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In general the Attapu Chronicle, like other chronicles in Indochina, has its own writing style as well as contents consisting of fictional and essential elements. Some of them are significant, some are less valuable, and some are totally useless. Therefore, the reader has to understand that the composition style of chronicles in early times and nowadays is very different, owing to the fact that the people of those days and nowadays differ in the foundations of their beliefs and conceptual frameworks. In the early days, miracles and supernatural powers were needed to make the chronicle interesting and were socially expected, but at present evidence is required and everything must be proved.

Thus, in order to analyze the Attapu Chronicle it is necessary to classify its contents and see if they are fact, fiction, or an embellishment to make it interesting and amazing. Moreover, chronicle compilers were inclined to include the folktales or folklore of their day, without discriminating between fact and fiction. People who were suspicious and questioned this were branded as heretics.

In the case of miracles or incredible elements found in the above mentioned chronicle, they do not have to be given any attention because it is a matter of the writing style popularly practiced in those days, and which is commonly found in histories or tales. But what we should be interested in is its subject matter, which is either historical fact or fragmentary historical material. The reader has to screen them and extract only the essence. So the problem lies in our mental ability to decide what is right and what is wrong. At least, we have to know how to consider and categorize the contents and analyze them one by one as follows:

The Sakkaraj Era

The sakkaraj era used in the Kingdom of Lan Chang (Chiang Thong) and Lan Na (Chiang Mai) was called the *Culasakkaraj* or minor era. It was invented by a Burmese king who used to be the Supreme Patriarch but left the monastic life to seize power and declare himself king in A.D. 638 when he repealed *Mahasakkaraj* and replaced it with a new era called *Culasakkaraj* (C.S.). Soon afterwards, *Culasakkaraj* began to be widely used both in the Kingdom of Lan Chang and Lan Na. Phya Lavacankaraj, the first monarch of the Lavacankaraj dynasty, ascended the throne at the beginning of the first year of the *Culasakkaraj* era. The city of Chiang Rai was founded at the beginning of C.S. 624

(B.E. 1805/A.D. 1262). But in the Lao Chronicle composed by Maha Sila Viravong, the Culasakkaraj era appeared in C.S. 715 (B.E. 1896/A.D. 1353), the year King Pha-Ngum the Great ascended the throne.

As for the Attapu Chronicle, the Culaskkaraj era is used 27 times, of which all but two are accompanied by the animal year: C.S. 800 and 1252. However, there are only five Culasakkaraj dates that the animal year and Culasakkaraj year agree with each other, while the rest have no validity. In addition, it is noticeable that the last portion of the Attapu Chronicle from C.S. 1239 to 1290 (B.E. 2420 to 2471/A.D. 1877 to 1928) the names of the animal year of the twelve zodiac signs are used, like Chuad, Chaloo, Khan, Thoh, Marong, Maseng, Mamia, Mamae, Wok, Rakaa, Chaw, and Khun, instead of the Lao animal year. The reason for such usage is that during this period nearly all events mentioned are concerned with Siam, which had adopted Khmer culture since the outset of Thai history. Likewise, the Tripitaka was written with the Khmer script, including *yantras* or magic formulas.

Proper names

With regard to names of people, only important persons are taken into consideration, beginning with Thao Pulu and Nang Pulu. These names are not found in other Lao historical documents but should be considered because this reflects the fact that they are names of the natives in the prefecture of Attapu who settled there before the Lao people came to occupy it. Later on their offspring adopted Lao culture, which was surreptitiously expanded there, and so Lao words appeared, like Thao Khim, Thao Phumsetthi, Thao So, Thao Yo, etc., which are common names in Laos.

Afterwards when the community grew bigger and bigger and adopted Hindu-Buddhist cultures, personal names also changed. For instance, Phraya Yuvaraj Lan Chang Viang Chan, Phraya Anujit and Phraya Traibhop appeared in B.E. 1981 (A.D. 1438), which is valid in the historical context. But we must prove its reliability by comparison with other examples.

The Chronicle relates that in C.S. 844 (B.E. 2025/A.D. 1482) King Chaichetthadhiraj took his wife, children and retinue by boat down the Mekong River. His ship was wrecked and all of them died, except for Chaichetthadhiraj. This event is not only contradictory to other historical facts, but also happened 52 years before Chaichetthadhiraj was born. However, it is possible that such an error was due to mistakes in numeral reading. Additionally, it seems to be part of a myth justifying the origin of fauna sounds. Usually, the people in those days invented such myths of origin, which are widely found in Southeast Asia. Western explorers noticed this in the 18th-19th century A.D. However, Chaichetthadhiraj is regarded as one of the most important monarchs in Lao history. He relocated the capital city from Chiang Thong to Vientiane in C.S. 922 (B.E. 2103/A.D. 1560). There the king

built Phra That Luang in C.S. 928 (B.E. 2109/A.D. 1568) and finally in C.S. 934 (B.E. 2115/A.D. 1572) he was cheated and led to unknown place by Phraya Nakhon when the former led his army to attack Muang Ongkaan and vanished for ever. As regards his demise, all chronicles are compatible but the event and the year concerned are slightly different.

In C.S. 1157 (B.E. 2338/A.D. 1795) political events occurred concerning Siam, which corresponds to King Chulalongkorn's reign. That is, towns in the prefecture of Attapu were under Siamese rule. Ruling lords were sent from Siam or natives were appointed to rule, which is consistent with Siamese historical documents. For instance, Phraya Maha-Amatyadhibodi was appointed by the Bangkok Court as a High Commissioner to the Lao Eastern Cities, overseeing eleven principalities and twenty six towns, with the head office at the city of Champassak.

In C.S. 905 (B.E. 2086/A.D. 1543) the Attapu chronicle mentions King Rama II at Bangkok. The events concerned are almost all possible, except that such events happened nearly 300 years before this king and before establishing the city of Ubon. But Chao Ngao (เจ้าหง้า) is mentioned to have fled Ubon, which is incorrect. Historians should make further research on this problematic point.

In C.S. 1253 (B.E. 2434/A.D. 1891) the statement that "Luang Pichit Preechakorn came from Bangkok to station himself at Ubon and sent officers to evacuate the Attapu people to Muang Sithandon" is all historically relevant; it corresponds to the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Finally, all the Lao kingdom was ceded to France as a colony in B.E. 2435 (A.D. 1893).

In C.S. 1290 (B.E. 2471/A.D. 1928) the Chronicle mentions the name of French officers who had come to rule the city of Attapu, such as M. Katanye (ท่านกะทันเย), the military officer who gave training to Lao soldiers and ruled Attapu from C.S. 1290 (B.E. 2471/A.D. 1928). The historical events in this period all agree with the histories of both sides.

Hierarchy

Political or administrative hierarchy came into existence since the rise of absolute monarchy. In the Attapu chronicle several hierarchical ranks are mentioned, such as Ajna-Bao (อาชญำปำว), Ajna-Muang (อาชญำเมือง), Saen-Muang (แสนเมือง), Mun-Nah (หมันหนำ), Phraya Chiang Nue (พระชำเชียงเหนือ), Phraya Nakhon (พระชำนคร), High Commissioner (ชำหัดง), Viceroy (อุปรำช), Rajavong (รำชวงค์) and Rajaputra (รำชบุตร), etc.

High-ranking officers were appointed to rule and take responsibility in the commissioned area. Out of these ranks, the rank of High Commissioner is mostly found during the reign of King Chulalongkorn but seems to be hardly found in Lan Chang and Lan

Na. On the contrary, the positions of Rajavong and Rajaputra are often found in the two Lao Kingdoms.

City names

In the Attapu Chronicle several cities and towns are mentioned. In particular, the cities of Attapu and Champassak are frequently referred to. These two cities border each other and lie in southernmost Laos. One of the frontiers is adjacent to Siam and the other to Cambodia. This region was evergreen forest with a wide diversity of wildlife, especially elephants that roamed along the border areas of the three countries.

All the cities mentioned in the Chronicle, especially the cities in southern Laos, like Attapu, Sithandon and Chiangtaeng are said to be large cities in the History of Laos written by Maha Sila Viravong. These cities were ruled by local lords under the supervision of a High Commissioner appointed from Bangkok. However, among the cities mentioned in the Chronicle some have ceased to be important, while some have remained important up to the present day, and others have become larger cities with concentrated populations.

Myth

One myth found in the Chronicle is related to the story of King Chaichetthadhiraj taking his wife, children and retinue on board a boat floating down the Mekong River and crossing the Li Phi Rapids. These are formed by a barrier of solid rock, which makes the watercourse impossible for goods transportation by boat. While occupying Laos, the French government thought of blasting the Li Phi Rapids but awareness of the exploitation of the ecosystem changed their minds. In addition, it would need a big investment to make the Li Phi Rapids navigable and require a large water gate to balance the flow of water. The story of Chaichetthadhiraj floating down the Li Phi in the Chronicle is invented. But the incentive for such creations is unknown, except that in this case it is intended to tell the cause of different sounds made by the animals brought along by Chaichetthadhiraj. For instance, the cock said, “chod...chod;” the duck, “vard...vard;” the black drongo, “saeo...saeo;” the peacock, “paeo cho wo...paeo cho wo,” and so forth. These inventions may have been made in order to tell the sounds of each animal species as in other myths explaining the cause of things, or “myths of origin,” which are abundant in Southeast Asia.

All in all, the Attapu Chronicle seems to be of some value to historical studies. It is unwise for us to refuse its validity and reliability as done by one of Thailand’s History Revising Committees, which gives high credit to Chinese documents. A good historian must be considerate and free from ethnocentrism. We have to realize that the composers and the readers of chronicles were born in a different age, in which the social and cultural environments are quite different. If we do not try to be aware of this matter, we will inevitably see that this kind of document is useless, and will not be interested to keep it for others to study, which would be our fault rather than the author’s.