พันธุเมธา 221.

- Khun Lung (ขุนลุง) and Khun Lai (ขุนไล) had a quarrel because Khun Lai wanted to be a king. Khun Lung then accused him before Laengdon (เลงดอน) or Indra.
- Laengdon cursed Khun Lai and his descendants that they could not stay in power for a long time. Then Laengdon sent Khun Lung to rule Muang Krum Muang Ya (เมืองครุมเมืองย่า).

Story 5. *Ahom Buranji* or *The History of The Ahom* (G.L. Barua's version)

The text is translated by His Serene Highness Prasobsuk Sukasawat and entitled, "*The History of the Ahom*". The translator wrote in the Preface that the original copy was written on the bark of a *sashi* tree.²⁵

- Lengdon (เลงดอน) or Indra required the presence of the god of wisdom, Chao Sing Fa (เจ้าสิงฟ้า).
- Then Lengdon ordered Khun Luang (ขุนหลวง) and Khun Lai (ขุนหลาย), Sing Thao Yen Kai Fa's sons (สิงห์เท้าเย็นไค่ฟ้า), and the grandsons of Chao Ta Kham (เจ้าตากคำ) and Nang Saeng Dao (Nang Saeng Dao [นางแสงดาว] was the sister of Lengdon), with Pu Piksu (ภูิกษุ), to reincarnate to be the rulers on earth in order to keep the world peaceful.
- Lengdon gave them one chicken, Kai Saeng Muang (ไค่แสงเมือง), for divination by observing its beaks, entrails, and legs. For the meat of the chicken, he told them to give it to the *Ahom* people so that the people would be wealthy.
- Lengdon also gave them a piece of embroidered cloth and two drums to beat when there were enemies attacking the kingdom. When the people beat these drums, they would win the war. In addition, the people could beat these drums to ask for rain if they experienced draught. They could also beat these drums to make the sun shine.

²⁵ ม.จ. ประสพสุข สุขสวัสดิ์, *ประวัติศาสตร์อาหม [The History of the Ahom]* (กรุงเทพฯ: กรมศิลปากร, 2536) chapter 1 and 2.

- Khun Luang (ขุนหลวง) and Khun Lai (ขุนหลาย) came down to the earth through an iron ladder.
- But they forgot to bring the Kai Saeng Muang.
- A Langku (ลิงกู) man from a forest volunteered to go to heaven to bring the chicken back, but he wanted to rule Muaug Kae (China) in return.
- Chao Sing Fa commanded Langku to tell the two Khuns not to use the thigh bones of the chicken and to stick a sword in the ground in the center of his sitting place. Chao Sing Fa also prohibited the use of the drum for any other purposes, except for beating in war times, or in the ritual of sacrifice to the gods.
- Langku brought the chicken from heaven and lied to everyone that Chao Sing Fa commanded Khun Luang and Khun Lai to eat the meat and liver of the chicken but not the head and the legs because in the morning the chicken will use his legs to scratch his dung. Langku also told them to give the head and the wings of the chicken to him, as well as the sword and the authority to rule the northern country. He said that if the two Khuns followed his words, they would conquer the world.
- The two Khuns followed the distorted commands. They took the chicken into their palace. Then, they cleaned the thigh bones of the chicken and used such bones for divination.
- The first divination revealed that Khun Luang and Khun Lai would conquer and their enemies would lose.
- The second divination revealed that Khun Luang would have a powerful kingdom, with a large number of elephants and assets.
- On the third time, it was said that Khun Luang would have a great kingdom, but the enemies would have great kingdoms as well.
- For the fourth time, it was predicted that Khun Luang and Khun Lai would be the great leaders leading the kingdom to success.

- There was another divination which revealed that Langku would become the leader of a great kingdom and would expand his land to the peninsula.
- Khun Lai seized the power from his brother by some tricks.
- Khun Luang went back to heaven and told Lengdon the whole story. Finally, Lengdon cursed Khun Lai and his family. Then, Lengdon assigned Khun Luang to rule Man Kru Man Ya (มันครุมันหย้า).

Story 6. *Ahom Buranji* or *The Ahom Chronicle* (the British Library Version).

Renu Vichasilp²⁶ transliterated it and named it, “The Tai Ahom Chronicles Volume 1”. The myth of the world creation appears on pages 1-10, volume 7 of the original copy.

- After the Great Flood, Phi Fa came down from heaven to grow gourd. The gourd burst and became poplar.
- Phi Fa came back and sowed more human seeds. However, there were not enough human beings. Chao Pha Lan (เจ้าผาลาน) came down and continue to sow human seeds.
- Thao Leb Ling (เต่าเล็บลิง) and Thao Wan Saeng (เต่าวันแสง) were sent down to teach man below.
- Laengdon Chao Fa Phaед (แลงดอนเจ้าฟ้าผาด) ordered Thaen’s Nephews (แลน or god), Khun Luang (ขุนหลวง) and Khun Lai (ขุนลาย), together with 80,000 followers, to stay in Muang Ri Muang Ram (เมืองรีเมืองรำ)
- He also gave them “Dap Lang Ban (ดาบล้างบ้าน)” or the destroying village sword and “Klong Lang Muang (คลองล้างเมือง)” or the destroying town drum. They were instructed to respect their wives relatives.

²⁶ เรณู วิชาศิลป์ 41-45.

- Then, they performed chicken divination. Once the chicken was killed, the result showed a good sign. Both Khuns then climbed down the iron ladder to rule Muang Ri and Muang Ram.

Story 7. *Khruea Muang Ku Muang* or the Tai Chronicle

Chao Phraya Thammatae (เจ้าพระยาธรรมเต๋) or Pan Jang Ka (ปานจังกา), a Tai abbot, wrote this story from an oral narration given by the elderly of Nong Mai village, Rui Li District, Yunnan Province. It was written in the Tai language in 1778. Later on, Kong Su Choen, the Tai Muang Khon translated it into Chinese and the Yunnan Printing published it in 1990. Chao Hong Hyin and Sompong Vidhyasakpand translated it into Thai in 1997.²⁷

- 424 years after the death of the Lord Buddha, Chao Fa established a new town at Tapi (ต่าปี).²⁸
- Tod Ta Pong Dynasty ruled the town until 1037 A.D. After King Thammaraj died, there was no descendant; a relative named Mang Po (มังปอ) was invited to rule.
- At that time, in a temple in the town center, a grey chicken uttered in human language three times that “the one who eats my head will become king”.
- The next morning, the abbot ordered a young monk to kill the chicken to worship the Buddha image. It happened that the chicken was without a head. Later, the abbot found out that when the young monk boiled the chicken, the chicken’s head fell into the ash. Being afraid that the chicken’s head was dirty and would not be suitable for worshipping the Buddha, the young monk ate it.

²⁷ จ้าว หง หยิน และ สมพงษ์ วิทยศักดิ์พันธุ์ (ผู้แปลและเรียบเรียง), *เครือเมืองกูเมือง หรือ พงสาวดารเมืองไท [Khruea Muang Ku Muang or the Tai Chronicle]* (เอกสารจัดสำเนา, 2540).

²⁸ It should be Muang Kong.

- The young monk then was sent to serve as an official named Sukha Ming (สุกขามิ่ง), who then brought him to work in the palace.
- Pleasing with his personality, the king decided to consecrate him to be his heir. Later he ruled the Mao Kingdom for 52 years and died in the year 84 B.C. After his death there was chaos, and 22 kings in the young monk's dynasty ruled Mao kingdom until 1415 A.D.

All these seven stories can be divided in accordance with the theme into three types: the *Ahom Buranji* type (stories 3, 4, 5, 6), the *Muang Mao Chronicle* type (stories 1 and 2), and the *Khruea Muang* type (story 7).

The stories in the *Ahom Buranji* type have the same archetypes as the ones in the *Muang Mao* type as following:

1. The heavenly god sent his two descendants equipped with a chicken and a sword /knife to be the leaders of the Tai ethnic group.
2. The god commanded his descendants to kill the chicken with the sword/ knife once they arrived in the world.
3. Since the two heavenly descendants failed to do as they had been ordered, they lost the chicken and the knife.
4. The person who volunteered to bring the chicken back from heaven was from one of other ethnic groups.
5. The god ordered the two descendants to eat the chicken's head in order to rule the kingdom.
6. The volunteer betrayed and ate the chicken's head himself.
7. Finally, the volunteer became the ruler of Muang Khae (China).

The stories in the *Ahom Buranji* type are older than the others because they begin the stories from the creation of the earth and the human beings. The earlier parts of the story seem to be the myth of origin. They also mention *Thaen Kham* (แทนคำ), the archaic god in the belief of some other Tai groups such as the *Zhuang*, the *Tai Dam* (Black Tai), and the *Tai Lao*. The *Muang Mao Chronicle* type-stories, which belong to the Tai in Burma, are considered to take place in the period

of territorial expansion. The stories in the Khruea Mueang type are in the period of the well-settled monarchy in which the dynasty had been consecrated and the belief of religions had become firm. The author found that the stories are similar to the folk legends popularly told and known in Upper Burma. A tale called '*The King Outsider*' which Maung Htin Aung²⁹ has collected in the book entitled *Burmese Folktales*. The tale is also believed to be in the Kingdom of Prome era, which is before the year 1044 A.D. The monk in the tale should have been in Ari sub-division, which is a belief that mixed primitive belief with the idea of Tantra Bhuddism. The monks in the story, therefore, could kill chickens.

One day, an old rooster said, "If someone eats my head, he will be a king". The old monk who owned the rooster heard him but he did not take the rooster's words seriously because he thought that the rooster was a boaster. However, the rooster kept on saying the same statement everyday until the monk wanted to prove whether the rooster's words are true or not by killing the rooster. Then, he commanded his orphan disciple to boil the rooster. While the disciple was boiling the chicken, the chicken's head fell out off the cooking pot to the dirty floor. The disciple then was afraid that the chicken would not be clean enough for the monk. He, therefore, switched the monk's chicken with one of his own. When the monk knew, he thought that his disciple might be destined to become a king; thus, the monk gave his disciples a few more skills. One day, the minister visited this temple, and was impressed with the wisdom and the personality of the monk's orphan disciple. He then took the disciple with him. Later on, the orphan disciple had a chance to work in the palace and he became so favorable to the king that the king decided to consecrate him to be his heir. Finally, when the disciple became a king, he was beloved by the people. But since he did not have royal blood, people called him 'the Outside King' or 'the King Outside the dynasty'.

The story of the rooster who told everybody that his head would enable anyone who ate it to become a king also appears in two jatakas, namely, *Siri Jātaka* (story 284) and *Nigrodha Jātaka* (story

²⁹ Htin Aung Maung, *Burmese Folk-tales* (Calcutta: Oxford University, 1959) 226-227.

445). *Siri Jātaka* is about the luck of man. Siri always had good things in his life because of all the merit he had made in his previous lives. *Nigrodha Jātaka* is about gratitude.

The Interpretation of the Myth: Chicken and Power

The unique nature of this myth, particularly with this group of Tai people, is its involvement with chicken. Why does chicken play an important role in this myth? Where did this group of Tai people get this idea from? Was it from the Chinese or the Indian? Or was the Tai the origin of this myth and disseminated it to other ethnic groups?

According to the biological evidence, zoologists have emphasized that domestic chickens worldwide evolved from red jungle fowls (*Gallus gallus*) which originated in the jungles of Southeast Asia (Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam) 8,000 years ago, before spreading to China (West, B & Zhou, Ben-Xiong cited in *Tori to Hito*). This scientific evidence is in agreement with the archeological evidence from the Han dynasty. The archeological evidence is a square brick plate that has the painting of four sacred mythical animals at each cardinal point namely, The Blue Dragon on the East, The White Tiger on the West, the Black Warrior, Tortoise, and Snake on the North, and the Red Bird of the South. Also, there are inscriptions of eight archaic Chinese characters saying: "*A Thousand of Autumns and myriads of uncountable years, Happiness lasts forever*".³⁰ This brick plate is, therefore, important evidence pointing out that the red bird or red fowl were from the south and they are not a domestic fauna of China.

³⁰ Donald A. MacKenzie, *China and Japan Myths and Legends Series* (New York: Avenel Books, 1986) 161.



Figure 4 The square brick of the Hun Dynasty shows the Red Bird of the South.

Main issues from the interpretation of this myth can be summarized as follow:

1. Kai Saeng (ไก่แสง) or Kai Saeng Fa (ไก่แสงฟ้า) is a fowl brought from heaven.

This means it is a special species that did not exist before, or it can be assumed that Kai Saeng came from some other place. The myth does not state its colour but emphasizes the “light cockscomb (ngon saeng [หงอนแสง])” which shows that it is a cock. The term ‘light (saeng)’ in *Ahom* and *Tai* language means “radiance, precious stones, gem stones, talismans, or wisdom.” Kai Saeng Fa does not only have a red cockscomb, but is also likely to have red feather as *Pue Cho*, the first chicken in the *Akha* myth. The *Akha* myth indicates that the first chicken that

the god gave to the *Akha* was also red, as we can see in the tale called 'Umyae built Chicken Wings' and 'The Chicken Called for the Sun'.³¹ The *Ainu* in Japan also believe that the cock had a celestial birth, sent down from the Creator to investigate the earth. But, the cock dallied so much that it could not return to heaven.³²

2. The Giver Deity and the Teacher of Chicken Bone Divination.

The myths of the *Tai Phae Ke* and the *Ahom* indicate that the Giver Deity was "Laeng Lon", "Lengdon", or "Laeng Don Chao Fa Phaed" and "Ya Saeng Fa Phu Rueng Panya" (Ya Saeng Fa the Wise). According to the *Tai Mao* myth, the giver was "Khun Tueng Kham (ขุนตึงคำ)", but no account of chicken bone divination is mentioned. It is possible that the *Ahom* kept chicken bone divination because it was their practiced rite, as written in chronicles of latter eras. However, this part was cut off later since the *Tai* in Burma were strict Buddhist.

Laengdon (แลงดอน), the archaic god of all *Tai* clans is mentioned only by the *Tai* in Assam.³³ Khun Tueng Kham was mentioned in *Tai* myths.³⁴ Some versions of the myth note that Khun Tueng Kham is Laeng Don. The story of Khun Tueng Kham, whose mother was a Naga, is similar to the Laotian story of Khun Thueng (ขุนทึง). It is also the same story as the story of King U-Thane (พระเจ้าอุเทน) in Buddhist Literature.

Ya Saeng Fa (ย่าแสงฟ้า), who taught people the skill of divination by chickens, only appears in the *Ahom* myths. A noticeable point is that she is a goddess who, according to the

³¹ Sukanya Sujachaya and Chomnard Sithisarn 78.

³² MacKenzie 330.

³³ See รมณี เลิศเลื่อมใส, เลงดอน วีรบุรุษสมัยปรัมปราแห่งอาณาจักรอาหมยุคต้น, สรัสวดี อ๋องสกุล และโยชิยูกิ มาซุฮาร่า, การศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์และวรรณกรรมของกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ไท [Studies of History and Literature of Tai-Ethnic Groups] (2002) 229-331.

³⁴ For further reading see สมพงษ์ วิทยศักดิ์พันธุ์

myth, is distinguished by her wisdom. Ranee Lerdluemsai³⁵ categorizes this goddess in the group of Advisor Gods. B.J. Terwiel³⁶ suggests that Laengdon is the mighty god who set up sacrifice rituals, while *Ya Saeng Fa* is the goddess who passed on the knowledge and taught people in detail. The roles of *Ya Saeng Fa* are interesting because these roles are similar to those of the mother of rice and the mother-earth. *Ya Saeng Fa* represents the goddess with great love and care for human being. In fact, when we consider it from the view point of social development, *Ya Saeng Fa* could manifest some real conditions in ancient society in which women were more important than men.

3. Various parts of augury chicken are relevant to the functions of the leaders in various positions.

The head of the chicken is the most important part, which must be given to the most important person, namely, the god, or the ruler. The chicken's head symbolizes power. Therefore, the fight for the chicken head can be construed to be the fight for power. Evidence of this interpretation can be found in story 7 of the Tai in Yunnan. In both *jātakas*, the person who had eaten the chicken meat also became the ruler. (In *Siri Jātaka*, Siri (luck) of human being was in the cockscomb of the white rooster and it can shift to other positions. Besides, there is a story of two roosters fighting with each other as each of them boasted that their meat would make the eater become mighty. A similar story can be found in *Nigrodha Jātaka*, in which two roosters were fighting and finally the person who ate the rooster meat became the king, as the rooster boasted.) The chicken legs were used for foretelling future incidents that would happen to the ruler and the kingdom. It also involves the knowledge about the world and the universe, which is the knowledge that had to be asked for from the god.

³⁵ รณี เลิศเลื่อนไส 209

³⁶ เตอรวิล 50.

The reason the god commanded people not to eat chicken legs in the myth could be because chicken legs were a channel to communicate with the god. In this respect, chicken thigh bones were the symbol of knowledge and wisdom. Augury chickens, thus, symbolize the power to rule the people and the power to know the future, or the power to know the nature of the world the god granted to the leader or the chief of the tribe. In early periods of each tribe, the chief or the ritual leader was also the person who conducted the rite. When the society had become more complex, this knowledge was kept within some groups of people, especially to the professionals who performed the chicken bone divination or ‘Mo Kai (The Chicken Master)’.

4. The author noticed that chicken legs were relevant to the script of the ancient Tai.

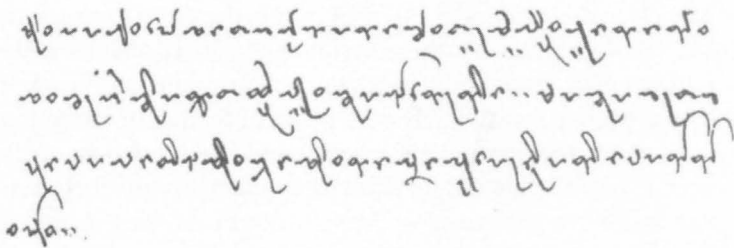


Figure 5 Lik Tho Ngok or Lik Tai Mao.

Tai scholars³⁷ believe that the Tai alphabet was invented before the Tai adopted Buddhism. Originally, when the Tai were ruled by the Nan Chow kingdom, the alphabet was square like the Chinese

³⁷ Sao Kentung, 1954:17 cited in ชาย คำเมือง, อักษรไทใหญ่และพัฒนาการของอักษรไทใหญ่ในพม่า, สรีสวัสดิ์ อ่องสกุล และโยชิยุกิ มาซุ-ฮาร่า, *การศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์และวรรณกรรมของกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ไท* [Studies of History and Literature of Tai-Ethnic Groups], (กรุงเทพฯ: บริษัทอมรินทร์พริ้นติ้งแอนด์พับลิชชิ่ง 2002) 432.

characters, which had eighteen alphabets. In the era of the Muang Mao Luang Kingdom, the script type called '*Lik Tai Mao*' or '*Lik Thua Ngok* (ลิกถั่วงอก)' or Lik of bean sprouts, was used for writing stories of mundane matters, while the script type called '*Lik Yuan*', was used for writing about religious (Buddhist) matters. (Lik Yuan was used in Shan State in Burma since the sixteenth century when Yuan Buddhism was disseminated to Saen Wee city; Lig Thua Ngok, were also called 'Tua Lik Kai Khia (ตัวลิกไก่เขี่ย)' because they were in a long shape and were usually written illegibly. A similar description also appears in Thai phrase as "written as a chicken's scratch".) These two types of scripts were the original scripts of Tai people used by the Tai in Yunnan, Lanna, and Laos; and by the Tai in Burma. Later, Lik Thua Ngok scripts evolved to be Lik Tua Mon, Lik KamTi, and Lik Tai Laeng scripts. As for Yuan scripts, they were developed to be that of the *Khoen* and *Lue*.³⁸ The oldest Lik Tai Mao or Lik Thua Ngok ever found was discovered in the scroll of a manuscript. Tai scholars state that these scripts had square shapes with long tails pointing to the left. This characteristic might have been caused by the writing tools which were made of feather or rabbit hair. In those days, important manuscripts would be written on an animal skin, especially, on a tiger skin. The type of scripts therefore also has another name, *Lik Nang Suea* (ลิกหนังเสือ) or Lik tiger skin. Today, the *Tai Nuea* around the border of Burma - China still use Lik Thua Ngok scripts. If we carefully consider these scripts, we will notice that Lik Thua Ngok look like the scratches of a chicken and some Chinese characters.

B.J. Terwiel suggests that the *Ahom* scripts were adopted from the ancient Mon scripts, which were invented in the twelfth century in the Northern part of Burma.³⁹ These scripts were similar to the scripts of the Tai in Shan State, but the scheme of

³⁸ Sao Kentung 432.

³⁹ เตอรวิล 126.

writing was rather unique. The oldest written evidence is Sao Ngu (Snake Pillar) which has the name of Chao Suea Hom Muang (เจ้าเสือหม่มเมือง), who ruled the area from 1497 to 1539. Terwiel's comments about *Ahom* documents are quite interesting. He says that the *Ahom* documents concerning astrology were the only type of documents that were different from other writings in *Tai (Yai)* language in Shan State. He also states that sometimes he suspects that the only reason *Tai* people invented documents may be because they indulged in astrology.

In the author's view, astrological manuscripts and chicken bones signify the symbolic icons of pictorial scripts. There is a tendency that ancient *Tai* scripts may be pictorial scripts like Chinese characters. If so, chicken thigh bones might be the first type of *Tai* scripts. This assumption would help to explain why chicken thigh bones were recorded in the myth as the key knowledge to unlocking the mystery of the universe and Nature. This could be equivalent to the Pakwa or Pokwuay symbol, the Chinese octagon symbol, which Fusi, a Chinese legendary hero, invented to teach people. Fusi used eight symbols to representing eight natural aspects, namely:

≡≡≡ Tien for the sky	≡ ≡ Khun for the earth,
≡≡≡ Khan for the water,	≡≡≡ Li for the fire,
≡≡≡ Keon for the mountain,	≡≡≡ Choen for the thunder,
≡≡≡ Sun for the wind,	≡≡≡ Tui for the water sources.

Fusi taught people to understand the occurrence and the relationship of these eight natural aspects. If people could understand Nature and benefit from it, they would as wise as angles.⁴⁰ Today, it is widely accepted that Pakwa symbol can teach people how to understand and to deal with natural phenomena.

⁴⁰ จูปิ่นเจ้, ฟูซี ผู้ประดิษฐ์ เครื่องหมายโหราศาสตร์จีน, เทพนิยายจีนโบราณ [*Ancient Chinese Mythology*] (เป่ย์จิง: สำนักพิมพ์ต่างประเทศ, 1985) 125-129.

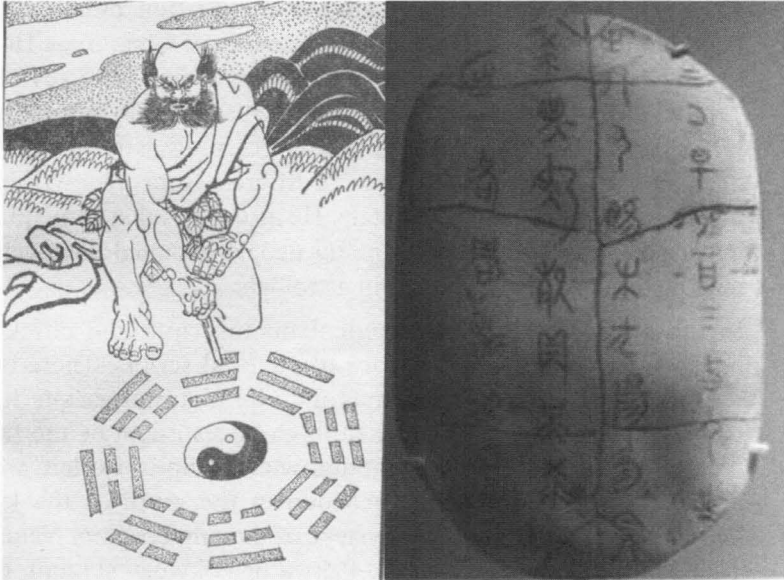


Figure 6 Left: Fusi, a Chinese legendary hero who invented Pakwa, or the octagon symbol; Right: pictograph on a Chinese oracle bone.



Figure 7
Pictograph in *Tai Yai* (Shan)
horoscopic about marriage.

5. Myths have served as historical records about the conflict between Tai people and Chinese people.

The myths have also shown the reasons why Tai people lost their kingdom to the Chinese. There are stories of the trick about the chicken head used by the ancestors of the Chinese (the Khae [ꨀꨣ]), who were differently called in myths as the La Ngu (by the *Ahom*), the forester or Chao Lang Khu, Chao Lao Wu or Chao Tee Kham (by the Tai in Mao), or Chao La Khoi (by the *Tai Pah Kae*). These stories manifest that the Chinese were smarter than the Tai, so they could trick the Tai people, and the reason why the Tai people were defeated was because the Tai had not eaten the chicken head.

Conclusion

The interpretation of these myths enables us to see the importance of the augury chicken in terms of being a symbol of power. The symbolic meaning of the augury chicken includes both the power to rule the kingdom and the power to understand and control Nature. The ruling class is the group of persons who were granted these two aspects of privilege from Heaven since the beginning. But when the ruling power shifted in later periods, the ruling class not only lost the power to control the kingdom, but they also lost the wisdom in interpreting the chicken bones.

Since the chicken bones might be viewed as pictorial scripts, losing the power of chicken bone divination may mean losing the understanding the pictorial scripts among the ancient Tai.

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