

A Study of Minority's Internet Usage A Case of Pa Khlang Hmong Villager in Nan Province, Thailand.

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This article is intended as an investigation of character of internet usage of Hmong people in Pa Khlang Village, Nan Province, Thailand.

In Thailand, only 1.5 per cent high and new middle class people use internet and 43 per cent of Thai internet users connect from Bangkok. We usually think internet usage needs their literature skills and enough money. However, some poor people living in Hmong village use internet for their purpose.

From 1999, Pa Khlang villagers have appealed to Thai government for a settlement of land conflict between Hmong people and Thai government. This village has had an only public telephone line and it is difficult to use this telephone line as communication tool because of relatively high cost and inconvenience.

Now some people use internet in Pua City near Pa Khlang village once a week. This usage has changed people's communication style. At the beginning they had used internet as communication tool for their kinship living in abroad. But now, they use E-mail for making social movement network and they get any information another social movement. Added to this, their internet usage has two specific characters. First, they have not used web browsing. This shows us Hmong people cannot find usual information in WWW. Secondary, they have not used Hmong language in internet. Many of Hmong people living in Southern east Asia area can speak Hmong language but they cannot write and read Romanized Phonetic Alphabet (RPA). RPA is most popular way of writing Hmong language. Though many abroad Hmong community send messages in RPA, most of Hmong people cannot read any information. Their communication in internet is based on only E-mail written in Thai language. Internet cannot provide Hmong people with useful information and it expand people's native communication only.

This example from Pa Khlang village makes it clear that improvement minority's internet usage.

Introduction

There have been a lot of IT declarations to be appealed in Asia area since 2000.

For examples, on 5th October 2000, ASEAN Minister of Economics meeting was given at Chiang Mai, Thailand. This meeting arrival at e-ASEAN agreement which is promising co-operation between ASEAN countries. From 31st October to 2nd November 2000, Pacific Information and Society Summit was given at Tokyo, Japan. This summit appealed Tokyo Declaration contained same article e-ASEAN agreement[†]. On 16th November 2000, APEC

Prime Minister Summit was given at Brunei.[‡]

In this meeting, APEC declaration was appealed and this contained a purpose to provide a Internet environment to three times people living in Asia till 2005.

In Japan, former Prime Minister Mori appealed "E-Japan concept" on September 2000. This aims Japanese ODA would shift to IT assistance and Japan would be a leader of IT.

These declarations which have been widely appealed since 2000, is one of the indicator next our life style. But these declarations have targeted only majority people in each country and these have not targeted minority people's Internet usage. Little attention has been given to the point and a public servant making these

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[†] Details of e-ASEAN agreement, See
http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/kaidan/kiroku/s_mori/arc_00/asea

n00/gaiyo_1.html (in Japanese)

[‡] Key Achievements from APEC Summit
<http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/1670.htm>

declarations have believed trickle down effect to minority people.

It is because I believe that trickle down effect, premise of these declarations, is doubtful to minority people that I have written this study. The following is what I will show a case of Hmong villager in Thailand and I will try to show no relation between their usage of Internet and trickle down effect.

1 Internet Users in Thailand

First of all, we will begin by considering Internet situation in Thailand.

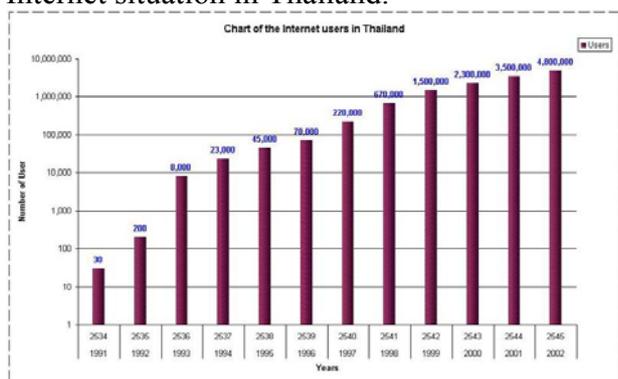


Figure. 1 Number of Internet user in Thailand

In Thailand, NECTEC[§] and NSTDA^{**} have administrated Internet systems. Their research in 2001 reported about Internet User in Thailand. This report indicated, there are 3,536,001 unique domestic Internet user. ^{††} This number occupied only 5.7 per cent of Thai population and another report shows us 54 per cent of them connect from Bangkok. ^{‡‡}



[§] NECTEC National Electric and Technology of Thailand
<http://www.nectec.or.th>

^{**} NSTDA National Science and Technology development Agency
<http://www.nstda.or.th>

^{††} <http://ntl.nectec.or.th/internet/user-growth.html>

^{‡‡} Pairasshu Thachayaphon, *General Thailand Economic outlook 2000/2001*, 2001 Bangkok Japanese Commercial Committee.

Many cities in Thailand, there are a lot of Internet shops, called “raan Internet.” At downtown most of them are located in first floor of shop house , called “thuk theu.” In standard raan Internet, there are 4 or 8 computers and they can connect local area network at 10 Mbps. LAN server machine integrated these host computers connected to upper provider through 56kbps telephone modem or 128kbps ADSL modem.

A fee of raan Internet is very cheep. In Bangkok area, 25 baht per hour, in local area 15 baht or less per hour. People can use Internet, specially web browsing and web mail, like Yahoo! Messenger and Hotmail.

It follows from what has been said that there are a few domestic internet user in Thailand but they are able to connect to internet easy.

2 Situations of hilltribe in Thailand

Most hilltribe have lived in Northern area. The number of Hilltribe people is 938,837 and this is same of 1.6 percent of Thai population. ^{§§}

They have come from south china, Laos, Burma since 1950s. For long time they are illegal existence in Thailand. The reason gave unfortunate situation to them. They had had no opportunity to study in school and to receive welfare service. In 1960s Thai government allowed for hilltribe to study in public school. But their situation has not been good in spite of this policy change. Many adult hill tribe people do not have ability of literature and easy calculation. So far as the Hmong is concerned situation of them have not improved.

3 Medias in Mountain

Hilltribe people can get and send information from some medias. In this section we will try to consider their situation of communication media before internet..

Postal Service

Thailand postal service is most useful way to send information between hilltribe people except for slow media.

Telephone

Most local village in Thailand, have only one public phone per 200 - 5,000 villager. This

^{§§} Research of Tribal Research Institute in 1998

public phone has been kept by people's large effort. When you call to your friend living in local village, person living near it would talk with you and this person told you to call again in 30 minutes later. When you are waiting in front of your phone, this person go to find and to pick up your friend by bike.

The contrary, when your friend try to call you, they can call you who living in Thailand. Fee of one domestic call is very cheap, 5 baht -20 baht per one minute. But if they call you who lives another country, international call is very expensive., 180 baht per three minutes. It is not general, using public phone for international call.

There are three companies running in Thailand. The number of user has increased in Thailand. Some hilltribe people have used mobile phone. But there are not enough base points in local area and monthly fee is expensive for hilltribe people. Though average of income at local area is only 4,000 – 5,000 baht per one household, minimum monthly fee of mobile phone is 500 baht.

	Short distance	Long Distance
Domestic	5 baht	20 baht
International	180 baht	250 baht

Table 1 Public telephone fee per three minutes

	Monthly fee	One minute
Mobile Phone	500 baht -	3baht

Table 2 Mobile phone fee

Telephone is one of the easiest communication way because of this media no require another media literacy. But fee of them is expensive to the poor and hilltribe people.

Radio program

Radio program for hilltribe people started in 1950s. This era many members of illegal communist party ran away in the mountain. Thai government cautioned combining hilltribe people and communist therefore government start radio programs for propaganda to hilltribe people in six hilltribe languages. The beginning of radio program broadcasted mainly propaganda and today it provide hilltribe with send much information of nutrition, sanitary,

health and social welfare.***

Every math communication medias have a character information moving from center to local and they provide only safer information for government without exceptions. Radio programs provide useful common information but they have not specific kinds of information, for example how to complain to government, a right of hill tribe's forest usage.

It follows from what has been said that hilltribe people in mountain had never had useful media for communication.

4 Pa Khlang Village

Next, we look a concrete example one of Hmong village.



Figure. 3 Location of Pa Khlang

History

1967 Thai government founded “Pa Khlang Refugee camp.” And government replace Hmong and Yao people in mountain to Pa Khlang. Government insisted protecting them from communist but to tell truth, government feared being connected hilltribe people and communist. Thai Government replace them to Pa Khlang and gave 3 rai land for farm and 1 rai land for housing. In 1973, Thai Government changed “Pa Khlang refugee camp” to “Pa Khlang Adminstrate Village.” In Pa Khlang village, all of them is domestic Hmong people but some of their clan accommodated another refugee camps was made emigrate to abroad, United States, France or Australia.

*** Chiang Mai University 2001 Hill Tribe Language Radio Programs: Communication Process for Highland Development, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Pa Khlang village locates north part of Nan Province, which closes to border. Pa Khlang has a population of about 6,000, including Hmong, Yao and H'tin tribes. Their monthly household income average is about 5,000 baht and average of Nan province is 7,387 baht. Villager's income is lower than around village. Villagers work in orchid farm. There are Lychee, Mango and Tamarind trees.^{†††}

Facilities

In Pa Khlang village, there are facilities bellows.

Media	Radio cassette tape recorder 543 Television set 781 Public telephone 1
Motors	Car 168 Motor bike 714 Bike 225

Table 3 Facilities in Pa Khlang village

If they want to buy some clothes and necessities of life, they go to Pua city locating near Pa Khlang village by their motors or bus, called "Son Teu."

Spread of Internet Usage in Pa Khlang

Spread of Internet usage in Pa Khlang passed four stages.

First, primary student study how to use Internet at school in Pa Khlang village. In Thailand Royal Project, "School-net", have started 1996. Children played a part of traction spread of internet in this village.

Secondary, young Hmong people learned how to use internet from children and they have used internet at Raan Internet in Pua city. The distance of Pua city and Pa Khlang village is about eight kilo meter. Since 1999, when raan internet opened in Pua, many people went there and checked e-mail once a week.

They write to their clan in abroad.

Thirdly, over 50 year people used Internet directly or indirectly. Many part of them don't have Thai language and English literacy. But when they want to send e-mail to their clan, they ask their children to send e-mail stand by them.

This phenomenon is very specific. Because

^{†††} Natonal Statistical Office, 2001, *The 2000 Population and Housing Census, Changwat Nan*, Bangkok, Thailand

they are not rich class and no literacy of writing letter. In Thailand there are people having same income and literacy situations but they have not used internet.

Their reason, usage of internet, is very simple. In Pa Khlang village, I interviewed "Why do you use Internet?" Their general answer is Internet is cheaper and rapidly than telephone and postal service.

Features of Hmong villager Internet usage

Their Internet usage have two specific features. First, in raan Internet, they only use web mail, like Hotmail and Yahoo! Mail. This is very ironical feature. Generally these free e-mail company give e-mail address in exchange of their permission of sending advertising information. But Hmong people has enough money to buy those goods.

Secondary, they use English and Thai language on e-mail. They write to Hmong living abroad in English and they write to domestic Hmong in Thai language. Their writing Hmong language is consisted of easy alphabet. This Romanized Hmong language thought up by French missionary. But Thai Hmong people has no ability of Hmong language literature.

Effect of Internet usage

This internet usage of Pa Khlang have made some changes to their life style. One of unprecedented case, ten women married to Hmong people living abroad. Brides and bridegrooms talked by chat system and they send e-mail a lot of times. Of course, I cannot say if their choice, moving to abroad, make them happy by a reason no bridegroom emigrating. Maybe this phenomenon include some gender bias.

But this phenomenon shows us one certain thing. Brides decide marriage with their husbands through internet communications. Internet communications provide them another kind of aspect.

Naturally enough, there are no same phenomenon in another village of Hmong.

5 Conclusion

These features was supported by two conditions around Pa Khlang.

The first is location of Pa Khlang village. Pa Khlang villager go to Pua city, where raan

internet is, easily. The second is their clan having been in abroad and they have a necessity to contact their clan.

However, this case shows us one important things. Their Internet usage come from not only trickle down effect but also their specific situation. Therefore we must take trickle down effect in some declarations more seriously. Minority's internet usage come from their purpose..

Reference

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[2] *Hilltribe language Radio programs: communication Process for Highland Development*, Chiang Mai University, 2001 (in Thai language)

[3] *Regional Workshop Report, Information exchange on Development Experiences with highland Peoples*, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

[4] *Human Development Report 2001* UNDP, New York, US, UNDP 2001