



សាកលវិទ្យាល័យកម្ពុជា
THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBODIA

UC OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

Volume 1

Issue 1



The University of Cambodia Press
March 2017

UC OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

Volume 1, Issue 1

March 2017

To cite this article:

Heng, K., Toch, S., Sao, C., Chet, V., & Chan, D. (2017). Perceptions of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China. *UC Occasional Paper Series*, 1(1), 41-67.

Perceptions of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China

**Heng Kimkong, Toch Sothiary, Sao Chantola, Chet Vathanak, Chan Dararasmeay
The University of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

Abstract

Cambodia's foreign policy options after 1993 have been a subject of heated discussion amongst researchers, politicians, teachers, students, and the general public. Research has also shown that Cambodian foreign policy has been swaying from side to side, with China tending to carry greater weight on Cambodia's foreign policy continuum. Accordingly, this study explores the perception of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy towards the United States and China. Using quantitative research design, 500 university students in Cambodia were randomly selected to participate in a three-page questionnaire survey designed to explore their perspectives on Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China. Descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS 23.0 shows that despite the massive flow of China's unconditional (no strings attached) aid to Cambodia, a large majority of the Cambodian students surveyed feel positive toward the presence of the US and wish to see Cambodia having better foreign policy relations with this Western superpower in the future. Moreover, it was found that although Cambodian university students have a relatively low to moderate understanding of Cambodia's foreign policy, almost all of them acknowledge the necessity that Cambodia should take a flexible route with regard to her foreign policy choices in order to reap the most benefits. This study helps to fill the gap in literature on Cambodia's foreign policy. In addition, this study has implications specifically for classroom teachers, curriculum developers, researchers, and policy makers whose work involves Cambodian foreign policy.

Keywords: Cambodia's foreign policy; Foreign policy toward the US and China

I. Introduction

There has recently been a lot of discussion in relation to the influence of the superpowers, particularly the US and China, on Cambodian foreign policy. Different views amongst scholars, researchers and policy makers on Cambodian foreign policy relations toward the US and China are not uncommon. This has led to questioning by the Cambodian public as to

which option – the US or China – will be more beneficial for Cambodia in terms of contribution to Cambodian national interests.

Many scholars argue that more linkage with the US significantly impacts on the development of good governance in respect of human rights and democracy in the country. This linkage was after the Cambodian political reform in 1993. Many US-funded projects have been implemented by many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government agencies on healthcare, education, democracy and good governance. The US has continued its relations with Cambodia up to now by providing aid to these sectors. For instance, US foreign assistance in these sectors was \$77.6 million USD dollars in 2014 (US Department of States, 2016).

However, some view the Cambodia-China relations as having a more positive and optimistic impact on Cambodian development. This can be demonstrated by the fact that most foreign direct investments (FDI) and capital investment in the country are owned by the Chinese. Moreover, as a non-traditional donor, China has been the largest donor providing loans to Cambodia and has significantly contributed to development areas such as infrastructure, transportation, energy, and government related activities over the past ten years (Ek & Sok, 2008). The gradually-increasing amount of Chinese financing assistance to Cambodia has been particularly notable. From 1997 to 2001, China provided Cambodia with US\$40 million in aid, more than US\$200 million in loans and at least US\$3 million for military support (Long, 2009). Recently, China announced grant aid of about \$USD 600 million dollars for three years from 2016 to 2018 (Sok, 2016). Even though Western donors have provided Cambodia with substantial amount of aid, Chinese aid has been given to Cambodia without any conditions, best known as “no-strings-attached” aid (Long, 2009).

However, some Cambodians with expertise in Cambodia's foreign policy-related subjects and who are also assumed to be foreign policy experts and political office holders, provide different perceptions regarding Cambodia's foreign policy relations toward the US and China.

They contend that Cambodia should act in a rational way in terms of its international relations and should have a balanced strategic relationship towards the US and China. In addition, they believe that the balancing of Cambodian relations with the US and China is highly important because these two superpowers could definitely contribute to the socio-economic

development of Cambodia. These distinct views on Cambodia's foreign policy relations with the two superpowers have caused heated controversy among the public in general and Cambodian university students in particular.

The views of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy relations with the US and China have never been more uncertain. Such uncertainties have been reinforced by a wide range of geopolitical issues in the Southeast Asia region that are derived from the competition for regional power and influence between the US and China. For example, the stance of Cambodia on the South China Sea dispute has led many Cambodian college students to become skeptical about whether or not Cambodia's pro-Chinese position could bring more or less national interests to the kingdom.

This question also raises another about the extent to which Cambodian university students understand Cambodia's foreign policy relations with the superpowers, particularly the US and China. This present analysis, which employed a cross-sectional study using survey methodology, was therefore initiated not only to seek answers to the question above but to explore the perceptions of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China. The views of university students on foreign policy, either in a positive or negative sense, are crucial for a better understanding of political dynamics in Cambodia. The empirical findings of this survey will provide an insightful notion and a milestone for Cambodian policy makers in both the foreign policy and education sectors to reconsider Cambodia's foreign policy maneuver and to incorporate Cambodia's foreign policy studies into higher education curriculums.

1. Research objectives

The following are the objectives of the present research:

1. To discover the understanding of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China;
2. To explore the perceptions of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China;
3. To investigate the different views of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy relations with the US and China.

2. Research questions

This research attempts to answer the following key research questions:

1. To what extent do Cambodian university students understand Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China?
2. What are the perceptions of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China?
3. What are the different views of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy relations with the US and China?

II. Literature Review

1. The principles of Cambodia's foreign policy

Cambodia is situated in Indochina – the region rocked by war after the French colonization came to an end. After gaining independence from France in 1953, Cambodia was in a position to align herself with neither capitalist nor communist regimes. Two major rivals, the US and China wanted to dominate Cambodia and place this country under the sphere of their political influence. With a view to attaining peace and enhancing the national interests, Cambodia had to adopt an overarching policy to balance herself between the West and the East. Cambodia's position on this continuum has significantly impacted on Cambodia's development today.

Cambodia's foreign policy generally lies on the principle of neutrality and non-alignment. Such a neutral policy was successfully implemented during Sihanouk's short-lived regime in the 1960s. Unfortunately, the policy faced a fiasco because of Prince Sihanouk's irrational decision to align with the North Vietnamese (Gordon, 1965; Leifer, 1967), leading to the demise of his regime and the intervening years of war until the late 1990s. Although the policy failed, its theory and successes are still widely recognized and considered to be conducive to the changes that took place in the regional and international political and economic systems after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, Cambodia has adopted this policy again, as can be reflected in the new Cambodian constitution promulgated in 1993. The formation of this policy is based upon three domains of policy work: strategic, operational and responsive.

In this regard, a number of studies into Cambodia's foreign policy were conducted. In his study, Smith (1965) analyses the complexities of the relations with global powers Cambodia had to deal with. He asserts that Prince Sihanouk adopted a neutral foreign policy to cope with security dilemmas that were caused by the confrontation of the superpowers. In that time, the neutrality of foreign policy was the fundamental footprint for security and war prevention (Gordon, 1965).

Similarly, Leifer (1967) provides an analytical study of Cambodia's foreign policy when Prince Sihanouk's government struggled with national security. This study demonstrates how foreign policy leadership prevented the country from wars, and the policy of neutrality was rational during that time, even although the strategies of Prince Sihanouk were not based on the holding principles of the policy. This was due to the fact that while Sihanouk proclaimed the neutrality Cambodia, he at the same time had contact with the communists in Vietnam. This had drawn Cambodia into the battlefield of the Vietnam War. With reference to this issue, Pilch (1998) further argues and explains that the main justification of Cambodian foreign policy at that time was the preservation of integrity and independence of the Cambodian nation, in the face of the hostility of its neighbors, much larger in size, and the confrontation between world powers in the region.

Another study by Brown and Zasloff (1998) in search of peace during the Vietnamese military occupation in Cambodia shows that most of the goals which had been achieved were greatly influenced by larger superpowers and international institutions. Despite little emphasis on Cambodian foreign policy, the study highlights a milestone of Cambodia's relations with other larger countries, particularly the US and other regional superpowers which led to the establishment of Paris Peace Agreement in 1991.

In a qualitative study into Cambodia's foreign policy and ASEAN, Kao (2002) provides an analytical discussion of the efforts made by the Cambodia's government to achieve regional integration. In the study, he envisions that Cambodia will benefit from this integration in terms of foreign policy and socio-economic development. He further underscored that Cambodia can even diversify trade opportunities and bilateral relations with other regional and global powers to limit the threats from foreign invasion (Kao, 2002).

Cambodia's neutral foreign policy, therefore, has been formulated to cope with both national and international trends. Cambodia has placed the highest importance on the development of sustainable peace and stability in the country as well as the political and economic integration into the regional and international communities.

2. Cambodian relations with the US

Cambodian relations with the US can be traced back to Prince Sihanouk's regime. In the year before the Second World War, Cambodia's presence was insignificant; however, this changed, as the Cold War pressured Cambodia to cope with the competition between the superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union. There was at that time no American diplomatic presence in the kingdom, although representatives from the consulate in Saigon sometimes traveled to Cambodia for field reports. When the U.S established diplomatic recognition of Cambodia in 1950, it did so not so much to contest French colonialism, but rather to protect Southeast Asia and its own interests from communist expansion (Clymer, 2013).

The Cambodian-American relations were often faced with trouble as Sihanouk was forced to join the battle against communism, but he made an effort to keep his country out of the Cold War (Clymer, 2004). Sihanouk then decided to break diplomatic relations with the US in 1965 (Lum, 2009). However, diplomatic relations with the US were later restored in 1969, after which time the US conducted a four-year, sustained and large scale bombing campaign in Cambodia which was aimed at destroying North Vietnamese troops in the country (Lum, 2009).

In 1970, Sihanouk was overthrown by a coup while he was on a mission overseas for diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. General Lon Nol with his associate, Sirik Matak, then seized power in Cambodia (Chandler, 1991). The Paris Agreement in January 1973, which ended the Vietnam War, proposed the withdrawal of foreign troops from Cambodia but massive B-52 and F-111 bombings of Cambodia still continued despite the ceasefire (Birds, 2012). The US bombing of Cambodia between 1969 and 1973, according to Kiernan (1989), killed between 50,000 and 150,000 people.

Cambodia was then fully committed as a client state of the US who was the largest financing source for Cambodian military support of Lon Nol's government. The US used Cambodian

armed forces to counter the communist Vietnamese troops (Omar, 2016). This was partly regarded as America's anti-communist containment policy in the Southeast Asian region (Chew, 2009). However, it is worth noting that after the coup, Sihanouk had reluctantly formed an alliance with the Cambodian communist party, which later transformed itself into the Khmer Rouge. This resulted in civil war between the two groups in the country, culminating in the defeat of Lon Nol on 17 April 1975 by the Khmer Rouge (Lum, 2009). During the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia adopted an isolationist foreign policy and cut itself off from the rest of the world, except China and a few other countries (Kao, 2002). Thus, Cambodia under Pol Pot leadership had no relations with the US.

Following the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, power was replaced by the Vietnamese-supported government, called the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), which was later changed to the State of Cambodia (SOC). Despite conquering most parts of the country, the new government could not have even nominal control over the whole territory of Cambodia until the Khmer Rouge forces were driven out to the northwest provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap and Oddar Meanchey (Slocomb, 2003). However, the civil war between the Khmer Rouge forces and the government still continued. The Khmer Rouge forces based along the Thai border allied with two smaller non-communist parties and called themselves the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). The US and other nations did not recognize the government dominated by Vietnam, which was in turn supported by the Soviet Union, but claimed that the CGDK was the legitimate government of Cambodia until 1992 (Kiernan, 1999; Picken, 2011).

After the 1993 election, the relations between the US and Cambodia had been gradually renormalized. The US policy toward Cambodia focused on communism resistance, human rights, and democratic governance (Lum, 2009). However, failing to promote human rights and democratic governance has been a constant source of friction in relations between the US and Cambodia. It is worth noting that the US-Cambodia relations were improved by the political stability in 2006 and the US interests in working with Cambodia to counter the spread of terrorism narratives and China's growing economic influence in the region.

As part of the US policy towards Asia, the Obama administration recently tried to reestablish good relations with Cambodia. The US high-level officials including President Barack

Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense, and First Lady Michelle Obama visited Cambodia, in part, to strengthen America's relations with Cambodia. More importantly, the US government supported the Cambodian military through naval port visits, joint exercises and military assistance. In addition, the US is the largest foreign market for Cambodian goods, accounting for about half of the country's garment exports. In fact, the garment sector accounts for 80 percent of Cambodia's exports, most of which go to the US and Europe (Millar, 2016). Cambodia is also the fifth-largest recipient of US foreign aid in Southeast Asia (Cheunboran, 2015b). According to the US state department, the US provided Cambodia with more than US\$77.6 million in aid for programs in health, education, governance, and economic growth in 2014 – just over a tenth of what China pledged to Cambodia in the same year (Millar, 2016).

It has been obvious that the relations between Cambodia and the US have often been stressful. This is due to the fact that the latter usually put much pressure on the former to align with its policy and interests. During the Cold War, for example, the US tried to place Cambodia under its influence and forced it to join a fierce battle to counter communist insurgencies in the region. However, the US interest to engage with Cambodia after the political reform in 1993 has changed. Not only has the US provided much aid to Cambodia for socio-economic development in specific sectors such as education, health, human rights and democratic governance, but it is also the main foreign market for Cambodian garment and textiles. The US, through its aid and assistance, wishes to promote human rights and good governance and to counter China's growing influence in Cambodia (Lum, 2009).

3. Cambodian relations with China

Cambodia has historically enjoyed friendly relations with China. Cambodia-China ties were significantly strengthened after Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953, due to the fact that Prince Sihanouk recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1958 and supported the PRC's campaign at the United Nations to remove the Republic of China (i.e. Taiwan) from having a seat in the UN (Phou, n.d). Most importantly, Sihanouk had a good relationship with Chinese leaders including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. The relationship blossomed when Sihanouk engaged and entertained the Chinese ambitions in Southeast Asia as a counterbalance to the Cold War being extended by

the Soviet Union and the United States in Indochina (Hunt, 2011). Thus, China not only supported Pol Pot but also kept a good relationship with the exiled Prince Sihanouk and showed its commitment to the reconciliation of Cambodia through the establishment of a four-party government (Gottesman, 2003) but had no relations with the Vietnamese-supported government (Brown & Zasloff, 1998).

Toward the last decade of the 20th century, the relations between Cambodia and China were further improved. After the Cambodian political crisis in 1997, for instance, China became Cambodia's closest ally and provided the most financial assistance for Cambodia's economic development, overtaking Western donors (Ek & Sok, 2008). Chinese aid to Cambodia has been steadily increasing over a decade, with President Xi Jinping pledging between US\$500 million and US\$700 million annually – a significant increase from less than \$100m in 2007 (Millar, 2016). By way of this enormous financial assistance, China has in return gained Cambodia's full support and loyalty to many international issues, particularly the issue concerning the South China Sea dispute. Moreover, China in 2014 became Cambodia's largest foreign investor, reportedly worth US\$10 billion and development assistance totaling over US\$3 billion (Cheunboran, 2015a). In this respect, China has been seen as a more trustful friend of Cambodia than the US in terms of development assistance, security, and sovereignty.

According to Millar (2016), Chinese economic aid is a combination of grants and loans which are aimed at supporting projects in agriculture, mining, garment production and the energy sector as well as roads and bridges across the country. Most Chinese giant state corporations have invested billions of dollars in dams, oilfields, highways, textile operations, and mines, and it is the low-profile, family-owned Chinese firms which have come to dominate the Cambodian investment landscape (Hutt, 2016). Even though there are some criticisms about the fact that Cambodian investment is largely controlled by Chinese investors, China's money and infrastructure development have significantly contributed to the economic advancement in Cambodia (Phal, 2016). Most currently, during the Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Cambodia, a total of 31 cooperation documents were signed to deepen the traditional friendship between the two countries. Both countries then promised to work harder to further enhance their bilateral ties and strengthen their comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership (Xinhua, 2016).

To sum up, the relations between Cambodia and China have become mutually satisfactory. China in this respect has provided Cambodia with the most financial assistance in the form of loans, aid and foreign direct investment, the amount of which surpasses those of Western donors, particularly investment by the United States. Cambodia in return has tacitly and consistently supported China on the international stage, a move China very much appreciates. This act of reciprocity will continue to exist for some time to come as long as China adheres to its non-interference principle, leaving Cambodia's internal affairs intact, and while Cambodia remains China's faithful friend and reliable partner.

III. Methodology

1. Research participants and settings

The participants in this study are 500 university students who are pursuing their higher education in Phnom Penh city, Cambodia. The students were randomly selected to participate in questionnaire surveys designed to explore their perspectives on Cambodia's foreign policy toward the United States and China. It should be noted that participation in this study was entirely voluntary and anonymous, and all participants were well informed in advance about the purpose of the study and the nature of their free participation before they decided to participate in the survey.

2. Research instruments

This study employs a quantitative research design (Creswell, 2013) which relies entirely on questionnaire surveys to collect data to answer the research questions. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) comprises 26 multiple choice questions with some 5-point Likert scale responses and is divided into four main parts, including (1) participants' demographic data, (2) their understanding of Cambodia's foreign policy, (3) their perception on the presence of the US in Cambodia, and (4) their perception on the Chinese presence in Cambodia. Besides the questionnaires, content analysis was also used in the study to better understand Cambodian relations with the US and China and to explore related literature on the subject under investigation.

3. Data collection and analysis

To improve the quality and reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with a group of students at the University of Cambodia to check whether the questionnaire questions could be easily understood to avoid possible misinterpretations of the questions. After the questionnaire had been edited and finalized, with comments received from the pilot study, 500 questionnaires were randomly administered to university students who are taking their undergraduate and graduate studies at universities in Phnom Penh. 484 questionnaires were returned, a good 96.8% response rate. The data from the questionnaires received were then analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 23.0). The study uses descriptive statistics to seek answers for the research questions.

4. Research ethics

All the participants in this study were well-informed of their anonymity in the study and in the research report. Moreover, prior to their participation in the survey, they were ensured that, under any circumstances, their participation in the study would not cause any negative consequences to them or to their study.

IV. Findings and Discussion

1. Cambodian university students' understanding of Cambodia's foreign policy

Four hundred and eighty-four Cambodian university students responded to the questionnaire, a near 100 per cent response rate (96.8%). The profile of the participants in this research can be found in Table 1.

When asked how much they knew about Cambodia's foreign policy, 33.1 per cent answered that their knowledge of Cambodian foreign policy was between 0 to 20 per cent, while 32.4 per cent identified themselves as being 21 to 40 per cent knowledgeable about Cambodia's foreign policy. Moreover, 24.9 per cent selected between 41 to 60 per cent as their knowledge base of Cambodian foreign policy, whereas only a small percentage of respondents (8.1%) claiming to know more than 60 per cent about Cambodia's foreign policy.

Table 1: *Participant profiles* (n = 484)

Features	Profiles (%)
Gender	Female (52.1); Male (47.9)
Age	16-20 (22.1); 21-25 (64.3); 26-30 (10.1); 31-35 (1.9); 36 and above (1)
Level of education	Associate degree (5.4) Bachelor's degree (80.8) Master's degree (10.3) Doctoral degree (2.1) Missing (1.4)
Year of study	Year 1 (15.7) Year 2 (30.2) Year 3 (27.5) Year 4 (25.8) Missing (0.8)
Employment	Yes (49.4) No (36.6) Missing (14)
Ever taken courses on Cambodia's foreign policy	Yes (40.3) No (56.6) Missing (3.1)
Major of study	Arts and education (30.8) Business-related (28.5) International Relations (15.7) Social sciences (14.9) Science and engineering (7.4) Missing (2.7)

In a similar question, the university student participants were asked about their knowledge of Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China and whether they think foreign policy is important for Cambodia. Their responses are shown in Table 2.

In addition, when asked whether Cambodian foreign policy plays an important role for national development, 24.1 per cent strongly agreed and a further 44.9 per cent agreed, while 21.4 chose neutral. When asked whether Cambodian foreign policy helps improve Cambodia's economic development, 49.3 per cent agreed and 29.6 strongly agreed. Only 3.9 per cent disagreed and one per cent strongly disagreed, which is unsurprising. The university

students surveyed also see the significance of Cambodian foreign policy relations with other superpowers such as the US and China as ensuring Cambodian security; 37.3% of them agreed and 16.2% strongly agreed. However, a relatively high percentage of students (35.3%) were neutral on this proposition, while 10.2 per cent disagreed.

Table 2: *Cambodian university students’ knowledge of Cambodia’s foreign policy toward the US and China* (n = 484)

Features	Responses (%)
Importance of foreign policy for Cambodia	Very important (40.7) Important (50.9) Not important (2.5) Do not know (4.6)
Knowledge of Cambodia’s foreign policy toward the US and China	0-20 per cent (30.2) 21-40 per cent (31.5) 41-60 per cent (25) More than 60 per cent (12.1)

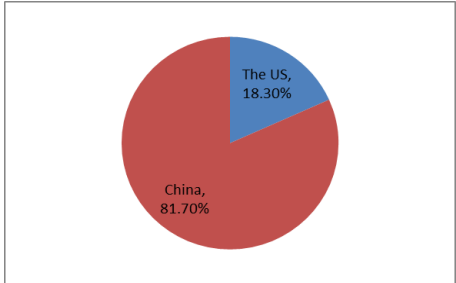
An interesting finding regards the neutrality and flexibility of Cambodia’s foreign policy. 39.6 per cent agreed and 27.4 per cent strongly agreed that Cambodian foreign policy should be neutral, while at the same time a large number of students (35.8% agreed and 35.3% strongly agreed) believed that Cambodian foreign policy should be flexible. This is interesting since the majority of university students wish their country to have either neutral or flexible foreign policy. This view is supported by Leng’s (2016) analysis of a small state diplomacy. Small states need to use a variety of strategies which could range from economic pragmatism, limited bandwagoning, binding engagement and soft-balancing.

2. The US and China: Which one is for Cambodia?

Two key survey questions sought to explore the different views of Cambodian university students on Cambodia’s foreign policy toward the US and China. In the first question, when asked which country between the US and China now has closer relations with Cambodia, a high 81.7 per cent chose China; while the US stood at only 18.3 per cent. Conversely, in the second question, when asked which country they want Cambodia to have closer relations with in the future, a large majority of respondents preferred the US (72.6%) to China (27.4%). This finding is of interest, considering the respondents’ awareness of China’s financial contribution

to the development of Cambodia and the long-term nature of Sino-Cambodian relations, discussed in subsequent sections. The pie charts below clearly illustrate the distinction.

Between the US and China which country does Cambodia now have closer relations with?



Which country do you want Cambodia to have closer relations with in the future?

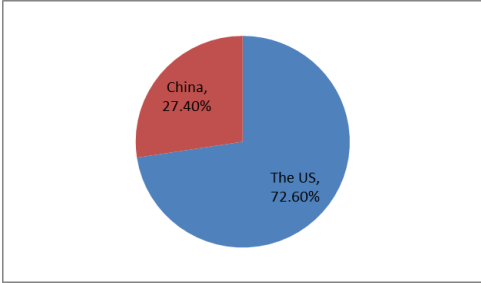


Figure 1: Cambodian university students’ views on the US and China

Nevertheless, when asked to compare the benefits of the US aid and Chinese aid to Cambodia, 36.8 per cent and 8.1 per cent agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, with the statement that the US aid provides greater long-term benefits for Cambodia than the Chinese aid. 36.2 per cent voiced no opinion by choosing neutral, while 16 per cent disagreed and 2.9 strongly disagreed. The result tends to show Cambodian university students’ hopes and aspirations for the future by looking up to the US whose democracy, human rights, and freedom, arguably, prevail.

3. Cambodian university students’ perceptions on the presence of the US in Cambodia

Data from the 484 questionnaires reveal mixed results with regard to the American presence in Cambodia. When asked about the US presence (people, businesses, investments, etc.) in Cambodia, 51.5 per cent of the respondents believed it is positive, while only 11.1 per cent thought the US presence is negative. 29.5 per cent did not decide and stayed neutral with this proposition. As for their overall satisfaction with benefits the US has provided to Cambodia, 42.9 per cent and 12.6 per cent felt satisfied and very satisfied, respectively. This high proportion is in line with the results presented earlier, which confirms Cambodian university students’ positivity toward the US.

However, in spite of their positive attitude toward the US, the result reflects the student respondents’ realistic assessment of the contribution the US has to offer for the development in Cambodia, with 44 per cent believing that the US has moderate contribution to the general

development of Cambodia and 25.8 per cent thinking that the US makes little contribution. A small number of respondents (6.7%) voiced no opinion, selecting a ‘Do not know’ option, while 20 per cent decided that the US makes a lot of contribution to Cambodia’s national development. Meanwhile, a small 3.5 per cent disregarded the American contribution to Cambodia, choosing ‘No contribution’ option.

The last US-related question is about the motive behind the US foreign policy with Cambodia. 9.6 per cent strongly agreed and a further 32.4 per cent agreed that the US keeps their relations with Cambodia only for their own interests. However, 21.5 per cent disagreed and 2.9 per cent strongly disagreed with the same statement, while 33.2 per cent, a relatively high percentage, stayed neutral on this matter.

4. Cambodian university students’ perceptions on the presence of China in Cambodia

A similar set of questions on the Chinese presence in Cambodia were also given to the respondents. Data analysis reveals a mixture of expected and unexpected results. 49.6 per cent, a relatively unexpected result compared to a rather negative yet popular myth about China, believed that the Chinese presence (people, businesses, investments, etc.) in Cambodia is positive, while only 17.2 per cent thought that the Chinese presence is negative. Also, when asked whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with benefits China has provided to Cambodia, 35.2 per cent of the 484 respondents were satisfied, whereas 16.1 per cent were dissatisfied (see Table 3).

Table 3: *Cambodian university students’ perceptions on the presence of China in Cambodia* (n = 484)

Statements	Responses (%)
Chinese presence in Cambodia	Very positive (7.9) Positive (49.6) Do not know (22.8) Negative (17.2) Very negative (2.5)
Benefits China has provided to Cambodia	Very satisfied (3.4) Satisfied (35.2) Neutral (41.9) Dissatisfied (16.1) Very dissatisfied (3.4)
Chinese contribution to Cambodian development	A lot (30.3) Moderate (45.2)

	Do not know (4.8) A little (18.8) Not at all (0.8)
China keeps their relations with Cambodia only for their own interests	Strongly agree (18.4) Agree (45) Neutral (27.8) Disagree (7.7) Strongly agree (1)
Impact of China's rise on Cambodia	Very positive (5) Positive (32.1) Do not know (35.2) Negative (23.3) Very negative (4.4)

With regard to the Chinese contribution to the development of Cambodia, unlike the findings on the US contribution, a large number of Cambodian university students acknowledged China's substantial contribution to the development in Cambodia, as seen in recent years. As Table 3 shows, 45.2 per cent, an equivalent of 218 respondents, believed that China has moderately contributed to Cambodia's national development, and 30.3 per cent accepted that China has greatly contributed to the development in Cambodia. When asked whether they agree or disagree with the proposition that China keeps their relations with Cambodia only for their own interests, surprisingly, 45 per cent agreed and 18.4 strongly agreed, with only 8.7 per cent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Finally, for a question on the impact of China's rise on Cambodia, university students' perceptions are divided. 32.1 per cent thought that the rise of China is positive for Cambodia; whereas 23.3 per cent had a negative attitude toward the rising power of China (see Table 3 above, for details).

5. Students' general perceptions of Cambodian relations with the US and China

This section is related to students' general knowledge and understanding of Cambodian relations with the US and China. One of the questions asked relates to the US and Chinese investment. Data analysis reveals students' adequate understanding of the investment phenomenon, with 43.6 per cent believing that most investments in Cambodia do not belong to the US companies, while 23.3 per cent and a higher 48.8 per cent agreed and strongly agreed that China has the most foreign investment in Cambodia. On another note, a total of 58.6 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed that the US aid to Cambodia focuses on governance, democracy and human rights; only about 10 per cent disagreed or strongly

disagreed, and about 31 per cent selected 'neutral'. In addition, approximately 52% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that Chinese aid and loans are important for Cambodia's economic development, while about 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this.

With reference to Cambodian security issues, about 35 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the US plays an important role in ensuring regional security where Cambodia is located. However, 42.8 per cent chose neutral, 19.4 per cent disagreed, and 2.5 per cent strongly disagreed. When asked the same question about the role of China in securing regional security, 27.2 per cent agreed and strongly agreed that China plays a crucial role in maintaining regional security where Cambodia is situated. A high 45.4 per cent decided to be neutral on this matter, and about 25% disregarded the Chinese role in ensuring security in the region. This finding contradicts a view by Hutt (2016), who claimed that China is the prime guarantor of Cambodia's regional security.

The last but very interesting question is about the foreign policy relations that the two superpowers have with Cambodia. In this part, student respondents were asked to decide on a 5-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, whether the US is the most trusted friend of Cambodia in terms of foreign policy relations or whether China is the most dependable friend on the same matter. As for the result, 29.9 per cent agreed and 7.7 per cent strongly agreed that the US is Cambodia's most trusted friend with regard to foreign policy relations. 39.9 per cent voiced their neutral opinion, while about 22 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. For the Chinese part, a similar result is found. 29.4 per cent agreed and 9.4 per cent strongly agreed that China is Cambodia's most trusted friend in terms of foreign policy relations. While 36 per cent decided 'neutral', about 25 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed that China is the most trusted friend for Cambodia's foreign policy maneuver.

Finally, an analytical look at the overall findings of this research yields a number of key findings. Firstly, this analysis finds that Cambodian university students have a low to moderate understanding of Cambodia's foreign policy, although 58.4 per cent have never taken any course related to Cambodian foreign policy. Such an understanding may develop from their frequent exposure to the social media, particularly Facebook, which has gained great popularity in the last few years. Secondly, albeit their acknowledgement and understanding that Cambodia now has closer foreign relations with China, the majority of the students surveyed aspire to see Cambodia become more democratic, have a better human

rights record, and promote freedom in all walks of life. Thirdly, half of the respondents think positively about the US or the Chinese presence in Cambodia. This finding is significant because, contrary to the general myth about China's exploitation of Cambodia's natural resources, respondents look on the bright side and see the significant contribution China and the US have to offer to Cambodia. To put this another way, the US and China are complementary in terms of their contribution to Cambodia's national development. While the US might strive to promote democracy, human rights, and good governance in Cambodia, the Chinese help with economic development, infrastructure, and foreign direct investment.

V. Conclusion

The study aims to discover the different perceptions of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy relations towards the US and China. The study employed a cross-sectional study using survey questionnaires delivered to 484 randomly-selected students from different universities in Phnom Penh. The student respondents come from different levels and backgrounds of study ranging from associate to doctoral degrees. Respondents' majors of study include business-related courses, social sciences, sciences and engineering, international relations and arts and education. The research addressed three main questions, one of which is about the perceptions of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy relations toward the U.S. and China.

1. Summary of key research findings

According to the findings, Cambodian university students have between low to moderate understandings of Cambodia's foreign policy relations toward the US and China. Among the proportion of all 484 surveyed students, only 25 per cent selected an option illustrating that their knowledge of Cambodian foreign policy toward the US and China is between 41 to 60 per cent, and a small number of respondents (12.1%) answered they know more than 60 per cent about Cambodia's foreign policy toward these two superpowers.

With reference to current foreign policy relations, a very high number of respondents (81.7%) responded that Cambodia is closer to China than the United States. On the contrary, a large proportion of students (72.6%) prefer the US to China when it comes to Cambodian foreign policy maneuvers in the future. Nonetheless, only 36.8 per cent and 8.1 per cent agreed and

strongly agreed, respectively, with the statement that US aid provides greater long-term benefits for Cambodia than the Chinese aid.

Another key research finding is related to students' perspectives on the US or the Chinese presence in Cambodia. It is particularly interesting to find out that more than 50% of Cambodian university students hold optimistic views about the presence of the two great powers in Cambodia. This positive attitude is likely to signal the advent of a more open-minded generation of Cambodians who would seem to be less self-absorbed and unprejudiced. However, they would become a more pragmatic generation of Cambodian people who are able to face challenges, overcome problems and live with others in a globalized world.

2. Implications for classroom teachers and curriculum developers

Based on the key findings, it is recommended that classroom teachers, regardless of the courses they teach, introduce their students to lessons on Cambodia's foreign policy to raise their awareness of the subject and enhance their understanding of how Cambodia adopts its policy when dealing with its neighbors, regional groups and great powers. Class discussions, presentations or debates on Cambodia's foreign policy options and maneuvers should be allowed, if not encouraged, so that Cambodian university students can be seen to be confident and competent in explaining and defending the country's choices and decisions to balance, align, or bandwagon with any country or group.

For curriculum developers, they may consider adding a course on Cambodia's foreign policy to their curriculum or require students to take such a course so that the students would gain a better insight into the issue and become more competent graduates who can discuss and express their ideas about Cambodia's foreign policy and other related topics confidently and succinctly. With a sound curriculum which incorporates the course on Cambodia's foreign policy, Cambodian university students would become more knowledgeable about the said subject.

2. Limitations and implications for further research

This research is undoubtedly not flawless. For example, it examines only the perceptions of university students in Phnom Penh, leaving out perspectives from students studying in

universities outside the capital city. Its methodology also lacks rigor because data was drawn from only one methodology – the questionnaire survey. More authoritative research should include other data collection methods, such as interviews and observations, to gain more in-depth data and to cross check or triangulate the validity of the data collected. Moreover, the scope of the research is limited to the perceptions of students only, which somehow marginalize the importance of diversity of opinions from other potential research participants such as teachers, policy makers, government officials, and/or members of the public.

Implications for further research are therefore obvious. Future researchers who are interested in Cambodia's foreign policy should strive to collect and include data from a variety of sources and methods. Using in-depth interviews or observations to gather data from students, teachers, scholars, or other interest groups might be good alternatives. Likewise, studies employing a mixed methodology research design would provide better cross-sectional analysis, while other forms of research into Cambodia's foreign policy toward other countries aside from the US and China also deserve more scholarly attention and consideration from future researchers.

The Authors

Kimkong HENG is an Assistant Dean for the School of Graduate Studies, The University of Cambodia. He has also been an English lecturer for almost ten years. He earned his MA in TESOL from the Institute of Foreign Languages (RUPP, Cambodia) and from the University of Canberra (Australia) with High Distinction in 2011 and 2014, respectively. His areas of interest include language teaching methodology, teacher education, teacher research capacity building, and now foreign policy. He can be reached at kimkongheng@gmail.com.

Sothiary TOCH is a PhD student of International Relations at the Techo Sen School of Government and International Relations, The University of Cambodia. He has extensive experience in research and development projects with both local and international NGOs. He is a researcher and assistant to the Secretariat of Academicians of the Royal Academy of Cambodia. His areas of research interest are development policy in developing countries, climate change policy and foreign policy. He can be reached at sothiary@gmail.com.

Chantola SAO is a PhD student of International Relations at the Techo Sen School of Government and International Relations, The University of Cambodia. He is an assistant at the Council for the Development of Cambodia and a lecturer of English at the University of Cambodia. He has worked as a Japanese speaking tour guide and an interpreter for almost 11 years. He can be reached at saochantola1@yahoo.com.

Vathanak CHET is a PhD student of International Relations at the Techo Sen School of Government and International Relations, The University of Cambodia. He holds two master's degrees. One in Business Administration from Pannasastra University of Cambodia and another in Public Administration from the Royal University of Law and Economics. He is a Deputy Director of Passport Department in the Ministry of Interior. He is also a lecturer of Economics and Management and Leadership at Royal University of Law and Economics, and the Police Academy of Cambodia. He can be reached at chetvathanak@gmail.com.

Dararasmey CHAN is a PhD student of International Relations at the Techo Sen School of Government and International Relations, The University of Cambodia. He is a Royal Prosecutor at the Supreme Court of the Kingdom of Cambodia and a lecturer of Law, Public Administration, and Business and Economic Sciences. He also has extensive experience in legal affairs, judicial profession, leadership, human resource management, business management, and political sciences. He can be reached at dararasmey@yahoo.com.

References

- Bird, A. (2012). *US foreign policy on transitional justice: Case studies on Cambodia, Liberia and Colombia* (Doctoral dissertation). The London School of Economics and Political Science. London: United Kingdom.
- Brown, M., & Zasloff, J. J. (1998). *Cambodia confounds the peacemakers, 1979-1998*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Ek, C., & Sok, H. (2008). *Aid effectiveness in Cambodia*. Wolfensohn Center for Development Working Papers. Washington DC: Brookings Institution.
- Cheunboran, C. (2015a, July 08). *Cambodia's strategic China alignment*. Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2015/07/cambodias-strategic-china-alignment/>
- Cheunboran, C. (2015b, August 11). *As Cambodia approaches China over the US, it should remember Machiavelli's lessons*. Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/as-cambodia-approaches-china-over-the-us-it-should-remember-machiavellis-lessons/>
- Chandler, D. P. (1991). *The tragedy of Cambodian history: War, politics and revolution since 1945*. Chiang Mai: Silkorm Books.
- Chew, E. (2009). *U.S foreign policy and the Southeast Asia: From manifest destiny to shared destiny*. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies Working Paper No. 185. Singapore: Nanyang Technological University.
- Clymer, K. (2004). *The United States and Cambodia, 1870-1969: From curiosity to confrontation*. New York: Routledge.
- Clymer, K. (2013). *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: A troubled relationship*. New York: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. New York: Sage Publications.
- Gordon, B. K.. (1965). Cambodia: Where foreign policy counts. *Asian Survey*, 5(9), 433–448. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2642493>.
- Gottesman, E. (2004). *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge: Inside the politics of nation building*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Hunt, L. (2011, February 10). *China's relations in the Asia-Pacific: Cambodia*. Retrieve from <http://thediplomat.com/2011/02/cambodia/>
- Hutt, D. (2016, September 1). *How China came to dominate Cambodia*. Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2016/09/how-china-came-to-dominate-cambodia/>
- Kao, K. H. (2002). *Cambodia's foreign policy and ASEAN: From nonalignment to engagement*. Phnom Penh: Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace.

- Kiernan, B. (1994). *The Cambodian genocide: Issues and responses* In G. Andreopoulos (Ed.), *Genocide: Conceptual and historical dimensions*: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Long, K. (2009). *Sino-Cambodia relations*. Phnom Penh: Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace.
- Leifer, M. (1967). *Cambodia: The search for security*. Connecticut: Praeger.
- Leng, T. (2016). Small state diplomacy: Cambodia's foreign policy towards Vietnam. *The Pacific Review*, 1-20. doi: 10.1080/09512748.2016.1239128
- Lum, T. (2009, April). *Cambodia: Background and US relations*. Washington DC: Congressional Research Service.
- Marks, P. (2000). *China's Cambodia strategy*. *Parameters*, 30(3), 92-108.
- Millar, P. (2016, September 1). *Cambodia caught between China and US amid superpower showdown*. Retrieved from <http://sea-globe.com/cambodia-in-the-middle/>
- Omar, O. (2016, May 24). *An analysis of U.S. policy towards Cambodia between 1969-1973*. Retrieved from <http://www.e-ir.info/2016/05/24/an-analysis-of-u-s-policy-towards-cambodia-between-1969-1973/>
- Phal, S. (2016, October 13). *China, the biggest investor in Cambodia*. Retrieved from <http://www.akp.gov.kh/wp-content/uploads/wp-post-to-pdf-cache/1/china-the-biggest-investor-in-cambodia.pdf>
- Phou, S. (n.d). *Cambodia-China relation: Past, present and future*. Institute of International Management and Business Administration, National Cheng Kung University. Retrieved from <http://www.ncku.edu.tw/cseas/98CSEAS/report%20SEA/CAM/cam11%20phou%20sambath.pdf>
- Pilch, I. (1988). *Prospects for the neutralisation of Kampuchea* (No. 43). Center for the Study of Australian-Asian Relations, Griffith University.
- Slocomb, M. (2003). *The People's Republic of Kampuchea, 1979-1989: The revolution after Pol Pot*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Sok, K. (2016, July 15). *China gives \$600m to Cambodia in exchange for international support*. Retrieved from <http://www.voacambodia.com/a/china-gives-600-million-to-cambodia-in-exchange-for-international-support/3419875.html>
- Smith, R. M. (1965). *Cambodia's foreign policy*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- US Department of States (2016, February 2). *US relations with Cambodia*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2732.htm>
- Var, V. (2015, May 20). *Cambodia: Between China and the United States*. Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2015/05/cambodia-between-china-and-the-united-states/>

Xinhua. (2016, October 15). Highlights of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Cambodia.
Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-10/15/c_135756590.htm

Appendix A

Student Survey Questionnaire

Topic: Perceptions of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China

Dear participant:

We are postgraduate students of Techo Sen School of Government and International Relations, University of Cambodia. We are conducting a survey to explore the perception of Cambodian university students on Cambodia's foreign policy toward the US and China. In this survey, we are trying to understand how university students feel about Cambodia's foreign policy relations towards the US and China. This questionnaire would take approximately 20 minutes. We would like to assure you that all information obtained will be used for research purposes only and no part of your identity will be revealed in the research report. In other words, participation in this survey is voluntary and it will not affect your academic performance. Should you have any questions about this survey, feel free to contact Mr. Toch Sothiary at 077 659 633 or sothiary@gmail.com or Mr. Heng Kimkong at 017 717236 or kimkongheng@gmail.com.

Instructions: Please tick (✓) or write down an appropriate answer.

PART 1: PERSONAL DETAILS

1. What is your gender?
 Male Female
2. What is your age?
 16 – 20 21 – 25 26 – 30 31 – 35 36 and above
3. What is your education?
 Associate degree Bachelor's degree Master's degree PhD degree
4. What year are you in?
 1 2 3 4
5. Do you have a job?
 Yes No
6. Have you taken any courses that allow you to understand/learn Cambodian foreign policy?
 Yes No
7. What is your major at school?

PART 2: UNDERSTANDING OF CAMBODIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

8. How much do you know about Cambodia's foreign policy?
 0% - 20% 21% - 40% 41% -60% More than 60%
9. Is foreign policy important for Cambodia?
 Not important Important Very important Don't know

10. Between China and the US which country does Cambodia have a closer relation with now?

- China US

11. Which country do you want Cambodia to have a closer relation with in the future?

- China US

12. Cambodia should have a balanced (*equal*) foreign policy toward the US and China.

- Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

13. How much do you know about Cambodian foreign policy toward the US and China?

- 0% - 20% 21% - 40% 41% -60% More than 60%

14. How do you agree/disagree with the statements below?

- (1. *Strongly disagree* 2. *Disagree* 3. *Neutral* 4. *Agree* 5. *Strongly agree*)

Please tick (✓) one.	1	2	3	4	5
a. Cambodian foreign policy plays an important role for national development.					
b. Cambodian foreign policy helps improve Cambodia's economic development.					
c. Cambodian foreign policy relation to other superpower countries such as the US and China can ensure Cambodia security.					
d. Cambodian foreign policy should be <u>neutral</u> (អព្យជ្ជិត)					
e. Cambodian foreign policy should be <u>flexible</u> (បត់បែន) to give Cambodia the most benefits.					

PART 3: PERCEPTION ON THE PRESENCE OF THE US IN CAMBODIA

15. How is the US presence (*US investments, businesses, or people*) in Cambodia?

- Very negative Negative Don't know Positive Very positive

16. How satisfied (*happy*) are you about the benefits the US has provided to Cambodia?

- Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very satisfied

17. How much does the US contribute (*help*) to the development of Cambodia?

- Not at all A little Moderate (50%) A lot Don't know

18. The US keeps their relations with Cambodia only for their own interests or benefits.

- Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

19. The US aid to Cambodia provides greater long-term benefits than the Chinese aid.

- Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

20. How do you agree/disagree with the statements below?

- (1. *Strongly disagree* 2. *Disagree* 3. *Neutral* 4. *Agree* 5. *Strongly agree*)

Please tick (✓) one.	1	2	3	4	5
a. Most investment in Cambodia belongs to the US companies.					
b. The US aid focuses on governance, democracy and human rights.					
c. The US is the only one country that provides the most aid to Cambodia after 1993.					
d. The US plays an important role in ensuring regional security where the Cambodia locates.					
e. The US is the most trusted friend of Cambodia in terms of					

foreign policy relations.					
---------------------------	--	--	--	--	--

PART 4: PERCEPTION ON THE PRESENCE OF CHINA IN CAMBODIA

21. How is the Chinese presence (*Chinese investments, businesses, or people*) in Cambodia?
 Very negative Negative Don't know Positive Very positive
22. How satisfied (*happy*) are you about the benefits China has provided to Cambodia?
 Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very satisfied
23. How much does China contribute (*help*) to the development of Cambodia?
 Not at all A little Moderate (50%) A lot Don't know
24. China keeps their relations with Cambodia only for their own interests or benefits.
 Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
25. What effect do you think China as a rising power will have on Cambodia?
 Very negative Negative Don't know Positive Very positive
26. How do you agree/disagree with the statements below?
 (1. *Strongly disagree* 2. *Disagree* 3. *Neutral* 4. *Agree* 5. *Strongly agree*)

Please tick (✓) one.	1	2	3	4	5
a. China has the most foreign investment in Cambodia.					
b. China is the only financing source for infrastructure development of Cambodia.					
c. The Chinese loans to Cambodia are important for Cambodia's economic development.					
d. China plays an important role in ensuring regional security where the Cambodia locates.					
e. China is the most trusted friend of Cambodia for long time in terms of foreign policy relations.					

This is the end of the survey.
 Thanks for your participation.

Note: Should you wish to read the findings of this research, please leave your contact details below.

Name: _____ (optional)
 Phone: _____ (optional)
 Email: _____ (required)