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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning in Standard Thai</th>
<th>in Some Tai dialects</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>กู (กู)</td>
<td>we (all of us)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ผ้า (ผ้า)</td>
<td>we (we two, exclusive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ผู้ไห (ผู้ไห)</td>
<td>- (the eldest, brother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ตาแย (ตาแย)</td>
<td>- (from the time, since)</td>
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</tbody>
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'khâu' (เข้า) which means 'rice or year' comes from the clause, 'มีกุกหนำ ขึ้น แต่ 19 ปี แล้ว' meaning "when I was 19 years old." 'khâu' means 'rice' in ST, but 'year' in many other dialects.
‘ya yâai’ (บุญผาาย) which means ‘to scatter’ in NT but no longer in use, comes from the sentence, ‘phrai ñaâ nàa sâi phêe kuu nî ya yâai’ meaning “my father’s men scatter in confusion.”

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

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

’lûu thâang (ฐูาง) which means ‘it is convenient.’ in NT and NET, comes from the sentence ‘câu miañ ño ñau cakûîp nài phrai lûu thâang phîan cuûn wau pîi khââ’ meaning “the lord does not levy tolls to his subjects and so it is convenient for them to trade.”

phîan (เพิน) which means ‘friend, neighbor, or they’, comes from the sentence ‘phîan cuûn wau pîi khââ’ meaning “they herd their cattle to trade.” ‘phîan’ means ‘friend’ in ST, but ‘they’ in NT.

yiia khââu’ (ียีเข้าว) is not used in ST, but means ‘granary’ in Shan, NT and NET.

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

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

màa fìa’ (มาเหนื้อย) is not used in ST, but it means ‘to support’ in many other dialects.

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

màak laañ’ (มามาก-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.

‘ทยา’ (เที่ยว) 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.

‘ขระ’ (เขี่ย) means ‘to sing’ in NT. It appears as ‘ขระ ร้อง’ meaning ‘to sing classical Thai songs’ in ST.

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

‘ลูก…มา’ (ลูก…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 ‘ลูก เข้า มีขนาด สิ่งหามร้ามมา’ meaning “(he) has come from the Province of Nakhon Si Thammarat.”

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

‘ทิศทาง ติน น้ำ’ (เที่ยวตีนน้ำ) 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.

‘เจ้า’ (เจ้า) means ‘the eighth day of the waning moon.’ ‘เจ้า’ in NT means ‘to have a nick’ and so ‘เจ้า’ 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.

‘สูต’ (สูต) means ‘to chant, to preach’ in NT, but not in ST. The sentence appears in the Inscription as ‘สูต ผู้ กษัตริย์ เทพ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริย์ เทพ กษัตริ�
‘laai ràii’ (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.’

‘khrài cai’ (โค๊ะใจ) is not found in ST, but it means ‘to think’ in Ahom, Phake, and TN. The sentence in the Inscription is ‘phũo khünk raam khamkhâen hâa khrài cai nai cai lææ sai laai sê thai nîi’ meaning “King Ram Khamhaeng thinks in his mind and devises the Thai alphabet.”

‘hâa’ (หา) in the phrase ‘hâa pen’ (หาเป็น) is found in the Inscriptions 1 and 3 which means ‘by oneself’ in White Tai. The sentence in the Inscription is ‘phũo khünk raam khamkhâen hâa pen khruu ?aacaan’ meaning “King Ram Kamphaeng himself is a teacher.”

‘kхаe’ (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, ‘râaen’ (แรง). The sentence in the Inscription is ‘dûai kхаe dûai râaen hâa khon càk samdî mí dâi’ meaning “there is no one to equal him in wisdom and strength.”

samût hâa pen dâaen (สมุทรปราการเป็นแดน) means ‘the ocean itself is the boundary.’ ‘dâaen’ means ‘a certain region’ in ST, but ‘a boundary’ in NT.

‘rìot’ (ริอด) which means ‘to be safe’ in ST, but ‘to reach’ in NT, comes from the sentence ‘bîaŋ tiin nân rìot mîaŋ phhrât’ meaning “In the north he conquered (or he reached) the Province of Phrae.”

In Inscription 2 we have the following words:

‘tîaŋ caaṟît wâi’ (ต้องเจริญไว้) which means ‘in conformity with tradition’ in ST but it means an inscription was carved’ in NT. ‘tîaŋ’ means ‘carve’ in Chiang.

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

In Inscription 3 we have the following words:
‘ḥāa raŋ ḥōk’ (หนังสือก) comes from the sentence ‘kham prā phūttācāu rau ḍāa raŋ ḥōk wāi ṭeeŋ sāi’ meaning “Lord Buddha himself did say it.” ‘ḥāa’ means ‘to seek’ in ST but it means ‘by oneself’ following the White Tai. ‘raŋ’ means ‘to build’ in ST but it should be translated as ‘to do’ in an emphatic sense. ‘ḥōk’ means to ‘say’ in ST.

‘kāa’ (แก้) means ‘to untie’ in ST., but ‘to explain’ in Chuang. The given sentence is ‘pī mīi khon thām daŋ nīi...hāi kāa wāa daŋ nīi’ meaning “If anyone asks this question, let the answer be explained to him.”

‘khāan’ (ข้าม) is ‘utter yes’ in ST, but ‘to answer’ in TN and Phake. In Inscription 2 there is a sentence ‘...hāi khāan wāa daŋ nīi’ meaning “...let it be answered thus.”

In Inscription 5, we have the following words:

‘pī lōn hōn pī sān’ (ปีล้อนปีสั้น) was translated by Griswold and Na Nagara (1973:78) as “the years that are too long and changed them back to short years,” because ‘pī’ means ‘year’, ‘lōn’ means ‘to overflow’, ‘hōn’ means ‘to retreat’ and ‘pī sān’ means ‘short years.’ This corresponds with the translation of Inscription 4 by Coedès. But according to ‘A Handbook for an Interpreter’ from the Ming Dynasty period, ‘dian lōn’ (เดือนล่อน) means ‘an intercalary month.’ Thus, ‘pī lōn’ must mean ‘a year with an intercalary month’ and ‘pī sān’ means ‘a short (lunar) year (with 354 days),’

‘phūuk’ or ‘fūuk’ (พุก, พุก) means ‘mattress’ in ST., but ‘mat’ in TL. ‘Mat’ corresponds with the translation of Inscription 4 (inscribed in Cambodian) by Coedès. It may be concluded that the Thais in the 13th century slept on mats.

The following words are collected from Chuang to be used in reading Thai classical literature.

‘pōorp’ (ป้อป) means ‘suck.’ Thus, ‘phīi pōorp’ means ‘a vampire spirit.’
‘ჰჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) means ‘a flower’ in Ahom and ‘ჰჰჰ’ pronouncing ‘ჰჰჰ’ in Chuang.

‘ფჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) means ‘a bright sky.’

‘ფჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) means ‘to burn’, but in ST it means ‘to burst out as steam.’ The full sentence is ‘ჰჰჰჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ’ is found in *Lilit Ongkan Chaeng Nam* (1986:6) meaning “the seven suns burnt until the water was entirely dried up.”

‘ჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) means ‘one eye.’ comes from a sentence ‘ჰჰჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ’ meaning “Phya Chueng was killed by Phya Maen, a one-eyed king, who came from far away.”

‘ჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) means ‘a bucket.’ I learned this word when I was a boy but did not understand the meaning of ‘ჰჰჰ’ in ‘ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ’ which is ‘a water bucket.’

‘ჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) means ‘to turn, to rotate.’ This explains the phrase ‘ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) which means ‘to whirl in a cycle of birth and rebirth.’

From ‘*A Handbook for an Interpreter*’ of the Ming Dynasty period, we have the following words:

‘ჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) means ‘bow and arrow.’

‘ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) means ‘a cannon’ but in NET it means ‘a bow with flaming arrows.’ These two words can help scholars in finding out whether there was a cannon or just a bow with flaming arrows in King Borom Trai Lokkanat’s reign (1448-1488 A.D.).

‘ჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) is ‘to pound with a fist, to punch.’ It comes from the sentence ‘ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ’ in *Yuan Phaai* (1969:21) meaning “only in pounding with a fist, the platform was trembled.”

‘ჰჰჰ’ (ჰჰჰ) which means ‘before or first’ comes from the phrase ‘ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ ჰჰჰ’ in *Yuan Phaai* (1969:21) meaning “to come to the city first, and (then) to return that last.”
References


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