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Table of Contents

Epistemology Matters: Human Security and Visual Research Methods

Marcos Farias Ferreira, Assistant Professor, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lisbon

João Terrenas, Ph. D. Candidate, Department of Politics, University of York 1

Pro-rural policies and people' s capacity to aspire:

Observations of the use of financial resources in the villages of Thailand

Atsushi Watabe, Policy researcher, Sustainable Consumption and Production Area,

Institute for Global Environmental Strategies. 19

Re-examining “Informed Choices”

Vu Le Thao Chi, Ph.D. Project Research Associate,

Graduate School of Media and Governance, Keio University. 40

Security of Japanese Fishermen and Russians in the Disputed Waters: Focusing on the Four Northern Islands

Noriko Watanabe, Doctoral student,

Tohoku University, Graduate School of International Cultural Studies, Department of International Resources Policy 59

Epistemology Matters: Human Security and Visual Research Methods

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Abstract

With this article the authors intend to underline the critical potential of Human Security as a liminal field of research and practice and then explore visual methods (photography and documentary film-making) as innovative tools for unveiling and assessing the discursive nature of global (in)security. By promoting these methods as productive ways of bridging the gap between levels of analysis – from local insecurities to global trends and backwards, from human resilience at local levels to governance choices and backwards – the authors intend to raise new epistemological and methodological questions (within International Relations, security studies and the social sciences at large) and take the (global) security problématique to broader audiences. Taking stock of field activities (academic research, volunteer work and collaborative filming) conducted by the authors in the last four years in Nicaragua, Fiji, Portugal and Rwanda, the assumption is such that as an emergent discourse – intersecting the academia with the worlds of (in)security – Human Security needs to take a reflexivist turn in order to be able to foster social innovation and change for those affected by tangible insecurities. Hence, a closer link between the arts and the humanities is critical here and sits at the very core of the epistemological paradigm the authors set out to put forward. This article works as the (meta)theoretical grounding for a more empirical informed second paper that shall expand on the authors' research experience of 'film-making for fieldwork' in Nicaragua, Fiji, Portugal and Rwanda from 2010 to 2014.

Keywords:

Pluralist research methods, HS visual paradigm, collaborative ethnography, reflexivity, narrativity

1. Introducing the problématique

With this article the authors set out to explore the privileged relationship between Human Security – both as an academic discipline and a set of discursive practices – and the panoply of visual research methods and strategies that are available to researchers these days. Our goal is threefold, viz. (i) to underline the critical potential of Human Security as a liminal field of research and practice; (ii) to explore visual methods (photography and documentary film-making) as innovative tools for unveiling and assessing the discursive nature of global insecurities (and their relevant discursive contexts); (iii) to promote these methods as productive ways of bridging the gap

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between levels of analysis: from local insecurities to global trends and backwards, from human resilience at local levels to governance choices and backwards. Taking stock of a variety of field activities (academic research, volunteer work in community development and collaborative filming) conducted by the authors in the last four years, the assumption is such that as an emergent discourse – intersecting academia with the worlds of (in)security – Human Security needs to take a reflexivist turn in order to be able to foster social innovation and change. We uphold that visual methods are (i) part of such innovative set of strategies connecting academia to real life; (ii) a way of putting into the limelight the discursive practices that are constitutive of the social world and (iii) a tool for narrowing the gap that still separates theory from practice due to a clear positivist hegemony in the broad range of international studies or IR and security studies.

In line with a critical approach to Human Security (HS), IR and the social sciences at large we assume that researchers bear a prime responsibility for the reality they purport to represent through the paradigms and images they produce. The authors then sustain that a founding task for researchers is always to inquire into who and what these images are for, the kind of enquiry that makes academic disciplines complicit in progressive social change. We advance thus a visual politics of human insecurities as a distinctive framework (i) implying our specific choices of how to represent security and insecurity in current global affairs; (ii) identifying a specific ethics linking researchers' values to research; (iii) enabling a deeper understanding of human affairs and a broader dissemination of research results, making it possible to reach a broader audience. By uncovering a specific realm of the visual politics of human insecurities we set out to contribute to a trans-disciplinary and pluralist methodology – viz. linking the arts and the humanities – and making up for the insufficiencies exhibited by traditional approaches. This article works as the (meta)theoretical grounding for a more empirical informed second paper that shall expand on the authors' research experience of 'film-making for fieldwork' in Nicaragua, Fiji, Portugal and Rwanda from 2010 to 2014.

2. The need for a reflexive turn in Human Security studies

In his influential book on the nature of thick and thin spheres of justice, Michael Walzer begins his argument by recalling a picture. It is a picture of people marching in the streets of Prague in late 1989, of people carrying signs saying 'Truth' and 'Justice'. By using this picture, Walzer brings in what he calls a conceptual occasion, a powerful starting point for his text capable of connecting directly to the readers' experiences and visual legacies. The Prague picture becomes a conceptual moment, in Walzer's own words, because "[w]hen I saw the picture, I knew immediately what the

signs meant – and so did everyone else who saw the same picture. Not only that: I also recognized and acknowledged the values that the marchers were defending – and so did (almost) everyone else”³. The picture becomes conceptual in Walzer’s exercise because it appeals to ideas of justice – thick or thin – shared by the readers of the text but also to the material conditions indispensable to fulfil such ideas. Walzer is not making the point that the pictures or images always convey the same ideas irrespective of the audience. Certainly they can awaken a panoply of different responses but always work, we believe, as reflexive devices vis-à-vis social ontologies, an idea we develop throughout the text.

Taking the argument further, Walzer notes that the march had nothing to do with epistemology, for no particular or single account of truth was at issue: the marchers “were not marching in defence of the coherence theory, or the consensus theory, or the correspondence theory of truth”⁴. The critical aspect here, for the authors, and that which makes the picture a reflexive or conceptual moment, is captured by Walzer when he underlines that although marchers shared a specific culture and were responding to a specific experience largely unfamiliar to most viewers, it became possible for them to understand – or to penetrate, in Walzer’s own words – quickly and unreservedly the ‘language game’ and the ‘power play’ inherent in the picture. The picture is already working as reflexive device, demanding of the viewer not only a description or explanation of the social situation but also a critical re-reading of power plays and language games, i.e., all sorts of social structures constraining but also enabling action. The argument in this article is sustained by a critical approach to Human Security taken as a liminal field of research and practice, located ambiguously in the in-betweenness of international studies: between global security, development and human rights. The authors uphold the necessity for a reflexive turn in Human Security studies, in line with David Mutimer’s assumptions of how critical approaches should proceed in their critique of social ontologies. According to Mutimer, critical security studies should be able to give an answer to (i) *what is real*, and provide a way into “understanding social ontology and the creation of social facts”; (ii) *the interests that underlie knowledge claims*, translating in “whom particular forms of knowledge are for and who they serve”; and (iii) *what is to be done*, assuming that “critical theory is a theory of praxis, a step in a process of political engagement designed to transform the world”⁵. In this light, a visual paradigm for HS studies sets out to resituate the camera and the research produced through it – filming for fieldwork – in a broad social pragmatics capable of exposing and exploring the

³ Walzer 1994, 1.

⁴ Walzer 1994, 1.

⁵ Critical Security Studies: A schismatic history, Mutimer, 2007, 67.

situatedness of human (in)security.

Consequently, the reflexive turn upheld here by the authors proceeds by stressing the need to think critically about human practices as social ontologies in the sense of historically constituted interactions and transactions embodying specific language games, power plays and discourses. Methodologically, a discursive practices approach shall help in the uncovering of the multiple ways in which cultural meanings are produced, sustained and imposed, through structural and direct violence, but also in the pointing at the immanent resources, inscribed in the current political order, for human resilience and progressive change. What stems from these assumptions is that instead of assuming a fixed reality, Human Security studies should focus more on how truth, morality, security or humanity are established, negotiated, maintained and challenged through discursive practices. And this is precisely where the documentary film can help. A Critical Human Security approach is above all a praxeology, a tool for progressive change, based on a realistic understanding of the myriad and complex processes inherent in the social construction of political orders. As R. B. J. Walker has put it, “[m]odern accounts of security are precisely about subjectivity, subjection and the conditions under which we have been constructed as subjects, subject to subjection. They tell us who we must be and then they often tell us how we might stay this way”⁶. Political orders are always sustained by intersubjective phenomena, social dynamics and structures but we often dismiss the importance of the more subjective structures and processes as critical *loci* of humanity, morality, power and change. A critical and reflexive Human Security approach can produce new insights into these *loci*, the authors sustain, if only researchers and academicians be able to produce (i) a better understanding of the discursive nature of global insecurities and (ii) a critical discourse about that which needs to be secured and how, engaging systematically with the transformations of political life in the sense of taking stock of the “emerging accounts of who we might become, and the conditions under which we might become other than that we are now without destroying others, ourselves, or the planet on which we all live”⁷.

As it is sometimes acknowledged, the Human Security approach can be said to be “normatively attractive, but analytically weak”⁸. It is often stressed that human security is about justice, resilience and emancipation, but it is not always easy to be critical and policy relevant at the same time, as Newman underlines. The focus on problem-solving has often curtailed the capacity to produce a critique of institutions and the power relations that constitute them, which takes further the argument

⁶ The Subject of Security, Walker, 1997, 72.

⁷ The Subject of Security, R. B. J. Walker, 1997, 78.

⁸ Newman, 2010, 82.

for more reflexivity through a more sensitive and pluralist methodology, namely linking the arts with the humanities. For Newman, the problem seems to be an excessive focus on the manifestations of insecurity and the lack of interest in the underlying structural conditions of insecurity which, in his view, composes a basic paradox of difficult solution, i.e., “it [human security] apparently calls for a critique of the structures and norms that produce human insecurity, yet the ontological starting point of most human security scholarship and its policy orientation reinforce these structures and norms”⁹. A more coherent engagement with epistemology and ontology must come first though. This is so due to the need to identify and explore the discursive contexts of security and unveil the complex ways in which “the formative order of discourse is not a stable self-reproducing structure, but a precarious system which is constantly subjected to political attempts to undermine and/or restructure the discursive context in the course of history”¹⁰. Engaging coherently with epistemology and ontology, before methodology, is often seen as a nuisance distracting researchers from down to earth, more pressing matters. As the authors see it though, it is a necessary step in the critical task of de-essentialising and deconstructing prevailing claims about security. According again to Newman, “[t]he normative strands of critical security studies – such as the ‘Welsh School’, which claims to seek to change the world for the better – could therefore engage human security as a bridge between critical security studies and policy”¹¹.

In this point, the authors adhere to the Aberystwyth (or Welsh) School of security and Ken Booth’s motto that the main role of academics in the field consists of ‘telling the world about the world’. This approach places at the centre of the IR community and its visions of security one of the critical Kantian questions, viz. the epistemological query about that which we can know about the world, and how we can know it: how we can produce knowledge about the vast phenomena constituting the world. More crucially still, the Welsh School is concerned with uncovering the ‘conditions of insecurity’ of ‘real people in ‘real places’ while engaging in immanent critique as a means of exploring the potential within society for the progressive transformation of politics¹². It should be noted though that this approach is deeply critical of more conventional perspectives of human security which often tend to reify and naturalize the very structures and relationships endangering the individual¹³. On the other hand, and as far as this motto goes, the world makes its

⁹ Newman, 2010, 88.

¹⁰ Discourse Theory: Achievements, arguments, and challenges, Torfing, 2005, 14.

¹¹ Newman, 2010, 92.

¹² As for the Welsh School, see Theory of World Security, Ken Booth, 2007; Security, Strategy and Critical Theory, Richard Wyn Jones, 1999; and Security, Emancipation and the Politics of Health, João Nunes, 2014.

¹³ A concise explanation of the distinctiveness of Human Security and the Welsh School is provided in Basu and Nunes, 2013, 67.

appearance as a hermeneutical problem that can and must be worked out. According to Hans Blumenberg¹⁴, no experience is located in the space of absolute indeterminacy nor does it develop itself in the mere linear unfolding of causal connection among objects. On the contrary, the whole experience of the world consists of something that must be read and interpreted, as the very world is approached as a succession of interpretations predating and ensuing – in fact ascribing sense – to other interpretations. To Blumenberg, the experimentability of the world is directly connected to its legibility.

Such epistemological question marks decisively all the debates in academic IR and security studies. There is already an epistemological background in the (more or less constructed) debate between realism and idealism in the 1930s. The questions about how to produce knowledge in IR got broader though in the 1950s' debates between behaviourists and traditionalists (still limited to methods) and critically deeper in debates between positivists and post-positivists starting in the 1980s. Epistemological matters (what can be known), ontological matters (what is there to be known) and methodological matters (how to proceed to produce knowledge) are directly connected and stem from each other. A specific epistemology produces a specific ontology and demands or imposes a specific methodology. In IR historiography, the dominant epistemology is still positivism which has undoubtedly marked the specific forms of seeing and practicing the discipline. The positivist hegemony in IR has determined an image of the 'international', and concomitant forms of studying it, that were imported from the natural sciences. As an epistemological approach, positivism in IR underlines the strict separation between facts and values, between observer and the observed, and subscribes to a naturalistic and empiricist paradigm in that it prescribes methods of natural sciences be used to study social and political phenomena.

The academic trajectory in IR (and security studies) has also been positivistic in the sense that the methods prescribed to explore the 'international' are clearly 'explanatory' instead of hermeneutic: they approach phenomena from the outside and take the social world as a simplistic linearity of causal relations. Observing the 'international' and its phenomena is performed in the passive and disengaged way set down by positivism in order to attain a neutral and objective knowledge of the world (knowledge as correspondence). This notion of observation aims at reducing social experience to a certain type of behaviour captured by pure perception, as it were, that which Mitchell calls the 'innocent eye', the pure vision stemming from "a merely mechanical process uncontaminated by imagination, purpose or desire [...]"¹⁵. It is the same empiricist and positivist

¹⁴ Blumenberg 1979.

¹⁵ Mitchell 1986, 118.

paradigm in IR that produces dichotomy and radical separation between theory and practice, between theory and method. As stressed by Jenks, theory has been seen as an individual eccentricity developed by academics who take an interest in deepening the contested and contentious side of knowledge production, while ‘method’ is introduced as the good, consensual and technical side capable of giving some uniformity to a certain epistemic community¹⁶. In IR today, this perspective is still dominant and has been reinforced by those who take an interest in reifying the most basic and simplistic empiricism in order to impose explanatory methods as the correct way to know the ‘international’. It is tantamount to ‘truth as correspondence’ and its claim that knowledge must be an objective reflection of the world captured by an ‘innocent eye’.

Nevertheless, the supposedly innocent eye is more of a blind eye. Pure perception does not exist per se; it is always already mediated by the mind, by the values and predispositions of those who see, or as Mitchell puts it, by imagination, purpose and desire of the mind capturing the world. At this stage it could be useful to contrast this image of the supposedly innocent eye with the perspectivist approach of Merleau-Ponty when he underlines that “the perceived thing is not an ideal unity in the possession of an intellect; [...] it is instead a totality open to the horizon of an infinite number of perspectives that mix according to a certain style defining the object”¹⁷. The main idea here is that perception is paradoxical, just as the object of perception, and it only exists in the sense that someone perceives it. These hints, as well as Merleau-Ponty’s perspectivism, can contribute to the questioning – in security studies too – of the inquisitorial dichotomy (as Jenks calls it) between ‘subject’ and ‘the other’ in the production of knowledge and the concomitant hygienisation of observation engraved in the positivist handbook. All of that converges on the ideology of scientism which has influenced the whole spectrum of the social sciences with its supposedly neutral, amoral and aesthetic paraphernalia implicated in the production and legitimization of modernity and its regime of truth¹⁸. Against such positivist epistemology, a visual paradigm for critical Human Security, and security studies at large, sets out to underline that reality is always for someone and some purpose, according to Robert Cox’s well known axiom¹⁹. Reality is not a value neutral fact out there but a web of intersubjective meanings and interactions that produce security for some to the detriment of others. A critical HS paradigm must take stock of this and use a pluralist methodology to tell the world about it.

¹⁶ The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture: An introduction, Jenks, 1995, 12.

¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty 1964, 16.

¹⁸ The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture: An introduction, Jenks, 1995, 7.

¹⁹ Cox, 1981, 129.

3. Putting forward a visual paradigm for Human Security studies

A second set of goals in this article has to do with exploring visual methods as innovative tools for unveiling and assessing the discursive nature of global insecurities (plus their relevant discursive contexts). In any case, contesting positivism in IR goes well beyond the question of which methods must be used to produce knowledge about the ‘international’ and the nature of ‘security’. In fact, upholding the use of visual tools as a post-positivist methodology stands at the centre of a renewed epistemological project for IR and Human Security, intent on placing *Verstehen* (hermeneutic understanding) and Reflexivism at the centre of knowledge production strategies about the ‘social’. This kind of visual paradigm sustained by the authors underlines the need to get involved in the production of the ‘visual’; not just reflecting upon the use of visual methods. By doing so, it departs from the notion of pure perception in the apprehension of reality in order to question the lack of hermeneutic understanding and reflection upon human practices (human rights and wrongs). It involves the setting up of a paradigm according to which, to follow Bryson’s words on art history, the ‘visual’ represents the concrete effort at unveiling, describing and interpreting social structures, interactions, transactions and contexts through the narratives individuals and groups tell about themselves and their lives.

This set of assumptions has prompted the authors in the last years to develop a series of visual projects around the world (Nicaragua in 2010, Fiji in 2012, Portugal in 2013 and Rwanda in 2014), in the institutional context of the Observatory for Human Security (University of Lisbon), aimed at reflecting upon the situatedness of human fragilities and the social practices that enhance human resilience. Two of these projects are already finished and produced three documentaries: *La Toma* (89’), a feature film about the taking of private lands in Northern Nicaragua and the social bonds that forged a new community; *Revolución* (122’), a feature film on the memories and expectations about the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua and how ideas about it still forge the daily life of different generations in the city of Estelí; *Esperance* (9’), a short film about Seth Nkundumukiza, an orphan of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, his trauma and expectations about the future. From the remaining two projects there should still come out two documentaries: *Islanders* (50’), a feature film about a community of fishermen living in the Yasawa Group, Fiji Islands, and *The Factory* (90’), a feature film about the setting up of a Popular Assembly in the outskirts of Lisbon and the renewal of social bonds that ensued as a bottom-up response to the financial and economic crisis afflicting Portugal in the last few years. What the authors want to underline with this pragmatic approach is that, according to Bryson, “the reality experienced by human beings is always historically produced: there

is no transcendent and naturally given Reality”²⁰, which demands a deeper reflection about the meanings social actors ascribe to social interactions and transactions in which they get involved, viz. the narratives they produce about themselves and their worlds. Such a visual paradigm, in which practitioners get involved both in the production of contents and the interpretation of contents produced by others, allows for a recuperation of Jenks’ idea that vision is a very sharp cultural (in the sense of productive) practice instead of the naked eye that captures a pre-formed and neutral reality waiting to be perceived²¹. A visual paradigm for HS and IR is especially fit for uncovering the dynamic and complex ways in which the social fabric – human insecurities and vulnerabilities but also human resilience – get produced and reproduced before our very eyes, in multiple *loci* whose sensitivity is not easy to capture through words only. If there is a ‘vision’ inherent to this visual paradigm it stems from the reflexive mind, not from the allegedly naked or innocent eye.

Reflexivity is one of the characteristics of post-positivist IR. In the context of a discursive and visual approach, being reflexive comes down to acknowledging the close relationship between social practices, increasingly visual, and the visual culture that constitutes the social world. Therefore, a visual paradigm for HS promotes the representation of social practices, namely (structural and direct) violence and resilience, not in the manner of correspondence to some kind of essential truth but as a way to transcend it according to criteria of human emancipation. Following Bryson’s logic, it does not imply the mere appropriation of the world through vision but a deep reorganization of that world in the context of a vision or perspective: one that allows for a critical understanding of how violence (or insecurities) and resilience get produced and reproduced, or how they get reconstituted as social practices. It is definitely a discursive or productive approach capable of bridging the gap between levels of analysis: from local insecurities to global trends and backwards, from human resilience at local levels to governance choices and backwards. By unveiling the productive and discursive nature of social interactions and transactions, the visual methodologies constitute themselves as potent tools to relate individual and specific stories to the vagaries of more global, impersonal or abstract political structures – of how the former become instances of the latter. Visual methodologies, we would like to stress, have the capacity to provide or trigger a macro understanding of human (in)security by discussing concrete instance or illustrations thereof.

Whereas the written word used to be the organizing stuff of industrial societies, the visual/audiovisual is becoming the organizing stuff of more complex, post-industrial societies even if the social sciences have shown a notorious difficulty to appropriate it as a relevant methodology

²⁰ Bryson 1983, 13.

²¹ The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture: An introduction, Jenks, 1995, 10.

and strategy in knowledge production. In order to fix their claim to scientificity, all academic domains need to reify a set of ‘summarizing technologies’, as Fyfe and Law²² call them, and make them legitimate vis-à-vis their peers. For a long time, the written text in its multiple forms was tantamount to the highest intellectual faculties dominated by social scientists in search of recognition by their peers in the natural sciences. In contrast, as Emmison and Smith underline, “images are seen as subversive, dangerous and visceral”²³. In academic institutions, always more or less tainted by various forms of conservatism, the emergence of a visual paradigm has proved clearly subversive of a naturalized order of commanding and obeying that depends on the survival of old paradigms with their ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies (and careers). In conservative institutions with a restricted and disciplined framework to assess what the social sciences are for, the emergence of a visual paradigm will always be perceived as a critical question enmeshed in the contestation of vested academic interests.

According to Callaghan, a visual approach to politics makes it possible to “move from an empirical/hermeneutic process of making subjects more ‘visible’ to the critical aesthetic mode of exploring the ‘visuality’ of how images themselves can ‘do’ things beyond representation and interpretation”²⁴. In this vein, it is crucial to explore how visualities can ‘do’ different things from the written text, i.e. to disclose a different kind of knowledge than more traditional written articles and papers can provide, and therefore should be accorded a special attention in the epistemology and methodology of knowledge production regarding (in)security. What the authors try to advance and consolidate with this approach is the contention and practice that ‘filming for fieldwork’ is a most valuable research method for knowing how the social works, how human insecurities are produced and how individuals and groups find ways to curb them. The goal should not be just to know better the hidden features of human (in)security but also to evoke them from an aesthetic viewpoint and reproduce their inner tensions, i.e. for cutting into new spaces of being and uncovering immanent possibilities for security. Underlying this paradigm there is the indivisibility of theory and practice and “a growing body of scholarly work advocating the practice of ‘transdisciplinarity’, ‘undisciplinarity’, and ‘cross-disciplinary’ translation calling for curiosity-driven and experimental research methods in IR and social sciences research more broadly”²⁵.

By employing a visual paradigm to the field of critical HS, the authors hope to get deeper into the complex processes of (real-time unfolding) practice and meaning making, according to

²² Fyfe and Law, ed. 1988.

²³ Emmison and Smith 2000, 14.

²⁴ Callaghan, 2015, 898.

²⁵ Barabantseva and Lawrence, 2015, 912.

MacDougall's remark that "observational film-making was founded on the assumption that things happen in the world which are worth watching, and that their own distinctive spatial and temporal configurations are part of what is worth watching about them"²⁶. In line with the pervasiveness of the 'visual' in modern societies, this paradigm can be said to apply an aesthetic mode of inquiry to the 'situated everyday life' where individuals and groups meet social structures, viz. to the pragmatic interactions of subjectivities, bodies and cultures with social technologies of control. Therefore, photography and documentary film are especially adept to capture a certain 'poetics of everydayness'. According to Highmore, and in the vein of Michel de Certeau, such a poetics equates to a certain 'density' emerging from the practices of everyday life and allowing those practices to become visible and audible, but at the same time always resisting representation, as in a kind of opaque or stubborn life²⁷. As Barabantseva and Lawrence put it, the camera does not just work as a medium for representing what is around; it preserves the embodied (re)actions of the filmmaker and therefore "[t]he ability to move closely and intersubjectively in the field of action at the moment of recording encourages a form of accountability not only in the moment of filming, but also in the audience who experience the film through the very images and sounds created in that moment"²⁸. The camera brings into the fore of HS the critical question of accountability of practices, not only those generated through social interactions in the world of global insecurities, but also those of knowledge production about these insecurities and how the world at large looks at them and experiences them.

The questions raised above bear a direct relationship to the discursive approach sustained throughout this article. In the sense attributed to it by Foucault, discursive practices consist in the set of social processes through which a certain reality becomes dominant by fixing tangible power-knowledge relations. In this context, it all comes down to unveiling and understanding how specific power-knowledge relations reify specific conceptions of truth (orders of truth) and that which is accepted as the 'real'²⁹. A visual paradigm that uncovers the discursive nature of global politics and human (in)security encourages the production of tools (photography and the documentary film-making, for instance) for the interpretation of the complex processes of producing meaning both within, across and among communities, i.e. in the broadest range of levels of analysis as possible. What this bridging of the gap between the micro and the macro makes possible is a better understanding of how cultural meanings are negotiated and renegotiated in the context of

²⁶ Whose story is it?, MacDougall, 1994, 31.

²⁷ Highmore 2002, 151.

²⁸ Barabantseva and Lawrence, 2015, 918-919.

²⁹ Foucault 1969; Foucault 1970.

concrete social structures and how they become intersubjective (although always contested) norms. The post-positivist influence comes by way of accepting that knowledge cannot be divorced from he or she who knows, his or her personal experiences and visions of the world and that the relationship established through a camera, for instance, can be a privileged way of witnessing (and knowing) how real people live, how they see the world, how they change or adapt to it, but also how they negotiate, renegotiate and contest meanings, norms, interests and even identities.

A visual paradigm for HS at large makes it easier for the researcher to understand the limitations of positivism and that the nature of knowledge he or she produces always depends on situatedness, i.e. one's *locus* in the world and the perceptions-cum-interpretations stemming from that. Telling the world about the worlds of (in)security with a camera in hand, the authors sustain, makes it easier to understand how such visions of the world get produced and upheld by social actors with complex interests and the power plays they become involved in. This way, the post-positivist researcher takes the position of someone who explores the (changing) nature of problems and challenges, not of someone who tests hypotheses. It is the position of someone who conducts research among people and learns with them, of someone who produces knowledge *with* people, not *on* people, as a collaborative endeavour. In this context, collaborative ethnographies may mirror, at the level of methodology, the epistemological assumptions raised above. The documentary film is then a privileged tool in the reconstruction or re-reading of social interactions and transactions, making it possible to produce knowledge from *within* specific forms of life (of individuals and communities) constituting the world discursively. Accordingly, documentary filming should aim at capturing the complexity and contingency of forms of life, thereby incorporating narrativity as a critical strategy to explore the world and change it for the better. To take Pierre Bourdieu as a reference, the documentary has the capacity "[t]o bring to light what is 'the hidden' par excellence, what escapes the gaze of science because it is hidden in the very gaze of the scientist [...]"³⁰. Drawing on Chris Marker, we are tempted to come to the conclusion that the only sensible weapon at the reach of the HS researcher in a world of inequities and insecurities of all sorts – both the fear from fear and the fear from want – is the film camera³¹. The critical reflexive twist here is that since international and global structures, and all phenomena stemming from them are always experienced and interpreted at the level of individual subjectivities, they find a most relevant expression in the stories actors tell about themselves, their lives and their worlds. The documentary film is then a privileged medium into those lives and worlds, the hermeneutic problématique of *other minds*, into

³⁰ Bourdieu, ed. 2004, 86.

³¹ Marker 2007, 7.

the different subjective ways in which different people experience insecurity and strive to build resilience.

On the other hand, putting forward a visual paradigm as a more reflexive and critical tool of research has also to take into account the consequences and potential that doing so can have at the level of human rights promotion and local empowerment. Writing about the pervasiveness of human wrongs in world politics, Ken Booth has argued that “[w]ords –even small words like definite and indefinite articles– can be tyrants; they can both kill and set free. Who we are and what we might become is in a word” (Booth, 1999: 31). Security however, is not a small word. At the individual level, it seems to encompass all that is primordial in the human condition, the need for survival. Yet, when expanded onto a broader canvas, security becomes fundamental to understand the shaping of human relations and the social arrangements upon which political societies have been structured. Furthermore, what we are and what we might become depends more upon some words than others. In a political landscape where new forms of thinking about who we might become are much needed, security achieves the status of a quintessential concept: an idea encompassing the unmatched potential to generate progressive social change.

Non-textual media is especially relevant in the context of human security given the fact that human insecurities usually strike those who are not in a position to articulate (textually) their life under duress. Hence, images of (in)security can be said to bear special significance in this process of re-thinking the meanings of (in)security in more inclusive, empowering and context-sensitive ways. By promoting understandings of (in)security that are always negotiated between beholders and the subjects of (in)security, visual methods can reveal deeper and more subjective layers of (in)security that often cannot be subsumed in words. On the other hand, by framing this notion through a direct engagement with the subjects’ daily lives, rather than an abstract notion of what it means to be (in)secure, visual tools can shed a deeper light on the material forms of (in)security. Finally, rather than victimising those who are often rendered insecure by broader political and institutional practices, an ethically-oriented production of visual knowledge can highlight the sites of agency and the strategies of resistance that individuals and communities deploy in their everydayness in order to cope with vulnerability. This in turn allows for a better understanding of what local agents conceive as critical in the process of promoting security while fortifying the hermeneutic tools of an approach concerned with ‘the identification, analysis and redressing of the insecurities affecting individuals and groups in particular contexts’³².

³² Security as emancipation, Basu and Nunes, 2013, 63.

On the other hand, and as shown in a variety of ethnographic research, images have a deeply emancipatory and pedagogical potential. In this sense, they can be mobilized as springboards for discussion either with the subjects of research, allowing them to produce their own understanding of insecurity by pinpointing the visual articulations that bear greater significance on their daily lives; or in the classroom environment, by confronting students with different understandings of (in)security and pushing them to question two specific features: how images can modify or deepen their understanding about the specific insecurities felt by ‘real people in real places’ and, more crucially, how these images can either challenge or reinforce broader narratives, relationships, institutions, ideas and structures of power. In other words, those features of insecurity can be highlighted through visual methods in ways that words are not capable of doing, and how these images always work in ways that legitimise specific moral geographies rather than others. In the way we conceive of them, visual methods highlight the possibility and need for a deeper ethics of care and collaboration in processes of knowledge production, allowing for the forging of dialogical bridges where knowledge and the subject of knowledge interact to (re)produce and challenge the entrenched logics of power while opening up new possibilities for emancipatory change. In this case, collaboration means that all subjects involved have a crucial role in the structuring of a specific visual project, as they define what should be seen, by whom, and for what purpose. The ethics of visual production is a very tricky subject that can only be dealt with satisfactorily by taking collaboration seriously. This bears special significance in contexts where individuals represented (and thus constituted) through images are also in a position of potential vulnerability vis-à-vis the protection of their privacy.

Furthermore, it is also important to underline that the visual as a method loses its somewhat rigid quality of a ‘tool’ that emerges out of deeper theoretical assumptions and acquires then a more flexible and porous character of a ‘journey’: a travelling process in which researcher and researched negotiate their distinctive visions in order to attribute new meaning(s) to world. If ‘to collect photographs is collect the world’³³, as Susan Sontag noted, to create images is to create the world. Visual methods work then as ways of worlding (or experiencing and constituting) the very subject they set out to apprehend. At the same time, this brings to the fore the deeper ethical questions about who should see these images and in which context they should be showed. As Roland Bleiker notes, while the ‘visual turn’ in social sciences brought with it a variety of methodological challenges, what is central in the process of producing visual knowledge is to take into account that ‘the meaning of images is always dependent upon the context of their interpretation’³⁴. Accordingly, it should be

³³ Sontag 2005, 1.

³⁴ Imagem, método, texto: entendendo a política da fotografia, Bleiker, 100-1.

noted that while mobilising visual methods for exploring the dynamics of (in)security it is critical to take into account the power, receptivity and predisposition of the beholder in order to assess the significance of images. Power, receptivity and predisposition cannot just be wished away. What we uphold here though is that images can serve as multiple loci of negotiation, tools for resisting and unsettling –through their reflexive potential– the fixity of words and concepts along with the power/knowledge processes that produce them. More than textual knowledge strategies, non-textual ones have the potential to cut through these processes, thereby embodying particularly well the Foucauldian dictum that knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting³⁵. In an era in which visual data circulates and is shared much more easily than textual data –and in which the visual itself becomes central in strategies of identity production– negotiations of meaning are all-pervasive and have the potential to cut through the different axes of privilege that breathe life to visual data. What collaborative projects may achieve therefore is to bring to the ‘negotiation table’ those who are not in a position to articulate textually the material and non-material conditions defining their (in)security, their experiences and identities, and then have these perspectives circulate in different platforms and media to unsettle the more established and privileged perspectives produced by the ‘secure’. Furthermore, collaborative visual projects should have the capacity to establish, from the very perspective of the ‘insecure’, what is trivial and what is significant in their condition, and how to articulate both in a representation of meaningful action and reaction. In the vein of Michel de Certeau, we claim that it is the articulation of ‘trivial’ and ‘significant’ that can give density to the practices of everyday life, in a photo exhibition or documentary, making these practices all the more reflexive as they are capable of translating a certain poetics of everydayness.

All in all, a visual paradigm of HS is meant to intervene in the constitution of the ‘political’ itself. As underlined by Matteo Stochetti, “despite its academic success, the actual contribution of visual analysis to the constitution of the political seems uncertain. The study of images seems to have been unable to engage the *politics* of images and, therefore, to mobilise the political imagination against the seemingly irresistible spread of corporate ‘promotion culture’ to the institutions of knowledge and reduction of societal cultural production into its logic”³⁶. The visual paradigm of HS that we put forward here is not merely a visual analysis of (in)security. Rather, it intends to cut deeper in ontological and epistemological terms and therefore engage in the politics of images by producing materials (still photos and films) that are capable of (re)opening the debate – within specific contexts of meaning and material conditions– about who and what security is for and

³⁵ Nietzsche Genealogy History, Foucault, 1984, 76-100.

³⁶ Stochetti and Kukkonen, eds. 2011, 22.

how the subjects of security constitute themselves as such by interacting in the context of power structures. The bottom line is that photography and documentary film as hermeneutic devices have the potential to stir up the kind of political imagination that is crucial for devising the future worlds of human security, i.e. our collective journey of becoming human.

4. Concluding remarks

The first concluding remark concerns the statement that the approach explored by the authors in this text is in itself part of the visual politics they prescribe for Human Security (which is understood here as a liminal academic discipline in need of a reflexive turn), IR and the Social Sciences at large. To be clearer, the authors have a specific political understanding of what HS, IR and the Social Sciences (theory and practice) are for and how a visual paradigm will help put it into effect. Such political understanding concerns, namely, how a visual paradigm can play a role in a better understanding (i) of human insecurities and their discursive nature but also (ii) of the possible ways of curbing them, protecting and empowering people, and producing resilient communities. Not only are authors conscious of their political understanding of Human Security; they conceive of their activities (academic research, volunteer work and filming) in collaborative terms and embrace collaborative ethnographies in order to accentuate the ‘political’ in Human Security, IR and the Social Sciences. Moreover, the authors put it into practice by making use of a visual paradigm – producing documentary films – within the social process of contestation about global security: (i) what it is; (ii) who it is for, and (iii) how to refine the institutional or governance rejoinders to global risks, threats and vulnerabilities.

A second conclusion concerns the connected statement that the reflexive turn defended by the authors for the Social Sciences can be productively approached through the concept of a visual politics. The authors claim that such a paradigm can enhance the understanding of the discursive nature of human insecurities, vulnerabilities and resilience, as well as the complexity of processes within which intersubjective meanings are negotiated, contested or imposed to produce discursive security contexts and structures. The authors also claim that a visual paradigm for Human Security can be productive by bridging the gap between levels of analysis and integrating micro-visions with macro-visions of global (in)security, concrete human stories of suffering and resilience with the interplay of global structures and governance policies. The bottom line is that, by unveiling the productive and discursive nature of social interactions and transactions, a visual paradigm has the potential to unveil the connection of personal narratives with the actual workings of global,

impersonal or abstract political structures. A paradigm that unfolds through the production of photography and documentary film about human insecurities and the immanent possibilities for resilience has a better chance of engaging the *politics* of images, questioning who and what security is for and therefore stirring up political imagination.

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Pro-rural policies and people's capacity to aspire: Observations of the use of financial resources in the villages of Thailand

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Abstract

This paper explores the diversity in the capacity to aspire among people living in societies in transition. To this end, it reflects on interviews with people living in three rural villages in the Northeast of Thailand, conducted during a period when the Thai government introduced a series of policies to support the rural poor, including the Million Baht Village Fund Program.

During the past decade, many researchers have evaluated the effectiveness of this programme to facilitate the rural poor to invest in capital to increase their village incomes. However, while the rural population has engaged in off-farm activities done outside of the villages more frequently, such a perspective fails to examine the implications of the diverse manner in which people benefit from, or shy away from this programme. Cases in rural Thailand reveal the creative ways used by people to interpret and combine various resources — either those that have long existed or have been newly introduced by a specific policy — to change their livelihoods, or to hold on to the current situation. Thus, such ways illustrate diversity in the capacity to aspire to an alternative future for these people.

Keywords:

Capacity to aspire; rural development; Northeast Thailand; Microfinance; Million Baht Village Fund Program

1. Introduction: What we can learn from the continuing rural-urban antagonism?

Since the coup initiated by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) in May 2014, the street rallies have calmed down. However, it is not clear whether Thailand can return to democracy in three years as was declared by NCPO². The continuing instability is usually associated with rural-urban antagonism in Thailand. In a popularly generalised story, the rural and the poor population, who have long been ignored in the economic development of the country, strongly supported Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) and its successors because it introduced

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² JETRO, 2014; The Government Public Relations Department, 2014b

a series of populist policies to help them³. On the other hand, the urban middle class and the traditional elites of the nation, namely the military and the royalists, have attempted to get rid of Thaksin's ever-increasing influence⁴. The TRT's pro-poor/pro-rural policies made a significant contribution to the escalation of conflict.

During the past decade, a number of studies have been carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of these policies in supporting the rural poor. As we will see in this paper, some of them conclude that they certainly improved the rural economy, with some limitations to reach the poorest population and improve their conditions. Moreover, statistics indicate that the TRT's period made substantial impacts on the agriculture sector.

Such a simplified perception, however, misses some important points of attention. First, the rural poor were not the only supporters of Thaksin. Major enterprises also welcomed TRT's economic policies to help them overcome the predicaments after the 1997 financial crisis⁵. Secondly, the red-shirts were not exclusively composed of the rural poor; a number of local government staff and individuals in the rural middle class contributed to organising this group. In addition, urban residents also participated in the street rallies⁶. These observations are important, considering the transition of rural societies since the late 20th century. Many researchers have reported drastic changes in Thai rural villages. Unlike the traditional agrarian communities, villagers have shifted their livelihoods to businesses, taking advantage of opportunities in the cities. The dichotomy of urban residents and rural farmers is not likely to hold true any longer⁷.

Given this, we would fail to capture the dynamics of people's lives in the transitional period if we only evaluate the effectiveness of certain policies to support the target population, i.e. poor rural villagers who continue farm-based livelihoods in villages. Therefore, instead of evaluating the effectiveness or the impacts of TRT's policies, this paper proposes an alternative perspective to learn from the ways in which individuals benefit from those policies to organise their lives during transitional periods. We will revisit the people's inventive approach to take advantage of them, or alternatively to hesitate to utilise them. This perspective enables us to better recognise the disparities in their capacity to aspire⁸ to their alternative futures.

³ Kuhonta, 2003; Parnwell, 1996, Hewison, 2004; Phongpaichit & Baker, 2008, Ockey, 2003

⁴ Brown & Hewison, 2005; Chambers, 2010; Hewison, 2004, 2005; Johnson, 2013; Kuhonta & Mutebi, 2006; McCargo, 2009

⁵ Glassman, 2004, 2007; Hewison, 2005. This policy is paradoxical in that it attempts to improve the social welfare in order to achieve neo-liberal economic development policies (Pye & Schaffar, 2008).

⁶ Chachavalpongpun, 2013; Prasirtsuk, 2010

⁷ Thabchumpon & McCargo, 2011; Walker, 2012

⁸ Appadurai, 2004.

2. Reviews: Understanding Thaksin's populist policies for the rural poor population

After the Financial Crisis in 1997, the two successive governments of the Democratic Party subscribed to the IMF's recommendation and carried out certain measures, such as the privatisation and restructuring of the state-owned enterprises, the lifting of barriers for foreign capital, and wage cuts. These measures further aggravated domestic business, triggering 'fire sales' wherein Thai enterprises were purchased with foreign capital for extremely discounted prices, and employment and wages were also severely damaged. Wage cuts most significantly affected the sectors of agriculture, manufacturing, transportation, and sales. Sensing the discontent among voters, the TRT promised to reinforce domestic business enterprises by clearing nonperforming loans, and to introduce various measures to alleviate the predicaments of the impoverished rural and urban populations, gaining wide support from these groups as well as from the leaders of large companies⁹. The highlights of the TRT's policies for the urban and rural poor are summarised as follows.

The Million Baht Village Fund Program was introduced in 2001, soon after the TRT came into power. According to this programme, the community's steering committee operates a microcredit scheme based on a transfer of one million baht of capital from the national government to the accounts of more than seventy thousand villages and communities as of 2001¹⁰. Villagers who are enrolled in the fund membership can apply for a small-scale loan at up to twenty thousand baht. The committee evaluates applicants' submitted proposals, which state the purpose of the loan and the financial condition of the applicant, and then determines the amount of the loan. The repayment term is one year, and the interest differs among villages, usually ranging from four to six percent.

A moratorium and abatement on the interest of loans from the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) was applied for small-scale farmers. These restrictions were in place for three years beginning on 1 April, 2001, and helped two million farmers in total¹¹.

In addition, the People's Bank was established by the Government Savings Bank (GSB) to provide small loans to those who do not have assets to offer as collateral. As a result, 708,000 people were allotted credit by August 2003¹².

Universal healthcare (also known as the '30 Baht Scheme') integrated previous healthcare plans

⁹ Glassman, 2004; Hewison, 2004, 2005; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009; Ockey, 2003; Pye & Schaffar, 2008

¹⁰ Chandoevrit & Ashakul, 2008

¹¹ JETRO, 2004

¹² JETRO, 2004

for the rural and poor populations, as well as for any others who were without coverage¹³. ‘Gold cards’ were issued to beneficiaries, who equated to 78.8% of the Thai population. Recipients were able to receive medical treatment at a flat rate of 30 baht per visit to public hospitals and health clinics by simply presenting the card.

The ‘One Tambol One Product’ (OTOP) measure aims to support manufacturing groups in rural villages. Through this measure, the national and local governments provide support to microenterprises and resident groups producing handicrafts or food products by utilising publicity and brand marketing. As a result, more than 1.3 million people from twenty thousand villages participated in the scheme¹⁴.

Finally, the Small-Medium-Large (SML) scheme provided 200 to 300 thousand baht to Thai villages in accordance with their population size to address the challenges of each village, such as the establishment of a community facility, the introduction of a welfare scheme, job training, or income generation¹⁵.

To some degree, these policies may have contributed to the rapid recovery of the rural areas and the agricultural sector in Thailand. Statistics show that agriculture grew faster than any other economic sector during the late 2000s (Figure 1). Additionally, the proportion of households living solely or mainly off of farming income increased from 2003 to 2013, reaching a level comparable to that of 1993 (Figure 2)¹⁶.

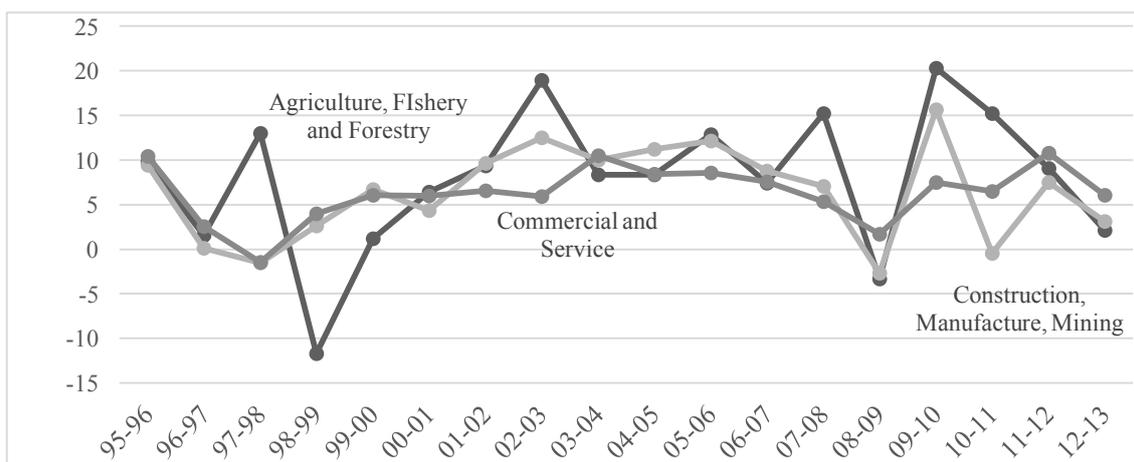


Figure 1: Annual GDP growth rate by sector in Thailand, 1995-2013

Source: Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, cited by the National Statistical Office

¹³ Chalernpol & Mizuno, 2006

¹⁴ Natsuda, Igusa, & Wiboonpongse, 2012

¹⁵ The Government Public Relations Department, 2005, 2014a

¹⁶ National Statistical Office, 2013

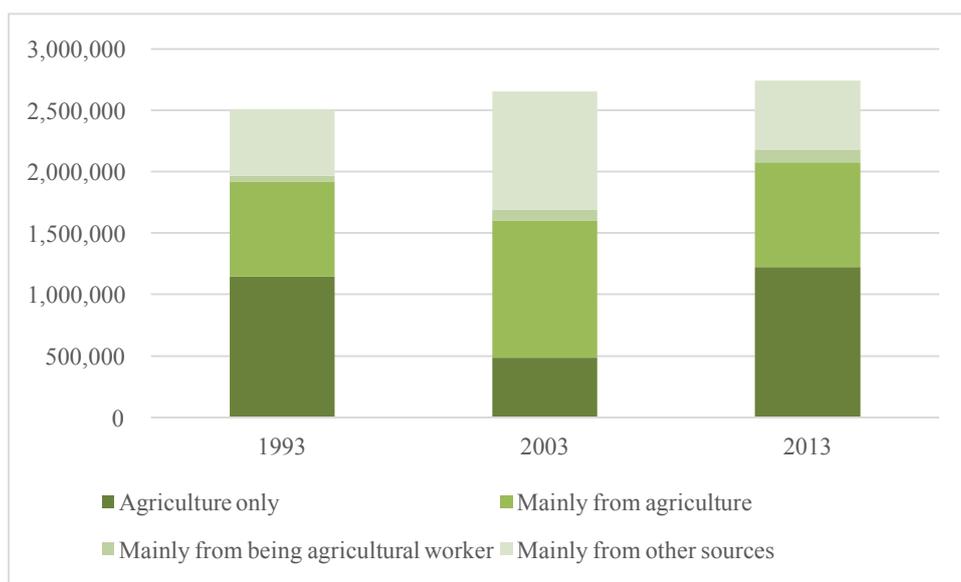


Figure 2: Number of farm households by the main source of income,
 Northeast Thailand, 1993, 2003 and 2013
 Source: National Statistical Office

A number of studies have been conducted to determine whether the policies of the TRT had any significant impact as expected. Above all, some of the nationwide schemes (namely, the Million Baht Fund Program, the 30 Baht Scheme, and OTOP) particularly gained the interest of researchers. Thus, the typical points of evaluation of such studies were analysed as follows, using the Million Baht Village Fund Program as an example.

The Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) issued a few reports analysing the impacts of the village fund. Anuchitworawong analysed the Socio-Economic Survey of the National Statistical Office (NSO) to examine whether the poor could easily access the credit programme and utilise it to raise income. The results revealed that the proportion of the poor (living below the poverty line) among those who took advantage of this scheme declined from 2002 to 2004, and then to 2006. A similar decrease in the proportion of the impoverished users was also observed in the moratorium on BAAC loans. Moreover, results revealed that the income gap between the top and lower quantiles widened during the period from 2002 to 2004, and then to 2006. Further, it was discovered that the richer users could increase income more substantially than the poor. Based on such findings, Anuchitworawong concluded that the governments' credit programmes did not achieve their objective of poverty alleviation¹⁷. Another report published by TDRI also examined the Socioeconomic Surveys in 2002 and 2004 to analyse the usages of the loans, and concluded that

¹⁷ Anuchitworawong, 2007

expenditures leading to income generation did not substantially change¹⁸.

Researchers from the NSO and the World Bank also relied on Thailand Socio-Economic Surveys for data, but produced results that were slightly different from those of the TDRI. Boonperm, Jirawan, Haughton, and Jonathan focused on the impact of the Million Baht Village Fund Program on the behaviours of users, such as consumption, investment, and refinancing, and compared them by their income levels. According to the report, the users could raise their incomes from agriculture and off-farm businesses, while the wage income and transferred income did not change substantially. The poorest quantile was found to use the fund programme most frequently, and the money borrowed from the fund was mostly used for farming expenditures, although less often to diversify crops or extend farmland and more often to deal with problems of cash flow. Additionally, the fund did not replace the BAAC's loans or other formal or informal credit systems; rather, it worked in a complementary manner to achieve positive impacts¹⁹.

Menkhoff and Rungruxsirivorn administered surveys to over 2,000 households to analyse whether the Million Baht Village Fund Program reached the poor population and how the users differentiated or combined it with other credit resources. In the rural areas of Thailand, various financial resources are available, including formal schemes such as the community bank and the BAAC loan, as well as semi-formal or informal financial institutions. The study revealed a few features of the village fund program: first, the profiles of its users were similar to those of the non-formal credit services, and second, it improved credit accessibility among the poor. Given these findings, the authors argued that the village fund was successful in functioning as complementary to the formal and informal financial services²⁰.

Kaboski and Townsend administered a panel survey to the same sample households for more than ten years beginning in 1997, four years prior to the introduction of the Million Baht Village Fund Program. They analysed the impacts of the village fund on the rural credit market, income, investment, and consumption, and also analysed whether such impacts differed according to users' gender. The authors concluded that the village fund succeeded in increasing the credit flow in the rural areas as it increased the future income in the short-term, and made business incomes and wage earnings more important in the total income structure of rural households²¹.

Based on these studies on the Million Baht Village Fund Program, we can formulate a set of questions to further clarify the fund's effectiveness.

¹⁸ Chandoevmit & Ashakul, 2008

¹⁹ Boonperm, Jirawan, Haughton, & Jonathan, 2013

²⁰ Menkhoff & Rungruxsirivorn, 2009a, 2009b

²¹ Kaboski & Townsend, 2005, 2012

- Q1. Did the fund actually reach the poor population, or was it mainly used by the richest population while excluding access by the poor?
- Q2. Was the loan used by the poor to diversify the farming or start-up businesses, or was it spent on daily expenses?
- Q3. Did the loan replace the existing credit sources (particularly the informal moneylenders), or did it function as a complementary resource?
- Q4. How did the fund change the on- and off-farm incomes and debts?
- Q5. Did the fund close or widen the gap between the poor and the rich?

The following table summarises the answers to these questions

Table: The summary of the key questions and answers about the effectiveness of the Million Baht Village Fund Program

Key Questions	TDRI	NSO & WB	Menkoff & Rungruxsirivorn	Kaboski & Townsend
Q1. Accessibility for the poor	The poor accessed. However, the share of the rich increased with time.	The poor accessed. However, some were rejected by the committee, and some did not apply for fear of rejection.	The poor utilised, just as they did the existing non-formal financial resources.	Not analysed.
Q2. Usages (investment, consumption, etc.)	Expenditures leading to income generation did not substantially increase.	Expenditures for agriculture increased, but they did not lead to diversification or expansion.	Used for both production and consumption. Effective to alleviate the credit restraint.	Expenditures related to renovation of houses and automobiles increased, but those related to starting a business did not increase.
Q3. Substitutability and complementarity to other (particularly non-formal) financial services	Not analysed.	Complementary to the existing finances.	Complementary to the existing finances, assuming the roles between the formal and non-formal services.	Not analysed.
Q4. Impacts on income, expenditures, and debt	Both income and expenditure increased. The impacts are more substantial in richer households.	Expenditures substantially increased. Income also increased to some extent.	Not analysed.	Wage and business incomes increased. However, the impact was limited during the initial years of implementation.
Q5. Impacts on the discrepancy between the rich and the poor	The gap between the rich and the poor is increasing.	Not analysed.	Not analysed.	Not analysed.

Such research revealed the achievements of the Village Fund Program in the target villages. However, it did not take into consideration the fact that the rural households had been diversifying

their livelihoods both in terms of their income sources including agriculture and off-farm activities, and the locations to live and work, including the villages, cities, and foreign countries. People had been doing so to meet their current needs, as well as those of the next generation, based on their unique understanding of socio-economic transition. More importantly, not all of the rural population are capable of diversifying their livelihood and pursuing future needs. Given this, we should not be satisfied with figuring out the effectiveness of a certain scheme in achieving the prescribed objectives. We should explore the diverse ways in which people can (or cannot) benefit from the opportunities provided by the pro-poor/pro-rural policies to organise their living in the transitional period.

3. The Question and Methodology

This paper addresses several questions as follows: how did people in societies under transition interpret and benefit from the opportunities provided by certain policy schemes designed to support them; what did they attempt to secure taking advantage of such opportunities; and how did they aspire to pathways to maintain and change their lives. Ultimately, these questions will guide us to revisit the way we (researchers, policymakers, field practitioners, etc.) approach such dynamics of capacity to aspire.

The paper reflects on the topics I learned from interviews with villagers in Northeast Thailand, where I made several visits between 2000 and 2006, a period when the TRT's policies in support of the rural farmers were spreading and beginning to take effect. While visiting the three villages (hereafter referred to as D, N, and P villages) in Khon Kaen province, whose capital was one of the largest growing cities in the region, I interviewed a total of 130 people. The interviews usually took between one and four hours, and covered topics from their farm and other economic activities, to labour migration both within and out of Thailand, household expenditures, education, and so on. I made multiple visits to 30 of the 130 informants in particular for more detailed interviews, focusing on their unique understanding of the experiences, present conditions, and prospects for the future.

In this paper, I will reflect on the topics I learned about the financial resources in the villages, including the Million Bhat Village Fund Program. Rather than identifying what a policy offers to the target population — in this context, the farmers and poor population in rural villages — the paper examines the ways in which people accept or neglect such policies, to figure out under what kind of transitions they are managing to survive, and then to revisit the diverse and dynamic natures of the rural population.

4. Observation: The flexible usages of financial resources in the villages

4.1 Borrowing money in village life

The TRT introduced the Million Baht Village Fund Program in 2001 as one of its policies aimed at assisting both the rural and urban poor. The funds were established in 2002 in D and P villages, and in 2004 in N village. The funds allowed member households to borrow a maximum amount of twenty thousand baht per year. In order to apply for the microcredit, applicants were requested to become members of the fund and to submit a proposal to the steering committee. The committee, comprising 15 villagers, evaluated the proposed objective of each loan as well as the assets and incomes of the applicant's household to judge the repayment capacity. Because of this process, some of the poor villagers did not apply for the scheme under the assumption that they would never be accepted. The payment period is fixed for one year, and the interest rate was set at 6% per year, which was considerably lower than the BAAC loans. Considering Thailand's inflation rate in the early 2000s, this rate was essentially interest-free. I did not hear of any cases of default in the village fund scheme²².

Needless to say, the Million Baht Village/Urban Fund Program was not the only financial resource available to the villagers. Various means, from formal schemes to semi- or informal resources, were utilised in accordance with the objectives and conditions of each case. To understand the impacts of the fund on villagers' lives, we must observe the different contexts of individual financial needs, as well as their corresponding approaches to taking advantage of the various resources.

More than 100 thousand baht was required in many cases, such as purchasing farmland, starting a business, or applying for a job in a foreign country. For instance, one person needed to invest 400 thousand baht or more to start a side business to collect rice and other crops from neighbouring village farms and transport them to the city market using a pickup truck. In such cases, applicants took advantage of loans from the BAAC, a commercial bank, or moneylenders. The BAAC was preferred as it had the cheapest interest rates (12% to 13% a year). Some of the villagers borrowed commission fees paid to brokers to find jobs in foreign countries. In some cases, however, they had no other choice than to borrow from moneylenders. For instance, middlemen supporting the villagers in their pursuit to travel abroad sometimes forced the applicants to borrow money from a specific

²² More than 90% of the borrowers completed their payment, while some refinanced the fund with the debt from informal lenders who proposed a 40% or higher interest (Boonperm et al., 2013). In some villages, the fund offered more flexible arrangements such as allowing interest payments while suspending payments of the principal. Such arrangements were not available through the funds offered in the three villages I visited.

moneylender. In other cases, if one did not have a transferable land title, one found it difficult to utilise the BAAC loan. In such a situation, one could join a mutual guarantee group to take out a loan. However, the maximum amount of the loan was set to 100 thousand baht in such cases. Thus, some villagers relied on moneylenders who offered more flexible arrangements. For example, some moneylenders would grant loans based on a pledge to transfer rights to use the land to those with the same family name rather than providing the land certificate as collateral.

Meanwhile, less than 100 thousand baht allowed people to achieve more minor changes in their livelihoods, such as by purchasing a motorcycle instead of a pickup truck, buying a buffalo, investing in seeds and fertilisers to start growing a new crop, or undertaking renovations to open a grocery store. In the past, the BAAC loan had been the most frequently used financial resource for such purposes. Almost all households in two of the three villages were members of the BAAC's loan groups, and over 80% had actually been financed through the BAAC at least once. Interestingly, some of the borrowers did not care about the possibility of falling behind the repayment schedule or going into default. It was often mentioned that the BAAC did not actually seize borrowers' lands, even in cases where recipients were unable to repay the loan. Moreover, borrowers could apply for a payment moratorium or a reduction of interest of the BAAC loans during the three-year period following April 2001. These conditions alleviated any pressing anxiety over the risk of default.

The village fund provided an alternative financial option other than the BAAC. The fund typically granted ten to fifteen thousand baht to go towards farming expenses, such as fertilisers, machines, and buffaloes. However, some of the borrowers utilised funds for daily necessities. A few conditions of the village fund were perceived by the villagers as inflexible, however. First, the maximum amount of the loan was fixed at twenty thousand baht. Second, full repayment was required within a year. Third, only one person from a family could apply per year; therefore, when one applied, all other members of the family were required to wait until the next year to apply. Finally, the application screening process made the fund less attractive to those who recognised themselves as poor or unstable in the village. Mr. K of P village provided an example of such a case, revealing why he opted not to apply to the Million Baht Village Fund Program.

[K] The poor are considered incapable of repaying, and thus aren't welcome to apply for the fund. We have no chance.

[Interviewer] Did you apply for the fund and get rejected?

[K] No, I did not. I do not want to borrow from them. A daily labourer like me can't pay back. We use the money up as we don't have the knowledge to invest. We do not need it. It

is easier for me to cut sugar canes (at the lender's field). This allows me to get an allowance in advance and work my debt off.

[Interviewer] Do you have any loans from the BAAC?

[K] No, no, I don't. I don't want to borrow from those imposing interest. When I fail to pay back, I will be summoned and get blamed.

(Interview with Mr. K, 16 September 2005)

The members of the steering committee were villagers selected by the village community. Therefore, in cases where an applicant was denied by the committee, this meant that he or she was discredited by the major stakeholders of the village. Further, the fixed repayment period of one year was also a burden for poorer households. For those whose income resources were unstable, it was far easier to borrow from moneylenders or relatives who offered a certain level of flexibility, such as accepting labour as debt repayment.

Smaller amounts of cash, such as hundreds of baht, were required to meet urgent needs in some cases (for example, when the remittance of a family member working in the city had temporarily ceased). Petty cash helped villagers afford smaller, daily expenses such as food and bus fares. The village fund did not respond to such urgent necessities, however, as the approval process takes months and borrowers may only apply once per year²³. Therefore, people often borrowed several hundred to a few thousand baht from their neighbours or relatives. When villagers' harvests were insufficient, rice was also borrowed. Neighbours and relatives offered quick support to those who were in urgent need of small amounts of cash or rice, and they usually did not take collateral. Further, they typically allowed borrowers to repay at any time or work at the lender's farm instead of paying cash. The interest rate was also usually unclear as generally, the borrowers did not consider interest and the lenders did not lend with the intent to gain interest. Therefore, the psychological burden was much lower than a more formal scheme.

4.2 Creative uses of the Village Fund Program

The above observations illustrate methods by Thai villagers to combine diverse financial resources to turn their aspirations into reality. More detailed descriptions will reveal what the Village Fund Program has brought to the lives of villagers in different conditions. Thus, now let me illustrate the contexts in which some of the villagers applied for the Village Fund Program, and utilised the

²³ Menkhoff and Rungruxsirivorn (2009a, 2009b) showed that the time-consuming procedure of the application and screening of the village fund hindered it from replacing other informal financial resources available to address urgent monetary needs or emergencies. Indeed, the fund was not at all helpful in addressing emergencies in the villages I visited. In cases of severe emergencies that required hundreds of thousands of baht to deal with, such as the death of a family member, villagers relied on other frameworks such as a funeral fund.

fund.

To begin with, the “productive” usages of the 20 thousand baht could be studied, such as purchase of cattle, minor renovations to a shop, or a start-up of small handicraft business. Such “investments” seem to have only a subtle impact, if we focus on the “profit” these activities made. However, we would look at these “minor” changes in a slightly different way if we knew how such people managed their livelihoods in the past, making full use of the different financial resources.

- The case of Mr. S

Mr. S, a man in D village, has worked in two foreign countries for a total of twelve years. When he returned to the village in 1996, he had saved more than one million baht. He bought two pickups and started a transportation company. However, his company was poorly managed and went bankrupt in 1999, leaving him with 700 thousand baht of debt owed to commercial banks and the BAAC. The payment of the BAAC loan was not suspended in his case, since the amount exceeded the limit of the moratorium. When I first met him in August 2001, he had barely managed to generate income for his family’s subsistence by raising ducks, chickens, pigs, and catfish.

(Interview with Mr. S, 19 April 2000)

Four years later, Mr. S sold most of his field to repay his debt, but still had a rice field that barely yielded enough for himself and his wife to survive on. He opened a small noodle restaurant and a grocery store on his land. His restaurant and store attracted more regular customers than any other establishments in the village, and this allowed him to repay his debt little by little. Further, Mr. S’s two children helped to contribute to his efforts, even though they already had their own jobs. He said, ‘(m)y daughter is in a distant place, and she helps us by sending money. My son lives here, though he has a job, and he gives us a hand anytime we need him’.

(Interview with Mr. S, 19 August 2004)’.

In 2004, Mr. S’s restaurant and store were still thriving, and he was happy to converse with me about the changes in the society and the villagers’ lives. He told me that it was normal for a family to live off profits from stores or other businesses, combined with the wage income of other family members. Therefore, Mr. S explained, the youth were expected to go outside of the village in search of jobs. ‘The days of rice farming were over’, according to Mr S. That said, Mr. S pointed out that people ‘have not stopped farming yet. They spend less time in the field since

they work (at other workplaces), but they go there whenever they have time'. Mr. S also continued farming in the rice field, which was reduced to a quarter of its original size. In 2004, he borrowed twenty thousand baht from the village fund to purchase a buffalo. Mr. S continued engaging in farming activities despite the fact that he realises they generate little income.

(Interview with Mr. S, 8 September 2005)

- The case of Ms. U

Ms. U, a primary school teacher living in N village, had a number of jobs before she gained her teacher's licence when she was eighteen. She said, 'Living in a rural village, I saw most children had to live much the same life. I wanted to support them by educating how to live, how to be a good person, and what kind of lives they could live.' Since then she has worked at a primary school in an adjacent province for more than 30 years. She became one of the highest-paid workers living in N village, and had a large farmland where she employed villagers to grow cattle, pumpkin, and rice, all of which was profitable. Her income and the status as a teacher allowed her to pay into various insurance schemes and a pension, and to become a member of a variety of saving groups. Thus, she did not feel anxious about her retirement security. She wished to "come back to the real life" of a farmer after retirement. She spent 2 hours in the morning and another 2 hours in the evening to make and sell sweets in N village. This was the way she could remain involved in the village where she does not spend most of her time. She applied for the Village Fund Program to purchase the equipment to cook and sell traditional sweets.

(Interview with Ms. U, 1 September 2005)

The above two cases illustrate the typical way that villagers successfully diversify their income sources, combining different economic activities both in the farm field and the other locations. The Village Fund Program enabled only subtle increases of income, in comparison to the sales of the grocery store or the teacher's salary. However, this does not mean that the fund did not provide them with any assistance. The opportunities for minor changes (such as those provided by the village fund) were also of great importance, even when people were expecting fundamental changes to adjust to socioeconomic transitions in the rural areas. Thus, the Million Baht Village Fund Program was certainly an effective means of support to most villagers who envisioned stable methods to enhance their living situations through borrowing smaller amounts of money.

However, not all of the borrowers was successful. Many villagers admitted that they ended up spending the money just to keep on rice farming as usual, or used it for daily expenditures for their

families. Should we look at such cases as failures?

- The case of Ms. J

Ms. J of N village was born in 1978. As was often the case with girls in her generation, she started working right after graduating from primary school. She worked as a housemaid, and then she worked at some factories in a few different provinces. Even when she got married and came home, she found a position at a doll factory near the village. When her mother became sick in 2003, she decided to quit her job and work in the rice paddy instead of her mother. This meant the income of the young couple decreased by half. J's husband came up with an idea to run a coffee stand in Khon Kaen city, and borrowed 36,000 baht from GSB for this purpose. J also opened a coffee stand in N village, but the sales of the second stand fell far short of expectation. Therefore, the family had to live mainly off the sales of her husband's coffee stand, about 250 baht per day. Moreover, for some reason J's husband had to support his sister. Therefore, the money borrowed from the Village Fund was used for his sister's family.

(Interview with Ms. J, 13 September 2005)

The villagers carried out different activities at the same time, benefitting from different financial resources to cope with their unique problems. As the result of their efforts to take advantage of different programmes, they spent the money borrowed from the Village Fund Program on daily expenditures. Therefore, we should not jump to conclusions and look at such cases as failures, simply from the fact that the money was not invested in income generating activities. However, those villagers with less financial capability were certainly more likely to spend the money borrowed from the Village Fund Program in such "unproductive" purposes.

- The case of Ms. Y

Ms. Y's family was probably the poorest among the 130 informants I talked to in the three villages. Y, a 71 year old woman with cataracts, lived with her two grandsons in a small wooden house, which did not have a wall on its front side. Her family did not have any farmland at all. Y's daughter and her husband had been working at a shrimp farm far away from the village for 3 years. Once her daughter borrowed 5,000 baht and attempted to grow taro. However, she was not successful and had to work at the shrimp farm again. Y and her grandsons lived off a few thousand baht of remittance sent from her daughter once in three months. However, this small remittance was sometimes ceased. Y gave her grandsons 10 to 12 baht a day to have lunch at the school, and cut the

other expenses, including of her own medical treatment.

(Interview with Ms. Y, 31 August 2002, 05 January 2003, 16 August 2003)

In contrast to Mr. K's statement that poor people like him would be rejected, they were actually allowed to borrow a certain amount of money. However, they were more likely to spend that money to maintain the current level of farm production, or to meet some unexpected expenditures. Despite these "unproductive" usages, they do not fail to pay the money back, thanks to diverse financial resources such as money from relatives, or an advance on their salaries from the owners of the sugar cane fields or the shrimp farms.

5. Discussion: Looking into diverse capacities to aspire

Based on these four cases, we will explore the different capacities among the villagers to make use of the resources, including their own assets, labour force, social relations, as well as the opportunities offered by certain policy schemes. The villagers combined different resources in association with their objectives, level of urgency, and the required monetary amount. They also considered specific conditions, such as the swiftness of approval, the flexibility of the payment period, or personal trust. It was sometimes impossible to use the most desirable financial resources, and in some cases, villagers displayed ingenuity and took advantage of schemes that were not available in principle. Through such considerations, some proactively sought out opportunities to secure large assets by going abroad or starting a relatively bigger business, and at the same time utilised available resources that enable minor changes. Such people engaged in a wide range of activities in various locations, including both within and outside of the village, out of consideration that rice farming is a thing of the past.

However, some of the villagers could not benefit from these schemes in any way. Some villagers spent the money borrowed from the fund on their daily expenses, and others did not even want to apply for the fund scheme in the first place. In fact, many villagers had given up on creating their own businesses or commercial crops, while others never had the intention to do so, expressing that they were satisfied with the ways in which they lived their lives and would continue living in a similar way. Mr. K was just one of many villagers who did not pursue the opportunities to change their lives. Based on his position as one of 'the poor', Mr. K expected that he would be denied a loan, and even if he could borrow he asserted that he would not be able to repay the loan. Mr. K was afraid of the stigma that could be placed on him if he were to be rejected or if he failed to pay back the loan.

For such villagers, most financial resources, including the Village Fund Program, were likely to be used to hold on to their current situations, rather than to move out of it.

More importantly, while villagers would communicate this expression often, no one expected their children or grandchildren to continue living in such an unchanging way. Instead, villagers strongly hoped that their children would do something different from what they had been doing (i.e. growing rice, vegetables and fruits). They often stressed how hard it had been to pick firewood, bamboo shoots and mushrooms in the forest, grow crops in the field, and catch fish in the ponds and rivers. On the surface, such sentiment was strange, as the same villagers also confessed that farming had become easier and more secure largely due to the introduction of new technologies. The laboriousness of farming was stressed particularly when the topics of the conversation touched upon the future of villagers' children. A woman in N village said, 'It was so hard to (work at the paddy and the garden. I didn't want them (her daughters) to experience that. I wanted them to have a bright future.' As a matter of fact, some parents had already saved sufficient assets or begun to initiate concrete actions to secure financial security. Meanwhile, others couldn't determine any means to do so, and considered that a potential future for their children different from their own lives as farmers was an unrealistic fantasy.

Given this, the disparity among the villagers do not merely exist in terms of their assets in the transitional periods when people pursue more diversified livelihoods. We need to pay more attention to the disparities among people's capacity to transform available goods and services — either those that have long existed or have been newly introduced by a specific policy — into concrete measures to realise their aspirations to pursue alternative futures²⁴. A villager's thoughts on the conditions of the village fund or any other schemes indicates what types of changes they are capable of envisaging regarding their business and even how they regard their relationship with their neighbours. The diverse ways of interpreting, utilising and neglecting the Million Baht Village Fund Program uncover that the villagers have been on various pathways towards their alternative futures. Further, people's different capacities to aspire do not only affect the possible economic activities among the current generation, but also the available options for future generations.

²⁴ Appadurai (2004) assimilated capacity to aspire to the capacity of navigation to alternative futures, that are not equally distributed among the members of a society. He stated, '(t)he more privileged in any society simply have used the map of its norms to explore the future more frequently and more realistically, and to share this knowledge with one another more routinely than their poorer and weaker neighbors', meanwhile '(t)he poorer members, precisely because of their lack of opportunities to practice the use of this navigational capacity (in turn because their situations permit fewer experiments and less easy archiving of alternative futures), have a more brittle horizon of aspirations. The argument that people archive the potential alternatives of their futures through their exploration is important to argument of the latter half of this paper. However, I am not fully convinced with his argument that the difference in the capacity exists between the privileged and the poor.

6. Conclusion

Thus, it is insufficient to evaluate the impacts of pro-rural policies on the ‘farmers’ lives, highlighted by their successful endeavours to make large profits. We should also pay attention to the minor changes in villagers’ livelihoods, or their attempts to hang on to the current situations. We should examine the creative ways they interpret various resources, such as their assets, workforces, social relations, and the opportunities offered by certain policy schemes, lined with their capacity to aspire to navigate themselves around the transitional period toward their alternative futures.

A closer observation of these diverse and creative interpretations enables us to focus on the disparities between those who fully utilised the opportunities and successfully changed their lives as a result, and those who maintained their lifestyles. The disparity in the capacity to aspire, or the differing ways in which villagers pursued alternative futures, deserve particular attention as this indicates particular threats or obstacles to the rural poor that cannot be revealed by simply focusing on the disparity of material or monetary conditions. While existing research evaluated the effectiveness of the pro-poor/pro-rural policies on improving the lives of the target population, namely the poorest categories of farmers in villages, they were unable to consider the implications of such differences on the opportunities of the people to pursue their alternative futures²⁵. Thus, unlike conventional methods of analysing what a certain policy provided with the predetermined targets, this paper proposed an alternative perspective of examining how the rural poor interpret, neglect, or find loopholes in a policy, to capture the disparities of individuals’ capacity to aspire, and then to revisit the dynamic and diverse nature of the villagers.

²⁵ That said, past research addressed some critical aspects of the policies and proposed some concrete ideas to improve them. For instance, they have shown that the share of the rich among the users of the Village Fund Program increased over time, and the rich were more likely to use the fund for productive purposes and improve their household economy than the poor. On this account, some modifications of the process of application and approval were suggested.

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Re-examining “Informed Choices”

Vu Le Thao Chi¹

Abstract

“Informed choices” has risen as a concept in circulation beyond the boundary of medical profession over the past decade. In 2003, the notion was officially highlighted in *Human Security Now*. Empowering individuals by keeping them informed has become a more conscious effort in providing information directly to individuals and/or creating more open sources of information to those individuals who seek for further information before making a decision. However, there is ambiguity in the concept itself -- the distance between “informing” and “making the choice”, thus leading to a question that is often times taken for granted: Are the choices informed to the individuals always good ones and/or is keeping them informed simply leaving the whole responsibility of “making the choice” on them?

The paper aims to re-examine the concept “informed choices” by using different examples from an extensive research in Vietnam. In doing so, the essay makes a liberal use of prospect theory as developed by Khaneman and Tversky for probing the limits of rational choice analyses. The contribution of the paper is to shed a new light on how involved the individuals are in the decision-making process and when they are influenced, either by changes in their living environment or by the availability of choices as well as by how choices are framed (presented), before they arrive at a certain decision. In other words, empowering the individuals alone may not be enough. How to make it easier for the individuals to arrive at a good choice should also be considered. The essay aims at strengthening the notion as the key concept in human security.

Keywords:

Informed choices, Empowerment, decision-making process, good choice, responsibility

1. Introduction

Being deprived of the right or the freedom to make a choice for one’s own wellbeing can be just as bad as being deprived of the right to live. Human Security, therefore, in addition to “protecting” people from “fear” and from “want”, also focuses on “empowering” people in order for them to be able to “make informed choices” and “take action on their own behalf and on behalf of others” as it is believed that “people are the most active participants in determining their well-being”. (*Human Security Now*, 2003, p. 4) Providing education and information have been the more universal means for “empowerment”. Once empowered, it is the individuals’ responsibilities, regarding how to choose right action and how to make right choices, to secure a better life for themselves and others.

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However, there is a crucial uncertainty: Can the choice, made by an educated and well-informed individual, be necessarily the right one?

The paper is consonant with the people-centered orientation of human security. As such, it aims at strengthening that orientation, first, by calling attention to certain conceptual ambiguity surrounding the “informed choice.” Secondly it also calls attention to factors concerning the “choices” themselves and how they are presented to the individuals. This second attention helps clarify whether the responsibility for the failure of arriving at a certain choice lies in the individual’s capability or in the choices themselves; and it also helps free the individual from nearly all the responsibilities of making the “right” final choice – a near impossibility for anyone constantly confronted with all sorts of occasions where he or she has to make the right choice.

With these points in mind, the paper turns away from a more macro perspective on the conditions under which “informed choices” are to be made, and to a micro perspective of the individuals who, empowered or not, are exposed to the threats in their living environment. As often pointed out, not much improvement has been made on reducing the instances of violence or on economic basis for secure life for many since the promulgation of human security in 1994. The living environment of many continues to be laden with disruptions threatening their secure life. It is one thing, as Mary Kaldor does in her *Human Security* (2007, especially Chapters 5 through 7), to call for cross-border efforts to find the roots for, and moderate, the disruptions. It is an entirely another to shift our attention away from the collective efforts, and to examine how the individuals navigate their lives under the threat of these disruptions.

The point of departure for this paper may lie in one observation that choices, even if they are considered good, might not be an optimal choice for an individual when they may involve a certain risk as far as where that individual stands is concerned. Based on that observation, I argue that there should be more to “empowering” individuals. The paper suggests that improving choices themselves and making them available and especially easier for the individuals to consider and to take should also be considered. An important note to make is: where that individual stands should be placed within “the continuation of daily life” (*Human Security Now*, 2003, p.10) as choices in real life sit on top of each other of layers of choices, prompting people to perceive choices as intricately woven into the other layers or dimensions of their life. In other words, what appears to be a “rational” choice in one layer may not be so readily established when cross-examined against the other layers or dimensions of people’s life.

2. Rational Choices and Rational Individuals

2.1 Rationalists' choice making:²

Rationalists argue that *expected* value or utility of choices dictates people's decision-making process and choices of higher value should be more appealing to any "rational" individuals. Expected value, therefore, is and should be sufficient as an incentive for them to make a decision, based on which they are judged either rational or otherwise. The presumption in this argument is that an individual as a decision maker has access to "a complete and consistent system of preferences that allows him always to choose among the alternatives open to him; [and] he is always completely aware of what these alternatives are", as pointed out by Herbert Simon, the author of "bounded rationality". In other words, a rational individual, regardless of who, would be attracted to the choice of highest value whenever the same set of choices are presented before him. This is so even when the decisions are made under risk, because the "probability calculations are neither frightening nor mysterious to him". A rational individual as constructed by rationalists is always consistent and rational to justify a further probing. "Human beings in the picture [are] only organic material" (Simon, *Administrative Behavior*, 1957, pp. xxvi-xxvii).

Likewise, the "continuation of daily life" of that individual is also taken as given. In the eyes of rationalists, ups and downs in daily life of an individual matters little. This is so because what occupies a rational individual is a set of choices which he or she evaluates on the basis purely of the merit of each within the set.

The implication of these rationalist postures is immense for our examination of the "informed choice." For example, take the role of the experts on the problem on hand. The experts by definition are best informed of relevant facts and their implications for anyone to make a decision on that problem. However, sitting deep in their "trenches of rationality" (Beck, *Risk Society*, 1992, p. 29), they are blind to a possible zero-sum relationship between a choice from one set of alternatives with its benefits may cut into those of another set from which an individual may be compelled to choose a choice.³ Thus, a noted decision-making theorist, Sven Hansson warns in his observation on how such a zero-sum relationship could be so easily overlooked: "If [risk] management took place in a

² There are probably no theorists who develop "rational choice" argument strictly following the mini-max rule of minimizing costs and maximizing gains. If any, like Milton Freedman or K.J. Arrow, such posture on human behavior is more for heuristic purposes. Here, I am following the critical perspective on "rationalist" argument as developed by Herbert Simon in his 1957 landmark, *Administrative Behavior*, Macmillan, NY. His more recent views are developed in his 1991 essay, "Bounded Rationality and Organizational Learning," *Organization Science* vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 125-134.

³ Rosenstock, "What research in Motivation suggests for public health," *American Journal of Public Health*, 1960, Vol. 50(3 Pt 1): 295-302, 1960, pp.301

complete isolation from other decisions in society, then the uniform price tag promoted by cost-benefits analysts would make sense;” but “[risk] issues are dispersed over the whole social agenda, where they are parts of various larger and more complex issues. Therefore, the idea of basing [risk] decisions on a unified calculation for all social sectors is insensitive to the different concerns and decision procedures of the various social sectors”⁴

Hansson’s point has many instances in a real life context. Even when people are living next to an active volcano, which has the record of recent eruptions,⁵ the risk of a volcanic eruption and the measures they have to adopt in order to evade the disaster are not the only concerns they have. No matter how threatening the risk may appear to be, it never takes place in “a complete isolation” in the minds of the residents. The volcanic eruption, presented only as probable, *does not consume* their minds. Choices in real life, therefore, often time may look more irrational than we wish to admit.

2.2 Empowered individuals

Human security advocates concentrate on empowerment, in addition to protection, of the individuals (and communities) via education and information-sharing, in order to strengthen “people’s abilities to act on their own behalf”, believing that:

“People empowered can demand respect for their dignity when it is violated. They can create new opportunities for work and address many problems locally. And they can mobilize for the security of others - say, by publicizing food shortages early, preventing famines or protesting human rights violations by states... They can scrutinize social arrangements and take collective action. It means building a public space that tolerates opposition, encourages local leadership and cultivates public discussion”. (*Human Security Now*, 2003, p. 11)

Empowerment is the effort to help people become more “rational” by bringing them closer to “rational individuals” who know their “system of preferences” and “all alternatives”, by means of education and information-sharing. Once educated and informed, it is the individuals’ responsibility to recognize choices, and consequently make the right/good choice; in other words, it is their responsibility to be “rational”.

While recognizing the importance of the shift from state-centered approach to people-centered and of the role of education and information-sharing in empowering people, the paper argues that empowerment alone may not be enough. And in many ways, it increases so much burden on the

⁴ Sven Ove Hansson, “Seven Myths of Risk,” *Risk Management*, 2005, Vol.7, No.2, p. 12.

⁵ Currently, I am in the process of designing a research on the residents near Mt. Merapi who have resisting the evacuation order despite the warning of its impending eruption.

individuals themselves now that they have to decide everything for their own and on their own, while the architects of choices may await that final decision to be made by people. The argument is based on two real-life observations:

1) There are (too) many reasons – opportunities to make decisions -- for one individual to arrive at one single choice at any given moment. Consequently, whether that choice is “rational” or “irrational” is virtually accidental.

2) An individual may not be always fully participating (making conscious and exclusive efforts to choose) in *one* decision-making process since individual life is a complex of layers of choices demanding his/her constant attention, even though the final outcome (choice) may be solely his/her own making.

The paper emphasizes the need to look at the *process*⁶ where one makes decisions in order to see first where “empowerment of people” is relevant to the final outcome of that process and second where it is not. As a conclusion, the paper proposes a complementary, if not alternative, approach to how we can bring good choices closer to people in order to lessen their burden of confronting various choices, instead of imposing good choices on them *or* bringing them closer to the good choices.

3. Decision-making as a Process

In order to examine and analyze how people make choices, the paper makes use of Prospect Theory developed by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (especially, 1979). Kahneman and Tversky are obviously not the first who saw the problem with rational behavior model where the expected value or utility is held to dictate the decision-making process, especially when it comes to the decision-making under risk. But they are among the first to clarify the problem in formulating a theory known as Prospect Theory, for which they won Nobel Prize in Economics in 2002. The greatest contribution of the theory is to look into the *process* of making decisions instead of evaluating the decision from its final *outcome*.

⁶ Attention to the process inevitably brings our attention to a larger area of inquiry, that is the area of complex workings of perception, minds, memories and all that matter in people’s habit to make sense from what they observe. This larger area is not the main concern of this essay. However, for an excellent account of where this area of inquiry stands, see Michael W. Eysenck and David Groome, eds., *Cognitive Psychology: Revisiting the Classic Studies*, Sage Pub., 2015

With this shift in perspective, Prospect Theory emphasizes the “reasonability” (Kahneman, *Think Fast and Slow*, 2011, p.411) rather than “rationality” of choices. Prospect Theory calls our attention to “reference points” of people. That is, they are the points against which people, the decision makers, can decide what constitutes a loss and a gain. It also calls attention to how these points can change choice outcomes among different decision makers and even within one decision maker at different times.

The cases I refer to below are meant to serve for heuristic purposes, that is, to illuminate how the key points derived from Prospect Theory may work in spotting where we can improve the notion of “informed choice.”

3.1 When the Individuals are *fully* engaged

One individual is fully engaged in the decision making process when he or she is aware of all alternatives and the costs as well as the benefits of each alternative before arriving at a final decision. Evidences collected from the 10-year fieldwork on the reproductive behaviors in Vietnam⁷ has shown that even when the individuals are aware of the available alternatives and are attracted to what appears to be an optimal choice, they may still pick a different decision. The reasons for this lie in the differences in how they weigh costs (losses) and benefits (gains) implied in each alternative, and in how they respond more to the area of losses or to that of gains. Costs and benefits are not lumped together in a sum in order to weigh the value of the final option.

The fieldwork was conducted in three districts in northern and central Vietnam: Phu Cat (Binh Dinh) and Thanh Khe (Da Nang) in the central and Kim Bang in the north. The main purpose was to examine the reproductive behavior among the Agent Orange (Dioxin) victim families⁸ who have at least one handicapped child. Of the 91 AO families examined, the number of handicapped children per family is 1.27. The figure for each district is 1.16 for Phu Cat, 1.26 for Thanh Khe and 1.8 for Kim Bang. These families are among those who had to face the two options: stop having more children or continue having more child(ren). Having a child is usually an option of high value to any most of the parents because of the three expected utilities that having a child can assure: entertainment, future security and labor⁹.

⁷ The field research included the examination of the use, and its scope, of the agrochemicals such as pesticides in rural Vietnam since the problems of the chemicals-induced ailments constitute the broader context for the problems of Agent Orange, the war-time use of dioxin-yielding herbicides.

⁸ Phu Cat and Thanh Khe used to house the American airbases during the Vietnam War (1961-1973). US as a way of removing the jungle canopies around the bases heavily sprayed the surrounding areas with Agent Orange/Dioxin. Kim Bang on the other hand had a heavy concentration of former North Vietnamese regular soldiers who had been exposed to the substance while they were active along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

⁹ Harvey Leibenstein, “An Interpretation of the Economic Theory of Fertility: Promising Path or Blind Alley?”

These Agent Orange victim families are not exceptional. None of the families in the three areas gave up on having more children even if the first child is born handicapped, with 2.18 more children on average. Specifically, there are up to 68 families in the three areas (69%, 80%, and 83% of the families in Phu Cat, Thanh Khe and Kim Bang respectively) who still decided to have one or more children after the first child with a birth defect (Table1).¹⁰ 22 families decided to have one or more children, having had not only one but two such experiences, (Table 2).

Table 1: Effect of Birth Defects

(The number of children after the *first* handicapped child)

	0	1 child	2 or more	NA	Total
<i>Phu Cat</i>	11	14	19	4	48
<i>Thanh Khe</i>	3	7	5	0	15
<i>Kim Bang</i>	4	4	19	1	28
<i>Total</i>	18 families	25	43	5	91

Table 2: Effect of Birth Defects

(The number of children after the *second* handicapped child)

	0	1 child	2 or more	NA	Total
<i>Phu Cat</i>	5	4	1	0	10
<i>Thanh Khe</i>	3	1	1	0	5
<i>Kim Bang</i>	2	7	8	0	17
<i>Total</i>	10 families	12	10	0	32

However, the choice of “having a child” in these cases is considered risky as the likelihood of having another among these families is high, which should reduce considerably the value of that choice and therefore, making it much less attractive, at least in the eyes of the reproduction experts, the medical doctors. This means that the behavior of the aforementioned 68 families (including the 22 families, who decided to have more children even after the second handicapped child) should be considered extremely “irrational”. This “irrational” behavior is more obvious among the groups of families in Phu Cat and Kim Bang as there is no or little difference exhibited in the reproductive behavior after the first child (normal) and the one after the first (handicapped).

Journal of Economic Literature, 12(2), 1974, pp. 457-79.

¹⁰ The data of the fieldwork, including witness accounts, from which the following tables are constructed, are available in my *doctoral thesis*, “Risks and Farmers’ Behaviors in Vietnam,” submitted to and accepted by Keio University Graduate School of Media and Governance, 2013/14.

**Table 3. Birth spacing (years) after the first child, year,
(normal and handicapped)¹¹**

	<i>Birth spacing after the 1st child (normal)</i>	<i>Birth spacing after the 1st child (handicapped)</i>
<i>Phu Cat</i>	3.64	3.75
<i>Thanh Khe</i>	3.20	5.28
<i>Kim Bang</i>	2.60	2.25
<i>Total</i>	3.88	3.92

In fact, that the first child was born with defect rushed them to have more children soon after that, especially the cases in Kim Bang. Birth spacing after the first handicapped child (2.25) is noticeably shorter than birth spacing after the first child as normal (2.6). The fear of having another handicapped child does not seem to play much of a role in the picture.

That said, does this mean that the rest of the families (like the 18 families who have no child after the first handicapped child in Table 1 and those families in Thanh Khe who exhibit a more cautious behavior after the first child as handicapped is born- Table 3) behave rationally – i.e., take the risk of another handicapped child carefully?

Not necessarily. The clue may lie in the fact that of the 18 families, 9 already had 4 or more children. A conventional understanding – the cost of rearing children -- applies here. The financial burden of having an additional child, and not the fear of having an additional handicapped child, is more powerful deterrent.

Among the three areas, Thanh Khe families responded distinctly to the first child born handicapped. The families are more cautious in having the next child, shown in the longer interval (5.28 years) compared to 3.1 years in correspondence with the first child born as normal. One point of note is that Danang is an urban dynamic emerging economy. The more developed the market is, the more available and the better the services are including health services. It also means that the access to the services is more costly. Most of the 15 interviewed families reported that they take their children for regular check-ups or therapy sessions. The reliance on cash income, for that reason, becomes more critical. Even without a handicapped child, the parents cannot afford to have many children.

The awareness of the burden on the household economy is particularly true to the younger couples (in their forties). The younger parents, with one or two handicapped children, cannot simply go ahead and continue pursuing a healthy child. They need to make a decision *out of full consideration of all choices* after overcoming the initial reaction out of intuitive feelings -- desire of

¹¹ The target group is 74 families, 18 less than the original 92 AO families. 18 are removed from the list for various reasons such as the parents' ambiguous memories.

having a healthy child. If they take risk, it is a calculated risk after taking costs from all aspects including medical costs, daycare costs, education costs into consideration before arriving at the decision. One more important reason to note for the case of Thanh Khe is the strict regulation of family planning having a lot to do with their source of income, which in the end leads them to be more cautious in the decision on whether they want to have more children or not. Violation may result in reduced income.

Meanwhile, the cost of having another handicapped child in rural areas like Phu Cat and Kim Bang is not readily translated into financial costs since they do not see the need of having regular checkups or regular treatment for their children, healthy or not. They respond to some medical emergency situations only. That the use of medical services is not integrated into their daily life is largely attributed to the relative paucity of health services, and also the lack of social integration opportunities for the handicapped children. Usually no school accepts the handicapped children, as their presence in the classrooms are considered hindrance to the learning by the healthy children. As a result, many handicapped children stay home. Even cases where the children may show high potentials for rehabilitation are no exception. The net result of this daily practices is that most of the parents in Phu Cat are concerned primarily and simply about having or not having children, and the question of a “handicapped child” or “healthy child” does not figure prominently (this point is further examined below).

Therefore, the financial cost for the parents in Thanh Khe is more salient than the desire of having more children. The parents in Thanh Khe are more cautious in having the next child, shown in the longer interval between the first handicapped child and the next one and this tendency is more obvious among the younger couples who are in the 30s and 40s, susceptible to major social changes including the introduction of market economy and of the family planning policy, which is strictly applied to state office workers since mid 1980s. Thus, the desire for having more child(ren) among these families has to be considered with the other attributes: the financial cost of having one more child (given raising a child in the city is far costlier than in the rural), not to mention a handicapped child and the risk of violating the family planning regulation (reduced salary or demotion). The increase in the number of attributes that parents have to consider help eliminate a certain set of choices among many choices and narrow specifically the aspects that are more salient to them.

As summarized in the table (Table 4), the desire of having a normal child is salient for both Thanh Khe and Phu Cat groups, which leads to the cost of not having a child also being salient for these families.

Table 4. Determining Attributes in the behaviors of AO families

<i>Attributes</i>	Thanh Khe	Phu Cat
<i>Desire of having a normal child</i>	Salient	Salient
<i>Desire of having many children</i>	No	Salient
<i>Costs of having one more child</i>	Salient	No
<i>Costs of having one more handicapped child</i>	Salient	No
<i>Costs of violating Family Planning</i>	Salient	No
<i>Costs of not having (more) a child</i>	Salient	Salient
<i>Final Outcome</i>	Reluctant	No different

What makes the difference in their behaviors is how they respond to the costs. The cost of not having a child for the group of families in Thanh Khe have to compete with the costs involved in having one more child (including the possibility of having another handicapped child) and the costs of violating family planning that directly influences their source of income, whereas having or not having another child is the only salient concern for families in Phu Cat, which makes them behave no different from the rest of regular farmers in their community.

This suggests that the shift in perspective is needed from viewing people respond only to the positive value of a course of action to viewing people responding to gains *and* losses given that prescribed course of action. Human beings are “guided by the immediate emotional impact of gains and losses, not by long term prospects of wealth and global utility” (Kahneman, *Think Fast and Slow*, 2011, 286-7). Likewise, that people tend to respond more to gains or losses rather the final state of wealth is also observed in Taleb’s works: “People tend to be sensitive to the presence or absence of a given stimulus rather than its magnitude. This implies that a loss is first perceived as just a loss, with further implications later. The same is true with profits. The agent [human being] would prefer the number of losses to be low and the number of gains to be high, rather than optimizing the total performance”. (Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan*, 2007, p. 111)

3.2 When individuals’ reference points are shifting

In the previous section, it has been observed that the values of the prescribed options are not the only factor that influences people’s choices even if their preferences are consistent -- the desire of having a healthy child. Even when one is fully involved in their decision-making process, it does not assure that their own will dictate the whole decision-making process. It is how they see “gains” (benefits) and “losses” (costs) from their reference point that greatly affects the final outcome of the decision. What that means is that, by recognizing their shifting reference points, people do change their choices. This tendency, in fact, has been captured in practice in marketing strategies to influence the behaviors of consumers. For example, when buyers have to decide if they want to

make a purchase, they usually care about how much they would have to “lose” in order to make the purchase (more concerned about the loss). However, if the same price is framed as “price 70% marked down” from the original price, the buyers tend to shift their concern to how much they benefit from that “70% off”, meaning they are “framed” to be attracted to the gains, which makes them easier to make the purchase. In this case, buyers are framed to shift the reference point prompting a shift from “how much they would lose” to “how much they benefit,” giving a strategic perspective for promoting the sale of a product.

In a similar manner, while both people in Thanh Khe and Phu Cat are both attracted to the option of having more children and the gains that it brings about (entertainment, future security and labor), to the young families in Thanh Khe, their reference point is shifted from the desire of having another (healthy) child (gains) to the financial cost (loss) in having more children due to the economic constraints that life in city imposes on as well as the penalty from the family planning.

Table 5: Size of the Agent Orange Victims’ Families

	3~4 members	5~6 members	7~8 members	More than 9 members	NA
Thanh Khe	5	6	4	0	0
Phu Cat	9	18	18	1	2
Kim Bang	0	13	14	2	1

A little more on how the reference point of the families in Thanh Khe is shifted, which makes their behaviors different from the other groups in Kim Bang and Phu Cat. As shown in Table 5, the size of each AO family in Thanh Khe is relatively small compared to those in Phu Cat and Kim Bang. Many of the household heads are also young, under 50 years old. This relatively smaller size may partially show the effectiveness of the 1988 Family Planning Policy¹² which has been rigorously enforced especially on party members or state enterprise workers *in the urban area* as it entailed, as the penalty for failing to comply, wage reduction, position demotion among others. Many of the parents in Thanh Khe are state officers, and more than half of the interviewees are or used to be the state-run train company’s workers during or after the war. In the four families with the larger size (7-8 members), the parents are older and they had children before the Family Planning policy became stricter (before 1988, the year Vietnam started the Family Planning campaign or during the early 1990s, the early phase of the campaign). Family Planning policy at this current phase works

¹² The decision on population and family planning announced on October 18, 1988 was to become effective three months after it was signed by the chairman of the Council of Ministers. The policy appears to have become official even before the three months had elapsed, for the Council’s December 1988 report to the eighth National Assembly indicated that the policy had already been formally promulgated by that time. <http://www.jstor.org/view/00987921/di962011/96p0612k/0>

more in the cities, especially to the group working in government offices. The penalty such as “Party Penalty” or “Demotion” has direct cost on their career with state officers. In contrast, in rural areas, it is often up to each local authorities to decide the penalty, usually in small cash amount. Some people do not even pay the fine. Some pay the fine and continue to have more children after that. Even if the amount of rice or cash they have to pay may be high, all they have to pay is *only once* and it is likely to be considered a worthwhile investment if they are seeking for more children.

The behaviors of Thanh Khe families – less handicapped children after the first and/or the second -- are considered risk averse, thus being *rational*, in the eye of medical doctors. However, the motive, as shown, has little to do with the (health) reference point that medical specialists talk about (a healthy child or a handicapped child), but more with what they may have to lose if one more child (even a healthy one) is born.

3.3 When Good choice is the obvious one

There are also cases when the good choice is prominently designed and becomes an “obvious choice”. For example, we may encounter almost every day a situation when we, by accident, turn off the document file we have worked on, the pc immediately asks: “do you want to save changes you made to the document?” Under the signal, there three options: “cancel”, “don't save” and “save” with default highlighted on “save”. This can help people save the document in case we do not pay attention to the options before us. This default design helps reduce the efforts to choose on the part of the decision maker – the pc user -- by showing the recommended choice *by default*.

In Phu Cat, Mr. Huynh Huu Gian used to buy Chinese agro-chemicals¹³ many years ago from some retail shop in the district. He couldn't remember the name because everything was written in Chinese. But now he solely relies on products from Plant Protection Center (PPC) shops, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development's local arms, where they sell *only* certified agrochemicals. One point of note is that he is the farmer who could still vividly recall the time he collected some strange white substance leftover (the herbicides) in the mountain and witnessed fishes floating dead covering the whole surface of the lake when he used the leftover in fishing. One may conclude that his personal encounter with Agent Orange and Chinese agro-chemicals must have served as a warning, driven him away from Chinese agro-chemical products and made him switch to the products circulated through PPC's local shop. Yet he himself admitted that he quit using the Chinese chemicals because the chemicals were not effective for long for his crops and the shops that had sold

¹³ See footnote 9 above.

these Chinese products were no longer there.

The establishment of PPC's shops reaching even the smallest administrative units nationwide is a noted effort of the state in generating a "*default*" effect. It helps the farmers to acquire, for one, legitimate chemicals when they purchase the recommended seeds. Director of the local PPC shops in Phu Cat testifies: "Oh [the farmers] have no choice, they have to buy the chemicals we recommend when they buy the seeds." The effect is *unintended*. When asked where they usually go to buy chemicals, the farmers in Phu Cat shared the same answer: "Plant Protection Center" (PPC) shops. More importantly, even if they don't go to the PPC shops, they look for *the same* chemical products at other retail shops.¹⁴

Plant Protection Department, under Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development (MARD) was established in 1991. Especially after 1990s, it strengthened its activities in controlling flows of agro-chemical by increasing the number of shops at local levels. PPC shops have become a friendly address to local farmers in all areas. These PPC shops are in charge of selling *reliable* agro-chemicals of all kinds, including those imported that are allowed by Plant Protection Department of Vietnam. Farmers do not need to make a weighty decision as to which *chemicals* they should choose. They need to go to the PPC shops to acquire *seeds*. Besides, the government has been increasing control over the illegal flows of agro-chemicals especially from China, which makes the presence of PPC shops even more dominant in the village and obviously almost the only choice for them. Mr. Gian's choice is a result of *effortless* effort, and not a difficult risk-aversion calculation.

3.4 When all alternatives are *not* good enough

There is another reality in which individuals cannot arrive at a good choice and not because of their capability. They simply cannot do so because all the choices available are equally bad. How Vietnamese patients make a decision when facing health problems is a case in point.

In Vietnam, up to the mid-1980s, the state played this crucial role in providing health care to its people. Health policies were "designed to achieve a state-financed health system based on the collectivist" ideal. The "centrally planned economic institutions of state socialism" are its instruments. In rural areas, agricultural collectives as representing the state "would be responsible for financing the activities of commune-level health workers, while medicine, materials, and labor were allocated through the planned economy"¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jonathan D. London, "Reasserting the State in Vietnam: Health Care and the Logics of Market-Leninism", *Policy and Society*, 2008, no. 27, p. 117.

The collapse of the planned economy by the end of 1980s undermined the foundation of the state-financed health system of Vietnam. Since then the costs of health care gradually shifted from the state to households.¹⁶ In 1989, Vietnam granted the government formal constitutional authority to introduce user fees (Decision No. 45), which “formally permitted the ‘collection of partial expenses’ in public clinics and hospitals”.¹⁷ Since 1989, with the economic recovery and improvement, Vietnam has also invested more in the health system. The noted effort is the development of a system of safety nets “to protect certain segments of the population from the vagaries of a marketized health system”.¹⁸ The targets of these safety nets (health care fee exemption and reductions) have been gradually expanded to cover the disadvantaged, the poor, the children under five and the members of certain political “priority groups” (contributors to the war of independence and unification such as certain war veterans, mothers of certain fallen soldiers, and their children and orphans).¹⁹

Compared with other countries of similar or higher income in the region such as Laos, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, and China, Vietnam does well in total health expenditure (6% of GDP as of 2013).²⁰ The state budget for health as percentage of total share budget (without health insurance was 10.2% (2008) and accounted for 25% of total health expenditure²¹. The state health budget has steadily increased to 11.1% (2012) and 12.32% (2013)²².

However, what is stunning is the out-of-pocket (OOP) spending of households has also increased and has accounted for the biggest share of the total health expenditures, as shown in figure 4.1 for an instance. In 2007, OOP spending accounts for 55.5%, more than doubling the spending from government budgets (at central and provincial levels: 3.7% + 19%) while social health insurance contributes only 14.2% of total health spending in 2007.²³ The OOP spending has been always high in Vietnam, ranging from 50% to 70%²⁴.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.115.

¹⁷ Quoted from *ibid.* p.117.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

²⁰ The World Bank Data, Data on Health Expenditure, total (% of GDP), retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.TOTL.ZS>

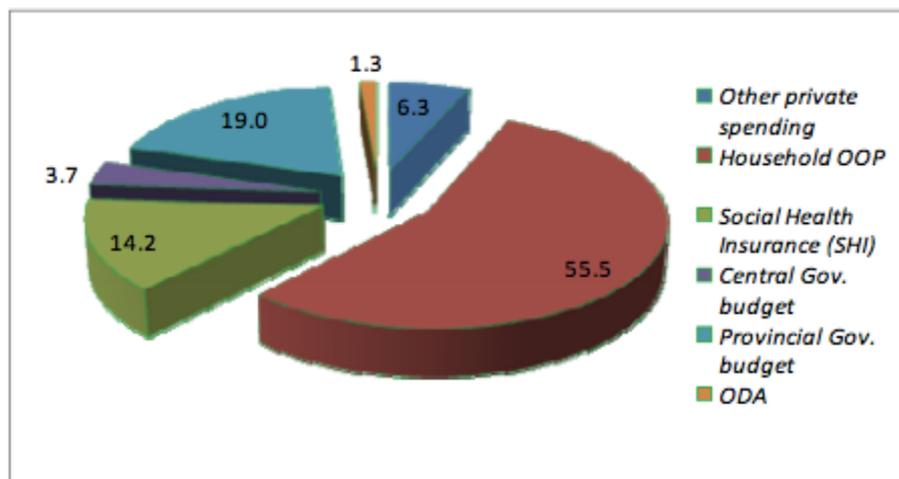
²¹ Hoang Van Minh, et.al, “Financial burden of household out-of pocket health expenditure in Vietnam: Findings from the National Living Standard Survey 2002-2010”, *Social Science and Medicine*, Nov. 2013, Vol. 96, p.258-263

²² Vietnam Ministry of Health, Health Statistical Profile 2009-2013, retrieved from <http://moh.gov.vn/province/Pages/ThongKeYTe.aspx?ItemID=13>,

²³ Tran Van Tien, et.al, 2011, *op. cit.*, p.10.

²⁴ Hoang Van Minh, et.al, “Financial burden of household out-of pocket health expenditure in Vietnam: Findings from the National Living Standard Survey 2002-2010”, *Social Science and Medicine*, Nov. 2013, Vol. 96, p.258-263

Figure 1 Sources of total health expenditure in 2007



One of the reasons for the high OOP expenditure in Vietnam is the limited National Health Insurance system that was introduced since 1992. The coverage of health insurance of Vietnam increased from 16% of the population in 2002 to 60% in 2010 and aims at 100% in 2020²⁵. Health insurance covers around 80% of all health services at *designated health facilities* and the users are responsible for the remaining 20%. However, health insurance is not always the primary choice for the people because of procedural complexities involved at public hospitals, of inconsistent coverage treatments between public health facilities and of the limited inclusion of private health services into the national health insurance coverage. Without seeing the need to go to hospitals, many among the poor refuse to buy health insurance. Besides, they would prefer to going to private services where health insurance is still an irrelevant matter. Although a few private health services began to provide health insurance based healthcare, the patients still have to pay for various surcharges that are not covered by private health insurance. Another option that patients usually opt for is just to go to a nearby drugstore (not in the range of health insurance coverage) and acquire medicine without prescription authorized by professional doctors. Even more simply, they do not see the need of doing anything, like most of the case of Dioxin victim families in the rural areas who do not send their handicapped children for a regular medical check or rehabilitation except for emergency case.

The complex picture of the set of health related choices presented to Vietnamese explains the persistently high rate of OOP spending. It indicates the limit in paternalistic mechanism of the state especially towards the poor in the society. World Health Organization observes: “[I]n general, health

²⁵ Hoang Van Minh, et.al, “Financial burden of household out-of pocket health expenditure in Vietnam: Findings from the National Living Standard Survey 2002-2010”, *Social Science and Medicine*, Nov. 2013, Vol. 96, p.258-263

systems that require lower out-of-pocket payments for health care offer better protection to the poor against catastrophic spending.”²⁶ The ominously-sounding catastrophic spending is:

Catastrophic health expenditure is when people have to pay fees or co-payments for health care, the amount can be so high in relation to income that it results in “financial catastrophe” for the individual or the household. Such high expenditure can mean that people have to cut down on necessities such as food and clothing, or are unable to pay for their children's education. Every year, approximately 44 million households, or more than 150 million individuals, throughout the world face catastrophic expenditure, and about 25 million households or more than 100 million individuals are pushed into poverty by the need to pay for services.²⁷

The same report points out also that where OOP spending is less than 15% of the total health spending, few household face catastrophic spending.²⁸ The point is clear that protecting the health of the people within its border is still a great challenge for Vietnam. The lack of resources is obviously one major obstacle for Vietnam to adopt its paternal role, given the increase in the size of the population (over 90 millions) and the widening range of social issues it is faced with.

The question is then how people can make an informed choice when each of that many choices is not exactly a complete one in and of itself. Therefore, an “informed” choice leaves one crucial puzzle: how much informed is “informed”? That poor health is the result of poor choices that people make may be true but applicable mostly to the developed countries where choices (good and bad) *are* available. But in developing countries like Vietnam where social infrastructure is undergoing “trials and errors”, “the causes of poor health are not so much about the choices people make but the choices that they are able to make,” as Alan Johnson, former British Secretary of State for Health points out.²⁹ People in these poor communities simply cannot, and not “do not,” make a healthy choice because they have too much burden of choosing while there are too many choices but none is complete.

4. In lieu of Conclusion

Empowerment of people, by way of education and information-sharing, in order for them to be

²⁶WHO (2005), *Technical Briefs for Policy Makers No.2- Designing Health Financing System to Reduce Catastrophic Health Expenditures*, Geneva 2005, p.3. Accessed at http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/70005/1/WHO_EIP_HSF_PB_05.02_eng.pdf

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3

²⁹ Rt. Hon. Alan Johnson MP, speech before the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) in March 19, 2009.

able to make a good choice -- informed choice -- has challenged and shaken the long-held rationality monopoly of experts (policy designers included), as put by Ulrich Beck: “The science’s monopoly on rationality is broken.”(Beck, 92, p.29) The recognized power of exercising “second opinion” and the flourished means of keeping individuals informed and/or educated has made individuals able to find more alternatives, to leave out the bad ones and to find good one out of them.

However, an individual cannot pay an equal amount of attention to, and make an equal investment in, every aspect of his/her life. One would have to be immensely hyper in leading daily life. Culture of living is after all the tradition of setting priorities and of exercising those priorities. Different groups may have different priorities, depending on various factors in their living environment. There are matters that may be so important in the eyes of experts but may play relatively limited role to ordinary people at any given time; therefore, the efforts of drawing extra efforts to keep themselves informed and looking for alternatives may not be even there.

By the same token, there are also matters that are so important to particular individuals but are trivial in the eyes of experts, and as a result, the opinions or suggestions of experts may easily evade their attention. But even when people do acknowledge, and agree on, the importance of a certain matter and try to explore different alternatives, that effort may not be paid off with a satisfying result as so often recognized, “not much improvement has been made on reducing the instances of violence or on economic basis for secure life” (Kalder, 2007), thus severely limiting choices and access to the choices. Empowerment, thus, does not always narrow the gap between professional ambitions of experts or policy designers in creating good choices for people to follow and people themselves.

Creating good choices and making people informed of what the good choices are *in isolation* is not enough for people to arrive at those choices. In order to narrow that gap, what is needed is the mechanism by which an action by people receives an immediate appreciation like an “a spell checker.”³⁰ Given people’s limited cognitive ability to link all costs and gains in all dimensions of life, the warnings, or the recommendations, need to grab the attention of non-“professionals.” Furthermore, the warnings and recommendations would have to assume the living environment as constantly shifting “reference points,” so that the people are not pressured into a conventional wisdom, which has proven unproductive: all these for your future’s sake.

One suggestion is to break down the entire process of the course of action, suggested by an alternative, leading to the final goal, into smaller parts, each of which becomes a point of the “action-immediate appreciation” sequence. In other words, the attention is given to a series of

³⁰ Thaler, Richard H. and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, Penguin Books, 2009, p.76

weighing of gains and losses, rather than to the final outcome of the well-designed course of action. It is the direction, not the final goal, of a series of action that should matter. Observing how the reference point of an individual works in shaping his/her behavior, another behavioral economist makes the point clear: “We can do more to facilitate good behavior by removing some small obstacle than by trying to shove people in a certain direction.”³¹ Thaler and others show the importance of a smaller decision at each of the gradual steps and of the direction that the steps collectively point. With the decisions confronting the people being less overwhelming in terms of allocation of time and other resources, “everyone’s freedom to choose”³² becomes an everyday practice within the given environment.

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³¹ *Ibid.*, p.70

³² *Ibid.*, p.8

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http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/70005/1/WHO_EIP_HSF_PB_05.02_eng.pdf

Security of Japanese Fishermen and Russians in the Disputed Waters: Focusing on the Four Northern Islands

Noriko Watanabe¹

Abstract

The Four Northern Islands of Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and Habomais off Hokkaido in Japan are the subject of an ongoing territorial dispute between Japan and Russia. The Japanese government insists that these islands should be an inherent part of the territory of Japan and be called the Northern Territories. However, the Soviet Union (Russia) insists that it has been in possession of what they refer to as the Kuril Islands which includes the Four Islands in dispute since World War II. Japanese nationals initially inhabited the islands. The Soviet Union (Russia) gained control of the islands in 1945 and have been in occupation since. By 1949, all Japanese residents of the islands (about 17,000 people) had been forcibly deported. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russians who had moved to the islands since 1945 were facing difficulties. The waters around the islands are fertile fishing grounds. Several Japanese fishing boats, however, were seized by the Soviet Union, who claimed the area as part of their sovereign territory. Japan and Russia subsequently executed fishery agreements to improve the lives of Japanese fishermen and Russian inhabitants on these islands.

The purpose of this report is to examine the two fishery agreements executed by Japan and Russia which was necessary for human security, despite the territorial dispute as well as to discuss the results of a survey carried out in 2005 on Russian inhabitants of the islands.

Keywords:

Four Northern Islands, fishery agreement, Japanese Fishermen, Russians on the Islands, human security

1. Introduction

Seventy years have passed since World War II (WWII) ended in 1945. The number of people who experienced the war has dwindled over the years. As a result of the territorial dispute between Japan and the Soviet Union (Russian Federation), although the World War ended in 1945, Japan did not conclude a peace treaty with the Soviet Union (Russia). The disputed area in question is known as the *Four Northern Islands* to Japan and the *Southern Kurils* to Russia. The island chain known as the Kurils stretches north across the Pacific Ocean from the Japanese Island of Hokkaido to the southern tip of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula. The southern parts of them are the Southern Kurils.

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They consist of four islands, namely, Etorofu (known in Russian as Iturup), Kunashiri (Kunashir), Shikotan and the Habomai islands. The Japanese government insists that these islands should be an inherent part of the territory of Japan and be called the Northern Territories. However, the Russia insists that it possessed the Kuril Islands which include the Four Islands during WWII. The islands have been under occupation by the Soviet Union since 1945, and Russia since 1991. By 1949, all Japanese residents of the islands (about 17,000 people) had forcibly been deported.²

The waters around the islands are fertile fishing grounds and Japanese fisheries flourished in these waters when the islands were inhabited by Japanese. After the Soviet Union took over possession of the islands in 1945, however, many Japanese fishing boats were seized by the Soviet border patrols because they entered the waters around the islands where the Soviet Union insisted on their jurisdiction. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russians who moved the islands and inhabited them since 1945 also began to face hardship. Over the years, Japan and Russia have had a number of negotiations to resolve the territorial issues, but have been unsuccessful.

Despite this situation, the two countries have been able to successfully negotiate and execute four fishery agreements³ for the benefit of the affected of both countries. In this paper the author investigates two of these fishery agreements related to the disputed waters. One is the Kelp Agreement of 1963, and the other is the Fishery Agreement of 1998. The 1963 agreement was proposed by Japanese fishermen while the 1998 agreement was proposed by the Russians inhabitants of the islands. The two were concluded to improve people's lives after a long negotiation.

The rich natural resources of the islands are one of the main reasons for the increasing interest in the islands. These resources include the rich fishing grounds that surround the islands as well as the belief that they have offshore reserves of oil and gas. In addition, rare rhenium deposits have been found on the Kudriavyy volcano on the Etorofu Island⁴. Tourism is also a potential source of income, as the islands have several beautiful volcanoes and a variety of birdlife. The unresolved political problems however continue to threaten the economic, food, community, and political security of the islanders who were deported for the past seventy years. The territorial issues are "state-centered," while the fishery resources agreements are "people-centered." This paper discusses the benefits of the two fishery resources agreements in addressing the needs of Japanese and Russian

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 'Japanese Territory, Northern Territories, March 1, 2010' Available from www.mofa.go.jp

³ Two of four agreements which the author excludes in this paper are "Japan-Russia Reciprocal Fishery Agreement" and "Japan-Russia Fisheries Cooperation Agreement". The former was signed in 1984. It's an agreement on the fish except salmon and trout. Both countries talk about conditions to operate in each other's 200 nautical miles EEZ. The latter was signed in 1985. It's an agreement on salmon and trout.

⁴ 'Kuril islands dispute between Russia and Japan' - BBC News, 29 April 2013, From the section Asia-Pacific. www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11664434 Accessed on 11/15/2015

communities on the islands, while the state-centered regulations imposed on the “losers of war” continues to jeopardize the security of the deported islanders.

This research is entirely based on the review of related literature and some interviews conducted with inhabitants of communities concerned. The author has conducted field investigations in Hokkaido in summer, 2015 and interviewed staff of Habomai fisheries cooperative near Kaigarajima, Nemuro Shinkokyoku (Development and Promotion Bureau), Nemuro City, Rausu fisheries cooperative near Kunashiri island, and Hokkaido Suisankai (Fisheries Association) about the situation of fishery and their lives.

2. Background : The situation of the Four Northern Islands

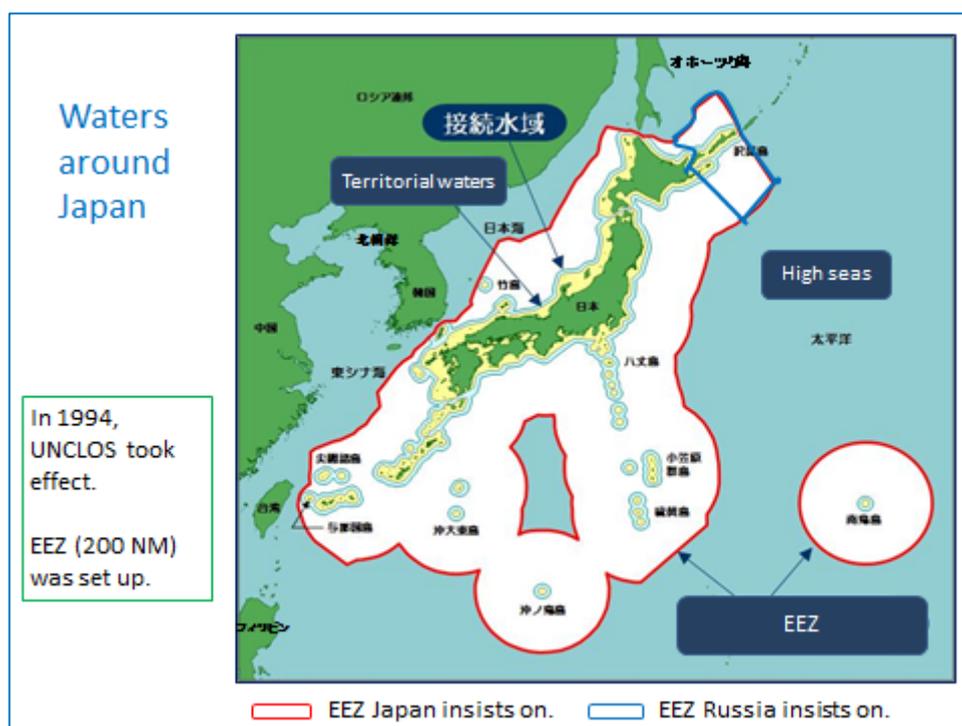


Figure 1: Waters around Japan

Source: Japan Coast Guard

Figure 1 shows the map of waters around Japan. Japan has more than 6,800 islands. Around these islands, the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is set. This concept of EEZ was introduced by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which took effect in 1994. Coastal states can have EEZ, which is the area of 200 nautical miles (NM)⁵ away from the baseline of the

⁵ 1NM = about 1.852km, 200NM =about 370.4km

state. These states have jurisdiction over the area. They have the right of carrying out economic activities exclusively and the duty of protecting the environment of that sea area. The white parts of the map in Figure 1, surrounded by the red line, are the EEZ that Japan claims. To the north of Japan, surrounded by blue line in the map, is the EEZ that Russia claims. In that area, where the red and blue lines on the map overlap is where the four islands: Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and Habomai are located. The Japanese government insists that the area should be called the Northern Territories and is an inherent part of the territory of Japan. The Four Islands, however, have been under occupation by the Soviet Union since the end of WWII in 1945, and by Russia since 1991, thus, the sea area surrounded by blue line is currently the EEZ of Russia.

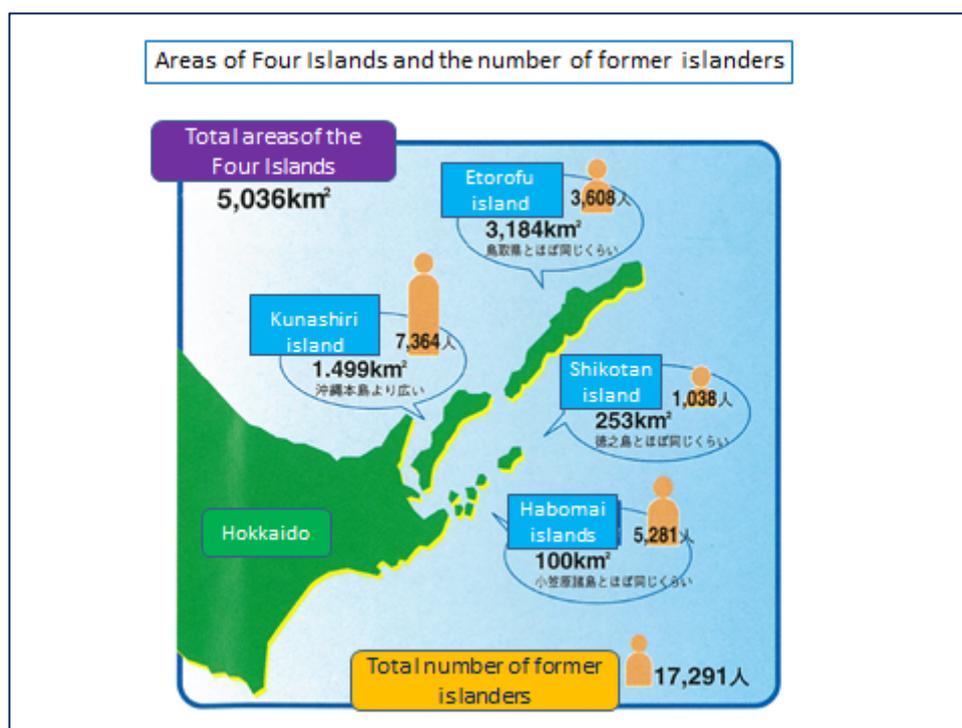


Figure 2: Area of Four Islands and the number of former Japanese islanders

Source: Northern Territories Issue Association

From August 28 to September 5, 1945, the Soviet Union occupied the Four Islands off Hokkaido and has been in occupation since. As Figure 2 shows, from 1946 to 1949, 17,291 Japanese islanders were forcedly moved to Hokkaido or Karahuto (Sakhalin) in the Soviet Union⁶. The islanders who moved to Hokkaido settled in Nemuro which was closest to the islands. Since the 1950s, ‘Regain Four Islands’ became a slogan in Japan, and the campaigns have been performed

⁶ Northern Territories Issue Association. “Hoppo Ryodo” Available from www.hoppou.go.jp

every year.

As stated, the waters around the islands are fertile fishing grounds. They have been counted as one of the three great fishing waters around the world for many centuries. Japanese fisheries flourished in these waters before WWII. After 1945, however, a lot of Japanese fishing boats were seized by the Soviet border patrols because they entered the waters around the islands which the Soviet Union (Russia) defended as their sovereign territory. Japanese fishermen and their family's security were heavily threatened by the Soviet Union's (or Russian) border patrol ships.

Table 1: Capture at sea water around Northern Territories (As of December 31, 2009)

Year/ Number	Capture		Return		Sink(Abandonment)	Death	No return	
	boat	crew	boat	crew	boat	crew	boat	crew
1946-1954	245	1,965	211	1,962	4	3	30	0
1955-1964	537	3,576	300	3,574	10	2	257	0
1965-1974	286	2,234	125	2,216	5	18	413	0
1975-1984	156	811	92	806	2	5	475	0
1985-1988	13	47	7	47	0	0	481	0
1989-1998	37	216	20	215	5	1	493	0
1999	7	49	7	49	0	0	493	0
2000	6	49	6	49	0	0	493	0
2001	3	28	3	28	0	0	493	0
2002	3	15	3	15	0	0	493	0
2003	0	0	0	0	0	0	493	0
2004	1	1	1	1	0	0	493	0
2005	1	5	1	5	0	0	493	0
2006	2	10	1	9	0	1	494	0
2007	5	17	4	17	0	0	495	0
2008	0	0	0	0	0	0	495	0
2009	0	0	1	0	0	0	495	0
Total	1,302	9,023	782	8,993	26	30	-	-

Source: Hokkaido Suisan Rinmubu.

Table 1 shows that from 1946 to 2009, many Japanese fishing boats and fishermen had been seized by the Soviet Union's or the Russian border patrols. Capture of Japanese boats was a very big problem in Japan. Japanese fishermen believed they could fish in the Japanese territories but they were captured by the Soviet Union's or the Russian border patrols who claimed the area as Soviet Union's (Russian) territory. All of the fishermen who were captured by the border patrols were investigated and the captains were detained for three months to four years in the Soviet Union or Russia. Their boats or the fishing implements were often confiscated. The families of these fishermen lost a husband or a son, usually the breadwinner of the family, and were forced into a life of hardship. Various authorities concerned as well as local fishermen and their families made efforts

to resolve the issues. An early solution to the territorial dispute became necessary to stop the capture of Japanese fishermen.

3. Fishery resources agreements

3.1 The Kelp Agreement of 1963

In 1963, an agreement on collecting kelp around Kaigarajima was successfully concluded and officially called the “*Agreement between Japan Fisheries Association and Fishery National Committee attached to the National Economy Congress of the Soviet Union on Collecting Kelp by Japanese Fishermen in Kaigarajima (Shigunarinui island ⁷) Area⁸*”. This agreement allowed Japanese boats to collect kelp around one of the Habomai islands, which the Soviet Union controlled, and Kaigarajima within its territorial waters. Coastal states usually do not allow fishing boats from other countries to enter their territorial waters, however, by this agreement, the Soviet Union consented to Japanese fishermen entering the territorial area to collect kelp.

Background

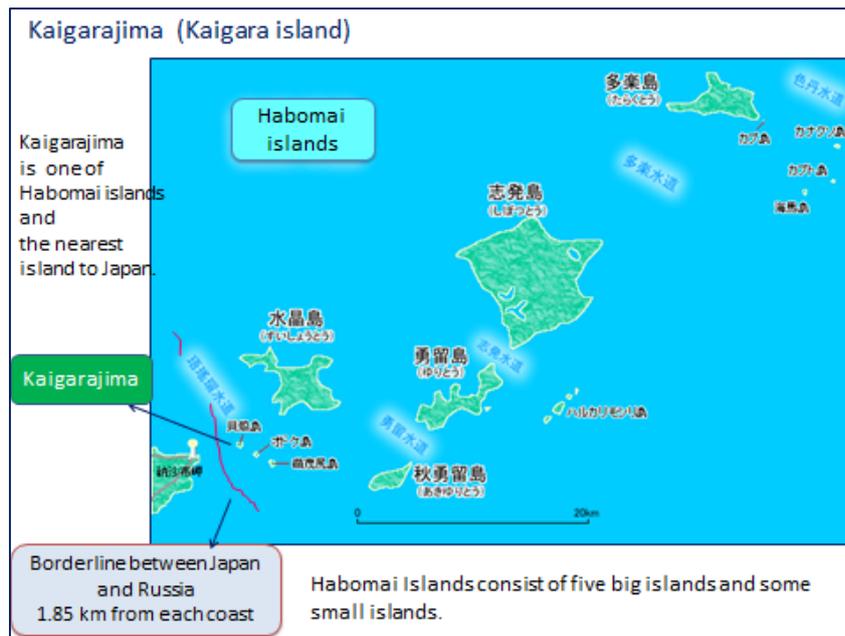


Figure 3: Kaigarajima

Source: ‘Nihon no shima he iko,’
imagic.qee.jp/sima/hokkaido/kaigarajima.html

⁷ It’s the island’s name of Russian ‘Остров Сигнальный’.

⁸ Two agreements in this paper were concluded between Japan and the Soviet Union (Russia). Therefore the official names of the agreements are written in Japanese and Russian. The author translated Japanese names into English ones.

Kaigarajima is one of the Habomai islands and is uninhabited. It is the southernmost islet in the Habomai group and lies only 3.7 km off Nemuro on the Japanese island of Hokkaido. It is the nearest island to Japan among the Four Islands. Between Kaigarajima in the Russian side and Nemuro, there is a borderline which is equidistant (1.85km) from each coast. The sea around Kaigarajima is rich in beds of kelp and the former Japanese inhabitants of the islands had collected them as their means of livelihood before 1945. However, after the war, it became difficult to collect kelp around the island the Soviet Union controlled, as a result of which they lost their means of livelihood and faced hardship. The fishermen and their supporters appealed to the society to intervene.

It became necessary for Japan and the Soviet Union to officially end the war and restore diplomatic ties since Russia did not sign the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty. On October 19, 1956, the “Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration” was signed by Japanese Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama and the Soviet Union’s Premier Nikolai Bulganin. This led the resumption of diplomatic ties between the two nations and the approval of Japan's membership to the United Nations in the same year⁹. However, a formal peace deal remained out of reach because of the territorial dispute.

Process for establishing the agreement

On the same day the “Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration” was signed, the “Treaty of Fishery between Japan and USSR¹⁰”, which related to salmon fishing in the Sea of Okhotsk or the Bering Sea, became effective¹¹. Under these conditions, a delegation was sent to initiate the kelp negotiation around Kaigarajima. The delegation included Tatsunosuke Takasaki¹², the president of the Japan Fisheries Association, and Ichiro Kono, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The negotiation was tough, because Kaigarajima in Habomai islands was the island where both Japan and the Soviet Union insisted they both had sovereignty rights over. Takasaki and Kono had a firm belief that the fishermen’s life was much more important than territorial problems and that they were willing to obey a part of the Soviet Union’s law to restore the fishermen’s livelihood. They had heard the pleas of fishermen and their families who were affected by the dispute and the inability to carry out their fishing activities. On the other hand, the Japanese government, especially the Japanese Foreign Ministry, was of the view that taking back the Four Islands to Japan was much

⁹ It was December 18, 1956.

¹⁰ USSR represents the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In this paper, the author stands for it as the Soviet Union.

¹¹ It was signed on May 14, 1956.

¹² Matsumura, 2013. Takasaki was in the chief position to negotiate with the Soviet Union on 1956 fishery treaty. He had a power and trust in business.

more important as national interests than collecting kelp. It was thus not the government but rather the Japan Fisheries Association from the nongovernmental sector, that continued the negotiation with the Soviet Union, culminating in the execution of a nongovernmental agreement on collecting kelp around Kaigarajima which took effect in 1963.

The content of this agreement is as follows: 1) the operating area is limited to around Kaigarajima. 2) Japan pays the Soviet Union a fee for collecting kelp. 3) The period for collecting kelp is June 1 to September 30. 4) The quantity of kelp and the number of boats are decided every year. 5) A captain and the crew must have the ID cards which the Japan Fisheries Association issues. 6) Japanese fishermen have to obey the Soviet Union's law when they operate. However, there is a reservation clause that if a Japanese fisherman breaks the rule, he will be disallowed to collect kelp by the Soviet Union or Japan Fisheries Association.

Both countries shelved the territorial problem and concluded this agreement as a nongovernmental agreement. Considering the fact that the agreement was signed during the cold war period, a nongovernmental organization in a capitalist country successfully concluding an agreement with a socialist country, was a landmark achievement. This agreement can be acknowledged as a people-centered worthy action, without waiting for state-led solution.

agreement with a few changes. The agreement did not name the organization which could terminate kelp collecting privilege of a Japanese fisherman if he broke a rule. The agreement also imposed a higher fee for collecting kelp. Despite this, this agreement is perceived as a beneficial agreement, meant to empower a vulnerable community. According to the interview at Habomai fisheries cooperative, Japanese boats enjoy collecting kelp in the area mainly in June and July. From August, they usually collect kelp at the foreshore, which is in the waters near their harbor.

3.2 The Fishery Agreement of 1998

In 1998, another agreement between Japan and Russia was concluded, which was officially called the “*Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Russian Federation on Some Matters of the Cooperation in the Field of the Operation about the Marine Life Resources*”. The subject of this agreement is the catching of fish around the Four Islands. It permits Japanese boats to fish in the waters around the islands (from 3 NM to 12 NM). In 1994, UNCLOS took effect. By this Law, territorial waters were defined as the sea area within 12 NM (about 22km) from the baseline of a coastal state. As these form part of their sovereign territory, coastal states usually do not allow other countries’ fishing boats to operate in their territorial waters. However, Russia agreed to the operation of Japanese fishing boats in the area.

Background

In 1987, ‘perestroika’ (‘reform’ in English) and ‘glasnost’(‘disclosure of information’ in English) began in the Soviet Union. President Gorbachev initiated the correction of the planned economy. The controlling power of Moscow weakened and in 1991 the Soviet Union disintegrated and Russian Federation was formed. By such a drastic change in politics, economics and society, the situation of the Four Islands greatly changed as well. Under price liberalization, prices increased and the pay differentials between Moscow and the islands decreased. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, residents on the islands received various preferential treatments such as; higher pay, draw on pension earlier, cheaper prices and employments on the islands, etc. There was a policy of the country then to encourage settlement by the Soviet population on the islands which were far away from Moscow. However, due to the changes brought about by the new Federation such as an increase of transportation cost, the fish processing industry, which is the main industry in the islands, lost its market in the Russian mainland, and the islanders’ living conditions deteriorated.

Russian Federation Fishery Agency became in charge of the negotiating counterpart.

In April, 1991, President Gorbachev visited Japan in an effort to improve relations between the Soviet Union and Japan. He was the first Russian president to visit Japan. On April 18, 1991, the “Japan-Soviet Joint Statement” was signed in Tokyo. The statement included the following contents;

- I. The Soviet Union recognized the Four Islands as "an object of the territorial problem" to be solved in a peace treaty.
- II. The Soviet Union suggested that Japanese come to the Four Islands without using the visa (non-visa interchange).
- III. The Soviet Union suggested that both countries should start joint economic activities on the Four Islands.
- IV. The Soviet Union suggested the reduction of the armaments in the Four Islands.

Process for establishing the agreement

On March 28, 1994, Kaiji Oya, the mayor of Nemuro, Hokkaido, received a telex from Nikolai Pokijin, the governor of South Kuril Islands (three of the Four Islands)¹⁴. They knew each other through ‘the non-visa visit frameworks.’ The message said that the situation of the islands was very bad and inquired whether Japan wanted to fish around the islands by paying a fee to Russia (to the islands) as was being done with kelp collection around Kaigarajima. Moreover a big earthquake of October 4, 1994¹⁵, caused extensive damage to the processed marine products factories which were the biggest industry in Shikotan island, which accelerated the industrial stagnation and the depopulation. As there was a territorial problem on the islands, it was very difficult to find a compromise. Japan wanted their fishermen to be able to catch fish at the waters around the islands, which were rich fishing grounds and would improve their living situation. Furthermore, Japan wanted to reduce the prevalence of poaching by the Japanese fishing boats and the incidence of capture by the Russian border patrol ships which had increased. On the other hand, Russia wanted to sell its excess marine products which Russian didn’t eat and wanted much money and equipment from Japan. Russia further hoped that entering such an agreement would lead to the socioeconomic development of Sakhalin oblast (‘state’ in English) and Kuril Islands including the Four Islands.

As a result of both efforts, an agreement on catching fish around the Four Islands by Japanese fishing boats was signed in Moscow on February 21, 1998. Though there is no mention of the territorial dispute in this agreement, there is a reservation clause that states that ‘Japan and Russian

¹⁴ Iwashita and Honda, 2006. p.99. Three islands are Kunashiri island, Shikotan island and Habomai islands.

¹⁵ It was called Hokkaido Eastward Offshore Earthquake, which registered a magnitude of 8.2.

Federation must consider that this agreement does not harm each other's situation or opinion'. In other words, both countries put the territorial issues aside and concluded the agreement.

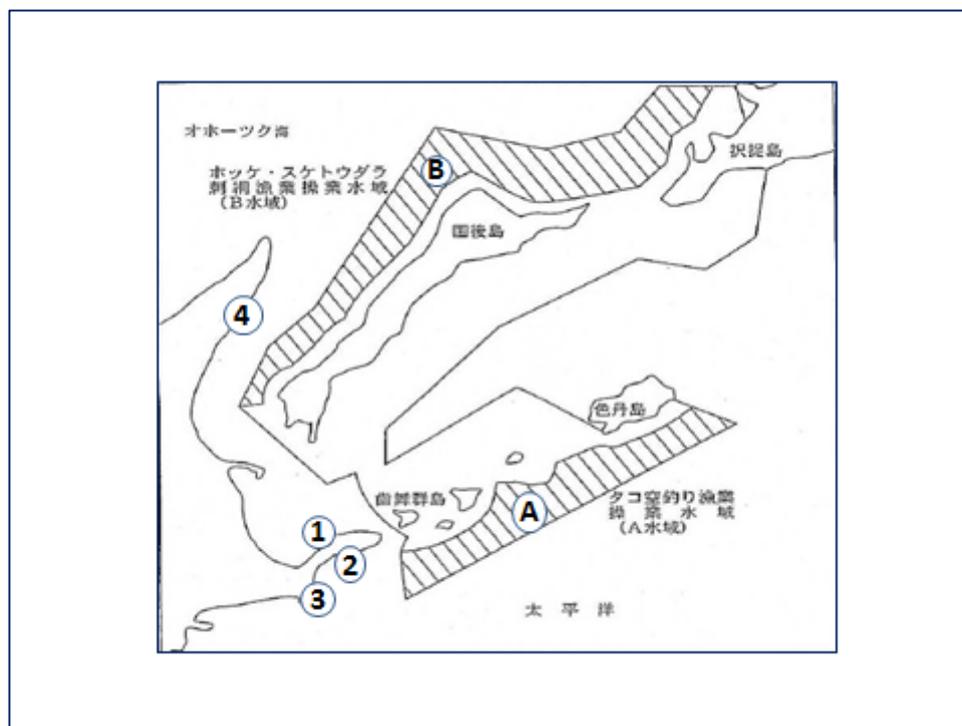


Figure.5: Fishing ground based on the 1998 agreement

Note: In the diagonal part of this map, Japanese boats can catch fish according to the agreement. No.1 to No.4 show the fisheries cooperatives which can operate in these waters. Neruro (No.1), Habomai (No.2), and Ochiishi (No.3) fisheries cooperatives' boats can catch octopus in A area. Rausu (No.4) one can catch hokke (Okhostk Atka mackerel) and suketo cod (Alaska Pollock) in B area.

Source: "Heisei 24nenndoban-Suisan Nemuro," (11) Hoppoyonto anzensogyo kosyo, p.22

The content of this agreement is as follows: 1) Japanese fishing boats can operate at the waters within 12NM of the Four Islands¹⁶. 2) Japan pays Russia a fee (cooperation money) and provides fishing equipment. 3) The fishing season, the number of boats, fish catches and fish species are limited. 4) Japanese boats must have ID cards which both countries issue. 5) Japanese fishermen should obey the Russian law on operating. 6) Both countries should cooperate with the preservation and the rational use of marine resources at the areas.

In this agreement, there is no punitive clause for Japanese boats, because it has the possibility of compounding the territorial issues between Japan and Russia. Therefore, fishermen are obliged to follow the rules of this agreement so as to continue this agreement. This agreement is a decision in

¹⁶ Strictly speaking, Japanese boats can operate in the waters from 3NM to 12NM around the islands.

the sea area with the territorial issues that gave rise to the agreement on kelp around Kaigarajima. This however is a government-to-government agreement, while the agreement on the Kaigarajima area is the government-to-nongovernmental organization agreement. The operating area of this agreement is much larger than that of Kaigarajima's and it is one of reasons that the then Japanese Foreign Ministry took the initiative to commence negotiations with the Russian government for this agreement. It was finally concluded by both governments shelving their territorial dispute and taking into consideration the health and the security of the people who live there. A nongovernmental organization, Hokkaido Fisheries Association, was in charge of negotiating some of the operational provisions for fishing.

This agreement has been in force from 1998 to date. Every October or November the intergovernmental talks and the government-to-nongovernmental organization talks have been held in Moscow. The Japanese attendants to the former talks include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Fisheries Agency and Hokkaido Government Office and the Russian attendants include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Fisheries Agency. They discuss any problems that have arisen in conjunction with the enforcement of the agreement. Around the same period, the latter talks are also held and the attendants include Hokkaido Fisheries Association, Russian Federation Fishery Agency and Russian Federation National Security Board. They discuss the concrete operation conditions such as fish catches and fish species caught by the Japanese fishing boats, etc. According to the interviews, Japanese boats now enjoy fishing in these areas. They, however, hope to expand their fishing area, to increase fish catches and fish species, and to decrease their burden (the cooperation money).

According to Northern Territories Issues Association, exchange visits between Japanese and Russians in the Four Islands have been ongoing for a long time though there were political and economic problems. Since 1964 and up until the end of 2014, 4,850 former islanders visited their family graves on the islands. Secondly, through "the non-visa visit frameworks", many Japanese visited the islands and the islanders visited Japan. The total number of visitors both ways was 20,610 and the number of visits totaled 526 from 1992 to the end of 2014¹⁷. Thirdly, there was what was known as the "Free Visit", which comprised of former islanders and their families visiting their home on the islands and deepening their interaction with Russians on the islands. From 1999 to the end of 2014, a total number of "free visitors" to the islands was 3,157, over 65 visits. The above statistics on the three categories of visitors to and from the islands over the years are from the

¹⁷ 12,023 of these were Japanese visiting the islands over a total of 313 visits, while 8,587 of the total number were Russian islanders who visited Hokkaido over a total number of 213 visits.

official voyages based on an agreement between the Kremlin and Japanese governments. Japanese citizens are allowed to visit the islands by ‘no passport, no visa’, but they have to have an identification card (ID card) issued by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan. In return, as ‘Humanitarian Support’, Japan accepts critically-ill patients of the islands.

4. Russians on the Four Northern Islands

The year of 2005 marked 60 years after WWII ended and 150 years after the Treaty of Commerce, Navigation and Delimitation between Japan and Russia was concluded¹⁸. It was anticipated that a solution to the territorial dispute will be attained, but this did not happen. It therefore became necessary to find out a new approach on the relationship between Japan and Russia regarding the four islands. A survey was thus carried out by the cooperation of Hokkaido University and Hokkaido Shimbun Press¹⁹ in order to ascertain the present status of the territorial dispute. The survey for the residents of Nemuro city was conducted from July 21 to July 22, 2005, while the survey for the Russians in the Northern territories (the Four Northern Islands) was conducted from October 21 to October 28, 2005. The following graphs show some results of the survey for the Russians in the Northern territories.

¹⁸ The treaty was concluded on February 7, 1855. It set the Japan-Russia border between Etorofu island and Uruppu island. Etorofu island, Kunashiri island, Shikotan island and the Habomai Islands were declared to be Japanese territories, and the Kurile Islands, lying to the north of and including Uruppu island, were declared to be Russian territories. Available from www.hoppou.go.jp/hoppou/wp-content/uploads/.../english.pdf Accessed on 10/15/2015

¹⁹ Iwashita and Honda, 2006.

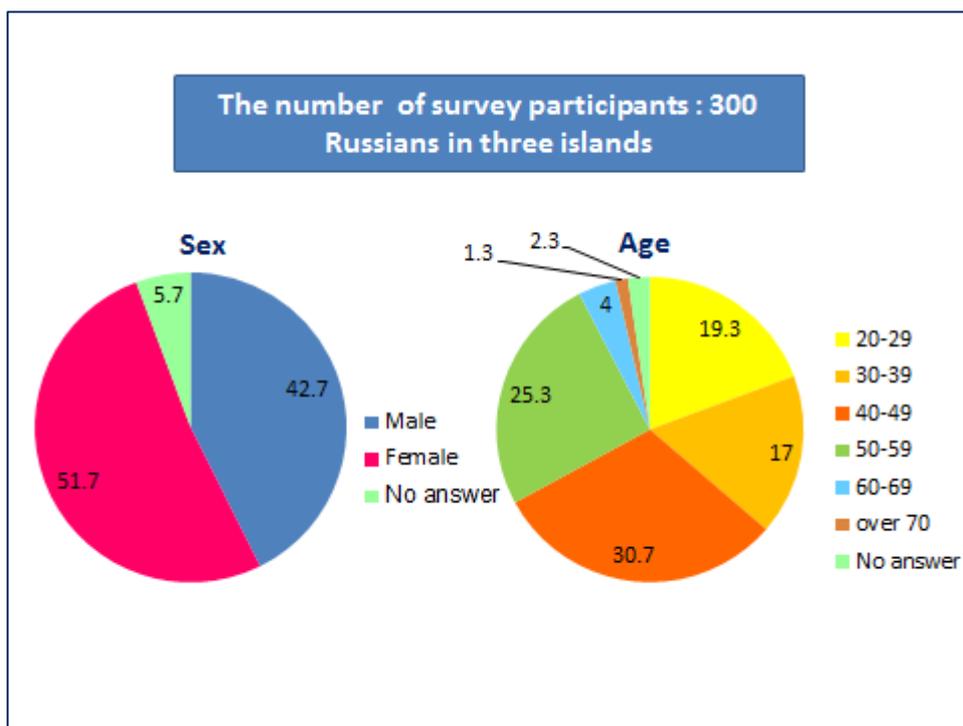


Figure 6: The rate of survey participants

Note: The number of survey participants is 300 Russians in three islands except Habomai islands where there are no inhabitants. 100 on each island answered the survey.

Source: Iwashita and Honda, 2006.

<https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no15/contents.html> pp. 43-44.

As shown in Figure 6, the number of male and female is almost half-and-half, and most of the respondents are in their twenties to sixties. Though there is no graph in this paper, by occupation, the number of those concerned with the fishing industry is the most (26.3%), the second is civil servants (22.0%), the third is self-employed workers (7.3%), and the fourth is military personnel and security officials (6.7%). In the case of Shikotan island, those concerned with the fishing industry occupy 50.0%. In this background, there was one reason that Gidorosutoroi (Гидрострой) company, a Russian fish processing company, was founded in Etorofu island in 1991, which increased the number of processed marine products factories, including one at Shikotan island.

This survey was carried out 5 years after President Putin took office in Moscow in 2000, and the residents were asked on their current living conditions in this survey. According to the result of it, 43.7% of the respondents answered it 'became better', while 21.7% answered 'became worse'. By sex, 39.8% of male respondents answered 'better', while 24.2% answered 'worse'. 46.5% of female respondents answered 'better', while 19.4% answered 'worse'. The percentage of 'better' was the highest in the twenties, which was 65.5%. By island, half of each respondent in Kunashiri island and Shikotan island answered 'better', while in Etorofu island, 41.0% of respondents answered 'not

change’, and around 30.0% each answered ‘better’ and ‘worse’. Under these responses, 300 respondents were asked the following question: “What problems do you have in your current life?” They could select more than one answer.

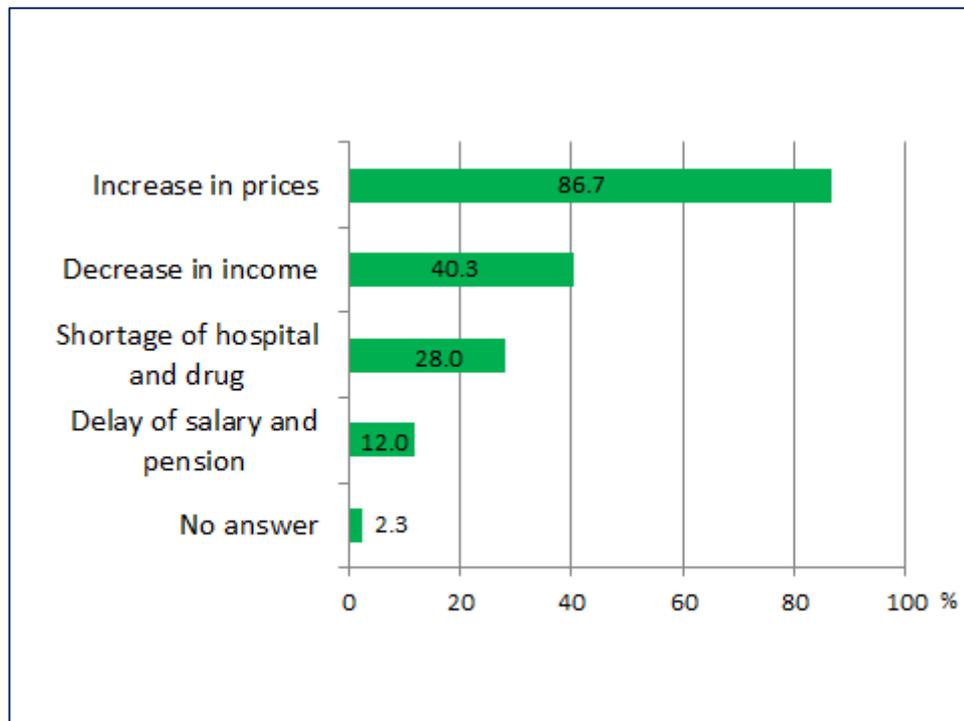


Figure 7: What problems do you have in your current life? (Multiple answers allowed)

Source: Iwashita and Honda, 2006.
<https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no15/contents.html> p.47.

Figure 7 shows that 86.7% of respondents answered that their problem was ‘Increase in prices’. It was the biggest problem for them. Furthermore, their responses were followed by ‘Decrease in income’ (40.3%), ‘Shortage of hospital and drug’(28.0%), and ‘Delay of salary and pension’ (12.0%). There were almost no differences among three islands.

The figure below shows the responses of respondents with regards to whether or not the Northern territories be returned to Japan and the action, if any to be taken after return.

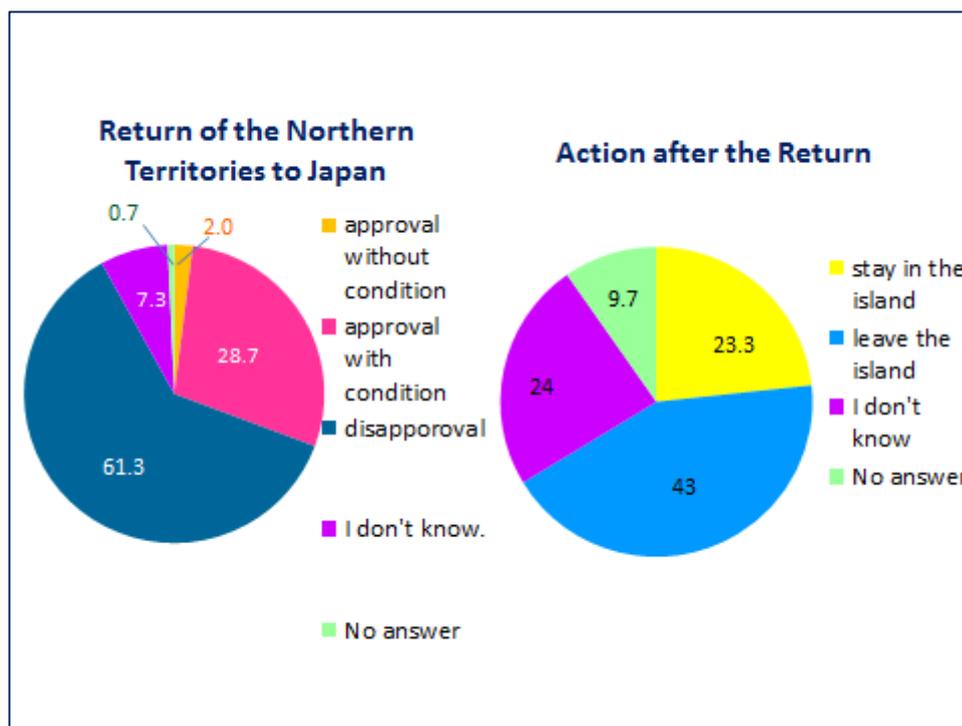


Figure 8: Return of the Northern Territories to Japan and Action after the Return

Source: Iwashita and Honda, 2006.

<https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no15/contents.html> p.48, p.50.

Figure 8 says that only 2% of the respondents approved the return of the islands to Japan without conditions. 28.7% of the respondents approved the return of the islands to Japan with conditions. About 60% of them disapproved the return. For the question of “What are you going to do if the islands return to Japan?”, 23.3% of the respondents answered they would stay in the island as before, while 43% of them answered they would leave the island.

Almost 30% of respondents approved the islands’ return to Japan without (2.0%) and with (28.7%) conditions. The number was about 92 of 300 respondents. These respondents were asked the further question, “What is your condition when you approve the island’s return to Japan?” Figure 9 below shows their response to this question.

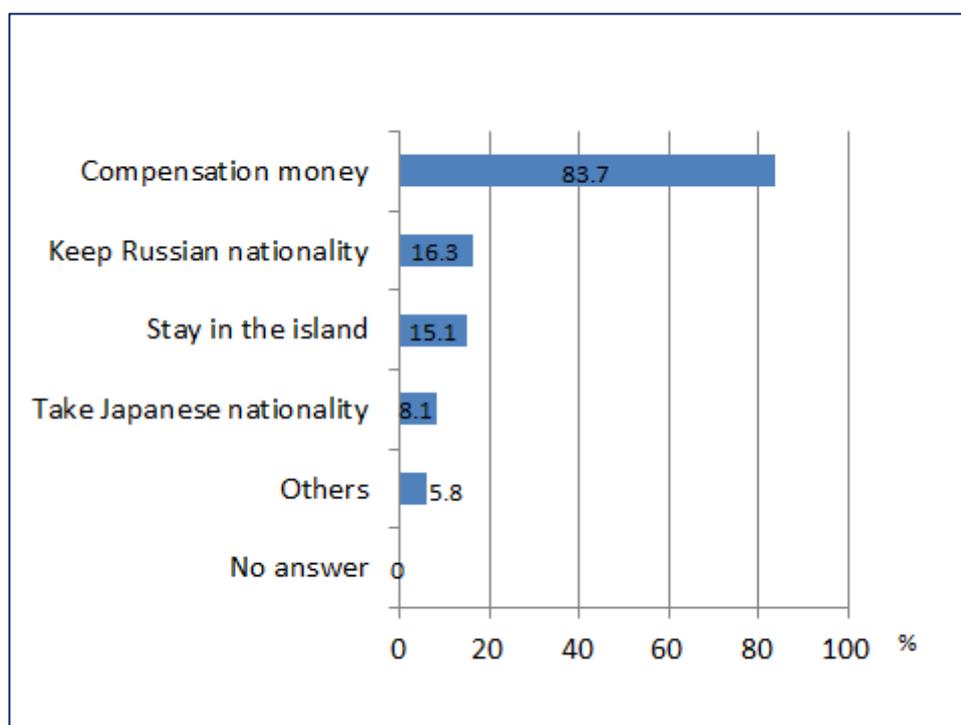


Figure 9: “What is your condition on the return?”(Multiple answers allowed)

Source: Iwashita and Honda, 2006.
<https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no15/contents.html> p.49.

From the figure above in which multiple answers were allowed, 83.7% of the respondents answered that the condition should be ‘compensation money’, while 16.3% of them responded that the condition be ‘Keep Russian nationality’, 15.1% responded ‘Stay in the island’, 8.1% responded ‘Take Japanese nationality’, and 5.8% responded ‘Others.’

Over ten years have now passed since the previous survey was conducted. ‘The Second Socioeconomic Development Program in Kuril Islands’ commenced in 2007²⁰. In May, 2012, Russia founded the ‘Ministry for Development of Russian Far East²¹’ to advance the development of the Far East. Infrastructure development for industrial promotion on the islands has been pushed forward by Russia: a new airport, military facilities and a hospital with a maternity section were built in the islands. The living condition of Russian islanders has greatly improved. If the survey for the Russian islanders were conducted today, the result might be different from the result of 2005.

²⁰ The first Socioeconomic Development Program in Kuril Islands was carried out from 1994 to 2005. The second one is from 2007 to 2015. The third one will be carried out from 2016 to 2025. Source: “Russia Now”, Available from jp.rbth.com. Accessed on 10/15/2015

²¹ This ministry is one of Russian central government ministries and was founded on May 21, 2012 by Presidential Order No.612. The headquarters is in Khabarovsk. Russian Far East is located in the eastern part of Russia and belongs to the Far East Russian Federal District. From Mitsui & Co., Ltd. Institute for Strategic Studies, Available from www.mgssi.com/issues/report/d_r1207r_kitade.html, www.mgssi.com/issues/report/d_r1305r.html. Accessed on 11/22/2015

5. Conclusion

Since the end of WWII in 1945, the Soviet Union (Russia) has controlled the Four Northern Islands, resulting in a territorial dispute between Japan and Russia. As this problem has not been solved, the two countries cannot conclude a peace treaty. In 2015, approximately 17,000 Russians²², which is almost as many as the Japanese inhabitants who were deported, were recorded to inhabit three islands with exception of Habomai islands, the nearest island to Hokkaido. More than two thirds of the Japanese islanders have passed away without returning to their home islands²³. Most of the initial Russian settlers have also passed away, leaving the island inhabited mostly by the next generation.

Both countries over the years have made efforts in order to protect their citizens. Setting aside the difficult territorial problems, they attached greater importance to the stability of the people's lives. In 1963, an agreement on collecting kelp around Kaigarajima was concluded by a strong desire from the Japanese side. Japan pays the Soviet Union (Russia) fees for kelp collection in the disputed waters. This was the extremely exceptional agreement entered into by a private sector organization (Japan Fisheries Association) and a socialist country. In other words, during the cold war period, only a private sector could negotiate a deal with a socialist country. This agreement continues in force until now as the 1981 agreement, after it had the 4 years' suspension. In 1998, an agreement on catching fish around the Four Islands was executed by a strong desire from the Russian side. The agreement allowed Japanese fishing boats to operate at the waters around the islands within 12 NM in return for Japan paying the cooperation money and providing equipment. This agreement differed from the kelp agreement in that it was an intergovernmental agreement. Aside from these agreements, the end of the cold war brought about an improved relationship between Japan and Russia. This cleared the path for the instituting of "the non-visa visit frameworks" which is still effective currently. Some results of the survey for the Russian inhabitants show that they would leave the islands if their economic conditions deteriorated. They give weight to the economic stability. In reality a lot of Russians left the islands after a 1994 big earthquake near the islands. However, the number of islanders has gradually increased owing to the Russian development program.

²² Hokkaido Sakhalin Office in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk "Sakhalin syu no gaiyo-2015 nendoban" (as of January 1).

Available from www.pref.hokkaido.lg.jp/file.jsp?id=851291 Accessed on 10/15/2015

Sankei News 2015.8.6 07:00 "Hoppo Ryodo Homonki" Available from www.sankei.com/premium/news/150806/prm1508060005-n1.html Accessed on 10/15/2015

²³ 6,444 of former islanders are alive as of the end of the fiscal 2014. Source: Northern Territories Issue Association, Available from www.hoppou.go.jp Accessed on 10/15/2015.

These two agreements which greatly improved the stability of residents' lives were concluded by shelving the territorial problems. Realistically it's significant for both countries to deal with the problem at hand. Under these agreements, Japanese fishermen can operate with the security and the peace of mind in the disputed waters, while Russian islanders can receive some money, equipment and cooperation from Japan. The basis of these agreements is that people's lives are much more important than territorial problems. As the marine products industry has played a key role in Hokkaido and the islands, it is crucial for the two countries to maintain and improve the industry for the stability of their lives. By appropriately utilizing and conserving fishery resources in the waters, both countries can give opportunities of employment to their citizens. In the interviews at fisheries cooperatives, some staff said, "The most important thing is that fishermen can operate with security and safely." and "Fishermen take pride in their work and their work will lead to defending Japanese territory."

The Japanese campaign to "Regain Northern Territories" has a long history: however, many Russians have lived there for a long time. Japan cannot forcibly deport them. Russia is pursuing 'the Socioeconomic Development Program in Kuril Islands'. As the islands' situation continues to improve, Russians in the islands will be satisfied with their lives and it might be difficult for Russia to return the islands to Japan.

This paper discussed how a fishery agreement tried to solve long prevailing 'wants' of both Japanese and Russians, shelving the territorial disputes. Ratifying the fishery agreement between a socialist country and a nongovernment group is not an easy task if the stakeholders adhered to their nationalistic views. While territorial issues are a consequence of state-centered security agenda, fishery agreements are people-centered, freeing the vulnerable societies from economic and community threats. Security in this paper is an instrumental value that frees its stakeholders to a greater to lesser extend from life determining constraints.

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