

Ethnic diversity and village names in the middle Mekong corridor: A preliminary study in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand

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Ethnic diversity in the northern Thailand has been well known for decades, especially among foreign tourists. However, that in northeastern Thailand is less well known. Across the Mekong River in Lao P.D.R., ethnic diversity is a major characteristic of the country, and a national census revealed the diversity in detail. The right left banks of the Mekong are ruled by Thailand and Laos, respectively; however, local communities in the middle Mekong corridor have been communicating across the river for a longer period than nation-state rule. Ethnic diversity on both banks can be expected to be similar.

This study focused on ethnic distribution at village level on the Thai side. Although the ethnic diversity is commonly understood by the local communities, reliable data on ethnic distribution on the right bank is lacking. As a first step, about 200 villages in Nakhon Phanom province in Northeast Thailand were surveyed briefly to reveal the ethnic identity of the majority of the villagers, their origins, and their relatives in the area. A further survey of about 300 villages is planned.

Results presented here include findings of ethnic diversity in Nakhon Phanom province in relation to village names, and some features of similarity on both sides of the river.