

THE NATURE OF THAI VILLAGE NAMES: A CASE STUDY OF KANCHANABURI PROVINCE

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1. Introduction

Hymes (1964:176) defined the investigation of the toponym as “the study of linguistic designations for places and other aspects of geographical reference.” To this he added that

Often the interest is historical or local curiosity, but especially when approached in terms of structural analysis, involving the organization of such designations into sets and on the basis of underlying components, the topic broaches the problems of spatial orientation in general, both as a cognitive activity and a factor of social life and cultural values.

Also Franz Boas in his article “On geographical names of the Kwakiutl Indians” (1964:171) stated that “geographical terminology does not depend solely upon cultural interests, but is also influenced by linguistic structure.”

So far, there is no study of toponyms, specifically those concerning the village names of the Western region of Thailand¹. Therefore, the aims of this paper are: 1) to analyze the linguistic structure of village names in Kanchanaburi Province², 2) to set up dimensions or categories of meaning of the generic nouns used in the village names and 3) to see the spatial orientation of the village names in Kanchanaburi.

2. The Data

The village names studied below are drawn from a complete list of names in **Tham-niap Thongthii 2535BC** (2535:55-74)³ (**Provincial Records 1992**, 1992:55-74). It

states that Kanchanaburi has 10 amphoes (10 districts) and 1 king-amphoe (1 sub-district) as follows:-

1. Amphoe Muang Kanchanaburi	88	mubaans (villages)
2. Amphoe Thaa-ma-kaa	130	mubaans (villages)
3. Amphoe Thaa-Muang	98	mubaans (villages)
4. Amphoe Boo-Ploy	83	mubaans (villages)
5. Amphoe Pha-nom-thuan	127	mubaans (villages)
6. Amphoe Sai-yook	52	mubaans (villages)
7. Amphoe Thong-pa-pum	38	mubaans (villages)
8. Amphoe Sang-khla-buri	19	mubaans (villages)
9. Amphoe Lao-Khwan	61	mubaans (villages)
10. Amphoe Sii-sawat	29	mubaans (villages)
11. Amphoe Daan-makham-tia	36	mubaans (villages)
The total corpus for this study is	761	village names.

3. The linguistic structure of village names in Kanchanaburi Province

In his article, Boas (1964:171-176) illustrates how the affixation in Kwakiutl expresses "the specific location of a place," and "the range of concepts," that is, how the geographical names "[are] influenced by linguistic structure." He also compares the structure of the Kwakiutl geographical terms with those of other American Indian groups, especially the ones that use compounding to express concepts which can co-occur with place names. In his own words "...the form of each language limits the range of terms that can be coined."

As is known, Thai is dominantly a monosyllabic language. Unanalyzable polysyllabic words also exist. Moreover, word-compounding and reduplication are very productive procedures in Thai. Modifiers follow the words they modify and, of course, the possessor follows the possessed. And Thai has prepositions. While its morphology differs from that of English, the Thai sentence has the same basic order as that of English, i.e., Subject-Verb-Object. Thus, we can say that Thai is typologically a (SVO/Pr/NP/NA) language.

Given that there is no productive inflection in Thai and that compounding is a very lively process, Thai village

names should reflect this linguistic special structure. From the 761 village names in Kanchanaburi, the findings are:

1. One single noun, a preposition or an adjective. There are just a few village names of this construction. Examples are:

บ้านบึง (*bǎan* 'a village' - *bij* 'a large swamp'), บ้านดอน (*bǎan* 'a village' - *doon* 'highland'), บ้านนอก (*bǎan* 'a village' - *nóok* 'outside'), บ้านใน (*bǎan* 'a village' - *nay* 'inside'), บ้านใหม่ (*bǎan* 'a village' - *mây* 'new'), บ้านงาม (*bǎan* 'a village' - *yaam* 'beautiful'), etc.⁵

2. Two nouns. Both of the two nouns are monosyllabic, the first noun being usually geographical terminology, plant or animal names, or gathering places, and the second noun a plant or animal name or geographical terminology, for example:

หนองทราย (*nóowj* 'swamp, lagoon, large pool' - *saay* 'sand'), บึงหล่ม (*bij* 'a large swamp' - *lóm* 'a muddy place'), โคกไผ่ (*khóok* 'mound, knoll' - *phây* 'bamboo'), ดอนงิ้ว (*doon* 'highland' - *yíw* 'cotton tree, bombax malabaricum'), ต้นมะพร้าว (*tón* 'tree' - *maphráaw* 'coconut'), ตลาดลูกแก (*taláat* 'market' - *húkkæx* 'unknown meaning')

3. Two nouns. The first noun is a monosyllabic noun of geographical terminology or plant name and the second noun is a compound noun, for example:

บึงหัวแหวน (*bij* 'a large swamp' - *húá + wææn* 'head + ring'), ดอนเตาอิฐ (*doon* 'highland' - *tau + íit* 'stove + brick'), ตอไม้แดง (*tóow* 'stump of a tree' - *máy + dææj* 'tree + red')

4. Two nouns and adjectival modifiers or prepositions. The first two nouns are usually monosyllabic nouns expressing geographical terms. The third word, which expresses a signifying characteristic, shape, age or direction, modifies the first two head nouns. For example:

หนองบางเก่า (*nóowj* 'swamp, lagoon, large pool' - *baaj* 'waterway, locality along a waterway' - *kàw* 'old'), วังลานใต้ (*way* 'a deep pool (in a large body of water)' - *laan* 'an open,

wide, level area' - *tây* 'south'), ท่าไม้ยาว (*thâa* 'port, harbor, pier, wharf, landing' - *máy* 'wood' - *yaaw* 'long'), หินลาดตะวันตก (*hĩn + dâat* 'a rock ledge' - *tawan?òk* 'east')

There are also some villages in Kanchanaburi that have Sanskrit or Pali names or modifiers of the head nouns of the names, for instance:

เจริญทรัพย์ (*carāṇ* 'to progress, advance' - *sáp* 'wealth, money, treasure'), ศรีมงคล (*sĩ* 'splendor, beauty, excellence' - *moṅkhon* 'auspicious sign'),หนองศรีมงคล (*นวัฏ* 'swamp' - *sĩ* 'splendor, beauty, excellence' - *moṅkhon* 'auspicious sign'), สระเศรษฐี (*sā* 'pool, pond' - *sèet-thĩ* 'rich person'), ดอนสมบูรณ์ (*dōon* 'highland' - *sōm-buun* 'to be abundant, plentiful'), etc.

One can thus summarize the linguistic structure of village names in Kanchanaburi Province as follows:

1. About 90% of 761 village names in Kanchanaburi consists of two nouns, the first word is monosyllabic word, the second word may be a monosyllabic word or a compound word.

2. Most of the two-word village names consists of a noun and a noun, a few consists of a noun and an adjective or a preposition.

3. If there is the third word in a village name, the third is usually a modifier of the first two nouns.

4. The word order of words in a village names follows the basic word order of the linguistic structure of the Thai language, i.e., a head noun followed by a modifier. And the compounding process is also very productive in the naming of villages.

4. Semantic dimensions of the village names in Kanchanaburi province

Based on meanings of the generic nouns that are the first or the head words of village names⁶, there are five major categories or dimensions as follows: