

Somsong Burusphat, Qin Xiaohang. (2006). *Northern Zhuang-Chinese-Thai-English Dictionary*. Bangkok: Ekphimthai Ltd. Pages: xxxix, 432; ISBN: 978-974-11-0687-5

Reviewed by Liang Gan*

lianggan163@163.com

This dictionary consists of two main parts: an introduction and lexical entries. The first part serves as a necessary foundation for readers to have a general knowledge of Northern Zhuang covering the population, distribution, name, villages and local-style dwelling houses, food and drink, love, marriage and family, religion, festival customs, literature, music, dance and the dramatic arts and the Zhuang language etc. With this knowledge, readers will easily understand the meaning of Zhuang lexical items and their structure, especially the cultural words. The Northern Zhuang lexical entries are presented with equivalent meanings in Chinese, Thai and English. The parts of speech given in the English entries are based on the Northern Zhuang language. The lexical entries are the main body of the whole dictionary with 329 pages and a 10,000 wordlist of Zhang, Chinese, Thai and English. The languages in the dictionary are arranged horizontally in order: Northern Zhuang, Chinese, Thai and English. All the words of Northern Zhuang are noted in Zhuang script with International Phonetic Symbols in brackets. The last part of this dictionary sees the English index covering pages 331 through to page 432, which is more convenient for readers and researchers from the perspective of internationalization and globalization. It is quick to find the right page and the needed Zhuang items as well as the corresponding Chinese and Thai. The order of this part is of course arranged in English alphabetical order since it is an English index.

This volume is the first successful multilingual dictionary so far, focusing on Northern Zhuang language and culture. It is also one of the great achievements to come from the collaborative research projects between Research Institute for

*Minzu University of China, Beijing, China

Languages and Cultures for Asia, Mahidol University at Salaya, Thailand and Kam-Tai Institute Central University for Nationalities PRC (now Minzu University of China). As prominent scholars and well-known experts, Professor Somsongee Burusphat (Ph.D) and Professor Qin Xiaohang (Ph.D) have made a great contribution to the field of Tai-Kadai research through their efforts and wisdom during the whole process, from the initiation of this project to the publication of this dictionary.

This dictionary is not like a traditional bilingual one, without or with less information about the cultures of the related languages. This volume differs considerably from the traditional dictionary and distinguishes itself with several unique points as follows.

(a) Profiling the Northern Zhuang language and culture with the main base of Tai-Kadai languages as its context and even beyond to enlarge the scope;

(b) A broad and profound historical comparative linguistics perspective and language contact and language change viewpoint;

(c) Enlarging the academic horizon and helping pull together the efforts of non-Tai-Kadai native speakers and researchers provided with corresponding English, Chinese and Thai lexical items respectively;

Including broad and profound historical comparative linguistics ideas and language contact and language change viewpoints means that, as the Sino-Thai relationship remains controversial and complicated, this multilingual dictionary may help to shed new light on these aspects. Linguists, anthropologists, ethnologists and archeologists etc. are eager to see what the window to Northern Zhuang and the many members of the Tai-Kadai family will reveal, and this may show more about the complicated relations among the Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian and Austroasiatic families. Readers of this dictionary, whether Northern Zhuang native speakers or non-Northern Zhuang native speakers, can begin with the lexical entries or the English index. Through these lexical correspondences, readers can easily find sound correspondences if he or she intends to do historical comparisons or language contact in this region. Chinese, as the mainstream, has constantly spread its culture by radiating to surrounding countries and regions, and different layers and borrowed words can be seen in many Tai-Kadai languages. On the other hand, many Tai-Kadai languages can be found in many southeastern Chinese dialects.

The academic horizon is enlarged for the languages and cultures of learners and researchers from Tai-Kadai and non-Tai-Kadai families. In this sense, the dictionary aims at helping promote the exchanges and communication between the Tai-Kadai and non-Tai-Kadai through a multilingual perspective. The Northern Zhuang language and culture etc. are encouraged to have further and more extensive study by efforts from home and abroad. Learners and researchers can achieve their aims through different channels, like English, Chinese or Thai. Also, Zhuang native speakers or researchers are encouraged to partake in crosslingual and crosscultural study. He or she can choose to learn Thai, Chinese or English. Availing oneself of this dictionary is rather convenient for any language learner and researcher in this region. This book might help in many directions and ways.

We can conclude that the contributions of Professor Somsong Burusphat (Ph.D) and Professor Qin Xiaohang (Ph.D) to the field of Tai-Kadai languages and cultures are so brilliant that even this dictionary and this book review cannot do their efforts full justice. So we have to admit that as elite and distinguished experts in Tai-Kadai languages and cultures research, Professor Somsong Burusphat (Ph.D) and Professor Qin Xiaohang (Ph.D) have set a brilliant example for their followers. And we optimistically believe that the future of Tai-Kadai research will become more and more attractive and promising with the help of this powerful tool, a multilingual dictionary of high level that can help, effectively, in the study and research into Zhuang history.

Finally we have to admit that, as good as a multilingual dictionary is, with its rich Zhuang cultural and linguistic knowledge, we cannot ignore the few shortcomings, e.g. a few misspelled words or small typewriting mistakes. In addition, the Thai writing system seems to be a little bit difficult to get into or get used to for non-Thai beginners. If provided with the corresponding International Phonetic Symbols under the Thai language, this dictionary could not be any more perfect.

Northern Zhuang-Chinese-Thai-English Dictionary proves to be a successful and wonderful encyclopedia-style multilingual dictionary of Zhuang history. It is of great significance to the further research and development of the Zhuang language and even the entirety of Tai-Kadai and Sino-Tibetan languages.