



CHAPTER IV

THE ATTITUDES OF YOUNG EDUCATED CAMBODIANS TOWARD THE VIETNAMESE

In this chapter, the attitudes of young educated Cambodians toward the Vietnamese will be examined in detail. The first part focuses on the attitudes towards the Vietnamese people who live in Cambodia whilst the second part deals with attitudes towards the Vietnamese government.

The term 'attitude' used in this thesis follows the definition of Petty and Cacloppo as "a general and enduring positive or negative feeling about some person, object, or issue."¹ Attitudes can be measured through direct and indirect techniques.² The direct procedure is to ask the person to scale their attitudes toward objects or concepts directly. In this measurement, various scaling techniques have been recommended such as Thurstone, Likert's Semantic Differential and One Item Rating Scale. The difference between each of these is the way to construct the questionnaire. Thurstone constructs the obtaining list of opinion statements relevant to the issues and allows the interviewee to select those statements with which they agree.

"Thurstone realized that people could also rank opinion statements in terms of their favourableness toward some objects or issues. If a scale of opinion statements relative to an issue could be constructed, then an indication of the people's attitudes could be obtained by finding out what statement they personally favoured."³

¹ Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacloppo, Attitudes and Persuasion: Classic and Contemporary Approaches, (Lowa: WCB, 1984) , p. 7

² Ibid, p. 9

³ Ibid

The Likert scale is designed similarly to Thurstone's but does differ in some ways. It allows the interviewee to rate his or her feeling toward an opinion statement about the object.

"A large number of opinion statements relevant to the attitude issue are collected. Each statement should clearly express either a positive or negative feeling about the issue under consideration. In the next step, a large sample of people expresses the extent of their own agreement with each of the statements on a five-point scale."⁴

Two other techniques, the Semantic Differential and the One-item Rating Scale, commonly allow the informants to rate their feelings, such as from less favoured to most favoured, toward an object. In the Semantic Differential "the attitudes could be measured by having subjects rate the attitude object on bipolar adjective pairs and that represented the evaluative dimension of meaning."⁵ In One-item Rating Scale "The investigator selects one question that he or she feels would most directly assess a particular attitude of interest."⁶

As for the indirect procedure, this technique is used in attempting to measure an attitude without letting the people know that they are being measured. The attitudes can be inferred from self-reports and behaviours, the way that the people act or respond, verbally or non-verbally, toward the attitude object.⁷ This technique could provide more accurate and reliable data than the direct method since we need both verbal and non-verbal observations to make sure that the responses come along together. The indirect technique was mainly used in this study for two reasons. First, the technique has more advantages as it could escape from the unwillingness of respondents to show their attitudes.⁸ Second, as mentioned earlier, this topic is quite sensitive and will therefore cause uncomfortable feelings to both the informants and the researcher. Using the indirect measure could help to reduce these feelings.

⁴ Ibid, p. 11

⁵ Ibid, p.12-13

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Icek Ajzen, *Attitudes, Personality and Behaviour*. (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1988), p.4

⁸ Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, *Attitudes and Persuasion: Classic and Contemporary Approaches*. (Iowa: WCB, 1984), p. 22

1. The attitudes toward the Vietnamese people

It was found that the YECs had both positive and negative attitudes toward the Vietnamese people who are currently living in Cambodia.

1.1 Positive attitudes towards the Vietnamese people

The positive attitudes of the YECs toward the Vietnamese living in Cambodia mostly relate to their good personal characteristics. Concerning working, the Vietnamese are perceived as clever, professional and industrious. They are also viewed as good in doing business and easy to do business with because they keep their word. Moreover, the YECs consider the Vietnamese to have a strong sense of unity. They are friendly toward the Cambodian.

1.1.1 Cleverness

The Vietnamese are viewed as clever people. They can do and learn to do something very quickly as one Cambodian lady observed: "The Vietnamese are clever. They can imitate something very quickly after they see just a bit. They can make it the same as the original."⁹ Many informants shared the same perception that the Vietnamese are clever and most raised the point that the Vietnamese are quick in solving work problems very skilfully.

1.1.2. Professional and skilful, industrious, respecting the value of the job

Through experiences in living, communicating with and observing the Vietnamese, some informants viewed them as professional, skilful and much more able to achieve good work performance than the Khmers. Moreover, they are industrious and have respect for the value of a job. With these good points, the informants somehow expressed their desire to have the Vietnamese work for them. During a group

⁹ Interview with informant no.7

discussion, one informant mentioned: "Even though the Vietnamese here are illegal immigrants, they are very professional and skilful."¹⁰

One lady who blames the Vietnamese for taking the jobs from the Khmers was however very sincere when talking about the building of her family house. "We (her family) like to hire the Vietnamese to work for us, especially construction workers. Their work performance is quite good. The Khmer construction workers work only for money. They don't think about us. They are lazy and careless. But as for the Vietnamese, we are very satisfied with them after they finish their work. They are very professional."¹¹

In a group discussion, many informants agreed that the Vietnamese are industrious and exhibit good work performance. One informant explained: "The Vietnamese work hard. Their work performance is better than the Khmers. My house was built by the Vietnamese. I saw them everywhere, not only in Phnom Penh. In Siem Reap, Battambang and Pailin Khmers also like to hire the Vietnamese to work for them because they are very professional in doing things such as wood carving. I saw them do thing very quickly. They do not look down on any jobs. They do every job, including those considered low level, such as shoe repair and fishing...They are illegal immigrants but they are very professional."¹²

1.1.3 Having the spirit of struggle

Some YECs perceived the Vietnamese as having a strong spirit of struggle. One university student said: "I have never seen Vietnamese who are beggars, but a lot of Khmers beg for food and money. Even if the Vietnamese have nothing to eat; they try to collect garbage to survive by themselves."¹³ Another university student shared the same perception. During the in-depth interview, he expressed his disappointment towards some Khmers who did not have this kind of spirit like the Vietnamese people. "At present, we can see that a lot of Khmers became beggars. Vietnamese said they came to

¹⁰ In a group discussion, informant no. 25

¹¹ Interview with informant no.6

¹² In group discussion, informant no. 25

¹³ Interview with informant no.16

Cambodia because of poor economic conditions in their country. They are poor but they have never begged. The Khmers have the habit of begging. They beg in the market. I feel disappointed to see the Khmers behave like that."¹⁴

1.1.4 Good in doing business, easy to do business with, wise in using money

One university student who lives near the Vietnamese border expressed his preference to do business with the Vietnamese rather than the Khmer. For example, in renting farmland, the owner of the land always makes a contract of sharing the produce after the end of the season. The Vietnamese are able to make more produce from the same plot of land than the Khmer. Moreover, they keep their word in paying the rental fees while the Khmers do not. That student explained: "Doing business with the Vietnamese is easier than with the Khmer because they always pay the rental fee at the end of the month, unlike Khmers. My family has never gotten the exact rental fee from a Khmer tenant. Some hide the amount of their rice production, so we lose out."¹⁵

A man who works for the government and runs a small business with his family at the same time thought that the Vietnamese are wise and practical in using their money. They spend money to better their living conditions, not for useless things. They are different from the Khmers whom he considered stingy, not daring to use money for a better life. He explained: "The Vietnamese are business minded, they are good in doing business. When they earn money, they spend to modernize their household. Let's look at their houses. They have many modern things. This is characteristic of business people. This is different from the Khmers, who want to keep their money and dare not spend for anything."¹⁶

1.1.5 Having a strong sense of unity

Besides working characteristics, the Vietnamese are perceived as people who have a strong sense of unity. One lady stated: "I don't like Vietnamese people because

¹⁴ Interview with informant no. 19

¹⁵ Interview with informant no. 15

¹⁶ Interview with informant no. 9

of many things, but one thing that I admire about them is they have a good sense of unity in their community. They always help each other."¹⁷ The same was mentioned by another elderly lady when she recalled: "When the Vietnamese troops were still in Cambodia; they were very good at working together to help extinguish a fire in the village."¹⁸

1.1.6 Friendly to the Cambodian people

Interestingly, some YECs had good feelings toward the Vietnamese due to their friendly gestures toward Cambodians. In a group discussion, a university student pointed out: "The Vietnamese never mistreat the Khmer. They like the Khmers but the Khmers don't like them. I have never heard that Vietnamese hate Cambodians. They are not like the Thais. The Thais look down on the Khmer"¹⁹ Another government official shared the same view. He mentioned: "The Vietnamese are better than the Thai. They respect the Khmers. They like the Khmers but the Thai look down on Khmers."²⁰

Positive attitudes of the YECs toward the Vietnamese are reflected in many ways. The YECs mostly admired the Vietnamese in terms of their good characteristics. Interestingly, very often positive attitudes toward the Vietnamese were expressed in comparison with the negative attitudes toward Khmer characteristics. The Vietnamese characteristics are seen as good and should be a model for the Khmers.

1.2. Negative attitudes towards the Vietnamese

The YECs viewed the Vietnamese people who are living in Cambodia negatively in many aspects. The Vietnamese were seen mostly as illegal immigrants. In terms of characteristics, they were considered immoral, being the trouble makers, destroyers and exploiters of Cambodian resources and reputations. The Khmers also felt that the Vietnamese in Cambodia were a major threat to job opportunities for Khmers.

¹⁷ Interview with informant no.7

¹⁸ Conversation with an old lady

¹⁹ In group discussion, informant no. 18

²⁰ In group discussion, informant no.9

Moreover, they are perceived as a tool of the Vietnamese government by which to invade Cambodia.

1.2.1 Illegal immigrants

Mostly, the Vietnamese in Cambodia are perceived as illegal immigrants who are bad, poor and lowly people. Many informants thought that because the Vietnamese are illegal immigrants, they conduct illegal activities that cause harm to the Cambodian people and society. A government official stated: "The Vietnamese in Cambodia are different from the Vietnamese in Vietnam...The ones who come here are not good Vietnamese. They are illegal immigrants, low class people... They are uneducated and are trouble makers."²¹

This view was shared by many other informants during a group discussion. A lecturer from a public institution mentioned: "As the Vietnamese who come to Cambodia are mostly illegal immigrants, they can not do legal work. The illegal work they perform such as prostitution is as low as their status, and this really has a bad effect on our society."²²

It is interesting to see that the informants differentiated between the Vietnamese in Cambodia and the Vietnamese in Vietnam. While they immediately and openly categorized the Vietnamese in Cambodia in a negative way, they seemed to be very careful when talking about the Vietnamese in Vietnam.

1.2.2 Immorality and improper manners

According to the standard defined by Cambodian society and culture, The Vietnamese people in Cambodia are seen as immoral people for they always have immoral occupations, being prostitutes in particular. Even the Vietnamese women who are not prostitute are always seen as behaving like a prostitute or not having correct

²¹ Interview with informant no.9

²² In group discussion. informant no. 26

behaviours. Moreover, the YECs thought that the Vietnamese have improper manners such as shouting and speaking impolitely instead of speaking softly and gently.

The idea that the Vietnamese who come to Cambodia always perform illegal work and mostly like to become prostitutes was common among the informants. Another university lecturer who is currently doing a master degree mentioned: "The Vietnamese like to do immoral work. They don't try to learn in order to find legal jobs. Most of them live with that occupation, being prostitutes."²³ Another male student expressed his opinion: "Most of the Vietnamese women behave like prostitutes. They like to wear light dresses like those of the prostitutes. For me, it looks very bad, not attractive at all."²⁴ Another woman working for a telecommunications company pointed out: "The Vietnamese are different from the Khmer. Their culture is also different from ours. I don't like them. They dress like prostitutes."²⁵

Many informants also shared the view that the Vietnamese people are impolite when speaking and this makes them feel they do not want to communicate with Vietnamese people. An informant who is a nurse explained: "I have never wanted to talk with Vietnamese people after I had many experiences in communication with them. When the Vietnamese come to our clinic, they do not speak to us in a normal way. They shout at us. It looks like we did something wrong to them. We always feel ashamed when others look at us talking with the Vietnamese. And I know that they may think we have problems with the Vietnamese although it is actually not true."²⁶ Another Cambodian student who graduated from abroad said: "I have a Cambodian friend who used to live on Vietnamese block. His manner is similar to that of the Vietnamese. He is very noisy and likes to drink alcohol."²⁷

²³ Interview with informant no. 1

²⁴ Interview with informant no. 18

²⁵ Interview with informant no. 11

²⁶ Interview with informant no. 7

²⁷ In group discussion, informant no.22

1.2.3 Being troublemakers

Most of the YECs perceived the Vietnamese as troublemakers and are not anxious to be their neighbours. First, they feel disturbed by Vietnamese bad characteristics such as making loud noise and always causing conflicts. The YECs thought that the Vietnamese have no respect for or understanding of other people. Second, they feel the presence of the Vietnamese has threatened the security of Cambodian society in many aspects such as prostitution issues and banditry.

Disturbing the daily lives of the Cambodian people

A university student raised a point: "We can not live near the Vietnamese. They always speak loudly. They are noisy. They live without respect for their neighbours. Some open Karaoke shops. Their way of living is not clean. The Khmers have difficulty in living in this condition because they like to have peaceful neighbours who are easy to communicate with and understand each other. The Vietnamese do not understand us".²⁸ This negative feeling was shared by many other informants.

Another lecturer recalled his experiences: "I do not have Vietnamese friends. The Vietnamese people made me not like them. I went to Phnom Penh and attended a technical training near Phsar Chas where many Vietnamese were living. When the Vietnamese were in conflict with each other, they quarrel without thinking of their neighbours. They do not care whether the neighbours can do their business or can sleep or not. If they want to shout, they shout. If they want to throw rocks at each other, they throw them without thinking of our feelings. The Vietnamese I met are always like this."²⁹

Another man explained with disgust the attitude of the Cambodian people toward the Vietnamese: "The Khmer hate the Vietnamese because when they come to

²⁸ In group discussion, informant no. 18

²⁹ Interview with informant no. 14

stay in Cambodia they made trouble for society. They make noise when they are drunk. They like to drink. They do not respect their neighbours or the Khmer."³⁰

In the eyes of the YECS, the Vietnamese disrupt the peaceful lives of the Cambodian people because they do not understand Khmer cultural practices such as politeness and consideration.

A threat to the security of the Cambodians

From the group discussions and interviews, it can be inferred that the Cambodian people feel insecure about living near the Vietnamese because they see the Vietnamese as troublemakers, not as good people. The Vietnamese are known for bringing in prostitution, banditry and fire to the communities in which they live. All of these cause great harm to the security and peaceful lives of the Cambodians.

A woman who had to leave home to work in Phnom Penh remembered her father's warning to not rent a house near the Vietnamese area. She mentioned: "My father does not allow me to rent a house near a Vietnamese block because they are not good."³¹ The Vietnamese are also referred to as being "not good people" by another man because he thought the Vietnamese brought a lot of problems into Cambodian society. "Most of the Vietnamese came here to find jobs. But they are illegal immigrants. So, all they can do are is engage in prostitution and selling drugs. All these things have really affected our society."³²

A government employee explained that she also does not like to live near the Vietnamese because they are not good. She mentioned banditry brought by the Vietnamese. "I don't want to stay near the Vietnamese because I am afraid that they will steal our stuff. Our family used to have these kinds of experiences. A long time ago our family sold construction materials and we lost a lot of things. We saw them stealing many times but we could not do anything except shout at them. We recognized them

³⁰ In group discussion, informant no. 12

³¹ Interview with informant no.7

³² In group discussion, informant no. 26

when they talked in Vietnamese."³³ The same experience was shared by another informant who still remembered the period when Cambodia was under Vietnamese occupation in the 1980s. She recalled: "My family used to suffer because of the Vietnamese...My mother told me that all our gold was stolen by Vietnamese soldiers who lived around our house. We always lost things such as shoes and clothes."³⁴

Another man felt afraid of the Vietnamese' aggressive characteristics which could cause harm to himself and his house. He used to hear many stories about the Vietnamese who burned their own houses when they had conflicts with each other. The man mentioned: "I don't like the Vietnamese, especially the ones who come to do business in Cambodia. They have bad characteristics. All make trouble and conflict among their group. Sometimes when they have conflicts, they burn their houses...so I don't want to live near the Vietnamese. For us, home is very important. We choose to sink a boat in the middle of the river rather than have our home on fire."³⁵ The stories of the Vietnamese burning their own houses were mentioned by many informants.

1.2.4 Destroyers and exploiters of natural resources

The Vietnamese are seen as destroyers of Cambodian natural resources and reputations. They do not care to protect natural resources like other people who live in the country. They do whatever they want in order to survive and never think about future effects on other people in the country. A YEC whose hometown is near the river remembered: "The Vietnamese destroy us and teach the Cambodians to do the same. For example, they fish by using poison and bombs. All these techniques the Khmer had never used before. The Vietnamese destroyed a lot of our natural resources. Now, even when the only available fish are too small, they catch and bring them to sell in the market."³⁶ Another informant said the same thing about the destructive nature of the Vietnamese people. "The Cambodian people refer to a kind of thorny tree as 'បន្ទាប្តូន'

³³ In group discussion, informant no. 6

³⁴ In group discussion, informant no.8

³⁵ Interview with informant no. 1

³⁶ Interview with informant no. 3

(thorny Yuon). That plant will destroy other plants wherever they grow. It is like the Yuon. Wherever they come to live, those places will be destroyed."³⁷

In addition, the Vietnamese are perceived as exploitative; they came to Cambodia just to derive benefits for themselves and never think of providing benefits to Cambodian society. The same informant added: "The Vietnamese came to Cambodia for their own benefits only. For example, they hold a Cambodian passport in order to go to a third county. And when problems occur, they are charged as a Cambodian". Here, the Vietnamese are seen as destroying the reputations of the Cambodians.³⁸

Hence, Cambodians feel they are the victims of the Vietnamese, the foreigners who come to stay in their country to destroy and exploit their resources without thinking about the effects. They feel the Vietnamese only want to use resources but do not help to preserve or protect anything.

1.2.5 Cruel and prone to violence

The Vietnamese are also viewed as cruel. For the Khmers, they are people who like to use violence, being totally different from the Khmers who are kind and peaceful. One informant reported fearfully: "The Vietnamese are quite different from us. We and the Thai are affectionate towards the family, wife and children...the Vietnamese, don't talk about affection or understanding. If they have conflicts between husband and wife, they can use knives to kill each other. This is how the Vietnamese are."³⁹

Another woman agreed that she is afraid of the Vietnamese. "The Vietnamese are not affectionate. They are brutal and tricky. They can even sell their daughters to be prostitutes. I saw a Vietnamese family near my house. The husband always treats his wife violently. He brutally hits her. This is the reason why I do not recommend that anyone to marry a Vietnamese man."⁴⁰

³⁷ Interview with informant no. 28

³⁸ Interview with informant no. 23

³⁹ Interview with informant no. 11

⁴⁰ Interview with informant no. 8

Interestingly, many informants made a comparison between the Khmers and the Vietnamese to show the cruelty of the Vietnamese. For the Khmers, wife and children are very important in the family. The reputation of the family can be protected when they live together morally and peacefully. The husband needs to take care of his wife and children and to provide them with good living conditions. For this reason, we can understand why the informants felt bad when they saw the Vietnamese using violence in the family and could even sell their children to be prostitutes. In this regard, the informants may feel the same towards a Cambodian family which is in the same situation as the Vietnamese.

1.2.6 Trickiness

Most of the informants share the same idea that Vietnamese are tricky. They dare not trust the Vietnamese, neither men nor women. However, none of the informants could find any evidence to show that the Vietnamese had cheated them. This negative attitude is rooted in what they have learnt from the history or what they have heard said in their family from one generation to the other. One man mentioned: "According to history, the Vietnamese are very tricky. A Khmer King married a Vietnamese Princess and she cheated on her husband. As for me, I don't want to marry a Vietnamese woman. I am afraid she will cheat on me."⁴¹ Another woman mentioned: "The Vietnamese like Cambodia, but we don't know what is behind that. They always use tricks on the Khmer."⁴²

To sum up, the informants do not trust the Vietnamese. They view the Vietnamese as tricky and dishonest and they are suspicious toward the Vietnamese.

1.2.7 A threat to job opportunities for Cambodians

The hard-working and industrious characteristics of the Vietnamese people are admired by most of the informants. However, the YECs at the same time perceived

⁴¹ Interview with informant no. 23

⁴² Interview with informant no.8

these characteristics as a threat toward the employment opportunities for Khmer people today. One informant expressed his worry as he has seen a lot of Vietnamese become big businessmen while the Khmer are still very poor.⁴³ Another informant stated: "I do not like the Vietnamese because they came here to compete for jobs."⁴⁴ Some informants agreed that when they hear about Vietnamese children graduating with BA or MA degrees, they feel that they pose a threat to job opportunities for Khmers. This is true not only of low level jobs but also high level jobs and positions in the government.⁴⁵

1.2.8 No respect for the Cambodian law

As the Vietnamese have mostly been perceived as illegal immigrants, they are expected to be afraid of or to have respect for Cambodian Law. However, the informants felt that as illegal immigrants the Vietnamese had too much right and freedom. They do not even respect the law or the Cambodian people and can do whatever they want. When they disturb the peaceful life of the Cambodian people, they are not arrested or given warning. In other words, the informants thought that the Cambodian authorities helped the Vietnamese too much. One informant stated: "They do not respect their neighbours or the Khmers. Look at the Khmer workers in Thailand. They do not dare to behave like that. They are very polite and quiet because they are afraid of the Thai law. But the Vietnamese in Cambodia are not afraid of us or our law. They have support from the government of Cambodia."⁴⁶ The same perception is shared by another informant. "The Vietnamese who are currently living in Cambodia have more rights than the Khmer. The local authorities protect the Vietnamese more than the Cambodians. For example, when there are conflicts between the Vietnamese and the Cambodian, the authority will arrest the Cambodians and put them in jail. This is the reason why the Vietnamese could do whatever they want. Probably the Vietnamese gave money to the authority or perhaps the government order the local authority to protect them."⁴⁷

⁴³ Interview with informant no. 27

⁴⁴ Interview with informant no.11

⁴⁵ Interview with informant no. 28, no.9

⁴⁶ In group discussion, informant no. 12

⁴⁷ Interview with informant no. 3

Two reasons why the Vietnamese do not respect Cambodian law and could do whatever they want in Cambodia are mentioned by the YECs. First, there seemed to be corruption among the local authorities. The Vietnamese could give bribes to the local authorities and they could escape from arrest. Second, the YECs suspect that the Cambodian government has a policy to allow the Vietnamese to come to Cambodia and order the local authorities to protect them. Apart from having negative attitudes toward the Vietnamese, the Cambodians also have negative attitudes towards the Cambodian authorities and the Cambodian government in this regard.

1.2.9 Clannish, having a strong nationalist sentiment, loyal to Vietnam rather than Cambodia

While a number of informants showed admired the Vietnamese for having a strong sense of unity, some of them viewed the Vietnamese as clannish. They like to stick together in their own community. Moreover, they felt that the Vietnamese discriminate against Khmers and do not want to live in the Khmer community. "The Vietnamese who live in Cambodia discriminate against the Khmers. They always live in their own block. They like their own nationality rather than the Khmer."⁴⁸

This unity is also viewed by Cambodians as including a strong nationalist sentiment. The YECs thought that the Vietnamese never thought about Cambodia or Cambodians even though they live in the country. They always think about or are loyal to Vietnam and their Vietnamese family. One student told a story about the Vietnamese during the interview: "Have you ever seen a movie about a Vietnamese woman who left Vietnam and stayed in the US? Even though she left Vietnam for such a long time and had children, she still loved her country. She stole a nuclear formula from her son's workplace and sent it to Vietnam. This shows that the Vietnamese people have never forgotten their country. They have had a strong nationalist ideology imposed upon them".⁴⁹

⁴⁸ In group discussion, informant no.18

⁴⁹ Interview with informant no. 4

Another informant raised a point about the Vietnamese today: "The Vietnamese are in every village in Cambodia. But when their children are born, they are still Vietnamese. They do not want to be Khmer".⁵⁰ Since the Vietnamese do not want to be Khmer, the Khmer do not want to accept them as well because they think they will not receive any devotion from the Vietnamese to the Cambodian people, the family and the country. One informant whose family denied the marriage of his brother to a Vietnamese woman clearly stated his feeling: "My younger brother has a Vietnamese girlfriend and he wants to marry her. Our family did not allow him to marry her because we know that the Vietnamese are not honest like Khmer women. They will never think about our family. They think only about themselves. They will take all the money to help their brothers and sisters. So, my parents and the people around recommended that he not marry the Vietnamese woman. Now, they've broken up."⁵¹

Thus, the Vietnamese are perceived by the YECs as having too strong a nationalist sentiment and loyalty to the Vietnamese and Vietnam rather than the country they are settling in. Therefore, they can not be trusted.

1.2.10 Tool of the Vietnamese government

As some informants are suspicious about the large number of Vietnamese flowing into Cambodian territory, they view the Vietnamese in Cambodia as tools of the Vietnamese government. They believe that they've been sent to Cambodia to play certain roles. A graduate student described how he suspects the Vietnamese: "Look at the Vietnamese here. What do they earn for living? I saw them open a coffee shop. I think they cannot earn enough for their living. I think they lose money every month. But why are the coffee shops still running even today? There must be something behind it. Even the Vietnamese garbage collectors go there to drink. I think the coffee shop is a center for Vietnamese spies".⁵²

⁵⁰ Interview with informant no. 25

⁵¹ In group discussion, informant no.13

⁵² Interview with informant no.2

Another informant who is a lecturer in a private university shared this suspicion: "Sometimes I think the poor Vietnamese come to live here because they just want to survive. But I'm suspicious, how can they live in Cambodia by just collecting the garbage? Maybe their government supports them, giving them salaries to live here."⁵³ Another teacher in a public institution teacher turned the question back on the researcher. His question reflects his perception. "I ask you, how many people are there in Phnom Penh? And how many of them are Vietnamese? Some said that it's more difficult to live in Cambodia today than in Vietnam. So, why do a lot of them come here?"⁵⁴

The suspicious attitudes of Cambodian toward the Vietnamese reflect that they know very little about the Vietnamese people who are living in Cambodia. They don't know how the Vietnamese survive, why they come to Cambodia and how the Vietnamese survive with only low-paying, menial jobs. Even though some seem to have received some information, they still are suspicious of the Vietnamese.

To sum up, the negative attitudes of the YECs toward the Vietnamese in Cambodia have two main themes. First, the YECs negative feelings are related to characteristics of the Vietnamese people. They do not like the noisy, cruel, selfish, tricky and inconsiderate characteristics of the Vietnamese. Second, the negative attitudes also relate to the status of the Vietnamese in Cambodia and the large flow of Vietnamese illegal immigrants in Cambodia. They do not like the Vietnamese who came to Cambodia illegally and commit immoral acts such as prostitution, banditry and drug trading, which cause big problems and harm to the security of the people. The illegal Vietnamese do not obey the law but they have more freedom and rights, thus they dare to do things without consideration. The large flow of illegal Vietnamese also affects job opportunities for Cambodians. Apart from this, the YECs dislike the strong nationalist sentiments of the Vietnamese people. Moreover, the YECs also suspected that the Vietnamese in Cambodia are tools of the Vietnamese government in part of a plot to invade Cambodia. This second theme not only reflects the unsatisfied and suspicious feeling of the Cambodian toward the illegal status of the Vietnamese and

⁵³ Interview with informant no. 27

⁵⁴ Interview with informant no. 14

problems that caused by their illegal acts. It also reflects the negative attitudes of the YECs towards the Cambodian government. It can be interpreted that the YECs think the Cambodian government must take responsibility for the flow of illegal Vietnamese into Cambodia. Instead of solving the problem, Cambodian government are seen as standing behind and giving more rights to the illegal Vietnamese than to Cambodians. And this has led the Vietnamese to continue to come illegally into Cambodia. The YECs suspected that the Cambodian government still had the relationship with the Vietnamese government.

2. Attitudes toward the Vietnamese government (VG)

2.1. Positive attitudes toward the VG

A number of informants, no matter whether they have visited Vietnam before or not, think that the Vietnamese government does well with the country's development. Some Cambodians viewed Vietnam as more developed than Cambodia. One informant recalled what he saw and viewed about Vietnam: "In general, Vietnam is better than our country. It is more developed than Cambodia, especially the equal distribution of development in the rural area. The people also obey the law more than the Cambodians. The economy is more active than in Cambodia."⁵⁵ Another woman also remembered her experiences in Vietnam. She thought: "Vietnamese laws are very strict. I saw the police enforce the law more carefully than the Khmer police. The police force the people to obey traffic laws and the people obey the police and really obey the law."⁵⁶

Concerning the Cambodian people, some YECs thought that the VG treated the Cambodian people in Vietnam well when compared to the Thai government. "The VG had a good policy toward the Cambodian beggars in Vietnam. They never treat the Cambodian badly. If they arrest Cambodian beggars, they send them back home. The Thai torture the Cambodians in Thailand. They treat those people very badly."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ In group discussion, informant no.26

⁵⁶ In group discussion, informant no.6

⁵⁷ In group discussion, informant no.9

Even though some positive attitudes had been found, there are a great many negative feelings on the part of the Cambodian people toward the VG.

2.2 Negative attitudes toward the VG

Negative attitudes have been inferred from the discussions and interviews. Many YECs are in fear of losing their country's territory to foreigners, especially to Vietnam. Talking about this point, the YECs did not trust the VG. They perceive the VG as having attempted to invade Cambodian territory.

2.2.1 On-going attempt to invade Cambodian territory

When going deeply into discussions about current politics and cooperation between Cambodia and Vietnam, most YECs did not trust the VG. One informant confidently mentioned: "I don't believe in the Vietnamese. History has taught us. They always want Khmer territory."⁵⁸ Another informant who is a lecturer gave a long explanation about this point. "The Vietnamese have a policy of expanding their territory. Ho Chi Minh advised his followers that, before Vietnam had just one policy of southward expansion...until they could occupy the Khmer territory in Kampuchea Krom. Now they are going westward and it is **our country** today. [...]. This policy has been implemented many times. The first step started since the Khmer Issarak period. The Khmer Issarak was Khmer but the Vietnamese sent their cadres into Khmer territory and took a lot of Cambodian children back to their country and trained them ideologically to serve the Vietnamese. Some of the present Cambodian politicians are the children who had been brought to Vietnam in 1953-54".⁵⁹ This informant said that he knows all the Vietnamese techniques because he read books outside the education system, such as the book entitled "Who is the murderer?"

The history of the Vietnamese invasion has been elaborated by the informants. In addition, current problems, such as border issues and Vietnamese illegal immigration, have been raised in connection with history. The YECs see these problems

⁵⁸ In group discussion, informant no.18

⁵⁹ Interview with informant no.1

as being linked to a strategy of the VG to invade the Cambodian territory. When talking about border issues, one man said he believed that the Vietnamese really invaded Cambodian territory. "The border problem is not only the political issue of the government. The NGOs also talk about this. Only the government said that nothing happened. So, if I ask you between the government and NGOs, which one will you believe? For me, I believe NGOs rather than our government".⁶⁰ This indicated that the YECs did not trust the Cambodian government when it comes to the Vietnamese problem in Cambodia.

Asked how the Vietnamese could have already taken Khmer territory since the Khmers still exist in their own territory, one informant responded aggressively: "Their technique to oust the Khmer from the territory is simple. The Cambodian cannot live near the Vietnamese because of their bad characteristics. Hence they will move to live far away from a place where Vietnamese live. So, it is easy for them to occupy the territory."⁶¹ One lecturer also explained: "The people sold their land to the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese scattered their military along the border. We cannot do anything."⁶² Another informant expressed that "the Vietnamese came here probably because they are poor or they came here for territorial expansion. Before, it was probably because of economic conditions, but now the Vietnamese come and expands their community in the whole of Cambodia. The Khmer still allow whole families to come. I used to visit Takeo (a border province of Cambodia). The people said that now our forest is gone and the border markers were moved inside our territory. But Vietnam is much more developed than us. I don't want to foresee our country's future."⁶³ This YEC also blames the Cambodian government whom she believes has allowed the Vietnamese to settle in Cambodia easily.

When asked why the Vietnamese want territory from Cambodia, some informants could not even answer this question. They ended up saying: "They want our territory". However, some YECs mentioned: "Study about Khmer territory, we have prosperous land for farming. What does Vietnam have? Industry alone could not allow

⁶⁰ Interview with informant no.14

⁶¹ Interview with informant no.21

⁶² Interview with informant no.14

⁶³ Interview with informant no.11

their people to live easily. If we look at the size of the population, could industry feed the population? How much farmland do they have? Only a small amount of farmland in Prey Nokor (Saigon). The rest is in mountainous areas that can only be used as mines for industry. So, they need to find farmland and they can find it here in our country."⁶⁴ Another informant just gave a short explanation: "The Vietnamese want to occupy a large amount of territory in order to have a large amount of power."⁶⁵

2.2.2 Role in Cambodian internal politics

Vietnam launched a war to oust the Khmer Rouge and occupied Cambodia for about 10 years (1979-1990). The Cambodian government installed by the Vietnamese later formed the Cambodian People Party (CPP) to join in the national election in 1993 prepared by the United Nations. The role of Vietnam in Cambodia finished with the Paris peace agreement in 1991. Vietnam withdrew its troops from Cambodia and signed an agreement to respect the territory and sovereignty of Cambodia. However, according to the discussions, interviews and observation of the YECs, the VG is still suspected of having a role in Cambodian internal politics.

One YEC perceived that the current Cambodian government has oriented itself towards the Vietnamese. She does not believe that the policy of the Cambodian government could protect existing Cambodian territory because some high ranking officials in the government or middle ranking officials such as some provincial governors are Vietnamese. "I don't trust them because the country's leaders orient themselves toward Vietnam. They are close to the Vietnamese. Some provincial governors or officials are Vietnamese".⁶⁶

Moreover, the YECs perceive that the special relationship between the CPP (then the PRK government) and the Vietnamese in the 1980s still continues today. One mentioned: "I think Vietnamese pressure on Cambodian government still continues until today even though they already withdrew their troops from Cambodia. However, if we

⁶⁴ Interview with informant no. 20

⁶⁵ Interview with informant no. 6

⁶⁶ Ibid

compare our country with Laos, Laos has a bigger problem than us. Vietnam controls the Laotian government as most of the ministers studied in Vietnam. So the leading concepts need to be like those of Vietnam. If those people follow Vietnamese ideas, they will be okay. Otherwise, they will be unlucky like Pen Sovan⁶⁷ who was put in jail in Vietnam and just returned to Cambodia in 1998. Why was he put in jail? Probably because he wanted to separate from Vietnam, and he deviated from their policy, so he was punished."⁶⁸

One YEC made this statement about the special relationship between the CPP and the VG: "In 1979 when Hun Sen came to Vietnam asking for help, we didn't know what conditions had been laid down between him and the Vietnamese. I think Vietnam still helps him to hold onto power, because the present government is easy to use. Look at the people in Phnom Penh. How many are Vietnamese? Some say that Cambodia is not easier to live in than Vietnam, but why do a lot of Vietnamese come to Cambodia? I think the ballot is one reason because in every election I have always heard about that. In Phnom Penh, the current government has very little chance to get votes from Cambodians. But they still get some votes from those people (the Vietnamese). In reverse, if the current government did not win the election, all Vietnamese in Cambodia would be forced to return to Vietnam."⁶⁹ The informant believed that the VG helps the CPP to hold the power in exchange for the CPP allowing the large number of Vietnamese illegal immigrants to stay in Cambodia. He also mentioned: "During the 1998 demonstration, I also joined the march. At that time the government ordered the police to separate the demonstrators but the police also joined the demonstration. When the police did not follow the government, they used their Vietnamese partners. Everyone knows that one official could not speak Khmer clearly, and only that official helped them." Here, the informant mentioned about some Vietnamese who have positions in the Cambodian government sector. The same attitudes are shared by another informant: "The VG is not good. They collaborated with the Cambodian

⁶⁷ Pen Sovan was the former Cambodian Prime Minister from 1979-1981. Actually, he was released after the signing of Paris peace agreement and later he had been send back to Cambodia. Here, the informant confused.

⁶⁸ Interview with informant no.20

⁶⁹ Interview with informant no.14

government to invade Cambodian territory and allow a large number of Vietnamese illegal immigrants to flow into Cambodia."⁷⁰

Some informants, on the other hand, put the blame on the VG only. The current Cambodia government was viewed as having a connection with the VG but it's believed that they're under Vietnamese pressure. The perception was shown when the informants discussed the current political issue of signing the supplementary border treaty. The informants believed that the signing of this supplementary treaty is like giving over territory to the Vietnamese side. One informant has empathy for the current Cambodian government: "Probably our leaders also love the country. Who know? Even the children in kindergarten know to love their country. There are probably some pressures that forced him [Hun Sen] to sign".⁷¹

To sum up, the VG have been perceived as continuing to have a role in Cambodian politics by giving help or putting pressure on the CPP who used to be their allies in the 1980s. The two main reasons given by the YECs are the Vietnamese desire to gain control of Cambodian territory and the desire to let Vietnamese illegal immigrants settle in Cambodia.

2.2.3 Exploiting the Cambodian economy and politics

The YECs also viewed the VG as exploiting the Cambodian economy through dishonest aid programs. Vietnam wants to gain benefits from Cambodia. An informant explained: "The Thai and Vietnamese governments help Cambodia through aid programs. But they help in order to take benefits back. For example, they help the Khmer to build roads to connect their countries in order to import their product to our country. They help to connect electricity from their countries to the Cambodian provinces near the border, but we have to sign a contract with them to pay for the use of electricity. So, their expenses helping us seem to be a lot but they spend only once and they will get benefit from us for many years after that.....I went to the Vietnamese-

⁷⁰ Interview with informant no.16

⁷¹ In group discussion, informant no. 14

Cambodian border and saw all this development".⁷² Another government official added: "We can not trust the Vietnamese. They are good in front of us, but behind us they exploit the Khmers, which can be seen in problems such as in the coastal area. They (the Thai and Vietnamese governments) cooperate with each other but do not share with us."⁷³

In addition, the YECs perceived Vietnam as having a bad purpose: pushing Cambodia downward. One mentioned: " I think our government is under the orders of the Vietnamese. In the case of burning the Thai embassy, I think that once we burnt the Thai embassy, investors would never come to our country. They will go to Vietnam instead. The same thing happened when the US president wanted to visit our country and we had a demonstration etc. So they went over to Vietnam. Investors also went to Vietnam instead of Cambodia. This is the same as Vietnamese illegal immigration in Cambodia, probably it is a Vietnamese policy. The VG ordered our government not to give good salaries to officials, so the officials turn to corruption. The Vietnamese can come easily by just giving bribes. We will never be able to solve these problems. I don't hate the Vietnamese people, but I hate the policy of the VG."⁷⁴ The same attitude was shared by another YEC. He aggressively said: "I won't talk about history. But when I was born, there were Vietnamese in the whole country already....The Vietnamese have a policy of causing conflict among our people. Moreover, they did not allow us to study English or French. This was the VG policy. They allowed us to study only Russian and Vietnamese. This was part of a policy to push the Khmer downward."⁷⁵

Most of the YECs do not trust the VG. They perceive the VG as dishonest and wanting to exploit Cambodia. Some YECs even recognize that Vietnam helped Cambodia in 1979 by saving them from Khmer Rouge hands but want something in return after that.⁷⁶ Besides negative attitudes toward the VG, the YECs also hold negative attitudes toward the Cambodian government. They suspect or view the Cambodian government of having a connection with the VG, of being under the

⁷² Interview with informant no. 1

⁷³ In group discussion, informant no.6

⁷⁴ Interview with informant no.27

⁷⁵ In group discussion, informant no.14

⁷⁶ Interview with informant no.14, informant no.16

pressure of the VG and allowing the VG to exploit Cambodia economically and politically.

From the discussions and interviews with the YECs, it has been found that the attitudes of Cambodians towards the Vietnamese people and government tend to be rather negative. Most of the positive attitudes and part of the negative attitudes are related to the characteristics of the Vietnamese people. The YECs admire the Vietnamese people for being clever, professional, hard-working and having a spirit of struggle and a strong sense of unity. However, the cruelty, tricky, noisy and inconsiderate characteristics of the Vietnamese caused dislike among the Cambodians.

Another part of the negative feelings of the YECs toward the Vietnamese people is related to the large flow of the Vietnamese into Cambodia and their status in Cambodian society. The YECs felt the Vietnamese are a threat to job opportunities of Cambodians. The flow of the illegal Vietnamese causes trouble, such as prostitution, banditry and drug trading, in Cambodian society. The flow of Vietnamese illegal immigrants without any control from the Cambodian government causes the suspicion toward these Vietnamese. Because the YECs perceived the Vietnamese as illegal immigrants with a strong sense of community and a nationalist sentiment, the YECs feel they somehow are connected with the Vietnamese government in a plan to take control of Cambodia.

The attitudes of Cambodian people toward the Vietnamese government were rather negative too. Although the YECs admired the Vietnamese government in their commitment to develop the country and some felt happy with the respectful manner with which Cambodian people are treated in Vietnam, many YECs suspected the Vietnamese government of having the continued goal of invading and asserting control over Cambodia. In their opinion, the Vietnamese government still maintains its role in Cambodian politics through its domination over the CPP. Moreover, they do not trust the VG as it always exploits Cambodia both economically and politically. The root of how the YECs hold these attitudes will be examined in detail in the next chapter.