

Language Vitality and the Ethnic Tourism Development of the Lao Ethnic Groups in the Western Region of Thailand

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Abstract

This paper is part of the research project entitled “Ethnicity Language Culture and Ethnic Tourism Development” which aims to explore the language use and language attitudes of ethnic groups in the western region of Thailand in order to reach the ultimate goal, that is, ethnic tourism development. The research sites include seven provinces, namely, Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Suphan Buri, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Sakhon, and Samut Songkhram. The paper sets its goals to explore the language vitality of Lao ethnic groups in order to evaluate the development of sustainable ethnic tourism in the region. A qualitative method combined with a quantitative method is used for this research. Two kinds of guided questionnaires were constructed for data collection, i.e., community and personal questionnaires.

It was found that there are six major Lao ethnic groups in the seven provinces, that is, Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, Lao Phuan, Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng and Lao Tay. The analysis of the language use and attitude of these Lao ethnic groups shows that, among all the Lao ethnic groups in these provinces, Lao Song Dam have the strongest language vitality across all provinces except for Samut Songkhram province where few Lao Song Dam speakers reside. Next to Lao Song Dam are Lao Khrang speakers who mostly reside in Nakhon Pathom province. Other Lao ethnic groups, namely, Lao Yuan, Lao Phuan, Lao Vieng, and Lao Tay have moderate language vitality.

The findings of the language vitality of the six Lao ethnic groups are used to determine a prospective sustainable ethnic tourism plan. Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang people are strongly united because of their strong language vitality and preservation of some cultural traits such as ritual practices and costumes. Therefore, the prospective community-based ethnic tourism project could be developed in those areas where the majority of these two Lao ethnic groups reside, and the ethnic language vitality and cultural practices are still productive.

Key words: Language vitality, language use, language attitude, Lao Song Dam, (Thai Song Dam), Lao Yuan (Thai Yuan), Lao Phuan (Thai Phuan), Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng, and Lao Tay, ethnic tourism development

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1. Introduction

1.1 The research project “Ethnicity, Language, Culture, and Ethnic Tourism Development”

The research project, 'Ethnicity, Language, Culture, and Ethnic Tourism Development' is developed with three main objectives. The first objective is to identify the ethnic languages spoken in seven provinces; Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram, and Suphan Buri in the western region of Thailand. The villages where the ethnic languages are spoken are presented in ethno-linguistic maps, linked with cultural information of ethnic groups. The second objective is to explore the ethnic groups' language use and attitudes towards languages which determine the language vitality of ethnic groups. Finally, it aims to evaluate the development of sustainable ethnic tourism in the region. The findings of the research could be used as a fundamental reference for national language planning as well as sustainable ethnic tourism plans. During the first year of the research project, the research team collects and analyzes sociolinguistic data in the seven provinces. During the second year, the research team will select one ethnic community as a model community to develop sustainable ethnic tourism. The ultimate goals of the project are to promote diversity in unity and the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures, as well as to strengthen the ethnic communities.

The present paper², “Language vitality and the ethnic tourism development of the Lao ethnic groups in the western region of Thailand” is the outcome of the first year of the project's research . The paper is limited to the Lao ethnic groups and sets its goals to (1) present updated ethno-linguistic maps of areas inhabited by the six major Lao ethnic groups; Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, Lao Phuan, Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng and Lao Tay (2) estimate the Lao ethnic groups' language vitality by their language use and attitudes towards their languages (3) evaluate the development of sustainable ethnic tourism in the areas where the Lao ethnic groups reside.³

² This paper was presented at the Third International Conference on Lao Studies, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand, July 14-16, 2010. It is the first year outcome of the research project entitled “Ethnicity, Language, Culture, and Ethnic Tourism Development” funded by Mahidol University in 2009-2010. This research is conducted by a research team of the Research Institute of Languages and Cultures of Asia as follows:

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³ Some people, especially Thai specialists on ethnicity, are worried that increased tourism may not be of benefit to the ethnic communities in Thailand, even though some respondents say they are in favor of it. It would be unfortunate if the effort to increase tourism were to lead to a huge influx of outsiders who are insensitive to ethnic cultural values, as seen in "Hill Tribes Shows", where members of various minority groups are made to sing and dance for tourists. In many villages, people charge tourists for taking photographs, which cannot be good for the local people.

Ethnic tourism in this study entails the recognition and strengthening of the role of ethnic people and their communities who should retain control of tourism development. Sustainable tourism is supposed to

1.2 Lao ethnic groups and language affiliation

In the Ratanakosin Period, the Siamese called people who lived in the central region of Thailand and spoke Thai with an accent, “Lao” (Thawat 2010). They also used to call all Tai-speaking, glutinous rice-eating groups residing in the north (Yuan or Lanna) and northeast (Isan) of Thailand “Lao” (Sysamouth 1998). Following the Siamese use of the term “Lao”, Lao ethnicity in this study refers to ethnic groups who migrated from Laos and from the north of Thailand 200 years ago during the Ratanakosin Period to the central region of Thailand, and later on moved to nearby provinces in the western region of Thailand. These ethnic groups include Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, Lao Phuan, Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng, and Lao Tay. The Lao people of western Thailand are addressed as “Lao” in the same way as the Lao people of the northeastern (Isan) region of Thailand. They can tell that their languages are related to Lao Isan because of extensive lexical similarity. A Lao Khrang speaker notes that her language is similar to the northeastern Thai dialect which sounds faster than the Lao Khrang language which is closer to Luang Prabang language. Despite the linguistic similarity, the Lao people of western Thailand identify themselves as a distinct ethnic group because of their typical customs and rituals which distinguish them from Lao Isan.

Apart from the Lao Yuan, all of these Lao ethnic groups migrated from Laos as prisoners of war more than 200 years ago. The initial migration was in the early Ratanakosin Period. The original homeland of these Lao groups was mostly designated according to their ethnic names. Lao Phuan came from Muang Phuan, Xieng Khouang Province (Werapong 1996); Lao Khrang from Muang Phukhrang or Phukhrang mountain in the northeast of Luang Phrabang; Lao Vieng from Muang Vientiane; and Lao Tay from the southern region of Laos, Champasak Province (Mayuree and Em-On 2005).⁴ Lao Song Dam people have been addressed by various names. The name “Lao Song Dam” refers to people dressed in black costumes. They migrated from Muang Thaeng⁵ in the northern part of Laos. This place used to be under the Luang Prabang government (M. Sribusara 1987). Lao Yuan were Lanna people who lived in the northern region of Thailand. They moved to other regions for various reasons. In the early Ratanakosin Period (1804), they migrated to the central region because of the war between Thai and Burma (Renu 2005).

support the integrity of the place, benefit residents, conserve resources, respect local culture and traditions, strive for quality, not quantity, and not abuse local products. The ethnic groups select their cultural activities by themselves to show to tourists, so shows and photographs are not a problem as far as they are controlled by the ethnic communities themselves.

The researchers of this research project are aware of the negative effect on ethnic tourism development that has taken place in Thailand and will make sure that the Lao community plays a major role in ethnic tourism.

⁴ The naming of Lao Khrang and Lao Tay is sometimes controversial. Some people believe that Lao Khrang and Lao Tay have these names because they paid *khrang* ‘stick lacquer’ and *tay* ‘torch ashes’ respectively as tributes to the Thai government (Mayuree and Em-On 2005).

⁵ Muang Thaeng is presently Muang Dien Bien Fu in Vietnam.

The Lao ethnic groups of western Thailand whose communities are linguistically and culturally united, such as Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang, pay much attention to their settlement history. They have learned from chronicles and oral history that they came from Laos. Qualitative data reveal that Lao Song Dam still practice a funeral chant giving directions to the dead back to their original homeland in Laos. So, some Lao Song Dam people are determined to delve deeply into their history by going to Laos (Phanus 2010). Other Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang speakers are simply interested in seeing their original homeland so they arrange trips to visit those places known as their homeland. It has been more than 200 years since these people migrated from Laos so they have lost contact with their relatives in Laos and have been visiting Laos as tourists, not for family reunion reasons.

The Lao language is defined as the languages spoken by ethnic groups who migrated from Laos and northern Thailand as prisoners of war, to the central and western Thailand. These languages belong to the Southwestern Branch of the Tai-Kadai language family (Li 1960). Based on tonal splits and mergers, the languages of these Lao ethnic groups are classified into two groups: Lao group which includes Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng and Lao Tay and the Tai group which consists of Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, and Lao Phuan (Brown 1965). Consequently, Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, and Lao Phuan are also addressed as Thai Song Dam, Thai Yuan, and Thai Phuan.⁶

As Lao Yuan are descended from Lanna people who speak the northern Thai dialect, their language is similar to the northern Thai dialect. According to Kantima and Suwattana (1988), Lao Khrang language is similar to the languages of Luang Prabang group. Lao Vieng and Lao Tay languages are close to the languages of Vientiane group. Both the Luang Prabang and Vientiane language groups are closely related to the Lao Isan language or the northeastern dialect of Thailand. Though the tonal system distinguishes Lao Song Dam and Lao Phuan from Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng, and Lao Tay, based on the lexical criterion, both Lao groups are closely related to the northeastern Thai dialect. They share such vocabularies as *nam* 'with', *song* 'pants', and *bakkhiap* 'custard apple'.⁷

2. Methodology

2.1 Ethno-linguistic map of the west

The first step of this research is to locate the Lao ethnic residency. An ethno-linguistic map of the west is constructed to portray the distribution of all Lao ethnic languages found in the western part of Thailand. The data collected include Lao ethnic languages spoken in each location, still pictures and videotape of the Lao ethnic and cultural activities. To obtain the linguistic data, the researchers first conducted a library research on previous works, gathering information as to which districts or sub-districts are homes to the relevant Lao ethnic peoples. After the secondary data was collected and summarized, a survey form was constructed for a postal survey. The form includes a

⁶ This paper uses the term "Tai" to refer to Tai-Kadai speaking people who reside outside Thailand and "Thai" to those who live in Thailand. Some linguists still use "Tai" to address Tai-Kadai speaking people who migrated from other countries to Thailand, e.g., Tai Song Dam and Tai Phuan.

⁷ See a detailed discussion of Lao dialects in Phinnarat (2003).

list of village numbers, village names, and Lao ethnic names as exemplified in table 1.

Table 1 Example of a survey form

Village #	Village names	Lao Ethnic Names						
		Lao Song Dam	Lao Yuan	Lao Phuan	Lao Vieng	Lao Khrang	Lao Tay	Others
1								
2								

The survey form was sent out to all relevant district and sub-district offices. The purpose of the survey was to obtain updated information on the languages spoken in each location in detail—what ethnic languages are spoken and in which village. To assure the validity of the data received, the research team also went to their field locations to collect more data on the general living environment, seeking information on the vitality of ethnic languages and cultures, as well as cultural activities.

The collected data are analyzed in order to identify the Lao communities in the western region of Thailand by using two criteria. First, the Lao communities are settled communities where Lao people have lived for over a hundred years. Second, other ethnic communities into which some Lao people have moved, and where the Lao languages are not used in everyday life, are excluded. Based on these criteria, a number of villages are screened for display on the ethno-linguistic maps. By using a geographical information system, maps of the Lao villages where the Lao languages are spoken, overlapped with multiple layers of cultural information of Lao ethnic groups, are displayed.

2.2 Lao language vitality and attitude towards ethnic tourism development (ETD)

At the initial stage, an in-depth interview, a qualitative research technique, is used as a method of data collection to obtain self-reported data about the speakers' language usage and attitudes towards their language and ethnic tourism development. Two kinds of guided questionnaires were constructed for the in-depth interview, i.e., community and personal questionnaires. After the in-depth interview has been completed, it is confirmed by a quantitative method. A guided questionnaire is constructed for a collection of quantitative data. It consists of fifty questions which can be grouped into six themes: personal questions, verbal repertoire questions, language use questions, language attitude questions, cultural heritage questions, and ETD attitude questions (see the appendix). The personal questions include age, gender, family members, birthplace, and spatial movements. The verbal repertoire, the language use, and the language attitude questions will provide answers that are used to determine the language vitality of each Lao ethnic group. The last two themes of questions are used to elicit data on the cultural preservation and attitude towards ethnic tourism which are crucial to Lao ETD. A semi-structured interview is conducted by using this guided questionnaire. Using a sociolinguistic approach, the informants are classified into three age groups: old generation (over 60), middle generation (36-59), and young generation (18-35). Three informants of each age group represent the sampling of each district where Lao ethnic groups reside. Based on the two criteria mentioned in 2.1, a village of each district was selected for a data collection site. The

total number of villages is 162 as shown in table 2. Three informants from each village were interviewed giving a total number of informants of 486.

Table 2 Numbers of villages where the data have been collected

Provinces	Numbers of villages						Total
	Lao Song Dam	Lao Yuan	Lao Phuan	Lao Khrang	Lao Vieng	Lao Tay	
Kanchanaburi	8	2	1	3	4	-	18
Ratchaburi	8	14	-	1	12	1	36
Phetchaburi	20	-	2	-	5	-	27
Nakhon Pathom	13	3	-	12	-	8	36
Samutsakhon	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Samut Songkhram	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Suphan Buri	9	-	8	12	12	-	41
Total	62	19	11	28	33	9	162

The data collected from the in-depth interview with Lao community leaders are analyzed by the qualitative approach. The analysis shows physical features of Lao communities such as village settlements, public utility, means of communication, education, language and culture, etc. The data collected from the guided questionnaire are quantitatively analyzed in order to evaluate the language vitality of Lao people in each age group which results in the language maintenance and language loss, as well as to evaluate the feasibility of ETD. The SPSS for Window Program has been used to calculate the frequency, percentage, and arithmetic mean of the data. To display the analyzed data, tables consisting of questions and answers of informants of different age groups are created. The appendix illustrates these tables with exemplified Lao Song Dam data of Nakhon Pathom province.

3. Findings

3.1 Ethno-linguistic maps of Lao ethnic groups

The survey of areas inhabited by Lao ethnic groups reveals that in the western region of Thailand, the six Lao ethnic groups reside in the provinces described below. Table 3 shows the numbers of villages where the six Lao ethnic groups live.

Table 3 Numbers of villages where Lao ethnic groups reside

Provinces	Numbers of villages						Total
	Lao Song Dam	Lao Yuan	Lao Phuan	Lao Khrang	Lao Vieng	Lao Tay	
Kanchanaburi	49	7	23	25	46	-	150
Ratchaburi	49	87	-	32	70	4	242
Phetchaburi	98	-	21	-	22	-	141
Nakhon Pathom	74	27	-	81	16	18	216
Samutsakhon	30	-	-	-	-	-	30
Samut Songkhram	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Suphan Buri	92	-	88	121	112	-	413
Total	394	121	132	259	266	22	1194

3.1.1 Lao Song Dam

Lao Song Dam people were found in all seven provinces under this study: Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram, and Suphan Buri. Lao Song Dam community leaders reported that the first migration of Lao Song Dam settled in Phetchaburi province. At later stages, Lao Song Dam moved to nearby provinces.



Map 1 Lao Song Dam speaking areas

3.1.2 Lao Yuan

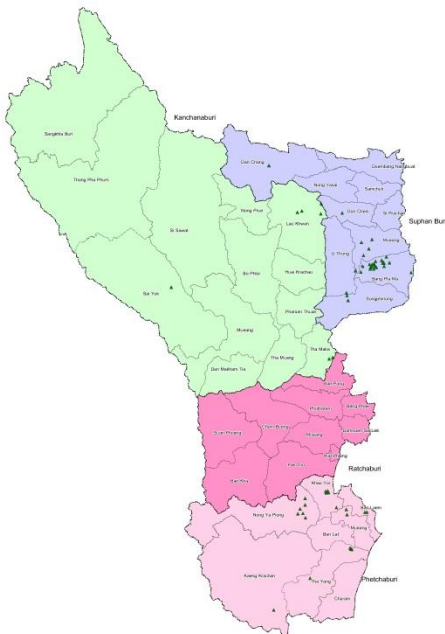
Lao Yuan people reside in three provinces: Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi and Nakhon Pathom. Ratchaburi has the highest concentration of Lao Yuan people.



Map 2 Lao Yuan speaking areas

3.1.3 Lao Phuan

Lao Phuan live in three provinces: Kanchanaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphan Buri where the majority of Lao Phuan reside.



Map 3 Lao Phuan speaking areas

3.1.4 Lao Khrang

Lao Khrang speakers live in four provinces: Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, and Suphan Buri. The original settlements of Lao Khrang were in Nakhon Pathom and Suphan Buri.



Map 4 Lao Khrang speaking areas

3.1.5 Lao Vieng

Lao Vieng people live in five provinces: Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, and Suphan Buri. The majority of Lao Vieng people reside in Ratchaburi and Suphan Buri.



Map 5 Lao Vieng speaking areas

3.1.6 Lao Tay

Lao Tay people are found in Nakhon Pathom and Ratchaburi provinces.



Map 6 Lao Tay speaking areas

3.2 Language vitality and attitude towards ETD

The results of data analyses using both qualitative and quantitative methods are summarized in tables 4-9. The language vitality of Lao ethnic groups is determined by degrees of language use and language attitude. The language vitality is high if the language use is strong (S) and there are positive language attitudes (POS); medium if the language use is moderate (M) and language attitudes are neutral (NEU); and low if the language use is weak (W) or endangered and there are negative attitudes (NEG).

A prospective sustainable ethnic tourism plan can be evaluated by considering degrees of cultural preservation and the attitudes of Lao ethnic groups towards ETD. The cultural preservation is strong (S) if the community can preserve over 50 percents of their traditional customs; medium (M) if less than 50 percents; and weak (W) if no customs are practiced. The feasibility of ETD is high if the community has positive attitudes (POS) towards ethnic tourism; medium if the community has neutral attitudes (NEU); and low if the community has negative attitudes (NEG) or unable to develop as an ethnic tourism site because there is no cultural heritage left. The language vitality and attitudes towards ETD cannot be evaluated and thus non-applicable (NA) if there are few or none of the ethnic group living in the province.

3.2.1 Lao Song Dam

Table 4 Lao Song Dam language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi	X			X			X			X		
Ratchaburi		X		X			X			X		
Phetchaburi	X			X			X			X		
Nakhon Pathom	X			X				X		X		
Samutsakhon	X			X				X		X		
Samut Songkhram			X		X				X			X
Suphan Buri	X			X			X			X		

Overall, Lao Song Dam is considered strong in all aspects: strong language use, positive attitudes towards the ethnic language, and active preservation of cultural heritage. The group also has positive attitudes towards ETD. The Lao Song Dam in Kanchanaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphan Buri are the strongest in all aspects among other provinces. Those in Ratchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, and Samut Sakhon are quite strong with moderate language use in the former, and moderate preservation of cultural heritage in the latter two. Samut Songkhram is rather weak in all aspects.

3.2.2 Lao Yuan

Table 5 Lao Yuan language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi	X			X				X				X
Ratchaburi	X			X			X				X	
Phetchaburi	NA											
Nakhon Pathom		X		X					X			X
Samutsakhon	NA											
Samut Songkhram	NA											
Suphan Buri			X			X			X			X

The language use and language attitudes of the Lao Yuan people are still strong in Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi provinces. Those living in Nakhon Pathom have positive language attitudes, but moderate use of language in daily life. In terms of the preservation of cultural heritage, Ratchaburi is the strongest followed by Kanchanaburi. In Nakhon Pathom and Suphan Buri, Lao Yuan cultural activities are not practiced any more. As far as attitudes towards ETD are concerned, the Lao Yuan people across all

provinces do not show much interest in the development of ETD in the community. The Lao Yuan people in Suphan Buri are weak in all aspects.

3.2.3 Lao Phuan

Table 6 Lao Phuan language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi		X		X					X		X	
Ratchaburi	NA											
Phetchaburi		X			X			X			X	
Nakhon Pathom	NA											
Samutsakhon	NA											
Samut Songkhram	NA											
Suphan Buri		X			X			X			X	

The Lao Phuan people in Kanchanaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphan Buri display moderate daily use of their ethnic language as well as neutral attitudes towards the development of ethnic tourism in the communities. Language attitudes are still positive among those in Kanchanaburi, but moderate in Phetchaburi and Suphan Buri. The preservation of cultural heritage is also moderate in these two provinces. Those residing in Kanchanaburi have, to a large extent, assimilated and embraced the customs of the Thai people, with weak cultural heritage, as shown in the table. Due to the moderate and weak degrees of cultural preservation, Lao Phuan in these three provinces have neutral attitudes towards ETD.

3.2.4 Lao Khrang

Table 7 Lao Khrang language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi		X		X					X			X
Ratchaburi		X			X				X			X
Phetchaburi	NA											
Nakhon Pathom	X			X				X		X		
Samutsakhon	NA											
Samut Songkhram	NA											
Suphan Buri		X			X			X			X	

From table 7, it seems all aspects of language use, language attitude, and preservation of cultural heritage among the Lao Khrang people across all provinces are

generally at a moderate level. Those who reside in Nakhon Pathom province exhibit the strongest language use and language attitudes, but are moderate in the preservation of cultural heritage. The only group which seems to be interested in ETD is the Lao Khrang in Nakhon Pathom.

3.2.5 Lao Vieng

Table 8 Lao Vieng language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi	X			X			X				X	
Ratchaburi		X		X				X				X
Phetchaburi		X			X			X			X	
Samutsakhon	NA											
Samut Songkhram	NA											
Nakhon Pathom	NA											
Suphan Buri		X			X			X			X	

The Lao Vieng people reside in four provinces in the western part of Thailand. These provinces are Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphan Buri. Among others, the Lao Vieng group in Kanchanaburi is the strongest in all aspects of language use and attitude, cultural heritage, with a moderate interest in ETD. Those in Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi and Suphan Buri demonstrate a moderate language use. The preservation of cultural heritage is also moderate in all these three provinces. None of the Lao Vieng communities in four provinces have positive attitudes towards ETD. Those in Kanchanaburi, Phetchaburi, and Suphan Buri have a moderate attitude while those in Ratchaburi have a negative attitude.

3.2.6 Lao Tay

Table 9 Lao Tay language vitality and attitude towards ETD

Provinces	Language use			Language attitude			Cultural heritage			Attitude towards ETD		
	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG	S	M	W	POS	NEU	NEG
Kanchanaburi	NA											
Ratchaburi		X			X				X		X	
Phetchaburi	NA											
Nakhon Pathom		X			X				X			X
Samutsakhon	NA											
Samut Songkhram	NA											
Suphan Buri	NA											

The Lao Tay people reside in Ratchaburi and Nakhon Pathom provinces. Both communities have moderate language use and language attitude. The preservation of their cultural heritage is weak, with a neutral attitude towards ETD in Ratchaburi province and negative one in Nakhon Pathom province.

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This paper presents the first year's findings of the research project entitled "Ethnicity Language Culture and Ethnic Tourism Development." The initial attempt is to locate Lao ethnic groups residing in the western region of Thailand. A survey form is devised for a data collection on Lao inhabited areas. Based on the collected data, an ethno-linguistic map of areas inhabited by Lao ethnic groups, overlapped with multiple layers of cultural information of Lao ethnic groups, is presented. A preliminary survey of language use and attitudes of Lao people towards the Lao language and ethnic tourism development was carried out using a qualitative approach. Two kinds of guided questionnaires were constructed for data collection, community and personal questionnaires. Key persons living in each Lao community were interviewed using the guided questionnaires. The in-depth interviews yield preliminary findings on physical features of Lao communities, the language vitality, cultural preservation, and language attitudes of Lao people as well as attitudes towards ethnic tourism development in six provinces. These findings are supplemented by a quantitative method using the SPSS for Window Program to calculate the frequency, percentage, and arithmetic mean of the data.

It has been found that there are six Lao ethnic groups residing in the seven provinces in the western region of Thailand: Lao Song Dam, Lao Yuan, Lao Phuan, Lao Khrang, Lao Vieng, and Lao Tay. Based on the population size, the strong language vitality, and the preservation of cultural heritage, the dynamic linguistic and cultural resources of these six Lao ethnic groups were found in the following provinces: Phetchaburi which is a rich source for Lao Song Dam; Ratchaburi for Lao Yuan and Lao Vieng; Nakhon Pathom for Lao Khrang and Lao Tay; and Suphan Buri for Lao Phuan. In

addition, a large number of Lao Khrang and Lao Vieng migrated to Suphan Buri from Laos and have settled there since early Rattanakosin period. At present the linguistic and cultural aspects of the groups are still prominent. Accordingly, Suphan Buri can be considered as a productive source for Lao Khrang and Lao Vieng as well.

The study of language vitality which is determined by the language use and language attitudes of the six Lao ethnic groups in seven provinces reveals that Lao Song Dam in all provinces except Samut Songkhram, where a minority of Lao Song Dam lives, has the strongest language vitality. Lao song Dam speakers of all generations still use their ethnic language in their daily lives though speakers of the younger generations speak more Thai than Lao Song Dam these days. Having seen lesser use of their language among young generation speakers, community leaders, especially in Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom, and Suphan Buri have tried to establish language maintenance programs by integrating Lao Song Dam language lessons into the regular curriculum. The strong language vitality and these language maintenance programs confirm that Lao Song Dam language will be maintained for the next few generations, at least.

In addition to the language vitality, Lao Song Dam people still preserve over fifty percent of their cultural traits such as ritual practices. Though folk plays and traditional costumes are dying out, Lao Song Dam people have tried to revive them by wearing Lao Song Dam traditional costumes at ceremonies or adapting traditional costumes for modern use. Museums and community cultural centers have been constructed. A number of traditional houses have been reproduced in many locations. The strong language vitality and cultural preservation have united Lao Song Dam communities. It is believed that the development of community based ethnic tourism will help to preserve the Lao Song Dam language and culture and refocus children's attention on their own language and culture as well as improve the Lao Song Dam economy.

Next to Lao Song Dam are Lao Khrang people in Nakhon Pathom who have strong language vitality while those in other locations have moderate language vitality. Though the Lao Khrang population in Nakhon Pathom is less than that of the Lao Song Dam, they are strongly united and have tried to revive their language and culture as well. Both Lao Khrang and Lao Song Dam agree that in the old days they were embarrassed to reveal their identity because they had ancestors who were prisoners of war from Laos and thus had low status in Thailand. However, over the past ten years, the situation has changed. There are many organizations campaigning towards the preservation of linguistic as well as cultural diversity in many countries. To name a few, UNESCO declared its Policy on Linguistic Rights in 1997, the United Nations announced a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in 2007 and declared the year of 2008 as International Year of Languages and 2009 as International Year of Indigenous People. Having seen the importance and value of linguistic and cultural diversity in Thailand, the Thai government is encouraging ethnic groups to preserve their language and culture and has implemented a number of development projects including ethnic tourism. Like the Lao Song Dam, the Lao Khrang people favor ethnic tourism so that they can preserve their cultural identity and practices.

Lao Tay and Lao Phuan have moderate language vitality in all locations. The degree of cultural preservation is either moderate or weak. Also, attitudes towards ETD are either neutral or negative. On the other hand, Lao Yuan have strong language vitality

and cultural preservation in Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi but attitudes towards ETD are either neutral or negative as well. Similarly, Lao Vieng in Kanchanaburi display strong language vitality and cultural heritage but neutral attitudes towards ETD. Lao Yuan and Lao Vieng in other locations show language vitality and cultural heritage at a neutral or weak degree and thus their attitudes towards ETD are either neutral or negative.

The Lao Song Dam and the Lao Khrang have stronger language vitality than the other groups because the nature of their 'Lao-ness' is still maintained. Ancestor worship which is related to the patriarchal family system plays an important role in the linguistic and cultural maintenance of Lao Song Dam. An in-depth interview with Mrs. Ruang (2009), a 72 year old Lao Song Dam speaker, reveals that Lao Song Dam people have a strong belief that they need to have a place called *kalorhong* in the house for ancestor spirits to live in and ancestor worship needs to be done regularly or else they will meet with unfortunate events, such as illness. This strict belief has survived through important rituals and customs.

Similar to the Lao Song Dam, Lao Khrang people also believe in ancestor worship. They practice a yearly ritual for the benefit of ancestor spirits to apologize for the bad deeds they have performed and to let the spirits know when a new member of the family is born. Any important activities need to be informed to the ancestor spirits. Ancestor worship helps to unite Lao Khrang communities and preserve their language and culture.

In addition to the traditional beliefs, population size is also another factor in linguistic and cultural maintenance. Lao Song Dam people have the highest population among ethnic groups so they have more strongly united communities. The Lao Khrang population is less than the Lao Song Dam but they are more concentrated. They live mostly in two provinces, Nakhon Pathom and Suphan Buri while Lao Song Dam live in many provinces in central, western and lower northern Thailand. Thanom (2010) explained to the researchers that during the initial period of migration from Laos to Thailand, Lao Song Dam people wanted to go back to Laos so they went in the direction they thought was their homeland. However, they never reached their destination and finally settled at the location they stopped their journey. Nowadays, Lao Song Dam can be found in many provinces. Wherever they live, they tend to preserve their traditional beliefs, especially ancestor worship.

Though these traditional beliefs help to maintain Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang identity, the heavy influence of Thai language and culture have almost destroyed it. Muang (2010), an 89 year old Lao Song Dam speaker, opined that "In the past ten years, cultural activities and rituals of Lao Song Dam have been gradually dying out. It was just recently that a campaign of cultural revitalization has been initiated by the Thai government and thus some traditions and customs are able to maintain."

The cultural campaign is employed on special occasions such as *Songkran* festival 'water splashing festival'. A number of cultural centers and museums have been established in Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang communities. Lao Song Dam traditional houses have been reproduced in most Lao Song Dam communities. Lao Song Dam (Tai Dam) and Lao Khrang Associations have been set up in Nakhon Pathom province to promote their ethnic languages and cultures. Documents have been produced for disseminating the linguistic and cultural information of ethnic groups to the public.

Lao Song Dam community leaders have established language revitalization programs by including Lao Song Dam language lessons in the school curriculum. These programs will help to refocus Lao Song Dam children's attention on their own language and culture. The linguistic and cultural revitalization programs are supported by various organizations such as the Provincial/District Cultural Council, Sub-District Administrative Organization, schools, and temples.

It should be noted that although some Lao groups possess language vitality and cultural preservation at moderate or weak level, their language attitudes are still positive. All Lao ethnic groups, especially middle-aged and old-aged people, wish their children could speak Lao because they are proud of their language which is unique to the Lao community and it helps to unite Lao people as a powerful ethnic group. They believe that being competent in Lao is an advantage. It is the language of their ancestors. It is the language used in rituals. Speaking Lao is the best way to preserve the language which is gradually diminishing in terms of its usage and vitality. Lao is a 'secret' language among Lao speakers. Along with the Lao language, parents also would like their children to be competent in Thai as both Lao and Thai languages function differently in Thailand. Thai is widely used in the public domain whereas the Lao language is a useful language and is widely used in all Lao communities.

Despite their attempts to maintain and revive their languages and cultures, all Lao ethnic groups have been assimilated into the Thai community. Thai is the most important language in the current situation as Thai is widely used in the public domain, especially in contacting governmental organizations and outsiders. In addition to the heavy influence of the Thai language as a standard language, there has been intermarriage with Thai and other ethnic groups, resulting in more Thai being used in heterogamous families as a means of communication. Mainstream education of young generation speakers is also an important factor leading to language loss. Consequently, it is anticipated that the Lao languages will be used less and less. Over the next 20-30 years the linguistic vitality of the language may decline.

Semi-structured interviews with local knowledge experts confirm the positive language attitudes of Lao groups and the Thai assimilation. The status of Lao ethnic groups in the past was different from the present. When the Lao ethnic groups migrated from Laos, they were placed in reserved areas in central Thailand. As prisoners of war, they were threatened by Thai people and afraid of them. This fear was so extreme that they could stop children from crying by saying *bakkuay maa yut ronghay* 'Thai people are coming. Stop crying.' To Thai people, Lao ethnic groups were animists whose ways of life were tied to spirit worship. They offered sacrifices to all kinds of spirits so that their life would be successful. They were seen as being poor and unhygienic. So, most Lao did not intermarry with Thai people or other ethnic groups. In those days, all Lao ethnic groups had a low status in Thai society. Nobody wanted to reveal themselves as Lao so that Thai people wouldn't know that they were foolish Lao people. They were ashamed of being Lao (Thanom 2010).

The situation has now changed. Lao people no longer live within their own communities remote from the outside world. They have been exposed to outsiders. There is inter-marriage between Lao and other ethnic groups, as well as Thais. Lao people have become Thai citizens. They feel that they have the same Thai national

identity as Thai people. The negative attitude towards Thai people has gradually diminished. As Thai citizens, they have access to education and enjoy the same rights as Thai people. Some Lao people have even achieved better social advancement than Thai people. Most Lao ethnic groups have assimilated into Thai society to the extent that the young generation no longer identify themselves as ethnic people. They are totally Thai. However, elderly and middle aged Lao are determined to retain their ethnic identity by using their ethnic languages in daily life and practicing rituals on special occasions. They teach their children not to be ashamed of their Lao identity. In fact, Lao people should be proud of their unique language and culture and need to help each other to create unity within Lao communities (Pattiya 2010).

Based on the language vitality, cultural preservation, and attitudes towards ETD, ethnic tourism can be developed in those areas where the majority of Lao Song Dam and Lao Khrang reside. Lao Song Dam areas are in Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, Nakhon Pathom Samut Sakhon, and Suphan Buri. Lao Khrang area is in Nakhon Pathom. On the other hand, the communities of other ethnic groups are either too small or not strongly united enough to develop ethnic tourism and are highly integrated into the Thai community.

In the past few years, various ethnic groups in Thailand have been brought to the attention of the public via mass communications such as television, radio, and the press. In addition, the Thai government has changed its policy from one which promoted a single Thai national identity to a policy that follows a mainstream global trend towards the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity. Therefore, the Thai government now encourages ethnic groups to preserve their language and culture and has implemented a number of development projects including ethnic tourism. Such tourist attractions already exist in western Thailand such as floating markets, waterfalls, beaches, orchid gardens, and temples. Most ethnic communities are located near tourist routes so ethnic tourism development will attract more tourists to the region. Tourists may stop off at ethnic villages to observe cloth weaving and buy some local products which helps to boost the community's economy. They may even have an option to home-stay for a day or two in order to learn the ethnic way of life. Consequently, there is a market of prospective tourists who have learned about these ethnic groups from the media and wish to visit the Lao of western Thailand.

Following the findings of the first year's research, participatory action research (PAR) will be carried out. One model community will be selected based on a number of supporting factors such as overall community strength, availability of manpower, the authenticity of the linguistic and cultural data available in the community, and most importantly the willingness of the whole community to participate in sustainable ethnic tourism development. After a model community has been selected, the research team will proceed with preparing the community and providing all the relevant information. The research team will re-visit the field site and discuss the objectives of the whole project in detail with the community, looking for leaders, community developers, and coordinators for the project. Essentially, the research team will be working together in partnership with the community, as consultants rather than directors. There will be a series of activities and discussions between the research team and the community to promote mutual understanding and cooperation, as well as to ensure an active role for the community towards sustainable community based ethnic tourism.

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APPENDIX

Guided questionnaire

Number of questionnaire.....Date.....

Name of informant.....Telephone number.....

Address.....

Name of researcher.....

Personal Questions1. Age 18-35 years 36-59 years over 60 years2. Gender female male

3. How many family members do you have? How are they related? What is their ethnicity?

Number of family members	Relationship	Ethnicity	Age
1.	Self (informant)		
2.			
3.			

4. Birthplace.....

5. How long have you lived in this village?years.

6. Have you ever moved to other places? If yes, how long?

 No Yes, for.....years.

7. If you have moved to other places, what are your purposes of moving?

 to study to work others, please specify.....

Quantitative Analysis of Lao Song Dam language vitality and attitude towards ethnic tourism development in Nakhon Pathom Province

1 = first generation (over 60 years old)

2 = second generation (36-59 years old)

3 = third generation (18-35 years old)

TC = Total count of three generations (Average)

NA = Non-applicable

Verbal repertoire questions

Table 1: Lao Song Dam language repertoires, percentages and averages based on age groups

Questions	Answers	Lao Song Dam				Thai				Both			
		1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC
8. What is your mother tongue? /		100.0	100.0	61.5	87.2	.0	.0	23.1	7.7	.0	.0	15.4	5.1
9. What languages can you speak?		.0%	.0%	7.7%	2.6	-	-	-	-	100.0	100.0	92.3	97.4
10. What languages can you write?		-	-	-	-	92.3	100.0	100.0	97.4	7.7	.0	.0	2.6
11. What language do you speak best?		46.2	30.8	7.7	28.2	7.7	.0	53.8	20.5	46.2	59.2	38.5	51.3

Language use questions

Table 2: Lao Song Dam language use, percentages and averages based on age groups

Language	Lao Song Dam				Thai				Both				Others				NA			
	1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC
Age group																				
Family domain																				
12. What language do you speak with your grandparents?	92.3	100.0	76.9	89.7	.0	.0	15.4	5.1	7.7	.0	7.7	5.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13. What language do you speak with your parents?	92.3	100.0	61.5	84.6	.0	.0	23.1	7.7	7.7	.0	15.4	7.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
14. What language do you speak with your siblings?	84.6	100.0	53.8	79.5	.0	.0	46.2	15.4	15.4	.0	.0	5.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
15. What language do you speak with your children?	53.8	53.8	7.7	38.5	7.7	7.7	.0	5.1	38.5	30.8	7.7	25.6	-	-	-	-	-	7.7	84.6	30.8
16. When you are at home, what language do you use most?	92.3	92.3	46.2	76.9	.0	.0	30.8	10.3	7.7	.0	23.1	10.3	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	-	-	-	-
Community domain																				
17. What language do you speak with your friends when you are in your village?	84.6	92.3	30.8	69.2	.0	.0	46.2	15.4	15.4	.0	23.1	12.8	.0	7.7	-	2.6	-	-	-	-
18. What language do you speak at a temple or at a festival?	61.5	69.2	46.2	59.0	7.7	.0	38.5	15.4	30.8	23.1	15.4	23.1	-	7.7	-	2.6	-	-	-	-
19. What language do you speak when you are working in the paddy fields?	38.5	46.2	.0	28.2	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	7.7	.0	.0	2.6	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	53.8	46.2	92.3	64.1
20. What language do you speak at shops in the village?	61.5	69.2	46.2	59.0	.0	.0	38.5	12.8	38.5	23.1	15.4	25.6	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	-	-	-	-
Public and Official domain																				
21. What language do you speak with your friends when you are outside your village?	-	-	-	-	15.4	15.4	69.2	33.3	84.6	84.6	30.8	66.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
22. What language do you speak at work (e.g. a factory)?	.0	15.4	23.1	12.8	.0	7.7	7.7	5.1	15.4	7.7	7.7	10.3	-	-	-	-	84.6	69.2	61.5	71.8
23. What language do you speak at school?	15.4	7.7	.0	7.7	76.9	30.8	92.3	66.7	7.7	61.5	7.7	25.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
24. What language do you speak at government offices?	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	84.6	69.2	100.0	84.6	15.4	23.1	.0	12.8	.0	-	-	-	53.8	-	-	-
25. What language do you speak at shops outside the village?	-	-	-	-	30.8	23.1	69.2	41.0	69.2	69.2	30.8	56.4	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	-	-	-	-

Cultural heritage and ETD attitude questions

Table 4: Lao Song Dam cultural preservation and attitudes towards ETD, percentages and averages based on age groups

Questions	Answers				Yes				No				Not sure				NA			
	1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC	1	2	3	TC				
43. Do villagers have ethnic cultures, customs, beliefs, and rituals that are unique?	100.0	92.3	100.0	97.4	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-				
44. Do villagers have ethnic costumes, accessories that are unique?	100.0	84.6	100.0	94.9	.0	15.4	.0	5.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-				
45. Should villagers preserve their unique ethnic language, cultures and customs?	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-				
46. Does ethnic tourism development maintain the language and culture of the ethnic group?	92.3	92.3	92.3	92.3	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	7.7	.0	.0	2.6	.0	7.7	.0	2.6				
47. Does tourism change the language and culture of the ethnic group?	23.1	.0	7.7	10.3	69.2	92.3	92.3	84.6	-	-	-	-	7.7	7.7	.0	5.1				
48. Villagers would welcome tourists to the village because tourism does not harm the way of life of the villagers.	92.3	76.9	76.9	82.1	.0	7.7	23.1	10.3	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	7.7	7.7	.0	5.1				
49. If there is promotion of ethnic tourism in the community, will villagers support this promotion? Will this promotion be successful?	92.3	92.3	92.3	92.3	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	-	-	-	-	7.7	7.7	.0	5.1				
50. Do the villagers have regular involvement in public activities with local government organizations, such as the village committee, school, temple?	100.0	92.3	92.3	94.9	.0	7.7	.0	2.6	.0	.0	7.7	2.6	-	-	-	-				