



The Use of Astrological and Religious Beliefs in Business Management : The Case of Lao PDR

Thongsavanh Nakhavith

Faculty of Economics and Business Management, National University of Laos

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ทำการศึกษาผลของความเชื่อทางศาสนาและโหราศาสตร์ที่ส่งผลความสำเร็จในการจัดการทางธุรกิจ ในสาธารณรัฐประชาธิปไตยประชาชนลาวเนื่องจากพบว่าความเชื่อมีความเกี่ยวข้องกับความสามารถในการจัดการปัญหา การประเมินเชิงปริมาณของความเชื่อโดยอาศัยเครื่องมือทางสถิติในการวิเคราะห์จะถูกนำมาใช้ในงานวิจัยนี้ กลุ่มตัวอย่างในงานวิจัยนี้เป็นนักธุรกิจที่ประสบความสำเร็จจากพื้นที่ส่วนเหนือ ส่วนกลาง และส่วนใต้ของประเทศลาว จำนวน 244 คน เพื่อนำมาอธิบายปรากฏการณ์ทางความเชื่อเหล่านี้ ผลจากการวิจัยพบว่านักธุรกิจส่วนมากที่ประสบความสำเร็จจะเข้าวัดฟังธรรม นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าความเชื่อในแต่ละพื้นที่ที่มีความแตกต่างกัน โดยพบว่าคนที่อาศัยในพื้นที่ทางตอนใต้จะมีความเชื่อที่มากกว่าคนที่อาศัยอยู่ทางตอนกลางของลาว และคนที่อาศัยทางตอนเหนือจะมีความเชื่อที่น้อยที่สุด ความเชื่อทางโหราศาสตร์และจักรราศียังถูกนำมาใช้ในการจัดการทางธุรกิจมากที่สุดในการเลือกเวลาทำการ การหาฤกษ์ยามดี สีและตราสัญลักษณ์ของธุรกิจ และการโปรโมชันการตลาด ลำดับถัดมาความเชื่อที่ถูกนำมาใช้ในการตกแต่งร้านค้าและการหาทำเลที่ตั้งของธุรกิจซึ่งขึ้นอยู่กับการทำนายทางภูมิศาสตร์ ปรากฏการณ์นี้อาจเกิดขึ้นเนื่องจากผลของระดับการศึกษาซึ่งพบว่ามีจำนวนมากกว่าครึ่งของกลุ่มตัวอย่างมีการศึกษาระดับอนุปริญญาหรือต่ำกว่า

คำสำคัญ : ศาสนา / โหราศาสตร์ / ผู้ประกอบวิสาหกิจ / การจัดการทางธุรกิจ / ความเชื่อ

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether astrological and religious beliefs have an influence on a success in business management in Lao PDR, since beliefs were found to be related to an ability to cope with the problems. The quantitative assessment of the beliefs by means of a statistical instrument for data analysis was made. A sample of this study was 244 successful business persons from the northern, central and southern parts of Laos being used to explain the existing phenomena of these beliefs. The results showed that there were a large number of successful business persons possessing Buddhist image and visiting monks for their mental support. In addition, the levels of beliefs in all parts of the country were found quite varied. The persons living in the southern part had more beliefs than those in the central part of Laos, while those living in the northern part had the least. The highest uses of astrological beliefs and zodiac in business management were found in selection of operating time, , auspicious time, color and logo of business sign and sale promotion. To a lesser degree, these beliefs were used in decorating shop and finding a business location, which were based on a geographical forecast. The phenomenon might be influenced by educational attainment; more than a half of the sample graduated with an associate's degree or lower.

Keywords : Religion / Astrology / Entrepreneur / Business Management / Belief



Introduction

Belief is a way of thinking culture which human created in order to secure their mental peacefulness since the happiness is born in the mind, which is the basic need of humankind. Happy mind is fundamental need for human. Human needs were classified into three categories: basic physical and mental needs, the needs to be a member in the society, and a need for identity which needs to be catered for by the development of sciences, religion, magical arts, and performance in the society. Human have created astrological and religious belief system to explain the learning and experience phenomenon and to assist humankind to understand and to feel safe. Strong religious beliefs, in some studies, were found to be correlated with improved ability to cope with stress in the workplace, influencing ethical behavior, organizational justice, the overall business environment, and socialization process in institution. Astrological and religious belief has been one of the Lao local knowledge since ancient time. There are evidence in the Lao bailane script and famous literature, namely Sangsinxay Story, Khouncheuang story, Nang Phomhom story, and other. Besides, tradition such as wedding, business launching, or new house construction has shown that Lao people look for good dates in accordance with astrological belief for auspiciousness and success. Therefore, the astrological and religious belief is a practice to enhance the confidence, brave, and attacking societal program. Having a particular belief and practice, according to each individual horoscope, an entrepreneur gains more confidence and endurance. It can make the surrounding people also accept the belief since they think it will bring good things for them. Therefore, astrological belief has been a science relating to human psychology for a long time. As it is a science that cannot be proved by evidence, reason, or history, the science has not been accepted; as it may be relevant to the sayings of

Monk Vichitvathanakane: “maybe we don’t know or not knowing enough as ancient people”.

From various phenomena that have been explained above, belief is the fact in the society which many people know, yet lack of systematic research regarding the influences of beliefs and correlation between beliefs and the business practices of the entrepreneurs. Therefore, I am interested in conducting the research in this area in order to understand the insight of entrepreneurs’ beliefs and their business practices. I am confidence that the result of this research will be beneficial to the business development so that the entrepreneurial activity can support economic and social development in the future.

Research Objectives and Methods

The primary objective of the paper is to investigate how religious and astrological belief influenced the business management of successful business in the Lao P.D.R. The research method was quantitative assessment of the belief with statistical analysis in rating scales using means. It is a survey research, attempting to explain the existing phenomena in the current situation. Samplings were 244 successful business people from the North, Central, and Southern part of Laos.

The population in this study includes the successful business people, the number of which is not precisely reported. Random and/or convenient samplings of business owners who are regarded successful by the district office are selected. The sampling selection attempted to involve women entrepreneur. Due to the lack of time, resources, and geographical differences, with unknown population, the target for the samplings are one province from the northern part, two provinces in the central and one province in the southern part of Laos. In each province, two districts were targeted. Data collection was done through the distribution of a set of



questionnaires, some of which were adapted from Suangswang (2005). The data analysis was carried out by comparing means between the region as well as correlation.

Literature Review

Religious Belief

Theravada Buddhism is a major religion, whose followers cover the largest portion of the population of the Lao P.D.R. Theravada Buddhism was more a philosophy than a religion and according to the Buddhist doctrine, and the Buddha is neither a god nor a supernatural being. In theory, Theravada Buddhism “has no dogmas, superstitions, necessary rituals, mediating priests or blind faith in an unknown (and unknowable) God” (King, 2001).

Theravada Buddhism was first religion to be introduced to Mainland Southeast Asia during the reign of the Indian King Asoka in 3rd century BCE (Carbine, 2004). Theravada Buddhism was brought to Laos during the reign of King Fa Ngum. There are two main branches of Buddhism, the other being Mahayana Buddhism which spread across Northern Asia: Tibet, China, Korea and Japan. Theravada is a Pali word meaning “way of the elders” or “Doctrine of the Elders” (Dhammapia, 2003).

Astrology

Eccles (2004) summarized Patrick Curry’s lecture on astrology that it consists of three different forms : popular astrology, judicial astrology, and philosophical or cosmological astrology. The first one, popular astrology, is a mixture of lunar lore, superstition, folklore and low magic. It often combines palmistry, lucky numbers, and other forms of fortune telling. It was learnt by oral transmission from older relatives, and supplemented to some extent by popular published almanacs. The second form, judicial astrology, requires an astrological judgment to be made, based on the positions of the

planets, and therefore almost always involves a horoscope, a diagram showing the positions of the visible planets at a precise moment. It professed to become exact and individual in its predictions, and required certain mathematical skills. The practitioners and their clients tended to come from the professional and mercantile classes of society, and were often urban. The third form, philosophical or cosmological astrology, used the geocentric model of the solar system and the received body of knowledge about planetary cycles to create a philosophical understanding of the universe and its nature, ‘both physical and divine’. The practitioners were small but highly-regarded elite of philosopher and theologians, and their clients were prelates, princes, and kings.

Research in Belief and Astrology on Business

The study on religious influence business practice by Anderson et al, (2000) on the Christianity influence business practice in Western country while Islam shape the business environments in many countries where Islam is the dominant religion (Ali and Al-Owaihan, 2008; Ali and Gibbs, 1998). Chinese and East Asian firms were influenced by Confucian philosophy (Yan and Sorenson, 2004). However, there were many philosophical orientations shaping Chinese management theory including Confucianists, the Legalists, and the orientations. Theravada Buddhism seemed to have influence on business environment and practice in mainland Southeast Asia. This region is, however, difficult to define as there are also distinct divisions within the region. Kutcher et al. (2010) conducted a study and found that there were strong religious beliefs correlated with improved ability to cope with stress in the workplace. Their study was supported by Vitell’s research that an individual religious value would affect ethical behaviour. Religious beliefs in some context appear to influence consumer behavior (Doran, C.J., and Natale, S.M., 2011) whereas Cole’s (2009) study



indicated that an individual religious value can have an effect on that individual's views about organizational justice. However, at macro level, the dominant religion of a region or country has often been found to have an impact on the overall business environment. There seems to be a correlation between the dominant religion in a country and the level of corruption, although other factors, specifically low gross domestic products per capita, also appear to play an even more important role in contributing to high levels of corruption (Samanta, Pleskov, Zadeh, 2010).

Research Results

Overview of the respondents

The overall samplings include 244 subjects. The ratio of surveyed subjects from the north covers 29.1% (71); from central part is 58.2% (142), and the south 12.7% (31). Among them, 47.5% are female and 52.5% are male. The majority of the respondents (74.5%) are married, 20.2% single, 4.1% divorced, and 1.2% are widowers. Religious backgrounds are mostly Buddhists (98.4%), and only 1.6% was animism.

Table 1 Characteristics of Belief

	Region			Total
	North	Central	South	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Buddha Image for Business Success	3.71	3.79	4.45	3.86
Non-Buddha Image for Business Success	2.11	2.54	2.86	2.46
Magical Plant for Business Success	1.57	1.83	1.97	1.78
Female Spirit Medium for Business Success	1.66	2.02	1.62	1.86
Monk for Business Success	3.16	3.37	4.34	3.45
Magical Text for Business Success	1.70	1.86	2.66	1.93
Average	2.32	2.57	2.98	2.56

The beliefs were classified into 6 different categories contributing to business success, namely Buddha image, non-Buddha image, magical plant, spirit medium, monks, and magical art. The overall mean score for each of these characteristics, Buddha image has the highest mean score, 3.9 out of a five point scale; followed by monks (3.5), non-Buddha image (2.5). Others have the mean score of less than the average. When classified by region, however, the southern part has the highest mean score, followed by the central region, while the northern part has the lowest mean score. The detail analysis shows that southern region has the strongest scores in Buddha image, monks, non-Buddha image, magical text, and magical plant. These characteristics also show similar pattern in the north and central region. Central region, comparing to the other two regions, has the highest score on female spirit medium. Northern region has the lowest score in most characteristics, except the female spirit medium, lower than the central but higher than the southern part. The results above indicate that the level of belief in Buddha image and monks contributing to business success is relatively high among the successful business community in all parts of Laos, particularly in the Southern part.

Table 2 The use of astrological and religious believe in management

	Region			Total
	North	Central	South	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Policy setting	2.52	2.66	3.18	2.69
Investment decision	2.51	2.55	3.36	2.65
Business planning	2.49	2.55	3.14	2.61
Resource procurement	2.35	2.36	2.98	2.44
Employee recruitment	2.03	1.95	3.05	2.12
Marketing management	2.86	2.69	3.19	2.80
Average	2.46	2.46	3.15	2.55



The analysis of astrological and religious belief in management was classified into 6 categories : policy setting, investment decision, business planning, resource procurement, employee recruitment, and marketing management. The average score of each region shows that the northern part and the central parts have the same level of astrological and religious belief usage in business management (2.46) while the southern region has far higher average score (3.15). In policy setting, investment decision, business planning, resource procurement, employee recruitment, and marketing management, the southern part has the highest score in all elements, which were higher than the average scores. When compare between the north and the central part, all except employee recruitment and marketing management, the central part has marginally higher scores. From this analysis, it can be seen that the business people in the southern parts utilize astrological believe more than the other parts, followed by the central, and the least was the north.

Policy Setting

The result also indicates that business people do use astrological and religious belief into their management practices (see appendix). In policy setting, the use of belief on fate or zodiac as one component in setting policy or business goal has a mean score of 2.9. Among them, business people in the southern region mean score is 3.6, while business people in the central part mean score was 2.9 and the northern part is 2.6. In considering stars or zodiac as part of activity or business type selection, the mean score is 2.5. The southern part mean score is 3.1. The central and northern region has a marginally different score, 2.4 and 2.3 chronologically. In considering stars or zodiac for selecting business location, total mean score is 2.7, while the south, central and north has the mean score of 3.2, 2.8, and 2.4 respectively. The selection of business partners

with similar fate of zodiac that support each other has a similar pattern, with average score of 2.6 (3.1 for the south, 2.6 for the central and 2.4 for the north). In praying for sacred things to help in policy setting, the average mean score is 2.8. The highest mean score is found in the north (2.92) followed by the south (2.90), and finally the central (2.55). The results can be concluded that the southern part, except for praying for sacred things to help in policy setting, utilize the belief on fate or zodiac in policy setting higher than the others.

Investment Decision

The investment decision has also been influenced by the use of fate and zodiac to some extent. In creating alternatives in business execution, average score is 2.8, while the southern part is 3.8, the central is 2.7, and the northern part is 2.6. In using fate and zodiac as part of alternative evaluation for decision making, the total mean score is 2.6 (3.2 for the south, 2.6 for the central, and 2.5 for the north). Using fate or suggestion from astrologer as part of decision making for business operation has the total mean score of 2.6, for business performance evaluation has a total mean score of 2.7 (3.1 for the south, 2.7 for the central, and 2.4 for the north). Praying for sacred things to help in investment decision has a total mean of 2.6 (3.2 for the south, 2.8 for the north, and 2.4 for the central).

Business Planning

The use of belief in religion and astrology in business planning is also evidenced, marginally above the average (2.6). The use of personal belief in fate and zodiac as part of business planning has a total mean score of 2.5 (3.2 for the south, and 2.4 for both central and north). The use of personal belief on fate and zodiac as part of operation strategy formulation has a total mean score of 2.5 (3.2 for the south, 2.4 for the central, and 2.3 for the north). Selecting timing for operation, considering auspicious time period



shows high total mean score, 3.1; with the central region the highest (3.2), followed by the south (3.6), and the north (2.9). The use of fate and suggestion from fortune teller as part of problem solution planning has a total mean score of 2.4. The northern part has the highest score (3.2), followed by the central part (2.4), and lastly the north (2.0). Praying for sacred things to direct business planning shows the total mean score of 2.6; while the south has the highest mean score (3.1), followed by the north (2.8), and the central part (2.4).

Resource Procurement

The resource procurement has a less influenced from the use of fate or zodiac comparing to the policy setting, investment decision, business planning, and marketing management, with the total mean score of 2.4. The location selection based on geographical auspiciousness or geographical forecasting has the highest total mean score (2.9), followed by praying for sacred things in business resources procurement (location, staffing, financing) (2.5), using personal belief in fate and zodiac as part of operating budget planning (2.4), using belief in fate and zodiac as part of operation material procurement (2.3). Except praying for sacred things in business resource procurement which the north exhibits the highest score, the southern part shows the highest score in all variables.

Marketing Management

Marketing management has the highest total mean scores comparing to all categories tested, with the score of 2.8. Variable with the highest mean score is using personal belief in selecting colour, logo, business sign for auspiciousness and sales promotion (3.04). The second highest score is found in decorating shops or business location (inside-out) according to geographical forecasting for sales promotion (2.95), followed by praying for sacred things to support sales or obtaining customer (2.89),

selecting sales agent with the characteristics according to the business owner's belief (2.57, and lastly using personal belief in auspicious timing as part of product pricing (2.55). In all these variables, the southern part shows the highest mean scores.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis between possessions of belief items that are believed to contribute to business success shows a useful result. Positive significant correlations are found on sacred text (0.02), and having Buddha image (0.04). Other positive correlation, but not significant, is on non-Buddha image (0.07). As for frequency of holy place visit, there is a negative significant correlation (0.02). Other negative correlations, but not significant, are having spirit house, and having Buddha shelf (0.93 and 0.07 respectively). When analyzed correlation between religious belief level, magical art belief level, and astrology believe level with the belief contributing to business success, all are found strong significant correlation. This can be interpreted that the more business people go to holy place, the business success is lower. In contrast, having sacred text and Buddha image is believed to increase a chance of business success.

Correlation analysis between previous business situation and the belief types of shows two significant correlations. Sacred text is found to have a negative correlation of $p=-0.176$ with a correlation $r=0.01$; and magical plant for business success also has a negative correlation ($p=-0.16$, $r=0.02$). Other negative correlation is found on frequency of holly place visit and possessing non-Buddha image. Positive correlation, but not significant, are found in having Buddha image, having spirit house, and having Buddha shelf. When analyzed correlation between religious belief level, magical art belief level, and astrology believe level with the previous business



situation, the results shows no significance, yet magical art belief level shows negative correlation, while the others are positive.

Conclusion

The analysis of religious belief shows that the entrepreneur's uses religious and astrological believe at an average level. The business people uses fate and zodiac the highest in marketing management, followed by policy setting, investment decision, and business planning. Resource procurement and employee recruitment were lower than the average.

The use of astrological belief and zodiac in business management are found the highest in selecting timing for operation, considering auspicious timing, and using personal belief in selecting color, logo, business sign for auspiciousness and sale promotion. The medium level of usage are found in decorating shops or business location according to geographical forecasting for sales promotion, praying for sacred things to support sales or obtaining customer, location selection based on geographical auspiciousness or geographical forecasting, using the belief on fate or zodiac as one component in setting policy or business goal, using fate and zodiac as part of creating alternatives in business execution, selecting business location, performance evaluation, decision making, selecting business partners and sales agent, product pricing, and business planning.

The result of this study shows that the business people in Laos tend to use, with reference Eccles (2004), popular astrology, which is a mixture of lunar lore, superstition, folklore and low magic; combining palmistry, lucky numbers, and other forms of fortune telling. In the case of Laos, monks were the source of this belief. The use of astrology and zodiac is also relevant to the study done by Suangswang (2005) who concluded that businessmen were found to be under astrological influence, with

the feeling of assuring, boosting, and supporting after following astrological advice.

References

- Ali and Al-Owaihian. (2008). "Islamic work ethic : A critical review," **Cross Cultural Management**. 5(1) : 5-19.
- Ali and Gibbs. (1998). Foundations of business ethics in contemporary religious thought : The ten Commandments perspective. **international Journal of Social Economics**. 25(10) : 1552-15562.
- Carbine. (2004). **An ethic of continuity : Shwegin monks and the Sasana in contemporary Burma / Myanmar**. Chicago : University of Chicago.
- Dhammapia. (2003). **Nibbana in Theravada perspective with special reference to Buddhism in Burma**. California : California Institute of Integral Studies.
- Doran, C.J., and Natale, S.M., (2011). "Empatheia and Caritas : The role of religion in fair trade consumption," **Journal of Business Ethnics**. 98(1) : 1-15.
- Eccles, B. (2004). Astrology in England in the Twenty-First Century. **Dissertation for MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology**. Bath Spa University College.
- King. (2001). **In the hope of Nibbana : An easay on Theravada Buddhist ethics**. Chicago : IL : Open Court Publishing.
- Samanta, Pleskov, Zadeh. (2010). "Religion as a determant of corruption : Comparative evidence from OPEC and OECD countries," **international Journal of Management**. 27(3) : 728-744.
- Suangswang, S. (2005). Astrological Belief and Business Behavior : A Case Study of Businessmen Group of Chiang Mai Chambers of Commerce. **The sis for Master of Arts (Political Economy)**. Chiang Mai : Chiang Mai University.