

DIALECTS OF CHONG: A CARTOGRAPHIC SKETCH

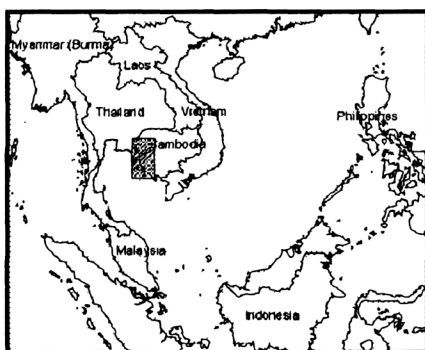
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1. Background

Chong is an ethnic minority of Thailand, whose language (Chong) belongs to the Pearic branch of Mon-Khmer group of Austroasiatic family. Pearic languages, i.e., Pear, Saoch, Chong, and Samre, extend across eastern provinces of Thailand, Chanthaburi and Trat, and northwestern Cambodia, including Batdambang, Pursat and Kampot. Due to the rapid decrease in mother tongue transmission, it is difficult to exactly determine the current number of Chong speakers. Different studies present different numbers of Chong speakers in Thailand, ranging from merely 500 (Grimes 2000) to about 4,000 (Mahidol Ethnolinguistic Map Project, forthcoming). The latter source indicates that, today, the largest group of Chong speakers is in Khao Khitchakut district of Chanthaburi province.¹

Map 1: Pearic Area



I started learning Chong in late 1998 with speakers from Khlong Phlu area north of Khao Khitchkut. At that time the language was already famous for its contrastive use of 4 registers.² For Chanthaburi alone, there are 5 descriptive

works dealing with Chong phonology both in Thai and English, plus two recent instrumental analyses of Chong ‘register’ in particular. All these works are based on data from Khao Khitchkut district (Surekha 2525, Saifon 2534, Sirikarn 2530, Siriphen 2001, Huffman 1985, L-Thongkum 1992 and Edmondson 1996). In contrast, direct accounts on dialects of Chong are rare.

The first attempt to categorize Chong dialects went back to Martin’s French publication in 1974. Martin proposes that Chong language can be divided into two dialects: Chong *lɔɔ* and Chong *həəp*. He provides some examples of the difference between Chong *lɔɔ* and Chong *həəp* that can be grouped as differences in final consonant, consonant cluster and vowel.

Table 1: Chong *lɔɔ* and Chong *həəp*

Gloss	Chong <i>lɔɔ</i>	Chong <i>həəp</i>
‘root’	reet	rih
‘head’	toot	toh
‘column’	caŋ	kraŋ
‘pig’	cok	krok
‘fish’	méev	míiv
‘fire’	pleev	pliiv

Source: Martin (1974)

Headley (1985) elaborates on Martin’s work and proposes that /-t/ and /-h/ are different treatments of *-s in Chong *lɔɔ* (*-s > /-t/) and Chong *həəp* (*-s > /-h/). However, my survey of recent studies has found further distinction within Chong dialects, especially between dialects of northern and southern Khao Khitchakut where linguists had long held as a unitary Chong *lɔɔ* proper (i.e. Huffman, 1985; Edmondson, 1996).

2. Research Methods

To verify my assumption about the inadequacy of the two-way division of Chong *lɔɔ* and Chong *həəp*, I had collected data in some Chong villages, especially in Khao Khitchakut district. In the beginning I elicited data from 8 primary villages by using a 300-item basic wordlist. After I analyzed the results, I selected about 30 words that represent sharp differences and tested them in other 3 villages. All in all, this paper is based on survey data from 11 villages.

I then link the results of my survey with geographic features of the studied areas on GIS platform in order to construct dialect maps that display linguistic data. With the pattern found in these maps, I propose a reconsideration of the Chong *lɔɔ*-Chong *həəp* distinction in Chanthaburi province.

3. Locations and Variants

Chanthaburi province can be divided as coastal areas and hinterlands (Weber 1976). Soi Dao Mountains, including Khao Khitchakut, lie from north to south, dividing the inner Chanthaburi into west and east. On the west side, Chong villages locate in two clusters (Takhian Thong in the north and Phluang in the south); on the east side is Pong Nam Ron district. Together with subsequent linguistic evidences, I propose that Chong dialect areas could be divided as (1) Northern Proper (2) Southern Proper, and (3) Eastern Proper.

The following survey data are referred to by abbreviated name of villages: CK = Cham Khloh, KP = Khlong Phlu, NK = Nam Khun, TT = Takhian Thong, PK = Phang Kalaeng, TI = Thung Ta-In, KT = Krathing, TP = Thung Saphan, WP = Wang Kraphrae. The first 10 villages locate in Khao Khitchakut district, and the last one is in Pong Nam Ron district, Chanthaburi province.

3.1 Final Consonant

My survey results confirm Headley's proposition (1985) that *-s is the boundary between Chong *lɔɔ* and Chong *həəp*. Data from Khao Khichakut agree with *-s > /-t/ (CK,

KP, NK, TT, PK, TI, KT, and TP), while such from Pong Nam Ron is clearly *-s > /-h/ (WP).

Table 2: Correspondence of /-t/ and /-h/

Gloss	Khao Khitchakut	Pong Nam Ron
‘barking deer’	/lo:t/	/loh/
‘grease’	/pit/	/pih/
‘old’	/c ^h it/	/c ^h ih/
‘tail’	/p ^h at/	/p ^h ah/

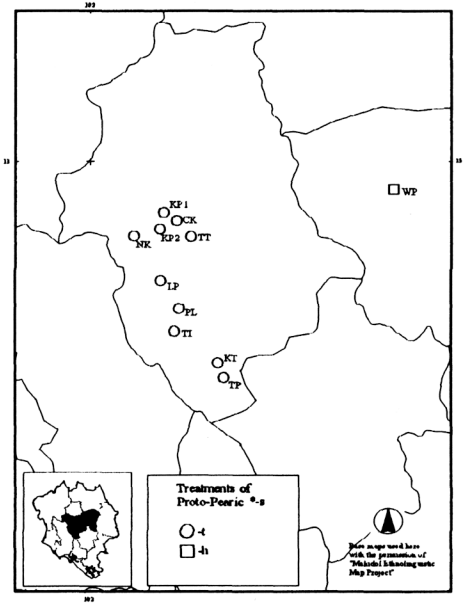
3.2 Consonant cluster

The correspondence between /c-/ and /kr-/ was accounted for in Martin (1974) and Headley (1985) reconstructed the Proto-Pearic *cr- in the word *crɛ:ŋ ‘ring.’ My data attest that in Chanthaburi Chong the cluster *cr- splits into /c-/ and /kr-/ (/cɛ:ŋ/ and /krɛ:ŋ/). However, the distribution of this phenomena is not of the same pattern as that of /-t/ and /-h/. Whereas Martin (1974) indicates no variation within Chong *ໂວ*, my study testifies that there are at least two sub-divisions within Chong *ໂວ* as spoken by people of the North and South Khao Khitchakut.

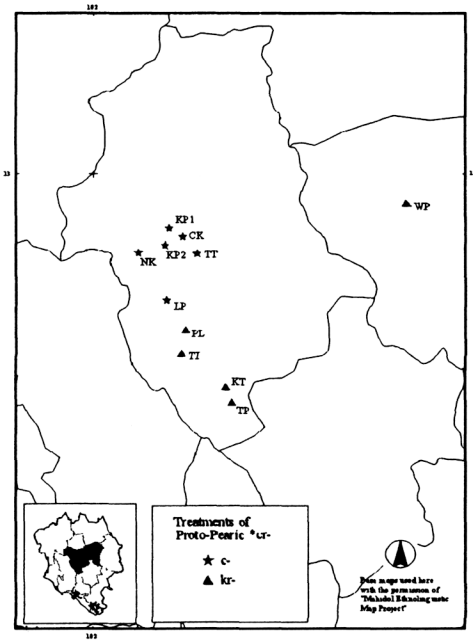
Table 3: Correspondence of /c-/ and /kr-/

Gloss	Khao Khitchakut		Pong Nam Ron
	North ³	South	
‘harvest’	/cu:t/	/kru:t/	/kru:t/
‘pig’	/cɔk/	/krɔk/	/krɔk/
‘pillar’	/cɔŋ/	/krɔŋ/	/krɔŋ/
‘ring’	/cɛ:ŋ/	/krɛ:ŋ/	/krɛ:ŋ/
‘river bank’	/co:ŋ/	/kro:ŋ/	/kro:ŋ/
‘run’	/co:k/	/kro:k/	/kro:k/

Map 2: Distribution of /-t/ and /-h/



Map 3: Distribution of /c-/ and /kr-/



3.3 Lexical Variants

Data grouped under lexical variants are more ambiguous than those cited in the first two categories. Some items could not be clearly explained. For instance, differences in vocabulary such as ‘come’ could be pronounced /ce:²n/ on one hand and /ʔe:n/ on the other hand. This could be interpreted as a phonological variant, but I could not find any other examples of this sort. For the time being, therefore, I group it under lexical variants. The same reason applies to /t^ha²t/ and /sa²t/] ‘nail’.

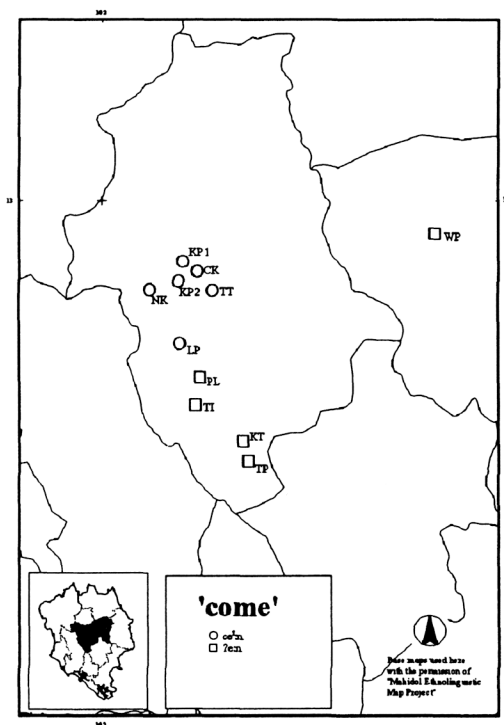
Table 4: Lexical Variants

Gloss	Khao Khitchakut		Pong Nam Ron
	North	South	
‘cattle’	/ŋuə/	/so:ŋ/	/so:ŋ/
‘come’	/ce: ² n/	/ʔe:n/	/ʔe:n/
‘mud’	/plo: ² k/	/p ^h luʔ/	/p ^h luʔ/
‘nail’	/kət ^h a ² t/	/sa ² t/	/sa ² :h/
‘play’	/le:ŋ/	/li:t/	/le:ŋ/
‘roof’	/kəbu:j/	/pɔ:k tɔŋ/	/kəbu:j/
‘shrimp’	/p ^h i: ² t/	/kra ² :w/	/kəpi ² :h/
‘ugly’	/siʔdo:/	/mɔʔ ʔih/	/mɔʔ ʔih/

It is interesting that most Chong speakers, especially among Khao Khitchakut locals, recognized many lexical variants used by their counterparts. The clearest example is /siʔdo:/ ‘ugly’ that is widely used among Takhian Thong speakers. Phluang speakers, on the other hand, would use /mɔʔ ʔih/ that literally means ‘beautiful not’ to describe the similar quality. Informants in Phluang proper told me that only *bâan bon* ‘upper village’ people use /siʔdo:/. It is notable that these lexical variants are not as evenly distributed in

geographical terms as in the cases of the final consonant and the consonant cluster.

Map 4: Distribution of 'come'



3.4 The breathy voice ambiguity

Apart from the distinction in the final consonant, the consonant cluster, and the lexical difference, there is another ambiguity when we look through the wordlists in Surekha (2525) and Saifon (2534) on one side, and Sirikarn (2530) and Huffman (1985) on the other side. We will find that initial plosives that co-occur with the 3rd register (breathy voice) are interpreted as aspirated series in the first two sources and as unaspirated series in the latter two. As proposed in the co-occurrence chart of registers and initial consonants, L. Thongkum (1992) also finds no occurrence of aspirated plosives with the 3rd register. The first

two works account for Takhian Thong dialect and the latter three for Phluang dialect.

Huffman (1985) acknowledges a certain degree of aspiration in the initial plosives but explained that they are influenced by the 3rd register (breathy voice) rather than being aspirated series in themselves. Therefore, there are two possibilities: first, Surekha (2525), and Saifon (2534) mistake 'breathy' unaspirated plosives for aspirated ones; second, there might be different degrees of aspiration in initial plosives occurring with the 3rd register in various dialects of Chong. I had selected some of these discrepancies and included them in my wordlist questionnaire.

My findings verify that in Takhian Thong proper, the initial plosives that occur with the 3rd register (breathy voice) are pronounced with stronger aspiration than those in Phluang proper, which carry weaker aspiration. However, Pong Nam Ron dialect is the least ambiguous in this aspect because the initial plosives that occur with the 3rd register are clearly unaspirated. Impressionistically, I would suggest that each of them represents the Chong's 3rd register with a different emphasis. While Takhian Thong dialect emphasizes aspiration, Pong Nam Ron dialect emphasizes low pitch and lax articulation, with less aspiration and breathiness. Phluang dialect locates in the middle of this continuum.

Table 5 Breathy Voice and Aspiration

Gloss	Khao Khitchakut		Pong Nam Ron
	North	South	
'drunk'	[phù:j]	[p ^h ù:j]	[pù:j]
'morning'	[phà:ŋ]	[p ^h à:ŋ]	[pà:ŋ]
'water'	[thà:k]	[t ^h à:k]	[tà:k]
'alcohol'	[khrà:n]	[k ^h rà:n]	[krà:n]

However, my survey results could only confirm that different descriptions of the 3rd register in Chong language (Surekha 2525; Saifon 2534; Sirikarn 2530; Huffman 1985) are

justified. In order to verify this distinction, more data and a different analytical procedure, which are not sufficient in my study, are essentially needed.

3.5 Vowel Height

About vowel use, my survey confirms Martin (1974) that in Pong Nam Ron dialect /i/ occurs in many words that are pronounced with /e/ in Khao Khitchakut dialects. For more evidence in this respect see Siriphen (2001). Such distinction is not that clearly seen among Khao Khitchakut variants.

4. Chong Dialect Continuum

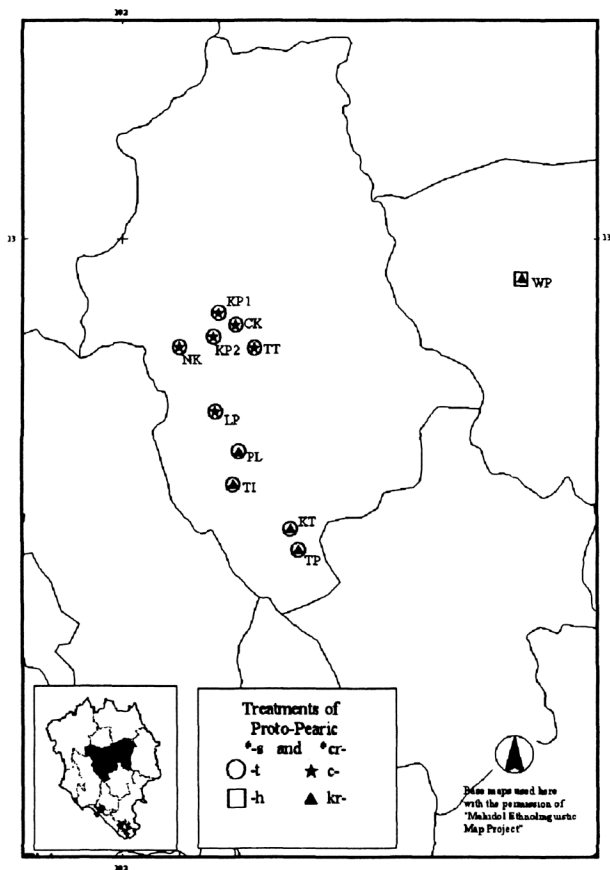
As the title of this paper suggests, I would like to present only a rough sketch of Chong dialects in order to support my hypothesis that it is more suitable to regard Chong areas in Chanthaburi as comprising of Takhian Thong Proper, Phluang Proper, and Pong Nam Ron Proper. For reason of uniformity, I will cite only data in §3.1 and §3.2 to confirm such hypothesis. I chose not to display data in other categories not because they are contradictory, but because it would be too awkward to present all of them here as word maps. Since the distributions of /-t, -h/ and /c-, kr-/ correspondences are more schematic, they could better illustrate the dialect continuum in Chong language.

Table 6: Chong Dialect Division

Treatment of Proto-Pearic		2-way Division (old)		3-way Division (new)		
		CL	CH	NC	SC	EC
* _{-s} >	/-t/	+	-	+	+	-
	/-h/	-	+	-	-	+
*kr- >	/c-/	+	-	+	-	-
	/kr-/	-	+	-	+	+

NC = Northern Chong, SC = Southern Chong,
and EC = Eastern Chong

Map 5: Chong Dialect Continuum



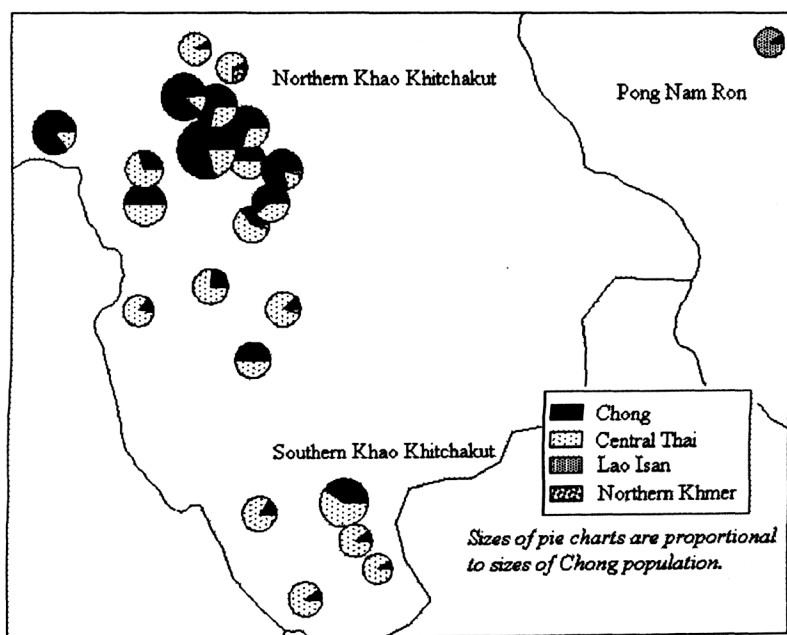
5. The Decline of Chong Dialects

Due to disruption of intergenerational transmission, Chong language is under threat of extinction. The most concrete sign is the reducing numbers of Chong communities. However, the rate of decrease in Chong population differs from one area to another. In the northern communities of Khao Khitchakut, Chong speakers have better maintained their language than those of the southern communities.

Recently, Chong leaders of Takhian Thong and Khlong Phlu districts have initiated a language revitalization project. This project started with the making of Chong orthography

based on Thai script. Later on, the group has received a grant for an action research project for revitalizing Chong language from the Thailand Research Fund. As a part of this project, I have found that Chong speakers of Takhian Thong proper not only regard themselves as a distinct group, but they are also aware of some variants between their dialect and those of Phluang proper. This sociolinguistic awareness is confirmed in my research. Such awareness is one of the reasons why the speakers of northern Khao Khitchakut chose to launch the Chong revitalization project within Takhian Thong proper instead of the whole Khao Kitchakut. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the dialect northern Khao Khitchakut has a brighter future than that of southern Khao Khitchakut in maintaining the number of speakers. Meanwhile, the eastern dialect (Pong Nam Ron) is becoming extinct.

Map 6: Distribution of Chong Population



Source: Mahidol Ethnolinguistic Map Project

6. Conclusion

What I found from this research on dialects of Chong are linguistic and geographical bases for further dividing them as three distinct groups. Therefore, I suggest that the two-way Chong *lɔɔ*-Chong *həəp* distinction be modified into a three-way distinction of northern, southern and eastern dialects.

Mountains and dense forests had long separated these groups. Only recently that modernization in Thailand had cleared out forests and provided road transportation linking them together. Despite infrequent inter-group association in the past, Chong speakers have been more or less aware of some linguistic variants among themselves. Apart from major differences that could be systematically mapped, as shown in this paper, there are minor differences that are recognized by Chong speakers from village to village (for more details, see my thesis—forthcoming). I also find that maps contribute to a better understanding of the geographical distribution of Chong dialects.

Notes

This paper is derived from my research for a master's thesis "Mapping Chong Dialects in Chanthaburi Province, Thailand: An Application of Geographical Information System (GIS)" to be submitted to Mahidol University.

¹ The Chong of Trat is not considered as Chong in this paper as the people usually call themselves Kasong.

² L. Thongkum (1992: 144) defines a register language as "a language that has a lexically contrastive register complex (a combination of vowel quality, pitch, phonation type, etc.), whereas a tone language has lexically contrastive pitch." For further description and explanation of the topic see Edmondson (1996) and Pittman (1978).

³ There are exceptional cases in Ban Nam Khun (NK) where 'river bank' is *kro:ŋ* and 'run' is *tʰu:*.

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