THE PHONOLOGY OF CHONG
A Mon-Khmer Language of Thailand

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I. Introduction

The Chong language belongs to the Pearic branch of the Mon-Khmer language family. The Pearic languages (Pear, Chong, Samre, Saoc) were earlier grouped with Khmer in a 'Cambodian group' by Schmidt (1907), Pinnow (1959), and Shorto, Jacob, and Simmonds (1963); however, Thomas and Headley in 1970, based on lexicostatistical evidence, established a Pearic branch, distinct from Khmer, as one of nine coordinate branches of Mon-Khmer, supported by Diffloth (1973) and Huffman (1976a).

In 1970-71 I collected data on fifteen Mon-Khmer languages in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia under a Guggenheim Fellowship and a National Science Foundation research grant; one of these languages was a dialect of Chong spoken in the village of Ban Thung Saphan, Amphoe Makham, Changwat Chantaburi. My principal informant was Mr. Tan Khunraj, chief of Müu 2, Ban Thung Saphan, who estimated that there are about 500 speakers of Chong in Thung Saphan, and that there are speakers of mutually intelligible dialects of Chong all the way to Takhian Thong, but that the Chong of Pong Nam Ron is very different.
He further stated that so far as he was aware, the Chong have been in their present location for thousands of years, which indicates at least that we are not dealing with a recent migration within the last one to two hundred years. He further estimated that there are some 5,000 Chong speakers in the area; this would be much higher than the usual estimate of numbers of Chong speakers, but would roughly equal the usual estimate of speakers of all languages of the Pearic subgroup in Thailand and Cambodia (Headley 1977).

Very little reliable data on the Chong has been published, other than short lists of vocabulary by 19th century authors (Crawfurd 1830, Bastian 1868, Garnier 1876); Pavie (1881-2) published an 86-item Chong vocabulary from Kampot Province in Cambodia; data collected by Purtle in the 1960's apparently support Pavie's data (Headley 1977, p. 71). Perhaps the most extensive data on the Chong of Thailand was published by Noe Isarangura in 1935, on a dialect spoken in Trat Province. Marie Martin recently collected data on two dialects of Chong spoken in Chantaburi province (Martin 1974), which she calls 'Coŋ ᵛʰəŋ' and 'Coŋ lœo'. Although she does not relate these two dialects to specific villages, her placement of the two dialects on a map (p. 27) suggests that 'Coŋ ᵛʰəŋ' might be the dialect of Pong Nam Ron while 'Coŋ lœo' might be a dialect spoken in Amphoe Makham; based on a few items which appear in her article,
her 'Coŋ lêo' would appear to be fairly similar to my dialect of Ban Thung Saphan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Martin</th>
<th>Huffman</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coŋ hêep</td>
<td>Coŋ lêo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'fish'</td>
<td>mîiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'head'</td>
<td>tooh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'root'</td>
<td>rih</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'stone'</td>
<td>kəmok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'tongue'</td>
<td>kətaa̯k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Martin's map furthermore agrees roughly with the indication of two locations of Chong speakers shown on the Gainey and Thongkum Language Map of Thailand (1977), i.e. one in Amphoe Makham and another in Amphoe Pong Nam Ron. In 1977 and 1978 Robert Headley published a Pearic vocabulary, which is a kind of synthesis of the disparate and fragmentary data so far published on Pearic languages, but it is clear that we need much more reliable descriptive and comparative data on specific dialects before we can clarify the language vs. dialect problem among the Pearic languages, or even within Chong itself. It is in this interest that I present the following analysis and glossary of my data on the Chong of Ban Thung Saphan, even though, based as it is on a corpus of only some 1,000 words, many problems remain unsolved.
II. Phonological Analysis

1. Vowels

Chong has the following 12 vowel phonemes:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
/i/ \quad /i/ \\
/e/ \\
/e/ \\
/a/ \\
\end{array}
\]

To this inventory must be added a phoneme of register /`/. Chong, like the languages of the Monic and (most of the languages of) the Katuic branches of Mon–Khmer, is a 'register' language; i.e. every vowel can be assigned unambiguously to one of two 'registers' or 'manners' or 'phonation types' (see Huffman 1976b):

1) a 'tense', 'clear', or 'head' manner (usually called 1st register);

2) a 'lax', 'breathy', or 'chest' manner (usually called 2nd register).

In this analysis we shall call these two registers 'tense' and 'lax'; tense vowels will be unmarked while lax vowels will be marked with a grave accent /`/.

In addition, Chong vowels may be either long or short; we will show length by writing double vowels /VV/, equivalent in length to diphthongs. The contrastive functions of length and register can be