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Sino-Cambodia Relations

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With Compliments

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Abstract:

The paper provides historical background of the bilateral relations between Cambodia and China particularly in the post cold war period. Cambodia is considered to be the closest friend of China in Southeast Asia. Since the late 1990s, Sino-Cambodia relations have been improving remarkably in all fields: politic, economic, and security. Good relations between Cambodia and China play a complementary role in East Asian community building.

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Sino-Cambodia Relations

By Long Kosal

Introduction

The sudden collapse of the bipolar world removed the antagonistic and confrontational policies adopted by the superpowers during the decades long cold war period. Former communist states in Europe had open up to international trade and cooperation and directed their energy toward a full speed international integration. No longer were political issues the predominant factor of interaction and most of the countries saw better future prospect of this new era. The world was witnessing the emergence of complex relationships between a large number of regional power centers, including states and non-state actors such as non-governmental organization and religious center. Relatively to the size of their population and territory, and comparative to the strength of their political foundation, military capacity and economic basis, each state in their own way influences the method, style and content of their diplomatic practices.¹ Seen in this context, states in their capacity and interest guided their foreign policy through various means of diplomacy. Cambodia was an exceptional case that truly reflected this viewpoint. As a former client state to the Soviet Union, Cambodia sensed that it has to dramatically redirecting its political and economic foundation. As the Soviet Union became dysfunctional and state members became independent, Cambodia found a new direction for its future path. Hostile verbal attacks on certain adversary were toned down to allow a healing time for good. Indeed, in 1993 with the adaptation of a multi-party political system and open market economy Cambodia was warmly encouraged by the international community to strongly promote democracy and human rights. With this also, Cambodia faced a daunting task to reintegrate itself to the international community and to gain diplomatic recognition. Among many other nations that Cambodia got reengaged with was China.²

¹ Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne., *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its evolution, theory and administration*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 238-239.

² Though their diplomatic relations were established on July 19, 1958, this relationship became hostile due to political differences during the 1980s. Chinese leader of different generation have been very close to King Sihanouk and cultivated profound friendship with him personally. With this, it lays a solid foundation for long-standing and stable development of relationship during then Prince Sihanouk was in power. China had long appreciated King Sihanouk for his assistance in breaking China's isolation in the 1960s by campaigning at the UN for the expulsion of the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the seating at the UN of China mainland. However, during the height of Cambodian civil war in the 1980s, China played a very prominent role in supporting the notorious Khmer Rouge, the Sihanoukist and the Son Sann group to fight against the Phnom Penh government which was ran by Heng Samrin, Chea Sim and Hun Sen. China at this particular period was not friendly to Cambodia as the majority of Cambodian citizens were living under the authority of the Phnom Penh government. The author would want to stress that Cambodia here means the People's Republic Kampuchear even as it was not recognized by the UN as a legitimate government. The main justification of that is, firstly, because the PRK was a dominant force that largely controlled Cambodia and the Cambodian people. Beside, PRK enjoyed the support of the Cambodian people who survived the horrible Khmer Rouge regime even it lacked international recognition from the Western block. It was during this period that antagonistic exchanges took place between PRK and China. Hun Sen, Prime Minister of PRK, was a fierce critic of China for its role in the conflict of Cambodia and counter criticism from the Chinese government were also directed

The article emphasizes on the bilateral cooperation between Cambodia and China from the period of 1990 to 2007. The choosing of this timeframe is significant due to the fact that the international community really had a great role establishing an elected Cambodian government, promoting democracy and, most important of all, stabilizing flurry Cambodian politics. In this aspect international contributions for Cambodian national reconciliation were tremendous and China played vital role in securing peace building in Cambodia. Not only were their efforts directed to effectiveness of the implementation of the Paris Agreement, but their presence provided a great opportunity for Cambodia's integration to the world. In addition to that was the development of Cambodian domestic politics and actors involved. That despite political turbulent and strong contestant from political rivals, Hun Sen remains the central figure in the Cambodian's political heart. Whether the international community including China likes it or not, they all have to engage Hun Sen in every aspect concern Cambodian issues. With this in mind, Hun Sen becomes very prominent domestically and internationally concerning the settings of Cambodian domestic and foreign policy.

There are three main interests that influence Cambodia's views on its relationship with China in this contemporary politics.³ However, it needs to be pointed out that these interests were not predetermined, but rather were considered accordingly at the time of interest. First, it is assumed that Cambodia looked up to China for promoting peace and national reconciliation for its war-torn society. Second, immediately after the July political crisis, Cambodia viewed China as a benign regional power who could provide it legitimacy at the international scale. This was truly the case as Cambodia's national sovereignty came under serious challenge from increasingly powerful ideas about international peace enforcement and the imposition of international norms of behavior on a small and weak state.⁴ Third, it is believed that Cambodia viewed that a prosperous China would be beneficial to Cambodian economy.⁵ Of the main arguments are of course the aspects of geopolitical location and cultural connection. It is believed that the Cambodian economy has always been under the control of Chinese-ancestral Cambodian businessmen. That the better off China would become one of the future catalysts of Cambodian economy through entrepreneurship, trade and the transfers of management as well as technological know how.

Brief History of Sino-Cambodian relationship

Despite Cambodia do not share a common border with China but they had long been in a historic and commercial relationship. In the early 12th century, Tcheou Ta- Koun led a diplomatic expedition mission to Cambodia and received audiences with Cambodia's King. From his memoir we have learned of the Chinese diplomatic and economic interactions with the ancient Khmer. From this it really reflects the strategic point of interest between the two countries. At the modern time, it was on July 19, 1958 that their diplomatic relations were established. Their tie was further flourishing during the early post independent Cambodia and King Norodom Sihanouk, at a personal level, was able to cultivate a profound friendly relationship with different generations of Chinese leaders. It is that this friendly relationship

toward PRK and helped the west to punish Cambodia and its people. Secondly, Hun Sen has always been the central figure of Cambodian politics from the early 1980s until present.

³ Those three interests are based on the author's empirical assumptions.

⁴ Tony Kevin., "Cambodia's international rehabilitation, 1997-2000" in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, January 12, 2000.

⁵ Speech of Cham Prasidh (Minister of Commerce)., "*Effects of China's entry into WTO and implications for Cambodian exports*" Phnom Penh, December 13, 2003. Please see; http://www.moc.gov.kh/cp_speech/cp_speech-01.htm

that lay a solid foundation for long-standing cooperation between the two nations. However, one should be noticed that at some stages, especially during the 1980s Sino-Cambodian relationship was badly degraded to a very worst in their history. China's patronage of the communist Khmer Rouge regime during 1975-1978 is widely known in the world and among ordinary Cambodians. And even the fall of this genocidal regime, which committed mass killing of around 1.7 millions of Cambodians, China continued to supply the notorious Khmer Rouge with weaponry along the Thai-Cambodian border during 1979 to 1990. Despite of that during the mid 1990s, especially after the 1997 July political crisis⁶ in Cambodia, their bilateral relationship would take a great detour and the building of trust and confidence slowly produces smooth cooperation politically, militarily and economically. China's economic profile in Cambodia has become particularly pronounced. In the wake of this crisis, Cambodia turned to China for financial aid to replace that temporary suspended by Western donors. During his official visit to Cambodia, Wen Jiabao expressed temptations to further enhance economic, political and military interaction through a comprehensive partnership of cooperation. He also promised \$600 million in aid and loans to Cambodia, much of it earmarked for the construction of hydro-electric dams and bridges.⁷ Chinese companies became very active in Cambodia post-1997 and in 2004 had emerged as the number one foreign investor. In the first nine months of 2005, China pledged \$442 million of investments, up from \$80 million in 2004.⁸

Sino-Cambodian relations: Political consolidations

Among its interests, Cambodia engaged China in two distinctive areas: peace and national reconciliation; and economic development. However, both countries were not able to exchange much of their mutual interest but were mainly preoccupied in building trust. The political momentum for China to stage its comeback was not ripe because of its mixed legacy during and after the Khmer Rouge period⁹. The Cambodians in general were suspicious in Chinese commitment to participate in the Paris Peace Agreement which it is one of the signatories. The Khmer Rouge sentiment was just too strong that ordinary Cambodian people could not hold their emotion. This was so alarming when China was not able to dissuade the Khmer Rouge from withdrawing out of the Paris Peace Agreement.¹⁰ So under the influence of suspicion, Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP) were so reserved toward China even if it seemed to diplomatically engage with full capacity at the official level. So the Chinese comeback was not so warmly welcome by the CPP and the ordinary Cambodian people placed little trust on China. Relationship between China and the CPP as well as the

⁶ It was the rise of political tensions and increased factionalism in the late Cambodian political upheaval. It featured the military confrontation between the coalition government partners, the FUNCINPEC of Prince Norodom Ranariddh and the CPP of Hun Sen, where in 48 hours of gun fires were exchange exclusively in Phnom Penh. As a result of the fighting, Prince Ranariddh, who was then the First Prime Minister of Cambodian, had been effectively ousted from power. From that period on, Cambodia has been largely dominated by the CCP and this party had massive victory in the following elections.

⁷ BBC News, April 8, 2006. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4890400.stm>)

⁸ Xinhua, February 14, 2006.

⁹ During 1975 to 1978, it is believed that Khmer Rouge had committed massive killing of about 1.7 million of Cambodian people.

¹⁰ In 1992 the Khmer Rouge leaders were misled that there were too Vietnamese migrants living in Cambodia and perceived that if they were to keep participating in the Paris Peace Agreement they would lose the upcoming general election in 1993. This argument was their only pretext not to participate in the international back reconciliation process which takes place under the jurisdiction of the UN. Eventually, Khmer Rouge was out of the election and continued to fight against the government until late 1998.

public slowly improved when China adopted an anti-Khmer Rouge policy; however, the relationship was still informal.¹¹ The estimated improvements were seen in two aspects, which were the direct impacts of that policy. Firstly, the China turn-away weakened the KR political resistance that would open up the opportunity among its rank to defect to the government, provided that there was no support and isolation from outsider. This issue has always been the central objective of the CPP ever since its establishment; therefore, the CPP took it as complementary to its objective. Secondly, China's stance reduced the KR military capacity through reduced military assistance.

During this period, there were a number of Chinese investments; only a single agreement for the promotion and protection of investment was signed on July 1996 in Beijing.¹² However, the said agreement did not serve the purpose of economic development but rather it was designed to generate a favourable atmosphere through which leaders of both countries can have a channel for smooth communication.

From 1997 onwards, the relationship between Cambodia and China was highly significant in almost every aspect. It kicked off as the impact of the crisis began to cloud over Cambodia international legitimacy and credential. Indeed, their relations were observed to have been taking place in 'full force'.¹³ There were a number of reasons to explain such trend of their relationship. Firstly and the most important factor was the convergence of their political fundamentality to the July crisis. It was the issue of national sovereignty and internal affair, which brought both Phnom Penh and Beijing together over the crisis. While the international community condemned and cried for the return of democrats with respect to human rights and freedom of speech, China voiced its opinion to Cambodia with a different tone. It offered the 'non-interference' assurance to Cambodia and urged all conflicting Cambodian leaders to adopt a peaceful resolution manner. This offering established the foundation that signalled Cambodia, Hun Sen's inclination to lean toward China for international political and breathing space. The international political support was important because it helped Cambodia not only for the protection of its institutional democratic image, but also the conflict resolution that it undertook in dealing with the crisis.

Secondly, the pressure, which the international community applied to Cambodia immediately after the crisis, created the 'favorable environment' for them to collaborate.¹⁴ It was the window of opportunity in which Cambodia and China exchanged mutual benefit. This thought explains Cambodia crisis behavior on the ground that China's response to the crisis was more sympathetic than the others. That after the July crisis, the U.S intensified its international campaign to punish Cambodia and on July 28, 1997 the House of Representative passed Resolution 195 and pronounced that military coup had happen in Cambodia.¹⁵ Following the US-led international protest against Phnom Penh some international aid programs and financial assistances were suspended. The UN condemned the

¹¹ Peou Sorpong., *Intervention & change in Cambodia: Toward democracy?*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000, p. 381.

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Please see <http://fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/yzs/gjlb/2696/t15870.htm>

¹³ Julio A. Jeldres, "China-Cambodia: More than just friends?", in *Asia Times*, September 16, 2003.

Please see; http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/EI16Ae03.html

¹⁴ Nayan Chanda., "China and Cambodia: The mirror of history" in *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, November 2002, p.6.

¹⁵ The House of Representative, Resolution 195, July 28, 1997.

crisis as acts of violence and expressed regret over the development, and had its credential committee to leave the Cambodian seat at the UN vacant. ASEAN also delayed the admission date of Cambodia to the group, which was originally set on July 10, 1997. Contrary to all, the Chinese responses were the accommodating ones. While always welcoming King Sihanouk to Beijing for his regular medical treatment, China was silent about the crisis and sidelined FUNCINPEC. It reiterated the principle of non-interference and urged all conflicting parties to find a peaceful resolution. In reality, however, China did not hid the fact that it favored Hun Sen and in the following months it had hosted two visits by top CPP officials. Not long after the crisis, China delivered \$2.8 million worth of military equipment to Cambodia.¹⁶ These gestures provided limited space for Cambodia to resist international pressure and to resist the resistance forces loyal to FUNCINPEC. In response to the Chinese goodwill gesture, Phnom Penh squeezed Taiwan's business representative office out of Cambodia.¹⁷

Thirdly, their political ties had further improved by means of exchanges of visit of top political figures. The visits included that of President Jiang Zemin's visit in November 2000, Defense Minister Chi Haotian in February 2001, Chairman of the Standing Committee Li Peng in May 2001, and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji in November 2002. Soon after the general election in 1998, China was among the others to welcome the election result and expressed its hope that Cambodian political parties would work hard to create a new parliament and government in a spirit of national harmony.¹⁸ China was also the first foreign country that invited Hun Sen to Beijing in February 1999 with some US\$218.3 million interest-free loan, which is believed to be the biggest Chinese financial assistance to any foreign country. And since the visit of Hun Sen to China, there have been frequent visits of Chinese delegation to Cambodia.¹⁹ Indeed, since 1997 to 2001, China had provided Cambodia with US\$40 million in aid, loans of more than US\$200 million, and more than US\$3 million of military package.

In this respect, among the noticeable perspectives that Phnom Penh enjoys from Beijing's support was the transformation from being the 'bitter foe to the close ally'. Expressing his satisfaction over the Chinese support, Hun Sen publicly expressed thanks to China for maintaining neutrality and not interfering in Cambodia's internal affairs.²⁰ The expression was not only aimed at Chinese political support but also referring to the economic assistance as well. A major influencing factor to that is the nature of Chinese economic assistance. Though western aids flew into Cambodia with large substantial amount higher than the Chinese aids, the latter were seen as more attractive because it came without conditionality for transparency or accountability.

Sino-Cambodian relations: Economic consolidations

Add to the political consolidation, their economic cooperation seemed to have followed two aspects: political and cultural. Politically, it is very important to note that their

¹⁶ Xinhua, December 9, 1997.

¹⁷ *The Nation*, August 11, 1997.

¹⁸ Poeu Sorpong., "Cambodia in 1998: From despair to hope?" in *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1, Jan/Feb 1999, p. 25.

¹⁹ Julio A. Jeldres., Note 13, op.cit.

²⁰ Kheang Un and Judy Ledgerwood., "Cambodia in 2001: Toward democratic consolidation?" in *Asian Survey*, Vol. XLII, No. 1, Jan/Feb 2002, p. 103.

cooperation was spearheaded by political manoeuvre. One aspect in the reflection of such relationship is the historical bilateral assistance data that China committed in promoting development in Cambodia. The Council for Development of Cambodia (CDC) in its June 1998 main report showed that, from 1992 to 1998, China had contributed over US\$46 million to Cambodia.²¹ And not surprisingly, those of Chinese assistance were without any specific condition for transparency or good governance.²² But the large proportion of this amount was strongly intensified with the average of more than US\$11.5 million from 1996 to 1998 when their close political relation began to merge. This amount in comparison to other major international bilateral assistance to Cambodia was too small; but, in the circumstance of financial shortage, that amount was quite significant. Adding to that was the suspension and reduction of aid of some major countries and international institutions and the conditionality attached to the assistance.²³ The Japanese reduction by a large margin in bilateral assistance from US\$111 million in 1996 to US\$59 million in 1997 and US\$71 million in 1998 provided more difficulty to Cambodia in the budget operational aspect. Moreover, it is worth to take note that Japan has always been strongly committed in developing Cambodia and is the country's top donor.

Economic wise is the Chinese business ethic that strongly related to ancestral and cultural aspects.²⁴ The Khmer is the main ethnic group constituting most of the population, but the Chinese minority in Cambodian has always been dominant in the economy. This group forged their business connection that is virtually designed to monopolize the economic sphere, and became the forerunner element for economic development. Another significant aspect that adds to the importance of this group in the economy is their overseas connection with other Chinese business communities from all around the region, especially from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Cambodians with Chinese ancestral connection enjoyed substantial support from this overseas web in establishing their trading activities. Far Eastern Economic Review reported that almost 90 percent of all foreign investments in Cambodia for 1998 were accountable for this group. FEER quoted a banker as saying "Chinese companies are flooding into the country".²⁵ It is believed that while some ASEAN investments in Cambodia drastically dropped during the Asian financial crisis, investment from countries such as China, Hong Kong and Taiwan steadily increased from 1995 to 1997.²⁶

Chinese culture has slowly penetrated the Cambodian society. The Chinese have been actively promoting their language through community, school and newspaper.²⁷ Though this initiative seemed to be privately run by the Chinese embassy, Phnom Penh had its part by providing necessary elements ranging from human resources and materials. It is believed that China had sent some teachers down to assess the quality of the school and provided scholarship to top students.

²¹ Ministry of Commerce, "Cambodia: Business and Investment Handbook 2000", p. 46.

²² Nayan Chanda., "Southern hospitality" in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 164, No. 20, May 2001, pp. 30-32.

²³ Matthew Lee., "New-found generosity: China offers Phnom Penh military aid" in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 159, NO. 19, May 9, 1996, pp. 28-29.

²⁴ Thomas, Menkhoff., "Trade routes, trust and tactics: Chinese traders in Singapore" in Hans-Dieter Evers and Heiko Schrader, eds., *The Moral Economy of Trade: Ethnicity and Developing Market*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 104-123.

²⁵ Bruce, Gilley., "The Exile Resurgent: Ethnic Chinese resume economic and political dominance", in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 161, No. 2, January 8, 1999, pp. 22-27.

²⁶ *Cambodia Development Review*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, June 1998.

²⁷ Note 22, op.cit., p. 32.

At the regional level, Sino-Cambodian economic cooperation is an illustration on how government creates favorable economic environment. Cambodia and China, during the official visit of Chinese vice-premier Wu Yi to Cambodia in March 2004, signed package of economic cooperation agreements aimed at broadening bilateral trade volume to US\$500 million in 2005 from US\$320 million in 2003. The signing also aimed to promote favorable economic environment between the two countries which are highly related to the five priority areas of ASEAN China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA); namely, agriculture, information and communication, human resource development, two-way investment, and Mekong river basin development. In practical sense, this signing helps to boost Cambodian agricultural sector as more than 500 items of preferential tariffs with no duties and quotas, mostly agricultural products, were approved under the early harvest program of ACFTA.²⁸ The optimistic prospect comes as agricultural sector is among the main engine growth of Cambodia GDP due to vast natural resource endowment, and is still relatively underdeveloped. Rice is by far the most important in Cambodia, but large area of land remains under-utilized which leads to the opportunity for a higher potential of increasing rice yield, improving food security and expanding rice exports. Agro-processing and fish farming, too, can also become promising sources of growth. Therefore, it offers greater investment opportunity for this sector because it is young and dynamic, and by establishing a competitive environment now, Cambodia has the opportunity to grow in more efficiency and strong foundation for economic take-off.

Furthermore, the agreements set to drive for more FDI in different sector and to maintain Cambodia's energetic industrial sector by eyeing the newly established economic processing zones in Sihanoukville town, Banteay Meanchey and Koh Kong provinces. These likely industrial zones were established to secure in the long run the manufacturing sector that has been the most important source for generating employment and income as well as foreign exchange earnings. The likely benefits these zones provide for economic environments are its being export-oriented, with easy access to the market (near the deep-sea port, Sihanoukville Port and Koh Kong province; close to potential investors, Banteay Meanchey province: near Cambodian-Thai border), and business preferential treatments including tax incentive. Infrastructure, too, was not left out. Under the GMS context, the Singapore-Kunming railways connecting ASEAN to China provide greater economic space in terms of potential market and tourism expansion, the increased business and employment opportunity, and the reduction of poverty to Cambodia.²⁹ The potential excitement of this connection would be the greater expansion of land cross-border roads which would allow Cambodia into this corridor of commerce through public and private sector related to transportation as well as power generation and distribution.

Sino-Cambodian relations: Security issues

Since the end of the Cold War, the international community and the US, in particular, has intervened in a series of civil conflicts around the world. Rooted out of the cold war mentality, the notion of democracy as the world political benchmark became apparent as the Western democratic world prevailed over the Eastern communist bloc. It enhanced the image

²⁸ *China Daily*, October 21, 2004.

²⁹ Kao Kim Hourn and Sisowath D. Chanto., "The Greater Mekong Subregion: An ASEAN issue", in Simon S. C. Tay, Jesus P. Estanislao and Hadi Soesastro, eds., *Reinventing ASEAN*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001, pp. 163-180.

of democratic values in the form of political practices.³⁰ Hence, three noticeable phenomena, which shaped many countries' political transformation, had taken place all around the world. First, immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many countries including the former Soviet Union republics took political transformation and adhered to the principle of democracy. Second, a number of countries, where actions such as economic sanctions or diplomatic pressures have failed, were militarily intervened by the international forces and pressured to exercise democracy as the way of political practice. Third, a number of countries were peacefully intervened by the international forces and voluntarily adopted a democratic form of governance.

The Cambodian peace settlement in 1991 fit well in the last category. Though, at the surface, it seemed more fortunate than those that became democratic by force³¹; six years later Cambodia faced a major political upheaval as democratic values were degraded. Like the nature of many other weak states, Cambodia stood on a very difficult position to fulfilling a wide range of functions necessary for self-government, mostly in the aspects of economy, and politics.³² This proponent is viewed mainly because of its dependency on the international community while trying to establish sound strategic plan for recovery and become self-sufficient. Derive from this dependency, sovereignty, which means 'self-rule' with no denial of any higher political authority and the claiming by state of supreme decision-making authority can sometimes come under pressure or throws doubt to its existence while in practice.³³ The suggestion of such proponent is that Cambodia could be easily manipulated or subjected to criticism and pressured by the international community through their assistance leverage, regardless of whether it is economic or political leverage. Factionalism also exacerbates political chaos where there is no consensus among the influential groups toward a clearly defined 'state building'. In both cases, unpleasant interaction atmospheres between Cambodia and the international community can sometimes occur and, in most circumstances, Cambodia comes under challenge. In this sense, Cambodia political foundation is vulnerable to the international community who could greatly intensify or maximized the scale of Cambodian conflicts such as the crisis in 1997.³⁴

How does the weak identity as a state implicated in the Cambodian political system? There are two possible explanations to such question. First, there is no strong solidarity or cooperation among political groups of how Cambodia should be established.³⁵ From the historical perspective, Cambodia had mostly been traditionally known to be King-ruled, one-

³⁰ Mohammed Ayoob., *The third world security predicament: State making, regional conflict, and the international system*, London: Lynne Rienner, 1995. p. 125.

³¹ Panama, Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia were classified under the second category.

Karin Von, Hippel., *Democracy by force: US military intervention in the Post-Cold War World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

³² Barry Buzan., *People, States, and Fear: The national security problem in International Relations*, Great Britain: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983, pp.40-44.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 41. Buzan said that the concept of sovereignty itself is unquestionable; however, it is questionable among states that apply it. He said that sovereignty of any state do emerge or exist while it is in practice.

³⁴ Note 2, *op.cit.*, pp. 71-88. Ayoob claims that because Third World countries are in between norms that assume the impending arrival of a global society and those that presuppose the continued functioning of a system of sovereign states even if the sovereignty of states is weakened by unequal capabilities, economic interdependence, and technological breakthroughs of revolutionary proportions.

³⁵ David Chandler., "How to slice a century of Cambodian history" in *Phnom Penh Post*, December 24, 1999 – January 6, 2000.

man, or one-party political system³⁶ and not until October 1991 was liberal democracy introduced into Cambodian political practice. Through this practical system, the society had been ruled by autocrats, military dictator and communist authoritarian regime, which all could not bridge social cohesiveness where opposition element guided by different ideology remained the forefront political challenging force. The most recent illustration of such insolidarity and challenging within was the floating idea, though unable to surface, of the reemergence of a republic despite the reinstallation of the constitutional monarch system in 1993 and the concept of kingship has been minimized to the notion that 'King reigns but not rules'.³⁷ Therefore, this issue represents the fragility of the country's future fate as two clashing schools of thoughts are pushing for their ultimate goal which illustrates the existence of the weak idea of the state in Cambodia.

Second, the time has never been given enough to allow the idea of the state to take its root. A major reason to that is Cambodia, from the early 1970s to 1993, had been occupied with the regime changes, civil war and isolation from the most of the international community. In addition, the changes were very much in the radical form where the former regime and its leaders were called traitors and accused of being bad elements; therefore, unacceptable role model. In these circumstances, it is fair to say that the new regime and its leaders would negatively find every element left by the former regime. On this note, the mass population was not fully informed or did not understand the country's institutional or political structure and even the fact that inequality in terms socioeconomic distribution existed. The existence of such sociopolitical and socioeconomic inequality, led to some dissatisfaction of the population, which could result to social uprising or revolt against the state.

Consequently, the clashing ideas are floating and competing within Cambodian society since these ideologies not only hold the basis of relations between state and society, but also define the conditions for both harmony and conflict in domestic politics. Its political foundation stands on the weak and fragile establishment where the organizing ideologies become loose as they have come and gone with different leaderships; therefore, there never have been a considerable timing for it to strike deeper roots among the population. Indeed, in the late 20th century, Cambodia has the highest rate in Southeast Asia of regime change and new leaderships.

Cambodian political institutionalization, though becoming more robust and striving for development, is still profoundly lacking in practices. One of the most important reasons is that it lacks what Edward E. Azar and Chung-In Moon describe as a structural source of

³⁶ It refers to the country's undemocratic political structure, which has profound influence on political practices in Cambodia. The Monarch had always been the most important political institution in the country and had played leadership roles in the country. The ordinary people whose concept had been based on the belief that the King is the supreme command and he is destined to rule have supported the role that played by the King. Indeed, the ordinary people had traditionally adopted this concept that the King is the 'God-King'. This concept bolsters the legitimacy of this important institution on the fact that since its existence, except from March 1970 to September 1993, the King has headed Cambodia. Though the Sangkum Reastniyum headed by King Sihanouk after independence from France in November 1953 practiced democracy, it had sharply declined in April 1975 with the arrival of the infamous Pol Pot communist regime. This regime marked the birth of communist in Cambodia and one-party practice, which lasted until October 1991.

³⁷ King Sihanouk is still strongly concerned over the future existence of monarchy in Cambodia. He is often alarmed of the possibilities of the return of the Republic by making extra effort to ensure that there will be King for Cambodia after his reign.

legitimacy.³⁸ In theory, basing itself on liberal democratic principles, Cambodia's 1993 Constitution should be respected as the supreme law providing favorable conditions to ensure the implementation of the system of checks and balances. However, it had not been properly conducted by political parties. Scholars have questioned the effectiveness of the Constitution and called it just more than a proclamation of intentions due to many unfulfilled constitutional mandates.³⁹ The National Congress, which is supposed to be held annually, has never been convened. The 'lack of political-will' from political groups is the reason responsible for such absence. During its first term, rarely did the National Assembly, which was directly elected by the people, question the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, or the responsible Ministers, all of whom had been elected by the National Assembly itself. Party leaders regularly suppressed debate on sensitive issues or delayed passage of legislation that threatened the stability of the fragile governing coalition or personal interests. In such circumstances, lawmakers were to comply with their compelling party's policies or agendas where party decisions were highly superior to her or his.

Cambodia's military strategic viewpoints toward China would help addressing the weaknesses manifest in security concerns. As explained earlier, despite many criticisms from major international donors during the July crisis; China was not moved by it. Instead, China provided breathing ground for Cambodia while it faced diplomatic and financial difficulty. Hence, the 'Chinese card' played by Cambodia was seen in its crisis behavior aiming to ease the political and economic pressures by the international community, especially the US.⁴⁰ This Chinese card, however, was not meant to seek an equilibrium power vis-à-vis the international community, but it was rather to seek some limited international space where Cambodia could breathe to resist the pressures. More importantly, it seeks to stabilize the domestic politics that had been severely damaged by the crisis and the international community pressures. It was no doubt that the international community seriously challenged Cambodia's international legitimacy after the crisis. But, it was this critical issue that brought Cambodia to China for international political support on the ground of 'sovereignty'. More so, Cambodia viewed China's diplomatic pragmatism as 'polite diplomacy' and condition to negotiation. This polite diplomacy is seen in the Chinese foreign relations culture that China has maintained with many of Southeast Asian countries since the classical kingdom of Southeast Asia.⁴¹ The emphasis of this culture is that China and Southeast Asian countries have most of the time engaged in equal exchanges and mutual respect. It is through such respect that they learned to deal with each other with a set of procedures and expectations that were never jointly endorsed in form of written treaty, but which nevertheless provided the basis for mutual accommodation and intercourse.

Equally important, the weak and vulnerable Cambodia has always viewed China as a benign power which is absolutely different from the view it perceived on its neighboring countries: Thailand and Vietnam. This logic can be drawn from the historical perspective in which throughout its existence, Cambodia's territorial integrity has always been threatened.

³⁸ Edward E. Azar and Chung-in Moon., "The Software side of third world national security", in Edward, E. Azar and Chung-in Moon, eds., *National Security in the Third World: The Management of Internal and External Threats*, Maryland: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, 1988, P. 82.

³⁹ Lao Mong Hay., "Cambodia's agonizing quest: Political progress amidst institutional backwardness", in Dylan Hendrickson, eds., *Safeguarding peace: Cambodia's constitutional challenge*, London: Conciliation Resources, 1998, p. 38.

⁴⁰ Joseph J. Zasloff., "Emerging stability in Cambodia" in *Asian Affairs*, January 1, 2002.

⁴¹ Stuart F. Martin., "Southeast Asia and China: The role of history and culture in shaping future relations" in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, January 4, 2004.

The past experiences of immediate neighbor warfare with Thailand and Vietnam in combination with many contemporary unresolved border disputes prove it more apparent.

Conclusion

The paper has given an overview of Sino-Cambodia relations in different aspects namely historical, political, economic, and security perspectives. It is argued that Sino-Cambodia relations are strongly based on historical linkages. Sino-Cambodia relations have been improved remarkably since 1998 when Cambodian government no longer accepted the diplomatic relations with Taiwan. China is the current main investor and emerging donor to Cambodia. The bilateral relations between China and Cambodia are complementary to the East Asian community construction.

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