SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE THAI LANGUAGE
IN THE SUKHOTHAI INSCRIPTIONS

presented at the International Conference
on Thai Studies
by
Naomitsu Mikami
Institute of Cultural & Linguistic Studies
Keio University
SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE THAI LANGUAGE
IN THE SUKHOTHAI INSCRIPTIONS

Naomitsu Mikami
Keio University

The present paper attempts to deduce the phonetic values of vowel symbols and to describe briefly some syntactic categories by utilizing the Sukhothai inscriptions as the corpus for analysis.

1. Reconstruction of vocalic system

From the correspondence to modern Tai dialects, mainly modern standard Thai, the vocalic system of the Thai language in Ramkamhaeng's inscription may be reconstructed as follows:

- i, ii → ɯ, ɯɯ
- e, ee → ɛ, ɛɛ
- a, aa → ɔ, ɔɔ
- ia → ɯa
- ai → ɯɯ

ee, ɛɛ and oo (also ɛʔ and ɔʔ) appear in loan words.

2. Description of some syntactic categories

(1) Classifiers: อัน is most widely used; others include หั่น, หัน, หัน, หัน, หัน, หัน, หัน, etc.
(2) Demonstratives: นี่, นี้, นี่, นี่, นี่, นี่ and นี่ are found.
(3) Personal pronouns: นี่, นี่, นี่ and นี่ appear as first person; นี่ as second person; นี่, นี่, นี่, นี่ and นี่ as third person. The dual form and exclusive form are partially attested.
(4) Prepositions: among others, แต่, แต่, แต่, แต่, แต่, แต่, เกิด, นี่, and นี่ are found.
(5) Conjunctions: แต่ occurs as a coordinator; เมื่อ, ค่ำ, เค้ย, ค่ำ, ค่ำ, ค่ำ, ค่ำ and ค่ำ occur as subordinators.
(6) Negatives: ไม่, ไม่, ไม่, ไม่ and ไม่ are used in negating verbal predicates; ไม่ is used in negating non-verbal predicates.
1. INTRODUCTION

The historical materials in the Sukhothai period are, for the most part, stone inscriptions, including Ramkamhaeng's inscription, the oldest of the surviving ones recording the Thai language and script. So far these inscription materials have been used as primary sources chiefly to elucidate the history and society of that period. At the same time they were taken up from a linguistic point of view as represented by the studies of Bradley, Burnay, Coedès, and so on, but their main interest lay in the writing system and deduction of phonetic values, and few results have been obtained in the grammatical analysis.

The purpose of this paper is first to discuss the vocalic system of the Thai language in Ramkamhaeng's inscription and next to describe briefly some of the syntactic categories of the Thai language found in the inscriptions which are assigned to the period between Ramkamhaeng's inscription (1292 A.D.) and 1438 A.D. when Sukhothai was annexed to Ayuthaya. The inscriptions in this period, however, are not of great value as linguistic materials: they are absolutely small in number and quantity; they contain many obscure passages due to breakage; their subject matter is limited. Since the materials are restricted both in quantity and

---

1) Inscriptions used as the corpus for analysis are the following:
พลิกที่ 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15 in พระธรรมจักรวาล ภาคที่ 1,
พลิกที่ 38, 40, 45, 46, 49 in พระธรรมจักรวาล ภาคที่ 3 and พลิกที่ 40, 93,
95, 102, 106 in พระธรรมจักรวาล ภาคที่ 4. Inscriptions 13, 14 and 15 are used as reference, although they are assigned to the period after 1438 A.D.

Citations will be indicated by (inscription number/face number/line number).
quality in this way, we are forced to deal with extremely limited linguistic phenomena, which will make it almost impossible to investigate the language systematically. For this reason, we do not know exactly to what extent the inscription materials available reflect the state of the language in that period.

In this paper, taking the nature of the inscriptions mentioned above into consideration, I will not generalize but describe the language just as it is.

2. VOCALIC SYSTEM

When we try to deduce the phonological system of the language in the Sukhothai period on the basis of its script, we are confronted with irregularity in spelling: the same word is often written in different ways even in the same inscription. In fact, it is not quite certain to what this is due, but breakage, engraving errors or reflections of phonetic facts may be suggested as possibilities. However, if we adopt the method of comparing the Sukhothai language (ST) with modern Tai dialects, examining the script, it will be possible to some extent, even if unsatisfactorily, to get at the phonetic reality underlying the spelling symbols. Here I will point out the difficulties in doing so, and discuss the phonetic values of the vowel letters of Ramkamhaeng's inscription chiefly by comparison with modern standard Thai (MT). Since the corpus is limited to one inscription of Ramkamhaeng, the reconstructed vocalic system is tentative in its nature.

2) In connection with this section, Professor Mitani, Yasuyuki of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies made helpful suggestions.
3) With regard to Tai dialects, I have consulted Li (1977) and A Comparative Tai Wordlist by William J. Gedney.