Method for Romanizing Siamese

Siamese, though belonging to a family of languages quite different from the Indo-European, uses a syllabic Indian alphabet which one may, with the exception of few letters, transliterate in Roman characters according to the system universally admitted for the Devanagari.

Each character of the Devanagari alphabet has been represented by a Roman letter, so that a single sign is transliterated by a single Roman letter, with the exception of the aspirated ones, which are transliterated by two.

The sounds expressed by those letters are as follows :—

Vowels.

short				long			
a	as	in	fat	ā	as	in	far
e	,,	,,	met	ē	,,	,,	there
i	,,	,,	pit	ī	,,	,,	sixteen
o	,,	,,	not	ō	,,	,,	no
u	,,	,,	bull	ū	,,	,,	rule
ṛ	no	equivalent		ṝ	no	equivalent	
ḷ	,,	,,					

Consonants.

Gutturals	k	—	kh	—	g	—	gh	—	ṅ
Palatals	c	—	ch	—	j	—	jh	—	ñ
Linguals	ṭ	—	ṭh	—	ḍ	—	ḍh	—	ṇ
Dentals	t	—	th	—	d	—	dh	—	n
Labials	p	—	ph	—	b	—	bh	—	m

All the unaspirated consonants have the same sound as the English ones with the following exceptions :—

The guttural nasal ṅ has no exact equivalent; it sounds almost like ng in "ingle." The palatal c sounds approximately like the Italian ch in "chianti"; ñ sounds like the Spanish ñ, *i.e.*, about ny. The h marks the aspiration of the preceding consonant.

Semivowels.

y r l v

Sibilants.

ç ṣ s

Aspirate.

h

Three signs, the anusvāra, the anunasika and the visarga are represented by ṃ and ṅ̆ and ḥ. The ṃ and ṅ̆ sound nearly like ordinary finals, m and n; the ḥ marks a sudden stop in the utterance of the preceding vowel.

All those characters with the exception of the anunasika exist in the Siamese alphabet, as they exist in all the alphabets deriving from the same source, *i. e.*, Cambodian, Burmese, Shan, Lao, etc., so that it is possible to romanize any word of Sanscrit or Pali origin, written in any of those languages, with the same letters. For instance the word "rāja" is exactly written with the same characters in the Siamese, Cambodian, Burmese and Lao languages, though it is respectively pronounced in those languages: "racha," "reachea," "yaza" and "latsa."

This system is, with a few exceptions, the one followed in the "Court Circulars," published in the newspapers here. It is the most practical for philological comparisons, the only one which enables one to recognize at once the words of Sanscrit or Pali origin, and it allows, with a few additions, retransliteration into Siamese letters.

But unfortunately it does not agree with the pronunciation of Siamese, which does not possess all the sounds of the Devanagari, and possesses some that the Devanagari does not.

According to the value which has been given to the Roman letters for the transliteration of the Devanagari, we have, roughly speaking, in Siamese the following sounds:--

Vowels.

a — ā — i — ī — u — ū — o — ō — e — to which must be added an open o (Siamese ๐) as in "gone."

ü, which is an intermediate sound between the English u in "cup" and the French u in "voiture;"

ū the same long;

ö as the French eu, nearly the English e in "here"—

ë as the French è in "frère."

Diphthongs.

ai, ài as in English "why."

öi as in French "œil"

Consonants.

Gutturals k — kh — ṅ
Palatals c — ch — s — ñ or y
Dentals d — t — th — n
Labials b — p — ph — f — m

Semivowels.

y — r — l — v

Sibilant.

s

Aspirate

h

It can be easily seen that in the Siamese alphabet, though it has preserved the character of the Indian alphabet, the sounds of those characters do not correspond any longer with the sounds of their originals. So if we want to represent the exact orthography of a Siamese word we must transliterate it letter by letter according to their value in the Devanagari alphabet, and if we want to represent its exact pronunciation we must transliterate the Siamese letters according to their pronunciation.

In the first case we shall write the word นคร ศรีธรรมราช nagar çrī dharrmarāj; in the second case, nokhon srī thamarāt.

It might seem possible to find a system which would give at the same time the orthography and the pronunciation; but it is not so, for the pronunciation of most of the Siamese letters varies with their place in a word. Any attempt to realize such a system will be a failure.

The best solution would be, perhaps, to follow the Devanagari transliteration, and to learn how to pronounce the words so romanized. Europeans agree to pronounce in many different ways the Latin word theatrum, which they write nearly with the same letters, viz.,

in French theatre,
in German theater,
in English theatre,
pronounced—téatr, théater and thīèta.

The name Shakespeare if read by a Frenchman who does not know English will be pronounced by him Chékéspéar and, if heard with the exact pronunciation, will be written Chekspire

We do not pronounce at all as we write, and when people say, Why don't you write words as they are pronounced ? we shall ask them to try first.

Hence the necessity of a system.

But for the ordinary reader who is not specially acquainted with philology or even with Siamese, who wants to know easily how to read a name on a map or in a newspaper, we must give a system which may be explained in a few lines and which follows as much as possible other systems already known and used in the same regions. The system followed for geographical names in India with a few alterations, and, better, the systems followed in Cambodia and the Malay States may be nearly adopted for the Siamese geographical names.

I have tried as much as possible to adopt for my phonetic transliteration the sounds already accepted for the Indochinese languages, with the exception of Annamite, which is too peculiar, and at the same time the phonetic systems already followed by the Roman Catholic Mission and the American Mission here.

In transliterating the tones, when necessary, I think better to adopt the signs as used in the Pallegoix dictionary.

The annexed list will give a complete system of literal and phonetic transliterations of Siamese :—

LITERAL AND PHONETIC TRANSLITERATIONS.

———o———

The first to be used for philological comparisons with other languages and for transliteration of the words of Pali and Sanscrit origin. The second for the usual transliteration of Siamese words.

Abbreviations. *A=literal transliteration.*
B=phonetic transliteration,
1. initial. 2. median. 3. final.

		B					B		
		1	2	3	A		1	2	3
ก	K	K	K	K	ฎ	ṭ	d	d	t
ข	Kh	Kh	Kh	K	ฏ	t̂	t	t	t
ฃ		Kh	Kh		ฐ	ṭh	th	th	t
ค	g	Kh	Kh		ฑ	ḍ	th	th	t
ฅ		Kh	Kh		ฒ	ḍh	th	th	t
ฆ	gh	Kh	Kh	K	ณ	ṇ	n	n	n
ง	ṅ	ṅ	ṅ	ṅ					
จ	c	c	c	t	ต	t	d	d	t
ฉ	ch	ch	ch		ฏ	t̂	t	t	
ช	j	ch	ch	t	ถ	th	th	th	t
ซ	ŝ	s	s	t	ท	d	th	th	t
ฌ	jh	ch	ch	t	ธ	dh	th	th	t
ญ	ñ	y	y	n	น	n	n	n	n

A		B 1	B 2	B 3
ป	p	b	b	p
ป	p̂	p	p	
ผ	ph	ph	ph	
ฝ	f	f	f	
พ	b	ph	ph	p
ฟ	f̂	f	f	
ภ	bh	ph	ph	p
ม	m	m	m	m
ย	y	y	y	i
ร	r	r	r	n
ล	l	l	l	n
ว	v	v	u	o
ศ	ç	s	s-ts	t
ษ	ṣ	s	s	t
ส	s	s	s	t

A	B	A	B
initial		ห h	h
ทร dr	s	ฬ ḷ	l

A	B 1	B 2	B 3
อ		o	o
ฮ ḥ	h		

inherent vowel	A a	B ŏ or ă
อั	a	a
อา	ā	ā
อิ	i	i
อี	ī	ī
อึ	ü	ü
อื	ǖ	ǖ
อุ	u	u
อู	ū	ū
ออ	o	o
ฤ	ṛ	rü
ฤๅ	ṝ	rǖ
ฦ	ḷ	lü
ฦๅ	ḹ	lǖ

	A	B
เอ	e	e
แอ	ē	ē
ไอ	ai	ai
ใอ	ai	ai
โอ	ō	ō
เอา	ó	ao
อำ	ām	am
อะ	aḥ	aḥ-a
อุํ	um	um
อรร	arr	a-an
อรรม	arrm	am
เอาะ	óḥ	oḥ

	A	B		A	B
เกีย	Kiye	Kya	เกือย	Kūoey	Kūei
เกียว	Kiyev	Kyao	เกย	Key	Kōi
กือ	Kūo	Kū	เกอ	Koe	Kō
เกือ	Kūoe	Kūa	แกะ	Keḥ	Kēḥ

	A	B
วย	vay	wei

Tones

altus	'
circumflexus	~
demissus	'
gravis	.

SAMPLES.

1st line, B system

2nd line, A system

มณฑล นคร ไชยศรี เมืองพระประฐม เจดีย์

monthon nokhon chaisrī müan phraḥ prathom cedi

maṇḍal nagar jaiyçrī müoen braḥ pratḥam cetiy

กรุงเทพ	ลพบุรี	จันทบุรี	ชุมพร
Krūnthep	lopbūrī	canthabūrī	chumphon
Krundeb	labpūrī	candapūrī	jumbar
ไทรบุรี	นครสวรรค์	ฉเชิงเทรา	ปาจิณ
saibūrī	nakhon savan	chachönsao	pācin
draipūrī	nagar suarrg	chajiendrô	pâciṇ
พายัพ	เชียงใหม่	นาน	แพร่
phāyap	chīen mái	nān	phrē
bāyab	jīen ṃái	nān	brē
นครศรีธรรมราช	ราชบุรี	ภูเก็จ	สุรินทร์
nakhon srīthamarāt	rātbūrī	phūket	surin
nagar çrī dharrmarāj	rājpūrī	bhūkec	surindr
พิศณุโลกย์	พรหมพิราม	บริเวณอุบล	
phitsanulōk	phrohmphirām	boriven ubon	
biçṇulōky	brahmbirām	pariveṇ upal	
กำแพงเพ็ชร	เพ็ชรบูรณ	เพ็ชรบุรี	
kamphën phet	phechabūn	phechabūrī	
kaṃbēn bejr	bejrabūrṇ	bejrapūrī	

วากย สัมพันธ คือ ตำรา เรียง ถ้อย คำ เข้า เปน

wākyasamphan khò tamrā ryeṅ thoi kham khao pen

vakyasambandh güo tamrā riyeṅ thòi gām khô pĕn

ประโยค ต่าง ๆ ใน ความ ที่ พูดจา เปน เรื่อง ราว

prayōk tāṅ ๆ nai khwām thī phūtcā pen rūaṅ rao

p̂rayōg t̂āṅ ๆ nai gvām dī būtcā p̂ĕn rüóeṅ rāv

ธรรมดา ที่ เรากล่าว ความ อัน ใด จะ กล่าว ด้วย

thamadā thī rao klāo khwām an dai caḥ klāo dwei

dharrmatā dī rô klāv gvām an dai caḥ klāv dv̆y

วาจา ก็ ดี หรือ กล่าว ด้วย เขียน ลง เปน ตัว

wācā ko dī rū klāo dwei khyen loṅ pen twa

vācā ka dī rüo kláv dv̆y khīyen loṅ pĕn tva

หนังสือ ก็ ดี ย่อม เอา ถ้อย คำ มา เรียง กัน เข้า

náṅsū ko dī yom ao thoi kam mā ryeṅ kan khao

náṅsü kă dī yóm ô thòy gāṃ mā rīyeṅ kan khô

เปน เรื่อง ราว ที่ กล่าว นั้น

pen rūaṅ rāo thī klāo nan

p̂ĕn rüoeṅ rāv dī klāv nan̆

General Meeting of the Society.

A General meeting of the members of the Society was held at the Bangkok United Club on the evening of the 27th November, 1912, when Mr. P. Petithuguenin gave a lecture on Methods of Romanizing Siamese. The President, Dr. O. Frankfurter, was in the chair.

In opening the proceedings the President said:—We all miss this evening from our midst a familiar figure. I need not say that I allude to the Rev. Dr. Carrington, who after a short illness died on the 13th October last, in his seventy-first year. At the grave side Dr. Dunlap dilated on what our community has lost in him and on behalf of the Siam Society it is my duty to record our sense of gratitude for what he did for us. Dr. Carrington joined the Society a few months after its formation, and in 1903 he was elected a member of the Council. He always assisted us in our work, and you will remember he important paper he read before us on "Monthon Phuket." As there was no subject relating to Siam with which he had not made himself acquainted in his travels by personal experience, he took part in our discussions and enlivened them by the store of his knowledge Our Society will never forget what Dr. Carrington has done for us and I am sure you all will join in the regret of our Society at the death of our scholarly friend.

Dr. McFarland moved that this expression of the Society's regret be recorded on the Minutes.

This was agreed to with unamimity.

HONORARY MEMBER.

The President continued:—I have still to detain you for a few moments before we commence with the business for which this meeting has been convened. On behalf of the Council, I have to propose to you the appointment of Mr. R. W. Giblin as an honorary member of our Society. The decision to do so was taken unanimously and according to our statutes it requires the assent of a General Meeting; for this I now ask. Mr. Giblin acted for a long time in the

not always pleasant office of treasurer. He took part in our discussions and has contributed to the columns of our Journal some important papers. Now when he enjoys the "otium cum dignitate", he has promised further to take an interest in our Society by continuing his researches especially into the relations between France and Siam in the time of Louis XIV.

Mr. Petithuguenin seconded the proposal, which was at once adopted.

ROMANIZATION.

The President next called on Mr. Petithuguenin, who read his paper, and illustrated his points on a blackboard.

Discussion was afterwards invited, and after questions by Mr. Didier and Dr. McFarland had been replied to,

Mr. Irwin observed that the systems explained could certainly be made use of in Siam or by anyone who knew Siamese. Could there not, however, be a system which could be used in an intelligent way by people who knew nothing about the language or the country? If in order to use a system one must know something of the language it answered nearly the same purpose to use the Siamese alphabet. There were systems by which a man, say, in Central Africa could mark down the sounds he heard.

Mr. Petithuguenin considered the two systems could be explained in about five lines. There was also of course (he added) the system of the Survey Department, but this he considered more scientific than practical. The Survey Department transliteration was a real system, but it was not understood as it had never been explained. One had to learn three or four pages of explanation before one could pronounce a single word of it. Besides it seemed unnecessary to invent a special system for Siamese when by following the Devanagari one got a transliteration that could at once be understood by all scholars.

Mr. Irwin asked why the Boundary Commission, of which Mr. Petithuguenin was a member, adopted such a system.

Mr. Petithuguenin said they were asked to adopt it by the Siamese Department.

Mr. Irwin said that necessarily none of the British officers were concerned on the Commission or were consulted.

Mr. Petithuguenin replied that none of the French officers had ever been able to pronounce a word produced under this system.

Mr. Irwin said that for practical romanization he had in mind particularly the system, employed by the Royal Geographical Society, of using consonants according to the English pronunciation and vowesl according to the Italian. This could be explained in one line.

Dr. McFarland expressed the meeting's appreciation of Mr. Petithuguenin's paper. It was a very interesting subject, and the systems explained certainly seemed to be on correct lines. He hardly thought it possible to evolve a system by which all words could be rendered with the variations of tone. It really seemed easier to print in the Siamese characters, but perhaps some system would be accomplished in the future. The methods explained that evening certainly seemed much better than he had seen before.

Dr. Frankfurter hoped the Government would eventually settle on what is to be the recognised system for general use. It was only necessary that geographical names and names of persons should be transcribed. The British Government in Burma had issued a table for use as regards geographical names, so however a word was pronounced it would only be spelled in one way. As regards the comparison of languages the system of Mr. Petithuguenin appeared to be perfectly correct.

The meeting then closed.