

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
tuu (ตุ)	<i>we</i>	<i>all of us</i>
phǎa (เผื่อ)	<i>we</i>	<i>we two (exclusive)</i>
phûu ?âai (ผู้เฒ่า)	-	<i>the eldest (brother)</i>
tiam tææ (เดิยมมต)	-	<i>from the time, since</i>

‘khâu’ (ข้าว) which means ‘*rice or year*’ comes from the clause, ‘mǎia kuu khîn yài dâi sǐp kâau khâu’ meaning ‘*when I was 19 years old.*’ ‘khâu’ means ‘*rice*’ in ST, but ‘*year*’ in many other dialects.

‘ya yâai’ (ญ๋าย) which means ‘to scatter’ in NT but no longer in use, comes from the sentence, ‘phrâi fâa nâa sâi phôw kuu nî ya yâai’ meaning “*my father’s men scatter in confusion.*”

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

‘phîa’ (เฟื้อ) which means ‘for (someone) or because’ comes from the clause, ‘phîa kuu phûn cháan khûn sâam chon pháæ’ meaning “*because I won in elephants fighting with Khun Sam Chon.*” ‘phîa’ means ‘for (someone)’ in ST, but ‘because’ in many other dialects.

‘luu thâang’ (ลูทาง) which means ‘it is convenient.’ in NT and NET, comes from the sentence ‘câu mian bô ?au cakôop nai phrâi luu thâang phîan cuun wua pai khâa’ meaning “*the lord does not levy tolls to his subjects and so it is convenient for them to trade.*”

‘phîan’ (เฟือน) which means ‘friend, neighbor, or they’, comes from the sentence ‘phîan cuun wau pai khâa’ meaning “*they herd their cattle to trade.*” ‘phîan’ means ‘friend’ in ST, but ‘they’ in NT.

‘yîia khâau’ (เยี่ยข้าว) is not used in ST, but means ‘granary’ in Shan, NT and NET.

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

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

‘nîa fia’ (เหนื่อเฟื้อ) is not used in ST, but it means ‘to support’ in many other dialects.

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

‘màak laan’ (หมาก-กลาง) 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.

‘hian’ (เลี่ยน) 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.

‘khàp’ (ขับ) means ‘*to sing*’ in NT. It appears as ‘khàp róng’ meaning ‘*to sing classical Thai songs*’ in ST.

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

‘lúk...maa’ (ลุก...มา) 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 ‘lúk tææ mian sǐthammarâat maa’ meaning “(he) has come from the Province of Nakhon Si Thammarat.”

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

‘bhang tiin noon’ (เบื้องตีนนอน) 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.

‘dian bhang pææt wan’ (เดือนข้างแสดวัน) means ‘*the eighth day of the waning moon.*’ ‘bhang’ in NT means ‘*to have a nick*’ and so ‘dian bhang’ 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.

‘sùut’ (สูต) means ‘*to chant, to preach*’ in NT, but not in ST. The sentence appears in the Inscription as ‘fũuŋ pũu khruu thẽen mahãa thẽen khĩn nãŋ nĩa khadaan hĩn sùut tham kææ ?ùbaasòk’ meaning “a group of the monks sit on the stone slab to preach Dharma to the people.”

‘laai sǎi’ (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*.’

‘khrâi cai’ (ใครใจ) is not found in ST, but it means ‘*to think*’ in Ahom, Phake, and TN. The sentence in the Inscription is ‘phôw khũn raam khamhǎæŋ hǎa khrâi cai nai cai lææ sài laai sǎi thai nii’ meaning “*King Ram Khamhaeng thinks in his mind and devises the Thai alphabet*.”

‘hǎa’ (หา) in the phrase ‘hǎa pen’ (หาเป็น) is found in the Inscriptions 1 and 3 which means ‘*by oneself*’ in White Tai. The sentence in the Inscription is ‘phôw khũn raam khamhǎæŋ hǎa pen khruu ʔaacaan’ meaning “*King Ram Kamhaeng himself is a teacher*.”

‘khæ’ (แคะ) 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, ‘rææŋ’ (แรง). The sentence in the Inscription is ‘dûai khæ dûai rææŋ hǎa khon càk samǎw mí dâi’ meaning “*there is no one to equal him in wisdom and strength*.”

samùt hǎa pen dææn (สมุทรหาเป็นแดน) means ‘*the ocean itself is the boundary*.’ ‘dææn’ means ‘*a certain region*’ in ST, but ‘*a boundary*’ in NT.

‘rôwt’ (รอด) which means ‘*to be safe*’ in ST, but ‘*to reach*’ in NT, comes from the sentence ‘bǎŋ tiin noon rôwt mǎŋ phrææ’ meaning “*In the north he conquered (or he reached) the Province of Phrae*.”

In Inscription 2 we have the following words:

‘wǎŋ caarlit wái’ (ต้องจารีตไว้) which means ‘*in conformity with tradition*’ in ST but it means an inscription was carved’ in NT. ‘wǎŋ’ means ‘*carve*’ in Chuang.

‘sǔŋ’ (สูง) means ‘*a kiln*.’ Vickery (1986) says that this word is derived from Mon. In fact TN uses ‘sǔŋ’ for ‘*a fireplace*.’