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## REVIEW OF DICTIONARY OF KAMMU YÙAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, BY JAN-OLOF SVANTESSON, KÀM (DAMRONG TAYANIN) RÀW, KRISTINA LINDELL, AND HÅKAN LUNDSTRÖM

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The *Dictionary of Kammu of Yùan Language and Culture* (Kopenhagen: NIAS Press 2014. XXXVI, 462 S. m. Abb. 4°. Hartbd. ISBN 978-87-7694-116-1) is a pleasingly decorated, large (roughly size A paper), tan, hard-cover reference with clear black print inside but also with numerous vivid drawings referring to lexical entries exemplifying aspects of Kammu culture. A majority of the 700,000 speakers of the Austroasiatic Kammu (also spelled ‘Khmu’) language live in Laos but also nearby areas of China, Burma, Thailand and Vietnam. However, as the authors state, ‘This dictionary records the Yùan dialect of Kammu, spoken in the southern part of Luang Namtha Province in northern Laos. The dictionary is based on Kàm Ràw’s native knowledge of the Yuan dialect and his experience with other dialects, as well as on recordings of others speakers, in particular tellers of folk literature’. In the introduction, the stated goal in the introduction is that of documentation of a people whose traditional culture is ‘rapidly disappearing’, and indeed, the amount and depth of both linguistic and cultural information is exemplary: it is worth emulating this model in Southeast Asia and wherever indigenous cultures are experiencing change and loss.

This 462-page culturally focused dictionary is a highly valuable resource to both linguists and anthropologists interested in the Kammu people specifically, but also the indigenous groups of mainland Southeast Asia. This work is the result of decades of research by four authors, including a native Kammu speaker and three Western researchers who have devoted many years of their lives to researching the Kammu people and their language. In the list of references, all four of these contributors each have some 20 plus publications relevant to studies of the Kammu language and culture. Additional data and support come from others noted in the acknowledgements. Not surprisingly, this dedicated team has assembled not just a dictionary but essentially an encyclopedia of Kammu language and culture. In addition to the usual dictionary entries is a special section of socio-cultural terms, such as animals, plants, village, and songs and prayers.

The first 30 pages describe the features of the dictionary (e.g., a page of signs and abbreviations used in entries), aspects of Kammu society and culture (e.g., a chart of Kammu kinship terms, a description of the system of personal names, a list of names of years in the agricultural year cycle, etc.), and aspects of Kammu phonology (e.g., charts of major and minor syllables), morphosyntax and word classes (e.g., a lengthy list of classifiers), and Tai loanwords. A recurring point mentioned in the throughout the dictionary is that of expressives, the class of semantico-syntactically distinctive words. Expressives are described in the introduction, and in individual entries, complete morphological paradigms are presented.

The primary portion of the dictionary of Kammu consists of 422 pages of Kammu word headings with English translations, explanations, and additional cultural information. This is a strictly Kammu-English dictionary, organized alphabetically by Kammu vocabulary presented in their own systemized IPA. The dictionary contains approximately 6,000 entries but a total of about 14,000 words as entries contain

compounds, derived forms, and expressives with each entry. The amount and type of information of each entry varies but all have at least (a) a phonological reading, (b) where applicable, the etymological or derivational source (e.g., Laotian, derived reduplicants, etc.), and (c) a gloss or glosses. However, many of the entries also have (a) samples of words in phrases and sentences, (b) related compounds, (c) morphological paradigms of expressives, and (d) sociocultural details and relevant examples. While some of the entries have lightly technical or specialized details (e.g., morphological paradigms with MOM = momentaneous expressive, DYN = dynamic expressive, etc.) that require reference to the list of abbreviations at the beginning of the work, in most cases, readers can quickly and easily identify core information.

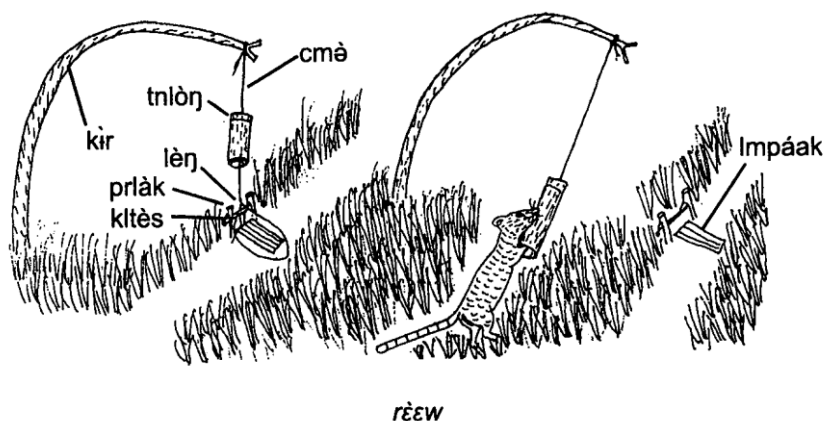
The following entry exemplifies the kinds of linguistic and sociocultural information the dictionary provides. The combination of the main entry plus the drawing (illustrations were mostly drawn by the Kammu co-author, Kàm Ràw)—which words for each part of the trap which can then be further checked in the dictionary—truly highlight the encyclopedic nature of the work.

**Figure 1:** Entry for the Kammu word *rèew* ‘spring-pole snare’

**rèew** [Lao *rèew*<sup>2</sup>] [*láaŋ*] spring-pole snare

Used for catching rather big animals such as barking-deer or civets. A bent rod (*kir*) is held down by a string (*cmè*). The other end of the string is fastened to a trigger (*lèn*) and there is also a loop placed around a hole in the ground, which is covered with a thin bamboo cover (*impáak*). When the trap is set, the trigger is held in place by the cover and a bolt (*kltès*) which rests on poles (*prlák*). When the animal touches the cover, the trigger releases and the animal is caught in the noose. This trap does not kill the animal, and it must have a bamboo tube (*tnlòn*) around the string to prevent the animal from biting off the string. It should be set in the night; otherwise it may hurt domestic animals.

**Figure 2:** Illustration of a *rèew* with identification of parts of the trap



The remaining 35 pages of the work contain (a) several maps of Kammu dialect and some sample maps of villages and farming, (b) several pages of geographical names, and (c) 15 pages of a glossary of somewhat more specialized vocabulary, including songs, prayers, and sayings, plants and animals, and aspects of village life. This last section has an English index to allow users to check these.

One can easily see potential uses of this work: studies of aspects of traditional Kammu culture, research into indigenous Southeast Asian societies and cultural practices, morphosyntactic studies from the phrasal

and sentential data, research in historical Austroasiatic linguistics, studies of reduplication and expressives, research of types of loanword and language contact, and so on. There is not an English index, and thus using the dictionary requires either some knowledge of Kammu vocabulary or willingness to skim and hunt through the dictionary. There is no electronic version, which means users cannot conveniently search for words or phrases. If the work becomes digitally available, it will become an even more effective research tool. Nevertheless, the clear presentation of information in print allows reasonably ready access to many types of information.

Overall, this is a tremendous contribution to mainland Southeast Asian linguistics and sociocultural studies, and it will undoubtedly help researchers deepen understanding of the Kammu language and culture, neighboring ethnic groups and languages in Southeast Asia, and traditional cultures more broadly.