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Sarkisov Ivan Vladimirovich

Metrics of Thai and Burmese poetry

Dissertation Summary
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Academic Supervisor:
Plungyan Vladimir Alexandrovich,
Doctor of Science in
Philology and Linguistics,
professor

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This dissertation is dedicated to the topic of the principles of the metrical organization of poetic meters in classical Thai and Burmese poetry and the comparison of them with each other.

The relevance of the research is connected with the fact that the metrical laws of poetry (especially if the poetic tradition has a long history and is well developed) are an important component of the culture of the people and, therefore, the study of the metrics of the poetry of the peoples of Southeast Asia is one of the stages in the study of their cultures.

The metric of the poetic traditions of Southeast Asia is studied poorly. Since ancient times, Siam (the name of modern Thailand before until the revolution in 1932) had its own tradition of versification, represented by descriptions of poetic meters and rhyme schemes. They were created in order to instruct future poets how to write verses, which would be "correct" in terms of the form. Such works contain detailed descriptions of Thai meters, but, of course, do not rely on any instrumental or quantitative methods accepted in linguistics and do not use modern scientific terms. For this reason, one of the main tasks in the study of the metrics of Thai poetry is checking by statistical methods the information reported by traditional Thai philology and "translation" of its descriptions into modern terms.

Some Thai scientists have created a number of works in English which are dedicated to the metrics of Thai poetry. These are, for example, the works of Chand Chirayu Rajani "On translating Thai poetry" written in 1977 and "Thai poetry translation: a review and some new examples" written in 1979, as well as the article by M. Chitakasem "Thai poetry: problems of translation" published in 1987. A typical feature of all these works is that they are dedicated not directly to the Thai metrics, but to the history and problems of translations of Thai poetry into English. The questions of the metrical organization of Thai poetry are touched upon in them only to the extent that it is required to cover their main topic. In Western countries, there is also a considerable amount of scientific works (mostly in English) regarding to the Thai metrics. First of all, it is necessary to note the works of the American scientist Thomas Hudak, who is one of the leading experts

on both the Indonesian and Thai metric systems. Among them, the most important are the articles (i) "Meta-rhymes in classical Thai poetry", which appeared in 1986 and describes in detail the features and different types of Thai rhyme, as well as two meters of classical Thai poetry ("rai" and "chan") with detailed excursions into their varieties, (ii) "Further observations on the Thai chan poetic conventions" 1992, dedicated directly to chan, and (iii) "Limericks and rhyme in Thai" 2001. These works could be called exhaustive in terms of the description of Thai poetic meters, but all of them have two very significant shortcomings. Firstly, the descriptions given in them are not based on any quantitative data or instrumental studies. Secondly, although for the works of T. Hudak the metrics of Thai poetry is the main subject of study (in contrast to the philological works of Thai scientists), he does not provide a typological classification of Thai poetic meters and his study is limited by description. As a result, the works of T. Hudak are very important because of the descriptive information provided in them, since they are the main "conductors" of the data of traditional Thai poetry in modern science. However, they are rather scarce in terms of theoretical basis and typological conclusions, thus leaving a fertile field for further research.

In Russian scientific literature, the problem of the metrics of Thai poetry is completely undeveloped. In Russia, to this day, attention has been paid only to grammatical studies of the Thai language and purely philological problems, and, despite the presence of a certain number of very valuable Russian-language works on these issues, Thai poetic meters have never become the subject of study by Russian scientists. At the same time, Russian philologists in their works paid attention to the philological analysis of examples of Thai poetry, still could not completely ignore this topic. For example, Vera Alexandrovna Ivanova in her dissertation work "The lyrical poem "Kamsuan siprat" (2nd half of the 17th century) and the formation of the genre of Thai literature nirat", defended in 2018 and dedicated to a famous Thai poem in the genre of nirat "The lament of Siprat" by the 17th century court poet Siprat repeatedly touches upon the issue of the use of certain meters of various Thai poetic genres. However, the study of the metric

itself remains outside the scope of the work, and therefore no attempts are made in principle to give a typological classification to any of the dimensions mentioned. Under these conditions, we can conclude that the problems of the metrics of classical Thai poetry are a completely new and undeveloped topic for Russian poetry.

In the case of the metrics of classical Burmese poetry, the situation seems somewhat different. At the moment, we know nearly nothing about the national Burmese poetic tradition. Although the presence of its own poetry and any philological works about it in pre-colonial Burma seems very likely, we were unable to find any such works, nor information about their existence, despite of both studying the scientific literature available to us, and communication with potential informants. At the same time, the total number of works dedicated to the metrics of Burmese poetry is much less than the number of works on the metrics of the Thai one. We are not aware of any works in European languages dealing specifically with this topic. In the English scientific literature, questions of Burmese metrics are touched upon only in the works of the famous Burmese philologist and linguist Hla Pe, who wrote in English. However, these works (the articles "Three 'immortal' Burmese songs", co-authored with A.J. Allot and J. Okell in 1963 and "Burmese poetry (1300-1971)", published in 1971) are purely philological and are dedicated to literary problems and relate to the metrics of Burmese poetry only indirectly, reporting very scarce information about it.

At the same time, in domestic science, although the total number of works on Burmese metrics is also quite small, there are several very valuable works on this topic, thanks to which it can be safely called much more developed than the metrics of Thai poetry. Such works are, first of all, the article by V.G. Zlatoverkhova "The Metric System of Burmese Classical Poetry", published in 1973, as well as articles by A.D. Burman "Some features of the Burmese rhyme" in 1971 and the outstanding Russian Burmese scholar R.A. Janson "On the Form of Existence of Burmese Poems" 2006. In the first of them, the author made an attempt to fully characterize and classify the meters of classical Burmese poetry

from a typological point of view, which has never been done with respect to Thai meters by any Thai, Western or Russian scientist. At the same time, instrumental data were also involved in the study, which at that time, probably, had not yet been undertaken with respect to meters in any of the poetic traditions of Southeast Asia. However, the most important method of studying metric systems, adopted in modern poetry as the main one, V.G. Zlatoverkhov was still not used. Unfortunately, despite a number of valuable observations and the great importance of the study as completely innovative, the main conclusions of V.G. Zlatoverkhova regarding the nature of the Burmese metric seem to us incorrect. Using rather vague formulations, such as “an important role is also played by the prosodic elements that are realized within the metric unit” [Zlatoverkhova 1973: 157] and “of the prosodic elements, the tonal component, apparently, plays the main role” [ibid], while not supporting them with some quantitative data, the author finally characterizes the Burmese metric system as a syllabo-tonal one. However, our studies, the results of which will be presented in this paper, have shown that the metric of Burmese poetry is purely syllabic, and the distribution of tones does not play a metro-forming role in it, which refutes the work of V.G. Golden-domed conclusion. Therefore, paying tribute to her work as probably the first attempt not only in Russian but also in world science to analyze and classify the meters of Burmese poetry (and most likely, the poetry of all the peoples of Southeast Asia in general), we must admit that the set in it the task has not been fully completed and certainly requires further research.

Thus, very important and significant developments have been made in the field of Burmese poetry, mainly by Russian scientists. Works on this topic, although their quantity is much small than the number of works about Thai poetry, are ahead of them in terms of the methods. However, the authors of these works were not able to determine the nature of Burmese poetic meters and classify them from the point of view of typology. Therefore, there is still a rich field for further research in this area.

The object of study in this paper is a corpus of specially selected Thai and

Burmese poetic texts.

As a material for analysis in the study of Thai metrics, we used the initial fragment of the poem "Lilit Phra Lo", written by alternating two types of khlóng meter (four- and two-line khlóng) and meter rai, with a total volume of 1009 poetic lines. 555 of them were for rai and 454 for khlóng (348 for four-line and 106 for two-line). In the case of Burmese metrics, we analyzed 15 small lyrical poems (including Anandaturiya's poem "The Law of Nature", considered one of the masterpieces of Burmese poetry) and excerpts from two large texts - "Rama yagan" by the poet U Tou and a play by Padeitayaza "Maniket". The total volume of the analyzed texts is 1397 poetic lines.

The research methodology combined the quantitative method with the modeling method. All conclusions are based on quantitative data obtained by counting various parameters that can be metro-forming - first of all, syllables in lines, but also tones, rhyming syllables, etc. However, decisions about which parameters to count, as well as about how to interpret the obtained numerical data were taken on the basis of hypothetical models of metric structures, which are formulated taking into account the theoretical experience of previous studies and our own ideas about the typology of the metric.

The subject of the research is the totality of metric regularities of classical Thai and Burmese poetic traditions.

The work intends to identify the principles of metrical organization in classical Thai and Burmese poetry and their comparative characteristics.

Achieving this goal involves the following decisions:

To identify all the main meters used in the classical Thai and Burmese poetic traditions and their detailed description.

To make a typological classification of each of these meters in terms of modern poetry and an attempt to classify Thai and Burmese metrics in general by using statistical methods.

To compare the metrics of Thai and Burmese poetry and, based on its results, hypotheses about the presence or absence of mutual influence between them.

To study the question about the influence of other poetic traditions on classical Thai and Burmese poetry.

To identify the most relevant unresolved issues for further research on this topic.

The theoretical significance of this work lies in the enrichment of poetry science with knowledge about the metrical laws of two original poetic traditions, which are poorly understood. They have never been used by modern methods of studying poetic meters, but they differ in a number of very original features (for example, the use of internal rhyme, the assignment of a metro-forming role to graphic rather than phonetic alternation, or the simultaneous use of several types of metrics) and, therefore, are of great interest to scientists.

The practical significance of the dissertation is due to the possibility of using its results in potential translations of Thai and Burmese poetic texts into Russian and other foreign languages, as well as in creating original poetic texts in these languages. In addition, the results of the study can be used in university courses in poetry, as well as Thai and Burmese literature. Although at present, translations of foreign poetry are increasingly being performed in *vers libre*, such an approach seems wrong to us, as it contradicts more than two hundred years old tradition, within which the undeniably best examples of translated literature in Russian were created (for example, translations of the poems of Homer by N.I. Gnedich and V. A. Zhukovsky, translation of the “Divine Comedy” and other works of European authors by M. L. Lozinsky, translations of European classics by B. L. Pasternak, Georgian poetry by N. A. Zabolotsky and many others). At the same time, the translators solved the problem of adapting the metrics of the original text for the Russian language (as, for example, with the ancient hexameter) or establishing a certain correspondence between this metrics and any meters traditionally accepted in Russian poetry (for example, for translating syllabic poetry in Roman languages there is an unspoken rule to use iamb with the number of feet equal to half of the number of syllables in the original line). Of course, not only intuitive ideas, but scientific knowledge about the metrics of the original texts (especially when this metric is strikingly different from the Russian one) seems to be very useful, if not

necessary, for solving such a problem. Consequently, if the monuments of Thai and Burmese poetry begin to be actively translated into Russian or other European languages (which we would very much like to believe), information about the principles of their metrical organization will turn out to be very relevant. It also cannot be ruled out that certain elements inherent in the metrics of poetry in the languages of Southeast Asia (for example, the so-called internal and stepped rhymes), at least in the form of creative experiments, can be used in Russian and European poetry (examples of which have already been placed in the translation of Thai poetic texts into English) and thereby enrich it.

The novelty of the work lies in the fact that it is dedicated to a poorly researched topic and should be the first scientific work to study the metrics of poetry in the languages of Southeast Asia using quantitative methods, to propose a typological classification of the meters of classical Thai and Burmese poetry, and to attempt their comparative description.

Approbation of the results of the study took place in the course of discussion and review at the Doctoral School of Philology of the National Research University Higher School of Economics. Also, the results of the study were successfully presented at the International conference on language and literature on January 15-17, 2020 in Kuala Lumpur.

Work structure

The work consists of an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion.

The introduction outlines the goals and objectives of the study, its relevance, theoretical and practical significance and novelty.

Chapter 1 sets out the various points of view on the concepts of meter and verse and gives their most common definitions.

Chapter 2 is a review of the prior literature. It describes in detail the previous studies known to us on the topic of the work, ranging from traditional Thai verse treatises-*chanthalaks* to our own publications. Particular attention is paid to the work of the American scientist T.J. Hudak, who is the largest specialist in Thai

metrics, as well as the attempt of the Soviet researcher V.G. Zlatoverkhova to make a typological classification of Burmese metrics using quantitative methods, with the results of which, unfortunately, we cannot fully agree.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to an overview of the poetic traditions of Myanmar and Thailand. The chapter consists of three paragraphs. Section 3.1 gives the basic information about the history and culture of the whole of mainland Indochina, which is necessary for understanding the subsequent information about the literature of its countries. Paragraph 3.2 summarizes the history and main features of the poetry of Myanmar, and paragraph 3.3 of the poetry of Thailand (Siam).

Chapter 4, consisting of two paragraphs, is dedicated to the linguistic characteristics of Thai (paragraph 4.1) and Burmese (paragraph 4.2) languages. It outlines the basic information about these languages (mainly about phonetics), which is necessary for understanding which parameters in poetry written in them can be metro-forming. This information does not pretend to be complete and is extremely concise, and the most complex and not fully resolved issues (for example, about the number and quality of tones in the Burmese language) are taken out of the discussion.

Chapters 5-7 present the actual results of the study. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the meters of Thai poetry. Paragraph 5.1 is dedicated to their general overview, paragraph 5.2 - to the two most simple Thai meters in terms of classification - syllabic klon and kap, 5.3 - to the syllabic meter chan. The description and classification of these meters are based on the data of previous works, and verification of these data was taken out of the scope of our study. Section 5.4 is dedicated to the most difficult (both in terms of use in poetry and in terms of classification) Thai meter - khlung. We formulate three hypotheses about its typological nature and present and analyze in detail the quantitative data we have collected in order to verify them, and as a result, we conclude that at present khlung is a syllabo-graphic meter that is unique for the typology of metrics, but, perhaps, it originally arose as a syllabo-tonal meter, and then lost its tonal basis due to changes in the rules of writing and reading. We describe the four-line and two-

line (not previously mentioned in the literature) khlung. Section 5.5 is dedicated to another Thai meter that presents a certain problem in terms of typological classification - rai. Based on the data collected and processed by us during the study, we come to the conclusion that rai, contrary to the opinion of T. Hudak, is not a type of rhymed prose, but a full-fledged syllabic poetic meter.

Chapter 6 consists of seven paragraphs and deals with the metrics of Burmese poetry. Section 6.1 provides an overview of the history of the study of Burmese metrics and summarizes the results of previous studies on it. Section 6.2 presents the results of our analysis of the syllabic structure of the poem "The Law of Nature" by Anandaturya, which is probably the most famous work of Burmese poetry and is considered exemplary in terms of metrics. According to the results of this analysis, we conclude that it is indeed written in a meter in which each line contains four syllables. Section 6.3 is dedicated to an attempt to identify any pattern in the distribution of tones in the same poem, as a result of which we came to the conclusion that the tone structure in it is not regulated in any way. In paragraph 6.4, the metrics of another famous Burmese poem, "Song of the chastened" by U Pone Nya is analyzed; in paragraph 6.5 – an excerpt from the poem "Rama yagan" by U Tou, in paragraph 6.6, an excerpt from the play "Maniket" by Padeythayaza, and in paragraph 6.7 – some small lyrical poems. According to this analysis, we conclude that Burmese poetry originally had a purely syllabic meter, in which each line contains four syllables, and the rhyme is usually stepped. At the same time, in the earliest examples of Burmese poetry, the syllabic structure of this measure is observed completely or almost strictly, but the rhyme, in fact, does not have a rigid structure. Further, the Burmese syllabic began to loosen and eventually acquired the character of the most unregulated. At the same time, rhyme in it, although not having a shadow of any structure, continued to be an obligatory attribute, which is an important argument in favor of distinguishing this type of metric from free verse.

In chapter 7, the metrics of Thai and Burmese poetry are compared with each other, as well as with the Vietnamese and Cham metrics (as far as the

available information about them allows). In the course of this comparison, we conclude that in the area of meters, these traditions show much more differences than similarities. Different traditions use different types of metrics: Burmese one – syllabic ones, Vietnamese - syllabo-tonal, Cham - presumably tonic, Thai (apparently the richest in terms of metric diversity) - sillibic, syllabo-metric meters and a syllabo-graphic one, most likely developed from the syllabo-tonal. On the other hand, all the poetic traditions of mainland Indochina known to us at the moment have one common characteristic in the field of rhyme, namely, the active use of internal rhyme. This is especially noteworthy, since in most other world traditions (for example, European and various Middle Eastern ones), this type of rhyme can only appear as a peripheral rhyme in relation to the end rhyme, which, in turn, is used much less frequently in the literature of the peoples of Indochina.

In conclusion, the results of the work are summarized and its main conclusions are briefly formulated, namely:

As for khlung, which (as well as other Thai meters, with the exception of rai) has never been attempted to classify typologically, the data of our study show that at present it is a syllabic-graphic meter, determined simultaneously by the number of syllables in lines and the alternation of purely graphic elements not determined by phonetics, which seems to be typologically rare (if not unique).

However, there is reason to believe that it originally appeared as a syllabo-tonal meter and turned into a syllabo-graphic meter as a result of changes in phonetics and reading rules.

Regarding rai, which T. Hudak characterized as a type of rhymed prose, and not a poetic meter, we have clearly shown that it should be considered a syllabic poetic meter.

Chan, according to the information of previous works, which were not verified by statistical methods in the course of our study, is a syllabo-metric meter, while the klon and kap are syllabic ones.

Thus, Thai poetry is characterized by great metrical diversity, since it uses three types of meters at once: syllabic, syllabo-metric and syllabo-graphic

(possibly having a syllabic-tonal origin) ones.

In khlung and rai, the metrics of which were studied by us by statistical methods, the structure is not rigid and deviations from the original form are allowed, but they are not too significant.

Also, in Thai poetry internal rhyme (between the last syllable of one line and some syllable inside another) and rhyme, which we called quasi-internal, are actively used, where the last syllable of one line rhymes with the last syllable of a non-final half-line of another. Rhyme between the final syllables of lines in Thai poetry is also found, but less frequently.

With regard to the metric of Burmese poetry, our research has confirmed that its oldest meter is syllabic, with each line containing four syllables. Regarding the later Burmese meters, the classification of which had previously remained unclear, we found that they most likely represent very unregulated syllabic. Rhyme in Burmese poetry is almost always internal, and even in a strict four-syllable meter, the structure of rhyme is not rigid and, thus, laxity has been inherent in Burmese metrics from the very moment of the birth of Burmese poetry, which, perhaps, was one of the reasons for its strong and fast loosening.

The main provisions for defense:

1. The Thai khlung meter is currently a syllabo-graphic meter, which is determined by the number of syllables in a line and the alternation of graphic elements not determined by phonetics, but there is reason to believe that it originally arose as a syllabo-tonal meter.
2. Thai meter rai is a syllabic verse meter, not rhymed prose.
3. All variants of Burmese meters known to us are syllabic – initially, a rigid four-syllable meter was used in Burmese poetry, and later the syllabic became extremely unregulated, but still different from free verse.
4. In Thai poetry, at least in khlung and rai, metrication can be loose, while Burmese poetry has been loose in terms of rhyme structure since its inception.
5. Internal rhyme is a typical and characteristic areal feature of the literary

traditions of various peoples of mainland Indochina.

6. Burmese, Thai, Vietnamese and Cham literary traditions do not show signs of significant mutual influence in the field of metrics and, apparently, developed completely independently in this aspect.

**List of publications of the author of the dissertation, which reflect the
main scientific results of the dissertation:**

On the topic of the dissertation research, 5 scientific papers were published, the personal contribution of the dissertation student is 100%.

Publications in journals recommended by HSE:

1. Sarkisov I.V. K voprosu o metricheskoi klassifikatsii razmerov taiskoi poezii [Towards the question about metrical classification of meters of Thai poetry] / Izvestiya RAN. Seriya literatury i yazyka. 2020. T. 79. № 2. Pp. 39-49.
2. Sarkisov I.V. Rifma v metricheskikh sistemah Yugo-Vostochnoy Azii // Izvestiya RAN. Seriya literatury i yazyka [Rhyme in the metric systems of Southeast Asia]. 2020. T. 80. № 6. Pp. 89-103 – 14.
3. Sarkisov I. Comparative Description of Meters in Thai and Burmese Poetries / Studia Metrica et Poetica. 9.1. University of Tartu, 2022. Pp. 20-38.

Other publications

4. Sarkisov I. Pri la klasifikado de la taja poetika metro khlung [About classification of Thai poetic meter khlung] // VAProsy yazykoznanii: Megabornik nanostatei. / Ed. A. A. Kibrik, Ks. P. Semyonova, D. V. Sichinava, S. G. Tatevosov, A. Yu. Urmanchieva. - M. : "Buki Vedi", 2020. - 684 p. - ISBN 978-5-4465-2882-0. Ss. 136-140.
5. Sarkisov I.V. Opyt izucheniya metricheskikh zakonov birmanskoy poezii [Experience in studying the metrical rules of Burmese poetry] // Vestnik RGGU, seriya «Literaturovedeniye, yazykoznaniiye, kul'turologiya». №2-2, 2021.

S. 135-162.