

Tracing the Meanings of Thai Disyllabic Words
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The mono-lingual Dictionary of the Thai language compiled by Thailand's Royal Institute contains a lot of disyllabic words of which the etymology are not provided. The preface states that giving the etymology was a very difficult part of the dictionary compilation because it was impossible to find evidence and literature from every period in the past. There were, therefore, a number of words that could only be roughly traced back to its origin but were as yet undetermined, until further evidence could be found. (Royal Institute 1982) These disyllabic words are still in use, but the origin and meaning of each element in many of them are still unknown. Many have lost their meanings and no longer occur by themselves in the present day language. Many have lost the aspects of meanings. Some are dying out. Some can be found in old works of literature, but their meanings are not known. Some are still being used, with their meanings changed. Others still appear in certain Thai dialects. An investigation of original meanings of the words can be conducted not only by looking into the Thai dialects spoken in Thailand, but also by examining the various Tai dialects spoken outside of Thailand, for example in the southern provinces of China such as Yunnan and Guangxi. However, the original meaning of the elements comprising the disyllabic words can be traced from Chinese language as well, due to the fact that Thai and Chinese are believed to belong historically to the same language family, and also because during their long contact, word loaning must have taken place.

The tracing of Thai disyllabic words from Chinese data helps us understand the meanings of a great number of Thai words. Some of these words in Chinese are found to have the same pronunciation with the Thai words while others have slightly different pronunciation. However, the pronunciation of the Chinese words studied in this paper is based on Archaic Chinese (approximately 1122-207 B.C.) and Ancient Chinese (approximately 601 A.D.) for the reason that the words studied

reflect a relation dating back to the periods of Archaic and Ancient Chinese. The Archaic Chinese pronunciation is given in Dr. Fang-kuei Li's reconstructed forms (Li 1971) and is marked by ** in front of the words, whereas the Ancient Chinese pronunciation is that of Bernhard Karlgren (1957) and is indicated by * before the words. The Thai disyllabic words that can be compared to Chinese words are as follows:

kong(ka:n) กอง(การ) : 工 *kung "work, task"

The Thai word **kong** can be compared to the word *kung in Chinese. It is usually paired with the word **ka:n** which means "work," **kong-ka:n** means "business or concern." In present day Thai, the word is usually used as a denial to mean none of one's business, or it is used to oppose that something is not desirable. For example, This is not our **kong-ka:n**. or What **kong-ka:n** is it of yours?

(kiat)khra:n เกียจคร้าน : 懶 **glan "lazy"

The Thai word **khra:n** can be compared to the word **glan in Chinese. It is usually used together with the word **kiat**, which also means "lazy" to form the semantic doublet **kiat-khra:n**.

kha:p(kiau) คาบ(เกี่ยว) : 盍 **gap "connected with, related to"

The word **kha:p** in Thai has many meanings such as "hold in the mouth" as in **kha:p king-mai** คาบกิ่งไม้ "hold a branch in the mouth," "to be in between" as in **kha:p-sa-mut** คาบสมุทร "peninsula," "to be at a designated point" as in **kha:p-sen** คาบเส้น "on the line." In the sense of **kha:p-kiau** "connected with, related to," however, the word **kha:p** corresponds with the word **gap in Chinese.

(ngo:)ngom (งอ)งม : 儻 *ngam “stupid”

The word **ngom** งม when used by itself as a verb in Thai means “dive to grope for something in the water.” To mean “stupid” as in Chinese, it occurs only in the compound **ngo:-ngom** งองม which is a way of adding a synonym word to define it.

cong(rak) จง(รัก) : 忠 *tjung “loyal”

If the word **cong** means “loyal” as the word *tjung does in Chinese, the person who **cong-rak** is the one who has both loyalty and love (**rak**).

The sound correspondence between the initial consonants of the above Thai and Chinese words is normal because the Thai initial consonants **t-** and **c-** can be interchanged. In Thai, the words that contain interchangeable initial consonants **t-** and **c-** are, for example, **ta-kha:p** ตะขาบ and **ca-kha:p** จะขาบ “centipede,” and **ta-khe:** ตะเห่ and **ca-khe:** จะเห่ “crocodile.”

(ru:)cak (รู้)จัก : 識 *sjek “know, recognize”

The word **cak** จัก in Thai has several meanings: “to make notches on the edge like the teeth of a saw,” “to split bamboo or rattan stems into fine strips with a knife,” “to know, recognize, remember.” It can also function as a modal to indicate future tense. When the word **cak** จัก is paired with the word **ru:** รู้ as in **ru:-cak** รู้จัก, it means “to know, to recognize.” When it is put together with more than one word as in **ru:-cak-mak-ci:** รู้จักมักจี, it means “to be familiar with or on intimate terms with;” that is, the meaning comes from the additional attached words **mak** มัก and **ci:** จี. Both **mak** มัก and **ci:** จี correspond with the word 慕 **mag “to like, love” and 知 *tie “to know, to be familiar with, to be intimate with.”

(cap)cau (จับ)เฉ่า: 抓 *tsau “(bird) to perch, grasp”

In Thai, the word **cau** เฉ่า always occurs with other words such as **cap-cau** จับเฉ่า “(of a bird) to perch, grasp” and **nang-cau** นั่งเฉ่า or **cau-cuk** เฉ่าจุก “(of a person) to sit still and look forlorn.” The word **cau** เฉ่า in all these cases could be the same word as the Chinese word *tsau.

(cun)cia (จุน)เจือ: 佐 *tsa “to assist, help”

The word **cia** เจือ in the compound word **cun-cia** จุนเจือ or **cia-ca:n** เจือจาน probably corresponds with the Chinese word *tsa. The word **cun-cia** จุนเจือ, therefore, means “to provide help and support.” **ciaca:n** เจือจาน means “to assist and lend a hand.”

(ya:p)cha: (หยาบ)ห่า: 粗 **dzag “coarse, rough”

The final **-g in this Archaic Chinese reconstructed form disappeared in the Western Han Dynasty (206-24 B.C.). In studying the sound correspondences between Thai and Archaic Chinese, the sound **-ag in Archaic Chinese usually corresponds to the sound -a: in Thai (Prapin 1975:195-6). As a result, the word **cha:** ห่า should be the same word as **dzag in Chinese, i.e. it is a synonym of **ya:p** หยาบ “coarse, rough.”

(sæ:):sɔ:ng (แซ่)ซ้อง: 頌 *zjwong “to praise, eulogize”

The word **sɔ:ng** ซ้อง in the sense of “to praise” is usually paired with the word **sæ:แซ่** which means “to be too noisy to catch to word,” and become the compound word **sæ:-sɔ:ng** แซ่ซ้อง meaning “to shout praises.”