

A NOTE ON "DIVINATION BY AHOM DEODHAIS"

Divination by the aid of the fowl's legs as described in the above article is not practiced, so far as I know, by the Thai people of this country. But there is a custom, perhaps of an allied kind performed by the Thai people of the North-Eastern area, known as the Lao. When a plot of land is cleared to be utilized as a rice field, the first thing for the owner to do is to erect a rude shrine, and invoke ceremonially the guardian spirit of the rice field to reside therein. The spirit is named *Phi Ta Haek* (ผีตาเทก) which means literally the Spirit of the Beginning. Every year when the rice planting season begins the owner of the field will sacrifice a fowl before the spirit, and then, tearing out the fowl's chin bone he will examine its tendinous tissue. If it is found to be a relatively long one, there will be much water during the year. If it is a fat one and of an appropriate length, the water in that year will be in abundance for rice growing. If it is a thin one, not of uniform size, distorted in shape and shrivelled, there will be a drought during that year and young rice plants will wither. After the divination, rice planting can begin. The above information is gleaned from an article written in Thai some sixty years ago. (Vide: เรื่องการนับถือเจ้าแม่ศรีอุ้มหาวิชัย (จันทร์) แห่ง วิชิตาหาราชเขตตอน ตอน ๒๗ ร.ศ. ๑๑๕) The custom has no doubt either become rare or perhaps by now has discontinued altogether due to the cultural progress of the people. The author did not say whether such a practice was confined to a particular locality of that area, but it is to be presumed that he meant it was generally practiced in the North-East.

It may perhaps be of some interest to add that there is another kind of divination practised by the people of this area. It is a kind of divination by the aid of the fowl's egg. When a person dies, a cremation is to take place at a selected site in an uninhabited place. An egg and a lump of boiled glutinous rice are thrown haphazardly on the ground; if the egg is broken, then the place is selected as a suitable site for such a cremation. The folk believe that the guardian spirit of the place has given his permission, or that the dead man desires that particular place because he has known some of his spirit friends there.

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