CAMBODIA-CHINA RELATIONS: CULTURAL FRONT

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1- INTRODUCTION

Despite Cambodia and China do not share a common border but the two countries had long been in a historic, cultural and commercial relationship. The relationship between the two countries dates back to early 13th century when Zhou Daguan (Chou Ta-kuan; French: Tcheou Ta-Kouan) led a diplomatic expedition mission to Cambodia and received audiences with Cambodia’s King. His memoir we have learned of the Chinese diplomatic and economic interactions with the ancient Khmer. From this it really reflects the strategic point of interest between the two countries.

On July 19, 1958, diplomatic relations were officially established between China and Cambodia. From then on, the bilateral relations of the two countries have witnessed the test of time and international vicissitudes. The late King Father Sihanouk has stayed in China for a long time to lead the struggle of the Cambodian people for national independence and freedom. China has been a staunch friend of the Cambodian people’s cause.

In April 2006, China and Cambodia agreed to forge a “Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation.” In December 2010, the two countries upgraded their bilateral ties to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation.” Nowadays, the relationship between China and Cambodia are at its best period. China-Cambodia relations have become a model of friendly coexistence and close cooperation among countries. Just as President Xi Jinping has reiterated that China and Cambodia are friendly neighbors and brothers and this has been frequently echoed Cambodian leaders. The two countries cherish traditional friendship that has withstood the test of time and changes in the international situation. The two countries are ready to maintain high-level contacts with Cambodia in various forms, and boost cooperation in major areas. The two countries have always supported each other, both materially and spiritually, at both regional and global levels.

In addition to its economic and political clout expands in Cambodia, Chinese culture and language fit seamlessly into the Cambodian society as well. In term of population, China is the biggest country in the world. It is widely known that Chinese people have been to the rest of the world since upon the time, and they have brought with them the Chinese culture, tradition, belief, and so on. Cambodia is not an exception.

During Chinese New Year, some Cambodian people celebrate Chinese New Year even they are not allowed to have holiday. Therefore, if we emphasize the living style and tradition lives, we will see Chinese and Cambodian people have relationships not only in the 21st century, but also since long time ago. Chinese becomes popular among Cambodians, more and more students have studied Chinese language and Confucius Institute in Cambodia is playing an important role in promoting Chinese culture and language.

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This paper first examines brief history of Cambodia-China relations, the reiterate Chinese ethnic, culture and language in the Cambodian society, and finally discusses the cultural roles in promoting the relationship between the two countries.

2- BRIEF HISTORY OF CAMBODIA-CHINA RELATIONS

Relations between China and Cambodia date back at least to the 13th century, when Chinese emissary Zhou Daguan—also known by his Khmer language name Chiv Ta Koan—visited the Kingdom of Angkor for one year, from 1296 to 1297. More than 700 years later, ties between the two countries are at their strongest ever. But despite their long diplomatic history, China and Cambodia only grew close during the Second World War and after Cambodia gained its independence from France in 1953.¹

The diplomatic relations between Cambodia and China were officially established on July 19, 1958. Chinese leader of different generation have been very close to King Sihanouk and cultivated profound friendship with him personally. With this, it lays a solid foundation for longstanding and stable development of relationship during then Prince Sihanouk was in power. China had long appreciated King Sihanouk for his assistance in breaking China’s isolation in the 1960s by campaigning at the UN for the expulsion of the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the seating at the UN of China mainland. However, during the height of Cambodian civil war in the 1980s, China played a very prominent role in supporting the notorious Khmer Rouge, the Sihanoukist and the Son Sann group to fight against the Phnom Penh government which was ran by Heng Samrin, Chea Sim and Hun Sen. China at this particular period was not friendly to Cambodia as the majority of Cambodian citizens were living under the authority of the Phnom Penh government.²

Their tie was further flourishing during the early post independent Cambodia and King Norodom Sihanouk, at a personal level, was able to cultivate a profound friendly relationship with different generations of Chinese leaders. It is that this friendly relationship that lay a solid foundation for long-standing cooperation between the two nations. However, one should be noticed that at some stages, especially during the 1980s Sino-Cambodian relationship was badly degraded to a very worst in their history. China’s patronage of the communist Khmer Rouge regime during 1975-1978 is widely known in the world and among ordinary Cambodians. And even the fall of this genocidal regime, which committed mass killing of around 1.7 million of Cambodians, China continued to supply the notorious Khmer Rouge with weaponry along the Thai-Cambodian border during 1979 to 1990.³

Political ties between the two countries have been bolstered considerably since 1997. In 2000, President Jiang Zemin became the first Chinese head of state to visit Cambodia, and his trip was followed by NPC Chairman Li Peng in 2001 and Premier Zhu Rongji in 2002. Hun Sen has become a frequent visitor to the PRC post-1997. Hun Sen invariably returns from these trips with a raft of bilateral agreements and pledges of aid. While Western countries, Japan and international agencies are still important donors (collectively pledging $601 million in 2006) they continually threaten to tie future aid to the enactment of much-needed judicial and political reforms, and the eradication of corruption. In contrast, China does not tie economic assistance to improved governance. During Premier Wen’s visit, Hun Sen explicitly thanked Beijing for not linking the two issues, and rebuked other donors by stating “China talks less but does a lot”. In another sign of the close political relationship between the two countries, Cambodia’s King Norodom Sihamoni’s first overseas trip as head of state was to the PRC in August 2005.⁴
In 2000 Cambodia reached the first of three important milestones in its relations with China. In November, President Jiang Zemin became the first Chinese head state to visit Cambodia. At the conclusion of his trip the two sides adopted the Joint Statement on the Framework of Bilateral Cooperation between the People’s Republic of China and the Kingdom of Cambodia. This agreement set out greater bilateral cooperation between the governments, parliaments, political parties, and armed forces of the two countries. The joint statement also made provision for diplomatic consultations and expanded trade and investment ties.  

Cambodia’s relations with China passed their second milestone in April 2006 during visit of Premier Wen Jiabao. At the end of Premier Wen’s trip the two sides adopted an agreement on a comprehensive partnership for cooperation. This document contained provisions for stepped up party-to-party ties, legislative exchanges, and consultations on international and regional issues. Premier Wen pledged US $600 million in financial support over the next four years. Cambodia and China also agreed to speed up China-ASEAN negotiations on a free trade agreement and to promote an ASEAN-China strategic dialogue.  

In December 2008, in a further development in bilateral relations, China launched China-Cambodia Friendship Radio and opened its first Confucius Institute in Phnom Penh. These developments were part of a concerted push to promote Chinese studies, language, and cultural programs among Cambodians and were approved by the Cambodian government.  

In December 2010 Cambodia and China reached the third milestone in their bilateral relations when Prime Minister Hun Sen and President Hu Jintao met in Beijing and agreed to raise bilateral relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership. At the end of his visit Hun Sen witnessed the signing of agreements on strengthening cooperation in energy security, infrastructure development, finance, and consular affairs.  

The year 2012 marks an important turning point in Cambodia-China relations under the comprehensive strategic partnership. In 2012 Cambodia assumed the role of ASEAN chair and hosted a number of ASEAN ministerial meetings, ASEAN summits and other ASEAN-related meetings such as the ASEAN Plus Three Summit and the East Asia Summit. During the year Cambodia hosted visits by President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao. New agreements on aid and trade were made after each visit. China used its special position of influence in Cambodia in an attempt to shape ASEAN policy on the South China Sea, and Cambodia was suitably rewarded for assisting this effort.  

President Hu Jintao visited Cambodia in late March-early April on the eve of the twentieth ASEAN summit. This marked the first time in twelve years since a Chinese head of state visited Cambodia. The media reported that Hu asked Hun Sen as ASEAN chair not to “push” the South China Sea issue and received the pledge that Cambodia shared China’s view that the South China Sea should not be internationalized. China Daily (March 31, 2012) quoted the Chinese ambassador to Cambodia as stating, “Cambodia, as chair country for the ASEAN meetings, will help co-ordinate ties between China and other ASEAN countries,” and further stated it would urge other involved ASEAN countries not to let South China Sea issues affect bilateral ties.  

3-THE PRESENCE OF CHINESE PEOPLE IN CAMBODIA  

Through the relationship closely, the both countries have expanded relations and signed an agreement on the cooperation some fields, particularly culture, tourism and agriculture, and
there are the visiting exchanges between leaders of the two countries. The close ties between Cambodia and China is bringing the large investment from China.

Moreover, because of the two countries' relations have connected for long time, so that the flow of Chinese people to the Kingdom of Cambodia also has a presence in Cambodia until now form Chinese people with bottom class to top class living permanently. Some Chinese people have been married to ethnic Khmer, and they always called them, Khmer-Chinese or Chinese-Khmer. Otherwise some Chinese people had just come in Cambodia to stay temporarily to make the investment.

Before we think about the present of Chinese culture in Cambodia, we need to think about the ethnic Chinese minorities living in Cambodia. There are six ethnic Chinese minorities living in Cambodia such as Teochiu, Cantonese, Hokkien, Hainanese, Hakka and other groups( Mainland Chinese).

The Teochew are an ethnic Chinese minority living in Cambodia. They have been immigrating to Cambodia for many centuries, coming in waves due to wars, political pressures and economic hardships. Nearly all of the descendants of Teochiu immigrants who arrived in Cambodia more than 100 years ago have assimilated into Khmer culture, but most of the descendants of more recent immigrants have retained much of their language and culture and remain distinctly Teochew.

In 1975 the Khmer Rouge gained control over Cambodia and began to systematically purge the middle and upper classes, viewing them as promoters of Western capitalism and a threat to their authority. Since most Teochew people were among the upper classes of Cambodian society, as a whole they suffered much more at the hands of the communists than most other ethnic groups in Cambodia. Attempting to escape extermination, many Chinese fled the country while others tried to mix with Cambodian villagers, passing themselves off as peasants.

When the Khmer Rouge fell from power in 1979, the Teochew returned and settled primarily in Phnom Penh, with a high concentration of their population in the O’Russey Market area.

Although many Teochew arrived in Cambodia as farmers or common laborers, their knack for business eventually pulled them into the world of trade. Among the ethnic Chinese people groups in Cambodia, the Teochew have risen to become the country's leaders in international trade and big business, yet most Teochew stores are small, family-owned businesses. Their days are spent selling or doing business from sunrise to sunset and they rarely take time off for rest. However, during the Chinese New Year celebrations most Teochiu families will stop doing business for 3 or 4 days to celebrate and travel.

Chinese food, traditional medicines, decorations and religious paraphernalia are found in abundance in Phnom Penh. Chinese noodle shops and cafés cover the city and are enjoyed by Chinese and Khmer alike. 11

The Cantonese are an ethnic Chinese minority living in Cambodia. For decades the Cantonese have been immigrating to Cambodia due to wars, political pressures and economic hardships and some have fully assimilated into Khmer culture. Although the children and grandchildren of Cantonese immigrants who were born in Cambodia are Cambodian citizens, most still retain their distinct Chinese culture. Many Cantonese immigrated first to Vietnam but eventually found better opportunities for work in Cambodia.
A smaller group than the Teochiu Chinese, the Cantonese population makes up about 10% of the ethnic Chinese population in Cambodia.

In 1975 the Khmer Rouge gained control over Cambodia and began to systematically purge the middle and upper classes, exacting a heavy toll on the Cantonese population. Attempting to escape extermination, many Cantonese fled to Vietnam due to their past connection with that country, while others tried to mix with Cambodian villagers, passing themselves off as peasants.

When the Khmer Rouge fell from power in 1979, the Cantonese returned and settled primarily in Phnom Penh. There are a few very small groups of Cantonese living in provincial areas as well.

Among the ethnic Chinese people groups in Cambodia, the Cantonese generally work as mechanics, appliance repairmen, craftsmen and carpenters. They are hard workers and rarely take time off for rest. However, during the Chinese New Year celebrations most Cantonese families will stop working for 3 or 4 days to celebrate and travel.

Not unlike the Khmer and other ethnic Chinese groups, the Cantonese love to gamble. A peculiar past time for elderly Cantonese men is to bet on the rain. In the mornings, coffee shops are abuzz with the banter of predictions for the day. Bets often climb into the hundreds of dollars!

The Cantonese people are very superstitious. Most practice ancestral worship, demon veneration and some, Buddhism. It is not uncommon to find an entire wall in their homes covered with altars to an array of different gods, endowed with food sacrifices and burning incense. Even though religious beliefs are expressed in a variety of ways, wealth (Mammon) is the real god of the Cantonese. It is out of fear, not love, that the Cantonese serve these gods, for to not offer sacrifices and burn incense to them is to invite disaster – poverty, sickness and bad luck. Proving to be more pragmatic, the Cantonese do not bury their dead in ornate tombs like other ethnic Chinese groups in Cambodia but have adopted the local Khmer Buddhist custom of cremation.12

The Hokkien are an ethnic Chinese minority living in Cambodia. They have been immigrating to Cambodia for many centuries, coming in waves due to wars, political pressures and economic hardships. The Hokkien come from the same part of China as the Teochiu people (Southeastern China) and are culturally and linguistically similar. The vast majority of Hokkien descendants have almost completely assimilated into Khmer culture, leaving a very small remnant of people who still hold strongly to language and ethnic distinctions.

When the communist Khmer Rouge rebels gained control over Cambodia in 1975 they systematically purged the middle and upper classes, viewing them as promoters of Western capitalism and a threat to their authority. Since many Hokkien people were government workers and military personnel, their people group suffered the greatest losses of any one ethnic group, their population being almost entirely wiped out.

Although there were enclaves of Hokkien villages and communities in various parts of Cambodia before the 1970's with a population in the 10's of thousands, there remains only a few thousand today.
Although the Hokkien have always been inclined to trade and do business like other ethnic Chinese, they also highly value education and positions in government, often preferring work positions rather than business ventures. In provincial areas like Batdambang and Kampong Thom, Hokkien farmers and traders lead a fairly laid-back life, tending fruit or vegetable plantations or engaging in small-time trade. Their counterparts in the city work hard and are committed to their businesses or salaried positions, putting in long hours. Hokkien children are expected to study hard and excel in school, their education geared primarily to studying in Cambodia.

The Hokkien people practice ancestral worship, demon veneration and most practice Buddhism as well. Their mindset is to "cover all the bases" and appease whatever spirit entities that threaten their prosperity or fortune. Fear drives the Hokkien to offer food sacrifices and burn incense to these gods. Because they pride themselves in adopting the customs and culture of the local people, the Hokkien have added Buddhist practices to their own set of beliefs, celebrating all of the major Khmer Buddhist holidays and venerating monks and holding to many of the Khmer superstitions. Although they have a well-developed sense of the spirit world, sadly, they do not believe in a creator God.

The Hainanese are an ethnic Chinese minority living in Cambodia. For centuries the Hainanese have been immigrating to Cambodia due to wars, political pressures and economic hardships. The earliest Hainanese settlers immigrated to Cambodia more than 500 years ago, and settled in a small province on Cambodia's coast, Kampot. There is still a large Hainanese population in Kampot Province, with Chinese temples and Chinese schools, which now use Mandarin as their language of instruction.

Originally, the Hainanese came as farmers and established large pepper plantations in Kampot. In time, they turned their focus to larger enterprises of producing salt in salt fields. In 1975 the Khmer Rouge gained control over Cambodia and the Hainanese population dispersed to various parts of the country. The flight of Hainanese away from Khmer Rouge control and the loss of life due to executions and starvation decimated the population. The remaining Hainanese population is less than 1/5 of its former size.

Today, many Hainanese still live in Kampot, while a large number have settled to do business in Phnom Penh.

Of late, the Hainanese have distinguished themselves as experts in the food catering business. Many Hainanese run coffee shops, Chinese noodle shops and other businesses in the food industry. They are hard workers and rarely take time off for rest, stopping work for only a few days a year during Chinese holidays to celebrate and travel.

Like most ethnic Chinese in Cambodia, Hainanese children spend their days attending both Chinese schools and state schools. Their parents frown upon any extracurricular activities and encourage them to work hard to be good students. Because they spend most of their time at work or school Hainanese people have little time for entertainment and socializing. The Hainanese people are very superstitious. Most practice ancestral worship, demon veneration and some, Buddhism. It is not uncommon to find an entire wall in their homes covered with altars to an array of different gods, endowed with food sacrifices and burning incense. The Hainanese in Kampot worship a territorial spirit called Bentougong. Their worship involves demon possession and tongue-cutting ceremonies where after slicing their tongues open with a cutlass, they lick pieces of paper that have a symbol of fortune or blessing and hang the amulet above their the door of their homes or in their shops. They believe that Bentougong will then bless their families and businesses and give them good
luck and prosperity. This dark practice highlights their spiritual depravity and and their need of a Savior.\textsuperscript{14}

The Hakka are an ethnic Chinese minority living in Cambodia. For many decades the Hakka have been immigrating to Cambodia from mainland China due to political pressures and economic hardships. Although the children and grand children of Hakka immigrants who were born in Cambodia are Cambodian citizens, most still retain at least some of their distinct Hakka culture. Locally, the Hakka are referred to as "Chen Kek" or "Kek Chinese." The Hakka are the smallest of the ethnic Chinese groups in Cambodia, and although accurate population statistics are unavailable, estimates of their population ranges from 2 to 3 thousand.

The mid to late 1970s was a time of great turmoil for the Hakka, as well as all the peoples of Cambodia. Many lost their lives as the Khmer Rouge were exterminating the upper classes. The Hakka fared much better than other Chinese ethnic groups because they tended to be among the lower classes and were not targeted by the Maoist communists. Although some Hakka escaped to neighboring countries during those years, most successfully passed themselves off as peasants.

When the Khmer Rouge fell from power in 1979, the Hakka returned to rebuild their lives, mostly in Phnom Penh. But there are 3 remote villages in Ratanakiri Province that are entirely made up "Kek Chinese" as well.

In Phnom Penh, the Hakka generally work as traders, selling fruit, vegetables, meat, Chinese traditional medicine and various imported goods, while others make their living as street vendors selling fruit in the evenings. Their blue carts laden with fresh fruit continue to be an icon of Phnom Penh night life.

The Hakka living in Ratanakiri make a living as traders of forest products, and live a quiet life in a very remote area. They purchase various nuts, resins, roots and endangered animal species from local tribal peoples and sell them to traders from mainland China, who then make traditional Chinese medicines out of them. Though remote, they still want their children to study Chinese and have regularly hired tutors from Taiwan to come and teach them.

The Hakka people are very superstitious, practicing ancestral worship, demon veneration and some, Buddhism. Even though religious beliefs are expressed in a variety of ways, wealth (Mammon) is the real god of the Hakka. Out of fear the Hakka purchase various talismans and charms to ward off disaster – poverty, sickness and bad luck. Sadly, they do not have a concept of a creator God and try to appease whatever spirit they think stands in the way of their prosperity and happiness.\textsuperscript{15}

The Mainland Chinese Living in Cambodia: Currently, there are as many as 30,000 mainland Chinese expatriates living in Cambodia. As China’s doors continue to open wider to the outside world, more and more mainlanders are taking the opportunity to venture across China’s borders in search of higher salaries and better lives. Finding an open door of welcome from the Cambodian government and opportunities to market their skills, the mainland Chinese have been increasingly pouring in. Although they come from many different parts of China, they all share a common language (Mandarin) and similar culture.

Most Mainland Chinese Expatriates in Cambodia are businessmen, garment factory managers or Chinese language teachers. Like other expats living in Cambodia, most
mainland Chinese expats are not immigrants. Rather, most of them stay in Cambodia for just a few years without assimilating to Cambodian culture, and then return to their home country. Because they are living in Cambodia on a short-term basis, they live simply and work long hours to maximize their potential of making money.

The Mainland Chinese Expatriates are more modern-thinking and technologically adept than the other ethnic Chinese people groups in Cambodia and are better educated as well. Seeing themselves as higher class, they tend to lack close relationships with other ethnic Chinese or Khmers, marginalizing themselves from the potential of long-term relationships in Cambodia. Time off from teaching or work is often spent in urban-style living, spending time at health clubs, coffee shops, bars and shopping malls. During Chinese New Year, some return to China to celebrate with their families.

The Mainland Chinese Expatriates do not tend to be as superstitious as Chinese-Cambodians. Some may practice ancestral worship, demon veneration and Buddhism, but the modern god of most is success and wealth. Much like their urban counterparts throughout the world, materialism and atheism dominates their worldview. Because they are not surrounded by family and friends pressuring them to hold to traditional beliefs, they are often more open to exploring new ideas about faith, religion and spiritual ideas than other Chinese peoples in Cambodia. Hence, they are the only Chinese people group in Cambodia in which the gospel has made a significant impact to date. There are currently 7 Chinese congregations in Phnom Penh, comprised almost entirely of Mainland Chinese Expatriates.16

4- CHINESE CULTURE AND LANGUAGE IN CAMBODIAN SOCIETY

CHINESE CULTURE IN CAMBODIAN SOCIETY

Belief

Belief was one of the principal components of Chinese living in Cambodia. If a disaster or any problem occurred and cannot be managed by using modern approaches, they usually relied on traditional practices of their own. Chinese brought with them costumes and traditional patterns from China to their second homeland Cambodia, and passed these beliefs on to their descendants, through several generations.17

Because of the belief, the Chinese people and the Chinese association in Cambodia built the Pen Thao Kong temple that symbolizes the Chinese belief. This kind of temple was erected and dedicated to the departed elderly inhabitants. The Chinese in Cambodia, usually bury the corpse or ashes of their grandparents, they do not send them back to China for burying. They believed that spirits of their ancestors still remained in Cambodia; the descendants considered them as guardian spirits who protected and took care of the living. Followers of the Chinese lineage set up the Pen Thao Kong temple to dedicate it to the ancestral spirits, as they would in their original country.

Otherwise, Pen Thao Kong temples were erected almost in all Chinese large communities in Cambodia. This erection represented their love towards their ancestors and memories of their life with their departed relatives. In addition, it was customary practice for strengthening their communities, and returning good deeds to the first Chinese settlers. A Pen Thao Kong temple in Kampong Trach district was built to memorize the three elders, known as the first Hainanese Chinese settlers in Cambodia. Nowadays, under the auspices of Chinese residents in the Western world like the USA, France, Australia (former inhabitants of Cambodia) and local Chinese, Pen Thao Kong temples increased in size. For instance the one in Mongkul
Borei district was recently erected at $3,000 donations from some Chinese in the USA. The temples were usually set up near or within schools, marketplaces, Khmer pagodas or Chinese association offices.

However, most were built on the premises of a school as it was easier to find someone to maintain them and to attract students. Their parents contributed in cash to organize ceremonies within the temples. Building the temples at the marketplaces facilitated access for people doing business, to pray or seek a fortune-teller. If these people had success in their jobs after praying they will, occasionally, share money with the temple as sign of gratitude.

Besides sacred places for worship, Pen Thao Kong temples had another role in social development for the Chinese associations. They were attractive places for people, both inside and outside the country to attend for worship or contribute in cash to building schools and establishing Chinese associations. They were also chosen to arrange meetings, sharing information and in particular, centre for culture and medical treatment using traditional and psychological approaches. However, some guardian spirit temples symbolically loaned money and lion-shaped cakes made of peanut to visitors. These borrowed things appeared to symbolize “good luck” in doing business or jobs.

For the belief of Chinese/half-Chinese in Chinese temples, Chinese believed that the guardian spirits had magic power that were able to give good luck, solve problems or make them avoid misfortune and accidents. For instance, the temple on the top of Daun Penh mountain in Phnom Penh, attracted worshippers not only Chinese, but also Khmer and Vietnamese who attended daily. Some overseas Chinese who had wished to obtain something by praying at the temple, returned to share money for the restoration and development of the temple as gratitude after having success. At the temple, there were paper-made things to tell one’s fortune, “Cheam See” in Chinese, alongside interpretations in Khmer and Vietnamese.

Some visitors came to prevent misfortune in the future by throwing pieces of pork into the mouth of a stone-made tiger or breaking eggs into this mouth. The stickiness of breaking eggs meant that worshippers wished to be attached to the ancestral lineage without changing their minds; and also demonstrated their fidelity towards the traditional practices of their own. Some frequented this temple to ask for a baby after several years of marriage left them without children. Others with their teenage children attended the temple to say thank you for happiness.

Wat Phnom temple was different from other temples which were usually managed by Chinese associations. This temple was under the supervision of the Phnom Penh municipal cultural department and Phnom Penh Municipal Hall, the ritual organizers were from the municipal cultural department. The contributions of money from worshippers’ were collected by the Municipal Hall. Most guardian spirit temples were not destroyed under the Khmer Rouge rule.

The president of the Banteay Mean Chey Association said the Svay Por temple was not demolished by the Khmer Rouge, adding it was believed that its guardian spirit there had great power. A Khmer man told the research team that in his childhood, he did not dare pass by this temple as he was afraid of power of the guardian spirit dwelling in this temple. In general, the Chinese today organized guardian spirits’ (Neak Ta Chen, in Khmer) processions every year, shortly after the Chinese New Year celebration. This Chinese procession was arranged to mobilize the guardian spirits who participated in Chinese New
Year and to allow them to return to their own world, when they became drunk they sometimes refused to go home.

A grandfather who cares for the Hokkien’s Pen Thao Kong temple, near Bien Sieng School reported that in the Sihanouk (Sangkum Reastr Niyum) time, Chinese organized the guardian spirits’ procession separately by groups of Chinese dialects. Hence during the procession disputes among these groups often occurred over who had to go first, and it was finally settled by annual rotation. In the study it was reported that the guardian spirits’ procession was not organized by dialect groups anymore, the current procession represented all-dialect Chinese involvement. According to the president of the Prey Kabbas district’s Chinese Association, every year at the guardian spirits’ procession he hired Khmer’s Bassac Theater to play instead of “Hy”, a Chinese traditional Opera, which disappeared in the Khmer Rouge time. The Sam Por guardian spirits’ temple in Takhmau, which is a provincial town of Kandal, held “offering” ceremonies which were organized for participants to compete for offerings. In Kampot province, the president of the Chinese Association in Mak Prang village said during the “offering” ceremony, people competed to take only the “red cloth” as they believed it was could be used for protection if tied to the front of vehicles, and especially boats and motorized boats.

**Chinese traditions and Customs**

Cambodian Chinese halfblooded People in Cambodia have always had respected for the significant Chinese traditional festivals. These festivals include: The Chinese New Year, Lantern Festival (Yuan Xiao Jie), Tomb sweeping festival (Qing ming Jie), Dragon boat festival, Hungry ghost festival (Zhong Yuan Jie), and Chinese moon festival (Zhong qiu Jie).  

Cambodian Chinese halfblooded People in Cambodia celebrated these festivals because they knew, after these celebrations; they could get a good health, happiness, good business and longevity.

In this paper will describe briefly about the following three festivals that Cambodian Chinese halfblooded People in Cambodia have practice regularly in every year.

**Chinese New year celebration:**

Cultural experts said the Chinese New Year or Spring Festival is celebrated widely in Cambodia, and He thanks to the respect for Chinese culture of Chinese-Cambodian halfblooded people that have made relationship between the people of Cambodia and China more closely.

Samraing Kamsan, Secretary of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, said Cambodia usually has the opportunity to celebrate three New Year ceremonies: Happy International New Year, New Year and Khmer New Year. Cambodian-Chinese halfblooded people in Cambodia celebrated the Happy Chinese New Year because they believe that New year's celebration will bring them wealth and happiness, luck throughout the new year.

Cambodian government and Cambodian people respect for multicultural value and welcome the diversity of culture, conservation and development. The Happy Chinese New Year is not a public holiday in the country, but the some students of some public schools don’t go to school and for private schools were closed by themselves in order to celebrate the Chinese New Year, because people or their ancestors originated in China.
In the Happy Chinese New Year, Cambodian-Chinese halfblooded people who do business, they always invite the group of art with lion dance (Mong Say), which Chinese Language called Ou Shi or Long say for showing in belief could chase the evil away and bring the happiness and wealth at home or business place respectively.

Every Happy Chinese New Year’s day or the welcome’s day for Chinese traditional New Year Angel, the lion dance has always appeared in the villages and urban areas with more happier atmosphere. The Associations of Lion Dance is located in Phnom Penh.

The Happy Chinese New Year, Cambodian Chinese halfblooded people as well as some Cambodian People with the belief of jumping lion dance in front of the house or front or inside the shop, because they believe that the jumping the lion dance would chase the evil away and bring the happiness and wealth at home or business place respectively.

**Tomb sweeping festival (Qing Ming):**

Tomb sweeping festival (Qing Ming) is a tradition that next generations do not forget their ancestors, and not only is to find any living relatives they did not know. If someone came to the grave to pray, and that the grave was cleaned and piled up, they will know that their family’s members still survived.

Mr. Chea Monyrith, director of the Confucius Institute of the Royal Academy of Cambodia said the grave festival has 4 important purposes: (1) to reunite family members who may have more family members than in the Happy New Year occasion, (2) to dedicate to them who passed away on the spot where the body is located, (3) to clean up the environment and improve the place where the body is located and (4) to Inspire the grateful cultural heritage for next generations to continue this.

**Chinese Moon Festivals (Zhong qiu Jie)**

Both Cambodian Chinese halfblooded people and Cambodian people always celebrated the moon festival, but this ceremony has the different time.

Dr. Sam Sophean said this Festival is a core philosophy for the Chinese people to express the culture of sharing and understanding to show the unity and solidarity like full moon.

**CHINESE LANGUAGE IN CAMBODIAN SOCIETY**

The Chinese language Training in Cambodia have had a long history and for more than 100 years ago, probably since the Qing Dynasty. Chinese people have migrated to live in Cambodia and during that time they also started to educate their children with their language and Culture.

During the 50th-60th decades of the 20th century was the golden era of Chinese language education in Cambodia. That time there were 231 schools in Cambodia, in Phnom Penh there were 50 schools with 50,000 students. In 15 provinces was erected the Chinese, One Province, one school as Battambang Province, Kratie and Kampong Chhnang etc., and as well as there were a primary and secondary school and technical and vocational Training school like Phnom Penh. Meanwhile, after students graduated from Chinese school some students have also opportunity to continue studying in China.
During the 1970-1973 Chinese schools was open as usual until 1973. The end of 1980s, the Cambodian Government did not restrict on foreign language Teaching, so that in some provinces also started teaching Chinese language at home constantly.

Early decade 90s while the government implemented the policy of peace, political stability and national unity, the Chinese education in Cambodia was permitted to restore and establish in formal.

On December 26, 1990, the Association of Cambodian-Chinese in the Kingdom of Cambodia was established, and the rehabilitation and development of Chinese Language education which has become an important work of the Association.

The Chinese school also started under management of the Cambodian Chinese Association in Cambodia such as Teochew association in Cambodia has re-opened Tuon Fa schools; Hakka Association in Cambodia also re-opened Chhong Ching School for teaching Chinese language. In 1991, the Qi Fa School was the first Chinese language school that opened in Kampong Cham Province.

Through development for more than 20 years ago, the Cambodian Chinese association in Cambodia has founded 60 schools and in city and provinces of Cambodia and there are approximately 50000 students and 1500 teachers, Tuon Fa School is a most famous Chinese language school in Phnom Penh that has approximately 15000 students and 300 teachers.

These Chinese schools aims to train Cambodian Chinese children to know the Chinese culture and literacy to share knowledge for developing the Cambodian society, etc. and aim to Cambodian Chinese youth can learn Chinese language easily and better, and to welcome to the Cambodian people and other nations living in Cambodia also can study the language Chinese.24

Nowadays, many Cambodian Chinese halfblooded youth who got education in Chinese schools and are good at Chinese language, most of them are working in local and oversea companies and some of them do own business.

Moreover, at present time there are 10% of Cambodian students studying in Chinese school in Cambodia. Some Cambodian families are sending their children to Chinese school in Cambodia to study the Chinese language in the morning and they go to Cambodian school in the afternoon.

Through the good relationships between the Cambodian royal government and the Chinese government at the present time, the Cambodian royal government has permitted the Institute of foreign languages of the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Asia Euro University and the Confucius Institute of the Royal Academy of Cambodia have the course of bachelor degree in Chinese language.

The Confucius Institute of the Royal Academy of Cambodia also has Chinese language training courses from a low level to high level. According to report of the Royal Academy of Cambodia stated that during four years, The Confucius Institute of the Royal Academy of Cambodia is created 13 branches including the Asia euro University, Hun Sen Prek Sdey lower secondary high school in Koh Thom district, Kandal Province, Mean Chey University in Banteamneanchey Province, Preah Sihanouk high School in Preah Sihanouk Province, Secretariat General of Senate, Military Institute in Kampong Speu,, Cultural and Commercial center of Cambodia, International federation School in Siem Reap Province,
Ankor High School, Headquarter of Commander N°-70, the Royal Academy of Cambodian Police and currently, the Confucius Institute of the Royal Academy of Cambodia opened a branch in the Royal University of fine and Art.

5- CONCLUSION

This paper examines Cambodia-China relations with mainly focusing on cultural front. These relations date back to more than 700 years ago. Cambodia’s geographical, economical, and cultural landscapes as well as the multifaceted mutual influences and interactions between Cambodia and China have allowed Cambodia-China bilateral relations to take a vital position in China’s foreign policy. Currently, the relations of the two countries have reached a new peak in terms of political, diplomatic, military, economic, and social aspects. Cambodia depends on China economically, while China needs Cambodia politically and strategically. Both nations will continue to be good friends at least until there is new leadership in either country. However, it is of great importance that the two countries work together to ensure that their relationship result in a win-win scenario.

In addition to its economic and political influence in Cambodia, Chinese culture and language fit seamlessly into the Cambodian society as well. China actively uses its culture as a tool to pursue peaceful relationships with other states’ civil societies and to project its fascinating attractiveness throughout the world. One major asset of the new Chinese public diplomacy is the increased promotion of cultural exchange. China spends huge amounts of money to attract more students to the Chinese language and culture, funding language programs at primary school level in developing countries and at university level in many countries worldwide including Cambodia.

Through the cultural practice of Cambodian Chinese people as well as Cambodian people in Cambodia and especially, because of the both government of Cambodia and China have good relationships. Understanding of culture such as beliefs, traditional value and language, Cambodian Chinese people and Cambodian people can live together and understand each other.

Since 1993 under the leadership of the Royal Government of Cambodia, Cambodian-Chinese people have enjoyed more freedom of culture than any other regimes. The Royal Government of Cambodia has clearly recognized that Chinese people in Cambodia could practice their own culture and identity, and they are not discriminated by Cambodian people.

The culture, considered as soft power, is playing an important role in strengthening and expanding relations between Cambodia and China. Long-standing historical relations and understanding the value of the two countries’ respective cultures, make the two countries enjoy brotherly relations. These relations have always been based on principle of equal footing and equal rights with no interference into each other’s internal affairs and sovereignty, and respect of mutual interest. These healthy relations are on the right track and fitting perfectly with the process of regional integration in the advent of globalization. These growing relations not only contribute to the development of bilateral cooperation between Cambodia and China but also bring about peace and prosperity in the region and the world.

Notes:
3 ibid, p. 5.
6 ibid, p. 229.
7 Julilio A. Jeldres, *Cambodia’s Relations with China: A Steadfast Friendship*, p. 91.
24 ibid, p. 50.
25 ibid, p. 21.