



Transnationalism and Multi-dimensional Flow of Remittance in Cambodia

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Abstract

Since migration from Cambodia to Thailand has become a phenomenon, emerging studies have mainly discussed the development impacts of remittances on Cambodia. However, lacking transnationalism conceptuality, those studies have underplayed the broader logics behind the flow of remittances into Cambodia. This study seeks to fill the gap by utilizing a conceptualization of transnationalism. Drawing upon empirical data from two migrant-sending villages in Banteay Meanchey province, Cambodia, this study finds that there are socioeconomic and sociocultural logics in explaining multidimensional flow of remittances into migrant-sending households and the whole community. On the one hand, remittance flow is determined by various forms of socioeconomic contracts such as house modernization, asset accumulation, agricultural intensification, children's education, shadow banking, housing installment, loan and borrowings, and informal real estate intermediary. On the other hand, sociocultural determinants, such as marriage norms, family narratives, and Buddhist norms and practices, explain the regularity of remittance

Introduction

Since its transition in 1990s, Cambodia has experienced gradual growth and arrived at a new point of high integration and connectivity due to its accession to various regional initiatives, namely the Association of Southeast Asian

Nations (ASEAN). This rise in connectivity provokes questions on the reconfiguration of its population as post-conflict Cambodia still faces challenges including unemployment, poverty, and population growth.¹ As a result, many Cambodian people seek alternative livelihood strategies, one of

¹ National Institute of Statistics, Labour and Social Trends in Cambodia 2010 (Phnom Penh: Cambodia's Ministry of Planning, 2014).

which is international migration as a means to access resources and capital in more advanced countries.²

From 2000 to 2015, the percentage of Cambodians migrating overseas has increased from 3.7% out of 12 million total populations to 7.6% out of 15.5 million total populations. The top destination country is Thailand, which receives 68% of total Cambodian migrants.³ This massive outflow of migrant workers is boosted by bilateral agreements between Cambodia and Thailand. For an instance, in 2014, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Employment of Workers to foster legal recruitment of Cambodian workers to Thailand. Then, over 700,000 Cambodian workers were registered.⁴ Today, migrant workers are acknowledged as agents of innovation and development since the Cambodian government and international development institutions are preparing effective and comprehensive frameworks and policies to

sustain development based on Cambodian overseas workers.⁵

Aside from attracting the attention of government and NGOs, the migration from Cambodia to Thailand has elicited academic interest. Recent scholarship has focused on topics relating to migration patterns,⁶ legal status and vulnerable well-beings of Cambodian immigrants,⁷ and general consequences of international migration on various aspects such as family roles,⁸ poverty alleviation,⁹ livelihood choices,¹⁰ and financial settings.¹¹ Unfortunately, these studies generally lack a transnational approach which delves into multi-stranded relations and spaces shared by both immigrants in Thailand and non-migrants in Cambodia. Instead, they are preoccupied with a ruptured framework that only sticks to experiences and livelihoods of either migrants or those individuals and communities that remain in Cambodia.

Drawing upon empirical data collected from two villages in Banteay

² Eun Hee Lee, *Poverty, Livelihoods, Social Capital, and Migration: A Case Study of Two Villages in Northwest Cambodia* (PhD Thesis) (Brighton: University of Sussex, 2005).

³ OECD/CDRI, *Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development in Cambodia* (Paris: OECD, 2017).

⁴ Mekong Migration Network, *The Precarious Status of Migrants in Thailand: Reflections on the Exodus of Cambodian Migrants and Lesson Learnt* (Hong Kong: Mekong Migration Network, 2014).

⁵ Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, *Policy on Labour Migration for Cambodia 2015-2018*, (Phnom Penh: Royal Government of Cambodia, 2014).

OECD/CDRI, *Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development in Cambodia*.

⁶ Sarthi Acharya, "Migration Patterns in Cambodia: Causes and Consequences," *Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Migration and Development* (Bangkok: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2003).

⁷ John C. Walsh and Makararavy Ty, "Cambodian Migrants in Thailand: Working Conditions and Issues," *Asia Journal of Social Science* (2011) 23-29.

⁸ Sabina Lawreniuk and Laurie Parsons Mother, "Grandmother, Migrant: Elder Translocality and the Renegotiation of Household Roles in Cambodia," *Environment and Planning A*, 49(2017), 1664-1683.

⁹ Roth Vathana and Luca Tiberti, "Economic Effects of Migration on the Left-Behind in Cambodia," *The Journal of Development Studies*, (2016) 1-19.

¹⁰ Maryann Bylander, "Depending on the Sky: Environmental, Distress, Migration, and Coping in Rural Cambodia," *International Migration* 53 no. 5 (2013): 135-147.

¹¹ Maryann Bylander, "Borrowing Across Borders: Migration and Microcredit in Rural Cambodia," *Development and Change*, 45(2014), 284-307.

Meanchey province, Cambodia, this study highlights the occurrences of socioeconomic and sociocultural logics in multidimensional flow of remittances into the households and the whole community. The paper has three sections. The first section discusses the existing studies of transnationalism focusing on the concept of transnational social fields, which gives broader understanding on remittance flow. Building on the reviewed literature, I pinpoint a theoretical limitation that underplays the roles of migrant-sending households and communities in catalyzing the flow of remittances. The second section describes a methodology which focuses on research sites, the context of migration, and data collection methods. The third section proceeds with the occurrences of socio-economic and sociocultural logics in regulating the multidimensional flow of remittances into the migrant-sending households and the community.

Transnational Social Fields as Linkages for Remittance Flow

Scholars have long been interested in the topic of immigrant assimilation, particularly in regard to the migration of workers from poor countries to rich countries. Among other issues, many scholars have discussed the relationship between immigrants and the informal economy in the receiving countries. For instance, the rise of the informal economy in the United States does not reside in the influx of immigrants, but is the result of structural transformations of the larger urban economy.¹² Immigrants are just the one of the groups who seize the opportunities which allow them to be part of the informal economy. They are not the direct cause of it.¹³ Likewise, in Germany, the increase of immigrant participation in the informal labour market is the result of post-war deregulation policies on foreigners,¹⁴ while in the Netherlands the rise of informal enterprises actually depends on high demand of cheaper labour and marginal-

¹² Saskia Sassen, "The Informal Economy," in *Dual City: Restructuring New York*, ed. Mollenkopf, John H. and Manuel Castells (New York: Russell Sage, 1991), 79-101.

¹³ Saskia Sassen, "Informalization: Imported Through Immigration or a Feature of Advanced Economy?," *WorkingUSA* 3, no.6 (2000): 6-26.

¹⁴ Czarina Wilpert, "Migration and Informal Work in the New Berlin: New Forms of Work or New Sources of Labour?," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 24, no.2 (1998): 269-294.

ization of immigrants.¹⁵ Additionally, the non-economic impacts of immigrants were also discussed with emphasis on the emerging citizenships,¹⁶ race differentials,¹⁷ uncertainty in immigrant legality,¹⁸ and social mobility of immigrants within different ethnic groups¹⁹ and different generations.²⁰

In addition to discussions on immigrant assimilation, other scholars have taken a different glimpse into a conceptual framework that calls for interconnectedness between immigrants and home. The conceptual framework is called “transnationalism” which prefers a term “transmigrant” in lieu of “emigrant” or “immigrant” on the ground that *transmigrants* not only assimilate and make changes in the host countries but also forge multidimensional relations and networks with those in their home countries, beyond the containment of state-defined boundaries.²¹ With regard to the decline in nation-state containment, scholars have proposed a

framework that contemporary societies have changed not only their outer relations between and beyond nation states but also their internal quality. What matters most is the ambivalence in what and who constitutes the society or field which people are living in and crossing on.²²

In line with the proposal to rethink the meaning of societies, transnationalism scholars contend that human society is rather transnational. They found that immigrants actually do not just leave but carry their homelands with them across national boundaries. To do so, the immigrants re-territorialize their transnational space by establishing connections and ties with non-migrants and relatives living in their homelands. In this essence, though transmigrants are visibly limited by national boundaries, they are invisibly limitless because their sense of nation appears to be quite mobile and transnational.²³ It therefore provokes a reconsideration of society and social membership.

¹⁵ Robert Kloosterman, Joanne van der Leun, and Jan Rath, “Across the Border: Immigrants’ Economic Opportunities, Social Capital, and Informal Business Activities,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 24, no.2 (1998): 249-268.

¹⁶ Lirio K. Negroni, review of *Remaking Citizenship: Latina Immigrants and New American Politics*, by Kathleen M. Coll, *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 38, no.3, Article 12 (2011): 181-184.

¹⁷ Cybelle Fox and Thomas A. Guglielmo, “Defining America’s Racial Boundaries: Blacks, Mexicans, and European Immigrants, 1890-1945” *American Journal of Sociology* 118, no.2, (2012): 327-379.

¹⁸ Cecilia Menjivar, “Liminal Legality: Salvadoran and Guatemalan Immigrants’ Lives in the United States,” *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no.4 (2006): 999-1037.

¹⁹ Lucinda Platt, “New Destinations? Assessing the Post-migration Social Mobility of Minority Ethnic Groups in England and Wales,” *Social Policy & Administration* 39, no. 6 (2005): 697-721.

²⁰ Peter Catron, “Made in America? Immigrant Occupational Mobility in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” *American Journal of Sociology* 122, no.2 (2016): 325-378.

²¹ Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, “Transnationalism: A New Analytical Framework for Understanding Migration,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 645 (1992): 1-24.

²² Ulrich Beck, “The Cosmopolitan Perspective: Sociology of the Second Age of Modernity,” *British Journal of Sociology* 51, no.1 (2000): 79-105.

²³ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton-Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne: Gordon and Breach, 1994).

Later scholarship reevaluated the meaning of society and social membership using a notion of “transnational social fields”.²⁴ The field is a set of multiple interlocked networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are exchanged, organized, and transformed. Transnational social fields distinguish the ways of being and the ways of belonging amongst transnational individuals. Levitt and Glick Schiller explain:

“If individuals engage in social relations and practices that cross borders as a regular feature of everyday life, then they exhibit a transnational way of being. When people explicitly recognize this and highlight the transnational elements of who they are, then they are also expressing a transnational way of belonging”.²⁵

They further add that Catholicism exemplifies a platform of transnational social field in which Cuban immigrants in Miami, by conducting their Catholic rituals and shrines in places they are settling, can symbolically move back-and-forth the two societies (home and host), and sustain their past memories when they were in Cuba and future when they will return.²⁶

The ways of being and ways of belonging not only maintain symbolic transnationality, but also serve as a platform for capital circulation. One example of this phenomenon can be observed in a study by Glick Schiller and Fouron on Haitian community in the United States. Through the language of blood and descent,²⁷ Haitian immigrants in the United States and Haitians in Haiti maintain ties to their family members and non-family members living in Haiti and construct transnational networks. To elaborate, the immigrants can access to and enhance the social capital just by sharing a common sense of nationalism in language of blood and descent. The acquired social networks have economic benefits for the immigrants because they could facilitate the immigrants with the economic possibilities and investments in Haiti.²⁸ Another study by Amporn Jirattikorn situates in a transnational society lived by Shan immigrants in Chiang Mai and Shan elites in Myanmar. The society is forged by “cross-border ethno-nationalism” which is shared and practiced by both groups in both sides. It is a kind of structure that Shan immigrants are entitled to pay tributes to their home nation via economic, social, and political cross-border activities. What Shan immigrants in Chiang Mai

²⁴ Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, “Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society,” *International Migration Review* 38, no.3 (2004): 1002-1039.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 1028.

²⁷ Obligation is a key to understand how the language of blood and decent helps establish a transnational social field lived by Haitian diasporas and the left-behinds in Haiti. These two kinds of Haitians are socially defined as brothers and sisters, etc., and those Haitians living in immigrant states like the U.S. continue to have *obligation* to those they left behind (see Glick Schiller and Fouron, 1999: 340-341).

²⁸ Nina Glick Schiller and George E. Fouron, “Terrains of Blood and Nation: Haitian Transnational Social Fields,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no.2 (1999): 340-366.

receive in return is symbolic capital in forms of social and political recognitions by Shan elites in Myanmar. Therefore, they become emancipated to continue their lives and social membership in both Chiang Mai and Shan state, as argued to be forever transnational.²⁹

The aforementioned cases in Haiti and Chiang Mai shed light on transnational linkages only from the immigrants' perspectives—how immigrants forge social networks and ties to secure gains from sending communities. However, we know almost nothing about the perspectives of non-migrants in the sending community. To elaborate, the existing studies only reveal the ways in which immigrants maintain the ways of being and the ways of belonging to their home countries in order to secure their gains. Yet, it does not mean that the non-migrants at home do nothing in reciprocity.³⁰ In fact, they too have potentials to build ways of being and ways of belonging with the immigrants who are obligated to send remittances necessary for livelihoods of a wide range of people at home.

Finally, I claim that the concept of transnational social field is a powerful instrument for conceptualizing the potential linkages connecting those who stay behind and those who leave. Without moving physically by themselves, the left-behind individuals and communities in Cambodia

can maintain cross-border social relations with the immigrants in Thailand through various forms of communications. Moreover, to a large extent, the communication serves as a potential platform that attracts certain qualities and frequency of remittances (i.e. capital) into the sending households and community.

Methodology

The field research was conducted in two villages: Kandal and Poy Samrong in Preah Netr Preah commune (*khum*), Banteay Meanchey province, northwest Cambodia. The commune's economic status ranks lower than its neighbors, so economic migration is unavoidable for economic relief (Figure 1). The site was chosen for three reasons: geographical proximity to Thailand, long experience of migration, and dynamics of groups with different socio-economic profiles. Since the villages are close to border checkpoints, and transportation is getting easier, people now reach Bangkok in between 5 and 6 hours by local taxi networks. In addition, villagers have extensive experience in migrating to Thailand in two periods of time. The first period started in late 1980s or early 1990s, and ended in mid 2000s. The second period, on the other hand, began consecutively up until today, in which the main reasons for migration include the damages and

²⁹ Amporn Jirattikorn, "Forever Transnational: The Ambivalence of Return and Cross-border Activities of the Shan across the Thailand-Myanmar Border," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 38, no.1 (2017): 75-89.

³⁰ Marcel Mauss argues that human relations in a society remain constant due to the norm of reciprocity, on the account of which gift exchange is an obligation to survive the relations (also see *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison. London: Cohen & West, 1950).

Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement," *American Sociological Review* 25, no.2 (1960): 161-178.

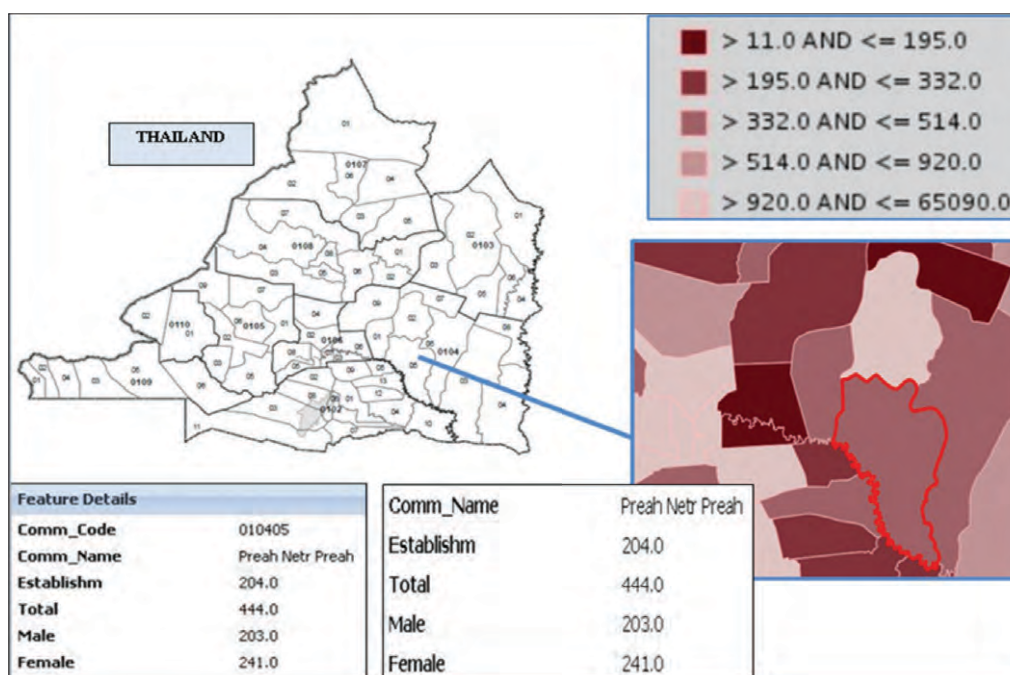


Figure 1: Banteay Meanchey province and Preah Netre Preah's Economical Status
 Source: Statistics Bureaus of Japan http://www.stat.go.jp/info/meetings/cambodia/pdf/01com_m2.pdf (Access 06/08/2018), and Harvard University's World Map database <http://worldmap.harvard.edu/maps/8012> (Access 05/03/2018).

devaluation of agricultural products, and land confiscation motivated by the local military and economic land concessions. In the villages, there are social groups with different socioeconomic profiles—between those who survive on receiving remittances from migrants in Thailand and those who survive on running businesses and trades in the villages.

I use both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. I conducted thirty-three semi-structured interviews with migrants' relatives, non-migrants, return migrants, and village chiefs, and I observed households' lifestyles and communication with migrants in Thailand. With qualitative method, I expect

to understand how the left-behinds maintain relations with the migrants so that they could receive remittances as their common income. Additionally, I conducted a household survey (N=64) to seek general information of remittance flow and usages. I visited the villages twice. The first time was in April 2017 during which I observed the villages and migrants visiting on occasions like Khmer New Year.³¹ The second time was between December 2017 and March 2018 when I spent the rest of my fieldwork on the survey, interviews, and observation. To note, the research ensures the confidentiality of informants by using pseudonyms for the rest of the paper.

³¹ In fact, migrants visit home on other celebrations like *Pchum Ben* and *Kak-Then*. "*Pchum Ben*" is an annual cultural celebration that lasts for 15 days in total during which people go to the temple for making offerings to indicate respect for their dead ancestors. Among these 15 days, the last three days are the occasions that attract the most majority of people. "*Kak-Then*" is an annual religious celebration when Buddhist followers contribute all kinds of offerings especially money to make merits and good deeds.

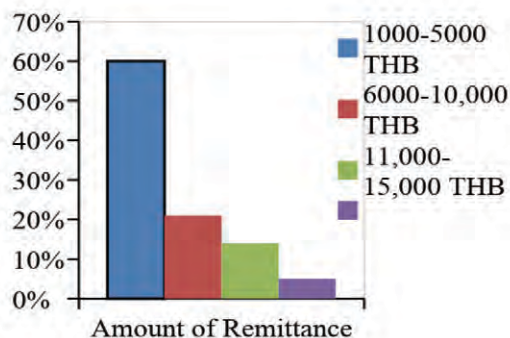


Table 1: Monthly Remittance by Households

Remittance Flow in General: Amount, Frequency, Channel

According to the survey, different households in Kandal and Poy Samrong receive different amounts of monthly remittance - approximately 60% of households receive remittance between 1,000 to 5,000 Thai Baht (THB), 21% receives remittance between 6,000 to 10,000 THB, while 14% receives between 11,000 to 15,000 THB. The remaining 5% receive up to 20,000 THB (Table 1). Overall, the differences of remittance quantity depend on the number of emigrant members and their left-behind children in each household. These monthly remittances are used for general purposes in households such as food, education, babysitting supplies, and healthcare. The result also depicts gender differentials in remittance management. While in 75% of total households, the use of remittances is primarily managed by mothers or wives manage, in 11% households, the fathers or husbands act as the primary managers of remittances (Table 2).

However, the time of sending remittances is not always determined by month. Occasional remittances occur when migrants are visiting home during cultural

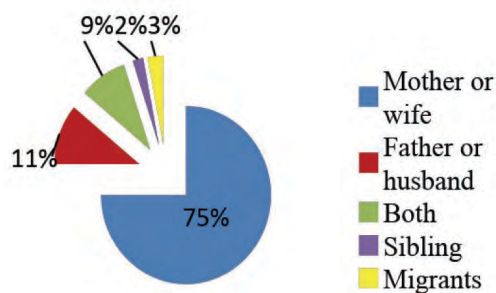


Table 2: Gender Differentials in Remittance Management

festivals or when families are in need. On annual occasions, such as *Khmer New Year* and *Pchum Ben*, each migrant may send 500 to 1,000 THB to their parents. For weddings and housewarmings, the migrants send between 400 and 600 THB to their parents who, in turn, attend the events on behalf of the migrants. Approximately, in a single wedding season, one household receives up to twenty invitations. There is also investment remittance which migrants send to their parents in order to buy land or to invest in rice farming.

All money is remitted in THB through informal money transmitters based in each village. The transmission process goes through a complex system which demands truthful networks in both Cambodia and Thailand. Initially, there must be one transmitter stationed in the village of receivers. Then, the transmitter has to secure his access a Thai bank in Thailand; there are two ways to secure the accessibility. The first way is to have a counterpart who stations in borderland towns like Poi Pet, whereby the counterpart easily crosses to Thailand and fetches money from a Thai bank or ATM. The

second way is to generate a Thai bank account by having a Thai citizen as the guarantee. The migrants in Thailand have to know the bank account of the transmitter carefully. Then, when they want to send money to their parents, they just send to his account and let the transmitter know. After confirming the transaction, the transmitter passes along the money to their waiting parents. In terms of transmission fee, transmitters made good money with 1000 THB for 10,000 THB transfer, accounting for 10%. However, now the fee rate has decreased down to 20, 40, 60, or 80 THB for 10,000 THB transfer, depending on tougher competition and available networks of each transmitter.³²

The advancement in telecommunication and transportation plays a key role in encouraging mutual visits between migrants in Thailand and their family members at home. In early years, migrants did not communicate with home frequently because the international phone calls and travelling were costly and dangerous. However, today migrants can visit and contact home with cheaper and safer ways. 50% of total households in my survey use both Facebook video calls and normal phone calls while the other 50% of households use *only* normal phone calls. Importantly, through Facebook, migrants and families exchange information and ideas more easily and more frequently. Therefore, they hardly miss the updated situations at home and in Thailand. The

exchanged information appears in both negative and positive images. On one hand, family members at home feel more relaxed and more tolerant to long distance and duration of migration because they are well informed of what the migrants' well-beings. On the other hand, family members especially parents, when seeing sad images on migrants' Facebook page or on video call, appear to be more intolerant. For instance, two mothers testified that they were broken-hearted when seeing unfortunate images of her sons working hard and eating bad meals. For this reason, she prefers using non-visual phone calls or getting away from Facebook to avoid seeing her sons' difficulties.

In addition, with telecommunication, migrants' parents also find it easier to visit their children in Thailand because the local taxi is more convenient and cheaper than in the past. It takes less than six hours to go from Kandal or Poy Samrong to Bangkok. The road infrastructure is convenient in the same way as legal proceeding. Several parents visited their children in Bangkok at least two times and their stay lasted at least two weeks according to visa allowance. Purposes of visit can be both for relaxation and family reunion. For the first, migrants want their aging parents to get relaxed and have fun by going to places like Bangkok and Pattaya. For the second, the migrants miss their children so much that they ask their parents to bring the children to Bangkok for the sake of family reunion.

³² One transmitter in Kandal receives only 20 THB for 10,000 THB because she has neither network in Poi Pet nor a Thai bank account. She partners with another money transmitter in a different district who can access to a counterpart in Poi Pet. Actually, the sender pays 60 THB for 10,000 THB, but because it has to go through three transmitters, the 60 THB is split to 20 THB equally for the three transmitters.

Socioeconomic Logics of Remittance Flow

In order to sustain the flow of remittances, both sending households and community play a key role in creating socioeconomic contracts that determine how migrants maintain their ways of being and ways of belonging with home; hence, the migrants are obliged to send remittances to the sending households and community accordingly.

At the household level, there are various socioeconomic contracts that support sending households to forge invisible but sturdy relations with migrants in Thailand, upon which the migrants are obliged to send remittance regularly. The contracts appear in forms of housing modernization, assets accumulation (i.e. land, gold), agricultural intensification, and education and childcare. First, amongst extremely poor households, the working migrants' parent often must upgrade their house in the home country from a broken wooden structure to a concrete structure. Since the parents cannot afford to build the house, they ask their migrant children to send money for the house construction. Second, other households need money to enlarge their economic income by investing the remitted capital into their domestic businesses (i.e. growing rice and buying lands). It is found that households, where the migrant children are still single, receive remittance to buy plots of land and buy new farming machines. These assets, though bought with migrant remittances, are

registered to the parents' ownership. Third, migrants have an economic obligation to send money to their parents to look after the little children; otherwise, they cannot have the time and space to work in Thailand. This is considered to be a source for aging parents who cannot earn any income but monthly remittance for childcare. Children's education takes much attention from migrant parents because the amount of remitted money depends on the children's school performance at school. They send more money for their teen children to go to school and buy new motorbikes or smartphones for them if they get good grades at school.

At the community level, the other locals who do not have any migrant family members but have remittance-related businesses also formulate socioeconomic determinants that regulate the importation of remittances into their revenue. Those determinants include: (1) informal banking system, (2) installment system, (3) loan and borrowings, and (4) informal real estate intermediary.

First, the local folks connect themselves to remittances through a traditional game that functions as a "shadow bank" which is joined by migrants' parents who secure monthly remittances. It provides informal savings, financings, and investment vehicles to a group of people without being regulated by the government.³³ The game is called in Khmer "tong-tin". Initially, it needs a trustee who has stable income and permanent residence, and who

³³ Kellee Tsai, "The Rise of Shadow Banking in China: The Political Economy of Modern Chinese State Capitalism," *Thought Leadership Briefs* 10, (2015): 1-4.

gathers a group of players. Because there are 42 players in total, the game will last 42 months accordingly. In the first month, all players, excluding the trustee, contribute an agreed amount of money (i.e. 3000 THB) into a common pool that secures communal accesses to the raised money, so in total it accounts for 123,000 THB (3000×41). Then, the trustee is the first to withdraw the raised money for any uses upon his wills, but he has to repay in monthly installments over consecutive 40 months. Technically, he pays 3000 THB per month. For the next consecutive 40 months, there are serial auctions in which all players, excluding the trustee, compete for the right to withdraw the money from the pool. In every auction, the winner can withdraw the raised money, plus the repaid installment from the trustee. However, the losing players contribute a different amount of money, minus the amount of winning offer in the auction. For example, if a player wins the auction with 200 THB offer, he gets only 115,000 THB in total [formula: $(3,000 - 200) \times 40 + 3,000$] because each losing player pays only 2800 THB. The next auctions are carried out in the same way till the last 42th month. To note, the winner in the prior auction cannot join in the next auctions; he only has to return the withdrawn money back to the team in installment system as the trustee does.

The game has an implication that players in urgent need of investment capital will win the auctions, while a villager in less urgent need just waits for the “final deal”. The final deal means he can accumulate all fully repaid credit from

previous players. He would finally get 123,000 THB. He gains money because he has paid to the monthly auctions in this formula [$3,000 - \text{winner offers}$]. Supposed that the offers rank 200 THB equally, the final player would gain 8,200 THB [formula: 200×41]. Mostly, the migrants’ parents prefer not to win the auction but to accumulate the final deal since they can gain. The migrants’ parents compete to win the auctions only when they need the money for building houses or investing in daily life. Instead, non-migrants in the community are more likely to win the auctions because they can access to investment capital without going to the formal bank which has higher interest rate and risks of foreclosures. Therefore, non-migrants in the community prefer to play the game with migrant households because their income from remittance is considered stable to reserve securitization. There are at least four or five groups of *tong-tin* game in Kandal and Poy Samrong, joined by migrants’ parents.

Second, in the wake of housing updates amongst migrants’ households, the local businessmen of construction supplies allocate a predatory payment method that incentivizes the households to buy their products with easier financing alternatives. The method is “installment sales” in which the households are allowed for partial deferral of payments. It requires the buyers to make regular payments or “installments” on a monthly basis, plus a certain interest rate of at least 20%. The households mostly accept this method because they trust in the regularity of remittances from their children in Thailand. Likewise, the businesses can

maximize their income in the long-term. Therefore, I argue that not only the migrants' parents but also the local businessmen pave the ways for attracting remittances into this revenue by offering easier financial systems, namely the installment sales. However, there have been cases of installment defaults amongst migrant households too as evident in the following cases:

Case 1: In 2009, Sothea ran a construction supplies shop near Kandal village. He chose the business because of the emergence of housing modernization amongst remittance-receiving households in Poy Samrong and Kandal. 80 % of his buyers are homeowners while 20% are the building contractors. He estimates that most buyers could afford about 70% of the total deals, leaving the rest 30% for installment payments. The buyers have to pay an extra 20% of interest for the monthly installments. His business saw the increase in daily revenue from 6,000 THB in 2009, to 20,000 THB in 2012, and now 80,000 THB. Out of 80,000 THB, he gets up to 30,000 THB in profit.³⁴

Case 2: Samnang began a building supplies business in 2014. Initially, he went bankrupt for several reasons, one of which was installment defaults. Admittedly, because he wanted to tie up loyal customers, he allocated installment method to migrant households in a contract that they had to repay with monthly remittances. The

installment debt of each household was estimated to be between 20,000 to 30,000 THB. Unfortunately, they broke the contract and left for Thailand without paying back. From that experience, he became more cautious with installment to migrant households, though he still practices installment sales. Afterwards, his business recovered and was extended into money transmissions and farming supplies, earning monthly revenue of about 5000 USD. An estimated 90% of the total revenue relates to housing constructions amongst migrant households.³⁵

Third, the regularity of remittances also encourages the non-migrants to allocate loans and borrowings more easily and in a predatory manner. The non-migrants concentrate giving loans to remittance-receiving households due to the fact that remittance-sending is stable and obligatory. To some extent, non-migrants who give loans and borrowings to migrants' parents absorb more fruition of remittances if compared to the migrants' households as seen in the following case:

Case 3: Navy's son and his wife are working in Thailand, leaving three children in her care. The monthly remittance Navy receives is not enough to deal with daily expense, so she needs to ask for loan from villagers. Navy indicated that loan givers in the village prefer migrant households because they value the regularity and reciprocity of remittances. She said, "We

³⁴ Interviewed with Sothea on January 31, 2018.

³⁵ Interviewed with Samnang on February 8, 2018.

*took the loan [20,000 THB] from others. We just worked to pay off the interest. That is because we migrated to Thailand. If [we] hadn't migrated to Thailand, they wouldn't give us loan.... If we take a loan for doing business in our country, they will not grant it."*³⁶

In addition, when migrant households have reached a certain level of material accumulation, such as a modern house, a new motorbike, or jewelry, their rich neighbors will recognize their prestigious status. Therefore, the mutual interactions between these two groups become more active and vibrant that borrowings and loaning are more possible. This is explained in the following cases:

Case 4: Saren had 5 children in burden. Being a widow with many children and living in helpless conditions, Saren was discriminated against by her neighbors. Her social interactions were poorly-received. Things have changed after her children grew up and migrated to Thailand. She built a new house and bought assets like land, gold and motorbikes. When asked whether she finds differences in social interactions now, Saren says, *"Today, since my children have been migrating, I have become better off. Life's different now. They [the neighbors] get to know me. They invite me to weddings and other celebrations, unlike the past when people discriminate against*

*me. They hated that I was poor and sick. When I needed loan, no one gave it to me. Today, no matter how much I want, they will grant it to me. I can get it from everyone.... Indeed, they wait for me to take loan from them."*³⁷

Case 5: With remittances from the children, Sitha upgraded her old house to be taller and bigger. She bought and upgraded new motorbikes. She now wears nice clothes and gold jewelry. With such material wealth, she feels more comfortable to interact with richer villagers and especially to ask for financial relief from them. The financial relief can be both loans and borrowings.³⁸

Fourth, the role of the village headman has been extended into a real estate intermediary who facilitates cross-border purchases of assets such as land and gold. His facilitation can take various forms, including investment consultancy and paperwork process. The headman looks for plots of land and then informs either the migrants in Thailand or the parents at home about the purchasable land. Several households follow the village headman's consultancy to buy land. Phanny, for instance, used the remitted money from her children in Thailand to buy a plot of land (38×40 meters in width) which cost her only 350,000 THB. The land now is estimated to cost at least 450,000 THB because the headman had proposed to the district government to build a country road that

³⁶ Interview with Navy on December 1, 2017.

³⁷ Interviewed with Saren on November 9, 2017.

³⁸ Interviewed with Sitha on December 2, 2017.

connects Phanny's land to farmland areas and to the main road.³⁹ Additionally, when some households need money from the bank to buy land, the headman also helps issuing certificate letters to get loan approval from the bank. Then, he helps the loan takers deal with their loans every month by making sure that the remittance is sent regularly.

Socio Cultural Logics of Remittance Flow

As important as socioeconomic logics, sociocultural logics play a crucial role in determining the regular flow of remittances to the sending households and community. At household level, the amount and frequency of received remittances depend on various cultural norms and narratives that circulate from households to migrants. For instance, because of patriarchy in marriage norm, migrant-son households enjoy less benefit of remittance if compared to migrant-daughter households. The reason is that the cultural norm expects the sons to relocate to live with the daughters' family, meaning that the migrant-daughter households will receive more labor forces after marriage. Also, when they have children, they tend to keep their children with the wife's family, so they have to send more remittance for childcare. In the meantime, migrant-son households complain that they receive less or no benefit because they have to keep the remitted money for the bride price for when their sons marry. Some households make uses of remittance for buying land only when the

sons are still single. If they get married, they will no longer send money to the parents since having their own family to take care.

Besides marriage norms, households create various remittance-induced narratives based on the fact that parents have dedicated themselves to bringing up children. Parents and siblings at home maintain and circulate those narratives in order to alert the migrants to take care of family in reciprocity. The migrants, therefore, have to be thrifty to save and send money to support the aging parents. If migrants fail to send remittance, they will insight moral sanction from family and society as they have taken the image of bad children. For instance, in Vuthea's family, there are 4 children working in Thailand. Upon being informed that her brothers bought a new smartphone, the oldest sister called to plead her brothers in Bangkok. She told them to resist their impulse towards modern materials. Vuthea repeats his daughter's preaching: "*Do not be so obsessed in buying new smartphones. Do not just think of getting fun. Please think of mom and dad. They have no one to count on. They have only you... You have to work hard. Do not neglect your responsibilities...*"⁴⁰

Vuthea also teaches his migrant children about Buddhist principles in gratitude: (1) *katannu* and (2) *katavedi*, which emphasize moral obligation of migrants to remit money whenever parents need. The first principle, *katannu*, means

³⁹ Interviewed with Phanny on December 18, 2017.

⁴⁰ Interviewed with Vuthea on December 01, 2017.

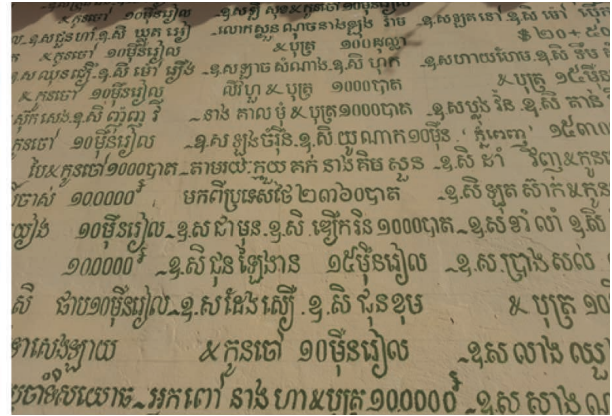
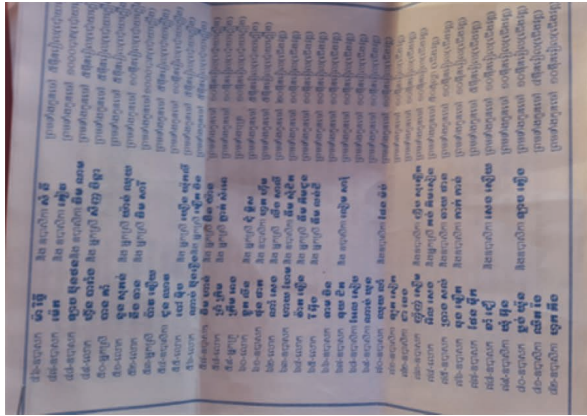


Figure 2: Names of contributors in the printed paper (left) and on the wall of crematorium (right)

that children need to be “aware” that they owe great gratitude to their parents for giving birth to them and for raising them. The second principle, *katavedi*, means that children have to “pay back” for parents’ dedication to children’s well-beings. Interestingly, he combines the two principles together as he expects his children to not only be aware of their parents’ dedication but also to pay them back for that dedication, so sending remittance is considered a mechanism of paying for the parents’ dedication. He reminds his children of this on big occasions like New Year, *Pchum Ben*, and other blessing rituals when migrants generally visit their homes.

At the community level, the local religious institution also pays a crucial role in developing the ways of being and ways of belonging between home and migrants, in pursuit of more possible means of remittance. Its role is to make it possible for what I call “transnational merit-making” in which migrants in Thailand donate money to the local temple in various ways. Firstly, the local monks sustain the faith in

Buddhism amongst transnational migrants so that they carry on donating merit-making money to local temple. When asked how to keep migrants spiritually connected to home villages, the local abbot highlighted three Buddhist teachings in Pali. They include (1) gratitude or obligation [*kataññu*], (2) patience or forbearance [*khanti*], and (3) trust or faith [*saddha*].⁴¹

The first means that children, no matter where they are at any circumstances, have to bear in mind that they will always owe gratitude to their parents who have brought them up. Also, they have to give offerings to parents when they are in need. The second has an implication that migrants have to work hard with patience and forbearance in order to save money; otherwise, they will not find jobs or save money back home. The third has specific implication on husbands and wives who live distant from one another due to migration. The husbands or wives have to sustain truth and faith in each other so that their long-distance relationship remains solid, regardless of spatial disconnection. The local

⁴¹ Interviewed with the abbot on January 11, 2018.

monks always preach with these three teachings either on the occasion that migrants and parents go to the temple on Khmer New Year and *Pchum Ben*, or on the occasion that they invite the monks to do blessing ceremony at home.

Secondly, the local temple committee⁴² calls for merit-making donations by spreading copies of an invitation letter to villagers. When migrants' parents receive the invitation letter, they inform their children in Thailand whether they want to make merit. Sometimes, the informed migrants gather their peers in the same worksite and raise donations for making merit. For instance, Navy informed her son in Thailand about *Kak-Then* ritual in the village. Her son then spread the information to other migrants and collected about 1,000 THB later sent for the merit-making to the local temple.

The raised money is used for general development both in the temple and in the village. The money raised for the temple may be used for entrance gates, crematoriums, restrooms, and common houses for monks, while the raised money for village may be used to build or repair roads as well as support to needy villagers. According to the local abbot, it is necessary to translate merit-making donations into development because doing so ensures accountability and philanthropy of the local temple which sustains faith of people especially overseas migrants in Buddhism. Even when villagers experienced a crop crisis, the amount of

merit-making donations did not see any decrease because migrants and their parents continue to make merit with remittances. Their names appear publicly in order to recognize their contributions development in the temple and community (Figure 2).

Thirdly, transnational merit-making appears to be more collective and larger in scale, involving local government and local religious institution. One instance is found in Poy Samrong. There an association called Poy Samrong Union which functions both as an association of senior citizens and as donation center has emerged. Its history began in 2000 when a local NGO named International Age International sponsored to construct a wooden structure serving as a center of senior citizens in Poy Samrong; it is well known by the villagers as "resting house" or "*sala-chor-tien*". The house serves as a public space where senior citizens gather on religious occasions such as Sila Day because the local temple is located a bit far. Since it was getting old, the village committee and temple committee ran a fund-raising campaign to raise money to build a new structure. As a result, in 2004 the old wooden structure was demolished and replaced with a new concrete structure. Then, the local governor named it "the Poy Samrong Union".

Its functions deal not only with senior citizens but also with fundraising campaigns for infrastructure development in Poy Samrong. The funding source largely relates to remittances from Thailand,

⁴² Temple committee here means something more than physical structure of temple lived by monks, but it refers mainly to an institutional organization of Buddhists which aims to deal with merit-making donation and the general development in the village.

according to the headman's estimation. There are two success stories that depict the fund raising campaigns by Poy Samrong Union for local development. The first story was a project which constructed a small road linking Poy Samrong to the main road. At that time, the temple committee and village committee launched fund raising activities. Then, migrant parents contacted to their children in Thailand in order to encourage them contribute to the project. The migrants donated to the project by remitting money to their parents. Also, the headman sent the announcement of the campaign to migrants in Thailand so that they can raise more funds from other migrants. In total, the raised fund reached three million KHR, but it did not fully compensate the whole expense which cost up to four million KHR in total. To fulfill the unfilled fund, the Poy Samrong Union hosted another campaign which raised extra one million KHR. According to record from the headman, about 50 % of the fund came from remittances while the rest was from non-migrants.

The second success story occurred in 2011 when there was restoration of a pond. The pond was getting shallow resulting from landslides. This had negative impacts on water resources for farmlands surrounding the village. At this time, the fund-raising campaign was done in a way that villagers were expected to buy the removed soil after the restoration finished. They could use the land for any purposes. Accordingly, the more people bought the removed soil, the deeper the restoration could go. Finally, the budget from soil

purchases reached 693,000 THB, and the pond was well-restored. Based upon the two cases, it is possible to say that the economic aspect alone cannot explain the regular flow of remittance because what does matter is something about cultural and religious rationality embedded to individual migrants who are morally obliged to send remittances.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to return to the first point of the introduction mainly highlighting that migration studies have received far more attention for rupture and assimilation conceptualizations. Transnationalism scholars have only paid attention to how immigrants formulate transnational relations and networks with home. To complement the existing literature, my study highlights that non-migrants in the sending ends also play active roles in forging transnational linkages and ties with the migrants in an attempt to regulate the remittance flow. These transnational linkages have wider implications on migrant-sending governments to the extent that people's local knowledge of remittance circulation cannot be taken for granted because the people already have their own mechanisms in dealing with transnational linkages and remittance beyond state intervention. They, the people, know how to stay connected with their family members in Thailand. Therefore, to keep the momentum of formal regionalization going, the government of Cambodia should also pay attention to the co-existing structures and

mechanism made by the people in sending villages.

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