

## Satisfaction Levels of the Local People on the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge: A Case of Mukdahan-Savannakhet

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### Abstract

The research paper was aim to determine the satisfaction levels of the local people on the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge in three main aspects including economic aspect, social and environment aspect and transportation aspect. A questionnaire survey was created to carry out this study. Findings indicated in economic aspect that the bridge plays as a key role in determining the economic situation of the local people. Lao respondents satisfied on this aspect at 3.914 and Thai respondents satisfied at 3.276. In social and environment aspect, the opening of the bridge brought about the change of fundamental structures in the border areas along the Mekong River. Lao respondents satisfied on this aspect at 3.538 and Thai respondents satisfied at 3.466. In transportation aspect, the sufficient infrastructure of Mukdahan province and the international bus makes it convenient to access Laos through Savannakhet province. However, Lao respondents satisfied on this aspect at 4.194 and Thai respondents satisfied at 3.652. The research findings suggest that the governments of both countries should be able to assist the local people, particularly the ones who need government's assistants and live close to the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge, to become more involved in cross-border activities and to gain benefits from the opening of the bridge as much as possible.

**Keywords:** satisfaction, local people, The Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge

### 1. Introduction

The Mekong River marks the border between Thailand and Laos. In order to commute from Thailand to Laos by road, it is very easy take one of the bridges that link between the two countries. There are five bridges situated between Thailand and Laos, called Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge. The fifth agreement of the bridge eventually has been proved successfully and it is now under construction. However, this research focuses on the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge which connects Mukdahan province in Thailand with Savannakhet province in Laos. Since the bridge has been opened, it is absolutely a factor that changes people the way of life. In addition, the bridge provides more conveniences in traveling back and forth between the border areas. Moreover, the bridge helps in increasing economic development of Indochina region and boosting border trade along Savannakhet to Mukdahan provinces.

The researchers found a previous research on the topic of **The Impact of Building the Third Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge in Nakhon Phanom** written by Warisara Ngarmpring in the year of 2012. This research topic analyzed about how the local people who live near the bridge satisfy their lives on several dimensions (Ngarmpring, 2012). Therefore, the researchers decided to conduct the *similar study pattern, but in different area where the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge is located*.

The overall objective of this research project is to determine the satisfaction level of the local people on the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge in three main aspects including economic aspect, social and environment aspect and transportation aspect. The previous research provided only positive outcomes of the bridge. Therefore, this study aims to better understand the situations and negative impacts after the opening of the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge for the future development in this area.

The satisfaction of local people who live nearby the Second Friendships Bridge between Thailand and Laos on the Border of Mukdahan Province and Savannakhet Province is the cause of this study. The research focused on the satisfaction on social, economic, environment, and transportation aspects among two countries. There are several researchers conducted their researches in these border areas. Here are some examples of previous researches on social, economic, environment, and transportation aspects.

***Evaluating an International Cooperation Project*** - from Beneficiaries' Perspective, according to Nobuko Fujita, foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development, he mentioned that Development evaluation is entering into a new stage in which beneficiaries' viewpoints are the prime consideration. This study focused on the Second Mekong International Bridge project evaluation. The evaluation criteria used are relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. For evaluation criteria, it is more meaningful for partner and donor countries to choose together evaluation questions with importance and urgency. In this case, it would not be just the effect of the bridge, but some of the important social influences as well. From this study, the importance of studying partner countries' evaluation needs has become apparent. Evaluating an International Cooperation is one of the economic cases that focused on the donation (Nobuko, n. d).

***Barriers to Border Trade along the East-West Economic Corridor: The Case of Thailand - the Lao PDR Trade on the Border of Mukdahan Province***, according to Pensri Jaroenwanit and Saran Ratanasithi, they chosen the border trade activities between Thailand and Lao PDR occurring on the border of Mukdahan Province as the case study. Mukdahan has been accepted as a major entrance not only to Lao but Vietnam with the geographically advantage. This research has used both qualitative and quantitative technique to collect the data and analyzed that data to answer the research's question. It started with compiling qualitative data from various sources and activities prior to operationalizing them via questionnaire survey. This research has showed that barriers affecting trade between Thai and Lao PDR can be categorized into three main groups based on sources of these impediments, i.e. barriers induced by overseas economic and political conditions, those derived from factors related to Thai government, and barriers influenced by factors internal to the trading firm. It can be concluded that major sources of border trading barriers are failure of both Thai and Lao public administration to facilitate trade flows between the two countries. A barrier to Border Trade along the East-West Economic Corridor is one of the economic cases that focused on the border trader activities (Jeroenwanit & Ratanasithi, 2011).

***The Effectiveness of Thailand–Laos Border Trade Strategic Management***, according to International Business & Economics Research Journal, this study was conducted in the years 2010 and 2011. This research focused on Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, and Mukdahan provinces in the northeast of Thailand via the quantitative method, has provided 352 questionnaires to entrepreneurs who conducted cross-border trade through the customhouses in these provinces. The researchers had analyzed this data using means, percentages, factor analysis, and regression analysis and the qualitative method, and conducted a focus group of 16 key participants, such as entrepreneurs, customs officers, directors, and officers of the Office of Provincial Commerce, as well as the management team of the Provincial Chamber of Commerce. The researchers had analyzed this data using content analysis and descriptive analysis. This research has showed the guidelines for the strategic management of cross-border trade between Thailand and Laos which first is both Thailand and Laos should solve any border-trade problems together and second is border trade management should have only one unit and/or department with management authority. Currently many units and departments are involved in managing cross-border trade. The Effectiveness of Thailand–Laos Border Trade Strategic Management is one of the economic cases that focused on the strategic management of cross-border trade between Thailand and Laos (Nanudorn et al., 2012).

## **2. Methodology**

### ***2.1 Scopes: Procedure and Study Area***

This study is a descriptive research study using survey method. The field of study conducted in Mukdahan province, Thailand and Savannakhet province, Laos. The population included the local people who live along the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge in both sides of the Mekong River. The 200 local people are the sample chosen for this study. A convenient sampling design was used in this study. This means that no random sampling or assignment was performed. Convenient sampling was used because of the time constraints imposed on this study, *the researchers had only one week to collect the data*. Limitation of the studies the researchers foresee.

1. The population of the experimental group is quite small, and the outcomes might not represent the majority of the whole society.
2. Accessibility, the local people may not be willing to give full cooperation in giving the right answer or information to our questions because the questions might be too risk for them.

3. Non-respondent bias occurs when those who do not respond to a survey differ in important ways from those who respond or participate. This bias can work in either direction.
4. Fluency in a language, the problem can occur with those who are not fluent in English. They are limited in being able to read and understand the statements. Resulting, the quality of the answers might quite poor.
5. Different cultural backgrounds may affect the way the researcher communicate and cooperate with the local people.
6. The researcher may not get enough time to interview all local people within specific period of time since most of the local people will be busy with their businesses.

## 2.2 Definition of Terms

**Economic:** Income of the local people, development of households and businesses.

**Friendship Bridge:** The Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge over the Mekong River connects Mukdahan province in Thailand with Savannakhet province in Laos.

**International Bus:** Buses depart from the Mukdahan Bus Station to Savannakhet Bus Station.

**Local People:** The people who live in Mukdahan province and Savannakhet province. Particularly, who live close to the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge.

**Local Village:** *Bangsaiyai* district in Mukdahan province and Savannakhet province.

**Market:** The Indochina market in Mukdahan and *Singapore Market in Savannakhet*.

**Mukdahan Province:** It is the 73rd province of Thailand.

**Satisfaction:** The act of providing what is needed or desired or the act of satisfying a need or desired.

**Savannakhet Province:** It is a province of Laos.

**Social and Environment:** Social and environment situations and living standards of the local people.

## 2.3 Instrument

A 5-point Likert-type scale questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument in order to obtain the local people satisfaction on the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections. The first section contained the items which asked participants about their demographic information. The second section asked participants to rate their overall satisfaction on 15 different items. The forced choice statements presented were in order of Very Satisfied (5), Satisfied (4), Neutral (3), Dissatisfied (2) and Very Dissatisfied (1). The last section asked participants to provide their opinion on the given open-ended questions.

## 2.4 Data Collection Process

After arriving to the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge, the questionnaires were given to participants. Then, the researchers explained the nature of the survey and how the results were going to be used. The participants were invited to participate in the survey voluntary and their responses would be kept confidential.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

All of the data will be collected and analyzed with percentage or statistics. Descriptive statistics will be used to explain about the variables. The researcher used Weighted Average formula for data analysis through Microsoft office pack that contains Microsoft Excel software. This formula is used to calculate the average value of a particular set of numbers with different levels of relevance.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Demographic Information of Thai Respondents from Mukdahan Province

Of 100 Thai's respondents, the number of male is more than the number of female with percentage of 51 and 49 respectively. The ages of the respondents' ranged from 22 years old to more than 60 years old. The majority of Thai's respondents are age between 45 - 50 years old with the percentage of 31, 36 - 40 years old with the percentage of 22 and 56 - 60 years old with the percentage of 20 respectively. Of the survey respondents, 50 percent are merchants, 27 percent are drivers and 11 percent are government officers. Another profession included travelers, visitors, and students. The majority of respondents earn approximately 11,000 - 15000 Baht per month with the percentage of 27 and 5,100 - 7,000 Baht per month with the percentage of 21% respectively.

### 3.2 Satisfaction on Economic Aspect

The respondents were asked about how the opening of the bridge affected the economic conditions of their businesses and careers. According to the surveys, the Thai respondents, especially the local retailer who own small shops, tended to satisfy their lives on economic aspect at neutral level with the percentage of 3.276. The main reason is the local retailers believed that since the bridge was built, they did not earn more profits or net earnings than the past. They claimed that Lao's customers used to buy products by ordering the Mukdahan's retailers and then imported through the Mekong River by boat. However, it was quite difficult to transport those goods by boat. In the present day, since we have the Friendship Bridge, the expansion of the department stores has been increasing, such as Tesco Lotus, Big C and Makro. It made things easier to Laos's customers because they can cross the Mekong River to Thailand by driving their own cars. Moreover, they also have many choices to buy products with the lower prices. This directly affected to Mukdahan's retailers. When Lao's customers have a chance to buy products from department stores, it means that the local retailers in Mukdahan lose profits that they used to gain.

### 3.3 Satisfaction on Social and Environment Aspect

The respondents were asked about how the opening of the bridge affected their social situations in various dimensions, such as fundamental structure, cultural exchange, health care and public sanitation, environmental issues and international crime. According to the surveys, the Thai respondents tended to satisfy their lives on social and environment aspect at neutral level with the percentage of 3.466, which means that they neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. According to the study since the opening of the bridge, the researchers found out that the local people had more opportunity to learn and exchange in traditional cultures and ways of life of Lao's people. The exchange of cultures and tradition assist the local people to enhance and develop a deep understanding of cultural diversity between Thailand and Laos. In addition, the bridge had brought about the change of fundamental structure, as well as the *health care* sector and sanitation system started seeing *improvements* in the city of Mukdahan. However, the main findings on negative impact is that the bridge has caused several environmental pollutions, such as pollution of the river by waste garbage and trash, the rapid *increase* in private cars is a major cause of air pollution. In a meantime, the bridge led to an increase in the numbers of transnational crimes, such as drug, human trafficking, casinos and money laundering.

### 3.4 Satisfaction on Transportation Aspect

The respondents were asked about how the change of transportation system in term of international bus affected on their satisfaction's level. According to the surveys, the Thai respondents tended to satisfy their lives on transportation aspect at neutral level with the percentage of 3.652, which means that they neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Since the better transportation linkages and logistics came to Mukdahan, the local people and travelers can easily cross Thai – Lao border via the Second Thai – Lao Friendship Bridge across the Mekong. The previous research, ***“Do Location and Cross-border Activity Matter in the Presence of Cross-border Economic Intergration?”*** stated that “the number of people crossing the Thai-Lao border via the Mukdahan international gate in Muang district has increased from 152,249 persons in 2000 to 220,965 persons in 2004 and it is very likely that the number of people crossing the border will rise sharply in 2007” (Panpiemras et al., 2007). There is an international bus connecting Mukdahan and Savannakhet bus station. When conducting this study, the researchers decided to cross border from Mukdahan to Savannakhet via an international bus. The bus was on time and provided good service. However, many of Thai's respondents have never taken an international bus because they usually go to Savannakhet province by their own vehicles.

### 3.5 Demographic Information of Lao Respondents from Savannakhet Province

Of 100 Lao's respondents, the number of female is more than the number of male with percentage of 67 and 33 respectively. The ages of the respondents' ranged from 22 years old to more than 60 years old. As reflected in Table 2, the majority of Lao's respondents are age between 25 - 35 years old with the percentage of 38, 36 - 40 years old with the percentage of 31 and 45 - 50 years old with the percentage of 12 respectively. Of the survey respondents, 88 percent are merchants, 6 percent are drivers and 3 percent are students. Another profession included travelers, visitors, and government officers. The majority of respondents earn approximately 5,100 - 7,000 Baht per month with the percentage of 27 and 7,100 - 10,000 Baht per month with the percentage of 25% respectively.

### 3.6 Satisfaction on Economic Aspect

The respondents were asked about how the opening of the bridge affected their economic conditions focusing on the net monthly income of local people, net earnings on international import and export products, several of

goods and services, the expansion of the department store and detail, and the expansion of investment project. According to the surveys, the Lao respondents, tended to satisfy their lives on economic aspect at neutral level with the percentage of 3.914, which means that they neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. After the achievement of the Second Friendships Bridge, the local people indicated that their income and net earnings on international trade still in the same level. There are more several of goods and services and also more department stores and detail shops opened. The investment projects are sharply increasing. Some new employment opportunities have been created, particularly on the Lao side. The major new employer to date is a new Casino to attract gamblers from the Thai side. This can be viewed as both positive as well as negative.

### *3.7 Satisfaction on Social and Environment Aspect*

The respondents were asked about how the opening of the bridge affected their social situations in various dimensions focusing on the well-being of local people, sanitation system, exchanged of culture between two countries, environmental problems, and problem of crimes. According to the surveys, the Lao respondents tended to satisfy their lives on social and environment aspect at neutral level with the percentage of 3.538, which means that they neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. After the achievement of the Second Friendships Bridge, the local people thought that the standard of living is getting better and it is constantly improving. Cultural exchanges were also initiated along the border between Lao's people and Thai's people. However, the local people still concerned the health risks that they might face from bad sanitation system. In addition, the environmental problems are getting worse because the number of cars and people who travel to Savannakhet has been increasing in every single day. These vehicles tended to emit more pollution. For problem of international crime, the situation is also getting worse because there are more smuggling and drugs flow into the border.

### *3.8 Satisfaction on Transportation Aspect*

The respondents were asked about how the change of transportation system in term of international bus affected on their satisfaction's level. According to the surveys in this part, the Lao respondents tended to satisfy their lives on transportation aspect at satisfied level with the percentage of 4.194. Most of the local people in Savannakhet satisfied on transportation system because in the past, they had only way to transport to Thai border which is by boat and boat wasn't safety enough. Also, it wasted a lot of time when going back and forth by boat. Since the Friendship Bridge was built between Savannakhet and Mukdahan, it made a big difference for them because they can cross the bridge to Mukdahan directly by their own cars or take an international bus. However, the researchers only focused on the use of international bus, International bus is very useful to Laos's people. Firstly, they can ride the bus safely and enjoy themselves. Secondly, they don't have to pay a lot of money because the price is fare and 45 baht per round is reasonable. Finally, by taking the bus, the local people usually take only 30-45 minutes and the bus departs every 30 minutes.

*In conclusion, for the future study the same or similar study pattern using the same questionnaires and methodology can be conducted in other areas that the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge is located. This research cannot assure that the result the researchers received from the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge would be the same to other areas of study. Therefore, in case of future study the researchers might receive differences and more effective information than the present research.*

## **4. Discussion and Recommendations**

This study's results suggested that the government's first priority for both countries should be to assist the local people, particularly the poor that living in the border areas, to become more involved in cross-border activities and to seek benefit from the economic opportunities, social and environment opportunities, and transportation opportunities which created by the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge.

### *4.1 Economic Aspect*

According to the findings, Thai respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied on economic aspect as well as Lao respondents. In order to increase the satisfaction level of economic aspect of the local people, the researchers thus endorse below policy to the government:

- 4.1.1 Providing proper occupational and financial training programs as a border's activities. The government should create a special trading zone in border markets or near international gates that would enable poor people to rent spaces at affordable prices.
- 4.1.2 Increasing the competitiveness of local firms by helping local enterprises to develop high quality goods and services that meet international standards.

- 4.1.3 Supplying an adequate educational system to the locals in order to create local capability to adjust in economic integration.

#### 4.2 Social and Environment Aspect

According to the findings, Thai respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied on social and environment aspect as well as Lao respondents. In order to increase the satisfaction level of economic aspect of the local people, the recommendations are recommended to the government:

- 4.2.1 Taking advantage of the border locations by creating tourism attractions and promoting tourism activities in the border areas.
- 4.2.2 Seeking sustainable development solutions for air pollution, wasted trash and wasted water.
- 4.2.3 Implementing the policy that will help to control or prevent human migration in between the border areas.

#### 4.3 Transportation Aspect

According to the findings, Thai respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied on transportation aspect, but Lao respondents tended to satisfied on this aspect. The below recommendations has been suggested in order to increase the satisfaction level of transportation aspect of the local people:

- 4.3.1 Transportation networks should be developed by connecting local roads to main roads which go strength to the Friendship Bridge.
- 4.3.2 Safe and great road conditions should have been maintained.

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