



Fig. 12: The Tai Mae Phosop (Nguyễn Xuân Hiên 1980: 234).



Fig. 13: Another Tai Mae Phosop (Trankell 1995: 265).

tist who lived for a long time in Cambodia, provided a version that is quite different (1962: 98):

At the beginning, it was unnecessary to cook rice because rice grain had no chaff. As people developed bad sentiment and the rice chaff developed too and so, people had to husk the rice grain before eating. An old woman wanted to dry rice in the sunlight. The paddy jumped on her and made her dirty. She got hurry and called all the bad names of rice, so all the vital spirits of rice were afraid and fled to hide in a cave, these spirits gathered in a flat cave and only the *thatlat* fish with her flat body could reach this cave and bring back rice spirits for human beings.

Porée-Maspéro's version shows a high Khmer influence. The "body-flatted *thatlat* fish"³⁵ is a typical Khmer element.³⁶

35 Flat-headed sole (*Hippoglossoides elassodon*) with Vietnamese name as *cá thò bon* or *cá bon*.

36 Legend from the Khmer ethnic group in South Vietnam shares the same motif "origin of rice as a part in the world creation": In a full moon night, Maha Prum God finds out that the Earth is too bare. He decides to create plants that grow plentifully everywhere and animals that move actively on the Earth. Then He thinks, it's necessary to have some thing more for man to eat, He creates the rice Sraw Phoc Saley that grows together with other grasses and plants. The Sraw Phoc Saley gives grains as big as a coconut; moreover they are succulent and unnecessary to cook ...

There is also in Thailand a vague and confused folktale of Mae Phosop (Rice Mother; Fig. 12, Fig. 13). The gist of which is somehow as follows:

The gods received an order from the All-High God to go and invite Mae Phosop to return.³⁷ The gods sought to find Mae Phosop by the help of fish, crossing the Seven Seas and the Seven Mountain Ranges until they came to the Diamond Mountain³⁸ where the gods found the Mother residing with her attendants. After much coaxing she consented to return to what was no doubt the land of rice fields. When the mother returned, she was followed by a large number of fish. Rice and fish are, therefore, the staple foods of the people of Central Thailand.³⁹

In practice of rice cultivation, rice is deemed animate, has its *khuan*, and so grows like other animate creatures. The Rice Mother, Mae Phosop,

37 Where she had been before, she went away and for what reason she had left her former residence, the story does not tell. Nevertheless, this tale bears a resemblance to that of Persephone, the daughter of the Goddess Ceres.

38 The Seven Seas and the Seven Ranges of Mountains were the mythological seas and mountains surrounding the Golden Mount Meru, the abode of the gods of Buddhist cosmology.

39 "To prepare rice and fish" and "to take rice and fish" are Tai idioms, which mean to prepare food and to take a meal.