

Program for Advancing Strategic International Networks to Accelerate the Circulation of Talented Researchers
Japan-ASEAN Collaboration Research Program on Innovative Humanosphere in Southeast Asia:
In search of Wisdom toward Compatibility Growth and Community in the World

Dispatch Report

Livelihood changes and social life in transforming Southeast Asian rural communities:
Collaborative research in Cambodia and its neighboring countries

Year: December 2014 to March 2015

Place of fieldwork: Cambodia and Thailand

Name: Kobayashi Satoru

Keywords: peaceful society, livelihood change, Cambodia, border area, agricultural extension in a conflict period

1. Research background

As a part of the research group analyzing essential qualifications for achieving a “peaceful society” in Southeast Asia and the world, this study will examine actual changes in Southeast Asian rural communities in the 20th and 21st century with a special interest in two areas of people’s lives: livelihoods and social life. Both are crucial for exploring historical changes in rural communities in the region and for estimating the future of human society **1**. The study focuses on Cambodia and its neighboring countries and will conduct collaborative research with young students and scholars in these countries.

2. Research purpose and aim

The research in FY2014 had two purposes. First, it aimed to collect basic information on rural communities in Cambodia and Thailand. Second, it developed collaborative networks with researchers in both countries.

I have studied Cambodian society and culture from the perspective of anthropology since the end of the 1990s. Through this program, I stayed at Phnom Penh from 26 December 2014 to 20 January 2015 and visited classes in the Faculty of Development Studies, Royal University of Phnom Penh for discussion with faculty, staff and students **2** on various issues of recent Cambodian society development. There were two faculty members from the Faculty of Development Studies, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Dr. Yin Soriya and Mr. Nup Sothun, who stayed at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto from the beginning of January 2015 to the end of March 2015 to conduct research on Cambodian society. I met them in Kyoto on 27 March 2015, before they returned, to discuss our future collaboration **3**.

After my time in Cambodia, I moved to Bangkok, Thailand from 21 January 2015 to 26 March 2015. During this period, I lived at the Bangkok Liaison Office at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. The office provided me with excellent research facilities and equipment such as a car and driver so that I could easily visit the offices of Thai scholars at Chulalongkorn University and rural provinces in central Thailand.

3. Results of the fieldwork

I made two short field trips during my stay in Cambodia and Thailand. Both were to visit rural communities in the Cambodia-Thai border area and to study changes in livelihood and expansion of connectivity in local people's lives. The area has unique characteristics in history and geography. First, it is known as the place of the most long-lasting conflict during the Cold War period. The development path seems to have been strongly influenced by the Thai economy in terms of supply and circulation of agricultural materials/products **4**, which is different from the development history of communities in central Cambodia.

The short trips helped me to understand the actual conditions of development in the area, which is much more complex than I had expected. One of the most important findings obtained during the fieldwork was the increase in land accumulation in the border area. Cambodian government has sent several young students to survey the land in rural areas since 2012. In the policy, the aim of the land survey was to contribute to the stabilization of rural people's livelihoods. However, several interviews with local farmers showed that some agri-business companies and/or wealthy individuals became more aggressive than before in purchasing agricultural land after completion of the land survey. This situation is opposite of the purpose of the land survey policy. However, I learned of interesting examples of agricultural knowledge and technique extension for growing fruit from Thailand to Cambodia. There were former Khmer Rouge soldiers who obtained necessary knowledge and techniques for farming fruit, such as orange and longan, from Thai farmers who they encountered in Thailand during the conflict. It was interesting to learn that part of the agricultural knowledge and technique expansion in the border area was embedded deep in the local dynamics of the conflict experience.

In Thailand, I had the opportunity to briefly observe the living conditions of Cambodian migrant laborers who worked at construction sites in Chonburi province. Employers let them to live in row houses called a "camp" that was surrounded by walls. I could not conduct proper interviews but short conversations with Cambodian migrants have motivated me to study their migrant experiences in the near future.

4. Implications and impact on future research

The purpose of the dispatch in FY2014 was to collect basic information on rural communities in Cambodia and Thailand as well as to establish a research network with local universities and institutions. Fieldwork in the Cambodia-Thai border area was significant for me to understand the dynamics and trends of the changing livelihood and social life in rural communities. The dispatch helped to successfully prepare the research agenda in FY2015. I plan to stay longer in Cambodia in FY2015 than in FY2014, to conduct fieldwork with Cambodian researchers and students on rural livelihood and social life.



Photo 1

Saplings of cassava in a farm land of Cambodia-Thai border area (Kamrieng, Battambang, Cambodia. February 2015)



Photo 2

Orange farm operated by small farmer (Veal Veng, Pursat, Cambodia. March 2015)



Photo 3

The village chief explains his life history as a Khmer Rouge soldier and orange farming (Veal Veng, Pursat, Cambodia. March 2015)



Photo 4

Cassava cultivation by small farmer (Veal Veng, Pursat, Cambodia. March 2015)



Photo 5
Current large-scale land reclamation by rich outsider
(Veal Veng, Pursat, Cambodia. March 2015)



Photo 6
The row houses of foreign migrant workers
(Chonburi, Thailand. February 2015)



Photo 7
Cambodian migrant worker at the row houses (Chonburi,
Thailand. February 2015)