

DYNAMICS OF POWER OF SPACE IN THE TAI-YUAN *CHAO LUANG KHAM DAENG* SPIRIT CULT¹

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Abstract

This paper aims to study the dynamics of power relations in the “Chao Luang Kham Daeng”/เจ้าหลวงคำแดง spirit cult of the Tai Yuan people in Chiang Mai and Phayao provinces. In the past, the spirit cult was followed by the rulers of Chiang Mai city. Later on and nowadays, it has been downgraded to be the responsibility of the district level. Therefore, it is interesting to

investigate the arrangement of the spirit cult in contemporary Lanna context.

The research results reveal the declaration of the ritual space and arrangement by various parties, i.e., the state, the community and the villagers. The government supports the budget for the ritual, however, the control and running of the cult is under the power of local people. Local leaders have power in producing and publicizing the discourses of the cult. Some have knowledge of the ritual performance and some have power in the management and the control of the performances including women who also have a certain space in the preparation of the rituals. The spirit cult can thus be viewed as a space for negotiation among various sides: the state, the community, certain local leaders and women, all of whom declare their power in the ritual.

Introduction

¹ This paper is a part of a Ph.D. dissertation in Thai Folklore entitled, “Dynamism of the *Chao Luang Khamdaeng Spirit Cult of Tai Yuan and Tai Lue in Northern Thailand*” submitted to the Department of Thai, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. The author would like to thank The Office of Higher Education Commission for providing ”The Teacher Development Scholarships” for Ph.D. studies and would like to thank Chulalongkorn University, “The 90th Anniversary Of Chulalongkorn University Fund” (Ratchadaphiseksomphot Endowment Fund) and Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University for partially supporting this Ph.D. field research.

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In this paper, the word “cult” is defined as the modes of belief and of rituals that produce narratives and present symbols of the person who is the centre of the belief; a cult is normally not part of the main religion of the society (Niti Eawsriwong 2003: 61).

The objective of this paper is to provide an understanding and to explain the phenomenon of the spirit cult of Chao Luang Kham Daeng among the Tai Yuan people in Lanna (northern Thailand) from an aspect concerning modes of power relationships. The *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cults at Chiang Dao district, Chiang Mai province and Mae Chai district, Phayao province have been selected for case study. This paper analyzes the distribution of the power of the ritual space by the government, the

community and local leaders in the spirit cult. In addition, the paper analyzes the dynamics of the control of the ritual space in the contemporary Lanna context.

Background to the belief and legend of Chao Luang Kham Daeng

Tai Yuan people are one of Tai ethnic group among many in Lanna or in the upper northern region of Thailand. Nowadays, the Yuan seldom address themselves as “Yuan” as in previous days but address themselves as *khon mueang*/ຂອນ ມື້ອງ ‘city people’ instead. They have also named the language used for their communication and writing as *phasa mueang* or ‘mueang language.’ The many explanations from academics can be summed up to explain that the word by which the “city people” have addressed themselves for a long time was likely first used at the start of the Rattanakosin period, during the Renaissance of the Lanna. During the period known as *Keb Paak Sai Saa Keb Kha Sai mueang*/ເກີບຫັກໄສ່ເກີບຫຳໄສ່ມື້ອງ or collecting vegetables in the basket and collecting people into the city, when war captives were herded into the city and became the citizens of Chiang Mai, the Yuan people, as the “real” citizens, decided to address themselves as *khon mueang* in order to separate themselves from the collected and the herded captives. Later, this word became popularly used by other ethnic groups and in other cities when referring to the Tai Yuan people. (Suraphol Dumrikul 1999: 96–105).

Chayan Watthanaphuti (2006: 39) explained that *khon mueang* were the words defining the Tai Yuan ethnic group, who presented their social and cultural relationship in the mode of city patterns.

Khon mueang also separated themselves from the “inferior” ethnic groups, such as the Lua, the Yang (Karen) or the Kha. The way they defined themselves as *khon mueang* had social implications since they were the most powerful ethnic group who were the owners and had the rights to the city land. This definition was also used for ethnic discrimination. However, the definition of the identity of the *khon mueang* has varied according to the social context; therefore, the political and historical background of the power space that was the context of ethnic relationships has been subjected to study for a better understanding (see more details in Chayan Watthanaphuti 2006: 32–73).

According to Tai Yuan belief, the biography of Chao Luang Kham Daeng is detailed in two legends: the *Chiang Mai Pang Doem Legend*/ຄໍານານຈີ່ຍາໄປ່ປາງດົມ (Chiang Mai University Social Research Institute 1994) and the *Suwankhamdaeng Legend*/ຄໍານານສູວັກຄຳແຊັງ or the *Sao Inthakhil Legend*/ຄໍານານສາວິຫຼຸກ (Sa-Nguan Chotisukarat, 1972: 117–160). These legends explain that Chao Luang Kham Daeng was a prehistoric figure who was alive before King Mangrai built Chiang Mai city in B.E 1839. In his past lives, he was born as Uttaracunda, the lord of the swine. Next, he was born as Chao Suwanna Khamdaeng, the son of Phaya Corani. The god Indra needed a representative human to work as a ruler teaching the humans in the Jampu Dvipa who were not keeping to the fives moral precepts of Buddhism. Phra Vissukam volunteered to find the representative. He eventually decided that Chao Suwanna Khamdaeng should take on this duty. So, he transformed himself into a golden deer to induce Chao Suwanna Khamdaeng. During the hunt, Chao Suwannakhamdaeng saw Nang In Lao at Doi Ang Song, where his counsellors also

saw the lotus ponds. They decided to build Lanna city on the low-lying plain of the Ping River and Chao Suwanna Khamdaeng became the first king of this city. At the end of his life, he abdicated and went with Nang In Lao to live in Chiang Dao cave, but his descendants ruled the city for generations. During the reign of Phaya Khrao, the city was ruined and sunk after his citizens ate a white soft-shelled turtle. After Chao Suwannakhamdaeng's death, according to the *Chiang Mai Pang Duem Legend*, the Chiang Mai citizens praised him and placed him as the leader of the guardian spirits of Chiang Mai city (Chiang Mai University Social Research Institute 1994: 40). In another legend, *Phra Chao Lieb Lok Legend/ต้านนาพระเจ้าลีบโลก* 'Legend of the Buddha's Visiting the World,' the *Ang Song Legend/ต้านนอ่างสรวง* and in several versions of the *Chiang Dao legends*, it is claimed that Chao Luang Kham Daeng was the lord of the ogres guarding treasure in the Chiang Dao cave (Phaitoon Dokbuakaew, 2007).

According to the beliefs of the spirit mediums in the upper Northern region of Thailand, the spirit of Chao Luang Kham Daeng was the greatest among all of the spirits of Lanna. He had a network of many important spirit followers⁴. Chaladchai Ramitanond (2002: 38–39), in his book, *Phii Chao Nai* (*Chao Nai Protective Spirits*), said that when the spirits in Chiang Mai province were ranked in hierarchy, Chao Luang Kham Daeng was placed on the fifth-level (all together there are nine levels), the same level as other most important Lanna legendary spirits. In the hierarchy of

possessing spirits, only spirits from the first to the fifth level will descend to possess the spirit medium in order to help the people and the spirits in the fifth level are considered to be the highest in the hierarchy.

Although the origin of the belief of the Chao Lang Kham Daeng spirit in Lanna is not specifically discussed, it is possible that this spirit originally belonged to the Lua, the indigenous tribe of the area. The Lua in Chiang Dao city have a belief in the guardian spirits residing in the Chiang Dao cave. It was told that later on when King Mangrai built Chiang Mai city, he gave Chiang Dao city to his son, Phaya Chai Song Khram, to rule. Since then, the belief in the guardian spirits residing in Chiang Dao cave has been continuously preserved and transmitted in the Lanna Kingdom.

According to the Yonok Chronicle/ พงศาวดาร ใจบก (Phaya Prachakitkorachak 1972: 277), Phaya Chai Song Khram had three sons. His elder son, Thao Saen Phu Rajabut, was born at Wiang Chiang Dao. When his wife went into labour, they gave offerings to the deities and the guardian spirits of Chiang Dao city. Moreover, according to the *Mueang Chiang Mai Legend/ต้านนเมืองเชียงใหม่* and the *Fifteen Dynasties Legend/ต้านนสิบห้าราชวงศ์*, during the reign of Chao Sam Fang Kaen, he protected the city from enemies by providing offerings to the guardian spirits of Chiang Saen city and of Chiang Mai city, including the guardian spirits along the path from Chiang Mai to Chiangrai and Chiang Saen (Venerable Teacher Sobhonkvivadhana, 2007: 60). Accordingly, the guardian spirits at Doi Chiang Dao would be given offerings during this vital ritual, because Chiang Dao city was built by Phaya Mangrai as a rest stop between Chiang Mai and Chiangrai.

⁴ Interview, Sukham Kukkong, 16th June 2008

According to certain foreign records, in *A Half Century among the Shan and Laos and Autobiography*, Daniel McGilvary (2002: 228–229) noted that villagers around Chiang Dao hill area believe in the spirit residing in Chiang Dao cave and that this spirit belongs to the Lua. Also, it was noted that Phra Chao Kaviroros, the King of Chiang Mai at that time, did not allow foreigners to build a bridge over the Ping River in the area of Chiang Dao city for fear that it would offend the spirit in the cave.

Another foreign record with reference to the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit of the Chiang Dao cave was later evident in *A Thousand Miles on an Elephant in the Shan States* by Holt S. Hallet (2000: 323–325). Hallet took a journey to Chiang Dao in 1986 and wrote in his note that the Chiang Dao cave was on the path to the Dewa (deity) city and the Yaksa (Ogre) city, both of which were ruled by Chao Luang Kham Daeng, or Phii Luang Kham Daeng ‘Kham Daeng, The Great Spirit’ and that he was the guardian spirit of Chiang Mai city.

According to the belief in the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit, he was praised and promoted from being a spirit of the Lua indigenous group to be the leader of the Chiang Mai guardians spirits having a higher status than other city guardian spirits, over both the king spirits and the local spirits, such as Phaya Mangrai, Phra Chao Saen Phu, Phra Chao Kue Na, Chao Phraya Sam Fang Kaen, Thao Lok, Thao Yod Chiangrai, Phii Pu Ya and Phii Pu Sae Ya Sae.

The beginning of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit offering ritual was in the reign of King Kavila, the period of the

city’s restoration after having been a Burmese colony for nearly two hundred years. During the ritual, the Inthakhil pillar was erected at Jediluang temple and it was there that the pillar worship ritual was held as well. Moreover, the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit was invited to take possession to prophesize the city’s future. Every year, the Chiang Mai rulers presented offerings to the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit at Jaeng Sri Phum/ແຈ່ງສີພູມ ‘the northeastern city wall corner.’ Other spirits in the city that were under the power of the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit who would join the ritual as well (Sa-Nguan Chokskurat 1969: 93). Obediently, the city rulers in the following generations had to follow this tradition strictly. However, after Chiang Mai city became a part of Siam during the early Rattanakosin period, this ritual was not performed.

Later, when the government tried to modernize Chiang Mai city to become the centre of the Northern region, there were tremendous social and economical changes. Once the spirit ritual was not performed as often as in the past, the ritual for Chao Luang Kham Daeng almost vanished. Whereas in Chiang Dao city where sacred places, such as the Chiang Dao cave and the Chiang Dao Hill are located, the related belief, legend and the worship of Chao Luang Kham Daeng were passed on and preserved by the local people. Such phenomena reflect a change in the belief in the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit whose status was downgraded from the city guardian spirit to be only a local guardian spirit.

Contemporary Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit cult: Case studies at Chiang Dao District and Mae Chai District

Spirit cult of Chao Luang Kham Daeng at Chiang Dao District, Chiang Mai

Since Chiang Dao district is directly connected to the belief of Chao Luang Kham Daeng, this district can be considered an important area for studying the belief, which is still strong in that area.

Shrines of Chao Luang Kham Daeng in Chiang Dao district



Figure 1: Shrine at Ban Tham village



Figure 2: Shrine at Kaeng Pan Tao village



Figure 3: Shrine at Ban Pa Sak Chiang Dao village



Figure 4: Shrine at Mae Na village

There are four shrines of Chao Luang Kham Daeng in Chiang Dao district, i.e., at Kaeng Pan Tao/แกลงปันเตี๊ย/ village, Mae Na/แม่นะ village, Ban Chiang Dao/บ้านเชียงดาว village and in front of Chiang Dao cave, Ban Tham/บ้านถ้ำ village. The spirit-offering rituals for Chao Luang Kham Daeng are held at these four shrines, during the Songkran festival (Thai New Year), however on a small scale. The grander

scale of the annual spirit offering ritual for Chao Luang Kham Daeng is held on the full moon day in the 9th month at Ban Kaeng Pan Tao.

The grand spirit offering ritual for Chao Luang Kham Daeng normally has three procedures. The first procedure is to present offerings to Chao Luang Kham Daeng and to worship the spirits of the Chiang Mai rulers, deities and guardians in the Brahmanistic style. The next procedure is the ritual of “extending the life of the city,” considered as a kind of Buddhist ritual, held for the fertility of the crops because the villagers believe that through this ritual the deities and the guardians in heaven will bless them and fulfil their needs. The last procedure is the time for the spirit medium possession when the spirit medium as the representative of the spirit will perform a Lanna traditional dance, *fon phi*/ฟ้อนพี.

Spirit cult of Chao Luang Kham Daeng at Mae Jai district, Phayao province

In Mae Jai district, Phayao province, the Tai Yuan people consider that the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit has two roles; the role of guardian spirit and of local hero spirit. A monk named Venerable Teacher Sobhonbadhanotom, the abbot of Photharam temple in Tambol Srithoi, Mae Jai district and the deputy ecclesiastical provincial governor of Phayao province, is the person who has enriched the value of the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit by connecting the spirit's narrative expressed in the *Chiang Mai Pang Duem Legend* and the *Suwannakhamdaeng Legend* with information on Phayao province history which declares that this spirit, or Khun Kham Daeng as his name was when he was alive, was the son of Phaya Ngam Mueang, the great king of Phayao city.

Khun Kham Daeng came to the throne in B.E. 1821. His son, Khun Kham Lue, came to the throne after Khun Kham Daeng passed away. In B.E. 1881, King Kham Fu, the king of Chiangsaen city, defeated Khun Kham Lue, so, Phayao city has become counted as a part of the Lanna kingdom since then (Phra Rajvisuddhisobhon 1984: 114–116). This legend has resulted in the perception of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng legend* among the Tai Yuan people in Mae Jai district to be different from that of the Tai Yuan in Chiang Mai province.

According to *The Biography of Chao Pho Luang Kham Daeng* (2008:1–4) published on the occasion of the ritual of pouring liquid gold to mould the Chao Pho Luang Kham Daeng statue on 20th January 2008 by Venerable Teacher Sobhonbadhanotom, Chao Luang Kham Daeng, the son of Phaya Ngam Mueang was the king of Phayao city. After construction of Chiang Mai city had been completed, with the cooperation of King Ramkhamhaeng, the king of Sukhothai city, and Khun Mengrai, the first king of Chiang Mai city, Khun Ngam Mueang returned to Phayao city. Later, he abdicated and went to live in Mueang Nguen. Then his son, Khun Kham Daeng, came to the throne. When the Tai Yai (the Shan) attacked Phayao city and robbed the people, Chao Luang Kham Daeng and his troop came to guard the city borders with all kinds of weapons; this area is Chiang Dao city today. Here, Chao Luang Kham Daeng met Chao Chom Devi, the beautiful lady in the golden deer figure who came to seduce him. Passionately, he followed her into the Chiang Dao cave. That night, she transformed herself into a woman and had an affair with him. Ever since they passed away, their spirits are believed to have resided in this cave.

The *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* new narratives were published for the public from the collective memory of local history among the villagers and several kinds of *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* amulets were sold to help increase the spirit's sacredness and make him better known. He became the spiritual centre for the local people. Whenever the people need help, they will go to the shrine and make a votive prayer; or whenever they undertake any activities, they always go to the shrine and light joss sticks of telling or asking permission from the spirit.⁵

Shrines of Chao Luang Kham Daeng in Mae Jai district



Figure 5: Shrine at Ton Phueng village



Figure 6: Shrine at Photharam temple

There are two *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* shrines in Mae Jai district. One is at Ton Phueng/ตันผึ้ง village, Srithoi sub district/ตำบลศรีที่อุบล and the other one is in Photharam temple which is the main temple of Srithoi sub district of Mae Jai district. In Ton Phueng village, spirit offering rituals are held three times a year at the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* shrine. The first is on the 13th waxing moon day of the 5th month (3rd lunar month), the second, is also on the 13th waxing moon day, of the 7th month (5th lunar month). The rituals held on these two occasions are not as grand as the third. The ritual committees bring only vegetarian food to present to the spirit at the shrine; a small group of villagers come to join the ritual. In comparison, the third ritual held annually on the 13th waxing moon day of the 9th month (7th lunar month), is a grand ritual in which a large number of the villagers in Mae Jai district and from other provinces who respect *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* come to participate.

The ritual is held over two days. The first day is for preparation; the ritual committees set the ritual place and prepare the objects needed for the ritual. The second day is for performing the ritual; the villagers who have made a vow to *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* will come to give an offering. From the early morning, they will make and bring offerings, such as pork, chicken, boiled eggs, water, young coconuts, flower, joss sticks, and candles, to the shrine committees in order to prepare the food to present to the spirit. Villagers who do not make a vow will bring mats, pillows, and the clothes of their family members to place on shelves beside the shrine to be a part of the objects used in the ritual. In doing so, villagers believe that their family members will be happy.

⁵ Interview, Po Wongkameng, 25th May 2009

When all of the “food offerings” are presented to the spirit of Chao Luang Kham Daeng, *pho mo* ‘the ritual practitioner’ will start the ritual. Then there will be a break to make sure that Chao Luang Kham Daeng has received all of the offerings and that break is often until noon. During the break, the sword dance, the spear dance and Lanna music are performed to entertain the spirit. At noon, the *pho mo* will measure a stick, this procedure is called *waa mai* and it is to ask whether the spirit has already received all of the offerings. If it has, a gun is fired as a signal to the villagers who come to take home their offerings. Some of the villagers may donate their offerings to make dishes to eat together, then comes the end of the ritual.

As for the ritual at the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* shrine in Photharam temple, it is held on the same day as the ritual held at Ton Phueng village, however, there are only fruit, flowers, incense and candles offered to the spirit.

The dynamics of power relations reflected in the spirit cult

In the past, the ritual of Chao Luang Kham Daeng was a cult of Chiang Mai city held by the king or the governor. Sa nguan Choksukarat (1969: 93) says that during the ritual of worshiping the Inthakhil pillar of Chiang Mai city, the local fiddlers, a spear dance, a sword dance, presented to the guardian spirits, were performed. The city guardian spirits, Chao Luang Kham Khiew and Chao Luang Kham Daeng, were invited to possess the mediums in order to prophesy the city's future. If the prophecy was not very good, the governor would hold another ritual to eliminate the future harmful effects.

However, the tradition of worshiping the Inthakhil pillar has not been held since the East Asia War or the Pacific War (A.D.1941–1945), whereas the grand *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit-offering ritual has been held every year by the governor at the northeastern corner of the Chiang Mai city wall. Other spirits under the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit would descend to join the cult as well. Holding this tradition has been the essential duty of rulers in the following generations who have strictly kept performing it, or else the city will be in trouble.

This belief demonstrates that the performance of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* cult was, in the olden days, meaningful and essential in legitimatizing the right and power of rulers. When the Lanna kingdom became a part of the Thai state, the power system of the Chiang Mai governors decreased. The cult thus became less popular and was eventually no longer held; however, the belief in the spirits has deeply persisted and is still communicated among Chiang Mai people.

When Chiang Mai became a large and modern city, many things changed. The *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* cult of Chiang Mai city was not held, so, the spirit became neglected and forgotten. However, the Chiang Dao people, who live in the sacred place connected with the belief and legend of Chao Luang Kham Daeng, have preserved and transmitted the belief and also consistently adhered to the local *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit offering cult.

In the contemporary Lanna context, the arrangement of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit ritual at Chiang Dao and Mae Chai is interesting to analyze in terms of the role of power distribution and the

power relations among the various parties involved, i.e., the government, the community, the local leaders, women and the villagers in general.

The state, the community and villagers: the space of power in the ritual

Recently when the Thai state through the officers of the Chiang Mai city realized the importance of traditional Chiang Mai culture, it helped revive and transmit some cults of Chiang Mai, such as the Inthakhil pillar worship, although not every ritual procedure is performed as in the past.

In Chiang Dao, the state has tried to exercise its power by sponsoring the ritual of Chao Luang Kham Daeng, providing the budget for constructing the statue and the shrine of the Chao Luang Kham Daeng and also sending government officials to preside over the ritual. However, the implementation and the procedure of the ritual are within the power of the Chiang Dao community and villagers. Accordingly, in Chiang Dao, the negotiation of power expression between the state and the villagers can be seen in the cult space.

The villagers of Chiang Dao say that the spirit offering ritual at the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* shrine has been held traditionally and annually by the villagers in the 9th month (June), whereas the ritual held by the Mae Na sub-district Administrative Organization, a local state organization in Chiang Dao district, only started since 2006. The ritual in the year 2006 was held twice. The first held in June was for the celebration of the establishment of a new shrine; the former shrine becoming a multipurpose pavilion and the place for ritual preparation and as a rest stop for the mediums during the period of the cult. In December, the statue

of Chao Luang Kham Daeng was invited to reside in the new shrine. In the following year, the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult was held in the 9th month. The rituals of preserving the 11th Chiang Mai city door and Chiang Dao city have been held since 2006 with budget support from Chiang Dao district and the Mae Na sub-district Administrative Organization.⁶

Participant observation during the annual spirit offering ritual at the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* shrine in Kaeng Pan Tao village during 2008–2009, it can be seen that the district tried to hold the ritual in a grand manner. The district, as an agent of the state, publicized it widely and presented the ritual as the district ritual. The Chiang Dao district chief officer presided over the ritual and a great number of government officers joined it, however, not many villagers were present during the preparation of the ritual. Villagers did not really appreciate the help from the state officers since they thought that people outside the community knew nothing about the ritual.

While the ritual in Chiang Dao district reflects some kind of negotiation over the ritual space by the state, the community and the villagers, in Mae Jai district, the control of ritual arrangements is in the power rather, of the local villagers.

Mae Chai villagers mutually establish the shrine and ritual committees. The duties in the ritual preparation are allocated to the people in the community. The shrine

⁶ Interview, Phattra Suphattrasuwan, 3rd June 2009

committees are divided into two groups. The first group is in charge of running the annual ritual. It includes, *khun hong*/խնໂຮງ, the chair of the ritual, who is required to give the orders, to control, to supervise and to coordinate with other villagers. The *saen nang suei*/ແສນໜັງສື່ອ, the position of secretary, is responsible for advertising the ritual. The *hua khan kao*/ໜ້າຂັນເກົ່າ, the head of the ritual preparation, is responsible for all the objects to be used in the ritual. The *khun heed*/խນເສີດ, the ritual practitioner, performs the annual ritual. The *hok noi*/ຫອກນ້ອຍ kills all the pigs and hens brought to him by the villagers who want to make a votive offering. These duties have been handed down from their ancestors through their descendants for many generations and can not be neglected.⁷ Another group of committees, chosen and changed depending on the appropriateness, is responsible for the income and budget concerned with the ritual and shrine. The income is from donations and the making of votive offerings. The budget pays for the shrine restoration and for the cost of food and beverages consumed during the period of the cult. The committees inform the villagers of the details of income and budget every year.⁸

In Mae Jai, the villagers' participation in the ritual can be considered to be the policy of the community. Forming a group as the local ritual authority can be viewed as a community technique in constructing the power to control the population in the community. The result of this power not only helps strengthen the community without depending on management by the state but also resists the government's

reaping the benefit from the community. Noticeably, even though the ritual is not publicized as broadly as in Chiang Dao district, a large number of people come through faith and by word of mouth to join the cult. Moreover, the spirit mediums are selected only from those who live in the community; spirit mediums from outside the community are not allowed to join the cult.⁹

The ritual performance is the representation of the power relationship between the state and the community. The ritual has its vital indispensable component in the symbolic statue functioning as the political representative of the power of the state in the early period, before the move to the era of localism (the villagers and the local fund). This can be seen through the various Chao Luang Kham Daeng statues.

The idea of building human monuments in Siam started in the Ayutthaya period. Mainly, it was related to the belief in Buddhism. Later, during the reign of King Rama IV, Siam was modernized along the lines of Western countries. The new idea of building statues of living people became evident in this reign when the King ordered moulding of his statue and its dispatch to Emperor Napoleon III after the French emperor had sent him statues of himself and his empress. During the reign of King Rama V, statues of both dead people and living people were built. In the reign of King Rama VII, there was a change from royal convention to state convention. Many monuments of important national figures were built. After the revolution in Thai politics in B.E. 2475 (A.D.1973), the statues of

⁷ Interview, Lek Ang-ing, 13th May 2010

⁸ Interview, Inkaew Jaiprom, 13th May 2010

⁹ Interview, Po Wongkameng, 25th May 2009

national historical figures, many of them ordinary people, such as the Thao Suranari monument in Nakhon Ratchasima province, or the Bang Rajan heroes monument in Sing Buri province were built to declare their courage (Saipin Kaewngamprasert 1995: 200–202).

State policy is applied consistently. The government supports local people in the budget for the construction of many local historical-figure monuments. Accordingly, the local people give importance to local heroes. Therefore, the idea of building monuments has been introduced from the centre to the locality, as a result, we can now see a large number of the monuments of local leaders and heroes from history and legends.

The state policy of local hero statue construction matches the thought system and belief of local people in making statues of the ancestors. Since the concept of monument construction is immensely popular, huge shrines and statues are increasingly being built. According to information from interviewing the elderly who have lived in the community for a long time, they say that *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* shrine in the past was a small shrine made of wood only used by the villagers for worship. The *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* statue and the huge shrine as seen at the present time were constructed later.

The *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* statues in some shrines, such as at Kaeng Pan Tao village, were built with support from the government, who also paid for the grand celebration of this statue; whereas the statues of this spirit in many shrines, such as at the Chiang Dao cave and in Mae Chai district, were built with the cooperation of local funds and the

villagers who raised funds and collected money from the annual spirit offering ritual. Several statues of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* are not only to remind us of his benevolence but are also the symbol of the cult reflecting sacredness, a fact easily noticed by the garlands, flowers, incense, candles, offerings, and sacred offerings in his hands and around the statue. These objects are from the votive prayers and votive offerings of believers.

Statues of *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* are not found inside some shrines which are still temporary shrines or ancient spirit houses, such as the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* shrine at Mae Na village and at Pa Suk Ngam village. This is because a grand annual ritual is not held there as in other communities and the villagers do not have any way of raising funds.

To sum up, the role of the Chiang Mai city rulers in the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult in the early period and the role of the local community in recovering and spreading the cult in later periods reflects the dynamics of power of the cult arrangement. The state and the local community may have seen the importance of the cult as a strong and efficient power in their hegemony and a way of legitimization in order to control and govern their people, to make them remain loyal and approve of the power of the superior, the state.



Figure 7: *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* statue at Chiang Mai



Figure 8: *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* statue at Phayao province

However, power does not stand still but can move and be transferred. It can be seen that, previously the Chiang Mai city governors held the ritual to legitimize their power but today the ritual is held by the villagers. The ritual is a tactic of local people in forming social networks and thus has other kinds of effects on the community. Even though later the state tried to control the ritual, the state's role and power could only be realized in some parts of the ritual, not with the whole. The idea of building the statues of important

figures in the cult started with the royal convention before being stressed as a practical policy of the state convention; finally the statues have become managed under the power of the local people.

The role of local leaders in promoting the knowledge of the cult

The *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult is considered to be a space of power declaration by the local people. Most of the ritual participants are villagers in the community who are faithful and hope to depend on the sacredness of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit. In both Mae Jai and Chiang Dao, there are certain villagers who have had a leading role in establishing the narratives about *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult and in organizing and publicizing the ritual.

In Mae Jai, there is a monk who can be considered to be the local leader in establishing knowledge about *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult. The monk who has this role is called *Luang Pho Mae Chai* (Venerable Mae Chai) by the villagers. His monastic name is Sobhon Bhadhanodom and he is the deputy ecclesiastical provincial governor and also the abbot of Photharam temple in Tambol Srithoi, Mae Chai district. He is a learned man. He researched and publicized the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng*'s biography.

Data from interviewing the local people reveals that previously villagers could not fully explain exactly who *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* was and where he was from and they only knew that he was the local guardian spirit. However, after the abbot publicized the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng*'s biography, the knowledge became more established. Moreover, villagers also said that the abbot had a statue of *Chao Luang*

Kham Daeng made at Chiang Dao and also held a ritual inviting the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit from Chiang Dao cave to Mae Chai.¹⁰

In addition, the abbot, in co-operation with his disciples, had an important role in building the shrine of Chao Luang Kham Daeng in Photharam temple in Mae Chai in 2008. The reason why the abbot built the shrine of Chao Luang Kham Daeng was because he believed that his health would recover if he built the shrine for Chao Luang Kham Daeng in the area of the temple. Moreover, it was suggested that the abbot visit the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit in the Chiang Dao cave. Therefore at the end of the year 2007, he made the journey to the Chiang Dao cave. The budget for the shrine construction was raised by selling propitious objects concerning the Chao Luang Kham Daeng spirit, such as auspicious coins, tiny statues and *ta krut* amulets (tiny rolled metal amulets inscribed with magic words). The construction of the statue and the shrine was completed in 2008, and its grand celebration was held later.¹¹

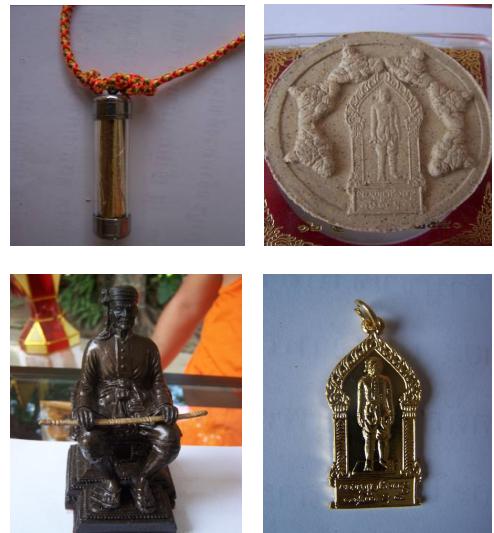


Figure 9: Several kinds of auspicious amulets relating to the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* of Photharam Temple, Mae Chai District, Phayao Province

In Chiang Dao district, the person who has a very important role as a Brahmanistic ritual practitioner in the spirit cult of Chao Luang Kham Daeng is an ex-policeman named Rewat Kittiputthakorn. Since he is a Buddhist, not a real Brahman, he does not call himself a *moh phram* (Brahman specialist) but a *bhudhacarya* (Buddhist specialist) instead. He is like a *pu jan*, a northern Thai word for one who is a knowledgeable Buddhist ritual practitioner. He has been hired to perform the ritual in Chiang Dao district and surrounding districts.¹² He has long been a ritual performer for Chao Luang Kham Daeng. He knows the legends and the history of Chiang Dao and Chiang Mai cities. He has also collected, written about and publicized the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng legend* and told the story to local people

¹⁰ Interview, Po Wongkameng, 25th May 2009

¹¹ Interview, Venerable Sobhon Bhadhanotom, 25th May 2009

¹² Interview, Rewat Kittiputthakorn, 16th June 2008

on the annual *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit offering day. Most of the villagers say that they did not know the biography of this spirit before but only knew the simple fact that he was a spirit in Chiang Dao cave. They know better about this spirit after listening to Mr. Rewat, the ex-policeman. Mr. Rewat has also performed the ritual of reciting the incantations to consecrate *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* amulets for the local people to worship.

The roles of these two people, the abbot and the ex-policeman mentioned above, are similar in the sense that they have researched, assembled, and publicized the history of *Chao Luang Kham Daeng*. They have also launched symbolic objects concerning the spirit. Both the legend and the symbolic objects are the necessary kind of knowledge that helps legitimize and preserve the cult. Considering the statuses of the monk and the policeman in the ritual contexts, they are local cultural personnels who have important roles in their communities. Even though they do not have political power in authority like government officers, they have religious and cultural power. More importantly, they are accepted by the local people.

The abbot has been considered a social developer and a devotee of social activities, which he has done consistently for a long time. He has thus been praised and received many rewards, certificates of honour and honorary awards from many authorities (Photharam temple 2008: 19–21). Mr. Rewat Kittiputthakorn is a local learned man, knowledgeable in local history. Their roles as religious leaders and local men of wisdom together with their statuses as inner persons have resulted in that causes their power and role concerning the presentation of discourses of the spirit cult to be well accepted. This

has also helped present a good image of the spirit cult and has increasingly convinced the local people of the cult which corresponds with Foucault's concept that "whatever those in power say, is right and is knowledge" (Michael Foucault 1983 cited in Teerayut Bunmee. 2008: 178–179).

When one considers the role of the abbot in the spirit cult in the frame of Buddhism, which is the national religion of Thailand and is supported by most authorities and the government, his involvement seems a strange irony. This is because most of the discourses of spirit cults are considered negatively by society, often being seen as deceiving people, particularly the many spirit-medium cults, the Maitreya, the Future Buddha cult, etc. (Suriya Samuttakup 1996: 18–24). These cults focus on spirits, magic and supernatural powers; they are against the Buddhist teachings.

At the present time, Thailand has been modernized; her agricultural society has become industrialized. The lifestyle of Thai citizens, including those of the northern Thai people, have started to change. Scientific knowledge and the worldview have influenced Thai society. This has caused some knowledge systems to change and vanish, such as the productive system for self-sufficiency, and the relationship system between family and community. Given the fact that Thailand has been modernized in contrast the belief in supernatural powers and spirit worship are still strongly adhered to in Lanna society.

Studies by many academics concerning the belief in spirits in Lanna society over nearly four decades have presented new aspects in the study of the Lanna tradition

and culture concerning spirits. These studies, such as those of Anan Kanchanapan, Prakong Nimmanahaeminda, Chaladchai Ramitanont, Shigeharu Tanabe and others (Narumon Hinshiranon. 1998), point out that the belief in supernatural powers and spirit cults has persisted and functioned continuously in Lanna society. The study of Chaladchai Ramitanont (2002), as an example of the studies in this group, states that the Lanna worship for the protective spirits is an example of the spirit worship that normally exists in popular religions, so one can see a co-existence between spirit cults in any Buddhist and Hindu societies. This is because spirit cults can fulfill both the spiritual and material needs of people in society. This is the reason why the worshiping of the legendary hero spirits still exists in modern Lanna society.

The existence of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult within the Buddhist context in Lanna reflects the plurality of the Thai religious system, which is a combination of the ancient-indigenous local power and the new religion, i.e., Buddhism. This combination becomes a knowledge of the acceptance of the dominant discourse as applied reasonably to local knowledge, leading to a strengthening in the power of the recessive discourse and becoming the device to negotiate with the dominant discourse and preserve the cult. For example, knowledge of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult was used as the power to resist the installation of cable cars on the Chiang Dao Hill in Chiang Dao district, the local people giving the reason that this installation would disrespect the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit. Another example is when the fashion of *Jatukamramtep* amulets was popular, the spirit cult also made a religious object of

Chao Luang Kham Daeng in combination with the figure of *Jatukamramtep* and sold this version of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* amulet to the local people.

The role of women and the transmission of power in the spirit cult

In *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult, both in Chiang Mai and Phayao provinces, the role of women in the transmission of power in the cult is similarly expressed. Women's power or women's space is seen in the role of the ritual guide and as possessing knowledge about the details of the objects used in the ritual.

In the case of the Tai Yuan community in Chiang Mai, Mrs. Patta Supatrasuwan is the person who prepares the objects used in the ritual every year. She has written a manual explaining clearly the objects used in the ritual and also the ritual procedures. She says that she was given this duty by her grandmother, the only spirit medium of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit. After her grandmother's death, there was no medium for the spirit. She had the duty of welcoming local people who came to join the cult, because her house was near the shrine which was the place for performing the ritual.¹³

In the case of the Tai Yuan in Phayao, Mrs. Po Wongkameng, 84 years old, has a role as the *Hua Khan Kao*. She was given this duty by her mother. She has helped collect all the objects used in the ritual for over forty years. She says that her family performed this duty because once, before being moved to be located in the public area nowadays, the shrine, which was just

¹³ Interview, Patta Supatrasuwan, 3rd June 2009

a tiny wood shrine, was situated in an area of her house.¹⁴ She is the only woman who is allowed on to the stage of the shrine. On the day of the ritual, a seat in front of the stage is set specifically for her. The local people respect her. If anyone wants to know in detail about the ritual's procedure or the objects for making a votive prayer and a votive offering to the spirit, they will come to ask her.

During the ritual preparation, the roles of women and men are divided. Women prepare the objects used in the ritual, whereas men provide the labour for the ritual, for example, killing sacrificial animals or playing music during the ritual. However, some duties such as cooking for the feast are a co-operation between both sexes.

The transmission of power in spiritual guiding and in carrying the knowledge of objects used in the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit-offering cult is the same as the transmission of power in the ritual relating to the Lanna ancestral spirits, which is mainly through the matrilineal line. The expression of power of each gender during the ritual is a compromise between women and men. This is similar to the study the Meng (Mon) Spirit Dance (ໜົນເມື່ອງ) in Lampang province by Shigeharu Tanabe (1991: 183–221). That study explains that there were several components for creating an understanding of gender in the Northern region of Thailand. Men were allowed to approach the knowledge of the mantras and the Buddhist traditions more. However, women had the right to approach the knowledge of ancestral spirit belief. The

ritual of the Meng spirit dance allowed women to have power and a role as important as the men's role in religious, economic and political spaces. Therefore, both genders were in a mode of compromise, not in competition. However, according to Pranee Wongthet (2001: 363), women have a role only in the spirit worship rituals, whereas in Buddhist rituals, only men are allowed to perform the rituals, women can only facilitate in the making merit ritual.

Conclusion

The analysis illustrates the dynamics of the power in the ritual space of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult. The belief and the cult of Chao Luang Kham Daeng in the past was the device of power for the ruler reaching out to the community and his people. This tradition was the essential duty of rulers in the following generations who strictly kept performing it, or else the city would be in trouble. The cult is strong and has power in its hegemony and legitimization in order to control and govern the people, to make them remain loyal and approve the power of the superior.

Nowadays, these beliefs and rituals have been developed to become a spirit cult which is under the control of the local people who have techniques and tactics in forming their network and their relationship of power on several layers. Local people who are the cultural personnel or local leaders such as monks and local learned men have the power to produce and publicize the discourse for the spirit cult. Some have the power and knowledge of the ritual performance. Some have power in the management and the control of the ritual which is an important role for women.

¹⁴ Interview, Po Wongkameng, 25th May 2009

Later, when the state realized the importance of the spirit cults, it helped revive and transmit the cults. The ritual was financially supported by the state as also was the construction of the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* statue and shrine. However, today, the state can only shed its light only on some parts of the ritual because the control and running of the cult is still under the local people. The cult is not a space for competition between the state and the local community; it is rather a space for negotiation between both sides to declare their power in the ritual.

Buddhism, as the national religion, has been established as the dominant discourse of Thailand. Therefore, the belief in the spirit cults has been deprived and considered as a recessive discourse, in spite of the fact that magic and spirit cults existed before Buddhism came in. The *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult is a case which reflects the mixture of the traditional belief in guardian spirits with Theravada Buddhism and Brahmanism and eventually has become a local cult. Its mixture, adaptation, new interpretation and explanation are appropriate to the environment, worldview, economy, society and culture of the Lanna people. In this case, the *Chao Luang Kham Daeng* spirit cult expresses the co-operation between the representatives of the power from the historical collective memory (legend) which has been the product of the society since ancient times and the representative of the power of the local belief (spirit) to become a new power which can negotiate with the dominant discourse (Buddhism) or other superior powers in order to preserve the cult. Moreover, the cult reflects its preservation of the power of women which has been part of Thai culture since the past.

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