

(1) From Lost to Online: A Digital eText + Image Edition of the First Thai-English Dictionary

(2) Lexicography

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In 2005 a brief entry in an unpublished handlist from the British Museum Library was revealed to be a hand-written Thai-English dictionary dating from the first half of the nineteenth century. On inspection, the microfilmed manuscript of “Or. 11828, 256 ff” yielded an extensive dictionary of nearly 10,000 entries, arranged in an authentic Thai alphabetical order not seen again until the publication of Dan Beach Bradley’s 1873 monolingual dictionary. The microfilm continued with what appeared to be an early draft of Rev. J. Caswell’s *Treatise on the Tones of the Siamese Language*, written in possibly the same hand.

Unsigned, and tantalizingly similar to other early texts, it took comparisons of every feature – content, ordering, and handwriting – to develop a theory of the dictionary’s origin. The first known monolingual dictionary, also written in longhand, is dated 1846 by J.H. Chandler, who ‘copied and enlarged’ it from a lost earlier work by Caswell. But in text and form it is clearly unrelated to the British Museum manuscript. More promising clues emerged along a different path – the well-preserved letters and journals of early missionaries in Siam, including those of Bradley. These pointed to Mr. and Mrs. J. Taylor Jones, the first American missionaries in Siam, as the likely authors, and to the manuscript itself as being the earliest Thai-English dictionary.

This talk will present my investigation of the British Museum manuscript, now believed to be the long-lost Jones dictionary, and describe its lexicographic properties and orthographic features. I will also discuss the methodology used to prepare an integrated, searchable online edition of the text, meant to mitigate a significant roadblock for Southeast Asian studies – the world-wide dispersal of early texts. The online Jones incorporates both digital text (searchable by both original spellings and their modern equivalents) and digitized images of the original document, providing immediate access to *all* text features, and enabling ongoing research on the region’s early manuscripts.