

# Ethnic Policies toward the Viet-Cambodians and Sino-Cambodians in the People's Republic of Kampuchea, 1979-1989

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On January 7, 1979, Vietnamese forces marched into Phnom Penh, Cambodia, fewer than three weeks after their initial invasion, ending the three years, eight months, and twenty days of the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror. Utilizing the same strategy that had been used to defeat South Vietnam in 1975, the Vietnamese were able to rout the undersupplied and unpopular Khmer Rouge soldiers with minimal effort.<sup>1</sup>

Upon entering Phnom Penh, the Vietnamese established the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), placing it under the control of a succession of former Khmer Rouge military leaders. Over the next ten years, Cambodia started to rebuild under the guidance of the Vietnamese. Part of this task involved re-assimilating Cambodians who had fled the country over the past decade during the chaos of the Lon Nol and Pol Pot regimes.<sup>2</sup> Although few, if any, Cambodians made it through the rule of the Khmer Rouge (KR) unscathed, the Viet-Cambodians arguably bore the brunt of the KR's discriminatory policies, while the Sino-Cambodians had a more varied experience.

Figures for international migration indicate that by 1979, hundreds of thousands of ethnically Vietnamese and Chinese Cambodians had fled the country.<sup>3,4</sup> However, while the pre-war populations of the two groups in

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (1st PublicAffairs ed. New York: PublicAffairs, 1998), 432.

<sup>2</sup> Lon Nol governed Cambodia as President of the Khmer Republic from 1970-1975. In April 1975 he lost the Cambodian Civil War to the Khmer Rouge forces and fled to the United States. Pol Pot was the leader of Democratic Kampuchea during its existence from 1975-1979, and then continued to lead the Khmer Rouge resistance against the central government until 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia In the Twentieth Century* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), 198.

<sup>4</sup> The largest ethnic group in Cambodia is the Khmer, comprising around 90% of the population. Vietnamese follows them at 5%, and Chinese at 1%, with the remaining 4% made up of a number of different ethnic groups.

Cambodia were approximately the same, data show that they certainly did not recover at the same rate following the establishment of the PRK. Indeed, the Viet-Cambodian population skyrocketed from fewer than 30,000 in 1978 to at least 300,000 by the mid-1980s.<sup>5</sup> The Sino-Cambodian population, in contrast, numbered only around 61,000 in the mid-1980s, down from a 1970s population of several hundred thousand.<sup>6</sup>

Despite promising equality in its constitution, the PRK systematically put the Sino-Cambodians at a disadvantage in a range of endeavors, favoring the Viet-Cambodians. This was the result not just of official policy, but also a slanted implementation of laws that benefitted those of the same ethnicity as the Vietnamese occupiers of Cambodia. An important caveat to this, though, is the extent to which many Vietnamese living in Cambodia, having fled Vietnam shortly after the communist victory, were viewed suspiciously by the Vietnamese government. The policies toward the ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese were reflective of the ongoing tension between China and Vietnam throughout the PRK's existence as well as a warped Marxist economic system that resulted from favoring the ethnic Vietnamese. Regardless of politics, on an individual level, the policy impact on the treatment of Sino-Cambodians and Viet-Cambodians by ethnic Khmers was generally minimal. Suspicions toward the ethnic Vietnamese persisted, and most Khmers did not believe the anti-Chinese propaganda.

## **Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)**

Before examining the People's Republic of Kampuchea, I will briefly survey the history of government policy towards ethnically Chinese and Vietnamese Cambodians during the reign of the Khmer Rouge in Democratic Kampuchea (DK). The brief but violent period during which the Khmer Rouge controlled Cambodia caused millions of deaths and the destruction of Cambodia's infrastructure. In order to properly contextualize the environment in which the PRK came to power, it is important to first examine how the policies of DK were implemented.

Article 13 of the Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea states:

*There must be complete equality among all  
Kampuchean people in an equal, just, democratic,  
harmonious, and happy society [in which] men  
and women are fully equal in every respect.<sup>7</sup>*

Although the wording in the DK Constitution espouses egalitarianism, it

<sup>5</sup> Ramses Amer, "Cambodia's Ethnic Vietnamese: Minority Rights and Domestic Politics," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 34 (3). Brill (2006): 390-391.

<sup>6</sup> Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia*, 196-199.

<sup>7</sup> Cambodia, *Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea*, Art. 13. Accessed April 25, 2016 [http://www.dccam.org/Archives/Documents/DK\\_Policy/DK\\_Policy\\_DK\\_Constitution.htm](http://www.dccam.org/Archives/Documents/DK_Policy/DK_Policy_DK_Constitution.htm).

begs several important questions. First and foremost, what does it mean to be “Kampuchean”? In this context, it is important to analyze how the DK regime treated those who were ethnically non-Khmer, specifically those of Vietnamese or Chinese descent.

The DK regime was rabidly anti-Vietnamese, and over the course of just a few years, it slaughtered thousands of Viet-Cambodians. At the same time, DK policy was more ambiguous toward the Sino-Khmer, no doubt due in part to both the large amount of aid China was providing to support DK and the ethnic Chinese background of many of the Khmer Rouge’s top leaders.

After supporting and training the Khmer Rouge for years, the communists in Vietnam were gaining full control of their country at the same time Phnom Penh was falling to the Khmer Rouge in April 1975. Because of the shared history between the two countries’ communist movements, Hanoi at one point called for “common diplomatic and economic policies” in addition to a “united party” and “united army” with DK.<sup>8</sup> Despite the assurances of then-North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong to Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk in 1970 that Vietnam would respect Cambodia’s sovereignty and territory following the end of the Cambodian Civil War, the Khmer Rouge’s trust in Vietnam was at best tenuous.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, despite Vietnam largely withdrawing its soldiers from Cambodian territory in 1975, peace was fragile, and, by 1977, DK was fighting the communists who ironically had helped establish Cambodia’s first communist cells in Kampong Cham decades earlier.<sup>10</sup>

While outright hostilities with Vietnam were relatively subdued at first, Viet-Cambodians were not so lucky. In an interview with Yale University professor Ben Kiernan, Heng Samrin, who would become one of the leaders of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, recalled that early on in DK, Pol Pot prioritized ridding Cambodia of all Vietnamese people, with Nuon Chea adding, “we cannot allow any Vietnamese minority [in Cambodia].”<sup>11,12</sup>

In practice, this eradication of the Vietnamese minority took several forms. Already, at least 200,000 Cambodians of Vietnamese descent had been expelled from the country in 1970 by the Lon Nol government, and 120,000 more ethnic Vietnamese residents of Cambodia had fled before the Khmer Rouge’s victory in 1975.<sup>13</sup> Under the Khmer Rouge, ethnic Vietnam-

<sup>8</sup> Pao-min Chang, *Kampuchea Between China and Vietnam* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, National University of Singapore, 1985), 41.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>10</sup> Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, *Peasants and Politics In Kampuchea, 1942-1981* (London: Zed Press, 1982), 213, 287-288.

<sup>11</sup> Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide In Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79* (3rd ed. New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2008), 58.

<sup>12</sup> Nuon Chea was Pol Pot’s second-in-command.

<sup>13</sup> Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia*, 196.

ese were quickly rounded up, and by September 1975, 150,000 had been sent to Vietnam. Although some were massacred en route, for the most part they were able to leave DK. However, this policy was reversed by mid-1976, with ethnic Vietnamese prohibited from leaving the country.<sup>14</sup>

According to Heng Samrin, this is when massacres of Vietnamese civilians began, not because of high-level directives from Pol Pot or Nuon Chea, but because anti-Vietnamese directives were interpreted on the local level as calling for massacres. This, though, would change on April 1, 1977, when the “Directive from 870” called for the arrest of all ethnic Vietnamese, in addition to Khmers who spoke Vietnamese or had Vietnamese friends.<sup>15</sup> At this point explicitly sanctioned massacres of ethnic Vietnamese began to occur, with tens to hundreds being killed at a time.<sup>16</sup>

While there clearly was large-scale officially condoned violence against ethnic Vietnamese Cambodians in DK, whether or not this existed for Cambodians of Chinese descent is harder to discern. The DK strictly prohibited speaking languages other than Khmer, and by sending the mainly urban Chinese out into the countryside, it greatly disrupted their traditional social networks. However, those who assimilated with Khmer culture generally survived the DK period more or less unscathed, all things considered.<sup>17</sup>

On the one hand, Penny Edwards points out that although roughly two-thirds of ethnic Chinese in DK were engaged in commercial activity in cities when the KR took power, there are no signs that the DK government specifically targeted them. She backs up her claim with her finding that despite comprising the majority Chinese group in trade and education prior to 1975, the Teochiu dialect group proportionally had the fewest deaths. This, according to Edwards, “undermines the theory that Chinese victims of DK rule were automatically persecuted on the grounds of capitalist or intellectual backgrounds.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Ben Kiernan supports this analysis with research that indicates that, in general, ethnic Chinese were treated no differently than ethnic Khmer and reported no racial discrimination or persecution. When ethnic Chinese were singled out, Kiernan notes, it was usually because, after having had a relatively comfortable lifestyle before the revolution, they were sometimes unwilling to do manual labor in the countryside.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, journalist Elizabeth Becker argues that although conditions varied from region to region in DK, Sino-Cambodians were still the victims of violence because of their ethnicity, and the only reason they were spared the same fate as the Buddhist monks or Chams

<sup>14</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 296.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 296-297.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>17</sup> Sambath Chan, “The Chinese Minority in Cambodia: Identity Construction and Contestation” PhD diss., Concordia University, 2005, 56-57.

<sup>18</sup> Penny Edwards quote in Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia*, 198.

<sup>19</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 298-299.

was because of DK's close relationship with Beijing.<sup>20,21</sup> According to her primary source, a Sino-Khmer businessman from Phnom Penh, the ethnic Chinese were frequently suppressed to, as Pol Pot put it, "ensure the perenniality of the Kampuchean race."<sup>22</sup> Despite this alleged suppression, though, no specific anti-Chinese policies were mentioned, in contrast to the Directive from 870 dealing with the ethnic Vietnamese. While the ethnic Chinese certainly suffered from abuses, it appears that they were not targeted as a race anywhere near the extent that the Vietnamese were. This was likely due to the massive amount of aid DK was receiving from China and the Chinese ancestry of many of DK's top leaders.

Although the DK Constitution guaranteed certain rights to the Kampuchean people, the term "Kampuchean" excluded everything that was non-Khmer. Under the DK regime, the Vietnamese minority living in Cambodia arguably suffered the most. They were the direct recipient of targeted pogroms and policies designed not just to eliminate their culture and language, but also their existence as a group in Cambodia. As shall be shown in the following sections, the status of the ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese in Cambodia greatly changed over the course of the following decade in the People's Republic of Kampuchea.

## The Peoples Republic of Kampuchea

Established after the Vietnamese toppled the Khmer Rouge in January 1979, from the very beginning, the PRK was dominated by Vietnam and its occupying army. Accordingly, for much of the PRK's ten years of existence, policy favored the ethnic Vietnamese, who returned to Cambodia en masse. All of this was occurring at the same time as a brief but bloody border war between China and Vietnam in 1979, following Vietnam's invasion of China-backed Democratic Kampuchea as well as an insurgency led by the KR and other armed opposition groups. Meanwhile, China was also formally reestablishing ties with Vietnam's erstwhile enemy, the United States, and the Soviet Union was scaling back their presence in Asia. To take the evolving geopolitical situation of the time into account to add context to the domestic policies promulgated by the PRK government is therefore important. Many of the policies toward the Chinese and Vietnamese challenged Cambodians' traditional views and relations with these groups and to an extent ran against the economic realities of the time.

## Policy and Practice

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Ratified on June 27, 1981, after several previous drafts had failed

<sup>20</sup> Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 228.

<sup>21</sup> Thousands of monks and members of the Cham ethnic minority were massacred by the Khmer Rouge.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

to gain the approval of the Vietnamese government, the Constitution of the People's Republic of Kampuchea explicitly granted equality to all of Cambodia's ethnicities after the discrimination during the Democratic Kampuchea era. As shown below, whereas the DK Constitution, quoted above, nominally gave equality just to the vaguely defined "Kampuchean people," Article 5 of the PRK Constitution stated that:

*The state carries out a policy of unity and equality among the people of all nationalities living in the national community of Kampuchea.*

*All nationalities must love and help each other.*

*All acts of discrimination against, oppression of and division among the nationalities are prohibited.*

*The languages and scripts as well as good customs and habits of the nationalities are respected.*

*The state takes care of ethnic minorities so they can rise to the common level. The state pays special attention to the development of economy, education, culture, social affairs, health and communications in the mountainous regions and remote areas.<sup>23</sup>*

However, it soon became clear that despite the equality touted in the Constitution, in practice, the PRK government consistently discriminated against ethnic minorities, specifically the Chinese. Whereas some scholars, such as Michael Vickery, assert that there were no laws or official statements that explicitly supported discrimination along ethnic lines, the evidence suggests that there were actually a number of policies, especially in the first few years of the PRK, that were specifically targeted at the Sino-Cambodians.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, despite the belief of many Cambodians that Vietnamese immigration was designed to bring Cambodia even more under Vietnam's control through what was known as "Vietnamization," many of the ethnic Vietnamese returning to Cambodia after fleeing the Khmer Rouge were viewed with suspicion by the government and faced a number of obstacles to re-assimilating to life in Cambodia. What ultimately emerged early on in the PRK, though, was a stratified system in which ethnicity, in this case Chinese and Vietnamese, replaced the class-based Marxist system to which the government in theory adhered.<sup>25</sup> However, the extent

<sup>23</sup> Albert P Blaustein and Gisbert H Flanz, *Constitutions of the Countries of the World: A Series of Updated Texts, Constitutional Chronologies and Annotated Bibliographies* (Permanent ed. Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1971).

<sup>24</sup> Michael Vickery, *Kampuchea: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: F. Pinter, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted, though, that the discrimination the ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese faced in the PRK was nowhere near as bad as the treatment they received under the Khmer Rouge.

of discrimination would start to change after 1985.

It appears that almost from the inception of the PRK government, discrimination against Sino-Cambodians became institutionalized. In 1981, just a few years after the Vietnamese toppled DK, Pen Sovan, the secretary general of the ruling Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), stated that "we do not choose ethnic Chinese or train them to be cadres or use them in jobs in enterprises either."<sup>26</sup>

While the ethnic Chinese were excluded from government and Party posts, in the years immediately following the establishment of the PRK, the ethnic Chinese who returned to Cambodia started to reestablish the commercial enterprises they had been engaged in before DK. Primarily in Phnom Penh and provincial capitals, they would sell goods ranging from gold to cigarettes. These businesses prospered to the extent that, by 1981, there were at least 2,000 of these operations, vastly outnumbering the measly 60 state-run operations established by the PRK government.<sup>27</sup>

To combat this embarrassment, the government planned to expel the "big businesspeople," give their houses to the state, and "break up the big noodle houses, the small markets, and the motor scooter and car repair shops."<sup>28</sup> How the government would implement this was extremely ambiguous with conflicting statements about what would happen to the Chinese and when the final plans would be implemented. Khang Sarin, an advisor to the Ministry of the Interior, first stated that ethnic Chinese who engaged in commerce would be sent to the countryside, but immediately contradicted himself by implying merchants would only need to pay heavy taxes to the state. As state production capacity was still lagging, Khang Sarin then suggested waiting to cut off private enterprise until after "state commerce increases a lot."<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, the most that happened was that a few restaurants closed, but there was no large scale emptying the cities of merchants.<sup>30,31</sup> While the government sporadically deported "vagrants" from Phnom Penh to the countryside, it does not appear that this was specifically targeted toward the ethnic Chinese.<sup>32</sup>

After enjoying some initial commercial successes, the Sino-Cambo-

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea, 1979-1989: The Revolution After Pol Pot* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), 135.

<sup>27</sup> Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 175-176.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-179.

<sup>31</sup> This is distinct from the efforts of the Vietnamese army in February and March 1979 to evacuate market towns in a move that alienated many ethnic Chinese. Many Sino-Cambodians fled to Thailand, where most were forced by the Thai military to return to Cambodia [Stephen R Heder, *Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance* (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1980), 23-25].

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-180.

dians soon found new policies increasingly restricted their business operations. One early example is the Circular Concerning the Ethnic Chinese in Kampuchea. Issued in 1982, this circular raised concern that:

*The Beijing Chinese expansionists, American imperialists and other imperialist groups, the Thai reactionaries along with their lackeys, Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan, Son Sann, have used some ethnic Chinese to be their lackeys in order to do espionage activities, psychological warfare, economic sabotage, creating panic in the markets, et cetera.*

The circular cast a wide net to tie the ethnic Chinese to all of the PRK's main opponents. However, rather than restrict the Sino-Cambodians directly, the circular instead encouraged Vietnamese solidarity and vigilance.<sup>33</sup>

Although the circular may not have created formal institutions to suppress the Sino-Cambodians, Government Policy 351, enacted in 1983, is a prime example of the institutional isolation the ethnic Chinese faced. Government Policy 351 called for a nationwide census of Sino-Cambodians that included photographs and systematic registration. This registry ostensibly served to root out networks of Chinese infiltrators working to undermine the country, but, in reality, the goal of the policy, as one police officer claimed, was "to find out where their [Chinese] capital came from."<sup>34</sup> Government Policy 351 effectively provided the basis to persecute Sino-Cambodians by denying them job opportunities and cultural freedom.<sup>35</sup> It codified what Pen Sovan declared two years earlier, barring Cambodian Chinese from holding administrative jobs in the government as well as positions within the KPRP. These restrictions extended to banning the display of Chinese characters in storefronts, prohibiting traditional festivals, and shutting down Chinese newspapers and schools.<sup>36</sup> At its worst, Sino-Cambodians could be randomly imprisoned for alleged pro-Chinese activities, or simply disappear.<sup>37</sup>

This systematic discrimination alienated many Sino-Cambodians from ethnic Khmers who feared reprisals for being caught associating with the Chinese. Because of the ease with which one could be classified as Chinese or a "351", as it became colloquially known, some took drastic steps to protect themselves. The most common steps taken by people were to become as overtly Khmer as possible by speaking only Khmer in public, changing their complexion through surgery or tanning, or bribing officials to obtain an official 'Khmer' background.<sup>38</sup> Although by 1985 the active anti-Chinese discrimination began to die down, it appears that the policies partially achieved their goals of limiting Chinese activity in the PRK. By the

<sup>33</sup> Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea*, 296.

<sup>34</sup> Chan, "The Chinese Minority in Cambodia", 60.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>36</sup> Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia*, 199.

<sup>37</sup> Chan, "The Chinese Minority in Cambodia", 60.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.



mid-1980's, the ethnic Cambodian population had rebounded from a low of about 30,000 in DK to just around 61,000.<sup>39</sup>

Despite constitutional protections, the PRK government clearly spent the first half of the 1980s trying to demonize the ethnic Chinese as capitalist antirevolutionaries to prevent them from taking important official positions. This stands in stark contrast to official policy aimed at the Viet-Cambodians, who frequently had engaged in commerce before the Khmer Rouge took control. One explanation could be that because Viet-Cambodians not only shared a language and culture with Vietnam, but many had also spent at least the past four years there during DK, they would be favored heavily by the new regime. As we shall see, despite some tensions, PRK policy and practice toward the ethnic Vietnamese was indeed generally preferential, and was perhaps the only period in modern Cambodian history to be so.<sup>40</sup>

Virtually anything would have been better than the treatment the Viet-Cambodians received under the Khmer Rouge. However, one issue that remained unresolved was whether or not the ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia were citizens of Cambodia or Vietnam. This was never completely resolved, and as the PRK solidified its legal and judicial institutions, this was often a sticking point. As scholar Evan Gottesman demonstrates through two brief case studies, Vietnamese advisors in Cambodia would on occasion directly intervene in legal cases against ethnic Vietnamese to pressure Cambodian authorities to step down. However, the defendants in these cases do not appear to have been targeted just because they were ethnically Vietnamese. Rather, they were ethnically Vietnamese people who committed crimes in Cambodia and were ultimately exonerated due to Vietnamese diplomatic pressure.<sup>41</sup>

In the PRK Constitution article quoted above, there are multiple references to “nationalities” living in Cambodia. This applied implicitly to the Vietnamese, who were divided into three categories: those who had fled Cambodia and returned, those who came after 1979, and those who came after 1982.<sup>42</sup> This was established by a 1982 policy directive that was later elaborated by another 1983 policy directive stating that the Vietnamese in the first two categories were free to work in Cambodia and could expect some degree of government assistance, while the third group would have to get special permission to enter the country to live and work. Since the PRK could not control its borders, this was essentially a moot point.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, nowhere in these documents are any Vietnamese referred to as ethnic

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<sup>39</sup> Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia*, 199.

<sup>40</sup> Amer, “Cambodia’s Ethnic Vietnamese”, 401.

<sup>41</sup> Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 167-168.

<sup>42</sup> International Centre for Ethnic Studies. *Minorities In Cambodia*. ([Kandy]: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1995), 21.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

minority citizens. Instead, they are all foreign residents.<sup>44</sup> This provides one explanation as to how the Vietnamese were able to legally justify the preferential treatment of those they viewed as fellow Vietnamese citizens. However, it certainly did not do anything to allay the fears of many Cambodians that hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese nationals were pouring into the country to “Vietnamize” it.

One of the most controversial aspects of the occupation was the issue of the hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese who were emigrating from Vietnam to Cambodia. While official PRK estimates claim that around 56,000 Vietnamese “residents” were in Cambodia, the opposition Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) claimed that the number was closer to 600,000, and today many scholars believe the figure is somewhere between 300,000 and 450,000.<sup>45</sup> Nominally, the PRK “sought to restrict Vietnamese migration but not to prevent it,” but in actuality, it continued more or less unabated due to both a lack of desire and capability.<sup>46</sup>

Although the top leaders of the PRK were handpicked by the Vietnamese, there were a few who refused to be completely controlled by Hanoi. Among them was Pen Sovan, the first Prime Minister of the PRK.<sup>47</sup> The policies he advocated were not meant to discriminate against the ethnic Vietnamese, but rather put them on a level playing field with the rest of the population. Furthermore, he made it clear that the PRK had no desire to deport Vietnamese residents who had lived for a long time in Cambodia. Rather, they simply wanted the authority to control immigration into their country. Ultimately, though, the government lacked the ability to deport immigrants and manage its borders.<sup>48</sup>

As Pen Sovan continued to defy Vietnamese control on issues ranging from immigration to taxes and anti-Vietnamese sentiment began to spread through the top levels of the PRK, Vietnam decided enough was enough. After less than a year in office, Vietnamese troops arrested Pen Sovan on December 2, 1981, for, as then-Foreign Minister Hun Sen supposedly said, opposing Vietnam with “narrow-minded nationalism” and pursuing policies that “betrayed communist principles.” For the next ten years, the government imprisoned Pen Sovan in Hanoi without trial.<sup>49</sup>

Following the disposal of Pen Sovan, the favoritism shown toward the ethnic Vietnamese only increased. In Phnom Penh, the number of Vietnamese engaged in various commercial activities, the same kind the Chinese were nominally prohibited from undertaking, quickly grew to over 19,000.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>45</sup> Amer, “Cambodia’s Ethnic Vietnamese”, 391.

<sup>46</sup> Zachary Abuza, “The Khmer Rouge and the Crisis of Vietnamese Settlers in Cambodia”. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 16 (4). Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS): (1995), 435.

<sup>47</sup> Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 125.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 131.

There they enjoyed Vietnamese-language schools and branches of the Cambodian-Vietnamese Friendship Association, which served to connect members of the Vietnamese community with city officials.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, many of the directives that most directly benefited the ethnic Vietnamese were passed after Sovan's deposition. The Vietnamese were given jobs and land, with around a quarter of the Vietnamese families in Cambodia receiving land and housing as a result of these benefits.<sup>51</sup> Nothing is mentioned about providing for other Cambodians, many of whom lived on collectivized plots of land.

However, it would be incorrect to say that all Vietnamese living in Cambodia were treated equally. In particular, the Vietnamese officials in the PRK government were extremely suspicious of so-called "bad elements" that sought to undermine the Cambodian and Vietnamese revolutions. This group consisted mainly of defectors from the Vietnamese army, people fleeing southern Vietnam trying to make their way elsewhere overseas, and, worst of all, anticommunist "soldiers from the old army [South Vietnam] and other bad people."<sup>52</sup>

The Vietnamese officials controlling Cambodia seemed to be almost as afraid of these "bad elements" as they were of the Chinese. To better monitor and control the Vietnamese, they were placed in Solidarity Groups with the goal of "consolidat[ing] the Vietnamese residents in order to teach the policies of the Cambodian revolution and the Vietnamese revolution, mutual assistance, ceaseless solidarity, etc."<sup>53,54</sup> The leaders of these groups were expected to be vigilant, and, between 1983 and 1985, more than one hundred people were allegedly arrested as part of nine conspiracies of "Thieu Vietnamese traitors."<sup>55</sup> In reality, many of the Vietnamese immigrants went to Cambodia because they had found it difficult to make a living in southern Vietnam, and very few were communists.<sup>56</sup>

Why does this discrepancy between the treatment of Sino-Cambodians and Viet-Cambodians exist? Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia provided a safety net to ethnic Vietnamese in a country that historically was at best suspicious of them and at worst slaughtered them. One reason why the Chinese faced such discrimination is because of the ongoing geopolitical situation with Vietnam and China. Another explanation, however, arises

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 163; Cambodia. *Policy of the People's Republic of Kampuchea with Regard to Vietnamese Resident[s]*. [Phnom Penh]: Press Dept., Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of Kampuchea, 1983, 11-12.

<sup>52</sup> Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 165.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 165-166.

<sup>54</sup> Solidarity Groups could be created along professional or ethnic lines, with most corresponding to ethnicity.

<sup>55</sup> This refers to followers of the former president of South Vietnam, Nguyen Van Thieu.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 165-166.

from Frank Parkin's critique of Marxist class theory.

Parkin argues that the most damaging factor in a class-based society is that "it cannot account properly for those complexities that arise when racial, religious, ethnic, and sexual divisions run at a tangent to formal class divisions."<sup>57</sup> He goes on to point out that in many cases, the collective social attributes of those in a group are important in class formation. That is to say, for example, it matters whether merchants are ethnically Vietnamese or Chinese, which can create social divisions.<sup>58</sup>

Because of the controlling influence of the Vietnamese on the PRK government, an ethnic stratification formed that supplanted the class structure that theoretically should have formed. As shown by Policy 351 in 1983 and the earlier discussions about shutting down the Chinese "big businesspeople," while Viet-Cambodians were able to continue their capitalistic pursuits with Vietnamese protection, a sort of social closure formed. This social closure refers to "a process by which social groups attempt to maximize their rewards by restricting the access of other groups to resources and opportunities."<sup>59</sup>

Social closure manifests itself in two forms: collectivist and individualist. On the individualist side is something like the Soviet system of *nomenklatura*, which compared individuals for positions based on ideological and party dedication.<sup>60</sup> A collectivist exclusion would be based on ethnicity, such as the discrimination against the Sino-Cambodians in the PRK when considering whom to give preference for jobs or who would be allowed to run small businesses.

In the collectivist exclusion model present in the PRK, the authorities sought repeatedly with varying degrees of success to shut down enterprise to preserve the integrity of the Marxist system.<sup>61</sup> Even though it appears that on occasion the government targeted Vietnamese in addition to the Chinese for their bourgeois tendencies, the influence of the Vietnamese government was such that rather than treating all capitalists equally, the traditional class structure was perverted to realign along ethnic lines where the Viet-Cambodians could operate more or less as they wished. In contrast, under Policy 351, the Chinese had to be careful of their actions, fearing that a misstep could lead to them disappearing or being sent to reeducation camps.

While this provides a convincing framework for the PRK before 1985, it does not explain why things started to liberalize after 1985. Do-

<sup>57</sup> Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 154.

<sup>60</sup> Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory*, 67.

<sup>61</sup> Following Vietnam's liberation of Cambodia, Vietnam imposed a Marxist-Leninist government there modeled off of the one in Vietnam.

mestically, the main reason was the changes brought about following the KPRP's Fifth Party Congress in 1985.<sup>62</sup>

At the Fifth Party Congress, Hun Sen was installed as Prime Minister. Not unlike Sihanouk and the French several decades earlier, the ability of the Vietnamese to influence a young Hun Sen when he was the PRK's Foreign Minister no doubt played a strong role in the decision to elevate him to Prime Minister.<sup>63</sup> However, once in power, Hun Sen was not as easy to control as the Vietnamese had originally planned, and he quickly worked to consolidate power. Along with President of the National Assembly Chea Sim, Hun Sen replaced almost all of those with heavy backing from Hanoi, with only five out of the thirty-one members of the KPRP's central committee after the congress being from the Khmer Viet Minh.<sup>64</sup>

Following the Fifth Party Congress, it appears there were no official changes in policy toward the ethnic Vietnamese or Chinese. However, there was a change in whom the government referred to as enemies. A shift in rhetoric following the congress can be seen in an exchange Hun Sen had with a visiting delegation from the East German Ministry of Justice in 1986. Even as the war with the Khmer Rouge continued to escalate, rather than discussing China as a threat to the PRK, he only singled out the "Pol Potists" as perpetrating crimes in Cambodia.<sup>65</sup> While one quote does not show a trend, this statement seems consistent with events under Hun Sen's rule in the PRK, which, though corrupt, did not single out the Vietnamese or Chinese for crimes of an economic nature or otherwise.

Additionally, starting in 1984 it became abundantly clear that the collectivized system that had been in effect in the PRK was not working. There was no system in place to ensure that collectives got the resources they needed, and in fact, many local cadre were actively involved in selling off collectives' land. While the Party knew that their policies were not working, they were not sure how to enact reforms while still ensuring stability.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, President Heng Samrin acknowledged during his report to the KPRP's Fifth Party Congress in October 1985 that government actions were not in line with the reality in the country. He noted that it was "imperative to continue to build the party into a solid Marxist-Leninist party with a correct political line... to make the party a vanguard detachment of the Cambodian working class animated by a heroic fighting will, absolutely loyal to the interests of the working class and laboring masses of Cambodia."<sup>67</sup>

In the end, Heng Samrin failed to accomplish these goals. As membership in the KPRP rapidly increased from 10,000 in 1986 to 22,000

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<sup>62</sup> The following section will discuss the international aspect of this.

<sup>63</sup> Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 208-209.

<sup>64</sup> Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea*, 200.

<sup>65</sup> Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 200.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 272-274.

<sup>67</sup> Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea*, 198-199.

in 1988, ideological training increasingly fell to the wayside.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, the situation in the country looked dire. Across the board, economic targets were consistently missed by upwards of fifty percent, salaries were abysmal, and the black market thrived.<sup>69</sup> This last point served as a windfall for the Sino-Cambodians. As the state could not always provide its employees with the food rations they were supposed to receive, the state instead had to supplement salaries. This was very complicated to accomplish, and the unsustainable system spiraled out of control. While difficult to prove, it seems logical that as the state found itself unable to provide essentials, the commercial enterprises run by the Chinese would become increasingly prominent as a means to secure food and other items. Had the state continued to try to shut these down or restrict their operations, it only would have hurt the legitimacy of an already ailing and disliked government. Therefore, the PRK was left with little choice but to ease their implementation of restrictions of the ethnic Chinese.

Thus, it can be seen that despite the egalitarian views espoused by the Constitution and some Western scholars, almost from its inception, the PRK set about isolating the Chinese community while aiding the Vietnamese. This helped cause the Chinese community, which had been roughly the same size as the Vietnamese community before the Khmer Rouge, to have only an anemic resurgence while the Vietnamese population skyrocketed from numbering in the tens of thousands in 1979 to the hundreds of thousands just five years later. Many of these migrants, Vietnamese and Chinese alike, engaged in similar occupations, primarily involving commerce. While structural inadequacies prohibited the PRK from completely shutting down these enterprises, the hodgepodge enforcement regime that emerged seems to have exclusively targeted the ethnic Chinese, demonstrating the extent to which a social exclusive system giving preferential treatment to the ethnic Vietnamese was created. Not until the last half of the PRK's decade in power did restrictions began to ease, but at this point, Vietnam and the KPRP were rapidly losing control over the country.

## **Cambodia and the World**

We have seen that on a national level, Vietnam's influence on the PRK government resulted in a system that benefitted the ethnic Vietnamese at the expense of the Chinese. But why did Vietnam, and by extension the PRK, feel compelled to go to such lengths to suppress the ethnic Chinese? As shown above, the most severe policies targeting the Chinese were ended by around 1985. In looking at events around the world in the mid-1980s, a relationship is apparent between the decline in anti-Chinese discrimination in PRK policies and the emerging power dynamics between China, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Going back once again to the PRK

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-200.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-211, 215-216.

Constitution, the Preamble states that:

*The Chinese expansionists and hegemonists in Beijing, acting in collusion with U.S. imperialism and other powers, are undertaking to destroy the revolution of our country. But the situation in Kampuchea is irreversible. Our people will certainly triumph. The enemy is doomed to failure.*

Nobody can deny the role China played in supporting the Khmer Rouge in its continued struggle against the PRK after the liberation of Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979. When the Japanese Prime Minister went to Beijing to try to create a political solution to the problems in Cambodia shortly after the invasion, Deng Xiaoping simply said, “It is wise for China to force the Vietnamese to stay in Kampuchea because that way they will suffer more and more.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, throughout the existence of the PRK, China, along with many other countries, continued to supply the CGDK with the means to resist the PRK.<sup>71</sup>

China evidently chose to support the Khmer Rouge, but what was the connection between China and the Sino-Cambodians? Can we give any credence to the Vietnamese theory that China was somehow manipulating the Sino-Cambodians to subvert Vietnamese authority? In fact, only one of seven ethnic Chinese in Cambodia was not a Cambodian citizen, and only one in twenty-three was born in China. Therefore, the vast majority of Sino-Cambodians had at best a tenuous connection to the mainland.<sup>72</sup> Instead, it appears that in the wake of the Sino-Vietnamese border conflict in 1979 and China’s support for the KR, Vietnam gave in to a paranoia that was divorced from the reality. This was due not only to the loose connection Sino-Cambodians shared with China, but also the suffering they had just experienced at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. Furthermore, there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that Beijing was funneling resources to the ethnic Chinese in areas controlled by the PRK in an attempt to undermine Vietnamese authority.

Accordingly, China seemingly cared little for its diaspora in Cambodia, with China’s overriding concern stemming from Soviet support for the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. China was chiefly worried that Soviet influence in the PRK through Vietnam posed a security threat to them and believed, correctly, that without Soviet support Vietnam would have to pull out of Cambodia.<sup>73</sup> So great was the threat to China that before Sino-Soviet talks began in 1982, Chinese Communist Party Secretary-General Hu Yao-

<sup>70</sup> Ben Kiernan, “KAMPUCHEA 1979–81: National Rehabilitation in the Eye of an International Storm”. *Southeast Asian Affairs*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) (1982): 185.

<sup>71</sup> Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 139.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>73</sup> Chang, *Kampuchea Between China and Vietnam*, 130-132.

bang considered Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia equally as threatening as the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan and Mongolia, declaring that they posed "grave threats to the peace of Asia and to China's security." These concerns were repeated again in 1983, and in 1984, Beijing stated that the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance was the "root of tension and turbulence in Southeast Asia and gravely threaten[ed] the security of Kampuchea, the ASEAN states and China."<sup>74</sup>

On the Vietnamese side, mounting international opposition pressed them to moderate their stance in the PRK. Between 1979 and 1985, the number of United Nations resolutions against Vietnam rose from 91 to 114. At the same time, China, North Korea, ASEAN and the United States were providing the non-communist factions in the CGDK with aid, and China was also giving a substantial amount of aid to the Khmer Rouge.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, in 1983, the UN declared the crisis in Cambodia over and promptly banned development aid to the PRK from all UN members and organizations, with just a select few organizations able to deliver humanitarian aid.<sup>76</sup> However, while some countries were beginning to question the benefits of continuing the "bleeding Cambodia and Vietnam white" strategy by the middle of the decade, the United States, China, and ASEAN could not agree on a way forward.<sup>7778</sup>

The tipping point ultimately came in 1985 when Deng Xiaoping acknowledged that China would not oppose a Soviet base in Vietnam at Cam Ranh Bay as long as Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia. Shortly thereafter, a senior Soviet Asia specialist told scholar Nayan Chanda "Vietnam would have to seek an accommodation with China. They cannot afford to have a hostile China on their border in perpetuity."<sup>79</sup>

The year 1985 was important to the PRK and would leave a lasting impact on the country. Likewise, in many ways 1985 also marked the beginning of the end for Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia due to the influence of other countries. As Hun Sen solidified his power in Cambodia, Vietnam and China underwent significant internal changes of their own to liberalize their economies. These changes contributed to a ripple effect of liberalization in Cambodia, as it had to adapt to new economic realities. Meanwhile, in a sign of warming Sino-Soviet ties, the USSR stationed twenty to twenty-five naval vessels in Cam Ranh Bay in 1986, and while publicly the Soviet Union continued to support the Vietnamese occupation, more and more

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>75</sup> Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War After the War* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 392.

<sup>76</sup> Benny Widyono, *Dancing In Shadows: Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge, and the United Nations In Cambodia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 32.

<sup>77</sup> "Bleeding Cambodia and Vietnam white" refers to the strategy amongst ASEAN states of making it so costly to occupy Cambodia that Vietnam withdrew.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 34.; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 392-393.

<sup>79</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, 400-401.



Soviet officials realized that it would be in the Soviet Union's best interest for Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia.<sup>80</sup> As economic support for Vietnam declined, Vietnam's debt began to rapidly rise. With defense against Khmer Rouge forces draining substantial human and financial resources after 1985, Vietnam's will to continue the occupation deteriorated.<sup>81</sup> Several years later, in 1988, Vietnam announced its plan to withdraw 50,000 troops from Cambodia by the end of the year. Vietnam's ten-year occupation of Cambodia finally came to an end as the last of its troops withdrew on September 26, 1989.<sup>82</sup>

With a significant occupying force that at its height numbered well over one hundred thousand Vietnamese soldiers and advisors, PRK official policy benefitted the ethnic Vietnamese. Given the historical animosity between Cambodia and Vietnam, one cannot assume that institutions favoring the Vietnamese developed naturally even though Vietnam had liberated Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge. Although Vietnam's influence started to decline after 1985, it did not decline to the extent that the PRK was able to permit discrimination against the ethnic Vietnamese.<sup>83</sup>

The link between international affairs during the PRK and policy toward Viet-Cambodians is more obscure. Certainly, there is a correlation between worsening Sino-Vietnamese relations in the first half of the 1980s and the various anti-Chinese policies discussed in the preceding section. In 1980, the "fraternal intervention" of Vietnamese advisors succeeded in creating a constitution for the PRK that eliminated any democratic choice in Cambodia's leadership, thereby all but guaranteeing that Hanoi could easily install whomever it wanted in positions of authority.<sup>84</sup> The sham elections that subsequently occurred resulted in almost unanimous approval of the Vietnam-installed leaders in the PRK, cementing Vietnam as the country calling the shots in Cambodia.<sup>85</sup> It does not appear that the declining fortunes of Vietnam toward the latter half of the decade had any effect on the PRK's policy toward the ethnic Vietnamese.

The case of the Sino-Cambodians is much more complicated. In order to prevent Vietnam from fully consolidating power in Cambodia and further surrounding China with countries in the Soviet bloc, China poured an enormous amount of aid into the CGDK, most notably the Khmer Rouge faction. In this match of wills, China clearly had the advantage over Vietnam, with top Chinese leaders recognizing that they needed to simply bide their time until Vietnam eventually was forced to withdraw. The PRK and Vietnamese officials were extremely wary of China. On the one hand, the anti-Chinese policies they enacted were no doubt genuinely intended

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 398, 400-401.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 404; Slocomb, *An Economic History of Cambodia*, 220.

<sup>82</sup> Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea*, 247.

<sup>83</sup> International Centre for Ethnic Studies, *Minorities In Cambodia*, 20-25.

<sup>84</sup> Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 111-113.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

to restrict the Chinese to help combat possible enemy networks. However, the data clearly show that there did not exist a strong connection between the Sino-Cambodians and China. In order to pressure China to moderate its support of the opposition and go to the negotiating table with Vietnam, that Vietnam urged the PRK to target the Chinese “big businesspeople,” believing incorrectly that China would actively try to prevent this action is possible.

If this were purely the case, why would Vietnam not keep up the pressure throughout the 1980s? China never offered them concessions of any sort, nor does it seem that discrimination against the ethnic Chinese was a matter of particular concern to the United Nations in the relevant resolutions passed between 1979 and 1984. Instead, the resolutions primarily seem to urge foreign powers, specifically Vietnam, to end their occupation of Cambodia.<sup>86</sup> Had Vietnam wanted to continue or even expand the policies restricting the activities of the Sino-Cambodians, they probably could have pressured the PRK government to do so.

There are no official documents or statements that can be referenced that explicitly tie policy toward the ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese living in Cambodia to an event going on between the major power players. However, it seems that the major policy shift in 1985 may have occurred because the Soviet Union knew that the situation in the PRK was unsustainable for Vietnam. This resulted in the Soviet Union pressuring Vietnam to allow an easing of the anti-Chinese policies to avoid derailing the ongoing Sino-Soviet rapprochement. According to China, one of the “three obstacles” to Sino-Soviet normalization was Soviet support for Vietnam’s occupancy of Cambodia, and, in contrast to General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko, who died in early 1985, Gorbachev was much more open to increasing ties with China.<sup>87</sup>

Shortly after the unnamed Soviet official told Nayan Chanda that Vietnam would have to resolve its issues with China, in 1986, Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev gave a speech in Vladivostok in which he pledged to disengage the Soviet Union from Asia and offered to go to China to help create “an atmosphere of good-neighborliness.” This was followed by a trip to Southeast Asia by Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in 1987. During his time in Hanoi, he met with party leaders to discuss the Cambodia dilemma. Five days later, the Vietnamese Prime Minister announced that Vietnam would withdraw from Cambodia by 1990.<sup>88</sup>

Ultimately, Vietnam was under intense pressure from China, the

<sup>86</sup> United Nations General Assembly. Case No. 57. Art. 2(7), Repertory, Suppl. 6, vol. I (1979-1984) Accessed May, 2016. [http://legal.un.org/repertory/art2/english/rep\\_supp6\\_vol1-art2\\_7\\_e.pdf](http://legal.un.org/repertory/art2/english/rep_supp6_vol1-art2_7_e.pdf).

<sup>87</sup> Robert C. Horn, “Vietnam and Sino-soviet Relations: What Price Rapprochement?”. *Asian Survey* 27 (7) University of California Press (1987): 736-740.

<sup>88</sup> Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 277-278.

Soviet Union, and much of the global community to change its position on Cambodia to fit various agendas. The PRK likely maintained its generally pro-Viet-Cambodian policies because Vietnam's influence was still such that it would not have permitted any reforms. However, a link can be drawn between the intensity of the policies targeting the ethnic Chinese and the Soviet Union's willingness to support Vietnam against China. Once the reform-minded Gorbachev came to power, though, it appears that the Soviet desire to improve its ties with China led to an increase in pressure on Vietnam to pull out of Cambodia. A financially struggling Vietnam faced with a persistent insurgency in much of the country had little option but to give in to Soviet demands.

## The View on the Ground

The policy of the PRK toward the ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese varied over the decade of its existence due to a variety of international and national factors. Regardless of stated macro-level policy objectives, the implementation of some policies had drastically different effects on different ethnic groups. The Viet-Cambodians had for decades been demonized by one regime after the other, yet now found themselves enjoying, at least in theory, the support of a government effectively run by Vietnam. Meanwhile, the Sino-Cambodians returning to Cambodia initially faced a tremendous amount of suspicion and discrimination due to their alleged connections to China. These experiences of ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese contribute to an overarching narrative of the impact of various government policies.

When Vietnam invaded DK in December 1978, it was “in answer to the request of the Kampuchean people,” freeing them from the tyranny of the Khmer Rouge.<sup>89</sup> Traveling to Cambodia shortly after the Vietnamese invasion, Ben Kiernan seemed to confirm this sentiment through interviews with a number of people in Phnom Penh and the surrounding countryside. Amongst those interviewed in Phnom Penh, there was an almost unanimously positive view of the invasion. While several expressed apprehension about the permanence of the occupation, multiple interviewees noted that the Vietnamese did not kill the Cambodians, and, had Vietnam not invaded, many of them would likely have been killed by the Pol Pot regime.<sup>90</sup> Meanwhile, Kiernan found that anti-Vietnamese sentiment in the countryside was almost non-existent.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, it appears that at first there was little to no open animosity toward the Vietnamese in the liberated areas, with some PRK officials (most of whom had fled to Vietnam from DK) noting that the historic tensions between the two countries were now “out of date.”<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Slocomb, *The People's Republic of Kampuchea*, 47.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 371-372.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

As an increasing number of Vietnamese entered Cambodia, attitudes that may have been positive in the beginning began to sour. After the death and displacement of millions of Khmer during the Khmer Rouge, the Vietnamese, with the support of the Vietnam-controlled government, began to fill the vacancies left behind in professions ranging from prostitution to teaching to civil service, despite a low level of cultural and linguistic assimilation.<sup>93</sup>

Surprisingly, even though there was a huge influx of largely uncontrollable Vietnamese immigration, there are no accounts of acts of physical violence against the ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia. However, that is not to say that there was no resistance to the Vietnamese occupation. Gottesman provides evidence of at least one protest that occurred in 1982 in which teachers demonstrated against Vietnamese occupation.<sup>94</sup>

However, these anti-Vietnamese sentiments were not uniform across time or space. Animosity felt by Khmers toward the Vietnamese varied based on the policies the Vietnam-controlled government was implementing at the time as well as the exact profession of the Vietnamese.<sup>95</sup> The overall feeling toward the Vietnamese, though, was that Vietnam was using immigration to gain control over Khmers in Cambodia. As one opposition group proclaimed, “In its scheme, Vietnam has moved hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese nationals into Cambodia as new masters of the land.”<sup>96</sup>

Ultimately, while the Khmers may not have viewed the ethnic Vietnamese particularly favorably, they were not subjected to anything comparable to what was commonplace in the Khmer Rouge or other Cambodian regimes. Even though that Cambodians afraid of “Vietnamization” carried out acts of violence against Vietnamese civilians was entirely possible, there is no textual evidence to support this.

While there is little information regarding the treatment of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia by the general population, there is even less with regards to the ethnic Chinese. In the first months following the Vietnamese invasion, there is one account from Battambang that says that the ethnic Chinese who went there originally encountered a large amount of anti-Chinese sentiment stemming from the aid China had given the Khmer Rouge. However, during a mass meeting, officials with the invading Vietnamese army pointed out that the Chinese had also suffered in DK.<sup>97</sup>

Any anti-Chinese resentment seems to have quickly faded. We have seen that the ethnic Chinese faced a great deal of discrimination from the

<sup>93</sup> Joachim Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Cambodia, vol. 2* (Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus Press, 2011), 262, 267-268.

<sup>94</sup> Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 137.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>97</sup> Wee Willmott, “The Chinese in Kampuchea.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies Jnl. of SE Asian Studs.* 12, no. 01 (1981): 45.

government as the result of policy that itself was caused by tensions between Vietnam and China. This was most clearly demonstrated by Circular 351. That the ethnic Chinese would resist regulations restricting their business practices was to be expected. However, the government did not count on the extent of the resistance from the general population. Many Cambodians did not see the Chinese as potential spies, did not believe in the PRK's ideas of class struggle, and thought Chinese-controlled commercial enterprises were the best way to help the country's economy. Therefore, that Cambodians disregarded the Vietnamese-controlled government's attempts to demonize the Chinese is not too surprising.<sup>98</sup> In sum, the actual effect of these policies is best described by a scholar who stated that "Cambodians thus approached the Party's policy toward the Chinese as they did communism: by ignoring it."<sup>99</sup>

How the policies enacted by the People's Republic of Kampuchea affected the ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese living there by influencing the behavior of the rest of the Cambodian population is a topic that has not been the subject of much research. In general, it seems that there was an overall negative attitude toward the Vietnamese, who were perceived as taking over the country, though this was not necessarily true from one place to another or from one year to the next. Just how this feeling toward the Vietnamese manifested itself is not entirely clear, but most open antagonism was likely kept to a minimum by the occupying Vietnamese military. In contrast, the anti-Chinese policies created in the early 1980s were largely panned, despite the connection between China and the Khmer Rouge. The extent to which these trends were constant throughout the PRK is not entirely known, but that there was much variation in these sentiments is doubtful.

## Conclusion

Between 1979 and 1989, the People's Republic of Kampuchea frequently found itself at the whim of more powerful countries, especially Vietnam. Due to Vietnam's influence, a series of policies were enacted in the early 1980s in response to fears of Chinese influence, resulting in the ethnic Chinese facing a number of restrictions not just in terms of their businesses, but also their cultural traditions. At the same time, the comparatively booming ethnic Vietnamese population engaged in many of the same occupations and faced few if any restrictions. Before 1985, this can be attributed to the ethnically stratified Marxist system that the government inadvertently created, in which the traditional class structure did not uniformly apply for the Vietnamese and Chinese. Instead, what emerged was a system in which the Vietnamese received preferential treatment. Meanwhile,

<sup>98</sup> Milton Takei, "Collective Memory as the Key to National and Ethnic Identity: The Case of Cambodia." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 4, no. 3 (1998): 67.

<sup>99</sup> Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 187.

though, the vast majority of the Cambodian population harbored anti-Vietnamese sentiments as the result of both the occupation and the traditional rivalry between the two countries. Despite the brokenness of the system in the PRK, its policies largely mirrored events between major regional players, primarily Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union. Partly because of tensions between these countries the anti-Chinese policies existed prior to 1985, and partly because of rapprochement and the decline of the Soviet Union there was a relaxation in policies after 1985. In 1985, the KPRP's Fifth Party Congress also brought to power a number of individuals less beholden to Hanoi than their predecessors.

Despite the politics occurring at the national and international level, the PRK was never successful at decisively turning popular opinion against the Sino-Cambodians, or in favor of the Viet-Cambodians. Although there was no ethnic violence in the PRK as in previous regimes, the distrust of the Vietnamese and the fear of the so-called Vietnamization of Cambodia pervaded the country, and the CGDK used this as propaganda against the government. As the Vietnamese withdrew from Cambodia in 1989, many of Cambodia's traditional social cleavages were well on their way to re-entrenching themselves. The ethnic Chinese were once again cementing themselves amongst the Cambodian business elite, and the ethnic Vietnamese were still viewed with suspicion by much of the general Cambodian population.

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