A SIAMESE INNOVATION

Siamese (that is, Standard Thai of Thailand) $h\text{aa}^2$ means 'plague, cholera, epidemic'. Nowadays this word is most commonly heard in various cursing expressions, for example, $\text{taay}^1 \ h\text{aa}^2$ 'to die, or may he (you, etc.) die of the plague', roughly equivalent in force and in degree of vulgarity to English 'God damn it!' and $\text{?aay}^3 \ h\text{aa}^2$, used in cursing a man, or boy, or object. Also there is another homophonous word $h\text{aa}^2$ 'classifier for showers of rain'. These two forms have different etymological origins, as we shall see, and most dictionaries list them as separate items. McFarland (1954), however, combines the two words in a single entry and contrives a gloss to cover both, reading in part 'coming or occurring in great abundance (as rain or disease)'.

The second word, $h\text{aa}^2$ 'shower', has in Siamese the precisely correct etymological form, corresponding without any deviation whatsoever to cognates found in all branches of the Tai family. The initial and tone of this word for 'shower' everywhere reflect an original voiceless initial with the B tone of

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Proto-Tai. On the basis of the initials found in the various languages, F. K. Li long ago grouped this word with those for which he reconstructs Proto-Tai initial *xr (see Li 1954, 378; Li 1960, 955-56; Li 1977, 234).

But the first word, haa² 'epidemic', is aberrant in Siamese; this form cannot be directly inherited. The initial h with second or low tone ought, as in the case of the other word, haa² 'shower', to reflect an original voiceless initial with Proto-Tai B tone, but everywhere in the Tai-speaking domain, outside of Thailand and Laos, the cognate forms for Siamese haa² 'epidemic' have initials and tones that reflect a Proto-Tai voiced initial, presumably *r, with the Proto-Tai B tone, so that the Siamese form ought to be not haa² with second or low tone, but rather *raa³, with third or falling tone. In his Handbook of Comparative Tai (1977), F. K. Li has (I believe mistakenly) listed his word with those for which he reconstructs the voiceless Proto-Tai initial *hr; that is, he takes the Siamese form haa² to be regular, and forms in other languages reflecting an original voiced initial to be aberrant. For some of the cognates that he cites he notes that they have not B1 tone (B with voiceless initial) but B2 (B with voiced initial). He fails to note that everywhere, except in Thailand and Laos, the initial and tone in this word reflect an original voiced initial. If the evidence to be presented in this paper is accepted, then 'epidemic' ought to be listed under Proto-Tai *r. Others have, so far as I know, also failed to notice the true facts regarding this word.
This paper will first present the evidence for the foregoing statement that the cognates of Siamese haa\textsuperscript{2} 'epidemic' indicate that the Siamese form ought to be not haa\textsuperscript{2} but *raa\textsuperscript{3}. Then an attempt will be made to venture a possible explanation for the aberrant and innovative Siamese form.

The evidence for the statement that the Siamese form for 'epidemic' ought to be *raa\textsuperscript{3} will be presented in the following way. For each language or dialect cited, the form for this word will be given, along with other words that agree with it in initial and tone, that is, other words having the initial and tone that reflect the voiced Proto-Tai initial *r with tone B, such as the cognates of Siamese ray\textsuperscript{3} 'dry field', rom\textsuperscript{3} 'shade', and rua\textsuperscript{3} 'to leak'. And for each language or dialect we will cite, by way of contrast, the cognate for Siamese haa\textsuperscript{2} 'shower', to show that the two words 'epidemic' and 'shower' everywhere but in Thailand and Laos differ in initial, or tone, or both.

Readers will be spared a complete analysis of the tone system of each language, or of the transcription system used in each source cited. For our present purpose it will presumably be sufficient to show that, regardless of vagaries of transcription in various sources, the word for 'epidemic' has the same tone and initial as the words for 'dry field', 'shade', and 'to leak', but differs in tone, or initial, or both, from the word for 'shower', in each language or dialect cited.

To the west of Thailand and Laos, Shan (citing Cushing 1914) has haa\textsuperscript{3} 'an epidemic disease, disease
prevailing without any apparent cause, particularly cholera', agreeing in initial and tone with hay³ 'a cultivated spot of ground, not subject to inundation, an upland field', hom³ 'to shade, to cast a shadow; the shade of anything', and ho³ 'to leak', but differing in tone from haa² 'a shower'. The Shan change of *r to h in 'dry field', 'shade' and 'to leak' (see also Siamese ray³, rom³, and rua³) is an instance of a very widespread but apparently fairly recent change of *r to h in all Tai dialects of Burma, Assam, northern and northeastern Thailand, Laos, Sipsongpanna in Yunnan, and the extreme northwestern part of Vietnam. Where this change has occurred, the word for 'epidemic' ends up, of course, with initial h, like the word for 'shower', and we are forced to turn to the tone to distinguish forms with original voiced initials, such as 'dry field', from those with original voiceless initials, such as 'shower'.

Even farther west, Ahom, in Assam, an archaic Tai language now extinct, is of no help to us, because the dictionaries do not mark tones. The Ahom Lexicons (Barua and Phukan 1964) gives rā 'an epidemic, disease', and rā 'to rain heavily'. The latter form, cognate with Siamese haa² 'shower', has in Ahom an initials r, which is part of the evidence upon which Li relied for his reconstruction of *xr for the set of words in which he includes it.

To the north of Thailand and Laos, the Lue language of Chieng Hung in Sipsongpanna, Yunnan (citing Gedney's field notes, quoted in Gedney 1976), has haa⁵ 'cholera, epidemic', agreeing in initial and