

Change and Continuity:
Identity of Chinese Cambodian in the 21st century
——Evidence from Fieldwork in Chinese schools in Cambodia——

DAI Fan *

LI Yuanxin **

Abstract

This study aims to explore the Chinese Cambodian with regards to their identity and views of China in the context of China's rise and closer economic and diplomatic relations between the two countries since 1990s. Using data gathered from survey, in-depth interviews and field observations in Cambodia, we first discovered that Chinese Cambodian have developed a sense of local identity but still have preserved their Chinese ethnic identity. Secondly, we also found that Chinese Cambodian give importance to Chinese traditions and preserve original Chinese languages, maintaining a strong sense of "Chineseness". However, the survey result also shows that Chinese Cambodian have assimilated themselves to some degree to their host country by adopting to a certain extent the local cultures and religions. Thirdly, the survey also shows that the Chinese Cambodian have positive attitude towards China and holds a favorable view of China's national image, economic development, political systems and global influence. We also applied Chi-square test to

* Associate Prof., School of International Studies/Academy of Overseas Chinese Studies, Jinan University

** PhD, University College Dublin

examine variations among different groups of Chinese Cambodian. Overall, we found that compared to overseas Chinese in other Southeast Asian countries, Chinese Cambodian in general hold a more positive view of China, a large portion of the reason is due to its deep economic and political dependence on China. Significant findings also show that the economic benefits brought forth by the rising China forges closer relationship between two countries and encourages Chinese Cambodian to preserve their ethnic and cultural identity.

Key words: Chinese Cambodian, China, identity, Culture.

〈Contact: Dr. DAI Fan, Email: tdaifan@jnu.edu.cn.〉

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

The history of Chinese emigration to Cambodia dates back to the Southern Song Dynasty. At the beginning of the 20th century, there was also an influx in numbers of Chinese emigration to Cambodia. The Chinese community there presents similarity to those in other Southeast Asia countries, one among which is forging a close relationship with China since the beginning of the 20th century. They have been concerned about China's domestic affairs and have preserved traditional Chinese customs and language. For example, during World War II, Chinese Cambodian actively participated in the Southern Overseas Chinese Association to support China's War of Resistance against Japan. Cambodia was one of the earliest countries in Southeast Asia where Chinese language schools have been founded. The first Chinese language school in Cambodia, namely the Duanhua School (端华学校), was built in early 1907. The report published in 1928 shows that there were more than 90

Chinese language schools with more than 4000 students in Cambodia at that time.¹⁾

After its independence in 1953, the new Cambodian government conducted and promulgated a series of policies aimed at acculturating and assimilating Chinese into the local society, these policies include economically restricting occupations that Chinese Cambodian can engage in. They culturally try to control Chinese schools and loosen immigration policies to encourage more Chinese to apply for local citizenship. Moreover, China has abandoned its long recognition of dual nationality when it signed a treaty with Indonesia in 1955. In this context, many Chinese Cambodian had to renounce their Chinese citizenship and joined Cambodian citizenship for survival reasons. However, good bilateral relations between China and Cambodia during that time allowed Chinese Cambodian to preserve their original culture, with Chinese schools and Chinese newspapers flourishing continuously. However, during China's Cultural Revolution, some personnel from the Chinese Embassy in Cambodia who have been motivated by China's radical left-wing foreign policy conducted political mobilization among Chinese Cambodian students and called them to oppose towards local reactionaries. This led to various demonstrations organized by young Chinese Cambodian against the Cambodian government.

After the overthrow of the Sihanouk government in 1970, the pro-American Lonno government imposed strict restrictions and assimilation policies towards Chinese Cambodian. In this context, all Chinese schools have been shut down and Chinese newspapers were banned from operations. After the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975, Chinese Cambodian have been perceived as the bourgeois enemy and have been ethnically excluded and cleansed. In less than four years of governance under Khmer Rouge, death tolls of Chinese Cambodians have been listed to no less than 200,000. After Vietnam occupied

Cambodia in 1979, Chinese Cambodian experience exclusion and isolation because of tension between China and Vietnam. Many Chinese Cambodian had to flee or hide their Chinese ethnic identity and actively assimilated themselves into the host society.

After the peaceful resolution of Cambodia issue in the early 1990s, the Chinese community in Cambodia was revived. This was reflected in the establishment of new Chinese associations and the revival of the old ones. An example is the Khmer-Chinese Association that was founded with support from the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), it has been the leading institution for Chinese community in the host country. Through a good relation with the Cambodia government and of high influence economically, the association have played an essential role in mobilizing the Chinese community in the promotion of Chinese inheritance especially in education and culture. This move brought forth the revitalization of Chinese language schools and Chinese newspapers. With full support from the Chinese community in Cambodia, a number of Chinese language schools have been founded or reopened across the country since the 1990s. By 2017, there is a total of 55 Chinese language schools and about 50, 000 students in Cambodia²⁾

With the gradual opening of Cambodian economy and the development of Sino-Cambodian bilateral relations, a large number of Chinese enterprises invested in Cambodia ranging from sectors such as infrastructure, manufacturing and agriculture. Moreover, a growing number of Chinese citizens have migrated to Cambodia, either for investment or prolonged stay. This move have impacted the existing Chinese community, most of which have already assimilated in Cambodia. On one hand, the increased interactions between the existing Chinese community and China paved the way for Chinese Cambodian to be influenced by China either in everyday life or in terms of

doing business. On the other hand, a large number of Chinese Cambodian who benefits from this close relationship between China and Cambodia exhibits increased interest in learning Chinese and knowing more about Chinese culture, which has been a primary reason for expansion in the development of Chinese education in Cambodia.

1.2 Research Questions

The term “identity” comes from the Latin *idem* (meaning “the same”). It covers objectively existing similarity and sameness and refers to the psychological perception of correspondence and the social relations thus established.³⁾ The identity describes the relations of individuals with their ethnic groups and consists of two main aspects, namely political identity and cultural identity. Rosenbaum (1975) argues that political identity refers to a person’s identification with political units (state, nation, town, region), geographical region and groups, especially this strong feeling to some unit or group he is loyal to or committed.⁴⁾ Cultural identity is another aspect of identity, which mainly refers to an individual’s recognition and belonging to his/her own culture, language, and ethnic attributes. Political identity, to a certain extent, is equal to state identity, while cultural identity is closely linked with ethnic identity.

The boundary of the ethnic group is not unchangeable. Two different ethnic groups can be integrated into a new one, while a small or weak ethnic group can be assimilated into a big or dominant group, even a single group can be divided into different sections.⁵⁾ In this regard, identity itself can change with time or situations.

In the case of Cambodia, whether to what extent the identity of Chinese Cambodian, who are well-localized and highly integrated with host society,

have been influenced by new trends and emerging factors such as the revival of Chinese community in Cambodia and closer interaction between Chinese Cambodian and China? This question forms the central focus of this study.

There is truly abundant literature on the political and cultural identity of Chinese in Southeast Asia countries. However, compared with the existing study on overseas Chinese in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines, the investigation on Chinese Cambodian attracts few attentions from scholars inside or outside China. Present works mainly focus on the changes of Chinese community and Chinese associations in Cambodia,⁶⁾ few of which pertains to cultural inheritance of Chinese Cambodian.⁷⁾ The Japanese scholar, Nozawa Tomohiro (野澤知弘) is one of the most prominent scholars and have done significant investigations about Chinese Cambodian regarding Chinese education, Chinese associations, and new Chinese immigrants.⁸⁾ Although the above research provides a foundation for us to understand the identity and cultural inheritance of Chinese Cambodian, the limitations to this study is its relative rarity.

Our paper focuses not only on the political and cultural identity of Chinese Cambodian but also their views and perceptions of China. We also explore the potential similarities and differences among Chinese Cambodian of different age, and generation.

In summary, our study aims to understand the views of Chinese Cambodian on their identity in the context of China's rise and with a closer economic and diplomatic relations between China and Cambodia since the 1990s. The rest of paper is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the data and methods. Section 3 presents the survey results and discussion. A conclusion is then provided.

2. Data and Methods

Our analysis is based on data collected from the questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and field observations from two Chinese schools in Cambodia in 2015. The first one is from Duanhua school (端华学校), located in Phnom Penh, known as one of the largest Chinese language institution in Cambodia with more than 15,000 students and long history that can be traced back to the Qing Dynasty.⁹⁾ The other school is Zhongshan School (中山学校), located in Siem Reap, also one of the most significant Chinese language institutions in the province of Siem Reap with more than 1300 students in its kindergarten, primary and secondary school.¹⁰⁾ These two schools have been selected for study due to their long history, significant local influence and diverse Chinese Cambodian students and teachers.

The investigation covers students and teachers in these two schools using survey questionnaire, in-depth interviews and field observations. More precisely, our questionnaires have a high response rate, a total number of 455 participants who completed the questionnaire among more than 600 participants. Each questionnaire has 33 questions, covering a wide range of inquiries related to their attitudes towards Chinese culture, relations and interactions with locals, language ability, and views of and interactions with China. The questionnaire is in Chinese Mandarin as advice by Chinese teachers from Duanhua school.

The survey results are first presented in proportion to selected questions. The proportion is calculated by the number of affirmative responses divided by the total number of responses received. Secondly, we use non-parametric techniques in order to examine whether there are statistical differences in attitudes and views among various groups of Chinese Cambodian. This involves

using Chi-square tests to assess the significance of differences in proportions. The significance of the chi-square at 95 per cent confidence level would indicate that there is variation between the attitudes and views of Chinese Cambodian and the selected groups. The chi-square tests have been used in many emigration literatures for examining variations among groups.¹¹⁾

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 A Descriptive Analysis of Survey Respondents

Table 1 shows the descriptive characteristics of Chinese Cambodian in our survey. Among those surveyed, 91% are students. A large number of respondents in this survey are Buddhist (90%), suggesting a low proportion of Chinese Cambodian having other religious beliefs. This is similar to the situation in Laos, Myanmar and Thailand. Nearly 56% of respondents are with mixed ethnicity/blooded, holding the highest proportion in this regard among eight southeast Asia countries surveyed. This figure is higher than those of Thailand (33.6%) and Myanmar (31.3%).

Table 1 Selected Characteristics of Chinese Cambodian in Survey (N=455)

<i>Occupation</i>		<i>Religion</i>	
Student	91%	Buddhist	90%
<i>Education</i>		<i>Generations</i>	
Secondary School	69%	1st	2%
Primary School or below	2%	2nd	15%
Tertiary or University or above	23%	3rd	33%
<i>Age</i>		4th or above	48%
12 to 17		74% <i>Mixed Ethnicity</i>	
18 to 34	20%	Yes	56%
35 to 45	1%		

*Most respondents are in their final-year of secondary schools or high school students aged above 15.

3.2 Self Identity

3.2.1 Ethnic Identity

Since 1953, the Cambodian government had implemented policies of encouraging Chinese to apply for naturalization. Since the subsequent related policies are relatively loose, a large number of Chinese applied for Cambodian nationality. At the same time, there were many restrictions on occupations being an immigrant in Cambodia, however, many Chinese did apply for Cambodian nationality to have better life and career.¹²⁾ According to the 1984 record of nationality status registration, 90% of Chinese have confirmed their Cambodian nationality.¹³⁾ They have benefited from the friendly bilateral relations between China and Cambodia, Chinese Cambodian also enjoy harmonious relations with other ethnic groups in Cambodia, which is one of the main reason for the commonly inter-ethnic marriage between the Chinese and other ethnic groups in Cambodia.¹⁴⁾

As of 2012, the total number of Chinese in Cambodia was about 700,000, accounting for 4.7% of the total population.¹⁵⁾ As shown in Table 2, 81.6% of respondents view themselves as *Chinese Cambodian*, while only 8.3% view themselves as *Cambodian* and 7.3% view themselves as *Chinese*. This means that Chinese Cambodian in general are well localized, viewing themselves as Cambodian citizenships, and also adhere to their “Chineseness” at the same

Table 2 Selected Attitudes of Chinese Cambodian towards Identity

	Age		Generations			Mixed Ethnicity		
	(N=455) 12 to 17 (n=338)	18 to 34 (n=90)	2nd (n=69)	3rd (n=151)	4th or above (n=217)	Yes (n=257)	No (n=155)	
<i>How do you identify yourself?</i>								
Chinese	6%	7%	4%	6%	4%	8%	7%	6%
Chinese Cambodian	69%	74%	59%	67%	71%	70%	72%	66%
Cambodian	7%	5%	14%	9%	5%	7%	6%	9%

time.

Holding to their ethnic identity as Chinese Cambodians are closely related with and influenced by Chinese Cambodian associations, most of which have long been perceived as one of the three pillars of overseas Chinese community.¹⁶⁾ Chinese community in Cambodia mainly consists of five dialect orientation divisions, namely *Guangzhao* (广肇), *Chaozhou* (潮州), *Hakka* (客家), *Hainan* (海南) and *Fujian* (福建). These variations which are founded on dialects serve not only as networks for early transnational migration of Chinese but also as fortress for uniting overseas Chinese community and maintaining Chinese identity. Let's take the Khmer-Chinese Association in the Kingdom of Cambodia as an example. It has long been active in promoting Chinese education and Chinese culture among Chinese Cambodian since its establishment in the 1990s. In our interviews, we find that some young Chinese Cambodian are willing to talk about their ancestry's migration history and are proud of their Chinese blood.

Table 2 also shows that in our survey, the younger Chinese Cambodian, a lower proportion of them view themselves as *Cambodian* and a higher proportion view themselves as *Chinese Cambodian*. It is interesting and also confusing that Chinese Cambodian with mixed ethnicity/blood have a stronger sense of feeling as *Chinese Cambodian* as compared to those without mixed ethnicity/blood. It is undoubtedly that Chinese Cambodian demonstrates strong political loyalty to Cambodia, while showing a great enthusiasm to China. When asked which soccer team in international game they will support, the Cambodian soccer team or the Chinese soccer team, the Chinese Cambodian surveyed showed a clear inclination to stand for Cambodia, with a ratio of *Strong Support* for Cambodia at 67.5% and 45.7% for China respectively.

Chinese Cambodian are not only politically loyal to Cambodia, but also well integrated into local society. As shown in Table 3, first, the Chinese Cambodian hold positive attitude towards inter-ethnic relations, with 49% of respondents consider Kampuchean ethnicity doesn't have any prejudice against Chinese in comparison to only 9% holding an opposing view. Second, a large majority of our respondents have Kampuchean friends, unlike the first generation of Chinese migrants who due to language barrier, only maintain Chinese friends. Third, most respondents hold the attitude of "Agree" (18%) and "No difference" (38%) with regards to inter-ethnic marriage; only 11% disagree. These results show that the relationship between Chinese and other ethnic groups in Cambodia have been relatively harmonious and second only to Thailand which represents the highest assimilation of Chinese community in local society.

We get some interesting findings when breaking down our results by groups. First, the second generation of Chinese Cambodian holds the most positive attitudes towards inter-ethnic marriage, but their attitudes towards ethnic relations are less positive than the third and fourth generation. Second, respondents ages 18 to 34 have more positive attitudes towards inter-ethnic marriage, but less positive than the younger respondents. Third, Chinese Cambodian with mixed ethnicity/mixed blooded do not hold a more supportive attitude on inter-ethnic marriage.

3.2.2 Culture and Traditions

Table 1 survey shows that 90% of Chinese Cambodian are Buddhist. Ancestral worship is an important aspect of the Chinese religious traditional and this is still common among Chinese Cambodian. Many families of Chinese Cambodian have an ancestral shrine at home and worship their ancestor

Table 3 Attitudes of Chinese Cambodian towards Interactions with Locals

	Age		Generations			Mixed Ethnicity		
	12 to 17 (n=338)	18 to 34 (n=90)	2nd (n=69)	3rd (n=151)	4th or above (n=217)	Yes (n=257)	No (n=155)	
<i>How do you identify yourself?</i>								
Chinese	6%	7%	4%	6%	4%	8%	7%	6%
Chinese Cambodian	69%	74%	59%	67%	71%	70%	72%	66%
Cambodian	7%	5%	14%	9%	5%	7%	6%	9%

during one of the most significant Chinese festivals like Ching Ming Festival. In the survey conducted in the area of Tonle Sap Lake in January 2019, we found that a number of Chinese Cambodian, who are highly integrated into local society and cannot speak Chinese language, still have ancestral shrine at home which was built on the boat and they continue to tell their kids about these Chinese origins. These families also put Spring Couplets on the gateposts of their house to celebrate the most significant Chinese festival, the Spring Festival.¹⁷⁾

As a set of social behaviors and values shared by all of its members, culture covers subjective and objective elements such as beliefs, customs, values, and so on. Zhuang (1999) argued that the relationship between the culture of overseas Chinese and Chinese culture in China had been transformed into “something that originates from the same root while develops independently”.¹⁸⁾ In our survey, we find that Chinese Cambodian to a great extent still retain Chinese culture and customs. They not only attach importance to Chinese traditional festivals which are critical in experiencing Chinese culture. For example, the Spring Festival is the most celebrated festival for Chinese Cambodian families, accounting to 71% respondents, this is far higher comparing to the most important traditional festival of Cambodia, the Water delivery Festival (22%) and also the national holiday of Cambodia,



Figure 1 Ancestor Shrine of a Chinese family. Taken from a Chinese boat vessel in Tonle Sap Lake

the Independence Day (10%). The Spring Festival is not an official holiday in Cambodia; however, it is the most populated holiday for Chinese Cambodian. During the Spring Festival in Cambodia, Chinese community usually organizes lion and dragon dance performances, some shops, hotels and even some government agencies hang large red lanterns in front of their doors, thus creating a strong festive atmosphere.¹⁹⁾

Values such as respecting the elderly, family orientation and seniority are important components of traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, the attitudes of Chinese Cambodian towards these traditional values to a certain extent reflect their view on Chinese culture. As shown in Table 4, Chinese Cambodian survey scored 6.42 and 6.51 (Full score is 10) respectively on the impact of traditional Chinese values on their careers and lives, and more than 40% of the respondents scored more than 7 points. It shows that traditional Chinese culture have a mid to high impact on Chinese Cambodian. After more variables are accounted, we find that Chinese Cambodian who have mixed ethnicity/mixed blooded, are elderly and belong to the third generation, they have more positive attitudes on the influence of traditional Chinese culture and values.

Table 4 shows that 70.6% of Chinese respondents argue that Chinese language schools are the best place to experience and feel Chinese culture, which, undoubtedly benefits from the revival of Chinese education since the 1990s. Over the past three decades, Chinese education has developed rapidly and expanded in scale. Chinese language schools keep a half-day teaching schedule, namely, students spend only a half day for studying courses in Chinese school and another half day learning in Cambodia or English school.

Table 4 Attitudes of Chinese Cambodian towards Chinese Traditional Values

	(N=455)	Age		Generations			Mixed Ethnicity	
		12 to 17 (n=338)	18 to 34 (n=90)	2nd (n=69)	3rd (n=151)	4th or above	Yes (n=257)	No (n=155)
<i>The degree to which Chinese traditional values influence your career (1-10)</i>								
Average scores	6.42	6.34	6.57	6.21	6.55	6.40	6.50	6.14
High scores (≥ 7)	42%	42%	44%	41%	38%	45%	46%	38%
Mid scores (≥ 4)	29%	32%	24%	28%	28%	31%	28%	34%
Low scores (≥ 0)	8%	8%	9%	13%	6%	8%	7%	11%
<i>The degree to which Chinese traditional values influence your daily life (1-10)</i>								
Average scores	6.51	6.42	6.71	6.23	7.12	6.29	6.55	6.28
High scores (≥ 7)	42%	42%	46%	42%	46%	41%	44%	40%
Mid scores (≥ 4)	29%	31%	23%	26%	26%	33%	30%	30%
Low scores (≥ 0)	8%	8%	9%	13%	2%	9%	6%	12%

Chinese schools are of the most important place where Chinese Cambodian can learn and experience Chinese culture, although the school hours for learning Chinese are limited. Take the textbook *Chinese* used in Chinese primary schools, as an example, the textbook consists of 27 texts related to Cambodian culture compared to 49 texts on Chinese culture. In total, Chinese Cambodian who have long been assimilated in the host environment still holds a strong sense of Chinese culture. The Spring Festival, as the most significant traditional Chinese festival, serves not only as the most important cultural symbol that Chinese Cambodian are familiar with (69.9%) but also a good way of experiencing Chinese culture (38.4%). In addition, with the growing exchanges in economy and trade between China and Cambodia, there are increasing number of people-to-people exchanges. Chinese Cambodian thus have more opportunities to interact with Chinese and their feelings of Chinese culture and tradition is also enhanced by these interactions.²⁰⁾

3.2.2 Language ability and attitudes

As the carrier of culture and tool of communication, language is the most basic and effective way to construct and maintain individual identity. Therefore, lacking the language ability results in a certain degree of alienation and distance between individual and his/her ethnic culture. Take Chinese Cambodian for example. The language commonly used in the family is Cambodian (56%), followed by Chinese dialect (29%) and Mandarin accounting for 16%. These results, on the one hand, show the deep integration of Chinese Cambodian into local society. On the other hand, they show that Chinese dialects still play an important role in Chinese Cambodian society. For example, the Khmer-Chinese Association as of the most significant Chinese association in Cambodia consists of five major dialect groups and 13 kinship

associations, of which Chaozhou association founded in 1994 is the biggest sub-group with members whose ancestors come from Chaozhou City of Canton Province and speak Cantonese.

In terms of language ability, the Chinese Cambodian has weak Chinese skill in general, only 3% of the respondents consider their Chinese language as *Very Good*, while more than 80% of respondents admit the importance of learning Chinese. The Chinese Cambodian without mixed ethnicity/mixed blooded have lower language ability, prefers to speak Chinese dialect compared to Cambodian and to those with mixed ethnicity/mixed blooded . At home, the respondents ages 18 to 34 prefer to speak Cambodian (61%) rather than their Chinese dialects (14%) and Chinese mandarin (16%) compared to those ages 12 to 17. We have a similar finding when breaking down our results by generations.

As shown in Figure 2, in the questions of why learning Chinese is important, 58% of the respondents gave reasons to better understand Chinese culture and traditions, while 47% is for future career. The reasons given by respondents ages 12 to 17 is mainly due to future consideration, as seen in the figure, this is still 18% higher than those from ages 18 to 34.

Table 5 Language Used among Chinese Cambodian and their Language Ability

	Age		Generations			Mixed Ethnicity		
	(N=455) 12 to 17 (n=338)	18 to 34 (n=90)	2nd (n=69)	3rd (n=151)	4th or above	Yes (n=257)	No (n=155)	
<i>What is the language or dialect that is mainly used in your family?(Multi-choice)</i>								
Cambodian	56%	56%	61%	59%	50%	59%	62%	51%
Chinese dialects	29%	34%	14%	26%	35%	25%	27%	32%
English	5%	5%	4%	3%	8%	4%	6%	3%
Chinese Mandarin	16%	14%	23%	10%	15%	19%	18%	15%
Others	6%	7%	3%	7%	6%	6%	5%	6%
<i>How is your Chinese language ability?</i>								
Poor	6%	6%	6%	9%	6%	5%	6%	7%
Fair	48%	52%	39%	45%	49%	48%	44%	52%
Good	27%	27%	29%	25%	22%	32%	30%	24%
Excellent	3%	2%	6%	7%	2%	2%	4%	3%

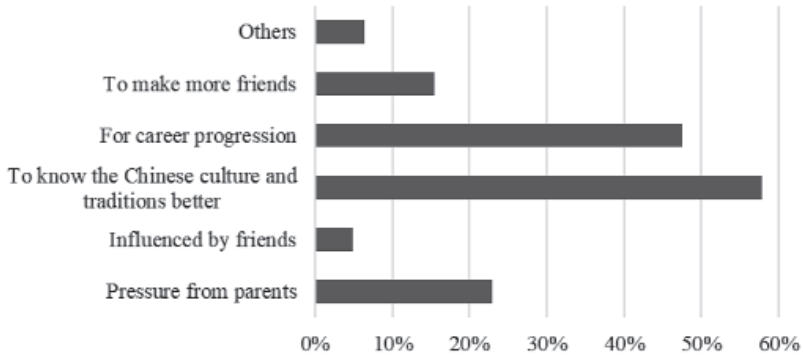


Figure 2 Reasons for Chinese Cambodian to learn Chinese

While it is clear that the preservation of traditional culture is the most important factor in motivating Chinese Cambodian to learn Chinese, other factors such as job opportunity and career considerations matter. Chinese Cambodian with excellent Mandarin skills tend to get well-paid jobs such as working as engineers and in banks. This is mainly due to investments directed to Cambodia from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia, which also utilizes the use of Chinese. In our interview, Li Huiming, the former president of Duanhua School, mentions that the Chinese schools face an increasing competition from the financial institutions that aim to hire employers with good-Chinese skills by providing higher salary.²¹⁾

The widespread use of Chinese in commercial activities, however, does not undermine the critical role of Chinese in cultural inheritance. On the contrary, we argue that the increasing importance of Chinese to commercial and business activities in Cambodian society contribute to the maintenance of Chinese culture and traditions among Chinese Cambodian, while at the same time being assimilated by the host community.

3.3 Perception of China

This study will examine the views and perceptions of Chinese Cambodian on China with regards to China's national image, domestic affairs and national influence.

3.3.1 China's national image

Chinese Cambodian surveyed have been asked to score their views on China's national image from 0 to 100. The average score of our respondents is 84.01 which was higher than that of surveyed responses from other Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia (83.15), the Philippines (79.5) and Thailand (77.84). This shows that Chinese Cambodian hold positive attitudes towards China's national image. Moreover, we find that respondents ages 12 to 17 hold a more positive attitude than those ages 18 to 34 in this regard.

Figure 3 show in detail the survey results on views of Chinese Cambodian about China's national image. As shown in Figure 3, Chinese Cambodian in general hold a positive view on China, with a higher proportion of respondents

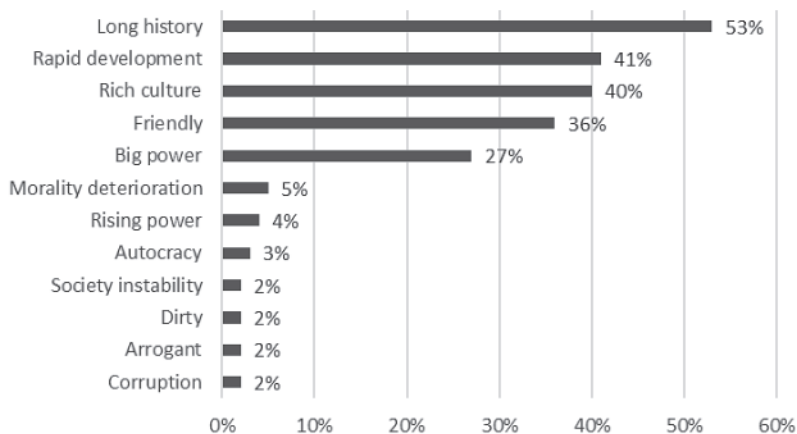


Figure 3 China's image in the eyes of Chinese Cambodian

considering China as having long history, rapid development, developed culture, being friendly and possess great power while a very low proportion hold negative perceptions of which is less than 5%. These findings are similar to our surveyed findings in other Southeast Asian countries. Moreover, respondents ages 12 to 17 have a more positive perception of China's national image than those ages 18 to 34.

3.3.2 Perception of China's domestic affairs

Since its economic reform in the 1978, China has developed rapidly and become the second largest economy in the world. With rapid development in economy, China has established closer economic and trade relations with Cambodia, especially since the establishment of comprehensive strategic partnerships between these two countries in 2010. The investment from China to Cambodia has increased dramatically and China has been Cambodia's largest source of foreign investment. Moreover, China has also provided a large number of low-interest and interest-free loans to Cambodia. According to data from the Cambodian Development Committee, China is the largest investment source of Cambodia in 2016 which accounts for 29.92 % of its total of 3.6 billion US dollars investment.²²⁾ In this regard, the close economic and trade relations between China and Cambodia, as well as China's massive investment in Cambodia, to great extent, has greatly promoted the sustainable economic development and social progress of Cambodia²³⁾, and affect the perception of Chinese Cambodian towards China with regards to its political system and development model.

In the question of what the main drivers of China's rapid economic growth are, the top answer from surveyed Cambodian are China's economic model (47%), political system (29%) and the scientific and technological innovation

ability (27%). In the question of whether China's political system and development path could serve its people, 53% of respondents gave a positive answer, with negative and uncertain answer rate at 5% and 27% respectively. It shows that Chinese Cambodian generally recognize China's political system, which is higher than that of Chinese interviewed in other seven Southeast Asian countries.

There is a higher proportion among respondents ages 12 to 17 viewing China's political system as of importance to China's economic growth than those of 18 to 34. Similarly, the proportion of third and fourth generation surveyed viewing China's political system as of importance to China's economic growth is higher than those of second generation.

3.3.3 Perception of China's international influence and soft power

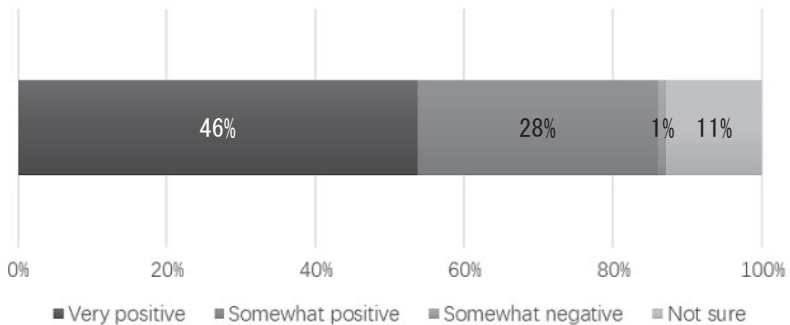


Figure 4 China's international influence

Over the past decades, China has developed from an onlooker to an active participant in international affairs due to its rise. China takes a more active role in not only international affairs but also in international institutions. In the

question asked regarding China's international influence, the proportions of answer from respondents are *Very Positive* (46%) and *Relatively Positive* (28%), only 1% of respondents choose either as an answer *Little Negative* or *Very Negative*.

These findings show that Chinese Cambodian have a relatively positive attitude towards the role of China in the international arena. We get some interesting findings when breaking down our results by groups. First, Chinese Cambodian with mixed ethnicity/blood have more positive perception of China's international influence compared to those without mixed ethnicity. Second, respondents ages 12 to 17 hold a higher proportion of viewing China has a positive global influence than those of 18 to 34, with a gap of 13% between each other.

Moreover, Chinese Cambodian have a positive perception of China's soft power. The Table 6 shows the views of Chinese Cambodian on the soft power of selected countries with regards to their importance to Cambodia, cultural charming, the quality of goods, Science and Technology Capacity (S&T level). The respondents were asked to score their views on the corresponding question from 0 to 10. As shown in Table 6, the United States receives mostly positive marks on these questions, with an average score of 7.76. China is second to the United States, with an average of 7.73. Moreover, we find that China is considered to be the most important and culturally attractive country, while its scientific and technological capacity and product quality are perceived subjacent to those of the United States. Moreover, respondents ages 12 to 17 have a more positive view in China's soft power than those ages 18 to 34, and in this regard Chinese Cambodian with mixed ethnicity/mixed blooded have a more positive perception compared to those without mixed blood.

Table 6 Views of Chinese Cambodian on Soft Power of Selected Countries (N=455)

	Importance to Cambodia	Cultural Charming	Quality of goods	Science and Technology Capacity	Average
Japan	6.7	5.46	7.35	7.42	6.73
Europe	5.66	6.05	6.49	6.87	6.27
China	8.05	8.04	7.12	7.7	7.73
United States	6.84	7.91	7.82	8.48	7.76
Vietnam	2.06	1.25	2.58	2.11	2

3.4 Comparison among Groups of Chinese Cambodian

In this section, we used Chi-square tests to examine variations among different groups of Chinese Cambodian regarding their views on identity and China. First, we compare two age groups, namely the group of 12 to 17 and those of 18 to 24. Second, we compare three generation groups. We combine the groups of second and third generations because chi-square tests require expected frequency in all cells should be at least 5.

Table 7 and Table 8 show the empirical results of age groups and generation groups respectively, both tables present selected results that are significant with 95 per cent confidence level. Table 7 shows that there are statistical differences between the group of 12 to 17 and those of 18 to 34 with regards to their usage of Chinese dialects, the purpose for learning Chinese for progression, attitude towards inter-racial marriage, and whether their impression of China is rapidly developing. Table 8 shows that there are statistical differences between the second and third generations and those of the fourth and higher with regards to having a connection to Chinese culture at home and whether they view political system as a significant factor driving rapid economic development in China.

Table 7 Variations among Age Groups of Chinese Cambodian: Chi-square Tests

Table 7 Variations among Age Groups: Chi-square tests						
Questions	Views	12 to 17	18 to 34	Pearson's Chi-squared test		
				X ²	df	p value
What is the language or dialect that is mainly used in your family: Chinese Dialects	Yes	114	13	11.365	1	0.001*
	No	190	63			
Why did you learn Chinese Mandarin: For Career Progression	Yes	177	30	7.943	1	0.005*
	No	131	46			
What is your attitude towards your brothers' and sisters' inter-racial marriage?	Agree	51	24	11.618	3	0.009*
	Disagree	34	11			
	No difference	142	24			
	Not sure	79	15			
Your impression of China: Rapid Development	Yes	159	27	7.387	1	0.007*
	No	128	45			

Table 8 Variations among Generation Groups of Chinese Cambodian: Chi-square Tests

Questions	Views	2nd and 3rd Generations	4th or above Generations	Pearson's Chi-squared test		
				X ²	df	p value
In which situations do you feel a connection with the Chinese culture: At Home	Yes	70	50	4.9	1	0.027*
	No	130	151			
Which of the following factors do you think is the major drive for the rapid economic development in China: Political system	Yes	75	53	5.384	1	0.02*
	No	114	134			

4. Conclusions

There is no doubt that the emigration from China in Cambodia has been an essential and integral part of Cambodian society. They are highly localized with regards to political identity, social interactions, language usage and cultural identity. For instance, they prefer to use Cambodian language and believe in Buddhism. The localization of Chinese Cambodian truly reflects the theory of structural assimilation. Hirschman (1988) suggests that cultural assimilation depends, in part, on the level of institutional separateness, while separate languages and traditional beliefs of an ethnic group are harder to maintain in a relatively open institutional environment.²⁴⁾ In the case of Chinese Cambodian, they have been assimilated gradually and continuously by the host country, of

which the relaxed political and social environment since the 1990s and a strong sense of Buddhism culture play an important role.

On the one hand, Chinese Cambodian, similar to those in other Southeast Asian countries, maintain a strong sense of “Chineseness” and well inherit traditional Chinese culture. This can be reflected by a high proportion of respondents surveyed showing a strong sense of Chinese ethnic identity, use of original language, openness to celebrate traditional Chinese festivals such as the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival and preservation of many traditional Chinese customs. The inheritance of Chinese traditional culture and customs depends on various factors. For instance, Chinese Cambodian in rural areas have been well assimilated by the host society with a limited preservation of Chinese culture and customs. For those living in urban areas, they have more opportunities to gain Chinese education and interact with other Chinese Cambodian, which leads to a higher chance of preserving and maintaining Chinese traditional culture. In general, the preservation of Chinese cultural identity among Chinese Cambodian has declined over time.

On the other hand, the views of Chinese Cambodian on identity and China have distinguishing characteristics compared to those in the other Southeast Asian countries. First, our survey results show that Chinese Cambodian ages 12 to 17 have a more positive feelings about their ethnic identity and views on China compared to those ages 18 to 34. Second, Chinese Cambodian hold a more positive view of China’s national image, economic development, political systems and global influence compared to those in other Southeast Asian countries surveyed. Third, although overseas Chinese with mixed ethnicity/mixed blooded tends to be more localized in general, our survey result shows that Chinese Cambodian with mixed ethnicity/mixed blooded, to a certain extent, is more likely to have a positive view on Chinese cultures and customs

compared to those without mixed ethnicity/mixed blooded.

What do these distinguishing characteristics of Chinese Cambodian mean and how to interpret them properly? We suggest that the positive attitudes of the Chinese emigration community in Cambodia mainly results from China's economic rise and the close economic and trade relations between these two countries. If a Chinese Cambodian, either belonging to a group or as an individual, benefits from China's economic growth or its investment, such as having a higher salary in Chinese firms located in Cambodia, he/she is more likely to be motivated to have a strong sense of Chinese ethnic identity and attach importance to Chinese culture. In our survey, we find that Chinese Cambodian, in general, consider China's development as an opportunity for their career, which results in an increase of their interest in learning Chinese. Moreover, the arrival of a large number of new emigrations from China boosts the development of Chinese Cambodian newspapers and Chinese education. This not only contributes to the preservation of Chinese traditional culture and customs among Chinese Cambodian but also makes the existing Chinese communities reflect on and re-capture traditional Chinese costumes when interacting with each other. However, the increasing interactions among the well-localized Chinese Cambodian and the new arrivals can reach different results; in other words, the bad experiences during the interactions can lead to divisions between each other. Third, the young Chinese Cambodian, even though they continue to be assimilated, have more opportunities to access Chinese cultures and be influenced by China helping them develop a more positive view on China. Fourth, Chinese Cambodian with ethnicity/mixed blooded can develop strong feelings of their Chinese ethnic identity through social and cultural interactions with China. This is one of the main reasons for the current tendencies of Chinese Cambodia with mixed ethnicity/mixed

blooded to maintain Chinese cultures and customs and hold a positive view on China.

[This paper is part of the research project “Identity of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asian countries and their perception of China”, funded by the Ministry of Education(Project No.: 13YJCZH024)]

Notes

- 1) Xue Jundu, Cao Yunhua, The change of Southeast Asian Chinese community since World War II (Zhanhou Dongnanya Huaren Shehui Bianqian, China Huaqiao Press, 1999, p.326
- 2) Huang Xiaojian, "The Changing Feature of Overseas Chinese in Cambodia from 1991 to 2017 —— Analysing the Role of Overseas Chinese in Cambodia of the Belt and Road Initiative", *Overseas Chinese History Studies*, Vol 3, 2018, p.34
- 3) Zhan Xiaomei & Wang Shimin, "Political Identity: A Perspective from Cultural Identity", *Social Science in China*, Volume 35, 2014 - Issue 2, p. 156
- 4) Walter A. Rosenbaum, *Political culture*, Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1975, p.9
- 5) Wu Naide, "Provincial consciousness, political support and state identity-A preliminary study on the Theory of ethnic Politics in Taiwan", in Zhang Maogui, *Ethnic relations and State identity*, Taibei: Yeqiang press, 1993, p.35
- 6) Wang Shilu, "Overseas Chinese in Cambodia: past and present", *Overseas Chinese History Studies*, Vol.4, 2002; Chen Shilun, "The Inheritance and Development of the Cantonese Ethnic Organizations in Cambodia", *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 5, 2017; Zhuang Guotu, "Changes in Social Position of Ethnic Chinese in Cambodia since World War II", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 3, 2004; Huang Xiaojian, "The Changing Feature of Overseas Chinese in Cambodia from 1991 to 2017——Analyzing the Role of Overseas Chinese in Cambodia of the Belt and Road Initiative", *Journal of Overseas Chinese History Studies*, Vol. 3, 2018.
- 7) Zheng Yisheng, Chen Junyuan, "The Primary Exploration of 'Zhao Zhen' People's Marriage Custom in Cambodia——A Case Study of Spean Tor Village of Kampong Cham Province", *Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, Vol. 39, 2017
- 8) Nozawa Tomohiro's research was published only in Japanese, but some of them were translated into Chinese and published in China, like "The Chinese Community in Cambodia——an investigation report on the Chinese settlement in Phnom Penh",

- Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 2, 2012; “The Chinese Community in Cambodia—an investigation on new Chinese migrants”, Southeast Asian Studies, Vol.1, 2013; “The Chinese Community in Cambodia—the internationalization of Chinese associations”, Southeast Asian Studies. Vol.3, 2011; “The Chinese Community in Cambodia—the Revitalization and Development of Chinese Education”, Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 3, 2012.
- 9) Iris Lo and Joan Tsang, Duanhua Chinese school in Phnom Penh, a magnet for recruiting Maoists in the 60s, celebrates its 120th anniversary, <https://ki-media.blogspot.com/2007/08/duanhua-chinese-school-in-phnom-penh.html>, 2017
 - 10) China news, <http://www.chinanews.com/zgqj/2013/07-08/5016300.shtml>, 2013
 - 11) Lundholm, Emma. “Return to Where? The Geography of Elderly Return Migration in Sweden.” *European Urban and Regional Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, Jan. 2015, pp. 92–103, doi:10.1177/0969776412464505; Levie, J. Small Bus Econ, Immigration, In-Migration, Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship in the United Kingdom, *Small Business Economics* (2007) 28:143–169; Bevelander, Pieter and Irastorza, Nahikari, Economic Integration of Intermarried Labour Migrants, Refugees and Family Migrants to Sweden: Premium or Selection?. IZA Discussion Paper No. 8065. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2420710>; Makina Daniel, Migration and Characteristics of Remittance Senders in South Africa, *International Migration*, 51, e148-e158.2013
 - 12) Wang Shilu, “Overseas Chinese in Cambodia: past and present”, *Overseas Chinese History Studies*, Vol. 4, 2002, p.50
 - 13) Fu Xi, Zhang Yu, The past and present situation of overseas Chinese in Cambodia., *Journal of overseas Chinese in Bangui*, Vol. 3, 2000.
 - 14) The wife of Hun Sen, present Prime Minister of Cambodia, is also a Chinese Cambodian.
 - 15) World population network, <http://www.renkou.org.cn/countries/jianpuzhai/>
 - 16) Chinese education, Chinese newspaper and Chinese association are regarded as the three pillars of traditional Chinese community abroad in maintaining and inheriting Chinese tradition and culture.
 - 17) According to our survey of and face-to-face interview with Chinese Cambodian conducted in 2019.
 - 18) Zhuang Guotu, “On the connotation of Chinese Culture and its relationship with ethnic identity”, *Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol.3, 1999, p.3
 - 19) People’s Daily Online, <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper68/14036/1252448.html>.2005-02-04
 - 20) In 2017, the number of Chinese tourists to Cambodia exceeded 1 million. By November 2018, there were already 1.8 million Mainland Chinese tourists, an increase of 69.3%

over 2017 and accounting for 33.5% of international tourists to Cambodian, see Tourism Statistics Report, Statistics and Tourism Information Department, Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia, Nov. 2018.

- 21) In our interview in Duanhua school in 2015.
- 22) Council for the Development of Cambodia, <http://www.cambodiainvestment.gov.kh/why-invest-in-cambodia/investment-environment/investment-trend.html>
- 23) Chheang Vannarith, "China and investments it has made in Cambodia", Khmer Times, July 28, 2017
- 24) Charles Hirschman, "Chinese Identity in Southeast Asia: Alternative Perspective", in Jennifer Cushman and Wang Gungwu eds., *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese Since World War II*, Hongkong University Press, 1988, p.28