

## THE SURNAMES OF SAEK ETHNICITY IN THAILAND

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### ABSTRACT

Naming has been signified in Southeast Asian countries. The people believe in good name that the good meaning will get them good luck, healthy, and rich. In the past time Thais having no surname, they used the short words to name themselves. The problems come across was that having the same name that it could not identify a person differently. In the Rama V of the Rattanakosin period, Thais had a surname to separate people who came from various areas of Thailand and being an ethnicity differently. Saek is a one ethnicity living in NakonPhanom province in the Northeastern region of Thailand. The origin place was in China before moved into Laos and Thailand. This research seeks to find the characteristic of Saek's surname by use the ethno linguistic framework and the fieldwork is NakonPhanom province, Thailand. The surnames were collected from province's census to search the surnames of Saek people living in Art-Samat villages as it has been well-known as a Saek village.

In this village have 206 Saek's families that there are 98 surnames totally. The surname's language structure was found that there are between 2-6 syllables. The surnames mostly have in 3 syllables and 2 syllables of which have more than 80 percentages of all. The languages root had been taken from Pali-Sanskrit, Isan, Thai, and Khmer languages. the word markers of Saek's surname that are the words 'han<sup>5</sup>' and 'kla<sup>3</sup>' of which mean the 'brave'. The word 'han' is in Mon-Khmer language family while 'kla' is in Tai language family. Having these words appearing in the surnames shown the mixing of various languages and ethnicities who is living together in this village. The word meaning of brave; moreover, illustrates the worldview concept of them that the brave is one identity of Saek people. The next research should be studied the surnames of Saek living in Laos and Vietnam to compare to find that the major language in that areas whether influences on Saek surname.

**KEYWORDS:** Tai language family, Saek, Surname, Thailand, Tai Ethnicity

### INTRODUCTION

The studies on naming surnames are able to explain the people's history both ethnicity and homeland. Thailand has plurality ethnic groups living through this country and each group has the language identity of their surnames that implies where is the original place of them. For instance, Phu Tai an ethnic group living at the Northeastern of Thailand there is mostly surnames that have the word 'Phu' having meaning mountain because this ethnic group have settled down close to the mountain. So they named their surname by this word to show their surname's identity. (Pornjarat and Rattana,2014).

In the ancient time Thailand had no surname. The people used the shortname to call each other's they have many the same name and it was problem. In 1903 the King Rama Vin the Rattanakosin period let Thai people to have surname so that refer to different persons (Arporn, 2001). The King gave surname to reward who contributed the nation. In addition, the King also gave the surname for people who were different ethnicities.

In the present time the surnames given by the King of Thailand indicated that they are relative of the King or being high position in the country such as Sukhum, Boonnak, Sawadsila, Na Ayutthaya. The King, moreover; gave surnames to foreigners whose benefited for the King and the country. These surnames, therefore, presented those people original nationality. For instance, the surname 'Phamon-montri' was original Mon ethnic from Myanmar before moved to Siam or Thailand in the past time. The word marker which referred to be given by the King is 'Na' (at). It indicates place of people such the surname Na Chingmai, Na Songkla, Na Kalasin. Chingmai is historical city of North region while Songkla is major province of South region and Kalasin is old city of Northeast region. The city names appearing in people surname indicate that those family used to be important in the past time and their surnames also let's to know where original place of them.

In Thailand, therefore the people who have the same surname are able to retrace their relation in two categories that is 1) they are related by blood relation or by living/moving from the same place. The second reason is what is an ethnicity of them (Sorabut, 2008). There are more than 70 ethnicities in Thailand. They have maintained their cultures and languages. Most of them live in the North and Northeast regions. The ethnic groups spoken Mong, Yao, or Tibeto-Burman language family live in the North while the ethnic groups spoken Tai language family live in Northeast part.

Saek is a Tai ethnic group that there is historic origin from North China. Some groups moved to the north region of Vietnam before moved down to Laos and to provinces in the northeastern region of Thailand in early the Rattanakosin period. Saek have live together with other ethnic groups speaking Tai language family. Even though Saek and other groups spoken the same language family but their languages quite difference from other Tai groups by tonal and vocabularies system. These differences might appear in their surnames. This article aims to explain the surname phenomenon of Saek living in Nakhonphanom province where big group of Saek. The map 1 below will show an immigration route of Saek into Thailand.



**Figure 1: Saek immigration**

(adapted from <http://www.lahistoriaconmapas.com/atlas/country-map10/myanmar-cambodia-laos-vietnam-map.htm> )

Only Saek speaks Tai language family belonging to the North blanch in Thailand(Wilaiwan,1976) while other Tai ethnic groups in Laos, and Vietnam use the Southwestern blanch. So, they have to adapt other languages into their language as well as Thai or regional languages spoken around the areas. At Nakhonphanom province of Thailand, Saek live with Tai-Isan people who speak Isan language being Southwestern language of Tai language family blanch. Moreover, this province also has Mon-Khmer ethnic groups that Mon-Khmer is their mother tongue. The mixing of people who speak variously languages whether will be shown in surnames of Saek as they have to adapt these languages into their language. As Saek there is no script or do not be allowed to teach in local school, they have to learn and speak Standard Thai language so might the standard also use in their surname. These presuppositions will be checked in this research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The part will review the previous studies of surnames in Thailand that mostly being concentrated at ethnicities living in regions of this country and in the end of this part will be explained to few western countries which attempt to collect their population surnames. The previously surname studies by Thais scholar mostly interested in ethnic groups. Wanida (1989) explored the surname of Chinese-Thai in Bangkok, capital city of Thailand, that is more syllabic word than Thais and they keep the short surname from China language where they came from such as ‘Tang’ ‘Hwang’ ‘Kho’. Sunantha (1999) studied the surname of people living in Dong Luang at Mukdahan province in the Northeastern of Thailand. This province has various ethnicities. The finding was shown that the surname be able to retrace which their ethnicity is such as Phu-Tai, Phuan, So. The study by Ar-porn (2001) in the surname of Muslim-Thai people living in Nonthaburi province closely Bangkok as this province was known that there are Muslim ethnic group. The finding was shown that the Muslim

people has their surname differently from Thais. Next year Pantip (2002) explained the surname of the surname given by the King Rama 6 that in this period the King also gave the surname for foreigners who sacrificed and did a benefit to the King and the Nation. The work of Porntip (2005) studies the surname of people living in Nakhon Rachasima province, a city between the Central region and the Northeastern region, was found that there is an identity of people's surname by using the word marker to show where they live such as 'kok' 'nein' 'sung' that these markers mean plateau as their landscape.

The studies of Pantip (2002) and Porntip (2005) used the ethno linguistic perspective. These studies above were focused on the surname of people in terms of ethnicity and living in many provinces of Thailand. The few year later there are the studies of surname of Dara-Ang, an ethnic group living in the North of Thailand, was found that their surnames had meaning about forest where they lived (Sorabut, 2007) similarly of Ponjarat(2008)'s finding that was found that the surname of Phu-Tai ethnic group living in the Northeastern had the word marker 'Phoo' meaning forest or mountain. The next work belonged to Naree(2007) studied the surname of Kui, an Khmer ethnic group living close to Cambodia, was found that the language used in surnamed was Khmer language as their mother tongue. The last work was Porntip (2008) who found that the surnames of Thais appearing the word implying to the place, district, province of the owners.

There are countries that attempt to collect their people surnames. For instance, Scotland by National Record Scotland (NRS,2017) provided 2028 common surnames of people living in Scotland. This report shown that there are multicultural languages in surnames such as Zahid, Mustafa, Zheng. Brigham Young University presented about 13,000 surnames of Italian people. Monasterio (2017) surveyed the Brazilian's surnames by ancestry that shown 17,000 surnames mostly from Brazil and German following Iberian, East Europe, and Japanese, respectively. This study also reveals mixing of ancestry of people living in Brazil as well as Italian. In addition, the studies of surnames are able to imply the ancestry or place of people living in each country from its meaning and language families. These studies above indicated that the surnames were collected and studies in variously countries; however, the similarity of the finding was surnames implying the people about nationality, ancestry, language, as well as original place of them.

Saek is an ethnicity in Tai language family living in few provinces of the Northeastern region of Thailand; Nakhon Phanom, Sakonnakon, and Mukdahan. Nakhon Phanom has well known as the major place of Saek being Art-Samat village. The original place of them were in the North Vietnam before moving into Laos and Thailand (Teim,1972) because they had been offended by Vietnam as the majority group at there. At first time they moved into Laos along the Mekong river opposite of the Northeastern Thai after cross the river to settle down in Thailand. the biggest villages of Saek being in Art-Samat villages of Nakhon Phanom province where they well known as Saek village of Thailand. In the present time although their language has still spoken by the young generation; however, they have known not original words and use the new Isan language instead of their

vocabularies. There is no Saek’s script or teaching their language in school that lead to the language loss and the Thais linguist was categorized Saek that would had been an endangered language of Thailand. Therefore, this research finding will be a part of Saek language record in terms of their identity surnames.

**3. METHODOLOGY**

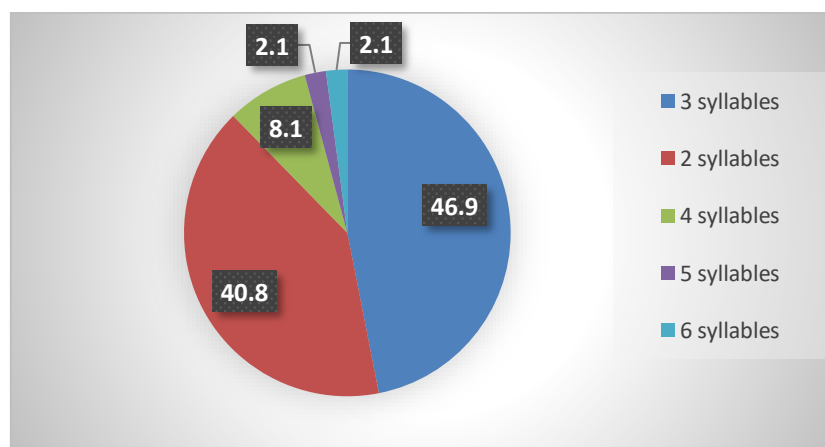
This research uses the linguistics perspective that having aims to find out the identity surname of Saek ethnic group by collecting the 206 families recorded by the province’s census of Saek who have ageover50 years old and they are living in Nakhon Phanom province, the northeastern region of Thailand. And interview key informants of villages’ headman for understanding the right meaning of surname and the Saek history. So, this research is mixed method in social sciences. The research finding will be explained by descriptive analysis of language structure, language root, and to find whether the Saek marker surname.

**4. RESULT**

The research finding will be divided into 2 parts that is the surname structure by syllable and the language root of surnames. The last of this part will be cleared whether Saek has surname identity and marker surname.

**4.1 Surname structure of Saek**

The finding was found that there are totally 98 surnames from 206 Saek families. They have between 2-6 syllables. The most 46 surnames (46.9 %) are in 3 syllables following there are 40 surnames (40.8 %) in 2 syllables. There are 8 surnames (8.3 %) being 4 syllables. And there are each 2 surnames being 5 (2%) and 6 (2%) syllables. The figure 2 below will show the percentage of surname structure.



**Figure 2 the Saek surname structure**

## 4.1.1) the 3 syllable surnames

The mostly surnames have 3 syllables. and these surnames use the Pali-Sanskrit language. It quite is mystified why they use this language to name their surname. The Pali-Sanskrit language popular used in Standard Thai. It influenced by Khmer Kingdom in the ancient period into Thailand. It has been used to name being not only the personal name but also has been used to name the new words being translated from new technologies by English language. Pali-Sanskrit, in addition, has widely used in Thais' surnames. In the first time before having surname in Thailand, the people found their surname by themselves, however, if they had no idea for surnames, the cities' s officers would have been found the surname for them. So, it was answer clearly why Saek's surnames use the Pali-Sanskrit language. The example 1 below shows the surnames in 3 syllables.

### Example 1: the 3 syllables surname

ราชลัย	/rat-cha-lay/	Pali language
พลหาราช	/phon-ha-rat/	Sanskrit language
ไชยปัญญา	/chay-pan-ya/	Pali & Sanskrit languages
พิมพานนท์	/phim-pha- non/	Sanskrit language
มหาพันธ์	/ma-ha-phan/	Sanskrit language

The Pali-Sanskrit languages are the multisyllabic language while Saek is Isolated language, therefore, this the research finding is able to explain why these languages have influenced into Saek's surnames. As the Pali-Sanskrit languages have been used as a prestige language in Thailand, therefore; to name the people or giving the surname by these languages lead the people's prestige as well.

## 4.1.2) The 2 syllable surnames

Although the 2 syllable surnames are less than the 3 syllables, there are not many numeral differences. Saek's mother tongue is Tai language family that it is isolating language or monosyllable language. The surnames having 2 syllables mostly is to use 2 words for getting the good meaning. The example 2 will show the surnames as well.

Example 2: The 2 syllable surnames

ใจกล้า	/cay-kla/	Tai language
หารา	/ha-ra/	Saek language
ปาทา	/pa-tha/	Saek language
แนนหนา	/nean-naa/	Tai language
ดีลัน	/di-lon/	Tai language

The examples above present that Saek use their original vocabularies by Tai language family to be surnames. Mostly the words have meaning of ‘brave’ such as the first example surname /cay-kla/ that the word ‘cay’ means ‘mind’ and the word ‘kla’ means the brave. All of examples above are the Isan language as the major language spoken by major group in this area, so Saek has to adapt this language into their daily life for communicate with major people. Appearing the Isan language to be surname of Saek disclose mixing of different ethnic groups. The original words of Saek, however, also appear in the surname such as the second and third surnames /ha-ra/ and /pa-tha/.

#### 4.1.3. The 4 syllable surnames

There are only 8 surnames having 4 syllables. Most of them is the Pali-Sanskrit or the mixing between Pali-Sanskrit and Tai languages. This mixing is to explain the languages influenced into Saek language in Thailand. An ancient time, Pali-Sanskrit have been used widely in the Southeast Asian mainland countries that it was been spread into these countries by Khmer Kingdom and Buddhism’s influence. The example 3 is the surnames being 4 syllables.

Example 3: The 4 syllable surnames

แสนทวีสุข	/san, tha-wi-suk/	Tai and Pali languages
ดงวิลาหล	/dong, wi-la-hon/	Saek and Pali languages
สุวรรณมาโจ	/su-wan, ma-cho/	Pali and Tai languages
รัตนจันทร์	/rat-ta-na, chan /	Pali and Pali language
บุพศิริ	/bup-pa, si-ri/	Pali and Pali language

The examples above reveal the multilanguage appearing in Saek’s surnames and they have adapted these languages in daily using as well as surnames.

#### 4.1.4. The 5 and 6 syllable surnames

The surnames having 5 or 6 syllables from Pali-Sanskrit languages, however, there are only 2 surnames of 5 syllables and 2 surnames of 6 syllables following the example 4 bellows;

**Example 4:** The 5 and 6 syllable surnames

สินธุ์ตระ	/sin-thu, rat-ta-na/	Pali language
ศิรินพคุณ	/si-ri, nop-pha-khun/	Sanskrit language
ไพฑูรย์ธนาดา	/phay-thun, tha-na-tha-da/	Sanskrit and Pali language
สวัสดิวงศ์ไชย	/sa-wat-di,wong-chay/	Sanskrit and Pali languages

The surnames in example 4 above having used together of Pali and Sanskrit languages that normally used in Standard Thai. They use these words to be surname for good meaning such as wealthy, win, good luck, and health.

## 5. CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND SUGGESTION

### 5.1 Conclusion

Saek is an ethnic group using their language calling Saek language being the North Blanch of Tai language family. They immigrated from original place in Vietnam before moved into Laos and crossed the Mekong river to settle down in the Northeastern region of Thailand. They established their ethnic group by having contact to other villages around few provinces closely. They live together with the Tai ethnic groups which use the same Tai language family but being the Southwestern Tai Blanch. Saek language and other Tai ethnic groups, therefore, are similar words. However, they have huge of words differently from the others. It seems that Saek has to adapt the languages to use. The Isan language as the language of major people. The Standard Thai as the formal language used in communication with government officer, and it also is only one language used as medium of education. In Thai language also has borrowed languages from Khmer, Pali and Sanskrit languages, therefore, these languages have been used to be surnames of Saek. The surnames in this research were collected only the people who have more 50 years old and born in this villages, therefore, the research finding in this article is shown the mixing languages in Saek surnames. The finding was found that most of Saek surnames have 3 syllables following by 2 syllables in not much different numeral. The surnames having 4-5-6 syllables there are not many surnames. The root of languages came from Saek, Standard Thai, Isan, Khmer, and Pali-Sanskrit languages. Their surnames were given by themselves and the government's officer when they had to report the surname for the government in the past time. The surname marker of Saek might being the meaning that is 'brave' that appears in Saek language, Khmer language, and Pali-Sanskrit languages. The most word used in surname for identify their group, however, is /Kla/, /Han/, /Art/ and /Sa-mat/ that mean 'the brave' as same as the name of their village /Art Sa-mad/ 'brave'.

### 5.2 Discussion



In the present time, Saek was categorized as an endanger language of Thailand because it has been spoken only older people while the young people only understand listening language, however, they unclear the meaning of original words. So, they cannot speak Saek with their family and moreover, it was not interested to learn by the teenagers. The Thais linguists attempted to do Saek language dictionary for children learn their language; however, there is less children who would like to learn. The younger people, moreover, they do not know the meaning of their surname in Saek language but understand the meaning of surnames from Standard Thai or Isan language more than Pali-Sanskrit languages. This language situation will lead to loss of Saek language in the future. This research is a part of an intention to understand the Saek identity language by analyze their surnames. The attempt is able to show the surname identity that emphasized appear in the meaning of surname that is 'the brave', although their surnames will be used in other languages.

### 5.3 Suggestion

The suggestion for the further research should be in these topics;

- 1) The comparison of Saek's surname between living in Thailand and Laos and Vietnam to find the surname identity of this group.
- 2) The comparison of the first name of Saek between young and older people to find the changes of Saek's name
- 3) The study of nick name of Saek in three generation to find the different and language change in naming.

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**NOTE:** This article is a part of M.A. in Thai, Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, KhonKaen University, Thailand.

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