

The Chinese Minority in Cambodia: Identity Construction and Contestation

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese Minority in Cambodia: Identity Construction and contestation.

Sambath Chan

This thesis is an anthropological study to investigate the complex processes of identity construction and contestation among the minority ethnic Chinese in Cambodia during the post Independence period. I call this group Sino-Cambodians. In myriad ways, the Sino-Cambodians have coped as "flexible citizens" (Ong 1999) in response to racist stereotypes, class antagonism, and the communist "fifth wheel" accusations imposed by various government regimes since Cambodia's independence in 1954. Castigated as "others". (i.e. by ethnic Khmers-the dominant ethnic group), envied for their economic wealth, and often branded with unsolicited political motivations, the Sino-Cambodian (Chinese-Cambodians) have nevertheless shown a remarkable ability to adapt, respond, and contest identities that have tended to marginalize them. In this thesis I reveal how the concept of Chinese identity is a racial construction by the ethnic Cambodia majority population, in particular the political elite, for purposes of political control. Moreover, I examine how multiple identities within the Chinese community, reflecting class, ethnic and political differences have contested this type of ethnic labelling, under each political regime and within the current context of globalization.

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Introduction

When I was eight years old, every morning I heard the voices of people speaking Khmer outside my house. In my house, two languages were spoken: Chinese and Khmer. At that time, I had not really thought about the difference between Chinese and Khmer languages or what they meant for ethnic identity. One day at the end of January, I began to understand because this was a special time for Chinese New Year. I saw many of my father's friends come over to our house, making New Year's Greetings, in Chinese fashion. I remember hearing them say something like: "Although we were born and grew up here in Cambodia, we should still honour and respect our Chinese national cultural practices." It was at that moment that I consciously recognized I was a Sino-Cambodian child living in Cambodia. And from then on I began to see how I lived differently from the Cambodian children who were my neighbours. Every Chinese New Year, the doors of business establishments shut according to tradition. But the noisy sounds of firecrackers and celebrations filled the streets of Phnom Penh. The happy noise of the Chinese was not so well received by our Cambodian neighbours. Some Cambodians scolded us not to be so noisy, saying, "you have come to live in this country, and you should demonstrate good manners". Others swore saying, "Our government should take those bloody Chinese in our country of Khmers back to their country "; "the Chinese are parasites sucking the blood of Cambodians."

From that time on, I realized that I was a Cambodian national holding a Chinese identity. When I went to study in the Cambodian school system, the Cambodian students in my class cursed me saying, "You are a Chinese clown"; "your face is like that of a pig", "you have a flat nose, big eyes, and cheeks like a pig's bum". After hearing this

time and again, I was very upset and decided quietly I could not accept such discrimination that pitted two nationalities against each other.

During the Khmer Republican regime, 1970 to 1975, all the Chinese schools were closed in the country. One of my friends who had studied in a Chinese school told me his had been closed by the government because the school had propagated Maoism. My neighbours and friends suddenly had lots of free time to help their parents at home because they were not going to school. The markets and large shops that had advertised their wares and names in Chinese had to change everything into the Cambodian language. This was the start of serious discrimination against the Chinese in Cambodia.

When my father was still alive, he told me that even the government officials who interacted with Chinese were at risk of losing their jobs by this association. Some Chinese families who wanted their children to join the army were rejected because of their ethnicity. Therefore, with exclusion from the civil service and military, it seemed that the only sector Chinese could work in was the business sector in the urban areas.

Before this problem of discrimination against the Chinese could be contested, the Republic collapsed on the losing side of the war, and the Khmer Rouge communist regime took over. My father, mother, brother and I all had to leave Phnom Penh, like everyone else who was evacuated from the city. But because we were Sino-Cambodians we had to first go to a special camp in a southern province along with some other one thousand Chinese. As a child of nine years old, I did not understand more than that we were all there because of our Chinese backgrounds. Only later as an adult, when I researched this question in more depth, did I find out that the Khmer Rouge did not target the Chinese for their ethnic identity as much as for their social class identity. We were of

the capitalist elite, and Chinese were closely identified more than Cambodians with the accumulation of wealth, and having a rich social background. In the camp we were given propaganda lessons about communism and capitalism and were put to work digging ditches and cutting trees. My mother was eventually killed because of her class background, my father died of illness not long after the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, and I was left with my brother and sister as an orphan in 1979.

After the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia to oust the Khmer Rouge in 1979, I was helped by Vietnamese soldiers to go to live in an orphanage. In the orphanage, the Cambodian managers separated Sino-Cambodians from the other children, and we slept and ate in different rooms from the Khmer children. I had the feeling then that if I had dark skin and had eyelids like Khmers I would be lucky and have freedom like the other kids, and not be confined to separate quarters.

There are countless other incidents of discrimination that I have experienced as a Chinese-Cambodian. But in summary, from the time I was small through to my adulthood I have struggled with the concepts and the discrimination of identity. And this is why I have chosen this topic. It is not only the suffering and misery that I myself suffered that has motivated this research, but also to demonstrate that so many others have as well. The struggle of the Sino-Cambodians has taken place over generations, and what is remarkable is that even though they have suffered so much, there is still a love of Cambodia on their part.

I hope this message will serve to help open a dialogue between the two communities so that they can live together in greater mutual understanding and respect.

Research Objectives

My research objective is to investigate the changing and contested forms of identity of an important minority group in Cambodia: the Chinese or Sino-Cambodian.

I conducted primary and secondary research on cultural, social class and ethnic expressions of this group over four different political regimes in Cambodia since independence. My interest was to document the experiences of Chinese immigrants to Cambodia through the anthropological lens of identity construction and contestation. The research objectives were as follows: to examine the concept of Chinese identity in terms of how it was a social and racial construction of the ethnic Cambodian majority population, in particular the political elite, for purposes of political and social control; to document the diversity of identities within the Chinese community, reflecting class, ethnic dialect, and political differences, to show how Chinese Cambodians contest this type of ethnic labelling. The ongoing struggles of the Sino-Cambodians to construct their multi-ethnic and social identities have been made in this context of minority or majority communities, making the question “who is Chinese” a challenge to answer.

This research investigated the complex processes of identity construction and contestation among the minority ethnic Chinese in Cambodia during the period of post independence. In myriad ways, the ethnic Chinese have coped as "flexible citizens" (Ong 1999) in response to racist stereotypes, class antagonism, and the communist "fifth wheel" accusations imposed by various government regimes since Cambodia's independence in 1953¹. Castigated as “others” by ethnic Khmer (the dominant ethnic group), envied for their economic wealth, and often branded with unsolicited political

¹ Cambodia had independence from France was in 1953 under the reign of King Sihanouk.

motivations, the Sino-Cambodians (Chinese Cambodians) have nevertheless shown a remarkable ability to adapt, respond, and contest identities that have tended to marginalize them.

The title of this thesis implies the existence of clear-cut boundaries between the subjects of my inquiry, ethnic Chinese, and their country of domicile, Cambodia. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ethnic Chinese are an integral part of the geography and history of Cambodia. While estimates of the Chinese population vary from 300,000 - 340,000, there is general agreement that at least ninety five percent of Cambodia's ethnic Chinese were born in Cambodia². Khmers and Chinese in Cambodia make a clear distinction between long term Chinese residents of Cambodia and the more transient population of recently arrived immigrants from Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China who have settled in Phnom Penh in relatively large numbers since the Paris Peace Agreements were signed in October 1991.

In keeping with these perceptions and in line with my aim, I have maintained the same distinction in my research, focusing on the history, social structure, legal-political status and cultural identity of the established Chinese community in Cambodia. I have given only the briefest attention to the newcomers, on the grounds that Hong Kong Chinese businessmen or Singapore Chinese doctors, along with the thousands of other such transients, are protected by the passports and laws of their countries of permanent residence, and, unlike the longstanding ethnic Chinese community in Cambodia, do not identify even partially as Cambodian.

² Chinese Nationals in Cambodia placed the population of 'pure Chinese' (ie not including Sino-Khmer) at 300,000 to 340,000 including 200,000 in Phnom Penh; while the Chinese Embassy in Cambodia estimated in 2003 the population at 300,000, with about 180,000 living in Phnom Penh.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis is organized in five chapters that correspond to chronological and thematic issues.

Chapter one presents a theoretical framework and methodology for the thesis. This theoretical framework is influenced by anthropological theories of identity, and broader social science concepts exploring the links between ethnicity and nationalism. These are important for the argument I wish to make because the Sino-Cambodians in Cambodia have suffered and prospered according to how they have been classified by state systems of authority, and by the extent that their existence has threatened a Khmer or Cambodian majority national identity. So examining the issues of ethnicity through a larger context of the nation and nationalism seemed appropriate.

This chapter also defines the main thematic terms of my argument: construction and contestation. These terms stem from postmodern studies that look at the role of those marginalized or cut off from the mainstream in society, and that is why I chose these terms for this thesis. I end the chapter with an overview of my experience of carrying out ethnographic research and the techniques I used for interviews and data collection.

Chapter two illustrates the Sino-Cambodian identity in historical perspective beginning in the 19th century. It is important to go back this far because history can show anthropology a lot about patterns in migration as they happened over time. For example, each wave of Chinese migration to Cambodia reflected different ethnic characteristics of the incoming groups, different dialects, and different home regions in China. And these differences also had an impact on Chinese identity formation in Cambodia. And that is why the historical perspective is important.

A second reason for using this historical approach is that there is a pattern of identity construction and contestation in the chronology of Cambodia's history. Different Cambodian regimes responded differently to the Chinese--sometimes as a threat, sometimes as an opportunity.

Identity is therefore defined in terms of Chinese dialects, regional cultural practices, and the wave of migration they came in. Identity is also defined by the Khmer or Cambodian lens of who the Chinese seemed to be for them. So this is why in this chapter I also talk about the effects of nationalism, and emergence of a distinct Chinese community in Cambodia.

Chapter three examines the repression of Chinese identity by the forces of war and state discrimination. This chapter looks at the degree of discrimination as measured by, relationship ability to practice cultural expression such as the very important funeral rites, employment for Chinese children and prohibitions on these. This chapter is about the contestation of Chinese identity through state policies. And I look in particular at four regimes that were well known by the Chinese as being the most repressive. The first is the Republican regime of General Lon Nol (1970-1975) that departed from the royal government of independence in its discrimination of Chinese. The second is the regime of Democratic Kampuchea under Pol Pot, that is now the subject of an upcoming war crimes tribunal in Cambodia. This regime lasted less than four years between 1975-1978 but its impact was horrific because 1.7 million people died from execution, starvation and

illness.³ Although many Sino- Cambodians died it is unclear that they were persecuted because of their ethnic identity⁴.

The third regime is that of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) from 1979-1989, and the fourth is the State of Cambodia that followed it from 1989-1992. This was a socialist state that prescribed roles for ethnic groups. In this chapter I rely on interview materials for first hand accounts of ethnic discrimination, as well as state documents that outline the regimes' ethnic policies.

Chapter four explores the renaissance of Sino- Cambodian language and culture in post war Cambodia from 1993-2004. I explain this in the context of the political opening of Cambodia that allowed for many different kinds of expressions in journalism, political party growth, and economic diversification. This was a time when Cambodia opened to the world again, first through the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia peacekeeping mission, and then through Cambodia's entry into Sino- ASEAN and the global community with aid money from the World Bank, IMP, ADB and United Nations agencies.

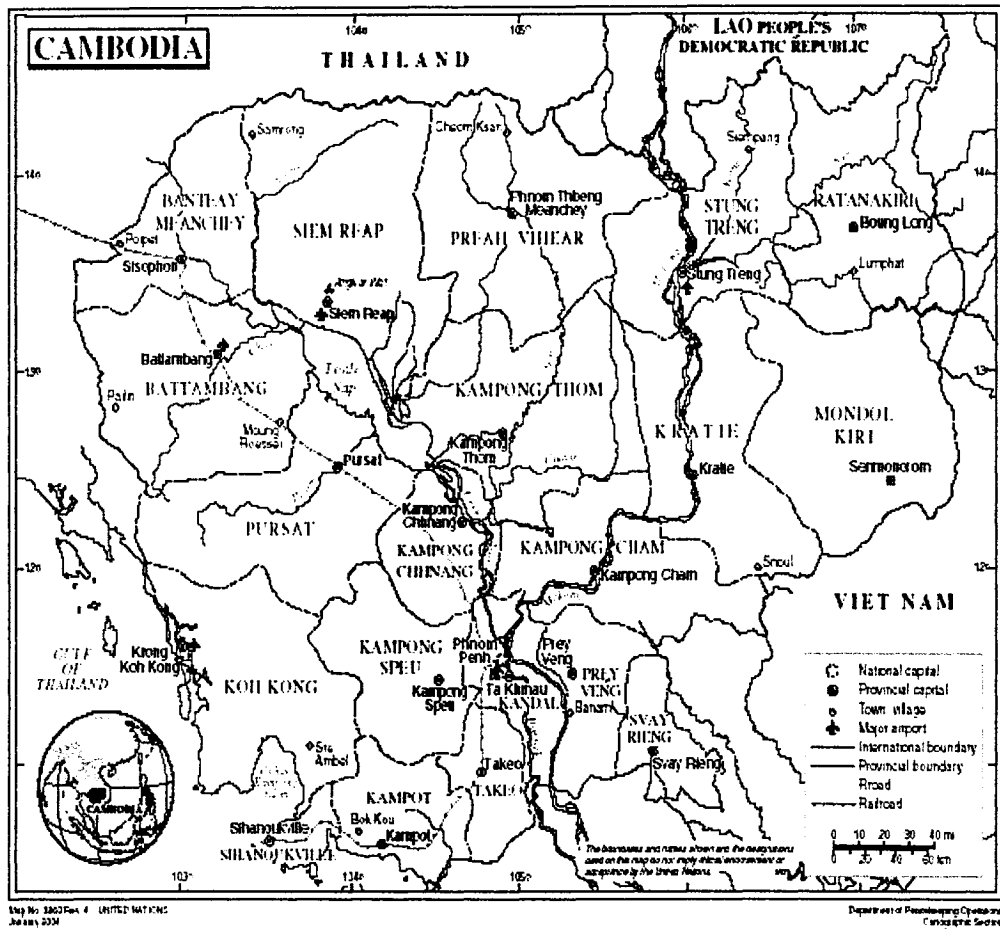
This positive environment of opening up Cambodia's geographical borders allowing foreign influence to come in, also seems to have had a positive impact on cultural expressions for the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia under the Royal Government of Cambodia (1993 to present). I will argue that this has been aided by increased investment and economic aid to the Ministry of Planning in Cambodia from China itself.

³ Cambodian National Statistic from Ministry of Planning in 1997 and also statistic from the documentation centre of Cambodia 2000

⁴ As for the Chinese in Cambodia, however the United Nations report released in 1999 notes no such persecution within the definition of the Genocide Convention.

The concluding chapter summarizes the main findings of the thesis. Here I try to bring together the theoretical argument with my data to show patterns of contestation, resistance, and cultural identity construction. For the Sino-Chinese, there is always uncertainty about their position in Cambodia. And so my conclusions must be in this context.

Map of Cambodia



<http://www.Un.org/Depts/Cartographi/map/Profile/Cambodia.pdf> (March 4th 2005)

CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

1-Theoretical Framework

Anthropological Theories of Identity

In this section, I explore anthropological and social science theories of identities, ethnicity, and the concept of "flexible citizenship" (Ong 1999) in connection with the subject of Chinese identity in Cambodia.

Scholars such as Nagata 1979, Barth 1969, Eriksen 1992, Sollors 1986, Jenkins 2002, Anderson 1991 and Ong 1999 have provided a comprehensive body of knowledge and theorizing on the problem of identity. Each focus on a different aspect. Nagata looks at the relationships between the insider and outsider. Barth is interested in the problem of boundaries and the role of the boundaries in defining identity. Eriksen looks at the history of terms. Sollors traces the linguistic roots of the term "ethnicity" and its relationship to the concepts of "nation". Jenkins looks at human rights and identity. Anderson looks at the nation and identity and argues that the nation is a product of our imagination. Ong looks at ethnic minority in terms of "flexible citizenship". So each scholar adds to the puzzle of ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity is a complex task of memory and feeling cemented through ties to people, place and time. The transmission of cultural knowledge across generations provides a grass-roots dynamic for the melding of ethnic identity. This is particularly true for minority ethnic groups which are vulnerable to adverse policy swings dictated by the ruling majority ethnic group.

According to Judith Nagata, ethnicity can be examined in two ways. In her discussion of ethnicity she asks: "what happens... when there is a discrepancy between

'ethnic' ascriptions of natives (the emic) and those of observers (the etic) or even between the emic insider or outsider view of members of the same local society.”(Nagata 1979:185) I will use Nagata’s discussion of the terms emic and etic and apply these concepts to constructions of Chinese identity in Cambodia.

This relates to what Barth has written in Ethnic Groups and Boundaries(1969) that the boundary of an ethnic group is more significant than “ the cultural stuff that it encloses ”(Barth 1969 :15 ; see also Nagata 1979 :186). Barth defines ethnic groups as minorities who are disliked and unaccepted by the ethnic majority. Barth uses the example of Gypsies in Europe to argue that the identities of pariah groups are imposed on them by outsiders. Barth uses the term " poly-ethnic "instead of the more common Greco-Roman mixture "multi-ethnic" to maintain boundaries in etymology.

Following on from Barth, I consider the role of Chinese culture in Cambodia, especially Buddhism, in the ethnic boundary maintenance of the Chinese community in Southeast Asia. Barth’s emphasis on the boundary, however, only went to stress the apparently bounded nature of ethnicity.

Anthropologist Thomas Eriksen (1992:42) explains that the term ethnicity itself seems to be a new term. In the United States "ethnics " came to be used around the Second World War as a polite term referring to Jews, Italians, Irish and other people considered inferior to the dominant group of largely British descent. He discussed ethnicity as like a linguistic idiom or like a language game, through which agents negotiate who they are and define themselves through contrast. As Eriksen says: "Although a credible interpretation of the hierarchical aspects of social classification

might stress the primacy of social class over ethnicity, ethnicity tends to appear as a more solid matrix for differentiation to the agents themselves"

(Eriksen1992: 42).

Eriksen argues that it is important to understand the history of the term ethnicity. He starts by noting that the Greek root word *ethnos* means pagan, and so even from the very beginning the word had a negative label attached to it. In the 19th century, the term came to refer to racial characteristics of people, especially in its usage in North America. The "ethnics" were not the majority ruling Anglophones in North America, for example, but they were the Poles, the Greek, the Russian, and then later, during the "colour migration" (Eriksen's term) they were the Chinese, the Khmer, the Vietnamese, the Hindis and so forth. Eriksen notes that these ethnics were considered inferior to the dominant Anglos who ruled North America. He says that in the present day, the term ethnicity and ethnic is well known and widely used, but it still has a meaning of "minority" attached to it, even though everyone has an ethnic identity. I find this is true even in ordinary language when friends talk about going to an "ethnic restaurant" and this means not a Canadian restaurant. Of course, all cuisines and foods have an ethnic origin. But we attach certain values and identities to these ethnic labels.

Sollors in his article "Who is Ethnic?" adds to the discussion by saying that ethnicity is often understood as "otherness" (Sollors 1986: 219). He also traces the linguistic roots of the term, and notes that from the 14th to 19th century, the term had the meaning of "heathen", and that only by the 19th century did ethnicity come to mean something like a race or a nation (Sollors 1986: 220).

Sollors has recognized one of Barth's unique contributions to the thinking about ethnicity when he writes that for Barth, ethnicity consists of "mental, cultural, social, moral, aesthetic and and not necessarily territorial boundary constructing processes which function as cultural markers between group"(Sollors 1995:220). This is different from other anthropologists who Sollors says, "tended to think about ethnicity in terms of different peoples, with different histories and cultures, coming together and accommodating themselves to each other"(Sollors : 220).

In another respect, ethnicity can be a challenge to the power of a nation-state by deconstructing its "essential difference" from other nations and questioning its internal unity (Sollors 1995: 220).

Sollors further states that "ethnicity includes dominant groups," such as nations. The nation can be considered an ethnic community. Yet as the content of ethnicity is interchangeable and rarely historically authenticated (Sollors 1995: 221), it becomes questionable whether or not the ethnic community called nation is a unified group that differs from other nations.

I will turn to Richard Jenkin's article "Imagined but not Imaginary: Ethnicity and, Nationalism in the Modern world" (Jenkins 2002). Jenkins himself talks about his roots coming from Northern Ireland, and he says that there ethnicity was defined in term of Protestant and Catholic. Jenkins is concerned with examining the violent nature of ethnic wars and nationalist ideologies in the modern period, for example in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, even the Aboriginal problem in Australia. He says that ethnicity and national identity are among the most significant and crucial claims people in the world can make about "who gets what and how much" with reference to rights, employment, citizenship.

He also talks about the community breaking down in his discussion of Yugoslavia. He called it the break down of the imagination – or failure of imagination. Because before the war started in 1990, Yugoslavia was a united multi-ethnic state of Croats, Serbs, and Muslims. After the 1990 elections, Jenkins says that the political ideologies of ultra nationalism took over. And he argues that the reality of mixed populations living together in peace were too big a contradiction for the political nationalists so this led to the wars, the “ ethnic cleansing” and the expulsion of millions of people from their homes. Jenkins’ approach to identity addresses the overall problem of identity and belonging. He recognizes that identity is a human rights issue.

The Concepts of Ethnicity, Nationalism, Nation, and Identity

Benedict Anderson’s theory of the nation and identity is perhaps the most abstract of all. He says that the nation is something that is created by our imagination. And that the nation is something new to history coming about in the 19th century or so. He argues that the nation is imagined in three important ways. First it is sovereign-meaning independent. I think here is he saying that because nations are recognized by other nations, that they have rights to exist, and not be attacked by other nations. Second, he says that nations are limited. He means they are geographically limited as they have boundaries and borders. And beyond these borders are other nations. Anderson’s third point is that nations are imagined as communities, because all of its members share equality as citizens. Even though there are inequalities among people within the nation, such as rich and poor, he says that all the members of the nation are loyal to the nation, and will die fighting for it if need be (Anderson 1991).

Aihwa Ong makes a good contribution to the study of the pressures of nationalism on ethnic groups. According to Ong (1999) ethnic minorities respond to varying political and economic pressures of ethnic majorities. Her term "flexible citizenship" refers to the "cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly to an opportunity to changing political and economic conditions" (Ong 1999:6). While much of Ong's work is concerned with the capitalist logics of "flexible citizenship" and in particular, with how overseas Chinese shape and respond to cultural representations of "Chineseness" in economic contexts, her term is nevertheless useful for looking at how Sino-Cambodians have adapted and reflected a dominant Cambodian political majority push for various policies of integration or separation.

The key element is "flexible" and it is tied to the Sino-Cambodian community's strategy of survival as a distinct group, able to blend into the Cambodian majority when politically demanded, such as during the Khmer Rouge period, or having to stand out, such as during the policy of the socialist era in the 1980s, when Sino-Cambodians had to brand themselves as a distinct ethnic group. Ong's scope in her book is overwhelmingly large, as she is not only examining multiple Chinese communities in North America, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, but she is also ambitiously connecting these ethnographic "sites" to anthropological explorations of modernity, postmodernism, global capitalism, and deracination (Ong 1999:26).

Theory and Practice

While there has been theoretical discussion of the terms ethnicity, ethnic and nation, how is it that these are practiced in the case of Cambodia and Sino-Cambodians? I will argue that in the case of Cambodia, the minority and marginal identity of those who are not ethnically Cambodian are in contestation with the majority. Over the last fifty years, ethnic Chinese under various regimes in Cambodia have been denied the right to assert their Chineseness through such practices as language use, religious practice or cultural festivals- precisely because the state has categorised them as Chinese. There is very clearly a sense among the majority Cambodians that anyone who is not like them, either linguistically, by physical looks, by cultural practice, is somehow not as good, not as entitled to belong to the national community. So in this sense, the early notion of the “ethnos” that Sollors and Eriksen discussed fit very well in Cambodia.

Definition of Terms Construction and Contestation

The two central themes of this thesis have to do with identity construction and identity contestation. Here I would like to explain what is meant by these terms.

Construction

Postmodern studies have looked at terms such as gender identity and even nationalism as a social constructs. This means that these things are not natural: they do not have an a priori existence, but are products of society and of different norms, values, cultures, prejudices, discrimination. These are part of the construction of identity, part of the building that is a process of social life. Social construction also takes place in the context of contained power relations.

My definition of construction used for this thesis is about action, activity. For me ethnic identity is about hard work and means building awareness of roots. Ethnic identity is like a task because people build language schools, publish minority newspapers, write books on literature and history, and build temples. Constructing identity is an enormous task that is done consciously. For example, the construction of identity is done through such practices as lighting the incense sticks; and making a special daily food offering to the monks. Construction is also a term that refers to building places such as distinct neighbourhoods, specialized food markets, temples and cemeteries that reflect identity. So the construction of identity is a social phenomenon that has physical as well as emotional manifestations.

The last aspect of the term construction relates to protection. Here I mean that the combination of beliefs and values on the one hand, and their physical manifestations in places on the other, creates a kind of protection.

Contestation

Contestation at its most fundamental, suggests disagreement, disharmony, conflict. All of these are relevant in the shifting positions of ethnic identity. Contestation takes place at different levels: at the level of the individual, of the group, at the community level, at the level of institutions, at the level of government policy, and between groups. Contestation exists within a contest of power relations that creates dominant and weak groups, insider or outsider battles for existence, or the right to

cultural expression. The results of contestation can range from assimilation, to mutually agreed segregation to conflicts leading to wars.

2-Methodology

Ethnographic Methodology

A multi-method approach was employed which combines participant observation and intensive qualitative interview techniques based on my research data with a review and critique of literature relevant to the study.

Between September and December 2003 working in multi-locations, I interviewed 72 (42men and 30 women) Cambodians, Sino-Cambodians and ethnic Chinese from a cross-section of all dialect groups, ages and occupations. When possible I tried to find older people in their 60s who appeared to be important in a kind of renaissance of Chinese temples and schools that I found was underway now in Cambodia.

Cambodia has 22 provinces. I visited 19 of them. I interviewed people in 19 provinces, 13 districts, 6 villages, and five major cities and five major Chinese associations in Cambodia. The ethnic Chinese in Cambodia whom I interviewed were: Chinese teachers, Sino-Cambodians who are working with the Cambodian government, the Chinese businessmen, the Chinese monks and the ordinary Chinese who live in the countryside. The reason I went to those places was because I wanted to collect wide variety of a personal narratives and include Chinese voices in the thesis. My goal is to redress the lack of scholarship on the history of the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia over the last forty years. In total, I have interviewed over 120 Sino-Cambodian families, and over several years, while doing different projects on the subject of the ethnic Chinese. Some of this work has been published, translated from the Khmer, and I have cited some of this in the thesis.

The research involved reviewing the exciting literature on the post independence period in order to better understand the relationship between nationalism and ethnic identity in Cambodia. It is hoped that the application of anthropological theoretical approaches to instances of identity formation and contestation within the Chinese community in Cambodia will illuminate the powerful struggles that Sino-Cambodians have faced in the complex period of post independence in Cambodia.

Interview Technique

Most Chinese in Cambodia do not like to be questioned about their ethnic origins, and with good reason. Such questioning has generally been carried out by security forces: People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) cadre and police carrying out the door-to-door investigation of Chinese backgrounds from 1980-1985; Khmer Rouge cadre rooting out suspected capitalists and spies under Democratic Kampuchea(DK), Republican Khmer policemen investigating suspected communist sympathisers. In none of these cases was the admission of Chinese identity a positive consequence. On the contrary, the price of honesty has ranged from fines (for teaching Chinese under the Republic of Khmer) to discrimination in the allocation of jobs, land and housing (under PRK) to hard labour, imprisonment and death (under DK and PRK).

This legacy has made ethnic Chinese in Cambodia extremely wary of anyone conducting "research", the Khmer term for which (sriwchriew) has a bad meaning through its long usage to describe research of a more political than social nature. Although I always stated clearly who I was working for and the terms of my mandate, I was frequently asked, in early stages of interviews, if I had been sent by the government. "You are not going to send us back to China, are you?" was a common response, especially from cenchiw (raw Chinese).

In order to gain the confidence of interviewees, I conducted my research by way of informal conversation, in Khmer or Chinese Teochiu dialect, focusing on social, cultural, political, historical, legal, economic issues and inter-ethnic relations. Use of a tape recorder made people nervous and uncomfortable so I stopped using it. I worked from notes, occasionally taking photographs where interviewees did not object. Once I

had won their confidence, most of the interviewees proved extremely willing to share their stories. I already had developed an interview schedule which consisted of a special range of questions to. A separate interview guide was prepared for each age category (See appendix I). The interview guide was replaced by questions regarding family, personal background and daily life interest. I prepared a shortened version of each interview guide, consisting of key questions.

While the majority of ethnic Chinese in Cambodia (approximately 85%) live in Phnom Penh and provincial towns or cities, it should not be forgotten that the majority of Khmers (approximately 85%) live in the countryside. So as to form a nationwide picture of both Chinese ethnic identity and inter-ethnic relations, I also interviewed rural Chinese in villages, communes and district towns. However, priority was given to interviewing first generation Chinese and Cambodian-born Chinese now in their late 70s, 80s and 90s before their voices are lost. It is often members of this generation who are the driving force behind the grass-roots renaissance of Chinese temples and schools. I went to visit those places by foot, bicycles, motors taxis, car, boats and houses carts.

Written Sources

A wide range of Chinese, English, French and Khmer publications were consulted. Sources included official documents, refugee accounts, newspapers, radio broadcasts, journals, school textbooks, and a variety of academic journals and books on both Cambodia and overseas Chinese. Most of this material is available at Cambodia National Library, Concordia University, University of Victoria, University of Wisconsin, Monash University, Cornell University, Oxford University, University of British Columbia, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

CHAPTER TWO

SINO-CAMBODIAN IDENTITY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: DIALECTS, DIVERSITY, DIVISION AND CULTURAL PRACTICES.

In this chapter I discuss Sino-Cambodian identity formation beginning in the 19th century⁵. This is when the first waves of Chinese migrants came to Cambodia in substantial numbers, although historical records date Chinese in Cambodia from the 13th century (Chu Ta Kwan 1992) . As theories of identity have shown, the identity of minority groups is formed by a complex process that includes the interaction between the small group and the larger group in nations Ong (1999), Nagata (1979) and especially, Barth (1969), are relevant for the case of the Chinese in Cambodia. In Cambodia this is also the case and the most immediate way is through the assignment of names or terms for the Sino-Cambodians by the Cambodians themselves. Identity is therefore, also defined by ascription through the Cambodian lens of who the Chinese seemed to be for them. I will address this issue in the context of nationalism, and the emergence of a distinct Chinese community in Cambodia.

Identity is also defined in Chinese terms on three key three markers: first is their generational identity and migration wave; second is their dialect group, and third is their regional cultural practice.

⁵ Chou Ta Kwan a Chinese diplomat visited the kingdom of Cambodia as a member of an embassy sent by the Mongol emperor Kubilai in 1224, and left the best and fullest account of Cambodia life, government and the city of Angkor Thom (King Jayavarman VII.) Chou occupies his time by recording his impressions about Cambodia which he later published in a famous book.

Brief History of Political events in Cambodia

Cambodia gained its independence from France in 1954 under the reign Of King Sihanouk. By 1970 he was overthrown, and the Vietnam War had engulfed the nation. Five years later, the Khmer Rouge swept into power and began its reign of terror. The country's urban population was driven into the countryside to establish a collective agricultural system. Civil servants, teacher, and doctors-in effect, all educated people-were classified as enemies of the Khmer Rouge, and members of the former regime were marked for execution. Between 1975 and 1979, 200,000 people were executed without trial, and a further 1.7 million(of a population totally 8 million) died of disease, overwork and starvation.

Republic of Khmer (General Lon Nol 1970-1975)

In January 1970, Norodom Sihanouk left Cambodia on a trip to France, entrusting the country to Prime Minister Lon Nol. After the coup of March 18th 1970, Lon Nol perceived a different threat from ethnic Chinese royal to communist China. In the midst of a civil war against the Beijing- backed Khmer Rouge, Lon Nol's Republic of Khmer shut down Chinese schools and newspapers, and charged Chinese with slowly making the Khmer lose their customs and morals and their way of thought in their attempts to spread communist propaganda.

Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979(DK)

After their defeat of the Khmer Republic in April 17th 1975, the leaders of DK put into place plans similar to those of Maoist China in the 1960s. These plans were intended to restructure Cambodia society. Although DK looked to China for political and financial support for these ideas, they did not hesitate to target the

Chinese as enemies of the new state in Cambodia. The Chinese, many of whom lived in the cities, were forcibly evacuated to the countryside. DK was the worst of all for the Chinese, who were again seen as degenerate urban capitalists. In line with their own quasi-political, quasi-racial obsession with creating a new worker peasant society devoid of ethnic diversity, the Khmer Rouge eradicated Chinese bourgeois culture and forbade the speaking of foreign languages, including Chinese. Rural as well as urban Chinese came under suspicion. The more assimilated Sino-Cambodians attempted to hide their background identities.

People's Republic of Kampuchea 1979-1989(PRK)

January 7th 1979, the day the Vietnamese army entered Cambodia and overthrew the Khmer Rouge (Pol Pot). Was Cambodia liberated that day or was it invaded? After the overthrow of Democratic Kampuchea, Cambodia would be a very different place. The PRK promised that "All Cambodians have the right to return to their old native land, and to build their families life in happiness, right to vote, freedom of thought, association and religion, work and education." As long as they did not offend Marxism-Leninism or pose a threat to the state, the ruling Party or the Vietnamese. According to the 1983 Constitution created during the PRK, there were no barriers to Sino-Cambodians in any field of work.

State of Cambodia 1990 1993(SOC)

The PRK was re-named the state of Cambodia . On 23 October 1991, the four main Cambodian political factions signed the Peace Accords in Paris in the presence of the five permanent members of the UN security council. The state opened up to international trade. The privatization of state –owned enterprises

began. Sales of state assets, such as offices, stores, buildings, land and factories took place on a large and unregulated scale.

The policy 351

In October 24th 1982 , Chea Soth, the deputy prime minister of People's Republic of Kampuchea, announced the regime's new policy on the Chinese in Cambodia who had survived[Khmer Rouge]. The Party policy which was distributed to provincial and municipal Party officials, central ministries, and some district chiefs, was mostly an investigative exercise, intended to uncover Chinese networks in the country. As the first widely distributed description of the regime's attitude toward the Chinese, "policy 351" also became shorthand for years of discrimination policies. Policy 351 instructed state officials to inquire into Chinese people's citizenship status, geographic origins, the amount of time they lived in Cambodia .

The policy K5 (kar pram)

The program had begun gradually. In 1982 and 1983, the Vietnamese military authorities began to construct roads with which to consolidate newly acquired territory and barriers with which to hold off the resistance. That policy is the most unpopular aspect of the war during the People's Republic of Kampuchea period. The planners of K5 as the policy came to be called –envisioned somewhere between 150,000 and 400,000 Cambodians engaged in intense labour for upward of six months. The effect on the K5 workforce were known to the leadership because workers who came from across the country were defecting en mass because of a lack of food and because of outbreaks of malaria. The central K5 committee

acknowledged that “high rates of malaria have seriously debilitated the workforce, and there are places where there have been deaths from malaria”. The other great danger was landmines. By end of 1986 when the policy was terminated, over 30,000 Chinese workers had died.

SINO-CAMBODIAN MIGRATION AND HISTORY

Cambodian terms for ethnic Chinese

The Cambodian language has different terms to describe the Sino-Cambodian minority. These terms refer to origins, generations and kinship. The Khmer term Cenchiw "raw Chinese" refers to the Chinese who immigrated to Cambodia from China. In Cambodian folktales, these Chinese migrants came by boat, were mostly men, and came to mine for gold. In subsequent waves of migration the Chenchiw were known for working on French colonial rubber and pepper plantations (Aymonier 1875).

My interview data shows that there is agreement between the Cambodians and Chinese about certain characteristics that are still commonly held among the Chenchiw. There is also a gendered dimension to the male and female identity of the Cenchiw that few scholars have noted, but that I have observed from my data. I discuss this below.

The first overall characteristic of the Cenchiw is that they did not want to learn the Cambodian language. They lived apart from the Cambodians in their own distinct communities, or on plantations.

However, the Chinese males married Cambodian women and brought them to live with them in the Chinese communities. Cenchiw respondents in Battambang and Kampot explained that they married Cambodian women out of necessity for translation and also to teach Cambodian women how to conduct businesses in the Chinese mode. Here it should be noted that Chinese women were very scarce and so this explains why the Chinese men sought Cambodian wives. A second related point is that Chinese businesses were family-run mostly, and this explains why Chinese viewed their Cambodian wives as partners in business as well as in the household. There are very few Cenchiw who are

still alive today, and those that are still living still speak very little Cambodian language. However, their Cambodian wives have learned to speak Chinese fluently.

For Cenchiew women, there is another story and identity that emerges. Cenchiw women often came to Cambodia seeking their husbands who had migrated earlier. Many of these women told sad stories of infidelity, and how their husbands had taken Cambodian women to be second wives. So these women tended to marry Cambodian men and most of these women also learned out of necessity to speak Cambodian and to adapt to Cambodian culture. One of the stories I heard was from Mao Chiu whom I interviewed three times over the last eight years. In 1923, she was a young Hakka woman came to Cambodia looking for her husband who had left China seven years earlier. She found her husband in Battambang province in the northwest of the country. He had married a Cambodian woman and had two sons. The husband invited his Chinese wife to live with him and his Cambodian wife but she refused. Instead, she moved to a nearby province, set up a business selling Chinese dumplings, and ended up marrying a Cambodian man who sold sugar palm. She was 92 years old when she told this story and she cried as she told it, saying that there were many women like her. This is one illustration of how gender has played an important part in the evolution of Cenchiew identity.⁶

Second or third generation Chinese in Cambodia, are known simply as Cen (pronounced Chen the ethnic term for Chinese), Kouncen (children of Chinese), or Kounciwcen (grandchildren of Chinese). A more colloquial Khmer term for Chinese in Cambodia comes from the popular Khmer folktale "The Story of Tun Ciy" about the boatloads of Chinese presented to the Khmer genius Tun Ciy as a gift from the Chinese

⁶ Author's Interview with Mao Chiu three times, Battambang 1999, 2001 and 2003

emperor (See appendix II). Finally, the children of mixed Cambodian-Chinese marriages are called Koun-Kat Cen, or even just Koun-Kat (literally "cut-child", meaning cut in middle, or half-and-half).

Although ethnic Chinese in Cambodia may refer to themselves by any of the above terms, they will also freely refer to themselves as Kmae-yeung (we Khmers), where Khmer indicates not ethnic origin but identity or belonging to Cambodia. (Ebihara 1977, Chandler 1992). Those Chinese who are of ethnic Chinese origin but have entered part of Khmer society, by intermarriage, are sometimes described as having coul Kmae literally "entered the Khmers". This can be so even when they still have kept their own Chinese identity, and are members of Chinese Associations or send their children to Chinese schools. Here we see that flexible identity is the case.

Finally, there are Khmer terms for the five major Chinese dialect groups in Cambodia, known as Cen-Katang (Cantonese), Cen-Hainan (Hainanese), Cen-Keh (Hakka), Cen-Hokkien (Hokkien) and Cen-Teochiew (Teochiu). This reflects the fact that Chinese in Cambodia have historically comprised five main dialect groups, all from southern China: Cantonese, Hainan, Hakka, Hokkien and Teochiu. While literate Chinese can communicate with each other irrespective of dialect group through a uniform Chinese script, the major Chinese dialects are mutually unintelligible.⁷

Teochiu Dialect

A board member of the Teochiu Association in Phnom Penh described Teochiu occupational niches as industry, business, retail-trade and coffee-shops, and laughingly

⁷ Each of the five Chinese dialect groups pronounces the same Chinese character in a different way. For uniformity and ease of reference, Chinese terms throughout these are provided according to standard Mandarin pronunciation, transcribed in the Pinyin system of Romanisation.

dismissed the idea that Teochiu played any economic role in rural areas beyond a "minute percentage" who might be farmers. Yet I found several distinct Teochiu communities in rural Cambodia, whose livelihoods range from garden farming to cottage industries in food or handicrafts. In Kompong Cham a number of Teochiu Chinese run tobacco farms and manufacture cigarettes from home. Typically, the whole family will contribute to the business, and skills are thus passed down through generations.

Despite the problems of recent history, a number of rural Teochiu communities have rebuilt along their historic dialect lines. Phum Kamjay Pnum village in Kampot is a Teochiu community with a history of over 200 years. Before the Vietnam wars spread to Cambodia in the late 1960s, the village comprised about 120 Teochiu families. From 1970 onwards the community dwindled as wealthier villagers fled from the war to the cities while the young and idealistic embraced war in the jungles. Those villagers still in Phum Kamjay Pnum on Pol Pot's take over were allowed to stay put, but some were killed while others died of disease and malnutrition. After 1979, some of those who had fled in the early 1970s made their way back to Phum Kamjay, and those who found surviving kin usually stayed. The community is now one third of its former strength, but all forty families are Teochiu. Occupations range from basket-weaving to woodcutting, vegetable and fruit farming.

The Teochiu community at Chup, which comprised Over 100 Chinese families lived in Chup in 1970, but now there are only about 60, still forming a recognisable Teochiu community. They have recently renovated a Bentougong temple, and reopened the school founded by the French Rubber Plantation in the 1940s. There has been little refugee flight: the fall in population is almost entirely due to the Pol Pot period. Similarly, the Chinese community in Boh Bi Commune in Krouc Chmar district of Kompong Cham is purely Teochiu. Before Pol Pot there were 100-200 families living along the river, most of whom made a living from retail trade. Major livelihoods today

comprise tobacco farming and cottage industries such as cigarette manufacture and bean-curd. There is an active Chinese Association in the village, and a school open to Khmer and Chinese, with predominantly Teochiu and Sino-Khmer pupils.

Today, Duanhua is once again Cambodia's most famous and largest Chinese school, with 7,000 day students and 3,000 night students. The school is financed by fees, fundraising by the Teochiu Association, and individual contributions from wealthy members of the Chinese community. Faced with US\$70,000 rent per annum on two school-annexes, Duanhua ran a high-profile fundraising campaign via the Chinese press in Cambodia in November 1995. The chief editor of Cambodia's leading Chinese newspaper, Huashang Ribao, is Teochiu, and coverage of the Cambodian Chinese community focuses on Teochiu activities, although not to the exclusion of other dialect groups.

Cantonese Dialect

The Cantonese community in Phnom Penh had its own temple and a Middle-school which had approximately 1,200 students by the late 1960s, and offered supplementary lessons in Khmer (Su: 53-54).

Although serviced by its own school and temple, the Cantonese community at Phum Katang did not conform to the exclusive stereotype. The village's Peng Tang Pu temple, built in 1939, was open to the neighbouring Teochiu community. The first Cantonese settlers moved there in about 1910, and as the community expanded, the area earned the name Cantonese Village. One villager told me how his father, a trader, had first heard of the village after emigrating to Kompong Cham in the 1920s, then moved there and married a kouncen of Cantonese parentage. Most Cantonese in the village grew tobacco, corn and beans, staple livelihoods today. Cantonese was taught at the temple

school, which had about 20 students in 1940, all male. Cantonese in Phum Katang buried their dead in a Chinese cemetery, apparently for use by both Cantonese and Teochiu, near the bridge.

After Independence, when Chinese immigration to Cambodia fell off sharply, the community stabilized, and there were about 20 Cantonese families in Phum Katang by the end of the Sihanouk era in 1970. There are now only a handful of Cantonese families in the village: others have died or moved away. Cantonese, Teochiu, Sino-Khmer and Khmer from Phum Katang and two neighbouring villages contributed to renovating the temple, as did ex-residents now in Kompong Cham or Phnom Penh. The villagers make offerings of food at the temple, but offerings of duck are taboo, because local lore has it that Bentougong was shipwrecked and a duck had saved his life. In this rural Cantonese community, intermarriage with Khmers was apparently common, partly because many of our ancestors had married Khmer women. As time went by, Cantonese and Khmer villagers observed each others festivals: the Khmer attending Chinese New Year and Qingming, the Cantonese celebrating Phum Ben and Khmer New Year.

The Cantonese Association was set up in 1991, with support from the Cantonese Association of Vietnam. Some Cantonese in Phnom Penh also made donations so that the school could be reopened⁸. As for ceremonies, many families observe Khmer customs, such as funerals, some families, both poor and rich, cremate like Khmers. Some other families bury in the Chinese tradition. The Cantonese do not yet have a Bentougong Temple of their own. The former Bentougong Temple now is a private home. The Cantonese association have asked for the site back from the state but have not been given

⁸ Author's interview with Phat Ma, Deputy of the Cantonese Association in Cambodia, November 23, 2003.

it. As for the school, it was opened later than the schools of the other dialect groups, in 1995, with 89 students, and 38 Khmer students and no Vietnamese or Cham students.

Hainanese Dialect

Although one of the earliest dialect-group communities in Cambodia, and one of the most cohesive, Hainanese comprise only a fraction of Cambodia's Chinese community. Hainanese emigration accounted for only 4% of Chinese emigration under colonial rule (Leclere 1907). By the 1960s, Hainanese comprised an estimated 10% of Chinese in Cambodia. Their cohesion as a dialect group stems from their geographic concentration and historic occupational specialization. Hainanese refer to themselves as "Hai Nam Khang" or "Kheng Chew Nang," Kheng Chew being the old name for Hainan Island. Although Hainan Island did not open up to foreign trade until Hankou was made a treaty port in 1870, there was a steady stream of emigration from Hainan throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties (Yu). Hainanese have been described as reluctant emigrants. (Tan 1990:14) However, Canadian scholar Robert Garry cites "adventurousness, desire for gain" and demographic pressures as factors leading to Hainanese emigration to Cambodia (Garry 1963: 374). In many overseas Chinese communities, Hainanese have specialized in the food industry as bakers, cooks, coffee-shop operators and, in the colonial era, as domestic servants to European families. (Fong 1995:65-66, Pan 1990:84, Tan 1990:15). Unintelligible by the other dialect groups, the Hainanese language has hampered the development of trade and commerce between Hainanese and other dialect groups in some overseas Chinese settlements. Widely known as "the second Hainan" by Cambodia's Chinese community, Kampot is home to two historic settlements of Hainanese in Tuk Meas and Kompong Trach (See appendix III). The trailblazer of

Hainanese emigration to Kampot was Mac Cuu, a Ming patriot who arrived in Cambodia in 1675, and built up such wealth and reputation that he was appointed a provincial governor (oknha) by the Cambodian King in 1708 (Willmott 1967: 6). Another impetus to Chinese immigration to Kampot was discriminatory measures in nineteenth century Vietnam, forcing some Chinese to move to Kompong Trach. Among them were pepper-planters and money-lenders, who combined forces to establish plantations. By the dawn of colonial rule, a small but cohesive Hainanese community of pepper planters had emerged in Kampot. Under colonial rule, this community rapidly expanded, as did the plantations. Historic transshipment points for trade with China and the long term haunts of smugglers and pirates, Kep and Kampot were the chief channels for the import of Chinese labour in colonial Cambodia. By 1899, Kampot had close to 3,000 Hainanese, and the Hainanese and Teochiu were the only two dialect-groups in Kampot large enough to warrant their own Congregation (Garry 1963: 377; Raquez 1903:955).

After Cambodian Independence in 1953, the number of Chinese pepper-planters gradually declined. By 1963, Cham and Khmer pepper-planters out numbered Chinese. (Garry 1963: 380-381). During this period Hainanese farmers diversified into salt production, with considerable success (Su 1966:32). In addition to occupational specialization, schools and temples played a major role in strengthening dialect-group solidarity. Kampot's Hainanese community prides itself on the genealogy of Bentougong, a divinity specific to Cambodia and closely tied to Kampot, who allegedly came into being along with his holy trinity of siblings upon the death of three Hainanese brothers in Kompong Trach centuries ago. In the late 1860s, August Pavie witnessed the "deafening performances " of Chinese opera at the "temple of their cult in Kampot". A century later,

William Willmott noted two Hainanese temples in Kampot (Willmott 1970:54). Both were dedicated to Bentougong, "variously described as the original ancestor of all Chinese in Cambodia or as the God of the local area" (Skinner 1957:138).

The Hainanese Association has recently reopened in its original site in Phnom Penh, and has refurbished the Hainanese temple and reopened the historic Jicheng Gongxiao (Jicheng Public School).⁹ The school teaches in Mandarin, English and Khmer, and accepts students from all dialect groups, as well as non-Chinese. It now has 1,500 students. Today, Hainanese comprises an estimated 5% of Cambodia's Chinese population. An estimated 95% are born locally. Many Hainanese still specialise as bakers, coffee-shop operators or restaurateurs. Hainanese in rural Kampot today make a living from farming, fishing and petty trade. Hainanese no longer run pepper plantations in Kampot: the fall in the price of pepper has made it unprofitable business, while the widespread execution of Chinese pepper plantation managers under the DK regime has diminished the pool of skills and knowledge, formerly handed down through generations. With the exception of a residual Hainanese pepper-growing community in Phum Srayjie, pepper plantations are now run by Khmers, while salt-fields are largely managed by Cham and Khmers.

Although the Hainanese population in Kampong Trach has dwindled to one-fifth of pre-Pol Pot levels, there has been no waning of historical consciousness among older generation Hainanese. This consciousness is now transmitted to younger generations, through the rehabilitation of historic cultural landmarks, such as the Juequn School in

⁹ Author's interviews with Ping Bao, Director of the Hainanese Association in Cambodia, September 17, 2003.

Kompong Trach, renovated with community funds and generous help from an ex-alumni who is now a successful businessman and a leading light of the Hainanese community in Phnom Penh. A Bentougong temple has also been erected in the school-grounds.

Hakka Dialect

Hakka means "guests" or "stranger families." Unlike the Teochiu, Hainan, Hokkien and Cantonese, all named after places of origin, the Hakka have no single native place in China they can call their own, but are scattered across Canton, Fujian, Chaozhou, Jiangxi, Guangzi, Hainan Island, Sichuan and Hunan as a result of successive migrations from the tenth century onwards. The majority of Hakka in Southeast Asia today emigrated from Fujian and Canton, where they had lived in concentrated settlements, often in huge circular walled compounds. Here they preserved a distinct language, observed communal living and eating, and rejected such widespread Chinese practices as foot-binding for women.

The Hakka have been described as the gypsies of China and are stereotyped by non-Hakka Chinese as yokels (Pan 1990: 16-17) However, Hakka have produced an impressive array of famous statesmen and businessmen including Deng Xiaoping, a Chinese Communist leader who has been in and out of power but has had great influence in important positions since the late 1970s and Lee Kuanyew who has dominated Singapore's politics since 1959. A brilliant British-trained lawyer, Lee Kuanyew has presided over Singapore's extraordinary transformation from a colonial entrepot into a thriving modern city. Aw Boon Par, founder of the "Tiger Balm" empire is also Hakka. In Hong Kong, Hakka have earned a reputation among non-Hakka for honesty and hard-work; Hakka women in particular are reputed for their stamina. By contrast, many Hakka

view members of other dialect groups as lazy, dishonest, and wasteful. Their major economic roles in Southeast Asia range from construction workers in Hong Kong, pepper and gambier cultivation in Singapore, spice farmers in Malaysia, to pawn-brokers, pharmacists, bakers and woodcutters. (Fong 1995:64,66)

After failing to arouse interest for a Hakka Association in 1989, Yu Heing, the current head of the Hakka Association, bid his time. By 1992 he had won support from Hakka in Hong Kong, Canada, Malaysia and Thailand, who donated funds for the resurrection of Zongzheng Xuexiao, the Hakka School in Phnom Penh. By 1994 he had raised enough funds to renovate the school and formed an Association, with a sixteen-member Committee, in Phnom Penh. Recently rehabilitated at the instigation of Yu Heing and with the generous support of Hakka donors from Hong Kong, Canada, Malaysia and Thailand. The Hakka Association, convened in 1994, numbers 72 Hakka families. There are now 370 students in the Hakka School, less than two thirds the enrolment in the 1960s. The old Hakka temple in Phnom Penh, formerly near the Old Market, was recently demolished and plans are underway to build a new temple. Today the Hakka population is concentrated in Stung Treng, Kratie, in Pnum Dun in Takeo Province, Sisophon and Kah Kong.

Hokkien Dialect

Hokkien were the first Chinese settlers in Cambodia¹⁰. Others point to the number of old temples dedicated to Hokkien deities as proof that their ancestors were the earliest Chinese settlers in Cambodia. Certainly, the Hokkien's worship of Cheng He, the Chinese Admiral who mesmerized fifteenth century Southeast Asia with his fantastic array of naval strength, indicates that Hokkien Chinese were in Cambodia from at least this period. Deified as San Bao Gong (Three Jewel Lord), Cheng He is worshipped by

¹⁰ Author's interview with Lor San, Deputy Chinese Hokkiens Association in 2000

Chinese across Southeast Asia, but one medieval monument indicates that Cheng He worship arose within Cambodia and was not a foreign import. Inscriptions on the Chinese temple at Wat Nokor in Kompong Cham are dedicated to Cheng He (Su 1966: 100).

The largest Chinese temple in Cambodia, Xie Tian Gong (Help Heaven Temple), was founded by the Hokkien Congregation early this century. Cambodia's wealthiest businessmen and most important officials flocked to this famous temple, and each year the procession of spirits organised by the temple was invited by King Sihanouk to parade through the grounds of his palace. Despite the professed Hokkien emphasis on learning Khmer, the Hokkien community ran its own Chinese school in Phnom Penh. Situated in the large walled grounds of Xietiangong Temple, Minsheng Zhongxue (Peoples Life Middle School) had over 1,000 students and over 20 teachers by the late 1960s. (Su 1966:53-54).

Outside Phnom Penh, Hokkien historically concentrated in Svay Sisophon District of Battambang (where they specialized in distilling rice-wine), in Chnok Trou in Kompong Chhnang, in Kompong Cham and Srok Stoong in Kompong Thom, home to the largest Hokkien community in Cambodia.

There are no reliable statistics for the number of Hokkien in Cambodia today. The membership of the Hokkien Association of Phnom Penh stands at about 1,000. Before Pol Pot, there were an estimated 10,000 Hokkiens in Kompong Thom: today there is half that number.

According to a senior member of the Association of Chinese Nationals in Cambodia, the Hokkien population suffered far greater casualties than any other dialect group under Pol Pot. However, a number of Hokkien respondents in the provinces were adamant that the DK had not singled out Hokkiens as a dialect group. A possible

explanation is that the traditional Hokkien emphasis on government careers led to a disproportionate number of Hokkien executions by Khmer Rouge, but because of their status as Lon Nol cadre, not as Hokkien. It is also plausible, as one Hokkien conjectured, that this apparent decline in population has little to do with political history, but simply reflects the fact that many Hokkiens have become so acculturated through intermarriage that “they do not even know they are Hokkien” and have “completely disappeared” (bat ah-leeng). Another possible explanation for the apparent mass reduction in the Hokkien community is that the Hokkien preoccupation with government service continued after the fall of Pol Pot, and that in order to obtain and retain government posts under the PRK, it was imperative to deny one’s Chineseness.

One second-generation Chinese civil servant interviewed in a provincial town in Cambodia reported how he was interrogated about his background when entering the local administration in 1984, and secured the job by professing Khmer peasant parentage. Now he has been promoted to a senior position, but although the 351 policy is long over, he is still afraid to reveal his Chinese lineage. The Hokkien Association of Phnom Penh is aware of many Hokkien civil servants in Phnom Penh who have assumed a Khmer identity and who have deliberately avoided making any contact with the Association. The Association’s membership of 1,000 thus largely comprises the families of coffee-shop operators, machine and air-conditioning repairmen, and carpenters.

In 1990, seventeen Hokkien joined forces to establish an underground Hokkien Association with the goal of opening a Chinese school for Phnom Penh’s Hokkien population. Following the change in government policy allowing the establishment of Chinese Associations, the organisation went public in 1991, since when it has secured rights of access to Xie Tian Gong (Help Heaven Temple). Closed in Lon Nol, abandoned under Pol Pot, the temple was occupied by Vietnamese troops and used as a prison by from 1979 to 1981. In 1981 a Cambodian state school was opened in the school and temple grounds.

Generous donations from Cambodian Chinese now living in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Canada have now restored the famous Xietian Temple to its former glory. However, as of November 1999, the Hokkien Association had seen no success in its founding objective, to reopen the Hokkien School. The Government has made return of the school buildings contingent upon the provision of an alternative campus for use by the Cambodian state school currently lodged therein. While the Hokkien Association has received pledges of funds for restoration of the school, these funds are insufficient to meet the government demand.

SINO-CAMBODIAN IDENTITY MARKERS

Chinese terms for ethnic Chinese

The ethnic Chinese in Cambodia commonly referred to themselves as Huaqiao (Chinese living abroad), which carries meanings of temporary residence. However, most ethnic Chinese are reluctant to use this term today. This is partly because Huaqiao have been treated as "fifth columns" both in Cambodia and in China (in 1967-70 under Sihanouk period; 1970-1975 under Lon Nol; 1973-1975 by Khmer Rouge in some "liberated zones" and 1975-1978 in Democratic Kampuchea; 1979-1989 under the PRK). There has also been an active rejection of Huaqiao identity by many Chinese who previously looked to China as a "mother figure" but were sorely disappointed by China's failure to save ethnic Chinese lives during the Pol Pot period (1975-1978)¹¹. Today, most ethnic Chinese in Cambodia refer to themselves not as Huaqiao but as Jianbuzhai Huaren (Cambodian Chinese), Huaren (Chinese) or Huayi (foreign citizen of Chinese origin). Over 90 percent of Chinese in Cambodia are Huayi, that is at least second generation Chinese. Hunxue (literally mixed blood) is the term for Sino-Cambodian. Ethnic Chinese often use the term Zuguo (ancestral land) to refer to China, and not Cambodia. This usage does not indicate that ethnic Chinese owe their first allegiance to China, but simply reflects the importance of ancestor worship in traditional Chinese culture. Finally, Chinese refer to themselves as Chaozhou (Teochiu), Guangdong (Cantonese), Fujian (Hokkien), Kejia (Hakka), or Hainan depending on their dialect group.

¹¹ Author's interview with Sok hout (Chinese teacher in Kampot 2000).

The last comprehensive survey of Chinese in Cambodia was conducted by anthropologist William Willmott from 1962 to 1963. In his landmark studies, The Chinese in Cambodia and The Political Structure of the Chinese Community in Cambodia, Willmott defined a Chinese as "any individual who supports or participates in some or all of the Chinese associations available to him"(Willmott 1970:5). This definition is more closely linked to an individual's self-perception than that adopted by the Cambodian Census of 1962, which registered anyone who spoke Chinese language or possessed Chinese nationality as ethnic Chinese (Ibid:175). However, Willmott's definition is outmoded in the context of recent Cambodian history.

This is because as I have shown, the idea of identity is complex, and Chinese in Cambodia, have had to adapt to different political realities and pressures. For example, not all people who consider themselves Chinese will necessarily join a Chinese Association. And also, not all members of Chinese Associations necessarily define themselves as Chinese rather than Cambodian. They are more likely to refer to or feel a dual identity, or "flexible" identity, to borrow from Ong. And this puts together memories and attachment to ancestor motherland ("mother village" is the common expression used) with dialect and place and environment of their settlement in Cambodia. For many respondents, the attachment to place is very clear because they do not want to return to China. A common phrase was: "I was born here so why would I want to go back to China?"

The Chinese Funeral Practice in Cambodia

The Chinese saying, "falling leaves return to their roots," reflects the traditional preoccupation with the ancestral home and the belief that a person's moorings are tied to his or her native place. As I have seen, such beliefs led many Chinese in Cambodia to

transport the bones of their deceased home for burial as late as the 1970s. However, this is now no longer the case. None of my interviewees knew of any cases of Chinese transporting the bones of the deceased to China for burial in their ancestral villages. This is because the local burial of their ancestors, in some cases for generations, has made Cambodia their new ancestral home. On a more practical note, most aged Chinese in Cambodia now have children and grandchildren here who will care for them after death by offering them food and tending to their grave. In a variation on the old maxim, Chinese leaves are now falling to Cambodian roots.

Indeed, Chinese funerals in Cambodia perhaps best encompass the diverse strands of ethnic Chinese identity in Cambodia. Chinese acceptance of Cambodia as a second ancestral home reflects a strong sense of Cambodian identity. The widespread performance of Chinese burial rites underscores the perpetuation, by most Chinese, of the key cultural values of filial piety and ancestor worship. The merging of Chinese ritual with Cambodian content, such as Khmer designs on coffins and the burning of models of specifically Cambodian (as opposed to archetypal Chinese) houses, further reflect the complexity of Chinese identity in Cambodia.

The only major differences between Khmer and Chinese funeral ceremonies today is in the disposal of the coffin. The decision to bury or cremate the body, and where, depends on the family's financial means. Rich families bury the dead as far away from the house as possible so that the ghost of the deceased won't haunt them, whereas a poor family could not afford the same transport costs.

A Chinese undertaker in Phnom Penh told me how he offers free coffins to the very poor. However, few families take him up on the offer, because they feel very strongly that whatever sacrifices they have to make, it is their duty to pay for a proper funeral as a means of showing respect for their parents. There are thriving Chinese coffin industries in Phnom Penh, Kampot, Kah Kong and Kompong Saom. The decoration on

the coffins often tells a Buddhist story, and designs might range from Chinese symbols such as the phoenix to Khmer symbols such as the Naga.¹²

The funeral ceremony lasts seven days, after which, descendants burn a paper house at the burial site to ensure a prosperous after life. The rural poor will often make their own house. In Phnom Penh, a specialty shop supplies intricate models ranging from simple two-storey houses (pteah-lyeeng) to elaborate villas with Mercedes Benzes and Honda Dreams parked outside. After the paper is burned, families place a tombstone in front of the burial mound. In urban and rural areas, tombstones of wealthy families range from elaborate friezes to tiled burial mounds. An elaborate tombstone on a hill-side in Phum Sray Jie, Kampot, marks the grave of a local businessman who ran the Parrot Brand Fish Sauce Factory and died in 1958. A son of his who lives in Saigon comes to sweep the grave every year, bringing an offering of roast pig. By contrast, many graves in the communal burial site in Kompong Trach are choked with weeds, mute testimony to the flight or death of the descendants. Where families could not afford tombstones, knowledge of grave sites is handed down orally. Some Chinese burial sites were used as pasture land by the Pol Pot regime, but the majority were undisturbed, in part due to the fear of ghosts that resides in the Cambodian psyche. Burials were carried out under the PRK, and by 1986 a Chinese coffin-shop had opened in Phnom Penh. However, the 351 campaign led to breaches with tradition by some Chinese who assumed a Khmer identity and cremated their dead as part of the act. In some cases, the weight of tradition has transcended the recent course of history, and Chinese who cremated their dead under the 351 campaign have now reverted to burying their dead. Today, the majority of Chinese in Cambodia, including those who may identify as Khmer in language, food, clothing and occupation such as the 'cen khmau' in interethnic communities in Kampot, still bury their

¹² Author's interview with Vang Lee the coffin shop owner in Phnom Penh, October 2, 2003. The Owner is Teochiu Chinese Dialect, born in Cambodia, his father was born in Teochiu . He now has a family of five, but he doesn't want to train his children to carry on this line of business in the future

dead¹³. The centrality of burial practices to the maintenance of Chinese identity is reflected in the numerous social organisations set up specifically to assist with funeral expenses. As I have seen, the forerunner of the Chinese Association of Kampot was an underground association established to help poor families meet funeral costs, which was also the founding aim of the Village Association in Pnum Kamjay, and of a newly established branch of the Chinese Association in Kratie province.

¹³ Author's interview with Ya Heng the Chinese villager in Phum Kamjay , Kompot province October 30 2003. He feels that the Chinese relations with Cambodian are harmonious and share the same customs.

CHAPTER THREE

STATE DISCRIMINATION AND SUPPRESSION OF CHINESE IDENTITY

This chapter examines the repression of Chinese identity by the state over several regimes. The Chinese have suffered different levels and forms of discrimination by various regimes since their migration from China in the 18th century. However, this thesis looks at state discrimination from 1970 to the present day. To put this chapter in context, it is necessary to look at the form of discrimination and suppression of Chinese identity. I have chosen to look at three areas: employment in the civil service and military; education and barriers to Chinese in either studying at tertiary level Cambodian universities or in their own schools; and religious worship.

There are several reasons overall why Cambodian governments have suppressed the Chinese. The first relates to the kind of nationalism that developed in Cambodia during the anti-colonial period leading to the nation's independence. As several scholars have noted, nationalism in Cambodia was defined very strictly in ethnic Khmer terms, as Khmers were the majority ethnic group in the country, and the concept of rights of minorities was foreign. This is when the terms Khmae yeung came out, meaning “We Khmers” (Chandler 1996). For the minorities in Cambodia they had no place in the new concept of the Khmer nation. So this then has an impact on such things as state schools, civil service, and military--all of the modern institutions of the nation-state, and who could join these institutions.

The second reason for oppression is that Khmer nationalism also developed a superior/inferior and insider/outsider characteristics. Sino-Cambodians had to negotiate their way inside and outside of these boundaries, and defining themselves as Khmer in

language, religion, intermarriage and other practices so as to be part of the Cambodian nation.

A third reason for state oppression has to do with the political role of China in Southeast Asia during the anti-Communist regimes of Lon Nol. The Chinese were suspected to be the "fifth wheel" meaning that they were loyal to communist China and not to Cambodia, and that they would try to make communist revolution in Cambodia and overturn the state. So this was also a reason for closing Chinese schools and not letting Chinese become civil servants.

All of these points create a strong barrier to acculturation. For many respondents, the worst time of oppression was just after the Khmer Rouge period, when a socialist state was created and led by the Vietnamese government whose army occupied Cambodia for ten years (1979-1989). Since China was an enemy of Vietnam, this translated into very oppressive policies for Sino-Cambodians. This chapter will discuss this in detail.

1-Ethnic Chinese under Khmer Republican (General Lon Nol, 1970-1975)

The expansion of the American-Vietnam war into Cambodia saw the destruction of much of the ethnic Chinese community's socio-cultural landscape. Like Sihanouk, Lon Nol (1970-75) stressed the ethnic homogeneity of Cambodia, asserting that all ethnic groups in Cambodia belonged to the great Khmer race, except for the Chinese and Vietnamese.¹⁴ Within months of coming to power, Lon Nol's state-sponsored massacre of hundreds of ethnic Vietnamese had triggered condemnation overseas and panic among the Chinese community in Cambodia. Addressing these two audiences, Lon Nol made a broadcast to the nation on 18 March 1970 appealing to his 'Dearest Chinese brothers' to

¹⁴ Khmer Republican Revue de l'Armee, 1972.

stay calm and issued a circular instructing all public officials to prevent any actions that might harm Chinese.(Kamm 1970) While paying lip-service to ethnic harmony, Lon Nol shut down Chinese schools and newspapers, and charged both Chinese and Vietnamese with slowly making the Khmers lose their customs and morals and their way of thought in their attempts to spread communist propaganda

A former student of the historic Yucai School in Kah Tiew Commune, Kah Thom, Kandal Province recalled how the school was shut down by the Lon Nol authorities in 1970 “because they said Chinese was a communist language..”¹⁵ In their campaign to crack down on Khmer Rouge sympathisers, his police targeted people of Chinese descent. A second-generation Teochiu Chinese recalls being arrested in Kratie, his hometown, "because I was Chinese, spoke fluent Khmer and was well educated. So they suspected me of being a Communist spy."

Many of those Chinese schools beyond Lon Nol’s jurisdiction, in "liberated zones," were bombed out of action, as were a number of Chinese temples, alongside the schools and temples of other ethnic groups. Chinese Sports Associations folded, and those Chinese newspapers that had started up again after Sihanouk’s 1967 ban were once again closed. A second-generation Cantonese now in his fifties recalled the suppression of Chinese language in Battambang town under Lon Nol. “People were afraid to speak Chinese. If we did, we were criticised for showing a lack of respect for Khmer culture.” However, a Hakka Chinese then living in rural Battambang encountered no such problems.

¹⁵ Author’s interview with Chan ly, a Chinese villager in Koh Thom Kandal Province in the east part of Phnom Penh, Cambodia December 3, 2003.

As these conflicting testimonies indicate, and true to a pattern that would characterise future regimes, Lon Nol's policy was not applied consistently throughout those areas under his control, and even when it was, Chinese adopted strategies of cultural survival that would appear again in the 1980s.

A Cantonese teacher now in her 40s remembers that, despite the rigorously enforced ban on Chinese education in Phnom Penh, people studied Chinese secretly at home¹⁶. Two of her friends were caught in the act, and fined 800,000 riels for teaching Chinese. But a second-generation Teochiu in Phnom Penh remembers loopholes in the law, and recalled Chinese being taught at the Lycée Sisowath during that period.¹⁷

A second-generation Cantonese in Kratie remembers how the famous Zhong Shan school which featured numbers of Lao Chinese among its pupils, and in the late 1960s, teachers from the PRC - was not shut down by Lon Nol authorities, but had closed on its own initiative in reaction to the post-coup political turbulence and the heavy fighting in the area.¹⁸

Like a number of the larger and more ornate Chinese schools and temples in provincial towns and the capital, Zhong Shan survived the Lon Nol period structurally intact. In many rural areas, the closure of Chinese schools was enforced by shrapnel, not red tape. The mass bombing from 1970-1973 destroyed powerful cultural and community centres. Many Chinese schools and temples, Khmer vats and schools, and Cham mosques

¹⁶ Interview with San Vally, a 49 year old Chinese teacher in Kompong Cham province January 17, 2000.

¹⁷ Interview with Peng Heng, a 54 year old Chinese teacher in Phnom Penh, December 6, 1999.

¹⁸ Author's interview with Lup Pee, a 57 year old president of a Chinese association in Kratic Province, March 10, 1995.

were razed to the ground. Those that were not invariably suffered some degree of cosmetic or structural damage.

A Sino-Khmer butcher from Krouch Chmar in Kompong Cham province remembered how, after the coup, the Lon Nol government gave Chinese special identity cards and charged them a special tax. They also drafted Chinese as soldiers (captwotiehien).¹⁹ While Chinese names figured prominently in the daily list of donors of funds on behalf of Lon Nol's defence forces and some Chinese took advantage of their business networks to turn the war to their profit, a great number of Chinese in Cambodia were unsympathetic to Lon Nol. China had thrown its weight firmly behind Sihanouk and the Front, and many Chinese and Sino-Khmers followed suit.

Whether out of allegiance to King Sihanouk, commitment to Maoist ideals, or sentimental ties to China, many ethnic Chinese students from Phnom Penh and other provincial capitals moved to the liberated zones early on, while many Chinese in rural areas, responding to Sihanouk's call to take up arms, entered the forest and joined up with the Khmer Rouge dominated and Sihanouk-led Front Uni National du Kampuchea (FUNK)(Agene Khmer Information:1973)

2-Ethnic Chinese under Democratic Kampuchea (DK 1975-1979)

In the three and a half years of Democratic Kampuchea more than half of the Chinese population in Cambodia died (Kiernan 1990). According to DK propaganda the Chinese had been living comfortably at the expense of Cambodians. More vulnerable to identification than the Cham, Thai and Lao, the Chinese were frequently the targets of violence. In the countryside, local inhabitants were instructed to hate the newcomers,

¹⁹ Author's interview with Hee Saer, a 51 year old Chinese butcher from Krouch Chmar in Kampong Cham Province, May 17, 1999.

who included many Chinese from the cities (Kiernan 1986). Some were forcibly Khmerized, banned from speaking Chinese, separated from family members and their community or segregated from the Cambodian and other ethnic groups.

The experiences of re-education, hard labour, incarceration, starvation, disease, exhaustion and fear of execution characterized their lives. Many were unaccustomed to the physical demands of manual labour. Some died from overwork and starvation. The accounts of those who survived under DK point to the difficulty of developing a paradigm for explaining the human rights violations of the Chinese under the DK rule. Certainly general factors and influences can be described, but at any time, several or none may have been determining the fate of the Chinese.

Some interviews with Sino-Cambodians showed that there was a ban on speaking Chinese language by the Khmer Rouge. This seems to have been the most prevalent means of persecution. Generally, all those under the control of DK were prohibited from speaking in their own Chinese dialects. There were exceptions. While some dared not to whisper to each other for fear of being heard by the militia, others spoke Chinese freely without impunity. Chim, a farmer from Stung district of Battambang, recalls that once she was heard speaking Chinese. For this she was criticized and one day's food ration was withheld. Thereafter anyone heard speaking Chinese was arrested.

To some extent those responsible for the different circumstances of the Chinese in the regions were the DK leaders in command. Party membership did not preclude significant differences in perspective and individual temperament emerging and influencing the areas under their control. For example the DK in Prey Veng did not hesitate to immediately kill all the 17th of April people who were accused of being Chinese capitalists. Similarly a DK officer in Kampot named Wa hated the Chinese. He

Chinese capitalists. Similarly a DK officer in Kampot named Wa hated the Chinese. He declared that they had oppressed Khmer and if they could not be re-educated, then they had to be killed. In 1976 he organized a manhunt targeting capitalists, in particular the Chinese, and repeated this in the following year. However, there were other instances of DK leaders being sympathetic to the Chinese. The Chams, Vietnamese and Chinese were herded into the Kroch Chhmar market for execution at the same time the officer in charge, a half-blooded Teochew-speaking Chinese, ordered his boys that the Chinese not be killed, but be evacuated to Stung Trang district (a Khmer-Teochew Chinese in Kroch Chhmar). Elsewhere another Teochew businessman did not suffer under DK because the officer in charge of him a first generation Teochew man was more interested in targeting officials from previous regimes. Therefore, regional variations appear, in some respects, to have been also related to those in command. This may have afforded some Chinese some protection for some of the time. But changes to the leadership in a region or at a lower level of the party hierarchy could have significantly altered this particularly if they were connected to intra-party political disruptions and purges as was the case in Koh Kong province. In Koh Kong province the Chinese had been relatively protected by a more liberal DK leadership. However, they were purged by hard-line soldiers from the center.

Movement and Work Difficulties

Also affecting the fate of the Chinese in any given area were the experiences of relocation, the particular environmental characteristics of the province and the degree of physical hardship either related to work in the area or the procurement of food and other essentials. Most urban Chinese were unaccustomed to manual labor, even if they had

been born in rural Cambodia. Although under DK rule the difference between murder and deliberate overwork seems slight, even spurious, it is important to note that often the DK cadre did not kill Chinese because of their race, but they forced the Chinese and other new people to work harder than the farmers. With insufficient food some died of starvation. Kiernan notes that Khmer refugees reported that the ethnic Chinese suffered the most because they were unused to labouring in the fields even if they had rural origins. They had to work harder and in worse conditions than the rural dwellers. In Svay Rieng, over twenty percent of the 10,000 Chinese young men and women working on the construction of a dam died in 1976 due to starvation and disease. The DK militia also killed other exhausted workers. These situations worsened when starvation became endemic at the end of 1977. Such accounts of extreme hardship support Stephen Heder's 1980 findings that the Chinese died equally of murder, starvation, and disease. For example, one interviewee reports that of the 4600 Chinese in his village over 1000 died of starvation and disease and only ten were specifically killed by DK in 1977.²⁰ Further, it is important to consider the extent to which the disruption or destruction of the Chinese social networks during their movement and resettlement increased their vulnerability. To survive, some Chinese adapted to living with the Khmer.

The historian Kiernan suggested that 225,000 Chinese died in the Pol Pot period and argued that their fate was dictated "by social, not ethnic considerations. Michael Vickery has also concluded that the Chinese were not especially disadvantaged under any regime" (Vickery 1986: 165). Another theory commonly postulated to explain the

²⁰ Author's interview with Veng Lang, a 33 year old former Khmer Rouge soldier in Takeo Province, September 22, 2003.

relatively high loss of Chinese life under the DK is that those Chinese who were not executed on social grounds, were more likely to die than Khmers because they were soft city-dwellers who could not withstand the hard agricultural work to which ethnic Khmers were accustomed. Elizabeth Becker has proposed a counter thesis, arguing that Chinese were discriminated against qua Chinese. However, her argument is flawed by the social status of her primary Chinese source, a Phnom Penh dwelling businessman.

(Becker 1986:254-255).

Cultural Prohibitions

The degree of intolerance for other cultures also had an impact on the survival rate of the Chinese in different regions. The prohibitions against certain behaviours were not fatal in themselves, but provided both the rationale and the conditions for many Chinese deaths. If the Chinese were to live, then they were to adopt Khmer ways of living. For some, like Muk Chot, a Chinese from Phnom Penh, the coerced cultural assimilation such as eating communally with the Khmer was essential because he and his family did not know how to fish or look for food.

The ban on speaking Chinese language seems to have been the most prevalent means of justifying persecution. Certainly deaths related to the use of Chinese as a prohibited language could be interpreted as ethnically based, but equally they can be explained as Chandler does the DK persecution of the Cham Muslim minority. That is, that language-related abuses were more about contesting the orders of those who hold power than about representing a particular ethnic group. That is to say, the DK regime hated those who rebelled against its rules more than ethnic difference.

Generally, all those under the control of DK were prohibited from speaking in polite Khmer or their own Chinese dialects. There were exceptions. While some dared not to whisper to each other for fear of being heard by the militia, others spoke Chinese freely without impunity. Chim, a farmer from Stung district of Battambang, recalls that once she was heard speaking Chinese. For this she was criticized and one day's food ration was withheld. Thereafter anyone heard speaking Chinese was arrested. The writing of Chinese was also banned. Those who disobeyed the prohibition were given hard labour or executed. Some spoke Chinese by mistake. Of these, some were punished, others lost their lives. In Chub village two middle-aged women were heard speaking Chinese. The following day they were executed as were twenty-seven Chinese families. Again regional and other factors affected degrees of leniency in relation to non-Khmer language usage. Language is critical to survival, without an effective means of communication the Chinese were more vulnerable to democratic Kampuchea (Chan 1999).

Other factors influencing the circumstances of the Chinese throughout Cambodia were their community segregation and or familial separation. Tang Eng, describes that in Takeo province, for example, the Chinese were forced to live in a separate Chinese village as they were also forced to do in other provinces. Ethnic segregation was also enforced in Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, and Kampong Speu. In some instances segregation was initially imposed according to racial background, but later the Chinese were sent to live among the Khmer. In and of themselves such social adjustments were not murderous, but ethnic segregation made the Chinese easier to target as a group. Separation was probably more insidious as children were separated from parents and taken away to work with other children only seeing their parents infrequently. Muk Chot,

for example, only saw his four children, aged between 8 to 10 years old, once every two months. Such an approach systematically undermined the social structures linked to the perpetuation of culture and community.

Further, these circumstances must surely have created greater duress and increased the likelihood of contravening regulations. However, the segregation of ethnic groups may have inadvertently served to restore some community ties.

3-Ethnic Chinese under People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK 1979-1989)

According to the 1983 Constitution created during the PRK, there were no barriers to Sino-Cambodians in any field of work.²¹ However, the reality was another story.

In the PRK regime, from 1979 to 1989, the state did not allow Chinese to enter into military service, and any members of the armed forces who were discovered to have Chinese relatives were dismissed as the leaders were afraid of having Chinese in the army. From 1989 to 1993 there was forced conscription and Khmers, Chinese and Cham alike were drafted. Those Chinese who were rounded up for conscription and could afford it, bribed their way out of the draft. Right up until today, despite there being no official discrimination stopping Chinese from joining up, only a very small minority of people of Chinese descent join the security forces, and those who do identity as Khmer.

According to more than 50 interviewees, all remarked that it was almost impossible for them or their relatives to apply for work in the government. This relates to

²¹ Article 51 of the 1980 Constitution stated that all citizens had equal access to employment.

Khmer nationalism and the government goal to build a pure nation of Khmers that did not have room for ethnic minorities. So to protect the state, and to keep the outsiders separate, there was an unofficial practice to hire ethnic Khmers for the civil service and military.

The most severe form of discrimination according to many interviewees was under policy 351 during the regime of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989).

Policy 351

Sino-Cambodians were intimidated, persecuted, denied job opportunities and cultural freedoms. Chinese were often prevented from returning to their former houses and reclaiming their former land; Chinese was not spoken; Chinese names were dropped; Chinese schools continued to be banned. As the PRK oversaw the return of mass numbers of internally displaced peoples to their homes from the former DK rural places, it also attempted to force internal ethnic Chinese into particular agricultural areas for development reasons(Heder: 1980).

In 1983, Government policy 351 was issued which formalized these prejudices with the enforcement, nationwide, of a 'census' of people of Chinese background. All Chinese had to be photographed and given a registration number.²² But "Chinese with

²² In October 24, 1982 Deputy Prime Minister of PRK, Chea Soth announced the regime's new policy on the Chinese [circular 351]. The party circular read by Chea Soth, which was distributed to provincial and municipal Party officials, central ministries, and some district chiefs, was mostly an investigative exercise, intended to uncover Chinese networks in the country.

money” as one former police officer remarked, “became Khmer”. Its implementation involved house-calls on every residence in Cambodia by security agents tasked with completing a form stating the ancestry, current Chinese family links in the PRC, and “nationality” of household occupants. Those who admitted to Chinese ancestry or relatives in the PRC subsequently faced discrimination in the allocation of such government resources as housing, jobs, and school-places for children(Edwards 2002).

The main objective of policy 351 was to take control of the Chinese and those who were involved in large-scale trade and in touch with relatives abroad. As one police officer subsequently disclosed, “We were trying to find out where their capital came from.” Interestingly, this tight control of the existing Chinese population coincided with the issue of a Central Committee Decree in Vietnam in 1983 facilitating large-scale Vietnamese control over Cambodia.²³

Under policy 351, Chinese individuals “disappeared” and faced random imprisonment for alleged pro-Chinese activities. Government school books taught their pupils, with the aid of maps and verses, that China and the Chinese (cen) were greedy for Cambodian land. Most Sino-Cambodians, and Chinese who had witnessed the deprivations suffered did not forget about this policy that came from pressure from the Vietnamese government. But policy 351 and contingent discrimination in jobs against Chinese discouraged Khmers from intermarrying with Chinese. During that period, many

²³ Author’s interview with Lim San, a Chinese teacher at Dounhour Chinese school in Phnom Penh, July 19,1999.

Khmer officers who were married to Sino-Cambodians lost their jobs, positions, and some were arrested and sent to jail for three years²⁴

The effect of this policy was wide-ranging: many Chinese did not feel free to speak Chinese or to use Chinese names. There was no public decree to prevent their doing so, but internal directives discriminated against one group of Chinese called "Group 351." From 1979-1985, and especially after the issue in 1983 of Party Center Circular the policy 351, the PRK conducted a nationwide registration of Chinese in their homes. This investigation paid particular attention to descent lines. In the words of one informant: "It was necessary to go back to the fourth generation to establish the ethnic origin of families." In practical terms, the policy 351 registration campaign often prescribed Chineseness on the basis of skin-color, clarity of Khmer pronunciation, or display of cultural artefacts (such as Chinese couplets, ancestral shrines in the home). However, fear of the repercussions (real and rumoured) of being labelled "351" led many Chinese at this time to assume an overtly Khmer identity (coul kame). Those that could afford it bribed their way to a 'Khmer' ethnic origin; others darkened their complexion, or stopped speaking Chinese in public, while still others fled the country in panic. A "351" joke among Khmers was that there was a run on toothpicks as all the Chinese had taken them to prop their eyes open.

The 351 campaign had an immediate impact on Chinese cultural life and a lasting impact on intermarriage. Some Chinese began to cremate their dead, as Cambodians do, as they were too afraid to bury their lost relatives in case the government discovered that

²⁴ During the policy 351 many Sino- Cambodian officers hid their identities for their own security. One of officer I interviewed in 2001, is Mr Yo Teckhor who came from an ethnic Chinese background. For many years after liberation, Teckhor worked in the field at Siem Reap Province. The PRK's own anti-Chinese 351 policies were well known and by this time he was using the Khmer name of Cham Pradith. Soon he became the Deputy Minister of the Council of Ministers appointed by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

they were Chinese and then used this to prevent them from finding work. During that period, many Chinese wanted to marry Khmers hoping that through intermarriage they could escape being labelled as 351. However, Khmers rejected Chinese for fear that if they married Chinese they would be called 351. In revenge, many Chinese today still swear not to let their children marry "pure Khmers" (kmae sot), and will only let their children marry Sino-Khmers or Chinese.

Related to this point I have a wonderful story from a Sino-Cambodian woman I interviewed named Sok Lang.²⁵ She is 66 years old and has 4 children "When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in 1979, all the Cambodians, Chams, Vietnamese and Chinese tried to return to the city. However only the ethnic Chinese were not allowed to travel into the city". "The Vietnamese soldiers", she said, "asked us to go back to the countryside to work in the rice field". Fortunately, Sok's family pretended to be Vietnamese and hid their Chinese identity. Then the Vietnamese soldiers allowed them to pass into the city of Phnom Penh. When she arrived in Phnom Penh a group of Vietnamese soldiers came to asked her "Are you Vietnamese or Chinese?" She said "I am Vietnamese". After that, the Vietnamese soldiers permitted her family to live in Phnom Penh as part of the Vietnamese ethnic community. For ten years Sok's family was not allowed to speak Chinese either in the home or in public.

According to Sok, she said the policy 351 circumscribed the Chinese as second class citizens, forbidden to hold a government job or attend school. She said that the Vietnamese had transferred their anti -Chinese policies to Cambodia. The police make a

²⁵Interview with Sok Lang. She is 66 years old and has 4 Children, October 6, 2003 in her house in Phnom Penh. This interview was emotionally moving for both interview and interviewee

Vietnamese had transferred their anti-Chinese policies to Cambodia. The police make a list of Chinese families and Vietnamese families. Sok told me that once, in 1984, when she was burning incense for the Chinese ancestors who had passed away, suddenly, a group of police came to her house and asked her “Are you Chinese or Vietnamese?” She told the police “I am Vietnamese- Cambodian, not Chinese”. The police did not believe her and then placed her family members on the 351 list.

For the Chinese in Cambodia the 351 brought immediate fear, as it was like being branded a criminal, although the only crime was being Chinese. This was the worst thing for Sok: to happen to be Chinese at this moment in Cambodian history. Then she said its impact was severe as some Chinese have plastic surgery to their lips, eyes, eyebrows, to make them look Cambodian, for their security and protection. Sok asked me “what is it to be real Cambodian?” Sok expressed that to be a real Cambodian you must have big lips, round eyes without lids, dark skin, and speak Cambodian clearly. Sok continued by saying there were a lot of Chinese who lived in her neighbourhood who wore short T-shirts so that it is easy to get dark skin and become a Cambodian.

According to my interviews, from 1980 to 1992, the Chinese were willing to be Cambodian, they really like to be Cambodians, and they trained themselves how to speak Cambodian clearly, and were willing to change their names and their Chinese identity. Although some Cambodian government officials had Chinese names and background they changed them to become Cambodian. Sok said that during this period many Chinese married into Cambodian families, changed their names and then they “became Cambodian”. Even the Prime Minister Hun Sen’s wife changed her name from Sam Heang to the Cambodian name Bun Rany Hun Sen.

K5 Program

A second policy that discriminated against the Chinese was called the K5 (ka pram in Khmer). This was the code name of the military strategy that consisted of building a series of dikes and a wall along the western border with Thailand to protect the front line troops in battle against Khmer resistance armies fighting the PRK. K5 is still very much a controversial subject because of the many thousands of Cambodians, including Sino-Cambodians who died making the defense. Many thousands more are handicapped as a result of stepping on mines laid down by the opposition armies based in Thailand. In my research, I also found that Sino-Cambodians felt they suffered ethnic persecution.

K5 was instituted in 1984, the middle of the PRK regime following the 351 policy. It came at a time when the government and supporting Vietnamese soldiers were losing many battles against the Khmer resistance and that had caused a lot of controversy about its use of forced labour.²⁶ The K5 was instituted by the occupying Vietnamese army and advisors during the PRK on 15th July 1984, and signed by Prime Minister Chan Si. The letter K is equivalent to the letter A in English and was typically assigned to programs or actions followed by a number referring to the order of the programs.

At the beginning, only Sino-Cambodians were sent to the western border to work on the K5 defence perimeter.²⁷ All Chinese families in Cambodia had the duty to appoint one of their members to work on K5. They were to work for between four to six months

²⁶After Pol Pot regime was overthrown in 1979, the PRK was supported by an occupying Vietnamese army of 50,000 soldiers. This was because the remnants of the Khmer Rouge gathered at the Thai-Cambodian border.

²⁷ Report 52, K5, PRK Central Committee, July 4, 1985 (Doc.11-41)

each. The military organized K5 workers to first meet in Phnom Penh in order to provide uniforms, equipment and some medical supplies before they were transported by military buses to the border.

Many of the survivors of K5 in their interviews spontaneously explained that for them, since the Vietnamese government was still hostile to China during this time, its domestic policies towards its own Chinese population were largely discriminatory; this had its impact in how Vietnamese targeted Sino-Cambodians (Nayan 1986). The extent to which this is true cannot at this time be corroborated as access to official government documents is not possible. However, I have interviewed 150 Sino-Cambodian families over the years, and over 70 of these had members who had gone to K5.

According to Meng Seng, former resident of O Russei market in Phnom Penh, who survived K5: "Working on K5 was like working as a soldier. During the day, I carried ammunition, and at night, they [military] distributed weapons we were to use for our own protection. Sino-Cambodians suffered a lot during this K5 work on the Thai border. This was the retaliation of the Vietnamese to us Chinese in Cambodia. I worked on the K5 for four months. When I came back, I returned with malaria, that I am still suffering from to this day. I like Cambodians, why do Cambodians treat us badly? We should love each , because I was born here, I understand the language, and I love Cambodians. With Pol Pot, he hated the Chinese, and PRK, why do they also hate the Chinese? The PRK came to liberate the population [from Pol Pot] and why should we have been sent to die on the border? The only reason is that the Vietnamese wanted to exterminate the Chinese from Cambodian soil²⁸".

²⁸ Author's interview with Hee Touv, a ex- K5 Chinese worker, September 22, 1997, Kompong Cham Province

According to 62 year old Chhum Ly, a former driver of the K5 buses, from the Ministry of Interior: "My duty was to organize the groupings of the K5 workers and then to take them by bus to the Thai border. Each time I transported between 50 to 90 people. Most of the Chinese came from Kandal, Kampong Cham and Phnom Penh. Each of these had to work from four to six months. The workers did not have any right to ask to stop this work. If a K5 worker was sick and could not recover or cope, they died at the border. There was no right to ask to go home. Work was during the day and night. We were so afraid of stepping on mines and being blown up by bombs. If the K5 workers escaped, the Vietnamese advisors there would communicate orders to have them caught and returned."²⁹

Another survivor, Vang Ly, 46 years old, and former bodyguard of the then PRK President Heng Samrin, recalled: "I was arrested [in 1985] and put into prison for 18 months because the government accused me of being a spy of the Chinese government. When I was released, I had to go to K5 in 1986. At that time, it was very dangerous for Sino-Cambodians, because the government arrested us without evidence. Just seeing our fair skin, they would accuse us of being unfaithful to the revolution. They used the expression: 'to stop the bloody Chinese from sucking Khmer blood, they must be taken out' (drev plas pdoh vea cheng gom duk vea achen jinjook cheam khmer). During that time, Sino-Cambodians were really afraid like we were during the Pol Pot period. During the Pol Pot period, those who made mistakes were taken out to be killed. But during the PRK, the Sino-Cambodians were jailed for no reason and taken to K5. Every day, my

²⁹Author's interview with Hok Lee , April 22,2003, Ta kmau Kandal Province.

wife prayed and lit incense to ask the gods for protection against K5 because those who went there often died³⁰ .

One former PRK Minister of Commerce, Dang Sarim, confirmed the difficulties of K5, and his recollections on this were as follows: "At the beginning, the [communist party] Central Committees of both Cambodia and Vietnam wanted to scare the Chinese into running from the city to the countryside. This plan did not succeed. Because many Chinese paid Cambodians from 26,000 to 40,000 riels [\$USD 60 at that time equivalent to a half year of salary] to take their place at K5. The government did not pay attention to this when the Chinese paid others to take their place. It was only later that the government took notice when the hospitals were full of Cambodians who were injured and dying [from K5] that they realized that the Chinese had stopped going to K5. So there was a second plan created for K5 whereby all the Cambodian people had a duty to go to K5 [so the ranks of workers would continue to be full]."³¹

Essentially, this meant that the Sino-Cambodians had used their stores of wealth to avoid being drafted to K5 after the horrendous results of working there came to be widely known. For poor Cambodians, this was an opportunity to help their families, but it also came with a terrible price. Most Cambodians also have bitter memories of K5, and even based their voting decisions on this in the historic 1993 first Cambodian elections organized by the United Nations. (Heder and Ledgerwood, 1996)

³⁰ Author's interview with Kov Soom, a Chinese teacher September 4, 2002 Phnom Penh.

³¹ Author's interview with Kim Fun August 14, 1999, Phnom Penh.

One of the Chinese I have talked to who did pay to get out of K5 was Kong Siek, 60 years old, a dried fish wholesaler in O Russei market in Phnom Penh, who was put in jail for a year after police had found evidence that he had paid a Cambodian to take his place at K5.³² He said: "When I was eating, the day was 12 July 1986, there were four police officers who came to my house. They showed me an arrest warrant, signed by Kim Puon, the Chief of Municipal Police, and K5 Committee Member. They did not harm me during the arrest. The police said, 'you have made a mistake, and must go to jail for one year'. I went to jail for two months, and my wife bribed the Municipal Police Chief Kim Puon for my release by giving 5 ounces of gold [in today's prices about \$2000USD]. When I returned home from jail, I did not dare speak any Chinese language and I didn't dare speak to anyone about K5. The police told me that if anyone asked me why I went to jail I was to tell them it was for gambling. I told my children not to take any work in the Cambodian government because the Cambodians have never been able to trust Chinese, and the Chinese will always remember that even though things are a little easier for us Chinese now, things can easily change back to discrimination."

³² Author's interview with Kong Siek, 60 years old, a dried fish wholesaler in O Russei market in Phnom Penh, April 10, 2002.

4-Ethnic Chinese under the State of Cambodia and the Royal government of Cambodia (SOC 1989-1993)

The establishment of the SOC in 1989 led to a gradual relaxation of restrictions on the Chinese in line with changes on the international political scene.³³ From late 1990 the SOC moved to improve the freedom of the Chinese community in Cambodia and to revive Chinese education in line with efforts “to improve ties with Beijing and to distance the Khmer Rouge from its Chinese patron”(Kawi Chongitthawon 1991). The Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989, followed by the UN peace initiative in Cambodia led to the first meetings between Beijing and Phnom Penh at the October 1990 Peace Talks in Jakarta, Indonesia. Shortly thereafter, SOC Foreign Minister Hor Namhong called for a dialogue with Beijing in December 1990, and National Assembly Chairman Chea Sim gave the green light for the formation of Cambodia’s first Overseas Chinese Association in Cambodia since 1975. Chea Sim appointed a board of eleven Chinese businessmen to represent Cambodia’s Chinese community.

The SOC restored the rights of ethnic Chinese to practice their religious customs and to celebrate Chinese festivals. The board could only promote culture practices, and did not dare to make any political activity. One of the association’s first activities was to reopen Phnom Penh’s oldest and most famous Chinese school, Duanhua. Later that year, a delegation of Cambodian-born Chinese residents in France, led by Mr. Trinh Huy, presented \$60,000 in flood relief funds and \$20,000 as a donation toward Duanhua

³³ The collapse of the Soviet bloc left the Cambodian government more impoverished than ever. By the end of 1989 its time to welcome Sino-Cambodians and Chinese back to business.

(SPK 1991). In 1991 Chinese New Year festivities were officially allowed for the first time since 1975. Many interviewees pointed to the return of King Sihanouk in 1991 as the key event that ended long years of discrimination of the past and began the cultural freedom period that they say continues for most Chinese today.

All the political regimes were responsible for the deaths, threats and discrimination against many Chinese. Meanwhile the Chinese in the process of attempting to construct their new identity construction and contestation renaissance society. My research data clearly show that under previous political regimes the ethnic Chinese suffered significantly. The degree to which they did and whether, in fact, ethnicity was the primary like ethnic factor is difficult to determine. Evidence also shows that for the Chinese under previous political regimes, ethnicity was only one of a range of factors that determined how they were treated. Certainly the extremist nationalism of Cambodian leaders from the previous political regimes meant that the Chinese as compared to Cambodia's other ethnic minorities were more vulnerable to persecution. But this only partially accounts for their oppression, discrimination, threats and the incitement of anti-Chinese sentiments.

For many Chinese, to get through and survive all the different forms of oppression, they had to acculturate and adopt Khmer ways of living.

CHAPTER FOUR

RENAISSANCE OF SINO-CAMBODIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN POST WAR CAMBODIA (1993-2004)

Chapter four explores the renaissance of Sino- Cambodian language and culture in post war Cambodia from 1993-2004. I explain this in the context of political opening in Cambodia that has allowed for many different kinds of expressions in journalism, political party growth, and economic diversification. This was a time when Cambodia opened to the world again, first through the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia peacekeeping mission, and then through Cambodia's entry into ASEAN and the global community with aid money from different donors.

Following the UN organized democratic elections in 1993, the Kingdom of Cambodia drew up a new constitution that recognized ethnic diversity and the right to identity: Article 31 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia guarantees all citizens “the same rights, freedom and duties regardless of their race, colour, sex, language, beliefs, religion”. The Royal Government of Cambodia has made a welcome break with the recent past in by positive policy towards recognising and encouraging Chinese cultural identity.

The past ten years have seen a massive renaissance of Chinese cultural identity across Cambodia.³⁴ It should be noted that this renaissance is taking place in a world changed by newly pre-eminent place of China in global capitalism. In this global context, Sino-Cambodians may have become an asset within the context of Cambodia nation-state. It must also be noted that the new openness to Chinese cultural expression in

³⁴ Over time, PRK discrimination against the ethnic Chinese has become less and less. As we shall see, the economic reforms of the late 1980 and the active participation of PRK officials in Phnom Penh's private commercial sector ensured that the state would become increasingly dependent on Chinese capitalists.

Cambodia is taking place in the context of the expression of and surveillance by global human rights discourse.

The Association of Chinese Nationals in Cambodia (ACNC) now has branches in every province, while numerous districts and some villages have formed their own Chinese Association. In Phnom Penh, the five main dialect groups have established associations under the umbrella of the ACNC.³⁵

The principle vehicles of cultural organisation are schools and temples. In the smaller rural communities, temples are often the first means by which ethnic Chinese are reasserting their identity. Usually, a former Chinese temple site destroyed by war or neglect is completely rebuilt or refurbished first. After that the community discusses resurrecting the school. Typically, fundraising for schools and temples will be organised by Chinese men in their fifties and over. In more remote districts, the funds pool comprises villagers, and relatives who've gone to make it big in the city. Closer to provincial towns, fundraising becomes linked into the various Provincial Branches of the Chinese Association of Cambodia.

One of my fieldwork observations was that in many cases, the Chinese were also building temples in the compounds of Buddhist temple sites. I had never seen or heard of this before, as usually Chinese temples were completely separate from Khmer Buddhist temples. This shows that there is a growing together of Khmer and Chinese spiritual practices and more mutual respect for religious worship. The reason for the Chinese temple building in Buddhist compounds comes from Chinese in the community offering to pay for restoration of Buddhist temples, and also negotiating a place for their own

³⁵ Author's interview with Kov Heng, head of the Association of Chinese National in Cambodia , October 12, 2002.

temple in the area. I found such temples in Kandal province near Phnom Penh, where there are many Sino-Cambodians living there who are financially well off.

In more poor Sino-Cambodian communities that do not have the ability to rebuild their temples, they still keep a strong sense of community history and knowledge of the names, sizes and locations of temples that used to be in their areas. It is also the case that many Sino-Cambodians want to have a chance one day of reviving all the schools and temples that they used to have to continue the construction of their identity and pass it on to their future generations.

Recognition of Chinese Schools

There has been a resurgence of Chinese schools in Cambodia, especially in almost all neighbourhoods of the capital. There are several reasons for this, some to do with the cultural construction of identity, in the changed global and national context, and other to do with a new interest in studying Chinese by Cambodians.

For cultural reasons, the older Sino-Cambodians interviewed said that there were only a few surviving members of the older generation, and they want to transmit their knowledge before they die. They say that there was a gap of Chinese school teaching for 20 years and so they must catch up on the education. Like all population groups in Cambodia, most of the educated class of Sino-Cambodians either died during the Khmer Rouge regime or became refugees to third countries. This means that qualified teachers were scarce after the war, and others who could have taught were too afraid to show their Chinese identity and also help reconstruct it in the education field.

In provincial centres and rural communities, teachers are often found within the community, and combine teaching with their standard livelihood. Chinese teachers

today said that they were motivated by the painful memories of the past and a sense of duty to preserve their language and culture for posterity. As one of the very few educated Chinese alive today in Kompong Trach, a Hainanese teacher who lost nearly all of his classmates feels very strongly that it is his duty as a Pol Pot survivor to pass on his skills to the next generations of Chinese. In addition to dreams of the future, most Chinese teachers, and donors to schools, are motivated by memories of their school years. Renovation of a particular school is an important means of establishing a link with the past, and of ensuring that the efforts of previous generations do not go wasted.

In addition to the cultural reasons for establishing Chinese schools, there is also a new demand for learning in Chinese schools by Cambodian children. This is because there is a common perception that Khmer schools are corrupt and that Chinese schools have better curriculum and organization than Khmer schools. For example, one can see that students of Chinese schools are bussed in colourful vans to and from school each day and that the elder members in the community are the pedestrian guards to help the children safely across the very chaotic streets of the city. In contrast, there is no bus system or street crossing help for children going to Cambodian state schools.³⁶

Ten years ago some ten percent of students at Chinese schools throughout Cambodia were Khmer. While it is not known how much that number has changed in national statistics, I found that that number has increased dramatically to some 60 per cent for the four main Chinese schools in Phnom Penh, and 3 schools I visited in Kompong Cham³⁷. The reason for this increase in Khmer students is related to

³⁶ These observations come from interviews conducted with Chinese School teachers.

³⁷ Author's interview with Kim Dee, 28 years old, Kompong Cham Province, September 7, 2003.

globalization and development. Khmer students believe that with the skills in language and science they learn in Chinese school they can apply for jobs with better outcome than if they stayed in the state schools. While Chinese are more generally aware of the benefits of learning Khmer than was the case before 1970, in the context of China's importance the global economy, many Khmer are realizing that Chinese language is widely used outside Cambodia, and that it is one of the business languages aside from English used in Cambodia.

Some Khmer families are now sending their children to Chinese schools to receive a purely Chinese education, while some send their children to Khmer schools in the morning and Chinese schools in the afternoon. Some Khmer parents hold Chinese up as an example to their children, because they feel that Chinese study hard and work hard for a living without taking long rests. If their children have no training, some parents will send their children to work as labourers for Chinese businesses and to learn from Chinese because many people in Khmer society consider Chinese to be clever at planning for their future.

Following a decree by the Ministry of Education, the curriculum at Chinese schools now focuses on Cambodia, although the chief medium of instruction is Chinese. The geography of the Tonle Sap, or the history of Angkor Wat, is now taught in Chinese. The content of lessons is roughly 70% Cambodian, 20% international, and 10% Chinese. The Ministry of Education also states that students in Chinese schools should have five hours of Khmer language instruction per week. There is informal monitoring of these rules through the branches of the Association of Chinese Nationals in Cambodia but there seems to be less interest by the Cambodian government to see if the rules are followed. I

observed Cambodian language lessons at numerous Chinese schools and the Cambodian students appeared well integrated into the student body. However, I came across one Chinese school which taught no Cambodian, while in two schools I visited, teachers addressed their students as “we Chinese people,” (sanmen zhongguo ren), even where Cambodians were present. Although all Chinese schools I visited displayed the Cambodian flag and portraits of King Sihanouk and Princess Monique, some had more Chinese maps on display than Cambodian maps, or no Cambodian maps.

The Royal Government of Cambodia, in conjunction with the Association of Chinese Nationals of Cambodia, has devised a good policy on the curriculum of Chinese schools which ensures that children may acquire Chinese language proficiency while continuing to learn about the geography, culture and history of Cambodia.

For the years 1993 to 1998, diplomas from Chinese schools were not recognized by higher educational institutions in Cambodia. The lower status of Chinese schools had officially caused resentment, and also was a method of the state contesting the Chinese cultural renaissance. To ensure that graduates of Chinese schools have access to equal employment and higher educational opportunities as graduates of Cambodian schools, then Minister of Education Tol Lah did make headway during the government's second term after 1998 with recognition of status and acceptability of diplomas issued by Chinese schools.

Contestation, cultural survival and property rights.

While there has been a positive shift from contestation policies to acceptance of Sino-Cambodians by the government, there is still some uncertainty and a feeling of powerlessness by some Sino-Cambodians whose cultural properties were taken over for

use as government offices or state schools during the intolerant years of the PRK. In many cases these properties have still not been returned.

The PRK's ban on education in “politically incorrect” foreign languages such as French, English and Chinese and the general policies and practices of discrimination against Cambodia's ethnic Chinese meant that Chinese communities had little legal or other access to their former cultural properties.

The current Chinese cultural renaissance has therefore come at great cost to certain Chinese communities, and also keeps alive tension between Chinese Association leaders and the local government. Chinese communities in rural and urban areas often say they must engage in a kind of corruption to buy back land which they see as their common cultural heritage in order to enjoy the ethnic and religious freedoms that are guaranteed in the constitution. In one small rural commune I visited the Sino-Cambodians paid \$400 for the return of a burial site. Burial sites have very large importance in Chinese culture as they transmit ancestor worship and filial piety, cornerstones of Chinese cultural identity. This particular burial site was overgrown and was not being used for either agricultural or commercial purposes.

More commonly, however, Chinese Associations are being asked to buy back school or temple buildings whose construction was financed by Chinese communities. In those cases where old Chinese schools or temple buildings have been taken over as state schools or offices, local governments commonly request the local Chinese Association to build an alternative school or office-buildings for state use, often to expensive specifications. In at least two cases drawn to my attention, local governments have refused to negotiate their withdrawal from established Chinese schools.

There are of course exceptions to this pattern. Xinmin Xuexiao, a huge school in Tboung Kmum district of Kompong Cham province, which was bombed out during the civil war in the early 1970s, was rebuilt in 1993 with the full cooperation of district authorities. And today, Duanhua is once again Cambodia's most famous and largest Chinese school with 7,000 day students and 3,000 night students.³⁸ The school is financed by fees, fundraising by the Teochiu Association, and individual contributions from wealthy members of the Chinese community.

In Kampot province, the Kampong Trach district town renovated the Bentougong temple in the grounds of Juequn School. During many years of neglect, a mound of earth had grown up “naturally” inside the temple, forming a small mountain against the inside back wall. The Headmaster explained this as a magical symbol of regeneration and growth, and this natural mountain has been left intact as the backdrop to the altar to Bentougong. Regarding ceremonies in Kompong Trach, La La said that people liked to hold weddings and funerals, and especially the tongue-cutting ceremony, when the two large cutlasses on the altar are used to draw blood from villagers' tongues.³⁹ Symbols are written in the blood on white paper. Villagers stick the resulting amulet above their household doors to ask for peace and health. Bentougong worship has also survived in Phum Preythom, in Kandal province, a historic Hainanese community. A new temple was built on the foundations of the destroyed temple, with donations by Chinese villagers. People of all ages come to worship. They come to make offerings to pray for rain, for

³⁸ Statistics come from interviews conducted with five Chinese Dialects Associations in Cambodia in April 19,2000.

³⁹ Author's interview with Lum Pay , Lee Jou, Lum Po , Lump eng , are the Chinese black magic from Kompot Province, December 27, 2002.

example, or better health, or good fortune in business; tongue-cutting ceremonies are also popular, and marriage ceremonies are blessed at the temple.

The old Hake temple in Phnom Penh, formerly near the Old Market, was demolished in 1975 and it was rebuilt in 1997.

The Chinese Embassy funds ethnic Chinese associations, the re-construction of Chinese schools, teacher education, textbooks, and conferences in China. Every year, the Chinese embassy organizes a delegation of Sino-Cambodians to attend business and investment conferences in China.⁴⁰

A Cambodian Government television and radio station broadcasts the news nightly in Mandarin, and Cambodian political parties distributed leaflets in Chinese in the 1998 and 2004 elections, and a Chinese language newspaper publishes a wealth of information.

The cultural renaissance of Chinese culture is also helped by the business and economic elites from Singapore, Taiwan and China who the government is welcoming as foreign investors. Some Cambodians are suspicious of these Chinese overseas investors, and think they are using their wealth to exploit the poor Cambodians. While there is little business regulation to safeguard rights of workers, the fact that such investments are being welcomed also has had some positive element for the revival of Chinese cultural institutions in Cambodia. More research is needed on this for investment statistics and other links between Chinese overseas and local Sino-Chinese to investigate the impact on cultural issues, and also the contestation issues from local Cambodians who do not trust these investors' ambitions.

⁴⁰ This information was received from Chinese counsellor Xiao Zheng Rong October 14, 1999, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

In conclusion, though, for the time being, the forces that allow the cultural construction of identity seem to be bigger than those that are contesting it. The new openness of Cambodia society to Chinese cultural institutions is supported by the importance of Chinese in the global economy and transnational human rights discourse. And so the cultural renaissance will likely continue in Cambodia until there is some political upheaval or economic problem that turns attention to blame the Sino-Cambodians.

CONCLUSION

As I began this thesis with personal remarks, it seems fitting to end it, in part, with some accounting of the personal voyage I took as a Sino-Cambodian student of anthropology. My own renaissance took shape with studying not only Mandarin, but also Cantonese language in Phnom Penh. Not only to sharpen my interview skills, but also because I wanted to explore more my own roots. I also found out that my sister Chantha, had officially changed her birth name from Peou Leang (beautiful girl in Chinese) during the 351 policy during the PRK regime. I remember that I had found it strange to call her by this Cambodian name, and I did not realize at the time that it was connected to identity and politics. To this day, she has kept her Cambodian name. I wonder if my parents had survived the war, if they would like this or not. My own Chinese name Peou Muoy (beautiful gold in Chinese) was changed to Sambath by my father during the Khmer Rouge regime so that I would fit in better. I had always had this Cambodian name, but it had never been used before. I am too used to Sambath to change it back to my Chinese name. But I am still faced with comments from people who say, "Amazing you have a Cambodian name but your face is Chinese". So this dual identity, this "flexible" identity, where I am emic and etic, to use Nagata's terms, or insider and outsider, continues to define who I am for Cambodians. Myself, I feel more Chinese than Khmer, maybe because I have not been allowed to be Cambodian.

However, this thesis has been about cultural construction and contestation. And it does end on a positive note overall. This is because ethnic Chinese enjoy greater freedom of cultural expression under the Royal Government of Cambodia than under any of the regimes in power from 1970 to 1993. The current Government, that is just starting its

third legislature, has made turned the tide from its former contestation of a Sino-Cambodian identity to its greater acceptance. There have been advances in legislation allowing the establishment of Chinese schools, recognition of their curriculum and diplomas by state school, and tolerance for cultural organisations and Chinese media.

These measures are a step in a positive direction and suggest that negative past practices are at an end. In allowing this florescence of Chinese social organisation, the Royal Government of Cambodia has given important recognition to the fact that ethnic Chinese in Cambodia today have a local (Cambodian) national identity while retaining a partially or specifically Chinese cultural and ethnic identity. This is an important step away from the perception of Sino-Cambodians as communist insurgents, disloyal subjects who served Mao's China or Chiang Kai Shek's Taiwan.

Indeed, the comparison by certain Chinese respondents between today's cultural freedoms and those enjoyed in the Sangkum Roaster Niyum regime of King (then Prince) Norodom Sihanouk, while looking back to the past, also reflect hope for the future. The fact that Sangkum Reastr Niyum, commonly referred to as simply bidaem (before) is increasingly linked by ethnic Chinese with the current situation aelow (today) shows a determination among many to try to forgive and forget the upheavals between 1970-1993 and work for the future of Cambodia and their children.

I have argued that the extent to which Sino-Cambodians are in an insider or outsider position reflects a pattern of construction and contestation. The cultural patterns of migration of Chinese into their distinct dialect groups, and their urban identities and class position that is more elite than the local Cambodian identity has caused tension and jealousy. I have also argued that the cultural construction and contestation of identity

needs to be looked at in the context of nationalism and a type of ethnocentric identity of "We Cambodians" that developed. This nationalism had little room to include either Chinese, or Chams or Vietnamese or other minorities in its making of the postcolonial nation.

The ability of the ethnic Chinese to construct their identity in Cambodia had much to do with the shift in the state policies, and also foreign relations and global economic realities and political discourses that have an impact on how local ethnic communities and minorities are perceived. For the Sino-Cambodians, it was unfortunate that, without wanting to be, they were targeted as communist agents during the Lon Nol period, associated with the enemy Khmer Rouge communist movement coming to power. Then they were targeted by the Khmer Rouge for their bourgeoisie background and discriminated against for this because the Khmer Rouge was building a classless society. They also suffered during the Khmer Rouge regime because they were not able to survive the harsh rural life that was forced on them, like other urban people forced out to the countryside after 1975. And during the regime that followed the Khmer Rouge, the PRK, the Sino-Chinese were especially suffering, because of the 351 and K5 policies that were like an extension of Vietnam's policy towards its own Chinese population.

Throughout all of these difficult periods, the Sino-Cambodians suffered but they did not give up trying to construct their identity in their own ways, either privately when it was not safe to be public, or like nowadays more publicly with state agreement. As both a Sino-Cambodian and anthropology student studying the problem of cultural construction and contestation, it would be very valuable if such concepts of adaptation and acculturation could be discussed in higher learning institutes in Cambodia. At this

time, the rights of minorities are still not discussed by academics or students in Cambodia. But anthropology can offer an intellectual discourse for this that will help understandings of the cultural divides that bring suffering and hardship. This thesis is an attempt to try to start this process.

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APPENDIX I

Key questions for the first Chinese generation :

Where did you come from?

Why did you come to Cambodia?

When did you arrive in Cambodia? When did you become a Cambodian permanent resident ? How do think of yourself: Cambodian or Chinese? Or do you want say “Chinese Cambodian”?

Which country do you regard as home, China, Hong Kong, Cambodia?

Would you consider retiring to China if the Cambodian Government asks you to leave?

What did you do for the last three decades?

How did you leave China?

What education did you receive?

When did you leave China and how old were you?

How long did you stay in Hong Kong in order to get to Cambodia?

When did you arrive in Cambodia? by boat? by foot? by air ? by train?

Where did you go when you first arrive in Cambodia?

Did you have any friends or relations already living in Cambodia?

What did you feel when you first arrived in Cambodia?

Key questions for the second Chinese generation :

What is your education? Can you read and write in Khmer? Can you read and write in Chinese?

What is your religion? Buddhist /Christianity/Muslim/Animist

What is your nationality? Khmer or Chinese?

What is your position in the Cambodian Government? What is your position in Chinese society?

What language do you speak at home?

What language do you speak at school?

Did you attend the Chinese school? What level did you complete?

Do you or family members participate in the Chinese Community events?

Do you know the rights of minorities in Cambodia?

Are you afraid to say you are Chinese? If yes, what reason?

Did any problem occur for you when the authorities implemented the Chinese 351?

How did Chinese Cambodians rebuild their society after the war?

What is Chinese-ness?

How do you define Chinese-ness?

Who qualifies as a global transnational Chinese?

Do you think Chinese nationals have a loyalty to the Cambodia? Chinese? nation-state?

How do Chinese Cambodians identify loyalty, to family, lineage, territorial group ?

Who is an “ overseas Chinese”?

When and how should we use the term” overseas Chinese”?

When does an “overseas Chinese” become a “Chinese Overseas”?

Do you think Chinese Cambodians have a concept of identity?

What does being a Chinese Cambodian mean to you?

What is important for you in your Chinese identity/ in your Cambodian identity?

You were born in Cambodia in the Chinese heritage but, your parents are Chinese, how do you usually think of yourself? Do you feel Cambodian, Chinese or other?

APPENDIX II

Extracts from the Story of Tun Ciy

Tun Ciy was a celebrated Khmer sage whose fame reached China. The Emperor of China appointed a Chinese sage and a Chinese professor to bring 500 people and 500 boats to Cambodia for a contest of wits with the Khmer scholar. The first test involved a watermelon. 'How many seeds are there in this melon?' the Chinese asked Tun Ciy. Ton Ciy guessed correctly. When he won, the Chinese sage and professor handed over the boats and the people to the King of Cambodia, and returned to China.

Some time later, news that Ton Ciy had died reached China, prompting the Chinese sage to make a return visit. [After finding Ton Ciy alive and well and having failed three challenges] the sage went to Ton Ciy's house to give him the fourth challenge. Ton Ciy greeted him warmly. The day before, Ton Ciy had taken some crabs and dipped them in ink, and sent them scuttling across the paper. Then he had gathered the small children in the village and taught them to 'read' this writing. The sage was surprised to see the children studying and took one of their books to read but couldn't understand. Ton Ciy asked him, 'Sir, you are a Chinese sage, don't you know this writing?' The sage said, 'No, I've never seen anything like it.' Ton Ciy replied: Then you've lost out to me again. If you've lost, I'll only take four boats, and as for you, you can head back to China.

A group of officials, fearing Ton Ciy's intelligence, advised the Khmer King to exile him to China, thinking that China was big, and that the Chinese loathe Ton Ciy, and that the Chinese Emperor and sages would kill him on sight. When Ton Ciy arrived in China, he worked as a servant for a wealthy Chinese official. One day, Ton Ciy made him some

noodles, and the Chinese people liked them so much that word of them reached the Chinese Emperor, who sent for Ton Ciy. 'Uncle, do you really make long noodles?' asked the Emperor. 'Yes,' replied Ton Ciy. The Emperor said 'What are these noodles called?' 'They're called Num Bannock (Noodles for feeding the people),' said Ton Ciy. 'Because they are only delicious if I feed them to you.' As he was feeding the Emperor the noodles, Ton Ciy remarked that the Emperor of China had a face like a dog, but that looking the King of Cambodia in the face was like looking at the moon. Then the Emperor of China called his interpreter over to translate Ton Ciy's words, and when he understood, he was furious with Ton Ciy, and threw him in prison. Ton Ciy was so cold in the prison that he started boxing with his fellow prisoners to feel warm. And then one day, Ton Ciy had a new idea, and made a kite, which he flew in the dead of night. The whining of the kite-strings puzzled the Emperor. 'What animal is crying?' he asked his Chinese soothsayer in astonishment. The soothsayer replied, 'we caught the Khmer sage and put him in prison, and ever since this strange animal has been sobbing at night. So, Your Highness should send the Khmer sage back to his country, and then the animal will stop its wailing'. Startled, the Chinese emperor asked Ton Ciy to forgive him. 'I'm sorry,' he said, 'I had no idea you were a sage, don't be angry. We will send 100 men and women from China to accompany you back to Cambodia.' Tun Ciy told the Emperor that the animal he'd heard crying every night was no ordinary beast. If it was an ordinary beast, it would cry with its mouth. But my animal cried with its horns. After he told the Chinese Emperor this, the Chinese Emperor gave him a boat with a hundred people and much wealth. When he arrived back in Cambodia, he built a house for the Chinese who'd come with him from China so that they could live in comfort in his village. That's

why, there are Chinese in Cambodia today, who are widely known as ‘Cen A-ciy’ or ‘Cen samnaen Tun Ciy’ (The Chinese offered to Tun Ciy) meaning that these are the Chinese that came with Tun Ciy. (Ministry of Education 1994:48)

APPENDIX III

Story of Bentougong Oral History from a Hainanese Chinese in Kompong Trach

Formerly, in China, temples to Bentougong were built to venerate the oldest person in the village after their death. Wherever there are Chinese communities overseas, they build temples to Bentougong. Actually, in Kompong Trach district in the past, there were three brothers of Hainanese origin, who were the first Chinese to come to Kompong Trach. They came by boat, via Kep, and came to live in Kompong Trach, and each of them built a temple to Bentougong so that other Chinese who came to live after them would continue their worship. The first temples to Bentougong in Cambodia were set up in West Kompong Trach. Later, the provinces of Kompong Cham and Kratie followed suit, along with Phnom Penh.

Bentougong worship venerates three brothers who were the first Chinese to come to Cambodia, 200-300 years ago. The eldest brother was Li Biqiang, (Li Must Be Strong), the second eldest Li Bisheng (Li Must Give Life), and the youngest Li Bixiu (Li Must Be Scholar). These were the first three Chinese to come to Kompong Trach village. Legend has it that they were all naval commanders. After their death, they were deified so that their glory and sense of duty to the people would be immortalized.

In addition to the three brothers, there were three sisters: The first sister was Shengmu Niangniang, in Phnom Penh; the second sister was in Kompong Cham, and the third sister, Shuiwei Niangniang, was in Kompong Trach. There is also a temple to Shuiwei Niangniang in Kampot Town at Juemin School. Shuiwei Niangniang offers protection from the sea and for this reason is the 'Sister' traditionally worshipped by

seafaring Chinese and Chinese living along the coast in Kompong Trach. Generations of Chinese in Cambodia see worship of these three sisters as worship of their ancestors.

Bentougong's powers are wide-ranging. He can heal the sick and protect people from evil. If people have a sickness they can not heal, they go to Bentougong. People also perform the tongue-cutting ritual and stick the paper over their doors to keep out bad spirits and protects the house.

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

KR	Khmer Republican regime 1970-1975
DK	Democratic of Kampuchea. Also known as Khmer Rouge regime 1975-1978
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea. Also known as Khmer Colloquial name for " <u>robab hengsamrin</u> " 1979-1989
SINO- KHMER OR SINO-CAMBODIAN: Refer to Chinese who borned in Cambodia	
SOC	State of Cambodia 1989-1992
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
FUNK	National United Fron of Kampuchea
GRUNK	National United Royal Government of Kampuchea
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
SPK	It's Khmer words "sarporomean kampuja" that means "Press of Kampuchea"
GMD	Guomindang Chinese loyal to leader Chinag Kai Shek who founded the Republic of Taiwan
QUA	Chinese live outside of China
HUAQIAO	Chinese Living abroad
JIANBUZHAI	Huaren " Chinese Cambodian"
HUAREN	Chinese
HUAYI	(Foreign Citizen of Chinese Origin)
HUAREN HUNXUE	(Chinese mixed blood)

ZUGUO (Ancestral Land) refer to China not Cambodia

CHAOZHOU (Teochiu) this term is one among five Chinese dialects

GUANGDONG (Cantonese) this term is one among five Chinese dialects

FUJIAN (Hokkien) this term is one among five Chinese dialects

KEJIAN (Hakka) this term is one among five Chinese dialects

HAINAMKHANG(Hainanese) this term is one among five Chinese dialects

CEN Khmer word that mean" Chinese "

CENCHIW (is the Khmer term literally raw Chinese) refer to Chinese who emigrated
toCambodia from China

CEN KMAU (Black Chinese)

KOUNCEN (Children of Chinese)

KOUNCIWCEN (Grandchildren of Chinese)

BENTONGONGWorship of local territorial gods or Chinese temple

OKHNA Provincial Governor

TOUKAY (Sponcer)

KUY-TIEW (Rice noodles soup or noodles)

WB World Bank

ADB Asia of Development Bank

UNTAC United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

WAT Pagoda or Khmer temple

ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations