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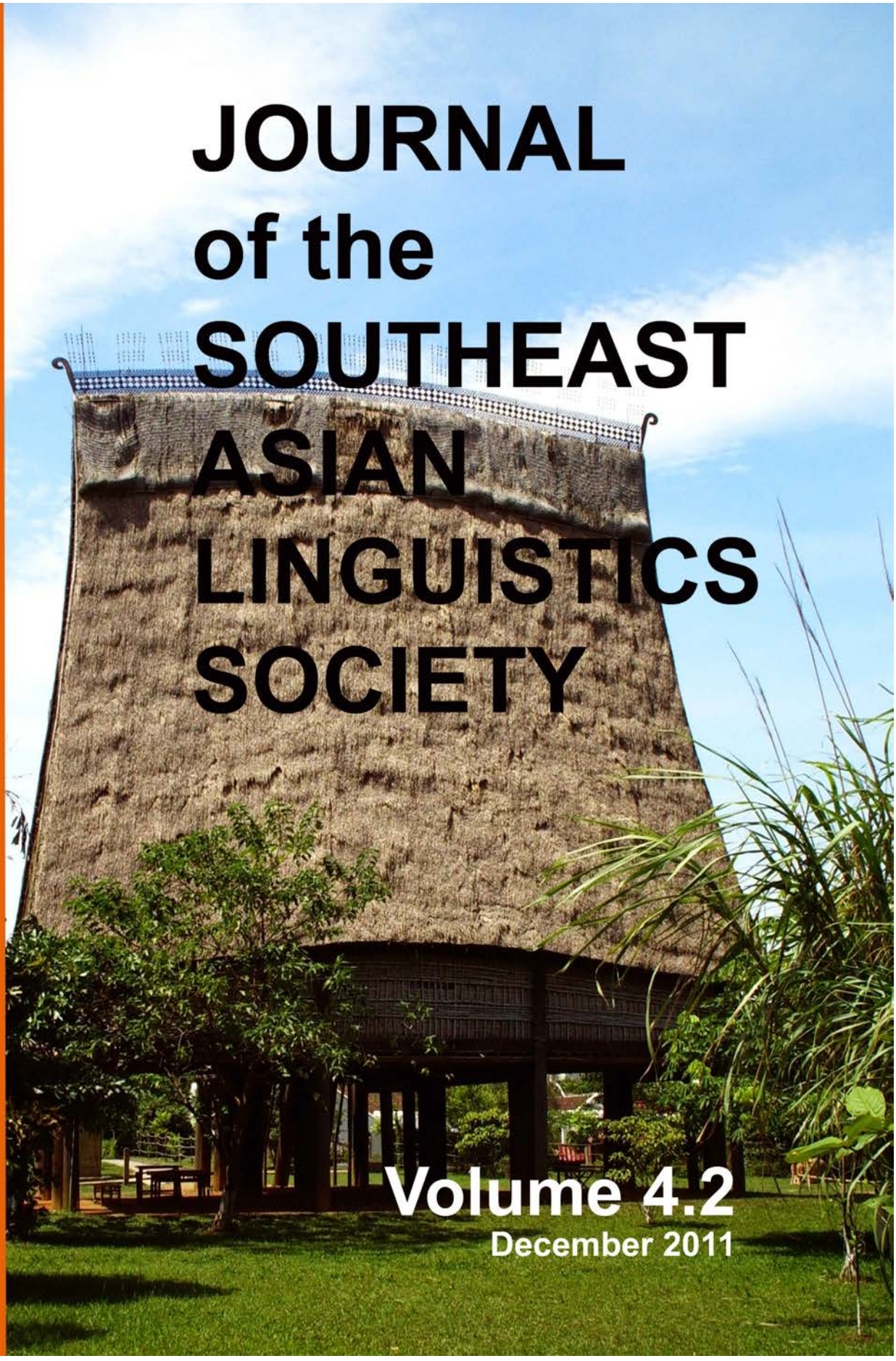

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LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES OF ETHNIC ORTHOGRAPHY IN A MULTILINGUAL STATE: THE CASE OF ETHNIC *THÁI* ORTHOGRAPHIES IN VIETNAM[58]

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Abstract
Contrary to the standard view on the imperative role of language homogenization to nation-state formation, this essay examines how multilingualism is vital to nation-state formation. Approached through language ideology framework, this ethnographic and historical research explores everlasting politics of orthography in the ethnic Thái case in Vietnam. Corresponding to local dialects, Thái orthographies represent pre-modern political formation of Thái sub-groups (Tai Dam, Tai Don and Tai Daeng). This diversity continues to colonial and post-colonial regimes. Consequently, while the state promotes national script to facilitate nation building, Thái sub-ethnic groups negotiate to maintain their orthographies in contemporary Vietnam.

Keywords: language ideology, multilingualism, orthography

Introduction

Based on documentary, archival and ethnographic research conducted in Vietnam in 2002-2005, this essay examines how the Vietnamese state and the Thái negotiate national and ethnic identity through the formation of policies and practices regarding multilingualism. Contrary to scholarship depicting ethnic minorities as internally homogeneous, this essay suggests how Vietnam's multilingual policies emerge from the complex historical and political interactions of the state, the ethnic minority communities, and the internal ethnic subgroups. As linguistic and orthographic characteristics of the Thái are diverse, this essay analyzes the ongoing politics of different Thái dialects and orthographies.[60] Such politics present the dilemmas of Vietnam's ethnic policies which, on the one hand, retain and

[58] I am grateful to anonymous reviewers of JSEALS for their advices to improve the draft. However the shortcoming of this paper is due to my limitation. If this article benefits anything, I devote it to Cầm Trọng (1934-2007), a great Vietnamese-Thái intellectual who devoted his life to preserve Thái scripts in Vietnam.

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[60] In addition, I studied three major Tai Dam ancient texts and unpublished manuscripts such as *Kwaam To Muang, Song Chu Son Saaw*, and *Kwaam Paaw Khwan* under Cầm Trọng's supervision. Upon being relatively fluent in Tai Dam (Black Tai), I explore spoken and written dialects of the Tai Don (White Tai) and the Tai Daeng (Red Tai) by myself. Because the differences between these dialects are very obvious in both spoken sounds and writing system I can identify the differences of individual consonants, vowels, and meanings. However, I am not as fluent in those dialects as I am in Tai Dam.

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promote ethnic diversity and ethnic traditional cultures, and yet, on the other hand, encourage the unified nationhood.

This essay is divided into six sections. First of all, I present my framework on language ideologies and how this framework benefits the understanding of the role of ethnic orthographies to the formation of the modern nation-state. Next, I introduce briefly who the Thái are and from where Thái orthographies came. The following three sections are a historical process of Tai language ideologies. They are periodized into the pre-French period, the period of the French rule and the early Vietnamese modern nation-state, and the contemporary period. Finally, I present a concluding remark on language ideologies of Thái orthographies in the Vietnamese context.

Language Ideologies: A Theoretical Background

Language is central to the formation of the modern nation-state. James Scott has argued that it is necessary for states to eliminate the complexities of the civil society in order to establish legibility, rationalization, standardization, and simplification (Scott 1998). If a state is founded out of a divers society, in Scott's view, such state will gradually reduce the diversity and thus homogenize the society. According to Scott, "of all state simplification, then, the imposition of a single official language may be the most powerful, and it is the precondition of many other simplifications" (1998: 72). Similarly, Ernest Gellner suggests that the process of homogenization of culture and language is integral to the formation of nation states (Gellner 1983). Using the case of French, Eugen Weber shows that the state had a longstanding interest in eradicating local languages and dialects, thus promoting the standardization of French, itself a Parisian French dialect (Weber 1979:67-94). Moreover, Benedict Anderson has argued that "print-capitalism," the mass production of printed materials, is a critical process for the formation of modern nation states (Anderson 1991). According to Anderson, a nation is a new kind of community imagined by people in a state, which emerges out of the sense of "we-ness" acquired and shared by people through the mass distribution of printed materials. In this regard, in places where a tradition of literacy has not been established, a standard national literacy is installed, thereby marginalizing the diversity of vernacular dialects.

However, language ideology approaches provide alternate theoretical grounds for the ethnographic examination of the roles of language in the nation-state formation. Anthropologists and linguists have long debated whether language objectively exists by itself or is embodied within power relations and human actions (Williams 1977; Hymes 1974; Voloshinov 1973 [1920s]). Recently, studies focusing on the ideology of language have begun to examine how the political economy, ranging from the face-to-face to the global level, intersects with ideas and uses of language (Gal 1989; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Schieffelin et al. 1998; Kroskrity 2000a). These processes can be referred collectively as "ideologies of language," summarized by Woolard and Schieffelin (1994:57-58) as "a set of beliefs about language articulated by users as a justification of perceived language structure and use. Additionally, as the term ideology suggests, this concept points to the relevance of social changes and power relations."

In response to Benedict Anderson's influential proposals on the relationship between language and nationhood, Susan Gal remarks that "it is clear that not only communities but also languages must be imagined before their unity can be socially accomplished" (1998:325). Language ideologies are thus the primary condition of the nation-state. In addition, Gal notes, "'language ideology' encourages analysis to encompass both social

interaction ... and state policy" (1998:319). In this sense, the language ideology approach covers the unit of analysis ranging from everyday linguistic ideas and practices to the state's linguistic policies.

Correspondingly, along with the recent treatment of ideology in the Gramscian notion of "hegemony" (e.g. Williams 1977; Eagelton 1991), rather than focusing on the dominant role of the state, the language ideology approach suggests that "different ideologies construct alternate, even opposing realities; they create differing views arising from and often constituting different social positions and subjectivities within a single social formation" (Gal 1998: 320). Accordingly, noted Gal, "It is the recognition that hegemony is never complete and that, in any social formation, ideologies--including linguistic ideologies--are multiple and at odds that renders the achievement of domination problematic, often fragile, and makes the semiotic aspects of its constant construction important to explore" (1998:323). Thereby, as Benedict Anderson has been criticized by Michael Silverstein, the language ideology approach points out the shortcoming of the approach to language and nationalism that "suppress[es] all the contestation and social history." To Silverstein, Anderson "takes its [the "we-ness"] meaning to be the straightforwardly and uniformly presupposed order of imaginable homogeneity-of-identity in the discursive-equal-discoursed-about spatiotemporal envelop of "the nation" (that is, the linguistic community informed by hegemonic standard) in which its speaker feel they reside" (Silverstein 2000:124). In this manner, apart from politicizing the ideas and practices of language, the language ideology approach views the politics of the ideas and practices of language as divergent, dynamic, processual, and complex.

As linguistic differentiation within and between social groups is political and processual, Susan Gal suggests characteristics of three semiotic processes for the investigation of sociolinguistic difference: (1) iconization "linguistic differences that index social contrasts are reinterpreted as icons of the social contrasts" (1998:328); (2) recursiveness "the projection of an opposition salient at one level of relationship onto some other level. Thus, the dichotomizing and participating process that was involved in some understood opposition (between groups or identities) recurs in distinctions made within the group, creating subcategories that mimic the original contrast" (Gal 1998:328); (3) erasure "occur[s] when an ideology simplifies a sociolinguistic field, forcing attention on only one part or dimension of it, thereby rendering some linguistic forms or groups invisible or recasting the image of their presence and practices to better fit the ideology" (Gal 1998:328). These political and processual characteristics of language are also found in the case of Thái orthographies in Vietnam.

The politics of orthography, which is essential to nation-state formation, is integral to language ideologies. Viewed through the language ideology approach, Woolard notes, "Orthographic systems cannot be conceptualized as simply reducing speech to writing but rather are symbols that themselves carry historical, cultural, and political meanings" (1998: 23). Not only is the orthographic choice involved intimately with the political process (Schieffelin and Doucet 1998), but orthographies in many cases are also the "weapon of the weak" (Scott 1985) used by social groups as their alternate or opposing means for transcription. Examples can be found in the new writing system of, for instance, the Apache in the United States (Basso and Anderson 1973), the orthography of Hmong and Khamu in Laos (Smalley et al. 1990), and the religious script in Nigeria (Probst 1997).

Although standardization of national language and orthography seems to be the most significant means of nation-state formation, many states have long since encountered the dilemmas involved in maintaining a national standard language while retaining minority languages or local dialects. They are, for example, the former Soviet Union (Lewis 1972), China (Zhou 2003), India (Zaman 1984), the United States and Canada (Handler 1988; Craith 1996; Ricento and Burnaby 1998), countries in Southeast Asia (Chee 1990; Esman 1990), and countries in Africa (Mansour 1993).

As the ideologies embodied in nation-state formation are complex and divisive, this essay sheds light on the complex interaction in the historical interplay between language, ethnic identity, and Vietnamese modern nation-state formation. The ethnographic and historical study offered by this essay will provide a case study of the way in which the diverse ethnic languages, literacies, and orthographies play role in the nation-state formation.

The Thái and Thái Orthographies

According to official records, in addition to the Kinh majority, Vietnam is comprised of 53 ethnic minorities, making up approximately 14% of Vietnam's overall population. Ranked as the second largest ethnic minority population (Asian Development Bank 2008:1), living in the northwest upland region, ethnic Thái (referred in Vietnamese) are inhabiting an area covering more than 30% of the landmass of northern Vietnam.[61] The Thái nationality can be divided into three main subgroups, *Tai Don* (White Tai or *Thái Trắng* in Vietnamese), *Tai Dam* (Black Tai or *Thái Đen* in Vietnamese), *Tai Daeng* (Red Tai or *Thái Đỏ* in Vietnamese); each subgroup has its own dialect and orthography. The populations of Tai Don, Tai Dam, and Tai Daeng (including Tai Do, Tai Hang Tong, Tai Thanh, and Tai Daeng listed in *Ethnologue* 2010) in 2002 numbered approximately 490,000, 764,000 and 190,000 respectively (*Ethnologue* 2010 [2002]).

Sharing the same Indic origin as Tai-Lao scripts in Southeast Asia, the Thái scripts were derived from "proto-Tai scripts" and arrived in Vietnam as early as the sixteenth century (Hartmann 1987). Unlike the Laotians or the Siamese, however, the Thái in Vietnam did not adopt Buddhism. Thái traditional literacy served the Thái elites to maintain class-based chiefdoms.[62] Even so, informants I interviewed recalled that villagers in the period before the modern state had access to the Thái traditional literacy to a certain degree. Although very few (mostly male) commoners were literate in the traditional Thái communities, literate villagers such as ritual experts, local poets, and singers disseminated the practices of the scripts in both religious and secular contexts. In this way, although Buddhism was not established in Thái traditional society, the script the Thái adopted from their Buddhist neighbor became an important means of communication for both elites and commoners.

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[61] The Tai language used in northwestern Vietnam belongs to a branch of the "Southwestern Tai language" whose close language-kin include Lao, Siamese, and Lue (Li 1977). In Vietnam, another major related linguistic branch of the Tai language family is the "Central Tai language" branch spoken by, for example, the Tày and the Nùng who settle in northeastern Vietnam. Throughout this article, I use the term Thái to refer to the Tai Dam, Tai Don and Tai Daeng in northwestern Vietnam who are recognized collectively by the Vietnamese as the Thái (*người Thái*). When referring to the Thái subgroups, I use local ethnonyms, which are Tai Dam, Tai Don and Tai Daeng.

[62] On Thái chiefdom, see Condominas (1990) and Cầm Trọng (1978: 240-265).

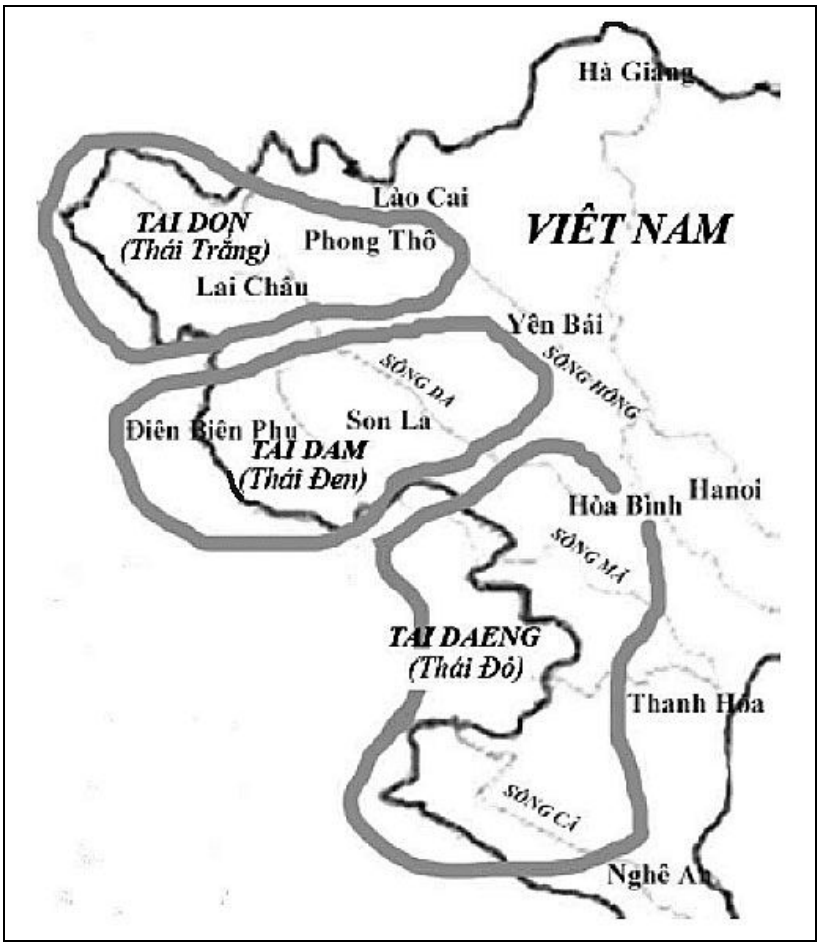

Figure I: *Map of Tai Dam, Tai Don, Tai Daeng Settlements*

Thái Orthographies in Pre-French Period

Pre-French Thái chiefdom politics formed by the patrilineal marriage system among the Thái elites. This political formation helped in maintaining not only political community but also linguistic and orthographic community. I argue that the language and the ethnic group considered "Thái" is a result of the political formation that created "linguistic boundaries," meaning geographical areas where a set of linguistic characteristics had been practiced. These linguistic boundaries had corresponded with Thái ethnic and subethnic identification.

Seen from the Thái tradition of literacy, each different Thái orthography has long been preserved to represent a form of Tai dialect used by a subgroup of the Thái, and each community of orthography was ruled by a Thái ruling clan. For example, the Tai Dam's *Kwaam To Muang* (Tai principality chronicle) was recorded in Tai Dam orthography and language and inherited through the Tai Dam patrilineal descended *Lo Kam* clan. The text was read to the public at the ruling class funeral. In this manner, I argue, the Tai Dam elites established an "imagined community," an imagination of "we-ness" in which a group of people living in a large area shared as they were belonging to the same group of people.

Such Tai Dam we-ness originated from the use of Tai Dam dialect and orthography. In this area the Tai Dam maintained patrilineal marriage relations within the *Lo Kam* clan.[63]

Not merely did the Thái subgroups speak different dialects, but they also used various systems of writing system to convey their distinctive spoken dialects. The spoken and written dialects were located within particular regions.[64] Similar to the spoken dialects, various types of Thái orthographies can be classified roughly by the different dialects of speaking. The correlation of writing systems and spoken dialects suggests a conclusion that the differences in Thái writing systems correlated with the Thái ethnic boundaries dividing them into several subgroups. This correlation leads me to argue that the different Thái groups probably identified themselves through the dialects spoken and the orthographies written, among other cultural characteristics. Linguistic forms and writing systems were perhaps used as a partial, if not the whole, index of ethnic identity. Each of these writing systems was a constructive part of a "community of literacy," where the population of each community of literacy speak, write, read, recite, and perform using a similar kind of orthography, practical writing, and literature.

Based on my collections of Thái orthographies, I propose that the Thái in Vietnam had at least seven orthographies, which correlated to the sub-groups and spoken dialects of the Thái in five regions, as presented in Table I.[65] Prior to the French period, the northern part of northwestern Vietnam was the location where the Tai Don orthography was used as the linguistic ideological index of the Tai settling in Lai Châu and Phong Thổ, the two major Tai Don principalities. The Tai Dam orthography was identified with the Tai chiefdoms located southward, covering a relatively large area ranging from the westernmost Điên Biên Phủ, toward central Sơn La, and Nghĩa Lộ in the easternmost of the Tai chiefdoms. On the southern region, the Tai Daeng orthography was related to the

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[63] A similar pattern of linguistic, orthographic, literary, ethnic and political boundary was also practiced by other Thái subgroups. Please find details in Yukti (2007: 97-140).

[64] Gedney's accounts on the Thái phonology (Gedney 1989) can be used as a starting point to understand the heterogeneity of Thái orthographies found in the pre-French period. The location of the dialects can still be found in present day. When traveling to the country of the Thái in northwestern Vietnam, as a speaker of Tai Dam, I found that the dialect spoken in central Sơn La, southern Điện Biên Phủ, western Yên Bái, southern Phong Thổ, and southern Than Uyên were the most understandable to me. By contrast, I hardly understood the Tai Don dialects spoken in Lai Châu, central Phong Thổ, western Sơn La and the Tai Daeng dialects spoken in eastern Sơn La, western Hòa Bình, western Thanh Hóa, and western Nghệ An. When native Tháis of different dialects met, they also had difficulty in understanding each other. Although, for example, the Tai Dam dialect is not completely unintelligible to a Tai Don speaker, in a long conversation on normal daily life issues the Tai Don speaker would have difficulty in understanding the Tai Dam dialect. This difficulty is also found among the Tai Dam and the Tai Daeng speakers when they try to communicate across Tai dialects. The Thái dialects are thus almost mutually unintelligible.

However, Gedney's accounts on Thái phonology probably need to be reinvestigated. My collection of Thái orthographies shows that the Thái orthographies are more diverse than what Gedney suggests regarding Thái phonology. According to Cầm Trọng, the Vietnamese-Tai Dam scholar, there are eight different types of Thái orthographies in Vietnam (Cầm Trọng 2002:809-810). Louis Finot lists five types of Vietnamese Thái scripts (Finot 1917). Disagreeing with both previous accounts, Michel Ferlus suggests that Thái scripts in Vietnam are comprised of four types (Ferlus 2546 BE: 276). Still, the variation corresponds with the divisions of Thái subgroups I found, i.e. the divisions of three major Thái scripts, Tai Dam, Tai Don and Tai Daeng. Nevertheless, this essay cannot provide a more accurate evidence and systematic research on variation of Thái phonology. A more elaborated study on Thái dialects may help explaining the great variation of Thái orthography.

[65] Please find details of the comparison of Thái letters in Appendix located at the end of this essay.

Tai residing in several Tai principalities in Thanh Hóa Province, and it was also used in the western part of Hòa Bình Province in Mai Châu District. Quỳ Châu and the Pao River (Sông Cà) were the southern and southernmost locations where the Quỳ Châu orthography and the Lai Pao orthography were found.

Different Thái sub-ethnic groups maintained distinctive ways of writing. The differences were represented in letter shapes, correspondences between phonemes (of both consonants and vowels) and script, special symbols, direction of writing (horizontally or vertically), and choice of phonemes (voiced or voiceless initial consonants). As a result of these differences, in pre-French Thái society, a native writer of Tai Dam, for instance, would find difficulties in reading Tai Don and Tai Daeng texts in the same way as those native of other Thái communities of literacy would.[66]

Table I: *Locations of Thái Orthographies*

Thái Orthographies	Thái Regions	Thái Ruling Clans
I. Tai Don (Central)	Lai Châu and northwestern Sơn La	Đeo (or Đèo in Vietnamese)
II Tai Don (Northeastern)	Phong Thổ	
III Tai Dam	Điên Biên Phủ, central Sơn La, Nghĩa Lộ	Lò Cầm (or Bạc Cầm, Cầm, and Cầm Ngọc in Vietnamese)
IV Tai Daeng (Central)	Thanh Hóa	Sa (or Hà, Hà Công in Vietnamese) and Hoàng
V Tai Daeng (Northern)	Mai Châu (Hòa Bình) (and eastern Sơn La?)	
VI Quỳ Châu (Southern Tai Daeng?)	Southern Thanh Hóa and Qùy Châu, northern Nghệ An	no information
VII Lai Pao (Southern Tai Daeng?)	Southern Nghệ An	no information

[66] I already provided the detail of the differences between the pre-modern Thái orthographies in Yukti (2007: 141-182).

Figure II: *Map of Tai Dam, Tai Don, Tai Daeng orthographies*

The language ideologies of the Thái in the pre-French period was thus a process of the iconization and recursiveness which demarcated sub-ethnic identities. Through the iconization, we can assume that the linguistic and orthographic features of different Thái languages were practiced over generations and were treated by the different Thái groups as if the index of each Thái group. For instance, Tai Don dialects used their vowel system which has fewer diphthongs than Tai Dam dialects; therefore, Tai Don dialects created a system of writing to represent their vowels. In terms of orthographies, for example, by writing a hook under an arch to represent phoneme /high k/, the Tai Daeng differentiated their orthography and ethnic identity from the Tai Dam whose letter /high k/ has a line crossing an arch. By practicing these different features the different Thái groups recognized their linguistic differences and created ethnic boundaries between each group. In other words, the linguistic and orthographic practices became an icon recognized by different Thái groups.

The process of recursiveness divided a Thái group into smaller subgroups by projecting different features of language and orthography applied for dividing the main subgroups into those features of languages and orthographies in the smaller subgroups. An example of the recursive process is the division of the Tai Don into the Tai Don of Lai and the Tai Don of Phong Thổ. According to my ethnographic and historical research, the Tai of Lai Châu and the Tai of Phong Thổ identify themselves as "Tai Khao" or "Tai Don." In term of political formation, the elites of the two areas claim that they descended from the same clan of Đèo or Điêu. In terms of language, the distinctive features of consonants and tones used to iconize the Tai Dam, the Tai Don, and the Tai Daeng were also applied to the

distinction between the Tai Don of Lai and the Tai Don of Phong Thổ. I assume that the similar process also occurred to the Tai Daeng regions in which several Tai Daeng dialects and orthographies were found. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that the Tai Dam did not develop their internal recursive linguistic ideology. The Tai Dam community of language and orthography was thus relatively more homogenous than the other Thái communities. It is likely that Tai Dam political system and literary tradition were more solid than those of other Tháis; and thus the Tai Dam were able to maintain their homogenous language and orthography.

As the division of Thái subgroups corresponded with the division of Thái chiefdoms formed through ruling patrilineal, the linguistic iconization and recursiveness of Thái languages, orthographies, and identities related intimately with the socio-political formation of the Thái division of sub-ethnic groups. To form the Thái polity, the Thái imagined and created not only their political, social, and ethnic boundaries but also their linguistic and orthographic boundaries. As northwestern Vietnam has been inhabited by diverse ethnic groups, the northwest residents, including the Thái, were multilingual. Due to the fact that the Thái were the hegemonic power of the northwest, however, Thái dialects became the dominant means of communication in this region. Moreover, the demarcation of sub-ethnic Thái boundaries into Tai Don, Tai Dam, and Tai Daeng, corresponding to the politics of the Thái clans and chiefdoms, determined the sub-division of Thái linguistic and orthographic communities.

Thái Orthographies under the French Rule and the Vietnamese Nation-State

The Thái did not isolate themselves from other ethnic groups, both in the region and in the globe, and thus the Thái community of language was never monolingual. Consequently, the choice of orthography within Thái society has always been complicated and politically contested. The Thái used not just in their own various kinds of Thái orthographies but also in the regional and globally influential states' orthographies. Lao script, Chinese characters, Vietnamese ancient *nôm* and modern *quốc ngữ* and French are thus not unfamiliar to the Thái. When they needed to communicate with surrounding more influential states, pre-French colonial Thái had to use those more powerful states' languages and orthographies. In addition to their Thái orthographies and dialects, evidences taken from many texts of Thái literature show that some Thái elites had skills in Vietnamese, Chinese, Lao, and French.

Language ideologies involved in Thái orthographies were even more complicated under the periods of French colonization and the Vietnamese nation-state formation. In the French period, the Thái had to learn Vietnamese and French. Two kinds of Roman-based orthographies--*quốc ngữ* and French--were introduced to the Thái. In addition, the French created a Roman-based orthography to write Thái. By doing so, the colonial regime iconized the diverse Tháis under one standard Thái language and orthography. However, French-based Thái orthographies did not succeed.

After the fall of French colonial power in Vietnam, the policies promoting mass education for ethnic minorities were crucial in the process of Vietnamese state formation. Three autonomous zones were founded, one of which was the Northwest Autonomous Zone, founded in 1955, on the first anniversary of the Điện Biên Phủ victory. Mass education in the ethnic minority areas was implemented after the northern regime was founded in 1954. Democratic Republic of Vietnam urged the ethnic peoples, particularly those who resided in the autonomous zones, to learn Vietnamese in *quốc ngữ*, while

supporting them to learn their own ancient scripts or newly invented *quốc ngữ*-based ethnic scripts.[67] Since then, influenced by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China's multilingual policies intended to promote mass literacy of ethnic minorities together with teaching the national language (Lewis 1972; Zhou 2003), the Vietnamese state invented quốc ngữ-based orthographies for the ethnic minorities. The state allowed several ethnic groups, particularly the Thái, the Tày, the Chinese and the Cham, the use of their own scripts, which were not quốc ngữ-based scripts, at school (Thanh Ha 1968; Trần Trí Dõi 1999).[68]

During the 1950s-1960s, in the Northwest Autonomous Zone, Tai Dam script was chosen by the Vietnamese government to be promoted over other Thái scripts in Vietnam. Under this new regime of language, the Vietnamese state's ideology of language characterized the Tai Dam script as it is "used by the largest number of people, . . . simple, beautiful, currently used and representing ethnic identity" (TTLTQG-3 1954: 6), "more advanced," "accurate" and "wealthy in literature of every kind" (TTLTQG-3 1956: 38-41) than other Thái orthographies. However, I argue that it is more likely because the Tai Dam actively participated in the liberation of the northwest in the early 1940s-1950s the Tai Dam script was thus the proper choice.[69] As pointed out by Kroskrity, "The imposition of a state-supported hegemonic standard will always benefit some social groups over others" (2000b:8); the choice of script implemented in the Thái community reflects the close relations between the Party and a division of the Tai Dam.

Later, however, the Vietnamese state attempted to create a quốc ngữ-based orthography, claiming that the quốc ngữ-based script is "quicker to learn and more accurate," "will bridge Thái language and the national script much more easily," "no longer makes Thái officials and civilians have the sense of division between different regions," "will facilitate the officials and civilians of other ethnic groups in the zone to learn Thái script much faster" (TTLTGQ-3 1971:34). Thái languages and orthographies have not been taught in schools since 1975 when the autonomous zones were dissolved. After the unification of northern and southern Vietnam, the Tai Dam orthography and other Thái orthographies were thus subordinated to Vietnamese language and orthography. To paraphrase Susan Gal's approach to language ideologies (1998:327-9), while the Vietnamese nation-state makes Tai Dam orthography become "recursive" in opposition to other Thái orthographies and the Vietnamese national orthography, the other Thái orthographies were almost completely "erased."

After the country was unified in 1975, discussions among ethnic Thái regarding the possibility of bringing the script back to schools and which script is the proper version are

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[67] Aside from ethnic Thái, many ethnic groups, e.g. Tày, Chinese, Cham, and Khmer, also have their own scripts. While the Tày script is based on Chinese, the Cham script and Khmer script in southern Vietnam are derived from Arabic and Indic scripts, respectively. As European missionaries were historically working in the highland areas of Vietnam, other ethnic groups, such as the Hmong, adopted different versions of roman-derived scripts (Smalley et al. 1990).

[68] Drawn mainly from the National Archive III, I provide a detailed discussion of Vietnam's language and orthography policies implemented in the Northwest Autonomous Zone in 1955-1975 in Yukti (2007:260-313).

[69] Please find details of Thái politics and how the Tai Dam became the leading group in the Vietnamese revolution in Yukti (2007: 214-239).

still divisive.[70] In summary, similar to many cases occurring cross-culturally worldwide, language ideologies in the case of the Thái in Vietnam are sites of "not only multiplicity and contestation but also clashes or disjunctures in which divergent ideological perspectives on language and discourse are juxtaposed, resulting in conflict, confusion, and contradiction" (Kroskrity 2000b:13).

Contemporary Debates on Thái Orthographies

The Thái in the present day still debate the proper way to preserve their orthographies. The debate is whether or not the Thái should standardize Thái orthographies to empower Tai ethnic identity. Many Thái scholars disagree and urge the Thái to preserve only each subgroup's local orthography. "Workshop on the Preservation and Digitalization of Tai Scripts" conference held on November 15th-16th, 2005 at Hanoi provides a clear picture of such debate.[71] Sponsored by UNESCO, the Programme for Thái Studies of Hanoi National University and the Institute of Information Technology, the Academy of Science and Technology, Thái delegates were invited from major Thái provinces including Điện Biên Phủ, Sơn La, Lai Châu, and Hòa Bình. International scholars from Japan, Thailand, and the United States were also invited. The main objectives were to call attention to roles, feasibilities, and benefits of the digitization of Thái scripts. In order to support the use of the digitized Thái script, UNESCO required that there must be at least one million Thái who will use the script. Another main purpose of the meeting was thus to urge local Tháis to reach an agreement on the standardization of Thái orthography.

After two days of academic presentations by Vietnamese, Thái, and international academics, as well as users of the Thái scripts, delegates from the Thái regions presented their reflections on the meeting. A prominent female delegate from Lai Châu noted that "Aside from worrying about what benefit the future of Thái script would have for Vietnam's modern life, born as half Tai Dam, half Tai Don, I don't know whether a standard Thái script would better be based on Tai Dam or Tai Don." A group of district officials representing Hòa Bình Province's Tai Daeng (nowadays referring to themselves as Tai Don) which successfully carried out the teaching of a standard a Thái script (which had been recently created by a group of Thái scholars working in Hanoi) reflected that "After adjusting the script to write our dialect, it is convenient for us to learn the standard Thái script." A young female teacher, wearing her "traditional" Tai Dam attire and hair bun representing her marriage status, insisted that "Intellectuals of Sơn La agree only on reviving the ancient Tai Dam script." Although she herself is a daughter of Lò Văn Mươi, an active leader of the movement to standardize Thái orthography during the 1950s-1960s, she did not agree with the use of a standard Thái. Instead, she had brought a computerized version of Sơn La's Tai Dam orthography, which she had helped create to, present at the meeting.

The meeting reflected main debates regarding Thái orthographies in contemporary Vietnam very well. First of all, it reflected the common interest shared among Tháis in many regions that Thái literacy is tied intimately with Thái orthography and it plays a key

[70] How the Thái orthographies and Thái traditional literacies are still significant to Thái villagers in present day is extensively discussed in my ethnographic study of Thái religious and secular textual performances (Yukti 2007:314-400).

[71] Some information on the conference and current situation on Thái scripts are presented at http://www.huesoft.com.vn/chuthaivietnam/TINTUC/.

role in the preservation of Thái ethnic identity and culture. While struggling to catch up with the national Vietnamese language and script, the Thái hope they could simultaneously preserve their ethnic identity and culture by preserving Thái orthographies and literacies. In this regard, the orthography that each Thái subgroup maintains "iconicizes" each subgroup's "imagined community" defining each Thái ethnic boundaries of spoken dialect and orthography against one another. The boundaries were drawn as if a Thái group was monolingual, although it is evident that multilingualism were practiced throughout Thái region. Within each Thái group, the linguistic and orthographic features iconized as the ethnic identity of a Thái group also recurred to iconize the sub-divisions of most of the Thái subgroups, except the Tai Dam.

Second, as different regions of the Thái have their own version of Tai orthography, they still disagree regarding the standardization of the Thái scripts. The maintenance of local diversity and the local hesitation to accept the standard Thái orthography echoes the agitation voiced by local intellectuals and authorities against Thái script reformation policies several decades ago in the Northwest Autonomous Zone (1955-1975). Each Tai proto-imagined community of language and orthography maintained its pre-colonial politico-linguistic boundaries even in the later eras. In the colonial period, different factions of the Thái established diverse relationships with Chinese bandits, the French, and Vietnamese anti-colonial organizations, including the Vietnamese Communist Party. The diverse Thái spoken and written dialects played different key roles in each Thái faction. After the 1950s, the intimate affiliation between a branch of the Tai Dam and the Vietnamese state led the Vietnamese state to grant its favor to Tai Dam language and orthography, while languages and orthographies of other Tháis were undermined.

Consequently, the attempts to homogenize Thái languages and orthographies led to counter-agitation by the diverse Tháis whose dialects and orthographies were under threat of erasure. The dilemma whether it would be better to accept a common Thái identity and the standard Thái orthography or to insist on developing each region's local orthography remains among the Thái community nowadays. This dilemma, however, prevents the Thái from creating a pan-Thái identity encompassing Thái subgroups and thus benefits the Vietnamese state enabling it to implement a "divide and rule" administrative strategy toward the different Thái subgroups.

Third, by granting the ethnic minorities the right to preserve and to use their languages and orthographies, the Vietnamese state has sought to implement multilingual policies. However, as demonstrated in the essay, Thái languages and orthographies have gone through an ever-shifting processes of being iconized, subordinated, and erased. Between the 1950s-1960s, the Vietnamese state iconized Tai Dam language and orthography as the language and script of the Thái, even though the languages and orthographies of the Thái in different regions are diverse. In the 1970s, Thái languages and orthographies, parallel to other ethnic languages and scripts, were recursively projected and subordinated to Vietnamese and quốc ngữ, the national language and orthography. From the 1980s to the present day, the multilingual policies were revived; thereby, nowadays Thái orthographies and traditional literacies are commonly practiced among Thái villagers, male and female alike in villages. Recently, as the Vietnamese government also acknowledges the use of ethnic minorities scripts in schools, Thái scripts are taught in schools located in Thái regions. Nonetheless, although the Vietnamese state preserves Thái languages and orthographies, the preservation is selective and thus, in the same way as

Susan Gal puts it, "rendering some linguistic forms or groups invisible or recasting the image of their presence and practices to better fit the ideology" (1998: 328). As the Tai Dam language and orthography are still promoted for preservation, other Thái dialects and orthographies are susceptible to erasure.

Nonetheless, Vietnam remains a multilingual state. Since the early years of the resistance war against the French and the Japanese in the 1940s, Thái languages and orthographies, particularly the Tai Dam language and orthography, had largely benefited from the formation of the anti-colonial movement. Consequently, Thái languages and scripts were significant to the transitional period of the integration of the Thái into the nation-state, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s. The state continues to consider the shortcomings of using the national language particularly in the educational sector in ethnic minority areas where ethnic languages still play key roles. Nowadays, a period when the Vietnamese nation-state is relatively stable, the multilingual policies are still being maintained or even expanded. On the one hand, the Vietnamese state's multilingual policies are a means for national integration and cultural assimilation. On the other hand, a side effect of its policies is that the ethnic peoples can to a certain degree preserve their culture and identity. Thái villagers thus continue to practice both traditional and emerging genres of Tai textual performances.

Last but not least, within the complex relationship between the Thái ideologies of language and the formation of Vietnamese nationhood, the ethnic peoples participate actively in policy making and implementation, both at the national and local level. At the local level, as suggested by the Tai Dam delegates from Sơn La and the Tai Daeng delegates from Hòa Bình attending UNESCO meeting noted above, Thái intellectuals and authorities initiated the Thái script classes and the computerization of the Thái script. At the national level, led by the Programme for Thái Studies, Thái scholars collaborate with the central governmental organizations to preserve and develop the use of Thái orthography.

The digitization of Thái script meeting ended without any agreement whether or not a standard Thái script already used in some region should be adopted by the entire Thái community. In 2006, however, a computerized Tai Dam script created in Sơn La was recognized by Unicode (Lò Luận 2010 [2009]). Still, the meeting did make certain gains. It marked the very first time since the termination of the autonomous zone that the Thái gathered to discuss the future of Thái orthographies. It assured the Thái that the Vietnamese state remains open to acknowledging and encouraging the preservation and the use of Thái orthography. The UNESCO meeting sheds light on the ever-shifting language ideologies of the Thái orthographies in the context of the rise of the Vietnamese nation-state. Not only did the meeting demonstrate that the diversity of the Thái still plays important role in their internal ethnic politics, but also it reveals that ethnic diversity continues to play a role in Vietnamese state policy decisions.

Conclusion

Reflected in a nuanced history of the language ideologies in the case of the Thái in Vietnam, the Vietnamese nation-state emerges from contestations of ethnic minorities, colonizers, and the ethnic majority over the ideas and practices of language and orthography. The ever-shifting linguistic ideologies regarding ethnic Thái in Vietnam have undergone processes of the linguistic change in various regimes of language. The case of Thái orthographies demonstrates that Vietnam has long maintained multiple literacy

policies where traditional literacy and standard national literacy co-exists in the ethnic minority communities. The language ideology approach provides a theoretical perspective for a linguistic anthropological examination to unravel the convergence of ideas and practices of the ethnic peoples, the sub-ethnic groups, and the state revealing how ethnic languages and orthographies take part in nation-state formation.

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Appendix

This appendix exhibits a collection of Thái scripts in four tables: Table 1: Tai Dam Consonants, Table 2: Tai Don Consonants, Table 3: Tai Daeng Consonants, and Table 4: Tai Dam, Tai Don, Tai Daeng Vowels. Some remarkable differences are:

(1) Tai Don consonants have six more letters than other Thái consonants because Tai Don dialect has phonemes low-high p^h, low-high c^h, and low-high x that are not found in other Thái dialects.

(2) Tai Don Lai Châu consonants and Tai Don Phong Thổ consonants differ only in the form of the low-high k^h and low-high x. Interestingly, they are similar to the low-high k^h of Tai Daeng Thanh Hóa and Tai Daeng Mai Châu scripts.

(3) Tai Daeng consonants from various regions differ from one another a great deal in their forms and location of vowels. For instance, although the vowel ɛ of Tai Daeng Lai Pao looks similar to the vowel ɛ of other Thái, Lao Pao ɛ comes after the initial consonant. However, other Thái ɛs, except Quỳ Châu ɛ, are located before the initial consonant.

(4) The most distinctive one is the Tai Daeng script of Quỳ Châu which is written vertically from right to left, while other Thái scripts are written horizontally from left to right. Quỳ Châu vowel locations are thus distinctive.

(5) In terms of vowels, in general, while i, ɛ, ɔ, ɨ, and u are relatively similar in all Thái scripts, some are very different, like e, o, ə, and ɨa. However, Tai Don scripts are distinctive in their smaller number of diphthongs in comparison to other Thaí scripts.

Table 1: Tai Dam Consonants

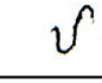
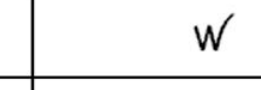
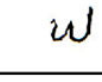
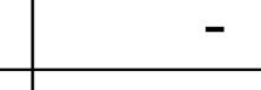
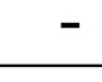
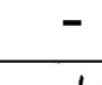
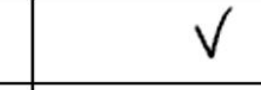
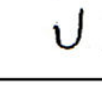
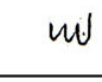
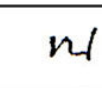
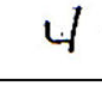
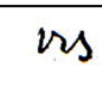
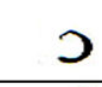
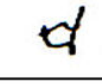
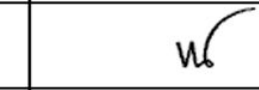
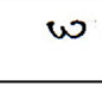
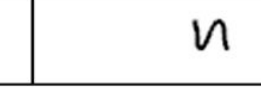
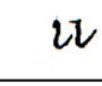
Tai Region	Taidam Điện Biên Phủ, Sơn La, Nghĩa Lộ	
Phonetic	SIL Tai Dam	TTLTQG-3, KTTTB
low p		
high p		
low p^h		
high p^h		
low b		
high b		
low m		
high m		
low ʊ		
high ʊ		
low f		
high f		
low t		
high t		

Table 1: Tai Dam Consonants (continued)

Tai Region	Taidam Điện Biên Phủ, Sơn La, Nghĩa Lộ	
Phonetic	SIL Tai Dam	TTLTQG-3, KTTTB
low t^h		
high t^h		
low d		
high d		
low n		
high n		
low s		
high s		
low l		
high l		
low c		
high c		
low c^h	-	-
high c^h	-	-

Table 1: Tai Dam Consonants (continued)

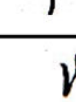
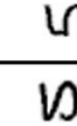
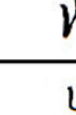
Tai Region	Taidam **Điện Biên Phủ, Sơn La, Nghĩa Lộ**	
Phonetic	SIL Tai Dam	TTLTQG-3, KTTTB
low ɲ		
high ɲ		
low j		
high j		
low k		
high k		
low k^h		
high k^h		
low x		
high x		
low ŋ		
high ŋ		
low ʔ		
high ʔ		
low h		
high h		

Table 2: Tai Don Consonants

Tai Region	Lai Châu				Phong Thổ			
Phonetic	Lefevre-Pontails (1892)	Martini (1954)	TTLTQG -3, KTTTB	Ferlus (1988)	Silvestre (1918)	Martini (1954)	TTLTQG -3, KTTTB	Đồng Trọng Im (2004)
low p						–		
high p					–	–		
low p^h			–			–	–	
high p^h			–	–			–	
low b					–	–		
high b			–	–	–	–		
low m						–		
high m						–		
low ʊ					–			
high ʊ					–	–	–	
low f						–		
high f					–	–		
low t								
high t					–			

Table 2: Tai Don Consonants (continued)

Tai Region	Lai Châu				Phong Thổ			
Phonetic	Lefevre-Pontails (1892)	Martini (1954)	TTLTQG -3, KTTTB	Ferlus (1988)	Silvestre (1918)	Martini (1954)	TTLTQG -3, KTTTB	Đồng Trọng Im (2004)
low t^h					–		–	
high t^h				–	–		–	
low d					–	–	–	
high d				–		–	–	
low n						–		
high n						–		
low s						–		
high s						–		
low l						–	–	
high l						–	–	
low c						–	–	
high c						–	–	
low c^h	–		–	–		–	–	
high c^h			–	–	–	–	–	

Table 2: Tai Don Consonants (continued)

Tai Region	Lai Châu				Phong Thổ			
Phonetic	Lefevre-Pontails (1892)	Martini (1954)	TTLTQG -3, KTTTB	Ferlus (1988)	Silvestre (1918)	Martini (1954)	TTLTQG -3, KTTTB	Đồng Trọng Im (2004)
low ɲ							–	
high ɲ							–	
low j								
high j						–		
low k						–		
high k						–		
low k^h			–				–	
high k^h			–		–		–	
low x	–		–				–	
high x	–		–	–	–		–	
low ŋ				–	–			
high ŋ						–		
low ʔ						–	–	
high ʔ				–		–	–	
low h						–		
high h					–	–		

Table 3: Tai Daeng Consonants

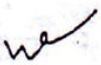
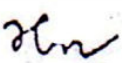
Tai Region	Tai Daeng			
Phonetic	**Thanh Hóa** (Silvestre 1886 c.f. Finot 1917: 16)	**Mai Châu** (Hà Công Tín 1998)	**Quy Châu** Ferlus 1993	Lai Pao Ferlus and Dõi 1997
low p				
high p				-
low p^h	-	-		-
high p^h	-	-	-	
low b				
high b				-
low m				
high m			-	
low ʊ			-	
high ʊ				-
low f				-
high f	-			-
low t				
high t		-		-

Table 3: Tai Daeng Consonants (continued)

Tai Region	Tai Daeng			
Phonetic	**Thanh Hóa** (Silvestre 1886 c.f. Finot 1917: 16)	**Mai Châu** (Hà Công Tín 1998)	**Quy Châu** Ferlus 1993	Lai Pao Ferlus and Dõi 1997
low t^h				-
high t^h	-		-	-
low d			-	
high d				
low n			-	
high n				
low s				-
high s		-		-
low l				
high l			-	
low c				-
high c			-	-
low c^h	-	-	-	
high c^h	-	-	-	-

Table 3: Tai Daeng Consonants (continued)

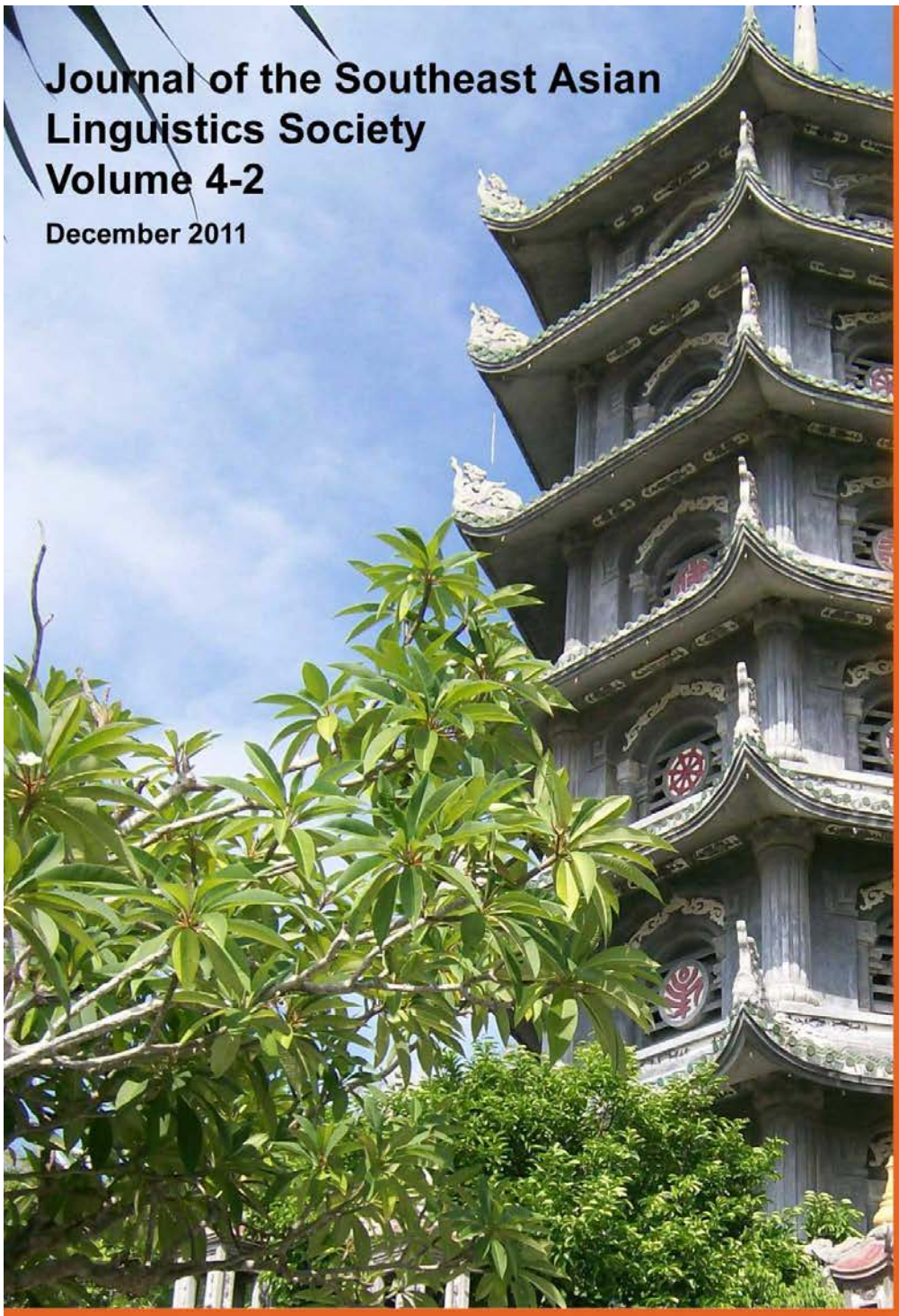
Tai Region	Tai Daeng			
Phonetic	**Thanh Hóa** (Silvestre 1886 c.f. Finot 1917: 16)	**Mai Châu** (Hà Công Tín 1998)	**Quy Châu** Ferlus 1993	Lai Pao Ferlus and Dõi 1997
low ɲ				
high ɲ	-			-
low j				-
high j	-		-	-
low k				
high k	-		-	
low k^h				
high k^h				-
low x	-	-		
high x	-	-		
low ŋ	-	-		
high ŋ			-	
low ʔ				-
high ʔ	-		-	-
low h			-	
high h				

Table 4: Tai Dam, Tai Don, Tai Daeng Vowels

Phonemes	Tai Dam	Tai Don **Lai Châu**	Tai Don **Phong Thổ**	Tai Daeng **Thanh Hóa**	Tai Daeng **Mai Châu**	Tai Daeng **Quy Châu**	Tai Daeng Lai Pao
i							
e							
ɛ							
a							
a:							
ɨ							
ə							
u							
o							
ɔ							
aɨ							
ai							
ao							
ia							
ɨa							
ua							

Table 4: Tai Dam, Tai Don, Tai Daeng Vowels (Continued)

Phonemes	Tai Dam	Tai Don Lai Châu	Tai Don Phong Thổ	Tai Daeng Thanh Hóa	Tai Daeng Mai Châu	Tai Daeng Quy Châu	Tai Daeng Lai Pao
oa	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
an	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
am	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ap	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
at	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
aŋ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
oi	-	-	-	-	-	-	-



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