ON THE THAI EVIDENCE FOR AUSTRO-THAI

1. Introduction. The purpose here will be to examine the evidence on the Thai side presented by Paul K. Benedict (hereafter PKB) in his new book Austro-Thai: Language and Culture, with a Glossary of Roots (hereafter AT).

The book is impressive for the great industry that has gone into it, and for the author's bold imagination. Both these qualities have been in the past, and will continue to be, requisite to any substantial forward progress in our understanding of the linguistic prehistory of Southeast Asia.

It is a convenience to the reader to have included in the book PKB's earlier publications on the subject. Pages 1-33 ("Austro-Thai") first appeared in 1966; pages 35-74 ("Austro-Thai Studies: 1. Material Culture" and "2. Kinship Terms") in 1967; pages 75-133 ("Austro-Thai Studies: 3. Austro-Thai

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and Chinese") also in 1967; and pages 438-63 (the famous original article "Thai, Kadai, and Indonesian: A New Alignment in Southeastern Asia") in 1942. The rest of the book is new. From time to time items cited below will be identified by these dates where it seems relevant to do so: that is, 1942, 1966, 1967, and (for the new material) 1975.

Before proceeding further I feel compelled to make some comments of a personal nature. For over thirty years, although the author and I have been good personal friends, I have been among those not persuaded by PKB's arguments in his original 1942 paper. PKB speaks on p. 138 of AT of "unrepentant scholars" who "still inveigh against the AT hypothesis." I hope I have not "inveighed," but I have made no secret of my disbelief, and perhaps, in cases of inveighing, the inveiger is never himself conscious that he is inveighing. I have been sorry through the years to find myself unable to agree with a number of scholars, many of them old friends and valued colleagues, for whom I otherwise have great respect, in their acceptance of PKB's hypothesis of a genetic relationship between Thai and Austronesian.

I resolved, therefore, to make as careful an examination as possible of all PKB's Thai evidence now presented. (I follow PKB throughout in using the spelling Thai, although normally I prefer the form Tai as the name of the family.) I have spent some weeks in indexing every Thai form cited, and intended originally to search all PKB's sources in order to make an exhaustive check. I have found it necessary, however, to curtail this work of checking, which
turned out to be much more time-consuming than expected, especially in cases where PKB has modified the original, or where he cites a gloss from a modern language without the specific modern form, giving instead his Proto-Thai reconstruction, sometimes making the search for the modern form slow and uncertain. But, although I have had to abandon the plan to make an exhaustive search of every source, I have done a good deal of this checking, and will present examples from my findings. It will be seen that so much has turned up calling for comment that it is just as well that time did not permit further checking.

I am sorry to report that after this close study of PKB's Thai material I find myself even more unconvinced than before. I regret now that I agreed to participate in this panel, since I have no desire to appear to pick a quarrel with PKB or the others who accept his hypothesis. Time will tell, as scholarship in these areas advances, whether he is right or wrong. But, having accepted this assignment, I am obliged now to try to organize and explain the various reasons for my disbelief. These will be roughly grouped under a number of headings. It will be seen that the division among these is not always clear-cut, and that some examples might as well have been mentioned under some other heading than the one chosen.

2. Bibliography. Before proceeding further I wish to comment on PKB's bibliography, pp. 428-37. For accuracy and clarity, this bibliography is unusually good. Southeast Asian linguistic scholarship
is not usually so successful in its handling of references. But this bibliography, surprisingly, fails to include many of the important references cited in the original 1942 article (pp. 438-63).

PKB has made use of most of the references available up to about 1940. There are only a few gaps in this earlier material: he does not use the valuable dictionary by Savina of the variety of Thai spoken in the Ha-Giang area of North Vietnam, of great interest because of its transitional position between Southwestern Thai to the west and the Tho-Nung dialects to the east. And for Siamese one is surprised to find reference only to the early dictionaries by Pallegoix and Lajonquière. Many of the errors in the Siamese data might have been avoided, and perhaps better material would have turned up, if he had used some of the many twentieth-century dictionaries of this language.

Use of references that have appeared since about 1940 is more sporadic. Perhaps one should not be too critical on this point; so much has appeared, often in out-of-the-way places, that no worker in this field can be expected to have gotten his hands on, or had time to make full use of, every source. But much of the more recent work that PKB has failed to utilize deals systematically with comparative phonology. It is in this area that his work is weakest. One has the impression that he has been mainly interested in gleaning dictionaries and word lists for items of interest to him, rather than in studying and perhaps advancing the systematic phonological comparisons and