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**The Style of Social Security of the Phnong
Indigenous People in Cambodia:
The Case of the Families of Civil Servants**

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The Style of Social Security of the Phnong Indigenous People in Cambodia: The Case of the Families of Civil Servants

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Abstract

This study selected key families of civil servants of the indigenous Phnong in the upland areas of Cambodia to examine their livelihood and social security experiences and revealed that these families are characterized by the orientation towards semi-subsistence livelihoods and self-insurance. However, within these commonalities, there are various types of cases in which some families perform well while others struggle. These cases are associated with strategic behaviours that are linked to Cambodia's socio-political transformation. Thus, I propose for more research into the styles of social security that prevail in less economically vibrant contexts that recognizes the habitual dimensions of social action and strategic behaviour.

Keywords: Cambodia, Indigenous Peoples, Pathways, Livelihood Security, Styles

1. Introduction

The recent transformation in opportunities and patterns of mobility in many areas of the global South has affected research on livelihoods. Various scholars and practitioners have extended their research beyond sustainable livelihoods to instead focus on livelihood pathways and trajectories (de Haan and Zoomer 2005; Scoones 2009). Pathways are used to disentangle regularities in the relationship between the strategic and unintentional behaviours involving access and decision making, on one hand, and structural factors, on the other (de Haan and Zoomers 2005). “A pathway can be defined as a pattern of livelihood activities, which emerges from a co-ordination process among actors, arising from individual strategic behaviour embedded both in a historical repertoire and in social differentiation, including power relations and institutional processes, both of which play a role in subsequent decision making.” (de Haan and Zoomers 2005: 45). Zoomers (1999) indicated that people should be treated as moving targets and classified based on their objectives and priorities rather than based on what they own because they may shift their strategies based on structural components, such as historical precedent and personality characteristics. Hence, recent research has increasingly focused on individuals’ livelihood experiences and the structural components that formed their

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strategies.

Nooteboom offered insight into individuals or groups who create a style of locally organized social security in the upland villages when formal social security is not provided by the state. The concept of “styles” is used to explain the habitual dimensions of social action beyond strategies towards livelihoods and social security that is pre-conditioned by the available historical repertoire and not from structural constraints alone. Nooteboom further explained this style as a coherent and distinctive manner of acting and doing things to obtain social security that can be observed through patterns and perceptions; thus, Nooteboom preferred to call it a style of social security or a social security style¹ instead of pathways or patterns. According to Nooteboom, the style of social security reflects solutions related to making a living, about making a good and secure living, and about the best way for people and households to prepare for the future (Nooteboom 2003: 145). Style is inherent within the family or community. For example, villagers who are raised in a family or community that values reciprocal actions tend to value mutual help. Furthermore, having a certain style is not always a conscious decision; it can be habitual, customary, traditional, and safe. If it has proven to be successful, then actions reflect the style and reproduce it (Nooteboom 2003: 206). It is difficult to switch to other styles; however, villagers can break away and reproduce another style that better suits their needs and orientation. Nooteboom also indicated that style might be disrupted as a result of travel and education (218). However, most of the world’s poor have little chance to transform such style, and some styles are more vulnerable to risk than others. From here, I posit that everyday political economy generates the styles that guide individuals or groups in the upland villages to obtain the utmost social security, and in this context, their strategic behaviour is pre-conditioned by their historically available repertoire and not just by structural constraints.

The article begins with an introduction to the background of the families of civil servants and their consciousness and manner that is contributed by the historical repertoire and experience such as displacement during the civil war and political changes. Then I will proceed to their livelihoods activities and different conditions between the families. Then I will continue to discuss concerning the role of the social security style and the cause of the differences. Then, I will also discuss how the strategic behaviour is also shaped by the current political and social changes. In the end, I concluded that the concept of styles and pathways are the suitable alternative concepts to study about the social security of IPs.

2. Research Context

Indigenous peoples (IPs) account for less than two percent of the Cambodian population, mostly residing in northeastern Cambodia. Although they are considered the most vulnerable and the poorest Cambodians, few researchers - and particularly few local researchers - have focused their scholarly

efforts on them (Simbolon 2002). It is generally acknowledged that they are stereotyped and have suffered from political changes and that they have been exoticized.

After Cambodia regained its independence from the French in 1953, governmental policy aimed to assimilate the Cambodian IPs into mainstream society by referring to them as “upper Khmer” to generate national unity among the majority Khmer and the people in the mountain areas (White 2009: 475). The government encouraged these IPs to live near roads or towns and gave them cows and/or buffaloes to more easily follow the Khmer way of life. Furthermore, the government sent Khmer families from the lowlands to live in Ratanakiri province in 1959 and Mondulakiri province in 1960 as part of a Khmerization policy in the remote northeastern part of Cambodia (Heang and Ek 2009: 583–4). There is also a record of 250 soldiers and their families who were deployed in the indigenous territories in the early 1960s to teach the IPs about sanitation, education, and paddy rice cultivation (White 2009: 475). When the civil war erupted in the 1970s, some IPs escaped deeper into the jungle, and others escaped to Vietnam and Laos in 1973 and 1974 when the Khmer Rouge began to implement radical collectivization schemes, forced labour, and communal eating programs in the northeastern Cambodian provinces (Colm 2000: 34). There is evidence that approximately 700 Phnong, mainly Catholic Phnong, fled from Cambodia to Vietnam (Bourdier 2009: 549). After the war ended, most IPs returned to their homes in the highlands. In 1979, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea was formed and embarked on new administrative reforms. IPs who had historically been scattered were put into a village system. They were ordered to live near the main roads. At that time, they continued to maintain their subsistence livelihoods due to the abundant natural resources and the lack of access to their territories. With the introduction of the market economy in 1993, IPs began to feel pressure from development, which pressure was manifest primarily as problems related to economic land concession (ELC) and land alienation (Men 2011: 17). Concurrently, they encountered development agencies that came to promote indigenous rights and environmental protection (Smith 2010; Baird 2011). This transformation changed IPs’ views about modernity.

Historically, IPs have experienced two forms of exoticization.² In the past, the state exoticized them as tribal people who required integration into mainstream society through education. At the beginning of the millennium, they were also subject to the exoticization of nostalgia that sees their culture as something to be protected. Both types of exoticization have been integrated into their culture and have led to the formation of a culture of inferiority. In addition, Smith said the interaction between Phnong and development agencies has created several reinforcing narratives, particularly the culture of silence (Smith 2010: 42–3). They were introduced to a distinction between those who know and those who do not. Cambodian society tends to tell them to educate themselves if they want to improve their lives and that remaining traditional is backwards. In the early 2000s, to promote development in the indigenous territories, new varieties of crops were brought into the indigenous communities for commercial farming (Van den Berg 2000: 40–7). There was one case in which IPs were provided crops

and equipment by a Vietnamese company to engage in cassava farming (Milne 2013). A research study found that upland crops have generated economic growth in indigenous villages, but research has also warned of the exigencies from cash crop farming (So et al. 2012). In the early 2000s, the government established a policy that promoted education in the remote areas. In addition, the government relaxed the procedure for teacher trainee recruitment to support and train teachers from remote areas. Under the new procedures, the educational requirement for a primary school teacher trainee changed from 12 + 2 years to 9 + 2 years (Phin 2014: 345). As a result, there was a surge in indigenous applicants with a lower secondary or ninth grade degree to study at the provincial teacher training college. A few Phnong succeeded in acquiring both an education and jobs in mainstream society and later encouraged their families and relatives to follow in their successful footsteps. In summary, two striking changes in the context of IPs include the shift from subsistence livelihoods to cash crops and the internalization of views regarding modernity and education. However, few livelihood studies have been conducted to study their perspective on modernity, their inherited attitudes towards obtaining social security and how IPs are linked to the wider transformations occurring in Cambodia.

Pathways and styles are used as concepts in an attempt to disentangle regularities in the relationship between access and decision making (de Haan and Zoomers 2005: 45). By employing these concepts in this research context, I unravel the livelihood experiences of the families of Phnong civil servants who are engaged in various forms of livelihood activities and patterns that seek to obtain security. I begin by peeling back the characteristics of the style employed in obtaining social security and various cases of families with high, average and low incomes. Then, from these findings, I will show why certain families living in the same structural context are able to obtain social security better than others and how their strategic behaviour is linked to the wider transformations occurring throughout the country. Finally, I will argue for research on a style of social security that recognizes the habitual dimensions of social action and strategic behaviour that is pre-conditioned by the historical repertoire and not just by structural constraints.

3. Research Methods

This ethnographic research was conducted in two Phnong villages in the Ou Reang district of Monduliri Province, northeastern Cambodia. The Phnong villages' names are Pu Rang village and Pu Treng village. The research, including preliminary field research, was conducted between August 2013 and September 2014. The selection of the two villages was based on two criteria. First, the villages are both considered vulnerable to climate changes and deforestation. Second, they have each gone through numerous transformations in past decades such as social and political changes. In terms of ethnicity, the research focused on the Phnong because they are considered the most adaptive among the indigenous minority groups in Cambodia (Bourdier 2009; White 2009). I asked: What are

Table 1 Numbers of Families of Phnong Civil Servants in Pu Rang and Pu Treng Villages.

	Families of Civil Servants			Total
	Primary School Teacher	Police and Soldier	Provincial and District Staffs	
Pu Rang	4	5	3	12
Pu Treng	1	4	4	9

Source: Author, 2014

the characteristics of the families of Phnong civil servants? Why do some families fare better than others in terms of obtaining security? Finally, how is this behaviour linked to wider transformations in Cambodia?

To explain and analyse the livelihood experiences before continuing to my main arguments, I employed livelihood trajectories for a methodological approach. Livelihood trajectories make use of life histories; however, it is not a typical report on the chronicle of an actor's life. Instead, a livelihood trajectory attempts to penetrate into a deeper layer of beliefs, needs, aspirations and limitations in addition to the particular need to be contextualized in relation to power and institutions (de Haan and Zoomers 2005: 43). Moreover, Rigg, Nguyen, and Luong (2014) have argued that this methodological approach can be used to unravel the hidden struggles that link to wider transformations.

The populations of Pu Rang village and Pu Treng village are 507 (98 families) and 698 (167 families), respectively. I began by selecting 20 households in each village and three to six key informants. I believed that the numbers were appropriate for phenomenon research and in-depth research. The research employed pseudonyms for participants to protect their identity. I utilized PT1–20 for respondents in Pu Treng village and PR1–20 for respondents in Pu Rang village. I found that of the 40 families in this research, there were 21 families who indicated that they had relatives who were civil servants. These respondents were chosen as the main targets because they are involved in various livelihood activities with distinctive styles of social security. Table 1 is provided below showing the number of families of Phnong civil servants, as shown by the primary fieldwork.

4. On Becoming a Civil Servant

In the past, the Phnong were recruited to become soldiers to protect the country. After the country became peaceful, the Phnong who were the beneficiaries of the past regime became integrated into Khmer society. They were proud when one of their ethnic group became the provincial governor and when others became high-ranking officials. PR19 recalled how he became a soldier in the early 1980s. When he was young, he lived close to the quarters of the Khmer civil servants who came to work in Pu Rang village. These Khmer civil servants asked him to go to school, but he had to quit school when the war began in the early 1970s, unfortunately. After liberation in 1979, he was recruited to

be a soldier in the area near the village. After the country became peaceful, he worked as a military driver in the province. Later, he was transferred to work at a military base near Pu Rang village. He said at that time there was not much emphasis on becoming a soldier or civil servant. Education was not required as long as the IPs could fight for the country. As the country became peaceful, he focused his attention more on farming to support his family. Similarly, PR3 said her husband only went to a primary school, but he was nonetheless able to obtain a position as a border patrol police officer thanks to a recommendation from the village chief. In her case, she was fortunate to complete ninth grade - it was rare for a Phnong woman to finish ninth grade. When she heard about the recruitment of police officers from her relatives, she went to apply and successfully passed. Similarly, PT1 became a civil servant in the early 1990s because he could speak the Khmer language and had the ability to write. At that time, Pu Treng village was still remote, and only a few villagers had obtained an education. With his ability to speak and write, he became the favourite of development agencies that came to implement projects in the village.

Therefore, from their stories, opportunities, connections and minimum education were the main factors in becoming a civil servant in the past. Through development discourse, the families of Phnong civil servants formed their own style of social security and inherited positive behaviours regarding livelihoods and education. The research found two characteristics of Phnong families: a mentality geared at self-reliance and engagement in semi-subsistence livelihoods. Their common and shared characteristics will be explained below.

5. Changing Mentality for Self-insurance

According to their accounts, these families mostly experienced suffering or difficulties related to their strict traditions. In addition, they said they could not rely solely on traditional livelihoods anymore. PR1 recalled a painful experience from her old village. The villagers collectively asked her to demolish her house to rid the village of the bad omen after her husband died in a freak accident. Some people were afraid to be contaminated with bad omens from her family, so they never visited her house. All her neighbours moved their houses to live in another village cluster. Even her children were discriminated against, as other children would not play with her children. In the process, she had her house demolished three times to remove the bad omen. Nonetheless, some villagers continued to hold a grudge against her. They asked her to demolish her house again and again because they felt that her family was not cleansed of the bad omen. After witnessing this hardship, her brother, a police officer in Pu Rang village, told the villagers with anger “How could you move away from my mother, my sister and my nephews?” After that, he asked her to follow him to live in Pu Rang village. She promised herself that she would rebuild her life because she did not want to live in pain anymore. Similarly, PT6 said when her mother passed away in 2009, the elders ordered her to perform rituals by

offering a pair of chickens, a pair of pigs and buffaloes, and by burning all her mother's belongings. She was fortunate that they allowed her to keep her house. After she completed the rituals, she decided to change her religion from animism to Catholicism so that she does not have to perform such rituals again. She said her brother who fled the civil war to Vietnam in 1970s and returned to the village in 1986 asked her to switch religion after he saw her hardship in following the traditional rituals.

The families of Phnong civil servants tend to value the importance of hard work rather than reliance on blessings from nature and spirits, and they developed different explanations for their economic conditions and livelihood security. They abandoned most of the economically burdensome traditions to reduce unnecessary expenditures. For instance, they stopped traditional rice farming to avoid expenditures on rituals and some even avoided using traditional rice seed.³ Instead - and in addition to their traditional farming - they became semi-involved in the market economy. PT7 offered his opinion regarding what makes the Phnong poor and unable to improve their livelihoods. He stressed two reasons. First, they are lazy. Some Phnong people are too lazy to produce materials and rely on buying from the market. Another reason is that they do not have knowledge about modern farming. They continue to engage in traditional farming that is characterized by low productivity and do not know how to save money and invest for the future. PT6 offered another insight into the mentality of the families of Phnong civil servants. She said that they had had difficulties and that was the reason that they worked hard to improve their lives. She said she wanted to live a good life like the Khmer people, so she followed their lead and opened her own grocery store to generate daily income.

6. Semi-subsistence Livelihoods

6.1. Cash Crop Farming

Cassava farming was first introduced to Pu Rang and Pu Treng villages in the early 2000s for food security. According to the twelve key families of Phnong civil servants in both villages, the average cash value of cassava per household is 496.3 USD, which represents 36% of the average annual household income. Comparing this finding to the Dak Dam commune data, cassava production by the families of the Phnong civil servants are higher than the commune average of 361 USD. From the interviews, it was confirmed that cassava has helped them to reduce hunger. Most families of Phnong civil servants in both villages said the income from cassava has helped in reducing hunger considerably, in addition to their salaries.

Nevertheless, cassava is primarily cultivated for self-sufficiency rather than for trade. Most respondents said they do not have a plan to expand their farmland, indicating that they prefer to be involved in semi-subsistence livelihoods rather than to be fully involved in the market, such as by becoming entrepreneurs. It is notable that entrepreneurs are considered wealthy people. Engaging in entrepreneurship means that they are at risk of losing mutual support from the community. Hence,

some families of Phnong civil servants prefer not to become entrepreneurs, although they are capable of doing so. By retaining their social relationships, they can obtain social security through traditional practices such as labour sharing, crop borrowing and crop sharing.

6.2. Annual Household Income

Information from the twelve key informants showed that the annual average household income of the families of Phnong civil servants is 1,612 USD. The annual household expenditure is 1,535 USD in which around 70 percent is spent on consumption item. The annual household income remains lower than the 2011 country average of 2,631 USD (Tong et al. 2013, 3). However, dividing income into low, average and high incomes reveals that there are Phnong families that nearly fall within the country average (Table 2). In addition, dividing it into three sections also reveals the diverse livelihood experiences and forms of security among the families of Phnong civil servants.

Table 2 Annual Household Income of the Key Families of Phnong Civil Servants in USD, N12.

Low	Average	High	Communes (2012)	Cambodia (2011)
PT18 = 820	PT12 = 1,476	PT1 = 2,153	Dak	Country = 2,631
PR10 = 479	PR1 = 1,316.3	PT6 = 2,588.5	Dam = 1,578	
PR2 = 529.3	PR20 = 1,400	PT7 = 2,177.8	Srae	
	PR16 = 1,558	PR3 = 2,593	Preah = 2,542	
		PR12 = 2,254		

Note: Commune data are from So et al., 2012. Country data are from Tong et al., 2013

Source: Author, 2014

In the following sections, I will provide descriptions of seven families' livelihood experiences from high-income, average-income and low-income families and the reasons behind these differences. I will also demonstrate their concerns and how they address the problems of maintaining their livelihoods.

7. High Income

7.1. Improving Life by Observing the Khmer

PT6 is a civil servant in Pu Treng village. She wanted to become a civil servant because it was her dream to follow the Khmer's successful route. She recalled asking her mother to allow her to go to school and finally obtaining a job. She is a well-known person in the community and has good connections with development agencies that come to conduct surveys or projects in her village. Sometimes, she provides food and a place to stay for the staff from NGOs. Unlike other Phnong, she preferred to take a job other than farming that can generate daily income. In 2013, she successfully opened a grocery store with the help of 500 USD borrowed from a Khmer merchant. It was a big risk,

but she was fortunate that she was able to pay the money back within a week because there was no competition in her village. At that time, she could make approximately 100 USD a day. Now she makes approximately 25 USD a day. She said she learned to run a grocery store from observing the Khmer and sought advice from her relatives and Khmer merchants who came to buy her herbs. She was pleased to realize her dream of owning a business like the Khmer and wants her child to continue her business in the future. Apart from owning the grocery store, she also makes money by providing home stays for foreign tourists. She recently hosted an Australian man who was introduced to her by an NGO staff member that is a customer of her grocery store. The Australian man wanted to experience Phnong culture so she cooked him traditional foods and took him to see her farm. Notably, she used to follow animism but converted to Catholicism. She said that converting to Catholicism helped her reduce unnecessary expenditures on rituals and helped her stay focused on improving her life. Now she is considered as one of the wealthiest Phnong in the village. There are only three members in her family so there are not too mouths to be fed. Her annual expenditure is around 1,000 USD in which 55 percent is spent on rice consumption. With some savings, she can spend on expanding her grocery stores and spend on her only child's education and other commodities.

7.2. Multiple Jobs

PR3 from Pu Rang is engaged in multiple jobs to generate income. She and her husband are both civil servants. She is a district police officer, and her husband is a border patrol police officer. She recalled that before the national election in 1993, the village had to recruit civil servants with minimum education requirements. Thus, they are considered beneficiaries from the past regime because they do not have high education levels. In the early 2000s, she received some cassava root from her relatives in the Keo Seima area, and she began farming cassava. Her husband still goes into the forest and brings back forest products. With the cash income from cassava and her salary, she was able to rebuild her house in 2005 and support her children's education. Her annual household income is approximately 2,593 USD, which is the highest among all respondents. Few families in her village own electric generators but she owns one for pumping water in the dry season and generating electricity at night. Although she could generate a stable income from cash crops, she said the money from cash crops would be gone if they became seriously ill. Last year, she had to go to Vietnam for medical treatment and spent approximately 500 USD just to cover the bill.

Although she can generate cash income for self-reliance, she tries to balance relationships with community members. For example, when her relatives and neighbours came to ask for cassava roots, she did not charge them money because she knew that one day she would rely on them for help. She was correct. After three years, she lost the roots to pest infestation, and she went to ask for the roots back from her relatives, demonstrating that it is important to balance social relationships within their ethnic group for social security.

7.3. Investing in Education

PT7 is a civil servant and is also a Catholic Church leader, in addition to proclaiming to be a farmer. In the 1970s, he and his relatives fled to Vietnam to avoid the civil war. In Vietnam, he was supported by the Catholic Church and his distant relatives. He returned to the village in the mid-1980s. When he returned, he engaged in traditional farming on his ancestral lands. In the early 2000s, he began to farm cassava and other marketable vegetables when NGOs began to promote it in the village. At that time, he was selected as one of the key participants. He said cash crops and livelihood activities, such as fruit trees and fish farming, have helped him to reduce livelihood insecurity. With the additional income from his wife, who is a traditional weaving instructor, he has generated some savings. He said she can sell approximately 5 to 10 craft pieces a month. His annual household income is approximately 2,177.8 USD. With the savings, he could educate his children despite the lack of a school in the village. With help from the Catholic Church, he might also be able to secure higher education in the city for his children.

8. Average Income

8.1. Overcoming Constraints

PR1 is a widow. Her husband passed away 15 years ago after she gave birth to her fourth child. She said she obtained cassava roots from her relatives for trial farming. Later, she bought more cassava roots from the market to expand the farm. She said she is fortunate that her farm is not far from the village, so she does not have to bring her dried cassava to the village. The middlemen will come to pick up the dried cassava directly from her farm. In addition, to maintain livelihood security, she also engages in various livelihood activities ranging from working in the agricultural plantation, selling cow dung, sewing old clothes and traveling to Vietnam. Most Phnong raise chicken and pigs, but she thought that ducks were easier to take care of than chickens and pigs. She said that as long as they were given water, they would not wander far from the house and will not be stolen. She used to have ten ducks but six died. She would eat them when she had nothing else to eat. She said she bought the ducks from a merchant who brought them from Vietnam. She also has a vegetable garden on her farm from which she can sell vegetables in the market. Her annual household income is approximately 1,316.3 USD, which is not high by any means, but by engaging in various livelihood activities and spending as little as possible, she has reduced her livelihood insecurities. She spends around 1,165 USD and almost 70 percent is spent on rice consumption. With her small savings and by selling buffaloes, she was able to afford to send her daughter to school. She said her relatives who are primary school teachers tend to remind her to send her daughter to study at the teacher training college before the opportunities given by the state to recruit indigenous teacher trainees areas close. Now, her daughter is a primary school teacher, and she tends to send remittances to support the family.

In the process, PR1 maintains good relations with her relatives for mutual help. She tends to give gifts to her relatives to maintain those good relations. She also travels to visit her relatives in Vietnam once or twice annually. If her relatives need someone to help with the harvest or when her relatives have important ceremonies or are sick, she will travel there more often than usual. She mostly visits the relatives of her parents. She has approximately six families of relatives who are living in Vietnam. Sometimes she also visits relatives of her deceased husband. When she must return home, most of her relatives tend to give her food and a gifts of 100,000–200,000 Dong (approximately 5–10 USD), whereas her wealthy relatives tend to give approximately 300,000–400,000 Dong (approximately 15–20 USD) for transportation expenses and for helping with the harvest. When she returns home, she brings new clothes, shoes, corn, and sardines that she bought with the cash she received from her relatives.

8.2. Those who Struggle

There are a few families of Phnong civil servants who cannot take advantage of the economic opportunities. They said their life is becoming more difficult. Instead, some intend to sell their ancestral lands after government Directive 01 was issued to register private land ownership in late 2012.⁴ Problems with their livelihoods have led some villagers to leave their communal land and have led to arguments among the community members.

PR16 lives in Pu Rang village. She has three children. She is working for the district office for women's affairs. Her father used to be the district chief and governed the community until the mid-2000. She lives with two other families under the same roof. Her sister just married and moved in with her husband. Apart from her main job, she also engages in traditional farming and cassava farming. She began farming cassava in 2004, which she obtained from her relatives. She saw others do well, so she decided to grow cassava also. Two years ago, she obtained 4 tonnes because she had time to clear and expand the farmland. This year she obtained only 2 tonnes because she became busy. At the time, she had to work and take care of her small children. She said it was hard to support a big family. Her mother could only take care of the buffaloes because she was aging. Adding to the hardship, her rice farming was destroyed last year by a pest infestation, and she now does not want to waste time farming rice anymore. Her husband is a farmer. To support the family, he engages in wage labour and also goes into the forest. He regularly kills a deer once a month and also brings home forest vegetables. However, she is worried that her livelihood will not be sustained over the long run.

Apart from their livelihoods, the communal land registration has caused conflict among those who want to stay and those who want to leave the community. PR16 recalled the time the communal representatives came to her house and cursed her family because she did not want to join the communal land ownership. Some neighbours still talk behind her back. Those who threaten her family are the group that has close relations with the communal representatives. The reason she did not want

to join the communal land registration is that she has a big family and she therefore sometimes needs quick money. She could not rely on her relatives who are also in difficult circumstances. If she owns her own private land, she can borrow money easily from the bank. If she joins the community, she cannot borrow money from the bank. Hence, they hold a grudge against her. They threatened her that if she would not join the community, they would not let her farm on her ancestral lands anymore. She said she could ask for money from the community, but it is difficult because she would need to obtain permission from all its members. If she keeps waiting, her family will have nothing to eat. In addition, she is worried that the communal land registration is taking too long and exposes her ancestral land to opportunists.⁵ If she obtains private land ownership, she can keep it for her children and obtain a loan.

9. Low Income

9.1. Spending as Little as Possible and Sharing Tasks

PR2 is a widow. Her husband was a civil servant in a provincial town. After he passed away during a mission in the early 2000s, she returned to live with her parents and sisters under one roof in Pu Rang village. There are three families in her house, including her old mother and her sister's family. It is common in the Phnong culture to house a vulnerable family member.

Her annual household income is only approximately 529.3 USD. To reduce her expenditures, she ate more wild fruits and vegetables with fermented fish than rice. From the interview, her expenditure is more than her income. Fortunately, her family practices product sharing, which allowed her to reduce her livelihood insecurities. For example, when she faced crop damage, she could rely on other family members, who may have a surplus. Therefore, she said that she would not have been able to survive without the help from her family and relatives. Wage work is another option to generate cash income, the type of work performed mainly by women after they finished farming. She said she first engaged in wage work in 2006–2007. Her job was to plant pine trees. She was also involved in harvesting cashew nuts, for which she had the ability to do in the area, rather than the highlighted phrase. A sentence that better expresses your intended meaning: "by paid daily. She would go to work when she was free with her two teenage children. Sometimes the farm owners called her, and sometimes she asked them when she needed money. With the addition of cassava in 2006, she was able to enhance her livelihood security and even send her children to school with partial help from donors and NGOs. Currently, one of her children has just become a primary school teacher.

Notably, at one stage of her life, she wanted to borrow money from a micro-finance institution to expand her farming. However, she was aware of the risk. She saw that some Phnong families became indebted after they borrowed money from a micro-finance institution to farm cassava. When their crops were damaged, they could not pay back the money on time. Some families did not see profits after they paid back the money they had borrowed. Therefore, it was a waste of time and effort and

risky to borrow money to expand their farming.

9.2. Returning to Traditional Practices

Like other low-income Phnong families, PR10 must rely on her relatives and has returned to traditional farming to avoid the risk associated with the market economy. She said she tried to grow paddy rice like other villagers in the early 2000s after she obtained seeds from NGOs. In the beginning, the harvest was good with little pest infestation. However, her paddy rice was damaged from pest infestation in 2011. It was the first time she lost all her rice seeds. Later, she was fortunate that her brother who is working in the provincial department gave her traditional seeds to continue farming. The seeds are believed to be resistant to climate change. She has been using traditional seeds for the past three years, and she does not think she will change that anytime soon. In addition, she relied on labour sharing to harvest cassava. She and her neighbours take turns harvesting cassava when there is a lack of labour.

10. Interpreting Livelihood Experiences

10.1. Various Styles of Families of Phnong Civil Servants

Although they may have insufficient income, the low-income families of Phnong civil servants can reduce livelihood insecurities through systems involving mutual help and access to natural resources. Characteristically, either many families live under one roof and practice crop sharing or small families have connections to families that can produce crop surpluses or have family members with jobs in mainstream society.

The average families of Phnong civil servants are involved with both traditional livelihoods and the market to generate cash income. Some families are more capable of accessing resources and traveling, and some are less. For example, the family of PR16 in Pu Rang village barely manages to make ends meet because there are many family members and she does not have good relations with the community members for mutual support. However, PR1 has learned how to maintain relations with community members. To maintain the relations, she must give them products for free or sell to them at cheaper prices. It is not possible to sustain their livelihoods just through self-insurance. When circumstances spiral out of their control, they need mutual support that allows them to overcome shock and stress. Hence, they are aware of exposing themselves to risk from the loss of their traditional social security.

The high-income families of Phnong civil servants engage in both cash crop farming and wage work. In addition, they continue to rely on forest products for daily consumption; however, because they become busy with work and farming, they do not go to the forest as often as before. Instead, they prefer to purchase food from the market. They are also capable of hiring labour for cassava farming. In

addition, they have more access to networks and information. Therefore, they are considered wealthy families. In term of expenditures, they are more capable of spending on commodities and leisure. Furthermore, they are more likely to send their children to study for higher education.

Regardless of income differences, all the families of civil servants consider education to be important and are eager to send their children to school because they want their children to follow in the footsteps of their relatives who are civil servants. Notably, high-income Phnong families are eager for their children to earn higher education degrees because they see the long-run benefits. Phnong parents do not discriminate between boys or girls when it comes to education decision. According to teachers in both villages, girls tend to stay longer in the primary school because they do not go to the forest as much as boys do. They also have more opportunities to reach higher education when the state started to recruit indigenous teachers and when NGOs come to promote girls' education.

10.2. Poverty and Social Security in a Form of Mutual Support

The families of Phnong civil servants share a common style in which they are primarily oriented towards semi-subsistence livelihoods and self-insurance. However, within the same socio-structural context, some families perform better than others. Therefore, although they share common orientations, at one stage, conditions such as family size, climate and pests have created problems. In this case, most families rely on mutual support as another form of social security. High income provides more access to local support networks than low income, which is similar to what Nootboom called the paradox of local social security because it appears to benefit rich villagers more than poor villagers (Nootboom 2014: 289). The rich villagers have access to many networks, which helps them obtain more labour help and accumulate more gifts during weddings and rituals. In this research, the high-income villagers said they maintain good mutual support in the form of labour sharing. Their neighbours help them with labour when they are busy with other business and wage work. However, the poor villagers have smaller networks and are thus able to amass less help. In this research, there are a few low-income families who can still depend on their relatives for mutual help, but their time seems to be running out. Some families are already struggling to survive and can rely less on networks of other families who are also poor. Thus, they must pay attention to their livelihoods rather than concentrating on reciprocal activities. Subsequently, they are excluded from the wider community because they are considered to not have the time or the means to contribute to the community. In this research, the PR16 family has been excluded from the community because they did not join with communal land ownership. Therefore, those who struggle must shift their style and rely on individuals' strategic pathways for better social security, such as by selling their ancestral land to reduce livelihood insecurities, traveling outside of the area or attempting to acquire an education for job opportunities. As Nootboom said, they must rely on their own devises, relations and inventiveness (Nootboom 2014: 293).

Therefore, local social security is seldom beneficial to those who struggle and have smaller networks. From this discussion, when poverty strikes a certain type of family, the family is not likely to be able to rely on local social security. It must shift its style of social security and rely on various strategies in response to insecurity and change.

10.3. Linking Strategic Behaviour to Socio-political Transformation

If the styles are to be successful, their strategic behaviour will lead them to conduct the same livelihood activities and social security. Thus, their strategic behaviour and attitude towards obtaining social security cannot be separated from their institutional and societal contexts. Through development discourse, the families of Phnong civil servants have developed an economic explanation for the reasons why they are poor and set a goal to be modern. They have formed their locally organized forms of social security while a lack of organized social security and the effects from the political transformation remain prevalent in the country. The families of Phnong civil servants are mostly the beneficiaries of past regimes. They have formulated a style of social security that allows them to access resources, networks and information. According to their livelihood accounts, they were the first to access cassava roots from the state and development agencies. In the early 2000s, they began to adopt cash crops because they faced frequent pest infestations and the loss of forestland to the ELC. They strove to maximize their income to reduce livelihood insecurities. Some families became more self-insurance oriented; however, they maintain social relations in case they required mutual help. They are also oriented towards education because they see it as a means to obtaining a job. When the state and development agencies began to promote education and revise policies to recruit teacher trainees in mid-2000 (Phin 2014), the families of the Phnong civil servants were the first to exploit this opportunity. Besides, when they obtained higher education and could access to more livelihoods opportunities, it has reinforced their styles and subsequently influenced their decision. However, there were a few families who could not generate benefits from their economic opportunities. Instead, they have considered selling their ancestral lands after the government issued Directive 01 in 2012, which allows them to register private land ownership (Milne 2013). Without strong mutual support, these families have no choice but to rely on selling their lands to reduce livelihood insecurities. It appears that at one stage, their style of social security did not work for them in comparison with other families of civil servants. The problems with community members over private land ownership also contributed to the failure of the style. Eventually, they abandoned the notion of communal land ownership in the hopes of secure land ownership and access to loans for self-insurance. In this case, the state's policy has contributed to this strategic behaviour and has harmed these families.

11. Conclusion

The research concluded that the families of Phnong civil servants are oriented towards semi-subsistence livelihoods for self-insurance and mutual support. The inherited style allowed most Phnong families to take advantage of their opportunities and adjust to Cambodia's socio-political transformation. However, some families did not adjust well due to various conditions in their cultural context and with respect to their links to this socio-political transformation. These families had to depart from the old form of social security that only works for certain individuals and groups and shift to another that works better for them. Finally, I argue that their style of social security was pre-conditioned by the historical repertoire that led them to behave and act and not just by their structural constraints. For example, regardless of income differences, they are all eager to invest in their children's education for social mobility and livelihood security. They followed the style that led them to habitually look for education to produce the effective style of social security.

This research provides an alternative approach to understanding the upland livelihoods in Cambodia, particularly the style of social security that characterizes a group and how their style is pre-conditioned by their historical repertoire and leads their behavioural patterns. Moreover, this paper has shown how these individual strategic behaviours are linked to the wider socio-political transformation in the country. The research findings will contribute to livelihood studies, project design and implementation, and policy development revision in the upland areas.

Notes

- 1 Nooteboom said, "... I define styles of social security as distinguishable patterns of orientations and actions concerning the variety of means to achieve security; these patterns are structured by an internal logic and conditioned by the social, economic, and personal characteristics of the people involved." (Nooteboom 2003: 54–5)
- 2 Please see Theodossopoulos 2012.
- 3 They said they do not need to perform rituals if they use the rice seeds from the low land.
- 4 Directive 01 is an order involving the strengthening measure and effectiveness of economic land concession management.
- 5 The Phnong cut the tree in half and used it as a sign to differentiate the landowners.

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