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Phonological variation and change of Thai Song¹

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This research is a case study of a phonological variation and a change of Thai Song phonology by age-group and region in Nakhon Pathom, Suphanburi, Ratchaburi, and Phetchaburi provinces. The phonological variation and change are compared with the Tai Dam language spoken in Son La, Vietnam.

The analysis of variation and change of consonants is based on the Proto-Tai Dam consonants reconstructed by Theraphan L-Thongkum (2002a). The consonant change of the Thai Song language which does not agree with that of the Thai language has a social variation. The young generation Thai Song speakers tend to use Thai consonants more than the older generations. Comparing the phonological change of Tai Dam and Thai Song, it has been found that the Proto Tai Dam consonants (second stage) have been kept in Thai Song more than Tai Dam. The study of vowel variation shows that middle and young generation Thai Song speakers began to use Thai vowels. The regional variation is marginally found.

The study of social and regional tone variation of Thai Song and Tai Dam shows an agreement of tonal systems, i.e., all varieties have six tones in live syllables. From the five tone categories of the parent language called A, B, C, DL, DS, two series of tones have developed in Thai Song varieties in all locations. Splits that have developed are ABCD123-4. DL and DS have merged with each other and DLDS123 and DLDS 4 correspond to B123 and B4 respectively. Even though tone splits and coalescences are the same across locations, phonetic values vary insignificantly from place to place. Despite the phonetic variation of tones, the six representative phonetic features of tones are determined based on the most frequency of usages: A123 mid falling rising; A4 mid rising falling; B123 lower mid falling high rising; B4 mid level; C123 lower-mid falling with glottalized; and C4 mid falling with glottalized. The phonetic features of these tones in some young generation speakers are different from the typical ones. The glottalized feature of C4 tone is absent in younger generation speakers. The phonetic features of A123 and A4 in Tai Dam are different from Thai Song in that both tones are level.

¹ Somsonge Burusphat . (2013). Tonal variation and change of Tai Dam. *Journal of Language and Culture*, 32(2), 19-41.