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*Language and Literature.*

Siamese belongs to the well-defined Tai group of the Siamese- Chinese family of languages. Its connexion with Chinese is clear though evidently distant, but its relationship with the other languages of the Tai group is very close. It is spoken throughout central Siam, in all parts of southern Siam except Patani Monton, in northern Siam along the river-banks as far up as Utaradit and Raheng, and in eastern Siam as far as the confines of the Korat Monton. In Patani the common language is still Malay, while in the upper parts of northern, and the outlying parts of eastern, Siam the prevailing language is Lao, though the many hill tribes which occupy the ranges of these parts have distinct languages of their own.

Originally Siamese was purely monosyllabic, that is, each true word consisted of a single vowel sound preceded by, or followed by, a consonant. Of such monosyllables there are less than two thousand, and therefore many syllables have to do duty for the expression of more than one idea, confusion being avoided bγ the tone in which they are spoken, whence the term “tonal,” which is applied to all the languages of this family. The language now consists of about 15,000 words, of which compounds of two monosyllabic words and appropriations from foreign sources form a very large part. Bali, the ancient language of the kingdom of Magadha, in which the sacred writings of Buddhism were made, was largely instrumental in forming all the languages of Further India, including Siamese— a fact which accounts for the numerous connecting links between the Môn, Burmese and Siamese languages of the present time, though these are of quite separate origin. When intercourse with the West began, and more especially when Western methods of government and education were first adopted in Siam, the tendency to utilize European words was very marked, but recently there has been an effort to avoid this by the coining of Siamese or Bali compound words.

The current Siamese characters are derived from the more monu­mental Cambodian alphabet, which again owes its origin to the alphabet of the inscriptions, an offshoot of the character found on the stone monuments of southern India in the 6th and 8th centuries. The sacred books of Siam are still written in the Cambodian character.

The Siamese alphabet consists of 44 consonants, in each of which the vowel sound “ aw ” is inherent, and of 52 vowels all marked not by individual letters, but by signs written above, below, before or after the consonant in connexion with which they are to be pro­nounced. ft may seem at first that so many as 44 consonants can scarcely be necessary, but the explanation is that several of them express each a slightly different intonation of what is practically the same consonant, the sound of “ kh,” for instance, being repre­sented by six different letters and the sound of “ t ” by eight. More­over, other letters are present only for use in certain words imported from Bali or Sanskrit. The vowel signs have.no sound by them­selves, but act upon the vowel sound “ aw ” inherent in the con­sonants, converting it into “ a,” “ i,” “ o,” "ee,” “ ow,” &c.. Each of the signs has a name, and some of them produce modulations so closely resembling those made by another that at the present day they are scarcely to be distinguished apart. A hard-and-fast rule of pronunciation is that only vowel or diphthong sounds, or the letters “ m,” “ n,” “ ng,” “ k,” “ t ” and " p ” are permissible at the end of words, and hence the final letter of all words ending in anything else is simply suppressed or is pronounced as though it were a letter naturally producing one or other of those sounds. Thus many of the words procured from foreign sources, not ex­cluding Bali and Sanskrit, are more or less mutilated, in pronuncia­tion, though the entirely suppressed or altered letter is still retained in writing.

Siamese is written from left to right. In manuscript there is usually no space between words, but punctuation is expressed by intervals isolating phrases and sentences.

The greatest difficulty with the Siamese language lies in the tonal system. Of the simple tones there are five—the even, the circumflex, the descending, the grave and the high—any one of. which when applied to a word may give it a quite distinct meaning. Four of the simple tones are marked in the written character by signs placed over the consonant affected, and the absence of a mark implies that the one remaining tone is to be used. A complication is caused by the fact that the consonants are grouped into three classes, to each of which a special tone applies, and consequently the application of a tonal sign to a letter has a different effect, accord­ing to the class to which such letter belongs. Though many syllables have to do duty for the expression of more than one idea, the majority have only one or at most two meanings, but there are some which are used with quite a number of different inflections, each of which gives the word a new meaning. Thus, for example, the syllable *khao* may mean “ they,” “ badly,” “ rice,” “ white,” “old,” or “ news,” simply according to the tone in which the word is spoken. Words are unchangeable and incapable of inflection. There is no article, and no distinction of gender, number or case. These, when it is necessary to denote them, are expressed by ex­planatory words after the respective nouns; only the dative and ablative are denoted by subsidiary words, which precede the nouns, the nominative being marked by its position before, the objective by its position after, the verb, and the genitive (and also the ad­jective) by. its place after the noun it qualifies. Occasionally, how­ever, auxiliary nouns serve that purpose. Words like “ mother,” “ son,” .“ water ” are often employed in forming compounds to express ideas for which the Siamese have no single words, *e.g. lûk cân, "*the son of hire,” a labourer; *mêmü, "*the mother of the hand,” the thumb. The use of class words with numerals obtains in Siamese as it does in Chinese, Burmese, Anamese, Malay and many other Eastern languages. As in these, so in Siamese the personal pronouns are mostly represented by nouns expressive of the various shades of superior or lower rank according to Eastern etiquette. The verb is, like the noun, perfectly colourless—person, number, tense and mood being indicated by auxiliary words only when they cannot be inferred from the context. Such auxiliary words are *yu,* “to be,” “to dwell” (present); *dai,* “to. have,” *leas,* “ end ” (past); *că,* “ also ” (future); the first and third follow, the second and fourth precede, the verb. *Hài, "*to give ” (prefixed), often indicates the subjunctive. As there are compound nouns, so there are compound verbs; thus, *e.g. pai,* “ to go,” is joined to a transitive verb to convert it into an intransitive or neuter; and *thûk,* “ to touch,” and *tòng, "*to be compelled,” serve to form a sort of passive voice. The number of adverbs, single and compound, is very large. The prepositions mostly consist of nouns.

The construction of the sentence in Siamese is straightforward and simple. The subject of the sentence precedes the verb and the object follows it. The possessive pronoun follows the object. The adverb usually follows the verb. In compound sentences the verbs are placed together as in English, not separated by the object as in German.. When an action is expressed in the past the word which forms with the verb the past tense is divided from the verb itself by the object. Examples are:—

Rao (We) dekchai (boy) sam (three) kon (persons) cha (will) pai (go) chap (catch) pla (fish) samrap (for) hài (give) paw (father) kin (eat).

Me (Mother) tan (you) yu (live) ti (place) nai (where), or “ Where is your mother?”

Mè (Mother) pai (go) talat (bazaar) leao (finish), or “ (My) mother has gone to the bazaar.”

The difficulties of the Siamese language are increased by the fact that in addition to the ordinary language of the people there is a completely different set of words ordained for the use. of royalty. This “ Palace language ” appears to have come into existence from a desire to avoid the employment in the presence of royalty of downright expressions of vulgarity or of words which might be capable of conveying an unpleasant or indelicate idea other than the meaning intended. In the effort to escape from the vulgar, words of Sanskrit origin have been freely adopted and many Cam­bodian. words are also used. The language is so complete that the dog, pig, crow and other common or unclean animals are all ex­pressed by special words, while the actions of royalty, such as eating, sleeping, walking, speaking, bathing, dying, are spoken of in words quite distinct from those used to describe similar actions of ordinary people.

The prose literature of Siam consists largely of mythological and historical fables, almost all of which are of Indian origin, though many of them have come to Siam through Cambodia. Their number is larger than is usually supposed, many of them being known to few beyond the writers who laboriously copy them and the professional “ raconteurs ” who draw upon them to replenish their stock-in-trade. The best known have all been made into stage-plays, and it is in this form that they usually come before the notice of the general public. Amongst them are *Ramakien,* taken from the great Hindu epic *Ramayana; Wetyasunyin,* the tale of a king who became an ascetic after contemplation of a withered tree; *Worawongs,* the story of a prince who loved a princess and was killed by the thrust of a magic spear which guarded her; *Chalawan,* the tale of a princess beloved by a crocodile; *Unarud,* the life story of Anuruddha, a demigod, the grandson of Krishna; *Phumhon,* the tale of a princess beloved by an elephant; *Prang tong,* a story of a princess who before birth was promised to a “ yak ” or giant in