Common vocabulary of Sukhothai inscriptions and different Tai dialects

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A speaker of the Northern Thai dialect of Thailand (NT) can communicate easily with either a Tai Lue (TL) or a Tai Nuea (TN) speaker from China. This is also true for the Northeastern Thai (NET) and the Southern Thai dialects. Unfortunately, a person who knows only the Central Thai or Standard Thai dialect (ST) can hardly understand any Tai dialects of China, and vice versa. A friend of mine who speaks TN can clearly understand the inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng (1292 A.D.), but can read modern Bangkok newspapers only with much difficulty. Thus, it is expected that Tai dialects can help in the interpretation of old Thai inscriptions.

From the Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng (Inscription 1):

Meaning in Standard Thai in Some Tai dialects

ตูน (ไจน) we all of us
พี่ (เหนือ) we we two (exclusive)
พี่น้อง (นี้เรา) - the eldest (brother)
tiam ต้อง (ตั้งยิ่งแม่) - from the time, since

'Khâu' (เข้า) which means 'rice or year' comes from the clause, 'มีดู คนนึกย่า ด้วย ษัพ 쌀 ใช้' meaning "when I was 19 years old." 'Khâu' means 'rice' in ST, but 'year' in many other dialects.
‘ya yāai’ (ย่าไถ่) which means ‘to scatter’ in NT but no longer in use, comes from the sentence, ‘phrái fāa nāa săi phēī kuu nī ya yāai’ meaning “my father’s men scatter in confusion.”

phēē (ฟี) which means ‘to be defeated or to win’ comes from the clause, ‘ton kuu ... phēē’ meaning “because I won in fighting.” ‘phēē’ means ‘to be defeated’ in ST, but ‘to win’ in many other dialects.

‘phīa’ (พี) which means ‘for (someone) or because’ comes from the clause, ‘phīa kuu phūṇ chāan khūn săam chon phēē’ meaning “because I won in elephants fighting with Khun Sam Chon.” ‘phīa’ means ‘for (someone)’ in ST, but ‘because’ in many other dialects.

‘luu thanh (ลูกทรง) which means ‘it is convenient.’ in NT and NET, comes from the sentence ‘cāu mian bāc báo cākēēp nai phrái luu thanh phīan cuuŋ wau pai khāa’ meaning “the lord does not levy tolls to his subjects and so it is convenient for them to trade.”

‘phīan’ (พี) which means ‘friend, neighbor, or they’, comes from the sentence ‘phīan cuuŋ wau pai khāa’ meaning “they herd their cattle to trade.” ‘phīan’ means ‘friend’ in ST, but ‘they’ in NT.

‘yīa khāa’ (ฝ่ายข้าว) is not used in ST, but means ‘granary’ in Shan, NT and NET.

‘khāa’ (ข้า) means ‘both of them’ in Phake and other dialects, but not in ST.

‘chēē’ (ซี้) is not used in ST, but it means ‘to help’ in many other dialects.

‘nā fīa’ (เนื้อฟื้น) is not used in ST, but it means ‘to support’ in many other dialects.

‘mia’ (เมี) is not used in ST, but it means ‘to go or to come’ in many other dialects.

‘māak laan’ (มาจากกลาง) renders different meanings in
reading texts of different dialects. It means ‘jack-fruit’ in Shan, ‘areca nut’ in Chuang, the White Tai and the Southern Thai dialects, and ‘coconut’ in many other dialects.

‘ Klan’ ( Klan) means ‘glide’ in ST and ‘to chant poetry or to recite in a singing manner’ in Phake and other dialects. The latter meaning seems to be more acceptable.

‘khap’ ( Khap) means ‘to sing’ in NT. It appears as ‘khap rōph’ meaning ‘to sing classical Thai songs’ in ST.

‘lāk’ ( Lāk) is not used in ST, but it means ‘to be wise’ in many other dialects.

‘lūk...māa’ ( Lūk...Mā) means ‘to stand up and come’ in ST, but ‘to come from’ in many other dialects which appears in a sentence in the Inscription as ‘lūk tāk māa sīthammarāat māa’ meaning “(he) has come from the Province of Nakhon Si Thammarat.”

‘mon’ ( Mon) is not used in ST, but it means ‘to be round’ in many other dialects.

‘tīang tīn nāak’ ( Tīang tīn nāak) means ‘the direction of a man’s feet when he is sleeping, which is the North.’ The NE Thais and the Southern Thais still sleep with their feet pointing north.

‘dīan bānχ̄ pâkαt wan’ ( Dīan bānχ̄ pâkαt wan) means ‘the eighth day of the waning moon.’ ‘bānχ̄’ in NT means ‘to have a nick’ and so ‘dīan bānχ̄’ means ‘the waning moon.’ It is very unusual for the Inscription to use the eighth day instead of the eighth night which is used in nearly all Tai dialects, but nowadays TN still uses the eighth day.

‘sūt’ ( Sūt) means ‘to chant, to preach’ in NT, but not in ST. The sentence appears in the Inscription as ‘sūt phūt khruu thēn mahā thēn khīn nān nā khadaan hīn sūt tham kāk̄ ?ūbaαsōk’ meaning “a group of the monks sit on the stone slab to preach Dharma to the people.”
'laai rai' (ลายสี), which means 'stripes' in ST and 'the alphabet' in TN which is equivalent to 'lik laai' in Phake, should be translated as 'the alphabet.'

'khrai cai' (คราจ) is not found in ST, but it means 'to think' in Ahom, Phake, and TN. The sentence in the Inscription is 'phhɔ̄ khun raam khamhaëng haa khrai cai nai cai lææ sai laai sii thai nii' meaning "King Ram Khamhaeng thinks in his mind and devises the Thai alphabet."

'haa' (หา) in the phrase 'haa pen' (หาเป็น) is found in the Inscriptions 1 and 3 which means 'by oneself' in White Tai. The sentence in the Inscription is 'phhɔ̄ khun raam khamhaëng haa pen khruu ?aacaan' meaning "King Ram Khamhaeng himself is a teacher."

'khɔ̄' (กะ) is not yet found in other Tai dialects, but in one Kha dialect meaning 'strong.' In the Inscription, the word is given together with its synonym, 'raaæng' (แรง). The sentence in the Inscription is 'duai khɔ̄ duai raaæng haa khon cak samlo mi dai' meaning "there is no one to equal him in wisdom and strength."

samut haa pen daoæn (สมุทรปราการเป็นแดน) means 'the ocean itself is the boundary.' 'daoæn' means 'a certain region' in ST, but 'a boundary' in NT.

'reñ' (แซว) which means 'to be safe' in ST, but 'to reach' in NT, comes from the sentence 'hian tiin noca reñ miñ phraæ' meaning "In the north he conquered (or he reached) the Province of Phrae."

In Inscription 2 we have the following words:

'thape caariit wai' (ตึงจาริตไว) which means 'in conformity with tradition' in ST but it means an inscription was carved' in NT. 'thae' means 'carve' in Chuang.

'suŋ' (ซุน) means 'a kiln.' Vickery (1986) says that this word is derived from Mon. In fact TN uses 'suŋ' for 'a fireplace.'