

Thailand: The Kammu Language and Folklore Project

By

KRISTINA LINDELL

The *Kammu Language and Folklore Project* was initiated in 1972, when Kristina Lindell spent a year of research at the Lampang (Thailand) field station of the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies. In early spring 1973, Damrong Tayanin joined the project. During this initial period, as well as during several revisits, material was collected from Kammu informants living in Northern Laos and Thailand.

More than 350 tales have been recorded on tape. At a later stage many jokes, puns and yarns, and traditional songs have been included in the collection. The folktales are in the process of being transcribed, translated and annotated. Dr. Jan-Ojvind Swahn is writing the comments and is compiling the type and motif indices.

Music and songs play a most important role in Kammu society. Hakan Lundstrom, M. A. in Anthropology of Music, is therefore working on sound-making, music, and singing.

During the work we have found that there are both single stories and cycles of stories that offer interesting possibilities for comparative studies. Many of the stories call for further analyses of composition, style and contents. We have, however, decided that our most urgent task at present is to translate and publish as many of the stories as possible. This is not only a scientific interest but also an artistic one, as many of the storytellers have developed very high esthetic standards. It goes without saying that we would welcome cooperation with other researchers in the field. Contact: Kristina Lindell, Paronvagen 15, 223 56 Lund, Sweden.

To achieve a better understanding of the workings of society, we cooperate with Rolf Samuelsson, M.A., on his project "Socio-economic Forces among Kammu and Lamet" (family system and religious beliefs). To illustrate this latter phase of the work, D. Tayanin has

written the following description of the driving out of a spirit of illness.

In the performance of this rite, five articles will be used:

1. a raw egg,
2. some grains of paddy,
3. two pairs of banana leaf cornets,
4. two wax candles,
5. two flowers.

These articles are wrapped into a banana leaf. The performer holds the pack in his hand and moves it back and forth over the patient's body. In doing so he utters the following *kruu*, 'magic formula':

ə,	rooy	rim	móh	yet	taa	lɔh
Oh,		spirit	which	stay	at	body
yet	taa	tua	kii	ləə	lian	pə
stay	at	body	this	then	get out	eat
kətoŋ	pə	həyiar	kii.	Lian	taa	luuy,
egg	eat	hen	this.	Get out	at	stomach
lian	taa	riaŋ,	lian	taa	kəmpon,	lian
get out	at	entrails	get out	at	head,	get out
taa	həntá,	lian	taa	tí,	lian	taa
at	tail,	get out	at	hand,	get out	at
cəaŋ,	lian	taa	cəaŋ	raáŋ,	taaŋ	taa
foot,	get out	at	foot	tooth,	cross over	at
cəaŋ	klə,	lian	taa	plu,	tu	taa
foot	hair,	get out	at	thigh,	run away	at
pləwəŋ,	lian	taa	cə'aarŋ	kəntɾəwəŋ	ləwəŋ	taa
calf,	get out	at	bone	back,	go down	at
cə'aarŋ	kəntip.	Səkii	cəə	yəh	kəne	yəh
bone	rib.	Today	will	go	look for	go
təwaar	yəw	məw	yəw	kruu.	Lian	yet
search	with	shaman	with	magic	Get out	stay
				formula.		
taa	rəŋko	taa	hərloŋ	kii,	lian	yet
at	paddy	at	centre piece	this,	get out	stay
taa	kətoŋ	taa	həyiar	kii.	Mooy	paar
at	egg	at	hen	this.	One	two
pə	pəaŋ	təw	səw	tu	səw	lan.
three	four?	six?	?	run away	?	get away

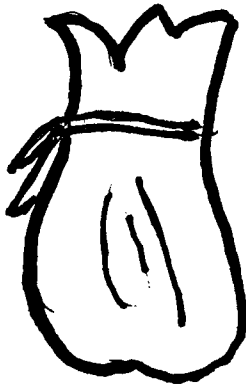
" Oh, whatever spirits that stay in this body, come out and eat this egg, eat this hen. Come out of the stomach, come out of the entrails, come out of the head, come out of the bottom, come out of the hands, come out of the feet, come out of the roots of the teeth. Cross over at the roots of the hairs, come out of the thighs, run away from the calves, come out of the backbone, go down from the ribs.

Today we will go and look, go and search with (the aid of) the shaman and the magic formulae. Come out and stay in this paddy, this core, come out and stay in this egg, this hen. One, two, three [these three syllables seem to be obsolete Mon-Khmer numerals] run away, off you go!”

When the formula has been read, the patient has to spit at the pack.

The actual driving out of the spirit can be undertaken by anyone, man or woman, and up to three people may perform together.

Only a shaman or a person with strong magic power can interpret the signs and identify the spirit causing the illness. He lights a candle and looks at the flame through the egg. In doing so he will be able to discern what kind of spirit it is that causes the illness. He can then check his assumption by putting the paddy grains together two and two. If he was right, the grains will come out in pairs, if not they will be in odd numbers.



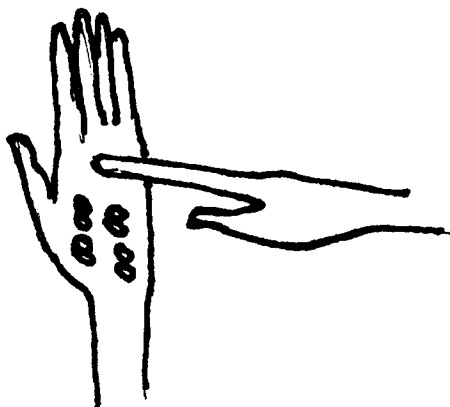
a. The articles used in the divination are wrapped in a banana leaf.



b. The shaman looks at the flame through the egg.

When the shaman has identified the spirit, he will be able to design a treatment.

Our work with the spirit world is still in an initial stage, and we do not know what will come out of it. It is becoming more and more obvious, however, that we will have to unravel the underlying ideas in order to understand not only folktales and song texts but the workings of Kammu society in its entirety.



- c. If the shaman has made a correct divination
the grains will come out in pairs.

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