



A small-scale Survey of the Cambodian Public’s Views of Chinese Presence: Business and/or Investment and Financial Loan and/or Aid

ការសិក្សាអំពីទស្សនៈសាធារណជនកម្ពុជាចំពោះវត្តមានរបស់ចិន៖ ពាណិជ្ជកម្ម/ការវិនិយោគ និងកម្ចី/ជំនួយហិរញ្ញវត្ថុ

Sothiary TOCH¹ and Tong LY²

- ¹ Institute of Humanities and Social Science, Royal Academy of Cambodia
Email: sothiarytoch@gmail.com
- ² Institute of Humanities and Social Science, Royal Academy of Cambodia
Email: lytongcambodia2013@gmail.com

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CORRESPONDENCE: ✉ sothiarytoch@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore Cambodian public’s views on China’s presence in Cambodia. Chinese business and investment as well as its loan/aid provided to Cambodia were the focal point of China’s presence in the study. The study employed online survey which involved 339 Cambodian publics. The research found that large proportions of people agreed that the presence of China in term of its business and investment as well as loan/aid did contribute to Cambodia’s development. Along with the benefits; however, the participants also agreed on the negative impacts imposed by the presence of China in the kingdom. To tackle the negative impacts brought by the China’s presence, the participants suggested should take practical measures and strategic actions to the issues that may arise. Relying on the kingdom’s context and demands, it is recommended that future Chinese business and investment should focus on (i) agricultural product processing, (ii) technology and artificial intelligence, (iii) clean and sustainable energy and (iv) textile and automation. Moreover, future China’s financial assistance should cover (i) agricultural infrastructure development, (ii) enhancing agricultural skills and innovation, (iii) technology know-how on development

sectors such as education, health ..., (iv) research and development (R&D) and (v) vocational training and development.

KEYWORDS: Cambodian, public view, China's presence, business and investment, loan/aid

សង្ខេប

គោលបំណងនៃការសិក្សានេះគឺផ្ដោតជាសំខាន់ទៅលើទស្សនៈរបស់សាធារណជនកម្ពុជាទាក់ទងទៅនឹងវត្តមានរបស់ចិននៅកម្ពុជា ក្រោមរូបភាពពាណិជ្ជកម្មនិងការវិនិយោគ និងជំនួយ/កម្ចីអភិវឌ្ឍន៍។ ការសិក្សានេះប្រើប្រាស់វិធីស្រាវជ្រាវបែបសង្គមតិ តាមអនឡាញ ដោយក្នុងនោះមានប្រជាពលរដ្ឋកម្ពុជាចំនួន៣៣៩នាក់បានចូលរួមក្នុងការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ។ ជាលទ្ធផល យើងរកឃើញថា មានប្រជាពលរដ្ឋដែលចូលរួមក្នុងការសិក្សានេះជាច្រើនបានយល់ស្របទៅនឹងមតិថា វត្តមានរបស់ចិននៅកម្ពុជាក្នុងទម្រង់ពាណិជ្ជកម្មនិងការវិនិយោគ ក៏ដូចជាជំនួយ/កម្ចីអភិវឌ្ឍន៍ ពិតជាបានចូលរួមចំណែកយ៉ាងសំខាន់ក្នុងការអភិវឌ្ឍរបស់សេដ្ឋកិច្ចកម្ពុជា។ ជាមួយនឹងអត្ថប្រយោជន៍នេះ ក៏មានសមាគមអ្នកចូលរួមយល់ឃើញថា វត្តមានរបស់ចិនក៏បាននាំមកផងដែរនូវគុណវិបត្តិមួយចំនួនដែលអាចប៉ះពាល់ដល់សង្គម។ ដើម្បីការពារបញ្ហាអវិជ្ជមានកើតចេញពីពាណិជ្ជកម្មនិងការវិនិយោគ ក៏ដូចជាកាត់បន្ថយនូវវិបត្តិនានាដែលអាចកើតមានចេញពីជំនួយហិរញ្ញវត្ថុរបស់ចិន ក្រុមគោលដៅស្រាវជ្រាវក៏យល់ឃើញថា រាជរដ្ឋាភិបាលកម្ពុជាគួរមានវិធានការ ឬយន្តការយុទ្ធសាស្ត្រឱ្យបានសមស្របនិងទាន់ពេលវេលា។ ការសិក្សានេះក៏មានផ្តល់ផងដែរនូវគំនិតអនុសាសន៍មួយចំនួនទាក់ទងនឹងពាណិជ្ជកម្មនិងការវិនិយោគរបស់ចិន ក៏ដូចជាសំណើកម្ចីអភិវឌ្ឍនាពេលអនាគត។ ការទាក់ទាញវិនិយោគចិននាពេលអនាគតគួរផ្ដោតទៅលើវិស័យមួយចំនួនដូចជា (១) ការកែច្នៃផលិតផលកសិកម្ម, (២) បច្ចេកវិទ្យានិងបញ្ញាសិប្បនិម្មិត, (៣) ថាមពលស្អាតនិងមានចីរភាព និង (៤) វិស័យវាយនភណ្ឌនិងយានយន្ត។ បន្ថែមពីលើនេះ អនុសាសន៍ទាក់ទងនឹងសំណើកម្ចីនាពេលអនាគតគួរផ្ដោតលើ (១) ការអភិវឌ្ឍហេដ្ឋារចនាសម្ព័ន្ធកសិកម្ម, (២) ការពង្រឹងជំនាញកសិកម្មនិងនាំនូវវត្ថុ, (៣) ដំណោះស្រាយដោយប្រើបច្ចេកវិទ្យាពិសេសក្នុងវិស័យអប់រំ និងសុខាភិបាលជាដើម, (៤) ការស្រាវជ្រាវនិងការអភិវឌ្ឍ និង (៥) ការបណ្តុះបណ្តាលជំនាញវិជ្ជាជីវៈដែលជាតម្រូវការទីផ្សារការងារ។

ពាក្យគន្លឹះ: កម្ពុជា, ទស្សនៈសាធារណជន, វត្តមានចិន, ពាណិជ្ជកម្មនិងការវិនិយោគ, កម្ចីអភិវឌ្ឍន៍

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has increased its investment and influence in the neighboring countries and other parts of the world. Through regional and global cooperation and partnership, the Sino-centric development and investment have been remarkable, attracting more and more countries tilting closer to China, particularly the Southeast Asian countries. Most Southeast Asian countries have long traditionally been supportive of the US policies in the region. However, the rising Chinese influence in the region have been considered a remarkable disruption to traditional relations of the region with the US (Acharya, A., 2017). It is widely believed that the greater demands of the region for Chinese investment trade and financing assistance will eventually push

the countries into the China's sphere of influence and ultimately create a split, one faction with pro-US and the other one with pro-China (Soong, J. J., 2023).

It is a fact that some lower economies in the Southeast Asia region cannot afford to be more reluctant towards Chinese penetration in terms of investment trade and loans. Cambodia has also been included. In this regard, there are also concerns put forwards by international relations experts about the potential alliance of the country that simultaneously generate a basic leverage for China's strategic interest in the region despite the country's diplomats and leader have long considered the claim 'flawed'. This can demonstrate with the fact that Chinese's presence in the country is desirable in general. However, the decreasing intensity is provided during and after Covid-19 outbreak. In 2022, for instance, the trade

volume between Cambodia and China already reached USD\$14.5 billion, a significant increase of 19 percent, and the amount would have expanded in the following years to come (Khmer Times, December 2022).

Some observers have noticed that Cambodia has a consistent policy towards China. It is consistent in the sense that, economically, the kingdom has welcomed economic engagement with China both in both bilateral and regional means in the form of multilateralism. This dynamic, as argued by some analysts, is likely to provide more economic benefits to the kingdom while the other have warned that Phnom Penh has become more dependent on Beijing, thereby generating contradictions in the relations with the Western counterparts (Po, S., & West, L., 2021).

The other analysts of China's relations with Cambodia have noted that recent latter's relations with the former are becoming warmer, particularly since the outbreak of Covid-19. While China stood as the leading supplier of vaccines against the COVID-19 pandemic for the kingdom, the latter had shown its sincere friendship to stay with China in a hard time. The Prime Minister Hun Sen's visit to Beijing in February 2021 at the most critical point amid China's effort to fight against the COVID-19 outbreak is an illustration. Since then, there have been several important diplomatic visits between the two countries, which have profoundly impacted on the mutual relations even more consistent and friendly. However, it is the Cambodia's foreign policy to engage with the major economic power like China to harness its national interests, economically and politically.

A number of scholars have contended that Cambodia is seen by the Chinese counterpart as the important strategic place in regional and global politics for strengthening its dominant position to confront the Western powers, particularly the US (Chheang, 2017c). The bilateral and regional economic frameworks and cooperation, taking examples of the Belts and Roads Initiative (BRI), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and other free trade agreement, actively engaged by China have prompted and encouraged the kingdom to strengthen its bonds with Beijing. This has created different opinions among Cambodian people. While

the positive image of the Chinese's influence over Cambodia is generated, some public opinions have diverted. Some factions are concerned about the Kingdom's over-reliance and dependence on a single power that could affect its sovereignty and independence. Moreover, they are worried if the Chinese's presence creates benefits that are not fairly shared among all common Cambodian people (Mackenzie, Milne, Van Kerckhoff & Ray, 2022).

1.1. Research Problem

The rising China's political and economic clouts have been considered to be a long-term challenge to the Western powers, in particular the US (Kim, M. H., 2019). In the light of this, there have been ongoing debate, discussion and studies on how China's rise and influence is perceived in regional and global contexts. This continuum has made academics and researchers even more curious to learn and explore the public perceptions of any individual country whose Chinese influence is remarkably noticeable.

Even though public view does not directly translate into the latter's foreign policy with the former, it is certainly one of the factors that policy makers and implementers should focus on when forming and implementing the policy towards China (Chu et al., 2014). As far as it is concerned, China has put a lot of resources into its public diplomacy, using Confucius Institutes and tourism to influence the global perceptions of the public towards China (Chen & Duggan, 2016). It is true that as China's global power is rising its government continue using the soft power diplomacy to make itself attractive to people in other countries (Nye, 2005). Cambodia is no exception. This has become questionable if Cambodian publics do have a benign view of China, given the increase of Chinese business and trade, people and financing assistance in the kingdom as well the other regional China-initiated economic cooperation and partnership welcomed by Cambodia.

To the present, there have been only several academic attempts in assessing the Cambodian public's views towards the foreign power's influence and relations with the country. The studies were just done in specifically separated context and case studies. On the regional context, the study using the comparisons of elite's opinion, public's views on the rise of China

were popular in other regions of the world (Green & Szechenyi 2014; Aldrich et al. 2014; Chu et al. 2014). Unfortunately, there was not much consideration in Cambodia's context.

Even though public view does not directly translate into the latter's foreign policy with the former, it is certainly one of the factors that policy makers and implementers should focus on when forming and implementing the policy (Toch, S., & Ly, T., 2022). Understanding the public views in relation to Chinese influence or presence allows policy maker a better room to recapitalize and maneuver foreign policy, particularly in the status quo amid power rivalry. Utilizing various methodologies to explore the issues provides practical benefits in speculating more details information about the issues. This research aims to fill the gap in the existing insight and scholarly ongoing discussion about the Cambodia public views towards Chinese presence in specific and Cambodia's foreign policy or relations issues in general.

1.2. Research Objectives

China's presence and the views from the public were the focuses of this study which aiming at exploring how Cambodian publics perceive the practical benefits and shortfalls of the Chinese presence in the country in terms of its business/trade and financial loans. This research is guided by the following objectives:

- To explore Cambodian public's views on the practical benefits of the China's presence in Cambodia.
- To explore Cambodian public views on the challenges and issues imposed by the China's presence in Cambodia.
- To explore Cambodian public views on the strategic measures for the government to deal with negative impacts imposed by the China's presence in Cambodia.

1.3. China's Presence in Cambodia

Chinese Businesses and Investment

Over the past decade, China has risen to become Cambodia's largest investor, aid provider and a key political ally. China's presence as a major investor began to develop in 2006, after a state visit from then Premier Wen Jiabao, which resulted in the signing of

several bilateral agreements and commitments in loans and grants from that moment on. The relation between two countries has strengthened significantly and then upgraded it to a "comprehensive strategic cooperation partnership".

As the China-initiated Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a project to embellish trade and investment connectivity between China and other parts of the world, launched (Copper, 2017 & Tekdal, 2018), Cambodia become a strong supporter of the BRI, standing to gain immense economic benefits. It will offer Cambodia great opportunities to drive its economic development so that it can catch up with other countries in the region. Moreover, as it is complementary to Cambodia's national development strategy, the BRI will help Cambodia to realize its vision to become a middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050 (Chheang, 2017b). Even though economic gains for Cambodia seem to prevail, the BRI has also raised concerns among critics. There have been pressing issues related to China's growing influence in Cambodia, Chinese exploitation of the natural resources, and other social and human rights issues arising from Chinese aid and investment.

In light of regional connection, trade relations between China and ASEAN countries have been prominent over the past two decades, with the region predicted to be imminent for 'One Road' plan to succeed (Li & Yongke, 2017). More importantly, the two-way relationship between the region and China has proved to be efficacious; the Indochina Peninsula benefiting from steep infrastructure developments and huge influx of foreign direct investment (FDI). As China regards ASEAN as being a key partner to advance its agendas, thus crafting packages to tailor every country's needs seems to be benevolent on hindsight (Yi, 2017). There is no exception for Cambodia. Being viewed as the main China's ally in the region, Cambodia's trade relation with China has since blossomed due to the country's attractive nature of market access with untapped low-cost labour and more encouraging trade and investment policies. Moreover, Lin (2018) highlights the country's political stability calibrating the huge influx of FDI into its transport network and hydropower plants, with "more than \$7.5 billion in accumulated capital generating enough power to radically transform the

country's energy infrastructure". The nation's granted concessional finance has seen tremendous increases over the past years, given its compelling nature of infrastructure investment (Chan, 2017; Jeldres, 2012).

Through bilateral agreements and engagement between the China and Cambodia, the significance of the former's foray into the latter's trade results in a potential remuneration for the diminishing aid from the West. The decrease in likelihood of aid from the European Union and the United States, however so, envisages the opportunity for the reinstatement of China's geopolitical position in ASEAN through Cambodia (Touch, 2018). It is understandable that countries with higher trade surplus purports for a deeper embracement of the BRI, conversely the domestic politics of a nation affects the nation's disapproval of such initiatives. According a study, it asserts that Cambodia's willingness in their support towards BRI is so strong compared to other countries in the region (Chen, 2018). So, it has been obvious that China's participation in Cambodia's FDI has stimulated more increase in investment, making China itself the largest investor in the country. However, bilateral trade creates a huge imbalance for the kingdom, overwhelmingly dependency on China's good importation is by far larger than its agricultural products and goods exportation to China (Dongmiao, 2017). China's openness to Cambodia's exports might seem to revolt the notion of Western politicization of Eastern commodities for years. Its focus on the promotion of regional interests and its 'openness' towards multilateralism has helped shaped the modern China, creating layered dependence between itself and participating countries (Khmer Times, 2018). Cheong (2018) argues that the interdependence, when unveiled, falls heavily on the participating countries, a case of Cambodia, leaving major debt dents in the long-term. Hence, what might be initially be viewed as a positive bilateralism should there upon be accordingly questioned?

Under the leadership of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), the Cambodian government is attempting to readjust its foreign policy in an attempt to adapt to the rapidly changing global geopolitics and geo-economics (Chheang, 2017a). The BRI has been portrayed as a tool for China to expand its soft power which entails greater regional connectivity

(Albert, 2018). Upon which, China has already taken several steps to develop their soft power through the promotion of the Chinese language, media expansion, and educational exchanges (ibid). Cambodia has already viewed China as their most important strategic and economic partner, with the elaboration of Cambodia's Prime Minister, Hun Sen China as the country's "most trusted friend".

One of the many development projects under the BRI includes the establishment of a Cambodia-China Cultural Village in Beijing and the opening of Cambodia's Trade Center in various provinces of China (Heng and Po, 2017). There are some setbacks in terms of cultural understanding. Cultural imperialism originates from the hegemonic theory of media effects and is built on a foundation of a system constructed on both political and economic fields (Iancu & Mustăţea, 2014). Concern over the worsening of morals in the upcoming generation due to globalisation and the uncontrolled flow of foreign culture is inevitable (Chandara, 2000). Furthermore, Cambodian politics stray far away from the ideals of liberal democracy that is practiced by the West. Therefore, China is perceived as a crucial ally to Cambodia's ruling elites to offset pressures from the West pertaining to human rights and democracy criticism (Calabrese, L., Borodyna, O., & Nadin, R., 2022).

Despite positioning on its national interest, Cambodia's foreign policy has been scrutinized for favouring Chinese diplomatic and political interests (Lin, 2018). This has triggered concerns over China's burgeoning political and economic leverage over Cambodia which may lead to a future Cambodian policy that is simply an extension of Chinese regional authority (Lin, 2018). Statements such as "without Chinese aid, we go nowhere" by Council of Ministers spokesman indicates the magnitude of country's reliance on China (Hutt, 2016). It was most evident in Sihanouk Ville, a port city on the Gulf of Thailand, where many casinos had been built as the result of Chinese investments (Fifield, 2018). Besides the slowing down of local businesses, The Cambodian publics have been worried about crime and rising occurrences of drunken violence. After the COVID-19, the government has opened the country hoping the return of the Chinese to country to start their actual business but it has not been promising as before.

China's Financial Assistance to Cambodia

China has been providing billion dollars of aid to recipients who are willing to receive and come in line with Beijing's interests. However, unconditional China's aid is attractive to authoritarian regimes because it appears respectful of national sovereignty (Lum, Fischer, Gomez-Granger, & Leland, 2009). Within this context, unconditional 'authoritarian aid' from China is perceived as the most favourable source of finance Cambodia's government needs in order to advance its political agendas as well as economic interests. There are some possible reasons which drive Cambodia to be receptive to China's aid.

The explicit unconditionality of China's aid provides Cambodian government safe haven against Western and multilateral institutions donors' criticisms and pressures for fealty reforms. Whenever criticisms or pressures for reforms fall from traditional donors, China undertakes symbolic steps to voice its political support for Hun Sen's government and increase aid to offset the losses of aid suspension from those donors (Ciorciari, 2013). Whenever being pressured and condemned by the Western, China rejects but extends its economic and political support to Cambodia. Against this backdrop, Cambodia seized the opportunity and increasingly embraced China to maintain its political prowess (Ciorciari, 2013). China has been pouring tremendous aid to Cambodia than all other donors combined over the past years.

The priority of China's aid on infrastructure projects aptly mesh with Cambodian government's priority. Suffering from decades of civil wars, peace and stability are the prime concern of people. Cambodia's government has deciphered these concerns clearly and managed to marshal its legitimacy by propagandizing the achievements it made in finding peace, maintaining stability and building social infrastructures such as roads, bridges, schools or irrigation systems. These activities won Cambodian People's Party (CPP) consecutive landslide electoral victory from 1998 through 2018, except the 2013 election where CPP lost bundle of seats to the opposition party. At any public events, Hun Sen always praises China publicly stressing that China shows "respect" for recipient country and that "China always responds to projects judged to be Cambodia's priority". To date, China is the largest donor in

infrastructure development in Cambodia (Menon, 2022). The decrease in likelihood of aid from the European Union and the United States, however so, envisages the opportunity for the reinstatement of China's geopolitical position in the Southeast Asian region through Cambodia (Touch, 2018).

Last but not least, unconditional Chinese aid has enabled Cambodian ruling party to consolidate its power built on patron-client networks. The Cambodian state is structured by "interlocking pyramids of patron-client networks" built throughout 1980s and consolidated during the 1990s, and through various compromises and coalitions, these networks become more intertwined and complicated (Un, 2019). Even today, ruling Cambodian People's Party's political power depends largely on the financial arrangement flowing through these networks. The party has managed to use the networks and the control of Chinese support to repress political dissents out of the play field (Ciorciari, 2013). In addition, Beijing has been indifferent and more than willing to accept the status quo as long as Cambodia does not hurt its interests. The influx of China's aid and willingness to engage in corrupt practices help the Cambodian ruling party consolidate the patronage networks given the "no strings-attached" and the absence of concrete scrutiny from Beijing. Thus, pressure for fealty reforms, respect for human rights, rule of laws and complicated procedures required by traditional donors appear less alluring to the government. More importantly, as Cambodia enthusiastically supports China's BRI and continue to receive China's -no string attached aid and loans, its foreign policy will be undermined and formulated in favour of China's broader interests and influence in the regional and international arena. With this regard, it is worth considering that aids with string attached are not necessarily bad for the kingdom.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study centred on Cambodian public's views on practical benefits and challenges of the Chinese presence in Cambodia, mainly focusing on its businesses/investment and financial assistance (loan/aid). Quantitative research method (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) with online survey questionnaire was used to collect the primary data. Qualitative desk

review was also conducted to supplement the quantitative analysis in the study.

2.1. Sample and Data

The study's sample was selected using a combination of convenient, snowballing and volunteer sampling technique illustrated below:

- Firstly, the researchers used personal connection and professional network to approach the respondents by filling the questionnaire using Google link. It started with some colleagues, friends and relatives, then we asked them to pass on the link to other people they know. The process kept going like snowballing method.
- Secondly, the questionnaire link was posted on Facebook and we requested Facebook's users to help fill the questionnaire. We also requested those who helped fill the questionnaire to further share the link in any of their social media platforms to reach more participants.

The data collection started in two time periods. The initial step was made before Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA) while the second round was conducted after the official CCFTA signed. Each data collection period extended for 60 days. People who volunteered to fill questionnaire were regarded as the study's sample. A total of 339 people filled the questionnaire with 212 (62.5%) of them took part before CCFTA and 127 (37.5%) after CCFTA officially signed.

2.2. Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire consists two parts with 17 items totally. The first part consists of five items about personal information including gender, age, education, profession and their overseas experiences. The second part consists of 12 items with the first eight items aimed at exploring the participants' views on both positive and negative impacts of Chinese business and/or investment and Chinese loans and/or aids in Cambodia. Other four items were exploring the participants' views concerning strategic measures the Cambodian government should have in order to tackle challenges and issues that may arise due to the China's presence in the country.

2.3. Data Analysis

The quantitative data analysis approach was employed in the IBM SPSS Version 25. Descriptive statistics with graphical presentation, statistical tables and statistical numerical measures with mean values and standard deviations were presented. Chi-square tests were utilized to study the associations between the participants' views on each agreement item with some demographic variables such as time of data collection (Data), gender, profession and the participants' overseas experience (Overseas).

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1. Participants' Information

A total of 339 Cambodian people participated in this study. 67.8% of the participants were male while female comprised of 32.2% of the sample. More than half of the participants (51.6%) aged between 27 and 40 while those aged between 18 and 27 accounted for 38.9%. The ones between 40 and 60 comprised of 9.4%, the smallest portion. Additionally, 50.7% of the research respondents finished bachelor's degree while those obtained postgraduate level accounted for 45.4% of the sample. Respondents with TVET and/or below Grade 12 made up less than 4% of the sample.

In terms of profession, 42.5 % of the respondents were employed at either at private company or non-governmental organization (NGO) compared to its government civil servant with only 31.3%. Among the sample, 18.0% were unemployed while those reported to be self-employed accounted for 8.3%. In term of overseas experience including living, studying/training and travelling, the data showed that 65.2% of the respondents had overseas experience before while 34.8% of them reported having no overseas experiences.

3.2. Public's Views on Chinese Presence in Cambodia

This section presents the research findings about the respondents' views on practical benefits, challenges and issues brought by the Chinese presence in Cambodia.

Public's views on practical benefits

Overall, the finding from Figure 1 below showed that 73.5% of the participants agreed that Chinese business and investment provided practical benefits to Cambodia's development while 79.1% of them agreed that Chinese loan and/or aid contributed significantly to the kingdom's socio-economic development.

Figure 1
Descriptive information of Cambodian people's view on the benefits of China's presence in Cambodia.

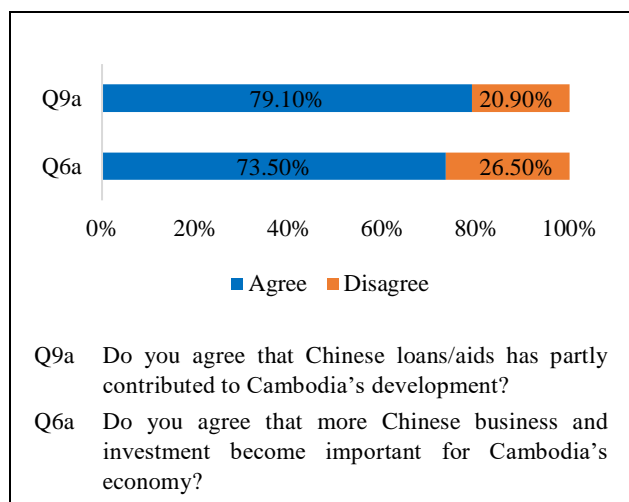


Table 1 below presents the findings related to the associations of people's views on practical benefits of the Chinese presence with some demographic variables such as data collection period (Data¹), gender, profession and the respondents' overseas experiences.

Table 1
Association between the participants' views on practical benefits of China presence with some demographic variables.

Item	Sample	Data	Gender	Profession	Overseas
Q9a	n = 339	.001	.961	.117	.841
Q6a	n = 339	.146	.780	.004	.228

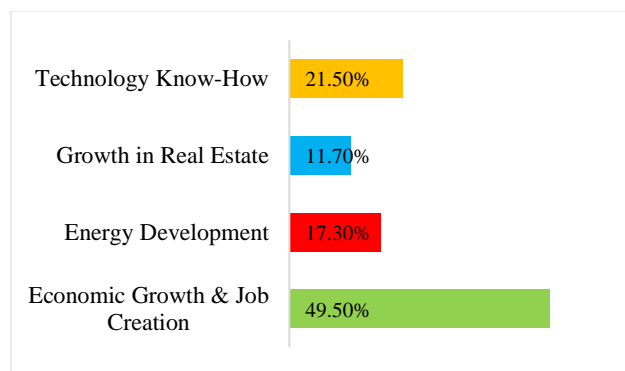
¹ **Data:** refers to the time of data collection which took place before and after the Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA) was officially signed.

² It should be note that the nature of this item is 'multiple response question' where each participant could choose more than one

It was revealed that Cambodian people's views on practical benefits of the Chinese business and/or investment in Cambodia was significantly associated with their profession. Evidently, unemployed people (82.0%) and those working in public sector (82.1%) expressed more favorable views compared to people working in private business or NGOs institutions (66.7%) and self-employed individuals (57.1%). Moreover, the people's views on practical benefits of Chinese loan and/or aid brought to Cambodia were found to have significantly association with the time of data collection. The data revealed that 88.2% of people participated after the CCFTA officially signed tended to agree more on the positive impacts of Chinese loan and/or aid for Cambodia's development compared to those participated before CCFTA with 73.6%.

We asked the respondents to express their views on the practical benefits brought by the Chinese business and/or investment. The finding was generated from the multiple-choice question basis and it revealed that 49.5% of the responses were economic growth and job creation and 21.5% were technological know-how. Energy infrastructure development made up of 17.3% the responses while growth in real estate sector accounted for 11.7% the total responses.

Figure 2
Participants' views on practical benefits of Chinese business and/or investment in Cambodia (total responses²=392).

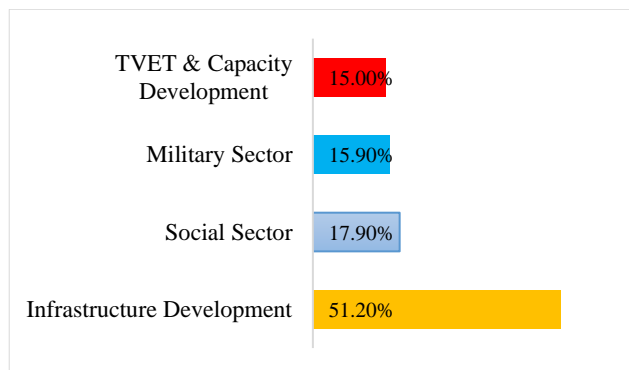


In addition, regarding the positive impacts of the Chinese loan and/or aid, 51.2% of the responses were

options. The 'total responses' here is the accumulation of all responses; therefore, the number is logically more than the research sample size or more than the sample size for that particular item. The subsequent items follow the same rule for such 'multiple response analyses'.

on infrastructure development, 17.9% on social sector while military sector and TVET & capacity development accounted for 15.9% and 15.0% respectively (Figure 3).

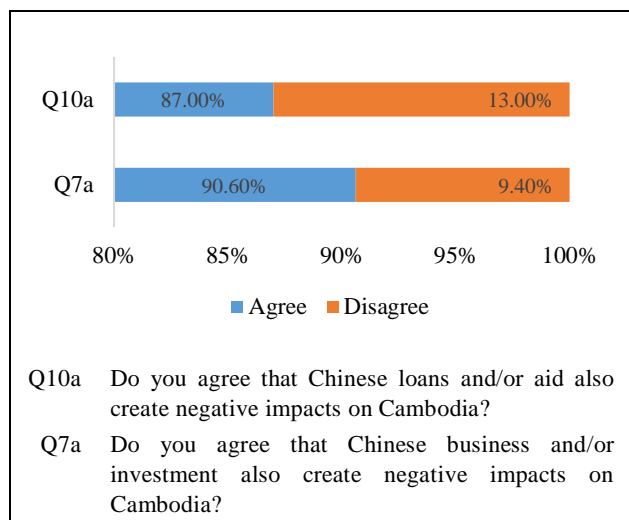
Figure 3
Participants' views on the contribution of Chinese loan and/or aid (total responses=492).



Public's Views on Challenges and Issues of Chinese's Presence for the Kingdom

The findings below presented the participants' views on the negative impacts of Chinese presence on Cambodia. Overall, besides the practical benefits presented above, 90.6% of the participants viewed that the Chinese business and investment also created challenges and issues while 87.0% of them agreed that the Chinese loan and aid provided to Cambodia generated negative impact on Cambodia in general (Figure 4).

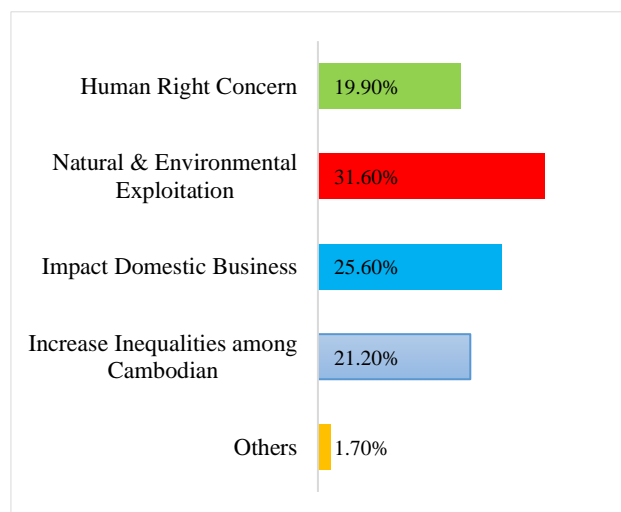
Figure 4
Descriptive information about people's view on the negative impact of China's presence in Cambodia.



In addition, the participants' views regarding the negative impacts of the Chinese presence were found to be no significantly associated with any of the demographic variables, that is, the respondents' views were common across different subgroups demarcated by those demographic variables.

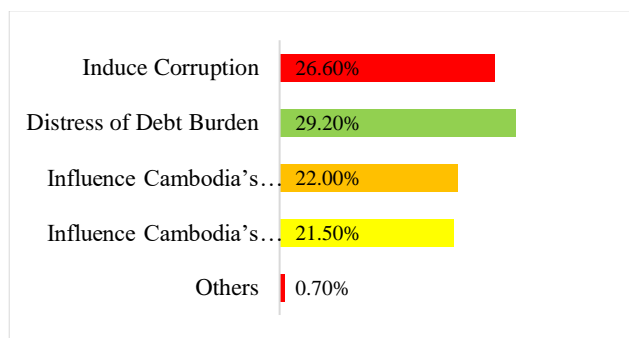
We asked about what would be the negative impacts brought by the Chinese presence in Cambodia, the findings revealed that, in terms of the challenges and issues conceivably caused by the Chinese business and/or investment, 31.6% of the responses fell on natural and environmental exploitation, 25.6% were the negative impact on domestic businesses, 21.2% on widening social and economic inequalities among Cambodian citizens while human right concerns accounted for 19.9% of the responses (Figure 5).

Figure 5
Participants' views on specific challenges and issues of Chinese business and/or investment in Cambodia (total responses=753).



Moreover, with regard to challenges and issues imposed by the Chinese loan and/or aid, 29.2% of the participants' responses focused on distress of debt burden on Chinese loan, 26.6% were on inducing more corruption while the concerns about the increases of Chinese influence on Cambodia's politics and influence on Cambodian foreign policy accounted for 22.0% and 21.5% respectively.

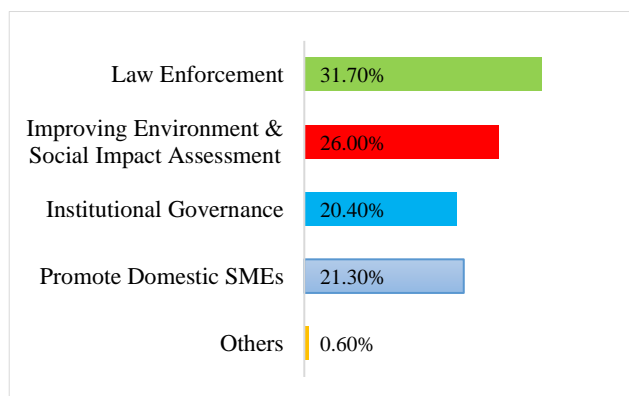
Figure 6
 Participants' concerns about challenges and issues of Chinese loans and aids provided to Cambodia (total responses=749).



Public's Views on Strategic Action and Solution

The below findings presented the overall view of Cambodian publics on the practical measures and/or strategic actions the Cambodian government should take to tackle the challenges and issues imposed by the Chinese presence in Cambodia. In term of practical measures to tackle Chinese business and/or investment malpractices, it was revealed that 31.7% of the responses focused on strengthening law enforcement, 26.0% fell on improving the assessment of environment and social impact. Moreover, promoting domestic SMEs made up of 21.3% while improving institutional governance accounted for 20.4% of the participants' responses (Figure 7).

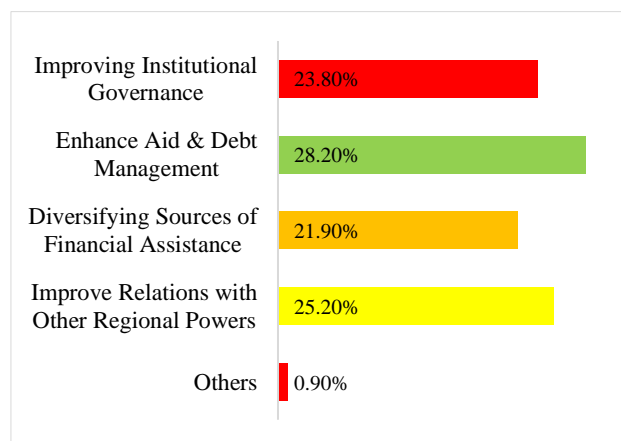
Figure 7
 Participants' views towards the government specific measures and actions over Chinese malpractice in business environment (total responses=828).



With regard to the public's views towards the strategic measures and actions over negative impacts of the Chinese loan and/or aid, the finding revealed that 28.2% of the responses were on enhancing the

effective management of aid and debts, 25.2% focused on improving the relationship with other regional great powers, 23.8% were on improving institutional governance, while the remaining 21.9% of the responses were on diversifying sources of financial assistance.

Figure 8
 Participants' views on effective government measures to deal with negative impact of Chinese loans and aids (total responses=755).



4. DISCUSSION

As China's global power has risen, so is the global view towards this second largest economy becoming crucial for its public diplomacy matter. As far as it is concerned, China has put a lot of resources into its public diplomacy, using business and/or trade, Confucius Institutes and tourism as well as state-controlled media to influence the global perceptions of the public towards China (Chen & Duggan, 2016; d'Hooghe, I., 2015; Pan, S. Y., 2013; Schliebs, M., Bailey, H., Bright, J., & Howard, P. N., 2021). It is true that as China's global power is rising the government continue using the soft power diplomacy to make itself attractive to people in other countries (Breslin, S., 2011; Kurlantzick, J., 2007; Nye, 2005; Shambaugh, D., 2015). In Cambodia, China's influence has become remarkable, making the former 'an ironclad friendship' stated by the foreign media and experts quite often. This has become questionable whether Cambodian publics do have a benign view of China, conceivably due to the increase of Chinese business and/or trade, people and financial assistance as well as the other regional China-initiated economic cooperation and partnership including Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI), Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (LMC), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and so on.

As presented in the finding section, regarding the public's opinion towards the practical benefits of the Chinese presence in term of its business and/or investment and financial assistance to Cambodia. The data showed favorable trends due to the high proportions of the respondents agreed on the practical benefits brought by the Chinese business and/or investment as well as its loan and/or aid provided to Cambodia. This finding can be illustrated by the fact that Chinese business, investment and trade have been remarkable and noticeable compared to the other Cambodia's major trade partners, thanks to its improved political and economic relations with Cambodia (Ly, 2018). This would have been well informed among the Cambodian publics working in different professions, particularly those who have been able to access the necessary information about Chinese business and/or investment in the country.

It is widely said that Chinese business and investment have brought more capital and technology and simultaneously stimulate growth of the local businesses and enterprises, thereby creating more jobs and benefits for Cambodian citizens in general (Heng & Chheang, 2019; Verver, 2020). Cambodia has been supportive of and welcomed to China-established initiatives and other cooperation frameworks, both on the regional and global agendas hoping that more Chinese businesses and investors come to invest in the kingdom. While the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and so on are the example, Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA) is another milestone of the improved relations between the two countries, economically and politically (Neak, & Sok, 2021).

It has been widely believed that China, in the future, will become a potential market for the kingdom's agricultural products and goods. In addition, China has become a major financial source for the kingdom, both in the forms of financial loan and aid (Chen, 2018). Over the last decade, China's financial assistance to Cambodia has dramatically risen and surpassed the Western counterparts as well as Japan.

Despite the Cambodian public's views towards the positive image of the Chinese business and/or investment and financial loan and/or aid with regard to the country's different sector development appeared to be more favorable, the views towards the negative image cannot be overlooked. This finding is paralleled with the other scholarly arguments saying that over reliance on a single dominant power, especially China, might possibly lead the country to have contradictions with the Western counterparts as well as fall into the China's domination, thereby harming the country's foreign policy (Leng, 2019; Ciorciari, 2013). Regarding this, there has been growing public concern about the huge influx of the Chinese presence to the country, albeit the significant interests prevail in the meantime.

Last but not least, the analysis showed interesting results. The public's views towards the strategic measures and actions the Cambodian government should to prevent the likely negative impacts resulted from the malpractices of the Chinese business and/or investment in the country were significant. The findings tend to respond the public perpetual concern, as mentioned above, and suggest to the government to take practical measures and actions over the malpractices of the Chinese business and investment in Cambodia (Pordié, 2020; Young, 2019; Zhao, 2018).

Furthermore, the discovered views towards the strategic measures and actions to deal with the negative image of the China's financial loan and aid in the country were significant. In light of this, the finding also appears to be favorable if the government cautiously and wisely acts with regard to its foreign aid and debt policy, neither over-relying on a single source of donor's financial assistance nor letting the debt going beyond its ceiling. This really corroborates with some scholarly arguments and media manipulation about the other country's debt distress, particularly in the case of Sri Lanka (Var, & Po, 2017).

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Conclusion

This small-scale study employed quantitative survey whose objectives were to explore on how Cambodian

public's views towards the Chinese presence in Cambodia. The results revealed both benefits and negative impacts brought by the Chinese presence in the kingdom. Large proportions of people agreed to the practical benefits brought by the Chinese business and investment as well as its loan/aid. The benefits from Chinese business and investment could be seen as economic growth and job creation, technological know-how, energy infrastructure development and growth in real estate sector. The practical advantages contributed to Cambodia's development in term of Chinese financial assistance were infrastructure development, improvement in social sector, military sector and TVET & capacity development.

Along with the benefits; however, a large proportion of participants agreed on the negative impacts imposed by the presence of China's business and investment and its financial assistance. The challenges and issues brought by the Chinese business and investment could be seen as natural and environmental exploitation, negative impact on domestic businesses, widening social and economic inequalities among Cambodian citizens and human right concerns. The challenges and issues imposed by the Chinese loan and/or aid were distress of debt burden on Chinese loan, inducing more corruption, the increases of Chinese influence on Cambodia's politics and foreign policy.

To tackle the negative impacts brought by China's presence in Cambodia, the participants suggested several key strategic actions and measures. To prevent the Chinese business and investment malpractice, strategic actions and measures should focus on strengthening national law enforcement, improving environment and social impact assessment, promoting domestic SMEs and improving institutional governance. Key strategies to improve the condition of negative impacts imposed by Chinese financial assistance were improving aid and debts management, improving the relationship with other regional powers, improving institutional governance and diversifying sources of financial assistance.

5.2. Recommendation

Since the China's presence in Cambodia bound in the forms of business and/or investment and financial

loan and/or aid has become significant with regard to the latter's development, it has become obvious that the relations between two countries will be stronger. The former is likely a major source of the latter's financial assistance. Relying on the kingdom's context and demands, the authors recommend that, in term of future Chinese business and investment, the Cambodian government should focus on the following key areas:

- agricultural product processing
- technology and artificial intelligence
- clean and sustainable energy
- textile and automation

Moreover, future China's financial assistance should be expanded to the following aspects:

- agricultural infrastructure development
- enhancing agricultural skills and innovation
- technology know-how on development sectors such as education, health ...
- research and development (R&D)
- vocational training and development that fit the demand of country's job market

5.3. Further Study

The research presented significant findings related to the public opinions on the influence of major power country in Cambodia; however, research sample put undeniably limitation to the representation of the views. To capture more significant inputs in this issue, more sample size is needed. It is recommended that future study should cover more sample size and include people from various background, for example, different geographical areas and diverse professions etc.

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**Sothiary
TOCH**



Workplace:

- Royal Academy of Cambodia

PhD in International Politics

*Central China Normal
University, People's Republic of
China (PRC)*

MA in Development Studies

*Victoria University of
Wellington, New Zealand*

Research Interest:

- International Politics
 - International Relations
-



Tong LY



Workplace:

- Royal Academy of Cambodia

Master's Degrees in:

- Mathematics Education
(Hiroshima University)
- Educational Administration
(University of Cambodia)
- Mathematics
*(Royal University of Phnom
Penh)*

Research Interest:

- Data Science
 - Student Learning and
Misconceptions
-

APPENDIX

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

**A Small-Scale Survey of Cambodian Public’s Views on China’s Presence:
Business/Investment and Loans/Aids**

Introduction

This survey intends to assess public’s view on ‘China’s presence’ in Cambodia, mainly reflecting on business and investment and loans and aids. With the structured questions provided below, you are appreciated to take on your voluntary response to the survey. The study is part of our personal research project aiming at exploring the Cambodian public’s view towards the China’s presence in the kingdom. On top of that, I believe that the finding of this study will also significantly contribute to the development of research sector in Cambodia in general, and provide further discussion and argument in particular with regard to the Cambodian public’s view on China’s growing influence in Cambodia. Your support to fill out this survey questionnaire is invaluable.

We really appreciate your kindness if you could pass this Questionnaire Link to more friends, relatives, colleagues and those you know so that they could also take part in this study.

SECTION I: RELEVANT INFORMATION	
Q1: Age <input type="checkbox"/> Below 18 <input type="checkbox"/> 18-27 <input type="checkbox"/> 27-40 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-60 <input type="checkbox"/> Over 60	Q2: Education Level <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 12 or Below <input type="checkbox"/> Technical Training <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate Degree
Q3: Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	Q4: Occupations <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Employed <input type="checkbox"/> Government Sector <input type="checkbox"/> Private Business/NGO Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Other.....
Q5: Have you ever experienced living or traveling abroad? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

SECTION II: CHINA’S PRESENCE IN CAMBODIA	
Q6a	Do you agree that more Chinese business and investment become important for Cambodia’s economy? <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree (Go to Q7a) <input type="checkbox"/> Agree (Go to Q6b)
Q6b	If you agree (in Q6a), in what sectors that Chinese business and investment become significant? <input type="checkbox"/> Economic growth and job creation <input type="checkbox"/> Energy development <input type="checkbox"/> Growth in business/enterprises and real estate <input type="checkbox"/> More technological know-how <input type="checkbox"/> Others
Q7a	Do you agree that Chinese business and investment also create negative impacts on Cambodia? <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree (Go to Q8a) <input type="checkbox"/> Agree (Go to Q7b)
Q7b	If you agree (in Q7a), what are the negative impacts of Chinese business and investment? <input type="checkbox"/> Human rights concerns <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental and Natural exploitation <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge the domestic small businesses <input type="checkbox"/> Increase inequality among Cambodians

		<input type="checkbox"/> Others
Q8a	Do you agree that the government should take on measures to prevent Chinese business/investment malpractices which result in negative impacts as soon as possible?	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree (Go to Q9a) <input type="checkbox"/> Agree (Go to Q8b)
Q8b	If agree (in Q8a), what should be the effective measures to prevent Chinese business/investment malpractices in Cambodia?	<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate law enforcement and compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Improve environmental and social impact assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Effective institutional governance <input type="checkbox"/> Promote domestic small enterprises <input type="checkbox"/> Others
Q9a	Do you agree that Chinese loans/aids has partly contributed to Cambodia's development?	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree (Go to Q10a) <input type="checkbox"/> Agree (Go to Q9b)
Q9b	If agree (in Q9a), which sectors that Chinese loans/aids has contributed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure development (bridge, road and building...) <input type="checkbox"/> Social sector (education and health) <input type="checkbox"/> Military sector <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational skill and capacity development <input type="checkbox"/> Others
Q10a	Do you agree that Chinese loans/aids also create negative impacts on Cambodia?	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree (Go to Q11a) <input type="checkbox"/> Agree (Go to Q10b)
Q10b	If agree (in Q10a), what concern you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Induce corruption in the government <input type="checkbox"/> Distressed due to more debt burden <input type="checkbox"/> Influence Cambodia's political development <input type="checkbox"/> Influence Cambodia's foreign policy decision <input type="checkbox"/> Others
Q11a	Do you agree that there are measures the government should take on to reduce the negative impacts due to Chinese loans/aids?	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree (Go Submit Form) <input type="checkbox"/> Agree (Go to Q11b)
Q11b	If agree (in Q11a), what are the effective measures the government should take on to curb on the negative impacts?	<input type="checkbox"/> Improve institutional governance <input type="checkbox"/> Enhance aid governance and debt management <input type="checkbox"/> Diversify sources of financial assistance <input type="checkbox"/> Keep up improving relations with other regional powers <input type="checkbox"/> Others