

Establishment process of new villages in the middle and upper watershed of the Songkhram River in Northeast Thailand

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ABSTRACT

In Northeast Thailand, the three major branches of the Mekong River are the Mun, the Chi, and the Songkhram River. At the 1950s, villages were already densely distributed in the middle watershed of the first two branches, whereas villages were sparsely distributed in the middle and upper watershed of the Songkhram River. The watershed of the Songkhram River could offer new land for farmers who eagerly desired their own farm land, thus many newly established villages can be identified. We conducted household-level surveys in four villages in this area to obtain information on migration history. Geographical analysis of important places in their life suggests typical stages in the establishment process of such new villages.

1. INTRODUCTION

The watershed of the Songkhram River covers northeastern part of Northeast Thailand, where the population density has been lower than other areas in Northeast Thailand. According to the population statistics (Alpha Research 1992, 2011), population density per square kilometer of Sakon Nakhon Province was 62.3 in 1970 and 116.4 in 2009, whereas that of Maha Sarakham Province was 115.8 and 177.5 respectively, and that of Surin Province was 93.0 and 169.6 respectively. Here, Sakon Nakhon, Maha Sarakham and Surin are as a representative province in the watershed of the Songkhram River, Chi River, and Mun River respectively. These three rivers are the three major branches of the Mekon River in Northeast Thailand.

According to another source, the topographic maps of the 1950s, villages were already densely distributed in the middle watershed of the Mun River and the Chi River, whereas villages were sparsely distributed in the middle and upper watershed of the Songkhram River. On a later edition of the topographic maps, many new villages can be easily identified in the latter area. Some of those are located nearby old villages which are identified on the 1950s edition, however, rest of those are located far from the old villages, and land use around were described as forest or bush in 1950s.

In 2007, we visited some of newly established villages to conduct brief interviews to senior villagers on the village history. The interviews revealed that villagers of those isolated new villages are from various birthplaces of not nearby but several days distance at the time of migration.

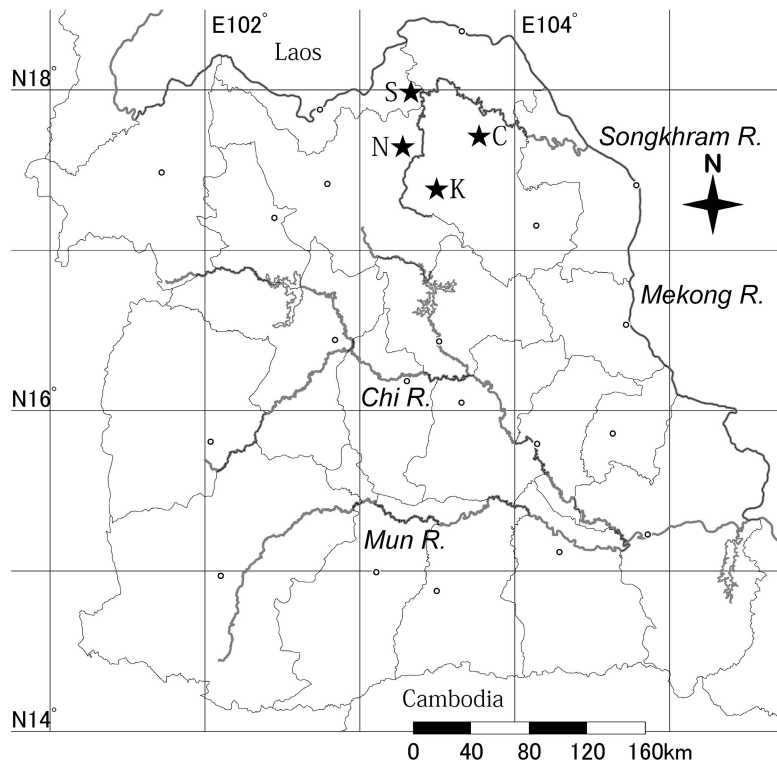


Figure 1. Surveyed villages

After preliminary surveys, we selected four villages in the middle and upper watershed of the Songkhram River, and conducted household-level surveys. The four villages are here called N, S, C, and K Village.

2. SURVEYS

2.1 Location

Locations of the four villages are shown in Figure 1. N Village is in Ban Dung District, Udon Thani Province. S Village is in Fao Rai District, Nong Khai Province. C Village is in Wanon Niwat District, Sakon Nakhon Province. K Village is in Song Dao District, Sakon Nakhon Province.

2.2 Survey issues

We conducted household-level surveys in four villages above to obtain information on rural migration. The major interview issues were: year and place of birth, year and place of marriage, household structure, migration history, agricultural activities, and religious activities. To some important villagers, such as village head person, member of health-support, religious leaders, and school teachers, general information of the village was also interviewed. N, S, C, and K Village were surveyed in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 respectively.

2.3 Overview

N Village is located in former forest hill at the altitude of about 185m, whereas

neighboring old villages are at the altitude of 160m to 170m. The nearest old village is 3km away. N was officially established in 1963, and the first migration was told to be in 1954. We collected data of 145 households which actually resided at the time of our survey.

In hilly former bush at the altitude of about 175m, S Village is located. Its neighboring old villages are at the altitude of 150m to 160m, and the nearest among them is 2.5km away. S was officially established in 1987, while the first migration was told to be in 1974. 70 households were interviewed.

C Village is located in former forest of about 25m higher elevation to neighboring villages. The nearest old village is about 3km away. Three old hamlets nearby are identified on the topographic maps of the 1950s, however, they were abandoned and disappeared afterward. C was officially established in 1970, and the first migration was told to be in early 1950s. We could interview 173 households.

K Village is located in the uppermost watershed among the four target villages. The first migration was told to be in 1950, and official establishment was in 1971. Unlike three villages above, K is not located in the highest altitude among neighboring villages. The land around K was formerly forest. 150 households were interviewed.

3. METHODS

Spatio-temporal viewpoint is applied firstly to classify surveyed households into roles in the development process of a new village, since it was understood at preliminary surveys that early migrants tended to come from various places of far distance.

Some interview items, such as places of birth, marriage, and past residence, included location information at village level by local administration name. Such location information must be checked for its geographical values of location to proceed to a geospatial analysis. Not a few villages are difficult to identify their location, since administrative names told by informants were usually what were used at the time of their intimate concern, and some administrative names were changed afterward.

At present, locations of about 95% of important places in connection with informants are identified in geographical coordinates.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Early migrants

Early migrants in the four villages are and had been playing important roles for administration, security, religious affairs, spiritual activities, and so on, in their community. Some early migrants already passed away and not a few might migrate to other areas. It is difficult for us to get details on these non-villagers at present.

Figure 2 shows major birthplaces of early migrants to the four villages. The farthest place from N is about 260km away in Surin Province in the Mun watershed. Major birthplaces in relation with N, S, and K, are rather close to major rivers, and population

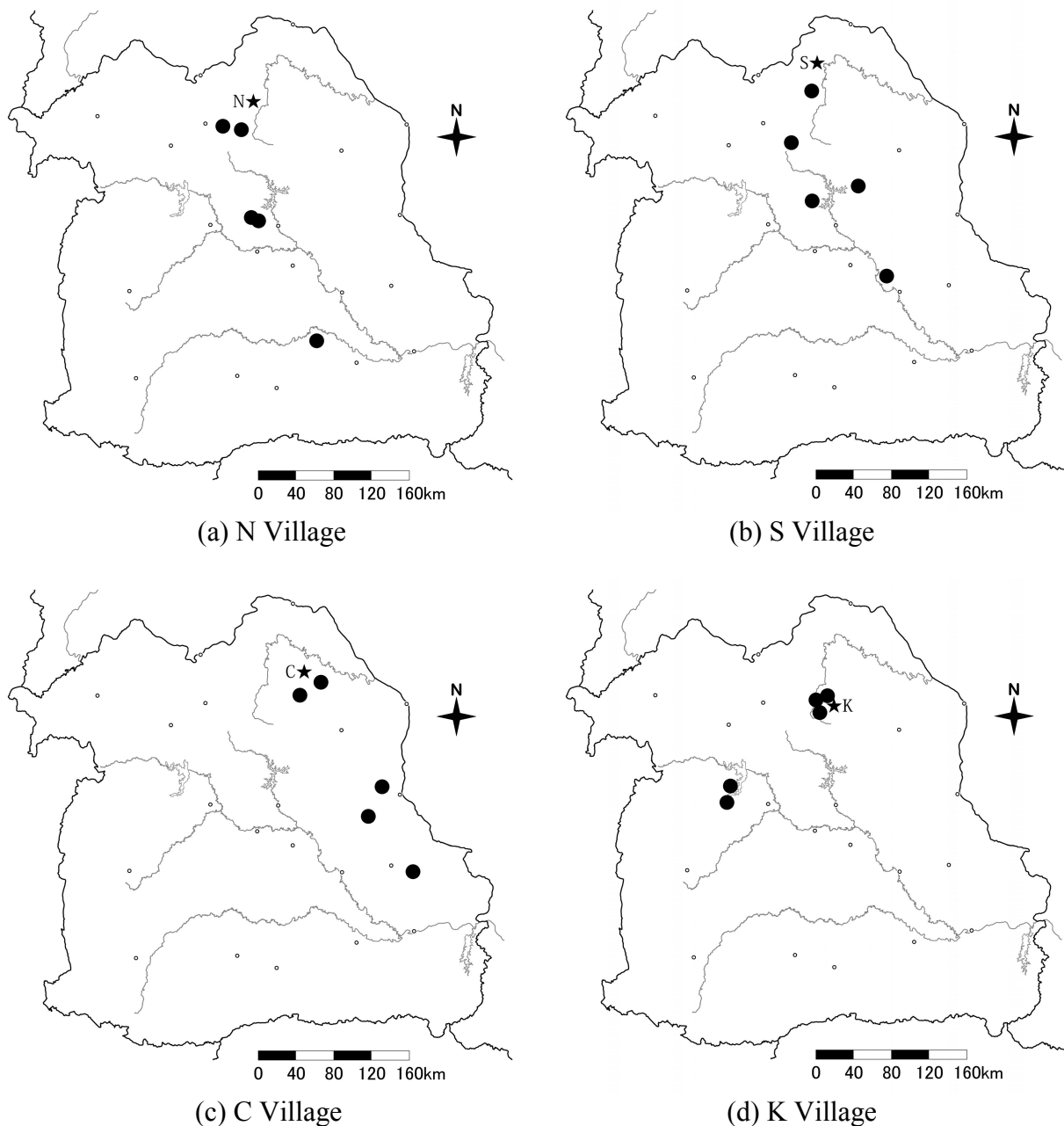


Figure 2. Major birthplaces of early migrants

density of such area is relatively high in Northeast Thailand. But those of C seem to show different distribution. Population density around them is lower than other areas in Northeast Thailand.

4.2 Late migrants

Late migrant here is defined as a migrant in recent two to three decades depending on the history of a village. Many of younger generation were born in their villages; however, there are still migrants from other areas though number of them is not much.

Figure 3 shows major birthplaces of late migrants. The figure on the N Village shows that major birthplaces of late migrants are same or close to those of early migrants. It

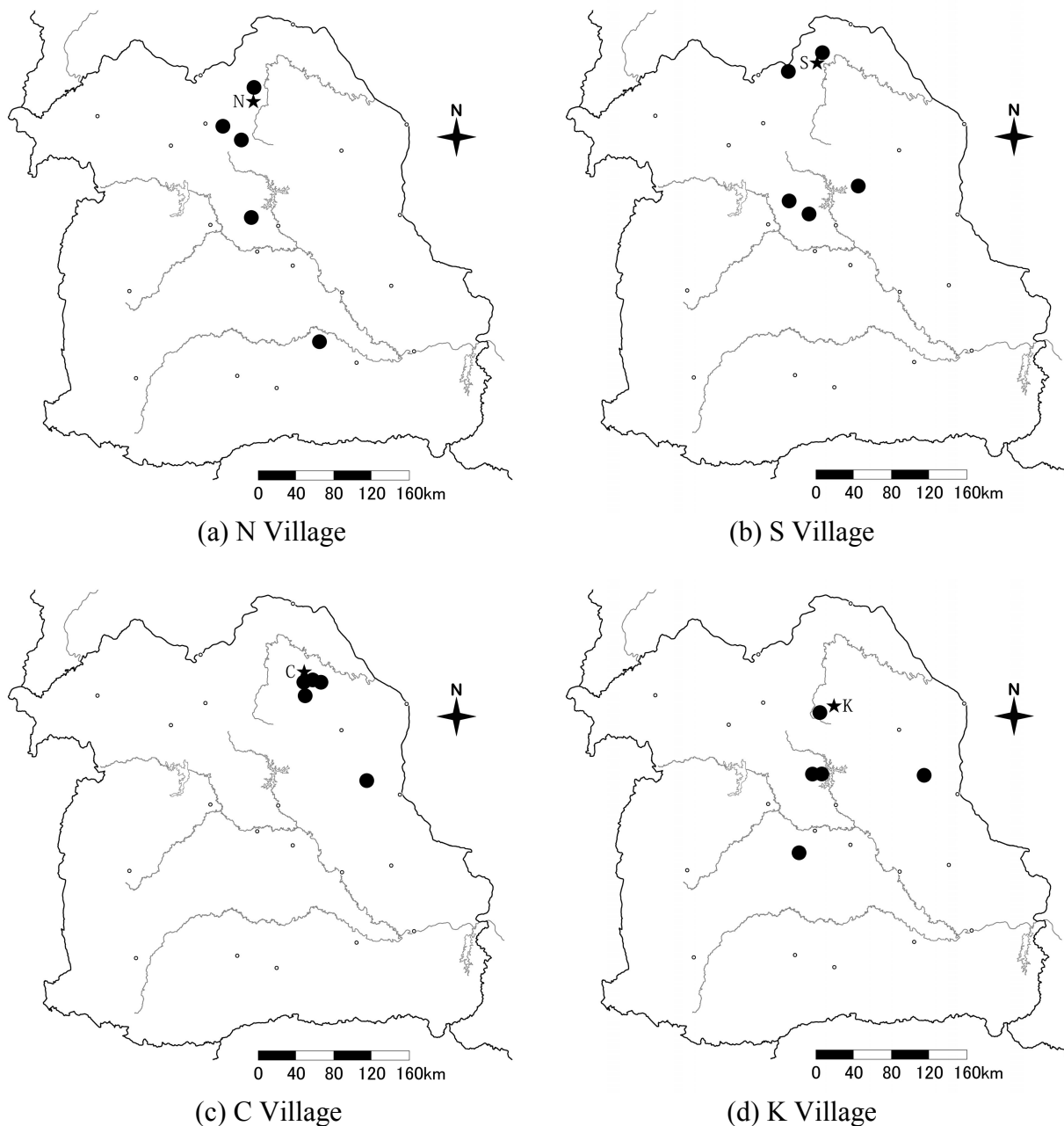


Figure 3. Major birthplaces of late migrants

suggests that chain migration is still an efficient motivation for new migrants to N. A significant difference between early migrants and late migrants is observed on the C Village. Late migrants to C are almost from the same district that C locates in. A difference found on the K Village is somehow similar to the converse of the difference on C above. Many of early migrants came to K from nearby; however, major birthplaces of late migrants are dispersed and farther. At this moment, this contra-directional trend is found by brief investigation on survey data. Further investigation is needed to reveal details on it.

4.3 Growth stage

The cumulative number of new households established by year can show some turning points in the growth history of the village (Nagata 2010). The year of establishment is the

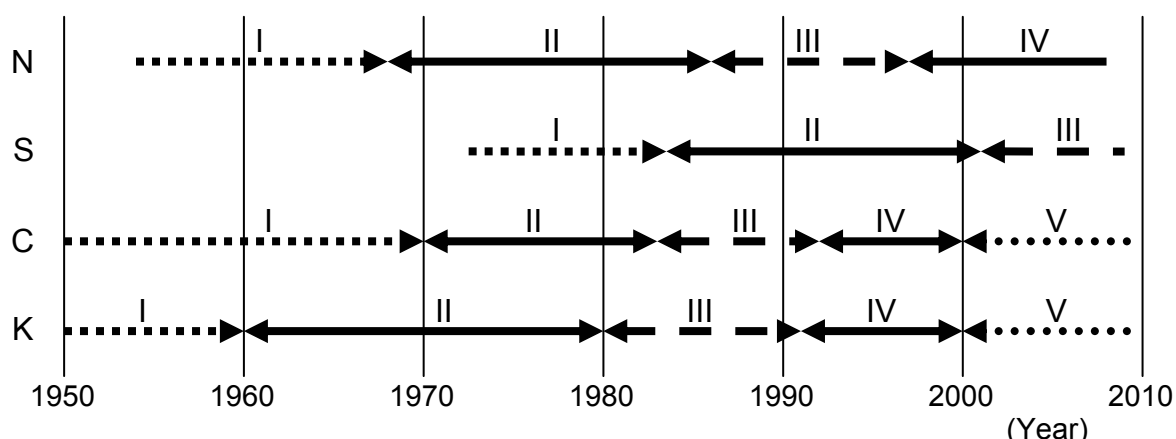


Figure 4. Growth stage (Nagata, 2011)

year of migration for migrant households, and the year of marriage for households in which at least one spouse was born in the village (Nagata 2008).

Figure 4 shows the growth stage of the four villages separately. In this figure, five stages are defined: I) the early stage, II) the first developing stage, III) the second developing stage, IV) the first slowing down stage, and V) the second slowing down stage. In the early stage, households increased slowly as one per year. In the first developing stage, households increased steadily, and new households were mostly from outside. In the second developing stage, households increased still steadily, however, new households were rather from inside. In the first slowing down stage, households increased very slowly and migrants from outside were rarely observed. In the second slowing down stage, the number of households seems to reach a point of saturation.

In this article, quantitative measurement is applied to describe characteristics of establishment of a new village. Qualitative and cultural one should be also applied to reveal the establishment process with more humanity aspects.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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