

STUDYING OF VIETNAMESE THAI'S SCRIPT
ITS COMPARISON WITH THE SCRIPT
OF THAILAND

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It is natural that Thai Language communities have their own scripts for a very long time. Among them, the Eastern communities, such as Choang and Tay, have been using square script system that bears the Chinese origin. And the western communities, including Thai in Vietnam, have been using other kinds of script. These are more close to the script system of Mon, Khmer and Eastern India.

In Vietnam, though many peoples use the Language system of Thai like Tay, Nung, only those who claim themselves Tày, or Thai in Vietnamese, living from the west Bank of The Red river towards the west border, have been using the same script of Thai communities in the west. The script does not belong to the square script. This has made it clearer for the difference between the people officially call themselves Thai (Tày) with those who call themselves Tày, Nùng.

Those who are called Thai (Tày) are divided into "black" branch - Tày đăm, and "white" branch - Tày Khao. But both of these two branches use the same script called Xư Tày - Thai script, though They are a bit different from each other, owing to the differences in the two Languages. (1).

(1) Câm Cường, Dương Xuân Cường : "First steps in search for comparison between Vietnamese Thai and Thai in Thailand".

However, this difference is only a small one in the comparison with other Thai communities' ones.

In order to compare, we have taken the present national Thai from Thai in general as the standard script. And, on the side of Vietnamese Thai, we have chosen the script of Black Thai, with the comparison of some special differences with White Thai's script. The reasons are:

- The Black Thai people are over 50% of the total Thai people in Vietnam.

- The Black Thai people have a high unity in Language script, culture etc ... Whereas this unity is decreased in the White Thai because they are divided into different regional smaller groups.

- For a long time now, The Black Thai area has been considered the centre of general culture of Thai peoples in Vietnam. And there maintains the common culture legacy of Thai peoples.

We are sure that Vietnamese Thai, Laos and Thai in Thailand have the same origin. But, the concrete historic and geographic circumstances have led to the present differences.

However, how this historic landmark appeared is still a question to us.

In Thailand, the most historical evidence of the script presence is the stela of Rem Khăm Heng Time, the year of The Goat 1205 - But, it is not the most historical time of Thai script.

Among Vietnamese Thai people there has been a legend as follow .

Long long ago, The God informed that he would give scripts to the man kind. And all kinds of Man hurried up there to receive their own scripts. The Chinese and other peoples were quick enough to get theirs. The Thai were so slow that when they got there, all scripts had been given. The God did not know what to

do though the Thai entreated very insistingly. Suddenly the God saw a basket of peas. He took a handful of peas and threw them down the yard, saying these words with sympathy: "Because you are too late. I have distributed all the scripts. In fact, the scripts have the same form with these peas. Take them as the model home and then try to creat your own scripts". So The Thai, Laos, Lu etc... took those peas home and began to make their scripts.

Therefore, the scripts of the Thai, Laos and Lu look the same and are similar to the form of pea seeds. Some other peoples like Mèo, Xá and Puộc ... were much slower than the Thai. And, there was nothing for them, even peas. That is the reason why they have not had their scripts yet. Legends are far from history - But they have shown us the truth that the scripts of The Thai, Laos and Lu are close to each other in many ways. We, therefor, think that it is useful to search for comparison between these scripts scientifically. It is still impossible to define charly the appeasing time of these scripts, but they must have been for over 1,000 years. Because the Vietnamese Thai are completely sure that their "Thông nǎng Xư" - the bark bags with engraved scripts have been made since Tào Xuông, Tào Ngan led Thai people from Mường Oun, Mường Ai to Mường Lo (2), The early of this century we hope that a complete study about the scripts of The Thai, Laos and Lu will bring useful scientific conclusions.

First of all, we study and compare the present-used scripts of Vietnamese Thai and Thai people in Thailand.

A. Comparison between Thai scrips in Vietnam and in Thailand.

I. Consonant *m* (tô).

(2) Quǎn Tô~Mưỡing (History of Thai in Vietnam).

* (Thông nǎng Xư" was engraved by hard pens. To read it, you must use "Mack nho" - a pink - bellied frnit to rub on, and the letters appear.

1.	v	w	b
2.	u	u	c, k
3.	o	o	j, z
4.	o	u	d, t
5.	u	o	h
6.	u	u	l
7.	u	u	m
8.	u	u	n
9.	o	u	o
10.	o	u	p
11.	m	u	t
12.	u	o	v
13.	x	u	x
14.	u	u	ch
15.	u	z	kh
16.	u	u	nh
17.	u	u	ng
18.	u	u	ph
19.	u	u	th

u

Explosive Consonants

(only in White Thai - Lai Chau - Vietnam).

ᨀ	ᨁ	to (ch')
ᨂ	ᨃ	pph
ᨄ	ᨅ	kkh

Consonants being in Thailand script only.

'r

II. Vowel. *ᨆ* (may)

a- Vowels preceding consonants (even for the purpose of making rhyme).

ᨇ	ua, uô
ᨈ	e
ᨉ	ɔ
ᨊ	ê
ᨋ	ô
ᨌ	ay
ᨍ	au
ᨎ	ăn

b- Vowels following consonants, between the rhyme .

ᨏ	a
ᨐ	o
ᨑ	ua, uô

c- Vowels standing above consonants.

ᨒ	i
ᨓ	u
ᨔ	ia, iê
ᨕ	ă
ᨖ	ăb, ăm

d- Vowels standing under consonants.

j

u

e- Vowels standing in front of and behind consonants.

e... 2

au

III. Making Rhyme.

1- Ending consonants to make rhyme (*final consonants*)

✓

b, p

n

c

ne

k

n

d, t

o

i, j

u

m

u

n

6

ng

j

v, o, u, w

2- Making closed and opened rhyme.

Adding the letter ɔ̌ (v) before vowels, having the influence like Vietnamese ơ (in oe) or u (in ua, uô) or like English w (in way). There are two cases of this kind.

a- adding only letter ɔ̌ (v) :

Example :

oɔ̌u

oan

oɔ̌6

uynh

oɔ̌u

uyn

oɔ̌u

oai,

oɔ̌n

uyn

b- adding both ʔ(v) and ʋ(j) when there is no other ending consonant.

Example :

oʔv	uya
oʔv	uy
oʔv	uê
ʔoʔv	oay

3- Notes :

a- Các may sau (vowels).

ʔ	ay
ʔ	au
ʔ...ʔ	au

They are rhymes themselves but single end, undeveloped ones. They don't combine, to create other rhymes, with ending consonants, except ʋ(j), when making flared (open) rhyme.

b- Các may (ending diphthongs).


ʔ	uʔa, uʔə
ʔ	ua, uô

They are diphthongs in fact ; but they and other vowels can combine with ending sounds to make different rhymes.

c- In Vietnamese Thai script as well as in the one of people in Thailand, the couple of "False" consonants (O) are always used to combine with may (vowels, limited rhymes, diphthong) and ending consonants to make rhymes having heading vowels, in comparison with Vietnamese and other Latin Languages.

o ₁₄	an
o ₂	ôm
o ₃	'ui
o ₆	iêng
o ₂	au
o ₂	ay
o ₂	om

Without the letter "O" in the above rhymes, we cannot make sounds.

The positions of the letter  in the above rhymes are the places in which we can put any consonants to make the responding sounds.

Example :

o ₂	chom
o ₂	chôm
o ₆	chiêng
o ₂	chau
o ₂	chay

This is the special similarity in both of the scripts of Vietnamese Thai and Thailand's Thai. It is, on the other hand, the important difference in comparison with other Languages of Latin origin.

d- To make simple sounds of a consonant+O, Thailand's script writes :

to
kho
bo

In Vietnamese Thai, people can simplify by making the mark "✓" above consonants to have responding sounds.

to



This mark is called "Khít Tẽng", it means "flip above". When we flip above the letter \checkmark (bo), it should be read "bo"- That is sensible because the names of consonants, in Vietnamese Thai script, and Thailand's script, stand beside the vowel o.

\checkmark	po
\checkmark	'no
\checkmark	ho

And, this is a small difference in writing of the two scripts.

e- In Vietnamese Thai, the vowel \checkmark (ă) combine with the ending consonants \checkmark (b), \checkmark (c), \checkmark (d), \checkmark (ng) in the same way as with other vowels. Only when with \checkmark (m), (\checkmark) disappears and replaced by \checkmark . It is read "ăm". Therefore, when it is put above consonant, it turns into the responding sound \checkmark (chăm). With the ending consonant \checkmark (n), it is read out (ăn).

Example :

\checkmark it	chăn
\checkmark it	păn
\checkmark it	khăn

g- In Vietnamese Thai script, it is acceptable to be a convention to write in short hand popularly the following words :

\checkmark au	côn (man)
\checkmark b	nùng (one)
\checkmark	xăm (repeat) - means ...
\checkmark	hồ hời

Hồ hời also means the full stop.

h- Unlike Thailand's script in Vietnamese Thai scripts there is not a number system of its own. Since the beginning of this century, people have been using Arabic numbers.

i- Unlike Thailand's script every letter in Vietnamese Thai script is written separately and clearly except in short hand. However, in ancient scripts, we sometimes see letters written in short ways.

Example :

sometimes are written

√u/ ư

√u/ (bản nã).

k- In the past, people did not use the full stop to punctuate a sentence. To separate the sentences, they leave a blank for readers to notice. Nowadays, Thai people use the punctuate marks like in other Latin scripts.

But in Thailand, the traditional punctuation (leaving blanks) is still used.

IV. Tone marks :

In present Vietnamese Thai script, there are 6 tone marks and if the ending consonants, used to make rhymes, are consonants √ (b-p), ư (k-c), ơ (d-t), there are only two tones. In Vietnamese Thai script, these six tones are divided into two groups, in each group there are three tones. These two groups are demonstrated by two different consonant groups "low" and "high". That is, these consonant groups bear the function of tone marks, though they are only two tone groups. Each of these two groups needs 2 more tone marks so that it can have enough 3 tones in a group, and six tones in two groups. And, as a result, there is "mai ệc and mai thộ" in Thailand and Laos scripts.

In old Vietnamese Thai script, there were not any tone marks besides the two low and high consonant groups, therefore one word can be read in three sounds (and three sounds only).

Example : √i

pa
pa'
pa''

ưi ma

ma'

ma''

ưi

pa
pa'
pa''

ưi

ma

ma'

ma''

When these words stand in sentences, it is up to the context (the special context in the poem), the readers can guess, among the three sounds, the most suitable sound to the context, without mistakes. However, it is difficult to have high accuracy, especially in contexts that need very high accuracy. Since early this century, people have been thinking of adding 2 more tone marks besides the above two consonant groups. One of the ways of adding, that is accepted by the majority, is :

ư	pa
ưê	pa'
ưg	pa'
ưi	pa
ưê	pā
ưg	pa

It is clear that there is a similarity with "mai ệc, mai Thộ" in scripts of Lao and Thailand.

The Vietnamese Thai people have known this "mai ệc, mai thộ" for a long time. But because Language of Thai people in Vietnam has not been used in national contexts, there has not been a demand for a high accuracy ; and, therefore, people still use the script with "low" and "high" groups.

The Language in Thailand in modern dictionaries has 5. main tones.

SOME FIRST COMMENTS

I. The two scripts have great similarities :

a) The way of naming consonants (all with the adding of 0).

b) The way of having positions of vowels (in front, behind, above or under).

c) The way of making rhymes with ending consonants :

- Use b instead of p, d(j) instead of i, đ instead of t, and v(w) instead of o, u.

d) Having the same special types of rhyme, and the same settlement about special rhymes : ay, an, en

e) The important part of letter O in making rhymes.

g) The settlement of Tone - mark problem on the basis of being divided into 2 low - high consonant groups.

h) The way of joining letter *ư* (h) with some high consonants to create responding low consonant group.

l (*ư*) *hl* (*ư*)

m (*ư*) *hm* (*ư*)

n (*ư*) *hn* (*ư*)

ng (*ư*) *hng* (*ư*)

v (*ư*) *hv* (*ư*)

nh (*ư*) *hnh* (*ư*)

i) Basically similar in the letter forms.

k) Specially similar in using ending consonants:

- To have open sounds, using high consonant group
m, n, ng, i, v. (*ư, ư, ư, ư, ư* —)

- While using ending low consonant group like b, c, đ
to make blocked sounds. (*ư, ư, ư* —)

II. The differences are as follow :

a) The forms of the letters are basically similar, but some forms are different. These differences can be seen in the end of the letters. The Vietnamese Thai script always has long and bent endings in letters. Thai script in Thailand are always neat, the long endings have been shortened in many ways

and always go to the left. Maybe somebody has thought of putting letter into printing machine. He has made them neat. The Vietnamese Thai script is basically in the form of hand-writing, maybe the writers are liberal in disposition. There are some apposite letters.

Thai Vietnam

Thailand

6 ng

9 v

It is clear that they are from the same origin but one of them has been improved.

d d(j)

n t

A 'C

n kh

b) Owing to consonant deformation between the two languages, the expression can be seen clearly in script :

Thái Vietnam

Thailand

{ n co
 'co

{ ʔ 'kho

{ n kho

>

n co'

ʔ kho

n kho'

We can see this in the consonant pairs : t - th , x - ch, p - ph : Mean while, in Thailand Language, a clear discrimination in one group (low) is put in another group (high). In Vietnamese Thai, There maintains a clear discrimination in two groups. As a result, in Vietnamese Thai the formations of the two low and high groups have been seen constantly. Whereas, in Thailand script, there is always the absence of some letter in

high group example b, ch, th, c, p). In this case, in Laos Language, the unpaired letters form the "middle" group - But in fact, it is the absence in one group owing to the sound variation.

c) In Thailand script, special attention is paid to details of discrimination of different writing ways of a sound. This discrimination partly bears the conception of despite of man to wards animals. The same sound "kh" is written in different ways :

khôn

That is the reason why there are different ways of writing the letters khokhôn and khokhoi. And, this is very clear in sounds kh, th, and ph. It is also the greatest difference in the two scripts.

d) About Tone marks :

In modern Black Thai Language in Vietnam, there is clear discrimination among six ordinary tone marks and two blocked ones ; mean while, in Thailand Language, the discrimination can only be seen among four ordinary and one blocked tone marks.

However, speaking of ways of writing sounds, they are completely the same, though pronounced differently.

๒๒ (ma)	dog	ma
๒๓ (mā)	to come back	ma
๒๔ (mạ)	horse	ma
๒๕ (pá)	porest	pà
๒๖ (pả)	aunt	pa
๒๗ (và)	to say	vạ