

# Comparative Description of Meters in Thai and Burmese Poetries

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**Abstract.** The article analyzes and classifies the meters used in Thai and Burmese poetry. Though both poetic traditions have a rich literary heritage and an advanced repertoire of poetic meters, their structural properties have not received significant scholarly attention. Along with summarizing preexisting scholarly research on the subject, the article provides description of meters used in traditional Thai poetry and their typological classification. The analysis of meters in Burmese poetry is based on the 18th century long drama “Maniket” by Padethayaza as well as on a collection of short Burmese classical poems. The article describes and classifies the five meters of Thai classical poetry (*klon*, *chan*, *khlong*, *kap* and *rai*). Burmese traditional poetry used one or two syllabic meters as well as other meters, which have not yet been classified in the scholarly literature. The article concludes with a comparative analysis of rhyme in Thai and Burmese poetry.

Keywords: Thai poetry, Burmese poetry, meters, syllabic poetry, syllabic-metric poetry, rhyme, verse, Thai language, Burmese language, Southeast-Asian languages

## 1.1. Introduction

The aim of the research is to describe and compare meters of the two main poetic traditions of the Southeast Asia – Thai and Burmese. For this purpose, it proposes classification of the main Thai poetic meters and examines the meters of Burmese poetry, which have been largely unstudied.

The 700-year-old Thai poetic tradition has a very rich literary heritage and a sophisticated repertoire of genres and poetic meters. Though traditional Thai study of poetry gives a comprehensive explanation of all these meters, they have been never described in terms of modern verse theories nor compared to other poetic traditions (Ivanova 2018: 20). The number of scientific studies dedicated to the meters of Thai poetry is also very small. To my knowledge this research is the first attempt to integrate findings of traditional Thai philology with the modern theory of verse.

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Burmese poetry is older than the Thai one and is equally rich and highly developed (Osipov 1980). At the same time, the Burmese poetry is not only very poorly studied by modern philologists and linguists, but even documents related to the Burmese traditional theory of verse have not yet been found.

This paper covers both the findings of the prior studies related to meters of both poetic traditions and the results of my own research, including the comparative analysis of traditional verses of Thai and Burmese poetry.

## 2. Brief Overview of Thai Poetry and Language

### 2.1. Thai poetry

Thai poetry first appeared between the 14th and 15th centuries, approximately 150 years after establishment of the first Thai state Sukhothai and creation of Thai script (Kornev 1985: 617). The first examples of Thai verses have not been preserved, but the poem “Lilit Yuan Phai” (‘Defeat of the Yuan’) written by anonymous author in the middle of XV century already shows a high development of poetry in Thailand (Hudak 2001: 32). Poetry remained the main type of literature keeping its paramount role until the end of the 19th century, when prose became more important (Ivanova 2018: 19–20). Poetry has always been a significant part of Thai culture. Poetry received the patronage of the kings, who were often poets themselves. Poetry was also one of the markers showing belonging to the high society (Ivanova 2018: 20).

Thai poetry, as well as Thai literature in general, has always been strongly influenced by Buddhism and indirectly influenced by Indian tradition (Osipov 1980: 30). The main topics of lyric poetry usually included glorification of monarchs, love and philosophical Buddhist concepts. Epic poems and plays often used plots of different *jatakas* (stories about earlier reincarnations of Buddha Shakyamuni from the sacred writing of Buddhism – “Tripitaka”) and Indian story of Rama, but some original plots were common as well (Osipov 1980: 150–200).

The most significant examples of Thai poetry include the big epic poems “Lilit Yuan Phai” (Osipov 1980: 239) about the war between Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya and a Northern Thai kingdom Lanna, “Lilit Phra Lo” (Osipov 2018: 240) about forbidden love between people from adversary countries and “Thet Mahachat”, which is a Thai adaptation of “Vessantara-jataka” from “Tripitaka” (Osipov 2018: 251). The authors of all these three poems are unknown. Also, the poem about competition between two old friends for the love of one woman “Kun Chang and Khun Phaen” and the Thai national version of the

story about Rama “Ramakien” are very popular in Thailand. They originally existed in the folk versions and were adapted by different poets in XIX century. The most famous example of Thai literature is the legacy of the poet Sunthorn Phu (1786–1855), who is considered the most famous and important Thai poet, especially known for his lengthy romantic-adventure poem “Phra Aphai Mani” (Osipov 2018: 243).

Over time many different genres and poetic meters have been created and developed by Thai poets. The system and rules of these meters are very sophisticated, because the form has always been very important in Thai poetry while complexity of structure and vocabulary have been considered as a display of a high poetic skill (Ivanova 2018: 20). Traditional Thai philology, which has also advanced to a high level, gives a full description of the most part of Thai poetic meters. On the other hand, this description is not connected to modern approaches of the theory of verse. Given the above, I believe that the main challenge with regards to the Thai poetic meters is to ‘translate’ the traditional classification and description of Thai meters into the terms of modern science of versification.

The existing scientific papers on Thai meters, do not go beyond examining the meters within the traditional framework. Insofar as I am aware there were no attempts to analyze these meters by applying the modern methodology of studying poetry nor to compare them to other poetic traditions. Also, there are no studies, which provide full overview of all meters used in Thai traditional poetry. Usually, each research is limited to one or maximum to a few meters.

In this study I provide a brief description of all five the most important Thai classical poetic meters as well as their analysis and classification in terms of the typology of verse.

## 2.2. Overview of Thai grammar

Before discussing meters of Thai traditional poetry, it is important to highlight some basic features of the grammar of the Thai language.

Thai language belongs to the Tai branch of Kra-Dai (Tai-Kradai) language family. Its closest relatives are Lao and Shan languages.

Consonant phonemes of Thai language are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Consonant sounds of Thai language (according to Slayden 2009: 2)

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Post-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p p <sup>h</sup> b		t t <sup>h</sup> d			kk <sup>h</sup>	
Nasal	m			n			
Trill				r			
Fricative		f		s			h
Affricates				tʃ tʃ <sup>h</sup>			
Approximants	w		l		ʃ ʃ		

Thai language has 9 vowel phonemes, each of them can be pronounced either short or long. There are also 17 diphthongs (some of them have short and long pairs and some do not) and 3 triphthongs. Five tones are distinguished for all kind of vowel phones as well. The length and tone are not connected to each other (Slayden 2009: 8–9).

These features of Thai phonetics allow to use in Thai poetry at least three different types of meters syllabic, syllabic-metric and meters based on the sequence of tones, like in classical Chinese and Vietnamese poetic traditions.

It is also important to say some words about Thai script, because, as it will be shown later, some meters can be based on the sequences of graphical elements as well.

Thai language uses its own alphabet. In this script letters are written and read from left to right. A letter written in the main line marks the consonant sounds. The vowels are marked by symbols written under, above, to the left or to the right of the consonant. Long and short vowels are marked by different symbols. The rules of tone marking are very complicated. The tone of the syllable depends on three different factors: type of the syllable (according to Thai traditional grammar syllables are divided into two classes: ‘live’ – open and long syllables and ‘dead’ – short or closed syllables); class of the consonant letter (Thai consonant letter are divided into three classes – low, middle and high: this division is based only on the tradition and does not have any phonetical explanations) and length of the syllable. The rules of tone marking in Thai language are shown in the Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Rules of tone marking for dead syllables in Thai script (according to Smyth 2002: 16–17)

Initial consonant	Short vowel	Long vowel
Low class	High tone	Falling tone
Middle class	Low tone	Low tone
High class	Low tone	Low tone

Table 3. Rules of tone marking for live syllables in Thai script (according to Smyth 2002: 16–17)

Initial consonant	No tone mark	May eek	May tho
Low class	Middle tone	Falling tone	High tone
Middle class	Middle tone	Low tone	Falling tone
High class	Rising tone	Low tone	Falling tone

According to these features of Thai script, graphical sequences (such as sequences of certain letters or diacritic signs) do not have to be equal to phonetic sequences. As we will see later, this fact is very important for classifying one of the meters of Thai traditional poetry.

### 3. Brief Overview of Burmese Poetry and Language

#### 3.1. Burmese poetry

The earliest examples of Burmese poetry (Burmese language is the official language of Myanmar, which used to be called Burma before 1989) appeared not later than in the XIV century. In that period, according to the views of the modern scientists, one of the most famous Burmese poems “Allaying the royal anger” by Anantathuriya was written (Hla Pe 1963: 40). At the same time, according to Burmese traditional scholars this poem was written in the 11th century. Also, according to some historical and archeological sources, poetry was already common in the times of the first Burmese state, the Kingdom of Bagan, which existed in the 11th–13th centuries (Osipov 1980: 141–150).

After the 15th century and until 1887, when Myanmar became part of British colonial empire, Burmese poetic tradition was developing quickly. In many respects it was always ahead of other poetic traditions of the Southeast

Asian region: usually, new genres (for example, the modern drama) and plots first appeared in Myanmar and only later became popular in the neighboring countries.

As well as in Thai tradition, the main topics of Burmese lyrical poetry were philosophical thoughts related to Buddhism and glorification of the kings. Big poems and dramas, as well as in Thai poetic tradition, were usually based on plots from *jatakas*. In the XVIII century the Indian story about Rama also became very popular.

The most famous examples of Burmese poetry are drama “Maniket” by Padethayaza (XVIII century) based on a *jataka* tale, “Yagan Rama” by U Tou (18th century), which is Burmese national version of Indian story about Rama and dramas of U Ponnya (19th century) (Osipov 1980: 141–150).

Insofar as I am aware, the meters of Burmese poetry were not studied. I was not able to locate any papers or references dedicated specifically to this topic. Having said this there are two papers (Hla Pe, Allot, Okell 1963 and Burman 1971), which provide some information about it. Also, while Thai traditional scholars give the full description of all the poetic meters used in Thai poetry, I was not able to find any sources about Burmese traditional theory of verse. As a result, to my knowledge, is not clear whether the Burmese tradition of verse has ever existed or the modern linguists have not yet revealed it. In any case so far, we do not have any understanding about the perceptions of Burmese traditional poets and philologists about the rules of their poetry.

### 3.2. Brief description of Burmese grammar

Burmese language belongs to Lolo-Burmese subgroup of Tibeto-Burman branch, which is a part of Sino-Tibetan language family (Bradley 1997: 38–39).

Vowel phonemes of Burmese include 7 monophthongs *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, *ɛ*, *ɔ* and *ə* and four diphthongs: *ei*, *ai*, *au* and *ou*. Consonant phonemes of Burmese are represented in the Table 4.

Table 4. Consonant phonemes of Burmese language (according to (Green 2002: 4)).

	Voiced	Voiceless	Aspirated
Plosive	<i>p, d, g</i>	<i>p<sup>h</sup>, t<sup>h</sup>, k<sup>h</sup></i>	<i>p<sup>h</sup>, t<sup>h</sup>, k<sup>h</sup></i>
Fricative	<i>(ð), z</i>	<i>θ, s, f, h</i>	<i>s<sup>h</sup></i>
Affricates	<i>dʒ</i>	<i>tʃ</i>	<i>tʃ<sup>h</sup></i>
Nasal	<i>m, n, ŋ, ŋ</i>	<i>ŋ, ŋ</i>	
Approximants	<i>w, j, l, r</i>	<i>w, l</i>	
Glottal	<i>ʔ</i>		

Burmese language, as well as Thai, has tones, but different linguists estimate their number differently: from three to five. According to the most popular interpretation of Burmese tonal system, the language distinguishes four tones, which are usually called ‘creaky’, ‘low’, ‘high’ and ‘checked’ or just by numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 (Watkins 2000: 139–140). The phonological difference between them is complicated for describing. It includes not only pitch, like in Thai, but also other aspects, such as length and secondary articulation (for example, the checked tone can be called glottalized, because it always has ʔ sound in the end) (Green 2002: 9). Not like in Thai, the length of the vowels in Burmese does not have phonological meaning separately from tone, but different tones are usually pronounced with different length (the longest tone is the low one and the shortest is the checked one (Green 2002: 9)).

According to this, in Burmese poetry syllabic meters or meters based on the sequences of tones can be used easily, but meters or syllabic-metric versification may also be possible, because different tones are pronounced with different length.

Similar to Thai language, Burmese language uses its own script. And like in Thai, only consonants are written in the main line and vowels are written under, above, right or left to them. Pronunciation of a certain vowel sound with a certain tone is marked by a combination of different signs, but unlike in Thai language, each sign usually marks only one tone. Burmese script is much more phonetically oriented than the Thai one and there is not a big difference between the spelling and pronunciation, though there are some exceptions (Yanson 2017: 12–13). According to this, all possible graphical sequences would be a reflection of the phonetic sequences. Therefore, the meters based only on graphical representation, and not on pronunciation would not be possible in Burmese poetry.

## 4. Methodology of the study

The research about Thai poetry is mostly based on the description of meters of Thai traditional poetry, which can be found in already existing studies. Though none of these studies tries to classify any meters according to typology of versification, these descriptions are quite comprehensive, because they describe all the meters used in Thai traditional poetry.

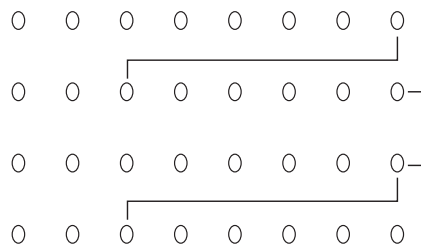
Along with the findings of the existing studies I have used the findings of my analysis of some Thai poetic texts, such as parts of “Phra Aphai Mani” and “Nirat Wat Chao Fa” by Sunthorn Phu and “Lilit Phra Lo”. Also, I made a comparative analysis of the findings of my previous research on Thai meters and on the meters of Burmese poetry. My research on Burmese poetry is based on analysis of a text of 212 lines from a long poem “Maniket” by Padethayaza written in the 18th century and 12 short Burmese classical poems from two sources: Lustig 1966 and Hla Pe, Allot, Okell 1963.

## 5. The main meters of Thai poetry

The main poetic meters of Thai classical poetry are *klon*, *chan*, *khlung*, *kap* and *rai*. I will provide the description of each of them.

### 5.1. Klon

In *klon* each line must contain 8 syllables. Any other factors, such as order of tones, length of vowels of stress do not play any role (Chitakasem 1987: 1971: 73). Each stanza usually consists of 4 lines. The rhyme connects the last syllable of the first line with the third syllable of the second line and the last syllables of the second and the third lines with the third syllable of the fourth one (Chitakasem 1987: 73–79). The patterns of *klon* is shown on the Picture 1.



Picture 1. Structure of *klon* (by Chitakasem 1987: 79)



For the reason that the structure of *klon* is based only on the number of the syllables in the line, it can easily be classified as a syllabic meter.

## 5.2. Chan

*Chan* was borrowed from Sanskrit and Pali poetry (Davids, Sted 1921–1925: 1) and its name comes from Pali word *chando* meaning ‘poetic meter’ or ‘prosody’ (Davids, Sted 4: 309). In this meter each line is a strict sequence of the so-called “heavy” (long or closed) and “light” (short and open) syllables (Hudak 1986: 1). Stanza usually also consists of 4 lines. The third line has the same structure as the first one, and the fourth line – the same as the second one. Therefore, a minimal element of stanza is a distich. There are many variants of *chan*, which differ from each other by the number of syllables in the distich (Hudak 1986: 55). The structures of 11-syllabic and 20-syllabic *chans* are introduced on the Picture 2 and Picture 3.

0      0 \* 0 0  
 \* \* 0 \* 0 0 (A)  
 0      0 \* 0 0 (A)  
 \* \* 0 \* 0 0

0 – heavy syllable, \* - light syllable

Picture 2. Structure of 11-syllabic Chan (by Hudak 1992: 280)

0      \* 0 \* 0 \* 0 \* 0 (A)  
 \* 0 \* 0 \* 0 \* 0 (A)  
 \* 0 0 (B)

Picture 3. Pattern of 20-syllabic Chan (by Hudak 1986: 54)

According to the fact that *chan* is based on a sequence of long and short syllables, it should be classified as a syllabic-metrical meter.

## 5.3. Khlong

The most difficult for classification Thai meter is *khlong*. In this meter each line should contain a certain number of syllables and at the same time certain syllables should be marked by one of diacritical symbols *mai tho* and *mai ek*.

As it has been shown before, these symbols are used for tone marking, but in modern Thai none of them is a symbol of a certain tone, because the

tone depends on three different factors: the diacritical symbol, class of the consonant and the type of the syllable. As a result, the *mai tho* can mark high or falling tone and the *mai ek* falling or low one (Diller, Early 2017: 16–17).

The structure of one of the variants of *khlóng* – *khlóng si supháp* is shown on the Picture 4. In this meter the first and the third lines should contain 7 or 9 syllables and the second and the fourth ones – 7 syllables. Here the fourth syllable of the first line, the second and the sixth syllables of the second line, the third and the seventh syllables of the third line and the second syllables of the fourth line should be either marked by *mai-ek* symbol or be ‘dead syllables’. The fifth syllable of the first line, the seventh syllable of the second line, and the fifth and the seventh syllables of the fourth line should be marked by *mai-tho* symbol (Cooke 1980: 427). If we translate this graphical pattern into the tonal one, we will get a distribution of tone, which is shown on the Picture 5.

0 0 0 0 <sup>1/2</sup> 0 <sup>3</sup>	0 0(A) [0 0]
0 0 <sup>1/2</sup> 0 0 0(A)	0 <sup>1/2</sup> 0 <sup>3</sup> (B)
0 0 0 <sup>1/2</sup> 0 0(A)	0 0 <sup>1/2</sup> (B) [0 0]
0 0 <sup>1/2</sup> 0 0 0 <sup>3</sup> (B)	0 0 <sup>3</sup> 0 0

0 – syllable, 1 – mai ek sign, 2 – dead syllable, 3 – mai tho sign. Syllable in square brackets are optional.

Picture 4. Structure of *khlóng si supháp* (by Cooke 1980: 427)

0 0 0 0 <sup>H/L/F</sup> 0 <sup>H/F</sup>	0 0 [0 0]
0 0 <sup>F/L/F</sup> 0 0 0	0 <sup>H/L/F</sup> 0 <sup>H/F</sup>
0 0 0 <sup>H/L/F</sup> 0 0 <sup>H/L/F</sup>	0 0 [0 0]
0 0 <sup>H/L/F</sup> 0 0 0 <sup>H/F</sup>	0 0 <sup>H/F</sup> 0 0

0 – syllable, H – high tone, L – low tone, F – falling tone

Picture 5. Tone pattern in *khlóng si supháp*.

The above shows that two or even three of the five tones can mark most of the syllables. Therefore, the order of the tones is not rigid enough to become a basis of the verse structure. Given this, we cannot identify *khlóng* as a determined sequence of tones, but should call it a determined sequence of graphemes – *mai ek* and *mai tho*. Accordingly, the best decision would be to introduce a special term “syllabo-graphical meter” for classifying *khlóng*. Though in different poetic traditions spelling can sometimes be more important than pronunciation, we have not found yet in other languages any meters, which

are fully based on a sequence of graphemes. So, the existence of “syllabographical” meter probably makes Thai poetry typologically unique.

The origin of such uncommon meter is unknown. We can put forward a hypothesis that at the time when *khlong* appeared, *mai ek* and *mai tho* symbols used to have other meanings, which were unambiguous (Sarkisov 2020). If it is true, *khlong* originally used to be a meter based on the number of syllables and on the sequence of tones at the same time. The history of Thai script is not studied enough to prove or disprove this hypothesis. We know that originally Thai language used to have not 5, as it is now, but only 3 tones. One of these tones used to be marked by *mai ek* symbol and another one by *my chattawa* symbol while *mai tho* symbol did not exist at that time (Diller 2017: 230–233). The *khlong* appeared for the first time later, during the period of instability, when both the phonetics and the script were changing drastically (Diller 2017: 242). In that period Thai language got two more tones and the *mai tho* symbol appeared in Thai script also at the same time. The meaning of all three diacritic signs and the rules of tone marking were unstable: sometimes the tones were not marked at all and sometimes, diacritic signs were even used for marking vowel sounds, but not the tones. As a result, it is still not quite clear, how exactly the meaning of *mai ek* symbol has been evolving and what the original meaning of *mai tho* symbol has been. Therefore, the real nature of *khlong* cannot be fully understood.

#### 5.4. Kap and rai

There is very little information about two other meters of Thai poetry: *kap* and *rai*. The only known work about *kap* states that in this meter each line should contain a certain number of syllables, which is 5 or 6 (Hudak 1986: 55). If it is so, *kap* together with *klon* should be classified as a syllabic meter.

*Rai* is usually described not as poetic meter, but as a type of rhymed prose. It is always written without dividing into poetic lines, like prose. At the same time, Dr. Hudak says that *rai* meter is a sequence of groups of 5 syllables (Hudak 1986: 44). This means that this meter has a strict structure, which is much more common for poetry rather than for prose. According to Hudak, this structure also seems to be syllabic.

## 6. Rhyme in Thai poetry

Rhyme is a very important element of traditional Thai poetry, which should never be ignored (Hudak 2001: 41).

Rhymed syllables in Thai poetic tradition should have similar vowel as well as similar final consonant, if they end with a consonant. It seems that similarity of tones is not necessary, because I have found some examples, where the tones of two syllables connected by rhyme are different (see Example).

Example. Rhymes between syllables with different tones in Thai poetry (by Hudak 2001: 42)

dii ~ kii  
têek ~ lêek

Unlike the European versification, rhyme in Thai poetry usually connects not only the last syllables of two or more different lines but the last syllable of one line with a certain syllable inside another line, as it has been shown in the above examples (Chitakasem 1987: 79, Cooke 2017: 427, Hudak 1992: 54–58). This type of rhyme appears in the most part of all five traditional meters of Thai poetry discussed in this article: *klon*, *khlong*, *chan*, *kap* and *rai*.

Such structure of rhyme seems to be very unusual for the most part of the world poetic traditions. It occurs neither in European poetry nor in Arabic, Indian or Chinese poetic traditions. On the other hand, the rhyme connecting the last syllables of one line with syllables inside other lines can be also found in other poetic traditions of Southeast Asia, for example in Burmese poetry.

## 7. Burmese meters and its comparison with Thai

### 7.1. Previous research on Burmese poetry

Comparative studies of Thai meters and meters of other Southeast Asian poetic traditions are important for exploring their mutual influence. Unfortunately, the description of meters of Khmer and Lao poetry do not exist while the studies of meters of Burmese poetry are very limited. Therefore, it is difficult to make any conclusions in this area.

I was not able to find out any sources of information about Burmese traditional philology and traditional descriptions of meters, which were in use in Burmese classical poetry. In this respect Burmese studies are very different from the Thai ones. The only two previous scientific researches regarding the meters of Burmese poetry (Hla Pe, Allot, Okell 1963 and Burman 1971) say

only that traditionally Burmese poets used to use a meter, in which each line had to consist of 4 syllables, but later they started to use “less strict” meters.

## 7.2. Burmese poetic meters

In order to understand better the Burmese traditional poetic meters, I have undertaken a research which was based on the text of approximately 212 poetic lines from the drama “Maniket” by Padethayaza and of 12 short Burmese classical poems. These short poems were taken from two sources. One of them was the book Lustig 1966 containing poems of different Burmese poets of 14th–19th centuries in Burmese and their English translations. The second source was the article Hla Pe, Allot, Okell 1963, which contains full original versions of three Burmese poems: “Allaying the royal anger” by Anantathuriya, “Poem written in exile”, by Let-We Thon-Dara and “The song of the chastened”, by U Ponnya.

Having said this, our study of Burmese meters has shown that two types of meters are used in Burmese traditional poetry. One of them is a syllabic meter and typological classification of the second one is unclear. It looks very similar to free verse, though the fact of existing of free verse in Asian poetry in the 18th century seems quite strange.

In the syllabic meter each line may contain 4 or 5 syllables. The most common meter is the meter with 4 syllables in each line. The poems “Allaying the royal anger” by Anantathuriya (Table 5), “Poem written in exile”, by Let-We Thon-Dara and “Take to heart” by Sahton Sayadaw are written only with this type of meter. In the poem “Deliverance cannot be distant” by Shin Maharattathara 85 of 91 lines consist of 4 syllables (Table 6).

Table 5. Number of syllables in a line in “Allaying the royal anger” by Anantathuriya.

Number of syllables	Number of lines of this length	% of all lines
4	41	100

In 212 lines from the drama “Maniket” by Padethayaza, which was quite “modernistic” for its time in terms of the style and structure (it was the first Burmese drama, which had division into dialogs and remarks for the actors and orchestra), lines consisting from 2–10 syllables have been found. Nearly 60% of them (125, which is 59%) contain 4 syllables and 18.4% contain 3 syllables and 4.3% contain 5 (Table 7). In total, number of lines, containing 3, 4 or 5 syllables, is 173, which is 81.6%. According to this, we can conclude that this piece is

also written by the same syllabic meter with 4 syllables in each line, which is sometimes violated or is used together with some other, more rare meters.

In all other Burmese poems, which have been analyzed during my research on Burmese meters, the number of syllables in different lines is absolutely different and can vary from 3 or even 2 to 15 or 16 (the statistic for some poems is represented in the Table 6–7). The percentage of lines with certain number of syllables does not show any strict regularity. This type of meter looks very similar to European free verse and can be easily classified this way. On the other hand, such early appearance of free verse in traditional Asian poetry seems unlikely. Therefore, I provide a hypothesis that this type of meter can be classified as disintegrated syllabic, which is the step between the classical strict syllabic meter and the free verse.

Table 6. Number of syllables in “Maniket” by Padethayaza (a fragment of 212 lines)

Number of syllables in a line	Number of lines containing this number of syllables	% of all lines analyzed
2	8	3.8
3	9	4.3
4	125	59.0
5	39	18.4
6	3	1.4
7	8	3.8
8	2	0.9
10	1	0.5

Table 7. Number of syllables in the poem “The song of the chastened” by U Pon Nya

Number of syllables in a line	Number of lines containing this number of syllables	% of all lines analyzed
3	2	12.5
4	2	12.5
5	1	6.25
6	4	25
7	2	12.5
8	3	18.75
9	2	12.5

Table 8. Number of syllables in the poem “Carved bullock-cart” by U Ya Kyaw

Number of syllables in a line	Number of lines containing this number of syllables	% of all lines analyzed
4	1	7
6	1	7
8	8	57
9	3	21
10	1	7

Table 9. Number of syllables in the poem “The golden-yellow padauk” by U Kyaw

Number of syllables in a line	Number of lines containing this number of syllables	% of all lines analyzed
3	5	25
4	2	10
5	7	35
6	3	15
7	2	10
9	1	5

Table 10. Number of syllables in the poem “Song of the forest” by princess Hlaing-Teik-Kaung-Tin

Number of syllables in a line	Number of lines containing this number of syllables	% of all lines analyzed
4	5	31
3	4	25
5	5	31
6	1	6
8	1	6

My research has not discovered any meters based on the sequence of tones or graphical elements (like *khlong*) in Burmese poetry. For example, in the poem “Allaying the royal anger” by Anantathuriya the distribution of tones seems to be accidental rather than influenced by meters structure (Table 11). It allows me to propose a hypothesis that Burmese poetry does not use tonal meters.

Table 11. Distribution of tones in the poem “Allaying the royal anger” by Anantathuriya

Tone	Position in the line			
	1	2	3	4
1	24 (58.5%)	26 (63.2%)	20 (48.8%)	14 (34.2%)
2	9 (21.96%)	5 (12.2%)	13 (31.7%)	16 (39%)
3	4 (9.7%)	6 (14.6%)	4 (9.8%)	7 (17.1%)
4	2 (4.9%)	6 (14.6%)	4 (9.8%)	4 (9.8%)

### 7.3. Rhyme in Burmese poetry

The very few existing studies about Burmese rhyme argue that the rhyme in Burmese poems often connects the last syllable of the first line of stanza with the next-to-last syllable of the second line and the third from the end syllable of the third line (Burman 1971: 140, Hla Pe 1963: 563). Though my research did not aim at studying the rhyme, it has revealed that this rule is not always followed and very often not all the syllables, which should be rhymed, are actually rhymed. On the other hand, like in Thai poetry, usually, the last syllable of one line is rhymed with a syllable inside another line. The example of both these features can be seen in the Example 1, which shows the rhyme pattern of the first ten lines of the poem “Allaying the royal anger” by Anantathuriya

Example 1. Rhyme pattern of the first 10 lines of the poem “Allaying the royal anger” by Anantathuriya

- - - A  
 - - A -  
 - - A B  
 - - - B  
 - - B -  
 - - - -  
 - - C D  
 - - D -  
 - D - E  
 - E - -



The above findings allow us to conclude that there are no significant similarities between Thai and Burmese poetry in terms of the verse structure, and the only type of meters, which is used in both traditions, is the syllabic meter. The syllabic meter is one of the most common in the world literature. According to this, it would be more logical to conclude that this type of meter appeared in Burmese and Thai poetries independently and did not result from their mutual influence. A strong argument, which supports this hypothesis relates to the fact that the number of syllables in each line in syllabic meters of Thai and Burmese poetries is absolutely different: in Thai verses lines are at least seven syllables long and in Burmese syllabic poetry each line has only four or five syllables. At the same time, in both poetic traditions internal rhyme, which is not used in all other poetic traditions of the world, is very common and probably is the most popular type of rhyme. Given this, internal rhyme seems to be a typical feature of poetry on Southeast Asian languages and may be a result of mutual influence between their poetic traditions. The origin of the internal rhyme is an important question, which should be addressed in the future research in order to better understand the history of Southeast Asian poetic traditions.

## 8. Conclusion

Summarizing the results of the research, which intended to describe and compare meters of Thai and Burmese poetries, I would like to highlight the following key findings:

Thai poetry uses syllabic (*klon*, *kap* and, probably, *rai*) and syllabic-metric (*chan*) meters and the meter *khlong*, however, its typological classification is not clear. In modern language this poetic meter is not based on order of any phonetic elements, and it seems to be a syllabic-graphical meter. Given the fact, that any other meters based only on graphical representation, and not on phonetic correlations, are not known, we can propose a hypothesis that historically *khlong* used to be based on the sequence of tones, which has disappeared later. So far, I was not able to prove or disprove this hypothesis. In order to test this hypothesis more in depth studies of the *khlong* meter in South East Asian poetry are needed. Burmese poetry uses one or two syllabic meters (one with four syllables in a line and may be another one with) and a meter or many meters, in which any regularity have not yet been discovered. This meter (or these meters) looks like free verse but needs to be studied further for making any final conclusions. Thai and Burmese poetic traditions do not show any similarities in terms of meter, which could be possibly interpreted as a result of influence between

them. Internal rhyme, which usually does not appear in European or other Asian poetic traditions, is very common in Thai poetry as well as in Burmese one. Therefore, it may be a regional feature of Southeast Asian poetry.

Future studies in Thai meters should explore the nature of *khlong* and the mutual influence on Thai, Burmese, and Khmer poetry. I believe these areas of research will yield valuable insight into the interconnectedness of these poetic traditions.<sup>1</sup>

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