

Supernatural Power of the Spirit of Boa Phankhan with Natural Resource Management in Thung Kula Ronghai, Thailand

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Abstract: Boa Phankhan area, Suwannaphum district, Roi ET province was an unimportant area of academics because of deterioration in water, forest and soil resources flowing saltwater in agricultural areas, drought and flood problems and deforesting for fuel so as to produce salt industry and difficulty to grow of trees in salt affected soil. A community relied on saltiness of soil and water for producing salt. Power of Brahmanism and Buddhism spirits supported to roles and literature story leading to beliefs in substantial power and supernatural power. Causing the spirit of Boa Phankhan, local hero spirit in Thung Kula Ronghai had become power influencing on a community in an economic boundary: rice, fish and salt. The purpose of this study was study on supernatural power influencing over people paths in Boa Phankhan community touching natural resource management: water, forest and soil. Areas chosen for study were communities in Tanen, Yah Nong Villages, Champakhan sub-district, Suwannaphm district together with Den Rat sub-district, Nong Hi district, Roi ET province. Using a qualitative research method by means of documentaries and field data: structured and unstructured interviews in company with participant and non-participant observations from samples of populations giving data for 32 samples: 8 formal leaders, 2 monks, 5 spiritual leaders, 5 farmers, 5 salt farmers, 2 fishermen, 2 weavers, 2 cattlemen and 1 sample from private organization. The study results were presented in terms of descriptive analysis. The results of the study found that supernatural power was the power of Chao Phao Boa Phankhan, the spirit of Boa Phankhan, taken place from power of beliefs in local hero spirit that built a community. There was power on control using water, forest and soil resources. Boa Phankhan community paid respect to the spirit of Boa Phankhan. People in a community had held the same ceremony to ask for using boiled salt water resource, rain for agriculture, holy water to remedy disease, forest for firewood, soil to mix with salt water and rice farming. A community had held a ceremony to the spirit of Boa Phankhan in a season on the 3rd, 6th and 11th months every year. In order to be fertile of rice, fish and salt, all people in community had rights to use natural resources equally. If anybody used natural resources without asking or granting, the power of the spirit of Boa Phankhan would punish him getting trouble including his family. Recommendation of this study are as; people in a community should take traditional concepts to restore, adapt and integrate for leading to bargain patterns for circularly natural resource management.

Key words: Supernatural power, Chao Phao Boa Phankhan, natural resource management, Thung Kula Rong Hai area, Thailand

INTRODUCTION

The spirit of Boa Phankhan was the power protecting holy well of salt farmer for a long time. The people, who lived in a community called themselves Luk Chang, Luk Mah, Luk Puang and KhunTiean. The old legend named Chao Phu Phran, this name took place from hunter's story who hunted animals in the forest, he found a novice lain

sickly down in the forest. Because of his faithfulness, he found herbs to heal but when he was back, but only ash piled on the ground. Bone ash was called Tha Nen, the hunter was called Phu Phan, Northeastern people called Phan. In Ya Khu period, the word that was popular for calling name was Thao Phan Phuwong when spirit performs. Thao was a rank name that was called since the Lan Xang kingdom. In addition, the story on Chao Phoo

was taught and connected with local literature. Tha Nen village used to be Maung Boa Phankhan, Boa Phankhan ancient district, export market; it exported salt, fish and rice. Nong Khun village was mound area but Ya Nong village was small shack groups, producing salt. Owing to salty area, people thought that this area was navel of the sea and the hole of Naga, which was myth, Thung Kula Ronghai Ocean (Wongtej, 2003). The spirit of Boa Phankhan was the powerful spirit; he used to be the ruler of ChampPak Nakburi, ancient city.

There was the Naga helping on, but the hole was closed later. The ruler had faithfulness in Buddhism; he had arranged and offered sacrifice to not only Brahminism but also Buddhism at the same time. The story of Thao Kham Phan Phuwong was power relationship to society, connecting to the other local hero spirits such as Chao Phao Dong Phoo Din, Sai Na Khon Tao, who concurrently participated in duties. That indicated to power relationship that managed with rulers for social survival.

As a result, the story of the spirit of Boa Phankhan in Thung Kula Ronghai area was newly created under the old story in order to relate to Thai-Lao ethnic groups, local hero spirits showed mystic power that involved with natural resources: water, forest and soil to be able to adapt for textures and environments to be in lie with people's aims in any locals (Rithidet *et al.*, 2005).

The aim of this article was study on supernatural power influencing over people paths in Boa Phankhan community touching natural resource management: water, forest and soil.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was a qualitative research which consisted of a conceptual framework, a research area, content boundaries and a supernatural power framework along with using a community unit, people in the same local area and natural resource management. Emphasizing to Bao Phankhan traditional community, three groups, there were Ta Nen, Ya Nong and Non Khun villages, Suwannaphum and Nong Hi districts, Roi Et province, all were above the Boa Phankhan primitive salt mine, 2 km in distance away from a mine. This research chose 32 samples as follows: 8 formal leaders, 2 monks, 5 spiritual leaders, 5 farmers, 5 salt farmers, 2 fishermen, 2 weavers, 2 cattlemen and 1 sample from private organization. Presentation to the research results was based on descriptive analysis research following this conceptual framework (Fig. 1).

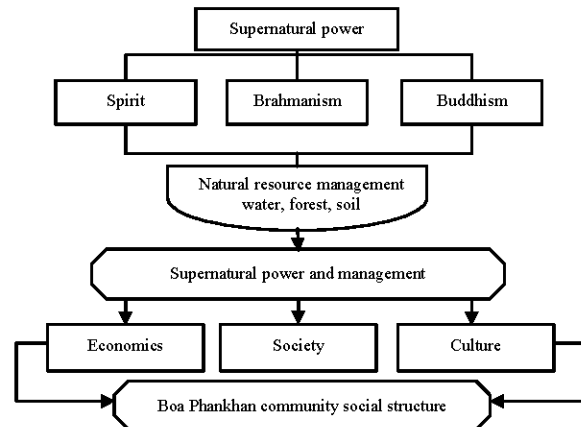


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role and power of the spirit of Boa Phankhan (Chao Phao Boa Phankhan) were based on mind restraint in agricultural society, beliefs in sacredness, Brahmanism and Buddhism. Becoming sacredness and righteous power transited sacrifice rites before earning a living. In according to Northeastern social legends, finding that beliefs in spirit was original ideology of people in community depending on Indian thoughts about household or city spirit (Phee Muang or Guardian Spirit), city rite and city aged extension (Mibun *et al.*, 2007). The industrial era never seemed to impact on people thoughts, water, forest and soil resource management carrying on as follows:

Power on water resource management of Boa Phankhan community, choosing settlement down near water resource, people believed that water was life that nourished people and animals continuously. Prominence of Boa Phankhan well was a small well dug from red sandstone among saltiness of salt affected soil happening around area and there was water flowing out of well in a cracked stone at the South of the well opposite to the spirit house of Boa Phankhan mound around 200 m.

People in a community used and drank, but water in the well was never finished. Water had constantly flowed out and its taste looked like mineral. It was cleverness of people in Boa Phankhan community concerning science and up to date technology.

From the results, we could understand that a community realized irrigation engineering systems clearly and properly managed with water resource management, filtering water with natural systems (Sata *et al.*, 2008a). Evidently, red sandstone was dug at Boa Phankhan well surrounding with saltiness of salt, which villagers had

used it to perfectly ward off disease. A community well knew about salt framing without affecting on irrigation systems and environment. People depended on cultures which were art and science connecting to management appropriately between a community and a community as well as a community and nature.

Power on a community forest resource management was like rice and curry pots besides a mainstay of a community (Sata *et al.*, 2008b). Boa Phankhan ways of life, Villagers believed that the spirit of Boa Phankhan had power to protect a forest resource to breed plants and to be forest food bank, which there were many varieties bamboos, mushrooms, animals, insects and herbs ever since their ancestors. Producing salt in Boa Phankhan area, villagers still asked for cutting tree twigs around the forest to be fuel for salt boiling. Boa Phankhan community created signs for supernatural power by building spirit house in the forest at Boa Phankhan reservoir area in South, next to North there was a holy well surrounded with big and small trees. The spirit house, Sal Phoo Tha, was built, it was the place for the great soldier of Chao Boa Phankhan. This belief was individuality for Boa Phankhan community to protect forest that covered soil or land having fertility (Soonthornpasuch, 2005).

Power on soil resource management depended on roles of Chao Phao Boa Phankhan, which relied on Nang Tiem, who directed and created rules among people in a community. Salt farmers had managed and disallowed digging salt soil to boil and to protect salt affected soil spreading, agricultural areas and human greediness in the village. The holy place, which the spirit of Chao Phao was thick forest with foods for elephants and horses, was disallowed people to make trouble in rice farming season. In the rice farming season, Bao Phankhan community had to offer to Chao Phao and spoke of his name for the purpose of his blessing for rice sprouts, crops and agricultural products beneficially.

This type of management was a result from trends of development mixed with supernatural power and government authority to cause resources sustainable by means of rites that would explain later.

Natural resource management: Boa Phankhan way of life, before salt mine closed, made a living with agriculture, salt farming and fishing. Before salt making process and fishing, people in a community had made offerings to the spirit of Chao Phao Boa Phankhan; it was a bargain way for Chao Phao to give well crops, seasonal rain, advantageous rice, young rice without pests and descendants without accidents and danger (Wongteij, 2003). Not only roles or power but also natural resource management was centered in Chao Phao Boa Phankhan and showed up ceremony patterns as follow:

- The first ceremony, it is the first Wednesday of the 3rd month. People had prepared 1 bag of paddy rice, 1 bottle of whisky, 5 pairs of flowers, 5 pairs of candles, 4 betel nuts, 4 betel, 4 cigarettes and equipments standing for pets to entertain Chao Phao Boa Phankhan to ask for blessing so as to be auspicious occasion on desire
- The second ceremony, it was the first Wednesday of the 6th month. People in a community brought sky rockets offering to Chao Phoo Phan asking for sky and rain following beliefs in Than
- The third ceremony, it was the same as the first one, but added long tailed boat racings in the rapid watered season. After closing salt mines, people held rites to decrease saltiness. In 2004, development trends of Thai government influenced on people in a community; they responded to development by adapting the original concepts for fighting and bargain for gaining budget from external sources in creative culture patterns, building conscience of people in local and setting ceremony processions, parading holy water the followings:
 - The first procession, bringing virgin girls offering oblation, which composed of 1 pot of spirit, 1 whole chicken, meat and sweet and fruits so as to show food fertility
 - The second procession, Nang Tiems came from any villages with getting dress, singing and dancing. Chao Phao Boa Phankhan showed his supernatural power
 - The third procession, holy water was sprinkled on Chao Phoo Phankhan asking for blessing- his or her family was protected and enjoyed a happy life. This practice indicated to paying respect to ancestors
 - The fourth procession, ancient carts was imitation of salt barter era in community economic bases
 - The fifth procession, imitation pictures and carrying salt water were persistently handling with salt water in a community. Carrying water to boil was pointed to quality of life of a community
 - The sixth procession, local dance procession to offer Chao Phoo Phankhan was applied dance showing gracefully and art, making a living in a community
 - The seventh procession, Pra Thak flag procession was a victory sign or freedom of people in a community

The results of ceremonies showed to power that would manage natural resources in symbolic pictures of cultural power to cause sustainable resources equally.

CONCLUSION

Taking supernatural power of Chao Phao Boa Phankhan is based on concepts for resource management which indicates to power relationship connecting to people and any groups in society. Power operation working by ceremony of social and environmental textures among modernization on fighting stages is a node of resource control that composes of water, forest and soil. Boa Phankhan community experiences stories and ceremonies. Building Chao Phao Boa Phankhan's statue looks upon emphasizing local supernatural power. Causing any groups, who have more power, accepts and creates agreements because of the power of worship in the same spirit. It is natural resource management with particular ethnic; nevertheless, the performance of Boa Phankhan community should not rely on an especial concept only. People in a community should take traditional concepts to restore, adapt and integrate for leading to bargain patterns for circularly natural resource management.

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