

ETYMOLOGICAL NOTES.

XI—ON ALLEGED CHINESE WORDS IN BURMESE.

Want of time has hitherto prevented me from dealing with Mr. Taw Sein Ko's reply to my former note on this subject and also with Professor Duroiselle's note on one of the alleged Chinese words. But what they have written plainly calls for some remark and it would be a want of courtesy on my part if I did not offer something by way of a rejoinder. I must add that I am, for the present, still unconvinced, and I propose to give reasons for my state of mind on the subject.

As regards the word *Klañjo* or *Kye: zū*: I have been in the unfortunate position of being subjected to a cross fire from my two learned opponents. One of them raises doubts whether the ancient form recorded in the inscriptions is at all connected with the modern form, which latter he wishes to derive from Chinese. The other throws serious doubt on the phonetic value of the ancient form, while admitting inferentially (and indeed proving) that, however it may have been pronounced, it is the true ancestor of the modern word. It will be more convenient to reserve the attack on my form *Klañjo* for separate treatment in another note.* With regard to Mr. Taw Sein Ko's objection to my having quoted the Cantonese form of the Chinese word which he believes to be identical with it, it ought, I think, to have been obvious to him that I did so because Cantonese is notoriously one of the most archaic

(if not the most archaic) of the modern Chinese dialects, so-called (they are really so distinct that they deserve to be styled languages rather than dialects, though they are all of course related together). My object was, as it always should be in linguistic research, to get back to the oldest ascertainable form of the word under discussion.* Of course if it were conceded that the word came into Burmese after 1284 A. D., that point would lose much of its force. But it seems plain, from Professor Duroiselle's note, that the *kye: zū:* of to-day is identical with the *klan̄jo* (no matter how pronounced) of the Myazedi inscription.

The case between Mr. Taw Sein Kō and myself does not, however, turn upon any one word. His argument, shortly, is that there are in Burmese a considerable number of loanwords from Chinese, and on pp. 30-1 of his *Burmese Sketches* he has given us a list of sixteen of them, by way of a sample. There would be no great objection to that if the case were clear. But it is far from being so. Pretty well half of the words in his list are admittedly words of Indian origin: that is common ground between us. But says Mr. Taw Sein Kō: "It is extremely remarkable that terms intimately connected with Buddhism should have been borrowed by Burma from China and her translations from Sanskrit, rather than from Ceylon and her Pāli literature." Now the words "from China" beg the whole question. Admitted that many of these words are from Sanskrit, and not through Pāli, that does not by any means justify the inference that they have passed through the channel of Chinese. Mon also has heaps of such words, so has Khmer, so has Siamese: in all these cases the words are undoubtedly of Sanskrit origin, but there is not the slightest evidence, and very little probability, that they have come into any of these three languages through a Chinese channel. Why should the case *necessarily* be different in Burmese?

There were several Buddhist schools or sects in India that used Sanskrit for their religious language. Not all of them were even Mahayanist; there were Hinayanists among them. Burmese might have got these Sanskrit words direct from Indian monks coming into Upper Burma, or indirectly through Mon. There is no need whatever to assume, nor are we justified on the evidence in assuming, that these words *must* have come into Burmese through Chinese, when they might just as well have come through other channels. Take the word *rahan:* in Burmese: it is found constantly in Mon inscriptions of the 11th. century, spelt *arahan*. Why should it not have come through Mon, if not direct from India? As a matter of fact it is most improbable that this word has entered Burmese from Chinese, for the very reason pointed out by my learned opponent, viz. that the Chinese turn *r* into *l* and pronounce it *lohan*. If they already suffered from this phonetic disability in medieval times, they would have taught their Burmese pupils to say *lohan*, not *rahan:* or *yahan:*, and the word would be *lohan* in Burmese to-day. And similarly with *Si-krā:*, the name of Indra, or any other Indian word containing an *r*: it would be something like a linguistic miracle if the original *r*, after changing into *l* or *i* in the mouths of the Chinese, should again have

*Incidentally it may be noted that Mr. Taw Sein Kō cites an Amoy form in explanation of *Kyaung*, "monastery" (*Burmese Sketches*, p. 30).

become *r* in Burmese. In fact this difficulty by itself is sufficient, so far as such words are concerned, to rule out the hypothesis of derivation through Chinese, unless, and until it is shown that no other derivation was possible or that Chinese at that period pronounced the sound *r*.

Mr. Taw Sein Ko protests against "individual words being taken from their setting" and criticized singly. That is very well, but each must surely stand on its own merits and answer the linguistic tests that may be applied to it. Let us, however, see what the "setting" amounts to. His leading (and in fact, only) instance consists of the names of the Three Precious Gems of the Buddhist faith. Admittedly this is about as strong a case as could have been selected, for the three words in question constantly appear together in the same context. If that alone were enough to prove their origin from a common source, no instance could have been better chosen with a view to support the contention. But, in the first place, I am by no means satisfied that the Burmese *Phu-rā:* and *Ta-rā:* are really of Chinese origin, so the fact that they are associated with *Saṅgha* does not convince me that the latter has come into Burmese through Chinese. In the former words there is the same difficulty about the sound *r* that I have already commented on, besides other phonetic difficulties which would have to be discussed in detail before the identity of these words with their Chinese equivalents could be regarded as *proved*.* But the whole argument, so far as it is based on the words being used frequently together, strikes me as being exceedingly thin. If the Pegu chronicles (edited by Schmidt) say (p. 28) *ṃow kyāk ṃow dhaw ṃow sañ*, "revere the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha", that does nothing to raise the presumption that *kyāk* is a word of Indian origin like the other two. We have, on the contrary, very strong reasons for believing that it is pure Mon-Khmer (for it occurs in slightly different forms in other Mon-Khmer languages, such as Bahnar and Stieng), and we can find no Indian derivation for it.

Such arguments really prove nothing at all as to the *source* and *origin* of words. In all languages that have to any extent been subject to foreign influence, foreign words are apt to be used together with native ones in the same contexts freely enough.

That is all I think I need say at present about the words of Indian origin in Mr. Taw Sein Ko's list. The Indian origin may be agreed,† but the onus lies on Mr. Taw Sein Ko (I submit) to show that they reached Burmese through the Chinese language, and not otherwise. It can hardly be done by merely pointing to their associations in use with words the Chinese origin of which is, to say the least, equally doubtful.

With regard to the non-Indian words, the case is more difficult to deal with. I have neither the time nor the competence to delve deeply into the

*Moreover there are other Chinese transcriptions of *Buddha* and *dharma* besides the ones given in *Burmese Sketches*. The one of *Buddha* embodies an honorific "lord" (or "father") which is not part of the essence of the name at all. Also the Burmese *phu-ra:* is not strictly equivalent as it applies to other worshipful persons and objects, not merely to Buddhas.

†I am not at present prepared to accept an Indian derivation for *phu-rā:* or *ta-ra:* but as to *Saṅgha* there can be no doubt, of course.

comparative philology of Chinese and Burmese. I would merely point out again that this is a *necessary preliminary* to any conclusion derived from the resemblance of a Chinese word with a Burmese word of somewhat similar sound and sense. And here I may be allowed to disclaim Mr. Taw Sein Ko's rather scathing remark that my criticism of his list merely "demolishes a theory or fabric and offers nothing in its place". We are all, as members of this Society and contributors to its Journal, first and foremost, seekers after truth: we are not so much concerned to be in the right ourselves as to contribute, it may be by criticism or in some other way, to the advancement of research and the discovery of new facts. Now it is something to point out the weaknesses of a theory from which conclusions, unwarranted as they seem to me by the evidence, have been rather hurriedly drawn by any learned friend and fellow member. For to expose the deficiencies of one method will sometimes suffice to suggest the adoption of a better one; and certainly the arranging of Burmese and Chinese words in parallel columns is not the only or the best conceivable method of proving the point at issue. But I quite see that I should not rest content with merely having thrown some measure of doubt upon my friend's mode of procedure, and I will therefore try to indicate as briefly as possible what should be put in its place.

When one sets about to compare the vocabularies of two languages, it is essential to put the whole thing on a strictly scientific basis. It is not enough to pick out a word here and there and compare them. I have already in my former note drawn attention to the pitfalls that await such a method. The resemblances discovered may be merely fortuitous, or the words may be derived from some common foreign stock (like the Indian words discussed above), or they may go back to a common native stock (if the two languages under comparison are ultimately related), or they may be loan words, from the one language to the other, but one cannot tell from which to which. No certainty is achieved by such a method. What, then, is the proper procedure?

In the case of Burmese and Chinese, it will be necessary, in the first place, to study historically every single sound of the Burmese language, trace its history in the old inscriptions, compare it with its equivalents in the other Tibeto-Burman languages, first in the groups that are most closely related to Burmese, and then in those that are more remotely connected with it, until at the end of all this research we arrive at the laws governing the correspondence or equivalence of each individual sound in the language with the corresponding ones in the cognate languages and dialects, and so may be enabled to infer what was the most ancient ascertainable value of each such sound. Then the same thing must be done for Chinese; and lastly we must endeavour to discover what ancient Chinese sounds correspond with what ancient Burmese or Tibeto-Burman ones. And as these languages are toned, we must take due account of the correspondence in tones as well. In the end, the laws governing the correspondence of Chinese sounds with Burmese ones will have to be formulated, and an etymology will stand or fall according as it fits in or fails to fit in with those laws.

I shall be told that such a procedure is long and tedious. I admit it, but I reply that it is the *only* method that will lead us to a sure and certain

conclusion. It is the method that has been applied with such conspicuous success to all the families of speech that have been seriously studied hitherto, and especially the Indo-European one. The science of comparative phonetics lies at the root of all etymology and of comparative linguistics in general. Apart from it, etymology can never rise higher than to be a mere series of more or less probable guesses. To put the case shortly, my criticism on Mr. Taw Sein Ko's method is that it leads nowhere: his conclusions may be right or wrong, but we have no means, on his lines, of testing the point. All remains mere theory: but we want facts supported by evidence. And that was why I ventured to suggest that for the present, at any rate, the conclusions he has sought to draw from the resemblance of certain Burmese words with certain Chinese ones, are (to say the least) decidedly premature.

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