

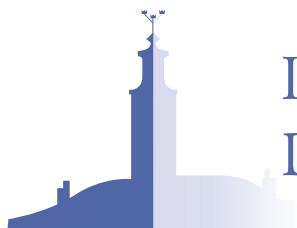
# Ethnic Minorities, Government Policies, and Foreign Relations

The Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and  
Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia



Ramses Amer

ASIA PAPER  
June 2014



Institute for Security &  
Development Policy



**Ethnic Minorities,  
Government Policies, and  
Foreign Relations:  
The Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam  
and Ethnic Vietnamese in  
Cambodia**

**Ramses Amer**

**Ethnic Minorities, Government Policies, and Foreign Relations: The Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and the Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia** is an *Asia Paper* published by the Institute for Security and Development Policy. The *Asia Papers Series* is the Occasional Paper series of the Institute's Asia Program, and addresses topical and timely subjects. The Institute is based in Stockholm, Sweden, and cooperates closely with research centers worldwide. Through its Silk Road Studies Program, the Institute runs a joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center with the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies. The Institute is firmly established as a leading research and policy center, serving a large and diverse community of analysts, scholars, policy-watchers, business leaders, and journalists. It is at the forefront of research on issues of conflict, security, and development. Through its applied research, publications, research cooperation, public lectures, and seminars, it functions as a focal point for academic, policy, and public discussion.

The opinions and conclusions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute for Security and Development Policy or its sponsors.

© Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2014

ISBN: 978-91-86635-74-9

Printed in Singapore

Cover Photo: A Vietnamese floating village in Cambodia (Wikimedia Commons).

Distributed in Europe by:

Institute for Security and Development Policy  
Västra Finnbodavägen 2, 131 30 Stockholm-Nacka, Sweden  
Tel. +46-841056953; Fax. +46-86403370  
Email: info@isd.eu

Distributed in North America by:

The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute  
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies  
1619 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036  
Tel. +1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785  
E-mail: [caci2@jhuadig.admin.jhu.edu](mailto:caci2@jhuadig.admin.jhu.edu)

Editor/Publications Manager: Alec Forss

Editorial correspondence should be addressed to Alec Forss at: [aforss@isd.eu](mailto:aforss@isd.eu)

# Contents

Key Abbreviations.....	4
Executive Summary .....	5
Introduction .....	7
The Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam .....	9
Demographic Developments.....	11
The Ethnic Chinese in the South: Spring 1975 to Spring 1978.....	15
The Exodus of Ethnic Chinese from the North in 1978 .....	22
The Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam from mid-1978 to mid-1979 .....	26
Gradual Reintegration in the 1980s and 1990s .....	32
The Orderly Departure Program.....	36
Assessing the Continued Decline in the Number of Ethnic Chinese .....	37
Analysing the Case of the Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam .....	38
The Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia.....	41
The Sihanouk Years, 1953-1970 .....	43
The Khmer Republic, 1970-1975.....	44
Democratic Kampuchea, 1975-1979 .....	45
People's Republic of Kampuchea/State of Cambodia, 1979–1992 .....	46
The United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, 1992-1993 .....	48
Developments after Peacekeeping, 1993-2000.....	50
Cessation of Attacks in the 2000s.....	55
Analysing the Case of the Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia.....	57
Conclusion.....	63
About the Author .....	66

## Key Abbreviations

CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CNRP	Cambodian National Rescue Party
CPK	Communist Party of Kampuchea
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
FUNCINPEC	Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
NEZ	New Economic Zones
NGC	National Government of Cambodia
ODP	Orderly Departure Program
PKD	Party of Democratic Kampuchea
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
PSB	Public Security Bureau
RGNUC	Royal Government of National Union of Cambodia
ROV	Republic of Vietnam
SNC	Supreme National Council
SOC	State of Cambodia
SRP	Sam Rainsy Party
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

## Executive Summary

The main purpose of this study is to analyse the impact of government policies and foreign relations on ethnic minorities. This is done through two case studies from East Asia. The cases are: 1) the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and Sino-Vietnamese relations, and 2) the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia and Cambodia-Vietnam relations. Both cases display that inter-state relations can have considerable impact on the situation of ethnic minorities in neighbouring countries. The two cases also display that deteriorating inter-state relations can influence government policies toward ethnic minorities. In both cases deteriorating inter-state relations combined with government policies have caused large-scale migrations, in particular in the 1970s. The empirical evidence provided by the two cases and the lessons drawn from them are used to analyse the relationship between government policies and inter-state relations both in relation to the two cases and more broadly.

The two cases display the relevance of studying the triangular relationship between host country, country of origin, and ethnic minority. In both cases the minorities can be seen as diasporas in countries bordering on their country of origin. The case of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam displays a case when the minority comes under pressure for a period of time due to a deterioration of relations between host country and country of origin. The case of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia display a similar pattern of development coupled with a domestic situation in which the ethnic Vietnamese are facing negative repercussions due to the domestic political situation. Thus, the basic difference between the two cases is that the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam have been reintegrated into Vietnamese society while the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia have not.





## Introduction\*

This paper analyses the impact of government policies and foreign relations on ethnic minorities. This is done through two case studies from East Asia. The first case concerns the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and Sino-Vietnamese relations, and the second deals with the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia and Cambodia-Vietnam relations. Both cases display how inter-state relations can have considerable impact on the situation of ethnic minorities in neighbouring countries, and that deteriorating inter-state relations can influence government policies toward ethnic minorities. In both cases deteriorating inter-state relations combined with government policies have caused large-scale migrations, in particular in the 1970s. In this study the empirical evidence provided by the two cases and the lessons drawn from them are used to analyse the relationship between government policies and inter-state relations, both in relation to the two cases and more broadly.

The case of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam displays that three factors had a considerably negative impact on ethnic Chinese during the second half of the 1970s: economic policies of socialist transformation, in particular on the ethnic Chinese in the South of the country; relations with China, in particular on the ethnic Chinese in the North of the country; and increasingly discriminatory policies of the Vietnamese authorities. The three factors combined to cause major challenges to the human security situation of the ethnic Chinese and also caused a major outward migration of ethnic Chinese, by land to China and by boat to Southeast Asia and to Hong Kong.

During the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, Vietnam's policies progressively changed toward the ethnic Chinese, and they were gradually re-integrated into Vietnamese society through a process that was officially completed in 1996. This political process, coupled with changes in economic

\* An earlier version of this study was presented as a paper at the International Conference: "Plural Coexistence and Sustainability: Asian Experiences in Interdisciplinary Perspectives," which was jointly organized by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, Singapore, on March 11-12, 2013. The study draws on earlier research by the author on the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, on relations between China and Vietnam, on the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, and on relations between Cambodia and Vietnam.

policies through the process of renovation, known as “Doi Moi,” facilitated the reintegration process of the Chinese community into Vietnamese society.

The case of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia also displays an interstate dimension through the importance played by Cambodian perceptions of Vietnam and of relations between Cambodia and Vietnam in shaping Cambodia’s policies toward the ethnic Vietnamese in the country. This situation, coupled with political competition and crisis in Cambodia, have had far-reaching negative repercussions on the human security situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. The far-reaching negative impact on the ethnic Vietnamese can be seen from the *de facto* elimination of the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia in the 1970s and politically motivated attacks on ethnic Vietnamese carried out on a number of occasions in the 1990s. Although lethal attacks ceased in the early 2000s, the legal status of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia is still unclear. In addition, during periods of political competition the ethnic Vietnamese are often targeted by anti-Vietnam rhetoric, such as has been displayed following the 2013 national elections in Cambodia. The ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia therefore remain a minority at risk.

The relevance of studying the triangular relationship between host country, country of origin, and ethnic minority, is displayed by the two cases. The minorities can be seen as diasporas in countries bordering on their country of origin. The case of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam displays that when the minority comes under pressure for a period of time due to a deterioration of relations between host country and country of origin. The case of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia displays a similar pattern of development coupled with a domestic situation in which the ethnic Vietnamese are facing negative repercussions due to the domestic political situation. The basic difference between the two cases is that ethnic Chinese in Vietnam have been reintegrated into Vietnamese society while the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia have not.

The study is structured as follows. First, the empirical developments relating to the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and Sino-Vietnamese relations are outlined and analysed. Second, the empirical developments relating to the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia and Cambodia-Vietnam relations are outlined and analysed. Third, in the concluding section, the main findings are summarised and final conclusions are drawn.

# **The Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam**



## Demographic Developments

Official terminology in the Vietnamese censuses in the former Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) (North) and also in the whole of Vietnam after 1975 classify three ethnic groups as ethnic Chinese, i.e. belonging to the “Han Group” based on their language. The three groups are the Hoa, the Ngái, and the Sán Dìu.<sup>1</sup> Since 1975, four official censuses have been carried out in the whole country: the first in October 1979, the second in April 1989, the third in April 1999, and the fourth in April 2009. An earlier census, carried out in the former Republic of Vietnam (ROV) (South) in February 1976, provided the basis for an official estimate for the whole country. This estimate and the four censuses of 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009 provide data on the Hoa and the Sán Dìu. In the 1979 census there were 1,318 Ngái,<sup>2</sup> but there is no figure in the 1989 census. The 1999 census puts the number of Ngai at 4,841,<sup>3</sup> and the 2009 census puts the number of Ngai at 1,035.<sup>4</sup> The Hoa in

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on decision No. 121 – TCTK/PPCD on the “Nomenclature of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups” by the General Department of Statistics on March 2, 1979. The “Nomenclature,” in Dang N. V., Chu T. S. and Luu H., *The Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1984), Dang N. V., Chu T. S. and Luu H., *Les ethnies minoritaires du Vietnam* [The Ethnic Minorities of Vietnam] (Hanoi: Edition en langues étrangères [Foreign Languages Publisher], 1986), Dang N. V., Chu T. S. and Luu, H., *The Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publisher, 1993) and Dang N. V., Chu T. S. and Luu, H., *The Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam. (Supplemented and Revised Edition)* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publisher, 2010). See also *The Socialist Republic of Vietnam* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1985), pp. 45–51 (hereafter *The Socialist Republic*). Based on author’s discussions with officials and researchers in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in December 1997, the attitude of the Vietnamese authorities seems to be that the members of Hoa group are of “Han Chinese origin” from China and that they maintain their Chinese customs, whereas other ethnic groups originating from China, e.g. the Ngái, and the Sán Dìu, are not “Han-anised” and they are not considered to be ethnic Chinese.

<sup>2</sup> “Population by ethnic groups,” in *Công hòa xã hội chủ nghĩa Việt Nam, Dân Số Việt Nam 1 - 10 - 1979* (Hà Nội: Ban chỉ đạo tổng điều tra dân số trung u’ơng, 1983), p. 104 (hereafter *Census 1979*).

<sup>3</sup> “Population by ethnic groups, sex and province,” in *Population and Housing Census Viet Nam 1999* (Ha Noi: Nah Xuat Ban Thong Ke, 2001), p. 21 (hereafter *Census 1999*).

<sup>4</sup> “Table 5 Population by Urban/Rural Residence, Sex, Ethnic Group, Socio-Economic Region, and Province/City, 1/4/2009,” in *The 2009 Vietnam Population and Housing Census: Completed Results* (Hanoi: Central Population and Housing Census Steering Committee, 2010), p. 135. from the web site of the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, accessed October 18, 2011, [http://www.gso.gov.vn/default\\_en.aspx?tabid=515&idmid=5&ItemID=10799](http://www.gso.gov.vn/default_en.aspx?tabid=515&idmid=5&ItemID=10799) (hereafter *Census 2009*).

Vietnam declined from 1976 to 2009. Between 1976 and 1979 the decline was 24.35 per cent, between 1979 and 1989 it was 3.73 per cent, between 1989 and 1999 it was 4.20 per cent, and between 1999 and 2009 it was 4.78 per cent (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Number of Hoa in the whole of Vietnam 1976, 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009<sup>5</sup>*

Estimate/Census	Total	Decrease/Increase (%)
1976	1,236,000	-
01-10-1979	935,074	- 24.35
01-04-1989	900,185	- 3.73
01-04-1999	862,371	- 4.20
01-04-2009	823,041	- 4.78

As a percentage of the total population of Vietnam, the Hoa declined from 2.57 per cent in 1976, to 1.77 per cent in 1979, down to 1.40 per cent in 1989, to 1.13 in 1999, and finally down to 0.96 per cent in 2009 (see Table 2).

*Table 2. The Hoa as a percentage of the total population of Vietnam 1976, 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009<sup>6</sup>*

Estimate/Census	Hoa	Total Population	% Hoa of Total
1976	1,236,000	48,060,000	2.57
01-10-1979	935,074	52,741,766	1.77
01-04-1989	900,185	64,375,762	1.40
01-04-1999	862,373	76,323,173	1.13
01-04-2009	823,071	85,846,997	0.96

The population in Vietnam as a whole has been growing since 1976. In 1976 the Hoa community was the second-largest ethnic group after the majority

<sup>5</sup> "Dân số các tộc chia theo nam nữ," in *Dân Số, Nước công hòa xã hội chủ nghĩa, Việt Nam, Tho tài liệu t'ong di'eu tra dân số toàn mi'ên Bac 4-1974, và di'eu dân số mi'ên Nam 2-1976*, *Luu hành nô'i bộ* (Hà Nội: Tổng cục thống kê, 1976), p. 18 (hereafter Census 1976); Census 1979, p. 104, "Population by ethnic group and sex," in *Vietnam Population Census – 1989, Complete Census Results I* (Hanoi: Central Census Steering Committee Census, 1991), p. 66 (hereafter Census 1989); Census 1999, p. 21; Census 2009, p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134; Census 1976, p. 18; Census 1979, p. 104; Census 1989, p. 66; Census 1999, p. 21.

Kinh. This was still the case in 1979, yet by 2009 the Hoa had dropped to eighth among the ethnic groups. The Hoa community has been the only major ethnic group<sup>7</sup> that has been diminishing in number between 1976 and 2009.<sup>8</sup>

In this context it is necessary to take a closer look at the demographic evolution of the Hoa in the former DRV and in the former ROV, respectively, since 1975. A comparison of the official figures of the number of Hoa in the former DRV can be based on the 1974 (only in the DRV), 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009 censuses. There was a dramatic decline in the number of Hoa between 1974 and 1979, amounting to 79 per cent. The decline of 8.6 per cent between 1979 and 1989 was, as a percentage, higher than the decline of the Hoa in the whole country. Since 1989 there has been an increase in the number of Hoa in the former DRV. Between 1989 and 1999 the Hoa increased by 6.39 per cent and between 1999 and 2009 the increase was 3.87 per cent (see Table 3).

Table 3. Number of Hoa in the former DRV 1974, 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009<sup>9</sup>

Census	Total	Decrease/Increase (%)
01-04-1974	256,534	-
01-10-1979	53,672	- 79.08
01-04-1989	49,040	- 8.63
01-04-1999	50,172	+ 6.39
01-04-2009	52,116	+ 3.87

The number of Hoa in the former ROV can be compared in five post-1975 censuses of 1976 (only in the former ROV), 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009. Between 1976 and 1979 the decline was 7.59 per cent less dramatic than in the North, but it was still significant in view of the size of the southern community.

<sup>7</sup> In this context “major ethnic group” is defined as numbering at least 40,000 persons in the 1979 census.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21; Census 1976, p. 18; Census 1979, p. 104; Census 1989, p. 66; Census 2009, p. 134.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148–164; “Dân Số” chia theo dân tộc (Toàn miền Bắc),” in *Dân Số, Nước cộng hòa xã hội chủ nghĩa, Việt Nam, Tho tài liệu t’ong đi’eu tra dân số toàn mi’ên Bac 4-1974, và đi’eu dân số mi’ên Nam 2-1976, Lưu hành nội bộ* (Hà Nội: Tổng cục thống kê, 1976), p. 28 (hereafter Census 1974 – DRV); Census 1979, pp. 105–115; Census 1989, pp. 68, 70–91; Census 1999, pp. 22–50.

The figures from 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009 indicate that the decline in the number of Hoa has continued throughout the period (see Table 4).

Table 4. Number of Hoa in the former ROV 1976, 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009<sup>10</sup>

Census	Total	Decrease/Increase (%)
01-02-1976	949,825	-
01-10-1979	877,691	- 7.59
01-04-1989	850,614	- 3.09
01-04-1999	809,516	- 5.08
01-04-2009	770,955	- 4.76

The demographic developments relating to the Sán Dìu ethnic group are diametrically opposite those of the Hoa ethnic group. The Sán Dìu ethnic group has been growing in number while the Hoa ethnic group has been declining in number since the mid-1970s. The official figures show that there has been a continuous growth of the Sán Dìu community between 1974 and 2009. The growth was particularly significant between the censuses of 1979 and 1989 and between the censuses of 1989 and 1999. The increase from 57,440 in 1974 to 146,821 in 2009 clearly displays the significant increase in the number of Sán Dìu since the mid-1970s.<sup>11</sup>

The demographic decline of the Hoa ethnic group<sup>12</sup> with a focus on the late 1970s will be the focus of the analysis in this study. As the pattern of Chinese migration from Vietnam varied considerably and different factors affected the migration flows from different parts of the country, it is necessary to study the evolution in the North and the South of Vietnam separately.

The causes behind the decline of the ethnic Chinese population will be sought within the context of the overall policies of the Vietnamese authorities

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51–82; “Dân số chia theo dân tộc (Số bình quân nam 1976),” in *Dân Số, Nước công hòa xã hội chủ nghĩa, Việt Nam, Tho tài liệu t’ong đĩ’eu tra dân số toàn mi’ền Bac 4-1974, và đĩ’eu dân số mi’ền Nam 2-1976, Lưu hành nội bộ* (Hà Nội: Tổng cục thống kê, 1976), p. 339 (hereafter Census 1976 – ROV); Census 1979, pp. 115–124; Census 1989, pp. 69 and 91–114; Census 2009, pp. 149–225.

<sup>11</sup> For details on the Sán Dìu see R. Amer, “Examining the Demographic Changes of the Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam Since 1975,” *Malaysian Journal of Chinese Studies* 2(1) (2013), pp. 4 and 23–26 (hereafter Amer, “Examining the Demographic Changes”).

<sup>12</sup> The term “ethnic Chinese” will be used as synonymous to “Hoa” if not otherwise indicated.



toward the Chinese community. In the former ROV, the economic policies are of particular interest since they were bound to affect the business interests of the ethnic Chinese. These policies aimed to transform the country into a socialist and classless society through the nationalization of private trade, private enterprises, and privately-owned land. In short, the DRV-model was to be applied nationwide.<sup>13</sup> The implementation of such policies in the former ROV could lead to a situation in which some of the ethnic Chinese would migrate or try to migrate from southern Vietnam. However, the most dramatic decline in the number of ethnic Chinese occurred in the former DRV during the second half of the 1970s, and this decline cannot be explained by the implementation of socialist policies, since such policies had been in place since 1954. Other causes have to be identified, both internal to Vietnam and in the field of foreign policy, i.e. Vietnam's relations with China.

## **The Ethnic Chinese in the South: Spring 1975 to Spring 1978**

### **Economic Policies**

After the end of the war in 1975, the Vietnamese authorities faced two major challenges. The first was the task of rebuilding the country, devastated by the Vietnam War, and the second was to transform the economic structure and life in the former ROV in line with the socialist ideals of the leaders.<sup>14</sup> One of the measures applied to cope with unemployment in the larger cities, primarily in Ho Chi Minh City,<sup>15</sup> was to send people to so-called New Economic Zones (NEZ). Parts of the countryside in the South had been

---

<sup>13</sup> R. Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and Sino-Vietnamese Relations* (Kuala Lumpur: Forum, 1991), pp. 16 and 24 (hereafter Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*).

<sup>14</sup> *On the Eve of the VIth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam: Vietnam 1976-1986* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1986), p. 12 (hereafter *On the Eve*); Nguyen, K. V., *Southern Vietnam, 1975-1985* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1985), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Saigon, the old capital of the ROV, was renamed Ho Chi Minh City on July 2, 1976. Ho Chi Minh City encompasses not only the former city of Saigon but also the former Cholon mainly inhabited by ethnic Chinese—the core of Cholon corresponds to Districts 5 and 6 in Ho Chi Minh City.

abandoned during the war due to two factors: the forcing of the population into strategic hamlets and a spontaneous migration to the cities to avoid the war's battlegrounds. After 1975, the abandoned regions had to be resettled and the NEZ programme was intended to be the vehicle for carrying out the resettlement policy.<sup>16</sup> The NEZ and the restructuring of the economy were interconnected. The aim was to get people who had been involved in so-called "unproductive" activities in the larger cities to engage in production in the NEZ. This would fulfil two goals: namely, increasing food production and increasing state control over the economy. In the agricultural sector the authorities also aimed to collectivize the peasantry in the South. This succeeded in the center of the country, but not in the Mekong delta, which remained largely non-collectivized even by the end of the 1970s.<sup>17</sup>

The Vietnamese authorities also initiated other moves in order to gain control over the economic life in the South. In September 1975 a currency reform was announced. The old currency was to be replaced and a certain amount of the new money had to be put into state controlled accounts.<sup>18</sup> Also in September a campaign—code-named "X1"—was launched against the "compradore bourgeoisie." People falling within this category had their industrial and commercial properties confiscated.<sup>19</sup> In an effort to curb speculation, hoarding of goods, and tendencies to monopolize the market, the Vietnamese authorities required the enterprises to register their machinery, vehicles, spare parts, and stocks.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> B. Grant, *The Boat People: An "Age" Investigation with Bruce Grant* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 25–26 (hereafter Grant, *The Boat People*).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26; *Communist Party of Vietnam 4th National Congress: Documents* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977), pp. 64 and 95; A. Fforde and S. De Vylder, *Vietnam: An Economy in Transition* (Stockholm: Swedish International Development Authority, 1988), p. 61 (hereafter Fforde and De Vylder, *Vietnam*); A. Fforde and S. De Vylder, *From Plan to Market. The Economic Transition in Vietnam, Transitions: Asia and Asian America* (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 128–129 (hereafter Fforde and De Vylder, *From Plan to Market*); Vo N. T., *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975* (Singapore: ASEAN Economic Research Unit, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990), pp. 72–79 (hereafter Vo, *Vietnam's Economic Policies*).

<sup>18</sup> Tran K., *The Ethnic Chinese and Economic Development in Vietnam* (Singapore: Indochina Unit, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), p. 82 (hereafter Tran, *The Ethnic Chinese*); A. Woodside, "Nationalism and Poverty in the Breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese Relations," *Pacific Affairs* 52(3) (1979), p. 394 (hereafter Woodside, "Nationalism and Poverty").

<sup>19</sup> Tran, *The Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 81–82; Vo, *Vietnam's Economic Policies*, pp. 64–66.

<sup>20</sup> L. M. Stern, *Vietnamese Communist Policy Toward the Overseas Chinese, 1920-82*, Ph.D. Thesis. University of Pittsburgh, 1984 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International,

Beginning in October 1975, the authorities launched a campaign to establish consumer co-operatives. The initial role of these co-operatives was to act as an alternative to the open market, but the long-term goal was to gain control over the distribution of goods. In June 1976 the authorities introduced special taxes on excess profits to curb hoarding of commodities and to contravene speculative actions by businessmen.<sup>21</sup> Despite continued efforts during 1977, state control over the economy in the South was not achieved and the efforts to raise food production were not successful.<sup>22</sup>

In response to these failures, the Vietnamese authorities moved to implement harsher measures against the capitalist-dominated economy, and another campaign—code-named “X2”—was launched on March 23, 1978.<sup>23</sup> In Ho Chi Minh City the clampdown on private business affected the whole city, but the largest concentration of political cadres, policemen, and volunteers was in areas mainly inhabited by ethnic Chinese.<sup>24</sup> Goods from tens of thousands of retailers were confiscated and many persons were ordered out of the city to settle in the NEZ. In a simultaneous move the authorities stepped up the establishment of consumer and marketing co-operatives and state-run stores with the goal of gaining control over trade and on March 31 all private trade in the country was banned.<sup>25</sup> Finally, on May 3 a currency reform was carried out. All old money and foreign currencies had to be handed in to the authorities with only a limited sum per person and per family being exchanged to the new currency.<sup>26</sup>

---

1985), pp. 259–263 (hereafter Stern, *Vietnamese Communist Policy*); L. M. Stern, “The Hoa Kieu under the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,” *Issues and Studies* 23(3) (1987), pp. 123–124 (hereafter Stern, “The Hoa Kieu”).

<sup>21</sup> Tran, *The Ethnic Chinese*, p. 83; Woodside, “Nationalism and Poverty,” p. 395.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 392–398; Stern, “The Hoa Kieu,” pp. 132–133. In this context it should also be noted that in 1977 widespread drought in the North caused a deficit of several million tons of rice in the country (*On The Eve*, p. 12).

<sup>23</sup> Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, p. 84; *British Broadcasting Corporation, Summary of World Broadcasts, Part Three, Far East* (5773) (March 28, 1978), pp. B5–9; Vo, *Vietnam’s Economic Policies*, p. 89.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89; N. Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War after the War: A History of Indochina since the Fall of Saigon* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1986), pp. 231–233 (hereafter Chanda, *Brother Enemy*); Chang P.-M., *Beijing, Hanoi and the Overseas Chinese* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1982), p. 27 (hereafter Chang, *Beijing*).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2; Stern, “The Hoa Kieu,” pp. 134–135 and 141; “Government Decision on Transfer of the Capitalist Trade Sector to Production,” *Vietnam Courier* (May 1978), pp. 14–15; Vo, *Vietnam’s Economic Policies*, pp. 89–90.

<sup>26</sup> Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 233; G. Evans and K. Rowley, *Red Brotherhood at War:*

The policies of socialist transformation carried out by the Vietnamese authorities were bound to adversely affect the ethnic Chinese more than other ethnic groups due to their predominant role in the economy. In 1975 members of the Chinese community controlled most of the processing industry, the wholesale trade, and the import-export trade, as well as about half of the retail trade and the banking and finance sectors.<sup>27</sup> The clamp-down on private trade launched in late March 1978 put a large number of ethnic Chinese out of work. The former businessmen and traders were “shifted to production,” i.e. sent to the NEZ. Life was hard in the NEZ and very different from life in the cities, especially Ho Chi Minh City, and many tried to leave the country.<sup>28</sup> However, it can be noted that parts of the ethnic Chinese business networks remained intact and were used to organize illegal channels for people who wanted to leave the country. Furthermore, trade links between the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and ethnic Chinese in other Southeast Asian countries, particularly Singapore, seem to have continued to function despite the campaign.<sup>29</sup>

### Political Dimension

It is likely that the Vietnamese authorities were aware that they might face challenges from the Chinese community in response to the attempts to change the economic structure in the former ROV, but the authorities were probably not expecting political challenges. However, according to Vietnamese research, this is precisely what happened. The period from spring 1976 to spring 1979 was characterized by an “explosion” of the “Chinese-national” idea among the ethnic Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City.<sup>30</sup> In fact, as early as in May 1975, several incidents were reported to have taken place and Vietnam alleged that agents from China helped set up several new

---

*Indochina Since the Fall of Saigon* (Thetford, Norfolk and London: The Thetford Ltd, and Verso Editions, 1984), p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> Tran K., “Ethnic Chinese still dominate,” *Vietnam Investment Review* (February 24–March 1, 1992), p. 18; Vo, *Vietnam’s Economic Policies*, p. 68. For details on the economic activities of the ethnic Chinese prior to 1975, see Tran, *The Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 41–76.

<sup>28</sup> Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> Stern, “The Hoa Kieu,” p. 141.

<sup>30</sup> Mac D., *The Hoa Society in Ho Chi Minh City After 1975: Potential and Developments* (Nha Xuat Ban Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1994), p. 209 (hereafter Mac, *The Hoa Society*); Mac D., “The Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City in the process of development,” *Vietnam Social Sciences* 4(42) (1994), p. 36 (hereafter Mac, “The Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City”).

organizations among the ethnic Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City. One of the main goals of the organizations was to campaign for the acquiring of Chinese citizenship. Vietnam also claimed that the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi was involved.<sup>31</sup>

China made several allegations relating to how the Vietnamese authorities acted with regard to the question of citizenship of the ethnic Chinese. First, in January 1976 the “Chinese residents” in the former ROV were allegedly required to register their citizenship. Seemingly the result of the registration campaign did not satisfy the Vietnamese authorities, i.e. more ethnic Chinese than expected claimed to be Chinese citizens. Second, according to China the ethnic Chinese were ordered to register again, but this time according to the citizenship they had in the ROV period. Third, China claimed that in February 1977 “Chinese residents” were required by the Vietnamese authorities to fill in printed forms to receive “citizenship cards.” Fourth, China accused Vietnam of discriminating against the ethnic Chinese by cancelling household registers, reducing food rations, withholding jobs, and imposing exorbitant taxes, with the aim of forcing them to become Vietnamese citizens. In essence, China protested against the oppressive character of the Vietnamese actions.<sup>32</sup>

The Vietnamese description of the above course of events was that immediately after the “liberation” of the ROV in 1975, Vietnam had undertaken a registration of foreign residents and no “Vietnamese of Chinese origin” had asked for registration. Vietnam also held the standpoint that the issue of the nationality of the ethnic Chinese had been settled before 1975 and they were to be regarded as Vietnamese citizens. However, the Vietnamese authorities

---

<sup>31</sup> “Statement by Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Hoang Bich Son, Head of the Delegation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam at the 2nd Session of the Vietnam-China Talks, (August 15, 1978),” in *The Hoa in Vietnam: Dossier II* (Hanoi: Edited by Vietnam Courier, 1978), pp. 73–74; “Statement by Chief Delegate Hoang Bich Son at the Fifth Session of the Vietnam-China Talks, (September 7, 1978),” in *The Hoa in Vietnam: Dossier II*. (Hanoi: Edited by Vietnam Courier, 1978), p. 82 (hereafter “Statement by Chief”); “De l’affaire du Kampuchéa à celle des Hoa ou la main de l’ambassade de Chine à Hanoi (aveux d’agents de Pékin)” [From the Kampuchea Issue to the One Relating to the Hoa or the Hand of the Embassy of China in Hanoi (Confessions of the Agents of Peking)], in *Kampuchéa, Dossier II* (Hanoi: Edité par le Courier du Vietnam [Edited by the Courier of Vietnam], 1978), pp. 83–101.

<sup>32</sup> “History Stood on Its Head – On the Vietnamese authorities’ position concerning the question of Chinese residents in south Viet Nam,” *Peking Review* 27 (July 7, 1978), pp. 28–29.

regarded some members of the Chinese community as foreign nationals and they were treated accordingly. The Vietnamese also emphasized that these persons had not been forced to become Vietnamese citizens.<sup>33</sup>

Although the two versions contradict each other in regard to some central issues, it can be presumed that a number of ethnic Chinese did not register as Vietnamese citizens in January 1976. It should be noted that the registration campaign was part of the preparations for elections to the National Assembly to be held in April 1976.<sup>34</sup> It can also be presumed that the Vietnamese authorities at least started to treat as “foreign residents” those ethnic Chinese who did not register as Vietnamese citizens, and this implied restrictions on employment opportunities and on involvement in economic activities.<sup>35</sup> The restrictions were formalized in 1978:

“Foreign nationals residing in Vietnam can choose their trade or profession freely, in keeping with Vietnamese law, with the exception of the following:

1. Fishery.
2. Forestry.
3. Repair of communications and radio and television equipment.
4. Driver of motor coaches and skipper of motor launches.
5. Printing, engraving and type casting.
6. Type-writing, mimeographing, photocopying.

For the exercise of their trade or profession, foreign nationals shall register their occupation with a competent Vietnamese organ.”<sup>36</sup>

The policies of the Vietnamese authorities toward the ethnic Chinese led to open protests. In March 1978 several demonstrations by the Chinese were reported to have taken place in Ho Chi Minh City.<sup>37</sup> The most important of

<sup>33</sup> “Statement by Chief,” p. 72; Ky S., “The Hoa in Vietnam: some Data,” in *The Hoa in Vietnam Dossier* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1978), pp. 23–28.

<sup>34</sup> G. Porter, “Vietnamese Policy and the Indochina Crisis,” in D.W.P. Elliot, ed. *The Third Indochina Conflict* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), p. 85; *The Socialist Republic*, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, p. 41.

<sup>36</sup> “Decision of the SRV Government Council on the Policy Toward Foreigners Residing and Making a Living in Vietnam, (April 25, 1977 – Decision No. 122-CP),” in *Documents Related to the Question of Hoa People in Vietnam* (Hanoi: Department of Press and Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1978), pp. 8–9.

<sup>37</sup> Chang, *Beijing*, p. 26.



these involved several hundred persons who demonstrated against people being sent to the NEZ and against the young men being drafted into the army. They also demanded to be repatriated to the Chinese motherland.<sup>38</sup> Another demonstration involving about one hundred persons occurred in August 1978 and the demonstrators demanded, among other things, Chinese citizenship.<sup>39</sup> The main reason for the rejection of Vietnamese citizenship seems to have been that the pragmatic reasons for adopting it during in the pre-1975 years no longer prevailed, i.e. the policies of the ROV at that time had made Vietnamese citizenship a prerequisite for taking part in many economic activities.<sup>40</sup> After 1975, an additional reason for claiming to be Chinese citizens was, most probably, a hope that as foreign nationals the ethnic Chinese would be allowed to leave the country, since French and Indian nationals were allowed to do so.<sup>41</sup>

The political and economic changes after 1975 led to a steadily increasing number of people leaving Southern Vietnam by boat. By the end of 1976, some 5,619 had arrived in other Southeast Asian states and by the end of 1977 the number was 21,276.<sup>42</sup> In April 1978 the figure rose sharply from 2,500 a month to 5,000 (see Table 5 on page 28). A connection can be established between the number of people leaving the South by boat and the economic policies of the Vietnamese authorities, but can the increase be ascribed only to the economic policies? This question can be addressed by examining the trends in departure by boat in 1978 and 1979 in relation to different factors pertinent to the exodus. However, before proceeding to

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 232.

<sup>39</sup> Mac, *The Hoa Society*, p. 210; Mac, "The Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City," p. 37.

<sup>40</sup> For further details pertaining to the ROV policies toward the ethnic Chinese, see Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 18–23, and Amer, "Examining the Demographic Developments Relating to the Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam Since 1954," in L. Suryadinata, ed. *Migration, Indigenization and Interaction: Chinese Overseas and Globalization* (Singapore: World Scientific and Chinese Heritage Centre, 2011), pp. 177–185 (hereafter Amer, "Examining the Demographic Developments").

<sup>41</sup> Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, p. 54; R. Amer, "The Chinese Minority in Vietnam Since 1975: Impact of Economic and Political Changes," *Ilmu Masyarakat, A Malaysian Social Science Association Publication* 22 (1992), p. 12; C. Benoit, "Vietnam's 'Boat People'," in D.W.P. Elliot, ed. *The Third Indochina Conflict* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), p. 158 (hereafter Benoit, "Vietnam's Boat People").

<sup>42</sup> The number of registered arrivals was 377 in 1975, 5,242 in 1976, and 15,657 in 1977. Grant, *The Boat People*, p. 31; "Power in Indo China Since 1975," *Parliamentary Paper* (124/1981) (Canberra: Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1981), p. 71 (hereafter "Power in Indo China").

such an analysis, the evolution taking place in the North of Vietnam in the spring and summer of 1978 has to be taken into consideration.

## The Exodus of Ethnic Chinese from the North in 1978

### Chinese and Vietnamese Views on the Exodus

The first official indication of a large-scale exodus of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam to China came on April 30, 1978, when the Head of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council in Beijing stated that, since early April 1978, the Vietnamese authorities had stepped up their expulsion of "Chinese residents." According to China, the number of expelled persons had reached 40,000 and seemed to be still increasing.<sup>43</sup>

At the bilateral level China had already raised the issue of the "expulsion" of "Chinese residents" with the Vietnamese on three occasions. However, despite China's reaction the exodus continued; by mid-May more than 50,000 people had entered China, by early June the number was over 100,000, and in mid-July more than 160,000 persons had arrived.<sup>44</sup>

In this context it should be noted that in 1977 the Vietnamese authorities had started to move the population away from the border between Vietnam and China in a process that was officially aimed at improving security in the northwestern border provinces. Also in October 1977 the Vietnamese authorities had begun to expel ethnic Chinese illegally residing in the country. According to the Vietnamese these measures affected only a small

---

<sup>43</sup> *British Broadcasting Corporation, Summary of World Broadcasts, Part Three, Far East* (5802) (May 2, 1978), p. C/3; "Note of the Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China to the Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in China, (May 12, 1978)," in *Documents Related to the Question of Hoa People in Vietnam* (Hanoi: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1978), p. 49 (hereafter "Note of the Foreign Ministry"); M. Godley, "A Summer Cruise to Nowhere China and the Vietnamese Chinese in Perspective," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 4 (1980), p. 35.

<sup>44</sup> "Note of the Foreign Ministry," p. 51; "Speech by Chung Hsi-tung, Leader of the Chinese Government Delegation, at the First Session of the Sino-Vietnamese Talks on the Question of Chinese Nationals Residing in Viet Nam (August 8, 1978)," in *On Viet Nam's Expulsion of Chinese Residents* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978), p. 39; "Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China on the Expulsion of Chinese Residents by Viet Nam, (June 9, 1978)," in *On Viet Nam's Expulsion of Chinese Residents*, p. 12.



number of the ethnic Chinese living in the border region.<sup>45</sup> China raised the issue with Vietnam on October 27, 1977.<sup>46</sup> The events in 1977 do not seem to have caused any exodus. Consequently, the key question is: what were the reasons behind the sudden and massive exodus of ethnic Chinese from the northern parts of Vietnam, beginning in April 1978?

China argued that the Vietnamese authorities were responsible for the outflow and that it had been caused by a Vietnamese expulsion of ethnic Chinese. China claimed that the increase in the number of people who left was caused by the stepping up of the "expulsion" and by the extension of the area affected by the campaign. Furthermore, the Vietnamese authorities were accused of having "purposefully applied a policy of discrimination, ostracism, and persecution against Chinese residents."<sup>47</sup> Vietnam rejected these allegations and claimed that the outflow of ethnic Chinese had been triggered by a campaign launched by China in order to frighten the Chinese community in Vietnam. According to Vietnam the methods applied by China were the use of loudspeakers along the border, radio broadcasting, and the infiltration of Chinese agents among the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. The central theme in the campaign was the probable outbreak of war between China and Vietnam, in which members of the Chinese community in Vietnam would find themselves caught in the middle.<sup>48</sup> China refuted the Vietnamese claims and accusations.<sup>49</sup> China's standpoint implied that the Vietnamese authorities themselves were spreading the rumours. However, accounts given by refugees leaving Vietnam describe how the Vietnamese

---

<sup>45</sup> G. Porter, "Vietnam's Ethnic Chinese and the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 12(4) (1980), p. 56 (hereafter Porter, "Vietnam's Ethnic Chinese"); "Note of the Foreign Ministry," p. 49.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>48</sup> Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 47–48; Nguyen Y., "Mechanism of a campaign of coercion," *The Hoa In Vietnam: Dossier, Documents of Vietnam Courier* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1978), pp. 40–50.

<sup>49</sup> "Statement by Chung Hsi-tung, Leader of the Chinese Government Delegation, at the Second Session of the Sino-Vietnamese Talks, (August 15, 1978)," in *On Viet Nam's Expulsion of Chinese Residents*, p. 56; "Chinese Government Decides to Send Ships to Bring Home Persecuted Chinese From Viet Nam," *Peking Review* 22 (June 2, 1978), p. 15; "Untenable Arguments of Vietnamese Authorities, (Commentary by Hsinhua Correspondent), (July 25, 1978)," in *On Viet Nam's Expulsion of Chinese Residents*, pp. 171–175.

authorities attempted to halt the exodus by explaining to the ethnic Chinese that there was not going to be any war with China.<sup>50</sup>

### Factors Behind the Exodus

To understand the impact of the rumors of a coming war on the ethnic Chinese in the border region, it is necessary to carry out a closer examination of the context within which the rumors were spread. First, as noted above, the Vietnamese authorities were conducting a campaign against Chinese illegally residing in the country. Second, Vietnam was moving people away from the border, thus confirming that tension between the two countries was increasing. These Vietnamese actions gave more credence to the rumors of a forthcoming war. In this situation the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam became aware of the mounting tension between the two countries and they found themselves in a dilemma that many opted to solve by leaving for China, in order to avoid getting caught in a war. This had a triggering effect causing the outflow of Chinese from the border provinces and, soon after, from other parts of northern Vietnam.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the prime reason behind the exodus from the bordering provinces was the fear of a war between China and Vietnam.<sup>52</sup>

In others parts of the North of Vietnam the ethnic Chinese were less affected by the rumors of a forthcoming war, due to the relative distance to the border. However, the authorities implemented economic policies aimed at curbing private trade also in the North. One such campaign was launched in Haiphong in 1977. At that time some 32 per cent of the market activities in the city were still controlled by private traders, despite the implementation of socialist policies since the mid-1950s. Thus, the campaign against private trade affected a considerable number of people, and among them many ethnic Chinese.<sup>53</sup> Such campaigns in other places, for example in Hanoi, probably had a similar effect. These campaigns contributed to the increase in the

<sup>50</sup> Benoit, "Vietnam's 'Boat People'," pp. 150–151; Grant, *The Boat People*, pp. 85–87.

<sup>51</sup> According to China, 95 per cent of the more than 160,000 persons who reached China up to late July/early August 1978 were from northern Vietnam. See *On Viet Nam's Expulsion of Chinese Residents*, pp. 173 and 177.

<sup>52</sup> China refuted the notion that the rumors of war were the cause of the exodus and blamed it on the Vietnamese who were said to be persecuting the Chinese, see for example: "Lies Cannot Cover Up Facts, (Commentary by Renmin Ribao Correspondent), (June 10, 1978)," in *On Viet Nam's Expulsion of Chinese Residents*, pp. 124–125.

<sup>53</sup> Woodside, "Nationalism and Poverty," p. 404.

outflow of people to China in the spring and summer of 1978, but did not trigger it. In the context of how the economic policies affected the ethnic Chinese in the North, it has to be noted that the major part of the ethnic Chinese lived in Quang Ninh province and were mainly fishermen, foresters, and craftsmen. In the urban areas the Chinese were mainly workers and technicians. Thus, the Chinese community played a different role in the former DRV society as compared to its counterpart in the former ROV. Prior to the exodus there were some 160,000 ethnic Chinese living in Quang Ninh province, i.e. approximately 22 per cent of the total population. The Chinese community provided much needed manpower to the industrial and mining sectors and the economy of the province was badly disrupted by the departure of almost the entire Chinese community.<sup>54</sup>

Another issue that caused turbulence within the Chinese community was the question of nationality.<sup>55</sup> According to the Vietnamese authorities, the issue of citizenship had been settled in the 1950s and the ethnic Chinese were to be regarded as Vietnamese citizens. Among interviewed refugees some people said that the issue of citizenship was important both for economic and sentimental reasons, whereas others were not as concerned about it.<sup>56</sup>

From the above analysis it can be concluded that the major underlying and immediate factor behind the exodus of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam in 1978 was the rumor of a coming war between China and Vietnam. Other factors such as the question of nationality, the expulsion of illegal Chinese migrants from the border region, and economic policies aiming at curbing private business contributed to increasing the number of people who departed but they did not trigger the exodus.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Nguyen V. L., "The exodus fever in a border province," in *The Hoa In Vietnam: Dossier, Documents of Vietnam Courier* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1978), pp. 54–55.

<sup>55</sup> Benoit, "Vietnam's 'Boat People,'" p. 145.

<sup>56</sup> The refugees interviewed in this context came from Hanoi and not from the border provinces. *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145.

<sup>57</sup> The rumors of a coming war between China and Vietnam and other factors behind the exodus are discussed and assessed by Han X., "Spoiled Guests or Dedicated Patriots? The Chinese in North Vietnam, 1954–1978," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 6(1) (2009), pp. 20–28.

## The Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam from mid-1978 to mid-1979

### Continued Exodus and Vietnam's Response

The situation of the ethnic Chinese during the period from mid-1978 to mid-1979 can not be properly understood without taking into account the diplomatic discussions between China and Vietnam on the question of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam in June-July and in August-September 1978. These discussions ended without any agreement and had the effect of further deteriorating the bilateral relationship. To stem the large-scale influx of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, China decided to close the border in July 1978.<sup>58</sup> However, despite the closure, some 40,000 persons managed to enter China, thus bringing the total up to 200,000 by the end of 1978.<sup>59</sup> An alternative way of leaving northern Vietnam was by boat, either to China or to Hong Kong, and the closure of the border led to an increase in departures by boat.<sup>60</sup>

In June 1978 two events must have increased the expectations of those ethnic Chinese who wanted to leave Vietnam. First, China dispatched two ships to Vietnam to repatriate "victimized Chinese residents." Second, the Vietnamese authorities started to register ethnic Chinese who wanted to leave for China. There are different accounts relating to the extent to which the ethnic Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City registered, and estimates range from some 30–40 per cent to about 75 per cent.<sup>61</sup> The Vietnamese initiated the registration campaign despite the fact that no agreement existed between the two countries. Maybe Vietnam expected an agreement to be forthcoming, but the negotiations did not result in any agreement and the Chinese ships returned empty. Thus, a large number of ethnic Chinese who had registered in order to leave Vietnam were left in the country and they most certainly started searching for alternative means to leave.

---

<sup>58</sup> For a detailed overview and analysis of the diplomatic dispute between China and Vietnam over the question of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, see Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 57–77.

<sup>59</sup> Chang, *Beijing*, p. 52.

<sup>60</sup> B. Wain, *The Refused: The Agony of the Indochinese Refugees* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), pp. 73–74 (hereafter Wain, *The Refused*).

<sup>61</sup> Benoit, "Vietnam's 'Boat People'," pp. 88–89; Chang, *Beijing*, pp. 39–40; Porter, "Vietnam's Ethnic Chinese," p. 57.

This situation, combined with the exodus by land to China, made the Vietnamese authorities increasingly suspicious of the loyalty of the Chinese community to the Vietnamese nation. The Vietnamese authorities responded to the situation through two main measures. First, ethnic Chinese were expelled from the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), the administration, and the army, as well as from all employment regarded as sensitive from a security point of view. This policy seems to have been most effectively carried out in the former DRV, where the ethnic Chinese had been integrated into the socialist system since 1954.<sup>62</sup> Second, a system of semi-legal departures was introduced, which was open only to the ethnic Chinese and administered by the Public Security Bureau (PSB)—an organ that was part of the Vietnamese administration. In essence the system worked as follows: the ethnic Chinese who wanted to leave had to pay, through ethnic Chinese organizers, a fixed fee that was handed over to a PSB official. Furthermore, they had to pay for the boat, fuel, and other necessities. The latter applied to all those who attempted to leave Vietnam and not only to the ethnic Chinese.<sup>63</sup>

In order to assess when the semi-legal departure system was introduced and for how long it was in operation the patterns of arrivals of people to various destinations in East and Southeast Asia during 1978 and 1979 have to be examined. There can be at least three explanations for the pattern shown in Table 5. First, people could leave by land to China up to mid-July 1978 and, following the closure of the border, people from the North attempted to leave by boat, primarily to Hong Kong. Second, the ethnic Chinese were not singled out for discrimination prior to August 1978. Third, persons leaving Vietnam by boat did not arrive in the countries of destination until several weeks later. The figures in Table 5 seem to indicate that the semi-legal departure system began to be implemented in August 1978, thus explaining why the arrivals by boat in other countries increased sharply from September 1978.

---

<sup>62</sup> Benoit, "Vietnam's 'Boat People'," pp. 140, 149 and 152; Grant, *The Boat People*, p. 88; Wain, *The Refused*, p. 73.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16–35 and 84–122; Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 85–87; Benoit, "Vietnam's 'Boat People'," pp. 116–133 and 157–160; Chang, *Beijing*, p. 50; Chang P-M., "The Sino-Vietnamese Dispute Over the Ethnic Chinese," *The China Quarterly* 90 (1982), pp. 222–223 (hereafter Chang, "The Sino-Vietnamese"); Grant, *The Boat People*, pp. 108–112; Porter, "Vietnam's Ethnic Chinese," pp. 57–58.

Table 5. Arrivals of Vietnamese refugees by boat in other Southeast Asian countries and Hong Kong in 1978 and 1979<sup>64</sup>

<b>1978</b>	January 2,000	February 2,000	March 2,500	April 5,012	May 5,569	June 4,924
	July 6,232	August 2,829	September 8,558	October 12,540	November 21,505	December 13,370
<b>1979</b>	January 9,931	February 8,568	March 13,423	April 26,602	May 46,338	June 54,871
	July 17,839	August 9,734	September 9,533	October 2,854	November 2,209	December 2,745

The figures for the period December 1978 to March 1979 show a decline, compared with November 1978. On the other hand, there was a sharp increase in the number of arrivals from April to June 1979. Finally, the number of arrivals declined during the second half of 1979. In order to explain these differences, two factors have to be examined. First, did the Vietnam authorities change the semi-legal departure system and/or their policy toward the ethnic Chinese? Second, what was the impact of international events on the situation in Vietnam during this period?

The decline in the number of arrivals during the period December 1978 to March 1979 may indicate a shift in policy that made it more difficult for people to leave. This must have been implemented during the month of November, taking into consideration the time needed to reach the different destinations by boat. It is likely that the policy shift was connected to a conference on refugees held in Geneva in December 1978, at which the Vietnamese refugee problem was subject to discussions. However, the figures do indicate that the shift in policy may have been disregarded or ineffective in parts of the country.<sup>65</sup>

The sharp increase in the number of arrivals during the period April to June 1979 indicates that the semi-legal departure system was fully

<sup>64</sup> For a discussion concerning the reliability of different sources providing figures over the number of refugees, see Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 82–84 and 96. It should be noted that up to mid-1979 the ethnic Chinese made up an estimated 60 to 70 per cent of the refugees.

<sup>65</sup> Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, p. 87; Benoit, "Vietnam's 'Boat People'," p. 160; Grant, *The Boat People*, pp. 108 and 124–129; Porter, "Vietnam's Ethnic Chinese," p. 58; Wain, *The Refused*, pp. 69 and 193.

implemented and most likely stepped up. Furthermore, this phase of the exodus displayed a novel feature, namely, the large number of people heading for Hong Kong.<sup>66</sup> In fact, April through July 1979 were the peak months in terms of arrivals by boat from Vietnam into Hong Kong during the so-called “Boatpeople crisis.” The importance of the ethnic Chinese factor as can be seen from the following estimate: between January 1 and July 21, 1979, the ethnic Chinese made up 83.16 per cent of arrivals into Hong Kong.<sup>67</sup> The patterns of arrivals into Hong Kong are outlined in Table 6.

Table 6. Arrivals of Vietnamese refugees by boat in Hong Kong in 1978 and 1979<sup>68</sup>

1978	January	February	March	April	May	June
	38	28	126	112	203	808
	July	August	September	October	November	December
	837	1,023	1,177	640	282	19
1979	January	February	March	April	May	June
	3,151	2,901	3,114	5,702	18,718	22,835
	July	August	September	October	November	December
	8,678	2,975	2,581	572	282	421

Judging from accounts given by refugees reaching Hong Kong during April to June 1979, the Vietnamese authorities were implementing a policy that

<sup>66</sup> M. Mignot, “Rapport sur les réfugiés du Vietnam” [Report on the Refugees from Vietnam], in *Les réfugiés originaires de l’Asie du Sud-Est, monographies [The refugees from Southeast Asia, Monographs]* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1984), p. 20 (hereafter Mignot “Rapport sur les réfugiés”); *Power in Indo China*, p. 71.

<sup>67</sup> Mignot, “Rapport sur les réfugiés,” p. 21.

<sup>68</sup> Table 6 is derived from R. Amer, “The boat people crisis of 1978–79 and the Hong Kong experience examined through the ethnic Chinese dimension,” in Y.-W. Chan, ed., *The Chinese/Vietnamese Diaspora: Revisiting the Boatpeople*, Routledge Contemporary Asia Series (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), p. 38. The figures are taken from Mignot with reference to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Mignot, “Rapport sur les réfugiés,” p. 20). Skeldon—with reference to the “Hong Kong Government, Monthly Statistical Report, June 1993”—provides a total number for the two years—77,863—that only differs slightly from Mignot’s total figure—77,277—but there is a considerable discrepancy between the respective years 1978 and 1979. Skeldon puts 1978 at 9,115 and 1979 at 68,758, while Mignot puts 1978 at 5,257 and 1979 at 77,277 (R. Skeldon, “Hong Kong’s Response to the Indochinese Influx, 1975–93,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 534 (1994), p. 98 (hereafter Skeldon, “Hong Kong’s Response”); Mignot, “Rapport sur les réfugiés,” p. 20). One of the reasons for this discrepancy seems to be that Skeldon refers to the arrival of 3,318 people on one freighter on December 23, 1978, obviously not included in the December figure provided by Mignot, i.e. 19 people (*Ibid.*, p. 20; Skeldon, “Hong Kong’s Response,” p. 92).



was tantamount to an expulsion of the remaining ethnic Chinese in the North. Some refugees said that the ethnic Chinese had been assembled at information meetings by the Vietnamese authorities and informed about the threat of a new Chinese military intervention (this occurred in the wake of the Chinese attack on Vietnam in February/March 1979).<sup>69</sup> At these meetings they were given two choices, either to be transferred to the NEZ—at a safe distance from Vietnam's border with China—or to leave Vietnam. Many of the ethnic Chinese had been well-established in Vietnamese society and had opted to remain in the country in spite of the increased pressure in 1978, but by the time of the meetings many of them opted to leave. Others may have felt that, considering their background, they had no possibility to establish themselves in a new country of residence. Consequently, they opted to remain in Vietnam and were transferred to the NEZ.<sup>70</sup>

As a response to the increasing number of people from Vietnam arriving by boat in other countries from April to June 1979, a new conference on refugees was convened in Geneva in July 1979 and the Vietnamese representatives pledged to do their utmost to stem the outflow of people.<sup>71</sup> Judging from the declining number of Vietnamese refugees reaching other countries in July, Vietnam had already begun halting the outflow in June. The figures for the rest of 1979 indicate that the decline in July was not a temporary fluctuation. The time needed to fully implement the new policy can be seen from the sharp drop in the number of arrivals in October as compared to September, thus bringing the number of arrivals by boat back to the pre-April 1978 level (see Table 5).

---

<sup>69</sup> The most extensive and detailed study on China's attack on Vietnam in February-March 1979 is K. C. Chen, *China's War with Vietnam, 1979: Issues, Decisions, and Implications* (Stanford: Stanford University, Hoover Institution Press, 1987), pp. 98–117. For a broader study on the overall deterioration of relations in the late 1970s, see R. Amer, "Sino-Vietnamese Normalization in the Light of the Crisis of the Late 1970s," *Pacific Affairs* 67(3) (1994), pp. 358–363 and 368–376 (hereafter Amer, "Sino-Vietnamese Normalization").

<sup>70</sup> Benoit, "Vietnam's 'Boat People'," pp. 140–152; Porter, "Vietnam's Ethnic Chinese," pp. 58–59; P. Quinn-Judge, "The Vietnam-China Split: Old Ties Remain," *Indochina Issues* 53 (1985), p. 4; Wain, *The Refused*, pp. 77–78.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221 and 225.



## Reliability of the Official Population Figures

It is essential to assess the reliability of the Vietnamese population figures relating to the ethnic Chinese, i.e. Hoa. If the figure over the number of people who arrived in other countries by boat from Vietnam is increased by ten per cent—which is the most reliable estimate over the number that perished at sea—the total number of departing persons would be 337,536. The percentage of ethnic Chinese among those leaving by boat has been estimated at 60 to 70 per cent,<sup>72</sup> which would be equivalent to between 202,521 and 236,275 persons based on a total number of departing persons of 337,536. Furthermore, an estimated 260,000<sup>73</sup> persons left for China and the number of ethnic Chinese among them is reported to have been 230,000.<sup>74</sup> According to these estimates a total of 597,536 persons would have left Vietnam up to the end of September 1979, and the total number of ethnic Chinese among them would have been in the range of 432,521–466,275.

The official Vietnamese figure of the number of Hoa was 1,236,000 in 1976, corresponding to 2.57 per cent of the total population of Vietnam (see Table 2). In the census of October 1, 1979, the Hoa were 935,074 out of a total population of 52,741,766 (see Table 2). If the estimated 597,536 who had left were added, the total population in Vietnam would have been 53,339,302 at the time of the 1979 census.<sup>75</sup> If the Hoa population had remained 2.57 per cent of the total Vietnamese population of 53,339,302 in 1979 they would have numbered 1,370,820. This would correspond to a difference of 435,746, which corroborates well with the above estimate of the number of ethnic Chinese who left Vietnam. Thus, the official number of Hoa in 1979, i.e. 935,074, can be regarded as reasonable.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Author's communication at the UNHCR office in Hanoi on February 7, 1990.

<sup>73</sup> "United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates over Indo-Chinese Refugees (as of December 31, 1989)," in *Statistics and charts concerning Indo-Chinese in South East Asia*, issued on a monthly basis by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva. 1989).

<sup>74</sup> An estimated 30,000 of the 260,000 were ethnic Vietnamese (Chang, *Beijing*, p. 57). According to one estimate, the 260,000 were all "Vietnamese of Chinese origin" (Quoted in "Population size and growth," in *Viet Nam Population Census - 1989, Detailed Analysis of Sample Results* (Hanoi: General Statistical Office, 1991), p. 3).

<sup>75</sup> Disregards the fact that people leaving leads to a decrease in the number of births. Under normal conditions the total Vietnamese population would have been higher.

<sup>76</sup> As in Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 107–108, footnote 11, the following line of argumentation by Chang must be refuted: "Although the boat people have included both Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese, if the 70 per cent proportion, which the ethnic Chinese

## Gradual Reintegration in the 1980s and 1990s

### Political Reintegration<sup>77</sup>

In November 1982 the CPV adopted Decree no. 10, which included “guidelines” with regard to the “Hoa people.” The most important clause was a reference to the “Hoa people” as Vietnamese citizens with the same duties and rights as all other citizens of the country. However, the decree also stated that the Hoa were not accepted in all fields of society, e.g. could not be officers in the armed forces and other security-related employment.

In October 1986 the Vietnamese Government adopted its Decree no. 256, which was important since it did not include any restriction on the possibilities for the ethnic Chinese to be employed in different fields of society. It also confirmed that the “Hoa people” were Vietnamese citizens with the same duties and rights as all other citizens. In Ho Chi Minh City, with its large Chinese community, the Municipal Party Committee adopted two important decrees with regard to the ethnic Chinese—Decree no. 23 in 1985 and Decree no. 85 in 1990. These two decrees aimed at “re-activating” the ethnic Chinese in such fields as education, culture, and journalism. Thus, the second half of the 1980s displayed a policy trend aimed at achieving the reintegration of the ethnic Chinese into Vietnamese society.

Despite these efforts, the reintegration had not been fully achieved by 1990, one reason being that the CPV itself had yet to adopt a new decree superseding the one adopted in 1982. Eventually, in the early 1990s, the CPV initiated a process of preparatory work on a new decree relating to the ethnic Chinese. At the Seventh National Party Congress of the CPV, held in June 1991, the CPV outlined the following aims of its policy toward the Chinese community in Vietnam:

“To guarantee to the Hoa community all civil rights and civic duties, to respect their culture and script, and to create conditions for them to work

---

are estimated to have constituted of boat refugee population may be used as a general guide, one can well also conclude that the entire Chinese population in South Vietnam has now been all but completely eliminated” (Chang, *Beijing*, p. 60; Chang, “The Sino-Vietnamese,” p. 320).

<sup>77</sup> For a more detailed overview, see Amer, “Examining the Demographic Developments,” pp. 212–215. See also Amer, “Examining the Demographic Changes,” pp. 18–19.

confidently, contribute to the building of Vietnam and cultivate friendly relations between the peoples of Vietnam and China."<sup>78</sup>

The new CPV Decree would have to address the first issue by restoring full civil rights and duties to the "Hoa" community along the lines expressed in the Government's Decree no. 256. It is noteworthy that the CPV identified a positive role for the "Hoa" community in contributing to good relations between Vietnam and China. This has to be understood in the context of the process of the normalization of relations between China and Vietnam that gained momentum following the Party Congress and led up to the full normalization of relations in November 1991.<sup>79</sup>

While the preparatory work on the new Party Decree was going on, the reintegration process of the Chinese community continued in practice, as can be seen in the field of education. In Ho Chi Minh City a society for the sponsoring of Chinese education was created in the early 1990s with the purpose of assisting in the preparation of a Chinese curriculum and of providing funds for Chinese education. Also in Ho Chi Minh City, measures were taken to encourage ethnic Chinese students to enroll in higher education, but at least initially they were not as successful as the efforts in the field of primary education.

This evolution pointed to a reintegration process moving ahead despite the fact that at the time of the election the CPV had not adopted a new decree. Eventually, Decree no. 62 was adopted on November 8, 1995, formulated in accordance with the aims outlined at the Seventh National Party Congress in 1991. The most important aspect of the new CPV Decree is that it does not include any references to restrictions on employment, thus removing the most discriminatory clause in the 1982 Decree. In essence the new decree reaffirms that the ethnic Chinese are Vietnamese citizens with the same rights and duties as all other citizens. The right of the ethnic

---

<sup>78</sup> *Communist Party of Vietnam 7th National Congress: Documents* (Hanoi: Vietnam Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1991), p. 124.

<sup>79</sup> For details on the normalization process between China and Vietnam, see Amer, "Sino-Vietnamese Normalization," pp. 363-368, 376-383; R. Amer, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations: Past, Present and Future," in C. A. Thayer and R. Amer, eds. *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition* (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies; and, New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 73-74, 105-108; R. Amer, "Assessing Sino-Vietnamese Relations through the Management of Contentious Issues," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 26(2) (2004), pp. 117-121.

Chinese to join the CPV and the mass organizations of Vietnam was guaranteed in the new decree. The cultural and educational rights of the ethnic Chinese are guaranteed, i.e. Chinese children can learn Mandarin in schools and Chinese students can gain access to tertiary education. The decree also includes provisions aimed at mobilizing the economic potential of the Chinese community, by ensuring favourable conditions for the Chinese to take part in the economic development of Vietnam.

On August 3, 1996, the Vietnamese Government adopted Decree no. 501 relating to the ethnic Chinese. This decree is similar to the CPV Decree of 1995 with the difference that the Government Decree is more detailed since it is a legislative decision and has to be implemented in practical terms, whereas the CPV Decree is more generally aimed at providing guidelines. Through the CPV and Government Decrees, the formal reintegration of the ethnic Chinese into Vietnamese society was completed.

### **Changes in Economic Policies and Impact on the Ethnic Chinese**

Vietnam faced many problems the late 1970s, one of which was a worsening economic situation. The Vietnamese authorities responded to the challenge of the economic crisis by revising their economic policies. The decision was taken at the Sixth Plenum (Fourth National Congress) of the Central Committee of the CPV in September 1979. In regard to the agricultural sector, a number of changes in policy were decided. A "contract system" was introduced, which meant that families could "contract" land on a short-term basis for their own use and sell the produce from these plots. In regard to the industrial sector, priority would be given to production of consumer goods and incentives would be used to stimulate production. Private enterprises and co-operatives would be encouraged in light industry and in export-oriented industries. These moves aimed at liberalizing the economy led to the re-emergence of private markets and private distribution systems. Despite these reforms, the economy continued to deteriorate during 1980, and this evolution prompted the authorities to respond by introducing directives to facilitate the implementation of the reforms in early 1981. The re-enforcement of the reforms seems to have resulted in a temporary improvement of the economy, but at the cost of higher inflation. Another side-effect of the revival of the private sector was diminishing state control over the economy. To reverse this development the authorities launched a campaign to

gain control over private business and industry, through registration, regulations, and taxation, following the Third Plenum (Fifth National Congress) of the CPV's Central Committee in December 1982, a policy that was enforced up to 1986.<sup>80</sup>

The liberalization of the economy benefited those ethnic Chinese who were involved in business-related activities, but the campaign to assert state control over the economy must also have affected them. It would appear that the goal of the Vietnamese authorities was to ensure that ethnic Chinese businessmen did not regain their earlier predominance in certain sectors of the economy. This concern was reflected in the references to the Chinese-dominated sectors of the economy as those in which the worst offences against the new regulations were committed.<sup>81</sup> These references could also be seen as evidence of a prompt re-emergence of the influence of the ethnic Chinese over some sectors of the economy.

The economic development continued to be disappointing during the first half of the 1980s. This state of affairs brought about the decision to introduce a more thorough liberalization of the economy at the Sixth National Congress of the CPV in December 1986, i.e. the policy of renovation or "Doi Moi."<sup>82</sup> It seems that real changes did not take place until early 1988, and new targets for the economic development were set at the Seventh National

---

<sup>80</sup> Fforde and De Vylder, *From Plan to Market*, pp. 130–132; Stern, *Vietnamese Communist Policy*, pp. 346–352 and 357–367; L. M. Stern, "The overseas Chinese in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1979–1982," *Asian Survey* 25(5) (1985), pp. 523–528 and 531–536 (hereafter Stern, "The overseas Chinese"); L. M. Stern, "Vietnamese Communist Policy toward the Overseas Chinese, 1983–1986," *Asian Profile* 16(2) (1988), p. 144 (hereafter Stern, "Vietnamese Communist Policy"); L. M. Stern, "The eternal return: changes in Vietnam's policies toward the Overseas Chinese, 1982–1988," *Issues and Studies* 24(7) (1988), pp. 120–121 (hereafter Stern, "The eternal return"); Tan T. L., "Economic debates in Vietnam, issues and problems in reconstruction and development (1975–84)," *Research Notes and Discussions Paper* 55 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), pp. 23–31 and 36–44; Vo, *Vietnam's Economic Policies*, pp. 82 and 91. It should be noted that Vo does not refer to such a campaign (*Ibid.* 124–169).

<sup>81</sup> Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 112–113; Stern, *Vietnamese Communist Policy*, pp. 352–353; Stern, "The overseas Chinese," p. 527.

<sup>82</sup> *6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1987); Fforde and De Vylder, *Vietnam*, pp. 71–73; Fforde and De Vylder, *From Plan to Market*, pp. 142–144; L. M. Stern, "The Vietnamese Communist Party during 1984 and 1985: economic crisis management, organizational reform and planning for the Sixth National Party Congress," *Asian Profile* 15(3) (1987), pp. 269–279; Stern, "Vietnamese Communist Policy," pp. 144–145; Stern, "The eternal return," pp. 120–121; Vo, *Vietnam's Economic Policies*, pp. 160–169 and 181–187.

Congress of the CPV in 1991.<sup>83</sup> Vietnam has since continued to pursue its policy of renovation.

As noted above, the economic reforms decided upon in September 1979 gave the ethnic Chinese, who had the ability and the means, a possibility to get involved in private business and other commercial activities. It appears that the ethnic Chinese were successful in exploiting the new opportunities, but uncertainty about the economic policies in a longer-term perspective led them to take a cautious approach. The more thorough economic reforms and the implementation of such policies since the late 1980s made it possible for the ethnic Chinese to expand their business activities and to gain control over a larger part of the economy. The uncertainty about the long-term economic objectives of the authorities was gradually reduced, leading to an increase in investments by the ethnic Chinese from resources pooled within the community, from relatives who left the country after 1975, and through joint ventures with foreign partners.

## The Orderly Departure Program

Since 1979 a considerable number of ethnic Chinese have left Vietnam. There have been two options, one legal through the Orderly Departure Program (ODP),<sup>84</sup> and one illegal by boat. The ODP was a programme through which people with relatives living abroad, i.e. outside Vietnam, could leave from 1979 to 1994. Thereafter they could leave through programs run by individual countries, e.g. the United States. Given the fact that many ethnic Chinese had left during the "boat people crisis" of 1978–1979, a considerable number

---

<sup>83</sup> *Country Profile: Vietnam, 1995-96* (London: The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), 1996), pp. 13–14; *Communist Party of Vietnam 7th National Congress: Documents* (Hanoi: Vietnam Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1991).

<sup>84</sup> On January 12, 1979, it was publicly announced that the Vietnamese Government had decided to permit the orderly departure of persons who had a wish to leave for new countries of residence. Furthermore, on May 30, 1979, an agreement was reached between Vietnam and the UNHCR in order to facilitate the implementation of this Orderly Departure Program (ODP). *Those Who Leave* (Hanoi: Published by Vietnam Courier, 1979), pp. 22 and 39–40; "Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Concerning the Departure of Persons from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (May 30, 1979)," *Vietnam Courier* 7 (1979), p. 3.

of those who remained had relatives living abroad and thus were eligible to leave through the ODP. According to unofficial estimates, about 50 per cent of those departing through the ODP during the period 1979–1991 were ethnic Chinese. Up to the mid-1980s the ethnic Chinese made up some 70 per cent of the ODP departures. After that the percentage of ethnic Chinese steadily decreased to about 20 per cent in 1991.<sup>85</sup> Up to the end of 1991, 352,300 persons had officially left through the ODP,<sup>86</sup> thus some 175,000 ethnic Chinese did so from 1979 to 1991.

The declining percentage of ethnic Chinese among those leaving through the ODP can be explained by two factors, first, by an overall improvement of relations between the Vietnamese authorities and the ethnic Chinese, and, second, by the liberalization of the Vietnamese economy, both factors contributing to making the ethnic Chinese less eager to leave the country. However, despite the declining percentage of ethnic Chinese among those who left through the ODP, they still made up a much larger percentage than their share of the overall Vietnamese population.

## **Assessing the Continued Decline in the Number of Ethnic Chinese**

The censuses of 1999 and 2009 display that the number of Hoa in Vietnam has continued to decline during the 1990s and the 2000s. The ODP was still in effect in the early years of the period 1989 to 2009, but thereafter was no longer a factor, at least not directly. However, the legacy of the large-scale migration in the late 1970s, coupled with legal migration through the ODP, had created a substantial number of ethnic Chinese living abroad, and hence a larger number of ethnic Chinese (Hoa) remaining in Vietnam had relatives abroad. The percentage of ethnic Chinese with relatives residing abroad is much higher than among other major ethnic groups in Vietnam.

---

<sup>85</sup> The estimates obtained through the author's communication with Mr. Nguyen Trong Dieu of the ODP in Hanoi on March 6, 1992.

<sup>86</sup> *The State of the World's Refugees 1993. The Challenge of Protection*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (New York: Penguin Books 1993), p. 26. Official figures obtained by the author through the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry in Ho Chi Minh City in December 1996 put the number of persons who had left through the ODP up to the end of 1991 at 351,708.



As displayed by the figures in the 1999 and 2009 Censuses, the outward migration of ethnic Chinese continued to be larger than the natural growth within the Hoa group in Vietnam. Such migration was facilitated by the extensive family links overseas among the Hoa community. The re-settlement of those who reached other Southeast Asian countries and Hong Kong to primarily Australia, North America, and Western Europe created opportunities for legal migration through the ODP up to 1994 and through national programmes thereafter. This explains the continued decline in the number of Hoa as displayed by the 2009 Census.

## **Analysing the Case of the Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam**

The study has displayed that after 1975, and in particular during 1978 and 1979, there was a process of large-scale outward migration of ethnic Chinese (Hoa) from Vietnam. Following the large-scale exodus of Hoa in 1978 and 1979, the imbalance in the distribution of Hoa between the North and the South of Vietnam was further accentuated. About half of the Hoa population in Vietnam currently reside in Ho Chi Minh City and about 93.7 per cent live in the former ROV. A demographic imbalance between the North and the South of Vietnam has existed since the large influx of Chinese migrants to the South during the second half the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, but it increased quite dramatically as a result of the exodus of Hoa from the North of Vietnam in 1978 and 1979.<sup>87</sup> It is notable that based on the censuses conducted in Vietnam up to 2009 there was no indication by the end of the first decade of the 2000s that the Hoa ethnic group was growing in size. On the contrary, the trend is toward a continued decline in the number of Hoa as indicated by the 2009 Census.

---

<sup>87</sup> For details on migration during the period of French colonial rule in Vietnam, see R. Amer, "French policies toward the Chinese in Vietnam: A study of migration and colonial responses," *Moussons. Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est [Social Science Research on Southeast Asia]* 16(2) (2010), pp. 60–80. The study also provides a summary of pre-colonial patterns of migration including the role of Chinese migrants in expanding Vietnam's control into the Mekong Delta during the 17th and 18 centuries (*Ibid.*, pp. 57–59). For details on the geographic distribution of the Hoa in Vietnam since 1979, see Amer, "Examining the Demographic Changes," pp. 23–26.



What could then be the assessment of the situation of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and the policies of the Vietnamese authorities since 1975? The overall developments lead to the conclusion that the situation of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam appears to have stabilized in the 1990s with the formal reintegration of the Hoa community into Vietnamese society, a situation that can be contrasted with the one prevailing in the late 1970s. In looking back at the evolution during the second half of the 1970s and the policies of the Vietnamese authorities during that period, two major mistakes can be identified. First, the implementation of economic policies that quite obviously failed and which contributed to the mass migration of ethnic Chinese (primarily from the South of Vietnam) and, second, relations with China which gradually deteriorated, resulting in the adoption of policies toward the ethnic Chinese that were increasingly discriminatory. As has been argued in a recent study, the human security of the ethnic Chinese was “seriously affected” and “discriminatory policies toward the remaining ethnic Chinese in Vietnam caused an even deeper human security crisis for this community.”<sup>88</sup>

With the new Party Decree of 1995 and the new Government Decree of 1996, the formal process of reintegration of the ethnic Chinese into Vietnamese society was brought to a completion. Future decisions are likely to be more limited in scope, i.e. addressing specific aspects of the policies and/or situations relating to the Chinese community, e.g. in relation to economic, educational, and cultural activities. As it seems, the policies implemented at the local level, for example in Ho Chi Minh City, where almost 50 per cent of the Hoa live, had already brought about a reintegration—in practice—by the early 1990s. It can therefore be argued that the reintegration of the Chinese community has had its own momentum that out-paced the policies at the national and central levels. Based on this line of argumentation, the 1995 and 1996 Decrees seem to re-confirm an evolution that had already taken place in Vietnamese society.

---

<sup>88</sup> R. Amer, “Vietnam and Challenges to Human Security,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 24(4) (2012), p. 474. For an analysis of this dimension in the context of post-conflict development in the Vietnamese context, see R. Amer, “Post-Conflict Developments in the Vietnamese Context—Reform, Conflict Resolution and Regional Integration,” in B. M. Howe, ed. *Post-Conflict Development in East Asia* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 91–113.



## **The Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia**



## The Sihanouk Years, 1953-1970<sup>89</sup>

After Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953, the Cambodian authorities attempted to regulate the activities of immigrant communities in the country, among them the ethnic Vietnamese, through a process that compelled many to seek naturalization to Cambodian citizenship. Cambodia's relations with the two Vietnamese states became an issue of growing concern as the war in Vietnam escalated in the 1960s, giving rise to anti-Vietnamese sentiments in the late 1960s. Already in 1963 Cambodia broke off diplomatic relations with the ROV (South) as a protest against the anti-Buddhist policies and the discriminatory measures of the Vietnamese authorities against the Khmer minority in that country.<sup>90</sup> An additional source of friction was that armed personnel from the National Liberation Front (NLF), struggling against the government in the ROV, and from the DRV (North), used parts of eastern Cambodia as safe havens and for transportation links. Overall, Cambodia had better relations with the NLF and the DRV than with the ROV. Nevertheless, the NLF's and the DRV's military presence in eastern Cambodia became an issue of increased concern for the Cambodia authorities in the late 1960s. Right-wing politicians and senior members of the Cambodian armed forces were particularly concerned about this foreign military presence on Cambodian soil.<sup>91</sup>

The size of the Vietnamese community is difficult to ascertain due to different criteria used to classify ethnic groups, with official censuses using nationality as the basis for classification, e.g. 217,774 Vietnamese in 1962.

---

<sup>89</sup> For a more extensive empirical overview of the period, see R. Amer, "The Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia - A Minority at Risk?" *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 16(2) (1994), pp. 214-216 (hereafter Amer, "The Ethnic Vietnamese").

<sup>90</sup> C. Goldblum, "Les relations inter-ethniques au Cambodge dans la presse Phnom-penhoise de langue française (1963-1970)" [The inter-ethnic relations in Cambodia in the French language media of Phnom Penh (1963-1970)], *Asie du Sud-Est et Monde Insulindien* 5(3) (1974), p. 27 (hereafter Goldblum, "Les relations")

<sup>91</sup> D. P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia. Second Edition* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993), pp. 201-204 (hereafter Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*); P. A. Toole, *The Expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia: Action and Response by the Governments of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Cambodia, and the United States (Papers in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series 17)* (Athens, Ohio: Southeast Asia Programme, Center for International Studies, Ohio University).

The most reliable estimate puts the number of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia at some 450,000 by the end of the 1960s out of a total population of about 7,300,000.<sup>92</sup>

## The Khmer Republic, 1970–1975<sup>93</sup>

Following a deepening political crisis, Prince Sihanouk was removed as Head of State in March 1970 and the Khmer Republic was established. The removal took place in the midst of a propaganda campaign against the Vietnamese. In fact, the attacks on Sihanouk were primarily centered on his alleged pro-Vietnamese stand. The verbal propaganda against the Vietnamese community soon turned into physical abuses and attacks all over Cambodia. Vietnamese houses, boats, property, and religious shrines were attacked. The offices and residences in Phnom Penh of the diplomatic representatives of the DRV and of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, formed in the ROV, were ransacked. The violence against the ethnic Vietnamese escalated when elements of the armed forces and the police joined in the attacks and killings that caused the death of thousands of ethnic Vietnamese.<sup>94</sup>

Far from protecting the Vietnamese, the new Cambodian authorities introduced a number of discriminatory measures. The Vietnamese were only allowed to move around between 7 and 11 A.M., making it impossible for them to attend schools and to work. The Vietnamese fishermen had their fishing licences withdrawn. Public and private organizations as well as persons living in state-owned houses were banned from employing

---

<sup>92</sup> J. Migozzi, *Cambodge faits et problèmes de population [Cambodia population facts and problems]* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique [Publishing of the National Centre for Scientific Research], 1973), pp. 40–46 (hereafter Migozzi, *Cambodge faits*).

<sup>93</sup> For a more extensive empirical overview of the period, see Amer, “The Ethnic Vietnamese,” pp. 216–218.

<sup>94</sup> Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, p. 205; C. Goldblum, “Les relations,” pp. 28–30 and 44–51; J. R. Pouvaty, “L’exode des vietnamiens du Cambodge en 1970,” *Mondes Asiatiques* 7 (1976), pp. 340–342 (hereafter Pouvaty, “L’exode des vietnamiens”); C. M. Tarr, “The Vietnamese minority in Cambodia,” *Race & Class* 34(2) (1992), p. 34 (hereafter Tarr, “The Vietnamese minority”).

Vietnamese staff. Furthermore, the authorities “recommended” that the Vietnamese language should not be used in public.<sup>95</sup>

The ROV authorities intervened officially and a growing awareness on the part of the Cambodian authorities of the negative international repercussions of the attacks on the Vietnamese prompted a change in attitude. The authorities called on people to “actively protect” the Vietnamese, in the spirit of maintaining cordial links between the two peoples. An agreement was reached between the ROV and the Cambodian government on the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia on May 27, 1970.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the new signals, the ethnic Vietnamese continued to flee from their homes and sought refuge in 18 camps set up in Cambodian towns, primarily in Phnom Penh, to cope with the flow of internal refugees. By the month of May the number of people in the camps reached a peak of 90,000. From May to August 1970 these refugees were “repatriated” to the ROV. On August 13 the last camp was closed down in Phnom Penh. However, the exodus of ethnic Vietnamese from Cambodia continued, and by the end of September 1970 a total of 197,378 Vietnamese had officially left for the ROV. According to the ROV authorities 28 per cent of the “repatriated” persons claimed to be Cambodian citizens. In fact, the ROV authorities estimated that 300,000 ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia prior to the exodus had Cambodian citizenship. In March 1971 the ROV officially estimated that approximately 250,000 ethnic Vietnamese had been “repatriated” from Cambodia.<sup>97</sup>

## Democratic Kampuchea, 1975–1979<sup>98</sup>

After a long and bitter war, the Royal Government of National Union of Cambodia (RGNUC), dominated by the Communist Party of Kampuchea

<sup>95</sup> Pouvatchy, “L’exode des vietnamiens,” p. 342.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 342 and 348–349.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 342–347. Pouvatchy expresses some reservations regarding the Vietnamese figure of 300,000 ethnic Vietnamese with Cambodian citizenship which he found to be rather on the high side. He also notes that the Cambodian authorities “seemed” to have encouraged Cambodian citizens of Vietnamese ethnicity to leave the country, see *ibid.*, p. 343.

<sup>98</sup> For a more extensive empirical overview of the period, see Amer, “The Ethnic Vietnamese,” pp. 218–219.

(CPK), captured the capital Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, and defeated the Khmer Republic. The CPK gradually took full control of political power in the country. The country was renamed Democratic Kampuchea (DK). The fate of the ethnic Vietnamese was one of renewed exodus as some 170,000 were expelled from Cambodia in 1975. The ethnic Vietnamese could be estimated at about 200,000 by the mid-1970s, thus only some 30,000 remained in the country and many of them died of starvation, disease, or executions between 1975 and 1978. This implied that the Vietnamese minority had all but completely disappeared from Cambodia.<sup>99</sup> The CPK remained in power until it was overthrown through a military intervention launched by Vietnam on December 25, 1978.

## **People's Republic of Kampuchea/State of Cambodia, 1979–1992<sup>100</sup>**

Following the fall of Phnom Penh in early January 1979, a new Cambodian administration was established and later gave the country the name People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). The PRK/State of Cambodia (SOC)<sup>101</sup> period lasted de facto until the establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in March 1992. The PRK/SOC faced armed opposition from three groups—the overthrown DK, also known as Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK), i.e. the Khmer Rouge; the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF); and the Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif (FUNCINPEC). They formed the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) on June 22, 1982.<sup>102</sup>

The new order installed in Cambodia in early 1979 came about with extensive Vietnamese assistance, and people who had sought refuge in

<sup>99</sup> In 1978 Vietnam requested assistance from the UNHCR to cope with 341,400 refugees who had arrived from Cambodia since 1975. Among these refugees there were 170,300 ethnic Vietnamese (Grant, *The Boat People*, p. 98).

<sup>100</sup> For a more extensive empirical overview of the period, see Amer, "The Ethnic Vietnamese," pp. 219-222.

<sup>101</sup> On April 30, 1989 the PRK officially changed its name to the SOC.

<sup>102</sup> The CGDK changed its name to National Government of Cambodia (NGC) in February 1990.



Vietnam in the 1975–1978 period returned to Cambodia. This process involved not only ethnic Khmers but also ethnic Vietnamese, leading to the re-emergence of a Vietnamese minority in Cambodia. The later caused international concern, as the ethnic Vietnamese were seen as part of a process of “Vietnamization” of the country. Whether the ethnic Vietnamese were returnees who had been forced out of Cambodia during the 1970s or new migrants, they were all perceived to be part of a larger Vietnamese scheme to gain influence and even to colonize Cambodia.

The ethnic Vietnamese settling down in Cambodia became one of the major issues in the discourse of the Cambodian groups opposed to the PRK/SOC and to the Vietnamese influence in the country. The Ambassador to the United Nations of DK<sup>103</sup> gave estimates of the number of Vietnamese settlers in 1979 (300,000) and in 1981 (500,000).<sup>104</sup> In 1984 the President of the CGDK, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, put the number at 600,000.<sup>105</sup> In 1986 he claimed that 700,000 Vietnamese had settled in Cambodia.<sup>106</sup> In 1988 Mr Son Sann, Prime Minister within the CGDK, claimed that the number was between 800,000 and 1,000,000.<sup>107</sup> In 1989 he claimed that there were 1,000,000 Vietnamese settlers in Cambodia.<sup>108</sup>

In 1983 the official policies of the PRK toward “Vietnamese residents” were outlined in a publication from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>109</sup> The PRK estimated that by mid-1983 there were about 56,000 “Vietnamese residents” in Cambodia, and they had returned after the PRK had authorised them to do so.<sup>110</sup> The official policy of the PRK toward the Vietnamese sought to regulate the Vietnamese migration to Cambodia but not to prevent it.

---

<sup>103</sup> The overthrown government in Cambodia (DK) was allowed to continue to represent Cambodia in the General Assembly from 1979 and throughout the 1980s. For details, see R. Amer, “The United Nations and Kampuchea: the Issue of Representation and its Implications,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 22(3) (1990), pp. 52–60; R. Amer, *The United Nations and Foreign Military Interventions. A Comparative Study of the Application of the Charter. Second Edition. Report (33)* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 1994), pp. 89–108.

<sup>104</sup> Provisional Verbatim Records, General Assembly, United Nations A/34/PV.62 (November 12, 1979), p. 1204; A/36/PV.36 (October 9, 1981), p. 722.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, A/39/PV.40 (November 1, 1984 (Provisional)), par. 4.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, A/41/PV.42 (October 22, 1986 (Provisional)), par. 46.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, A/43/PV.42 (November 4, 1988 (Provisional)), par. 17

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, A/44/PV.56 (November 22, 1989 (Provisional)), par. 16-17.

<sup>109</sup> *Policy of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea with regard to Vietnamese residents* (Phnom Penh: Press Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1983).

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

There is a considerable discrepancy between the PRK's claim of 56,000 ethnic Vietnamese in 1983 and the CGDK's claim of 600,000 settlers in 1984. It can be noted that in 1984 Cambodia's total population was estimated at about 7,200,000, i.e. about the same level as at the end of the 1960s. The scholarly literature does not produce any clear assessment of the figures or on the actual size of the Vietnamese community in Cambodia. Some researchers have simply quoted the CGDK claims or sought to justify these claims.<sup>111</sup> Other researchers have made more modest estimates than the CGDK, but higher than the PRK figure of 1983. According to such estimates, the number of ethnic Vietnamese would have been in the range of 300,000 to 450,000, i.e. below or at about the same size as before the two exoduses of the 1970s.<sup>112</sup>

## The United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, 1992–1993<sup>113</sup>

Following a peace process in the late 1980s and early 1990s that led to the signing of the Paris Agreements on Cambodia in October 1991, a peacekeeping operation was carried out by the United Nations in Cambodia from March 1992 (when UNTAC was formally established) to September 1993 when UNTAC's mandate expired following the adoption of a new Cambodian constitution by the Constituent Assembly.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> M. A. Martin, "Le processus de vietnamisation au Cambodge" [The Process of Vietnamization in Cambodia], *Politique Internationale* 24 (1984), pp. 180–184; J. R. Pouvatchy, *The Vietnamisation of Cambodia. ISIS Seminar Paper* (Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia, 1984), pp. 3–4; "The Vietnamisation of Kampuchea. A New Model of Colonialism," *Indochina Report (Pre-Publication Issue)* (1984), pp. 11–16.

<sup>112</sup> Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, pp. 233 and 267; Tarr, "The Vietnamese minority," p. 40; M. Vickery, *Kampuchea. Politics, Economics and Society* (London and Boulder: Frances Pinter Publishers and Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986), pp. 2–3 and 165–167.

<sup>113</sup> For a more extensive empirical overview of the period, see Amer, "The Ethnic Vietnamese," pp. 222–226.

<sup>114</sup> For overviews and assessments of the United Nations' peacekeeping operation and the post-electoral evolution up to the withdrawal of UNTAC, see R. Amer, "The United Nations' Peacekeeping Operation in Cambodia: Overview and Assessment," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 15(2) (1993), pp. 211–231; R. Amer, *Peace-keeping in a Peace Process: The Case of Cambodia. Report (40)* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research,

From late June 1992 anti-Vietnamese sentiments seemed to be on the increase, with representatives of PDK being the most vocal. However, representatives of the KPNLF expressed similar sentiments. As it seems, the intention was to put pressure on UNTAC to take action and to solve what these parties perceived to be a "Vietnamese problem." From early July the PDK began using the presence of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia in its criticism of the United Nations by claiming that UNTAC was neglecting an alleged massive illegal immigration of Vietnamese. The PDK claimed that 700,000 Vietnamese had obtained Cambodian identity cards. The anti-Vietnamese feelings seem to have been further reinforced by an influx of Vietnamese into Cambodia, attracted by the economic liberalization and by the arrival of thousands of well-paid UNTAC personnel and other foreigners.

The former parties to the CGDK/NGC attempted to limit the number of ethnic Vietnamese who could take part in the planned general elections. This was most evident in the discussion prior to the adoption of the Electoral Law in 1992. The issue of who would be allowed to vote in the Cambodian general elections preoccupied the four Cambodian parties represented in the Supreme National Council (SNC).<sup>115</sup> On August 5, 1992, the SNC adopted an electoral law drafted by UNTAC. The electoral law enfranchised any 18-year-old person born in Cambodia with a mother or a father born in the country or, in the case of those born overseas, with a mother or a father born in Cambodia whose mother or father was also born in the country, i.e. the grandparents also born in Cambodia. This constituted a revision of the provisions of the Paris Agreements on Cambodia, which stated that any 18-year-old born in Cambodia or the child of a person born in Cambodia would be eligible to vote. The PDK opposed the electoral law primarily because it would allow ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia to vote. The intention of the law was to disenfranchise new Vietnamese settlers but not ethnic Vietnamese who lived in the country in the pre-1970 period.

The political rhetoric was not the only example of anti-Vietnamese activities in Cambodia. Already in April and May 1992 two armed attacks against ethnic Vietnamese in the province of Kompong Chhnang had caused seven deaths. Another attack took place on July 21 in the province of Kampot,

---

Uppsala University, 1995).

<sup>115</sup> At a meeting held in Jakarta on September 9-10, 1990, the four warring Cambodian parties decided to create a SNC with twelve members, six from SOC and two from each of the other three parties—FUNCINPEC, the KPNLF, and the PDK.

resulting in the deaths of eight ethnic Vietnamese. In October armed attacks against ethnic Vietnamese in the province of Koh Kong led to further casualties, as did three other attacks on ethnic Vietnamese in October and November in Sihanoukville. Two attacks were reported in December, on the 16th in the province of Stung Treng and on the 27th in the province of Kompong Chhnang. After a period with no reported attacks in January and February 1993, there was a sharp increase in the number of attacks in March following an announcement by UNTAC, on March 1, that it had discovered three Vietnamese men who had served with the Vietnamese forces in Cambodia and whom UNTAC therefore regarded as “foreign forces.” UNTAC requested Vietnam to take the three persons back as Vietnamese “nationals.” During the month of March several attacks were carried out against ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. On March 10 an attack in a village in Siem Reap province caused the deaths of 33 ethnic Vietnamese and wounded 24 others. Two more attacks on ethnic Vietnamese were reported by UNTAC during the month of March, first on March 24 in the province of Kompong Chhnang, and the second on March 29, when at least four “premises” in Phnom Penh frequented by “Vietnamese-speaking” persons were attacked. These attacks caused a large number of ethnic Vietnamese to flee from Cambodia beginning in late March, and as of April 28 a total of 21,659 persons had entered Vietnam through the UNTAC checkpoints. Armed attacks against ethnic Vietnamese continued in April and in May. Even after the elections in late May attacks were reported in June.<sup>116</sup>

## Developments after Peacekeeping, 1993–2000<sup>117</sup>

The political developments did not put a halt to attacks causing deaths among the ethnic Vietnamese, as they continued in July with attacks on the

---

<sup>116</sup> For more details on the attacks on the Vietnamese during the peacekeeping period, see Amer, “The Ethnic Vietnamese,” pp. 222–228.

<sup>117</sup> For a more extensive empirical overview of the period, see Amer, “The Ethnic Vietnamese,” pp. 226–228; R. Amer, “Cambodia’s Ethnic Vietnamese - Minority Rights and Domestic Politics,” *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 34(3) (2006), pp. 392–400 (hereafter Amer, “Cambodia’s Ethnic Vietnamese”).

6th, 8th, and 10th and an attack also in August. These attacks prompted official protest by Vietnam.

During the withdrawal process of UNTAC from August to December 1993, the new Constitution of Cambodia was adopted. A closer look at the Constitution shows that it does not contain any provisions providing human rights protection nor any duties and privileges of foreign nationals living in Cambodia. The Constitution deals with the rights and duties of "Cambodian citizens" without making any reference to the ethnicity of such citizens.<sup>118</sup> Thus, the Constitution in itself does not exclude any ethnic group from being Cambodian citizens. However, in late September 1993 it was reported that during debates in the National Assembly relating to who should be regarded as "Cambodian," members of the Assembly broadened the definition to include ethnic Chams and ethnic Chinese but excluded the ethnic Vietnamese. Thus, the status and the rights of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia continued to be a controversial issue.

From September 1993 to March 1994 no armed attacks against ethnic Vietnamese warranted an official Vietnamese protest. Then, in early April, attacks resumed. Also in April 1994 a "Cambodian-Vietnamese joint communiqué" was issued at the end of the Vietnamese Prime Minister's visit to Cambodia. The communiqué stated that a working group would be established to "discuss and solve the issue of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia based on the respect for Cambodia's law and international law and customs." It also stated that the ethnic Vietnamese would be treated as other "foreign nationals."<sup>119</sup>

During the rest of 1994 relations between the two governments focused on the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia: first, in relation to attacks against ethnic Vietnamese with Vietnam protesting against killings of ethnic Vietnamese; and second, in connection with the Law of Immigration adopted by the Cambodian National Assembly on August 26.<sup>120</sup> The passing of the law raised fears that it would be used against the ethnic Vietnamese.

---

<sup>118</sup> For the full text of the "Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia" see *British Broadcasting Corporation, Summary of World Broadcasts, Part Three, Far East (1822)* (October 18, 1993), pp. S/1-9.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* (1962) (April 5, 1994), pp. B/1-3.

<sup>120</sup> For the full text of the law, see "Law on immigration," in *Laws of Cambodia 1993-1998. Adopted by the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Cambodia Volume II* (Phnom Penh: The Cambodian Legal Resources Development Center, 1998), pp. 113-129.

The first attack during the period took place in May in Kompong Chhnang Province. The second attack occurred in the same province on July 3. A third attack occurred on July 15 in Pursat Province. A fourth attack took place on July 26 in Kampot Province. Yet another attack occurred on September 5 in Kandal Province. The next lethal attack occurred on October 20 in Kompong Chhnang Province. The last attack with a deadly outcome in 1994 took place on December 7 in Kandal Province.

The visit by Cambodia's First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh to Vietnam in January 1995 gave the two countries an opportunity to discuss the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese at the highest political level. It was agreed to hold a meeting of experts to discuss the issue. Cambodia pledged that the Law of Immigration would not be aimed at "confining or deporting en masse Vietnamese nationals." Cambodia also stated that it would "try to do everything" in conformity with Cambodian regulations and "within its capacity" to ensure the safety of the "Vietnamese" in Cambodia.<sup>121</sup>

The first meeting of the expert-level working groups on the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia was held in Phnom Penh on March 29-30. It was reported that the two sides had "frank, friendly discussions" and they achieved "some results."<sup>122</sup> The second meeting was held in Hanoi on July 28-29 and an agreement was reached on measures to "settle the number of Vietnamese refugees" in Chrey Thom in Kandal Province. It was also decided to continue the discussions on other issues.<sup>123</sup> Then, on October 28, Cambodia announced that ethnic Vietnamese "staying temporarily" at Chrey Thom were being sent back to "their" provinces.<sup>124</sup>

In early April 1996 Vietnam's Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet made an official visit to Cambodia. In the press communiqué the problems concerning "Vietnamese residents" in Cambodia was subject to attention and it was agreed that the expert groups would hold their third meeting in Phnom Penh "as soon as possible."<sup>125</sup> If the meeting was eventually held, it was not publicized.

---

<sup>121</sup> *British Broadcasting Corporation, Summary of World Broadcasts, Part Three, Far East* (2204) (January 18, 1995), pp. B/2-3; *Ibid.* (2205) (January 19, 1995), pp. B/1-3.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* (2269) (April 4, 1995): p. B/4.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* (2371) (August 2, 1995), p. B/1.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* (2447) (October 30, 1995), p. B/4.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* (2584) (April 12, 1996), p. B/2.



In May 1996 attacks on ethnic Vietnamese re-occurred and Vietnam protested against the killing of 14 ethnic Vietnamese in Pursat Province. Then in early August Vietnam announced that 50 “Vietnamese nationals” living in Cambodia had returned to Vietnam following the “massacre” of 25 Vietnamese by the PDK. In late October the Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh protested against the killing of two “Vietnamese nationals” on October 10 in the province of Kompong Chhnang.

On October 9, 1996, the Law on Nationality of Cambodia was promulgated. The Law specifies the criteria for Cambodian citizenship as well as the requirements to be met by foreigners in order to obtain Cambodian citizenship, i.e. naturalization.<sup>126</sup> Vietnam did not officially publicize any concern about how the law would be applied in relation to the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. During the last five months of 1996 and into 1997 relations between the two countries improved through mutual visits. In November 1996 it was reported that Cambodia had taken steps to issue temporary residence permits to ethnic Vietnamese who had entered the country before 1993. During this period the most important visit took place in late February 1997 by Vietnam’s Foreign Minister Mr. Nguyen Manh Cam. It was agreed that talks aimed at finding “appropriate measures” to solve issues relating to the “Vietnamese nationals” in Cambodia would continue.<sup>127</sup>

The situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia remained problematic, and in late May 1997 the Vietnamese Embassy in Cambodia officially protested to the Cambodian authorities about PDK attacks on ethnic Vietnamese. Four attacks had taken place, the first on April 22. The second and third took place on April 27 in Ratanakiri Province. The fourth attack also took place in Ratanakiri Province in May. Further evidence of anti-Vietnamese sentiments was a bomb attack against the memorial monument for “Vietnamese Volunteer Soldiers” in Sihanoukville.

---

<sup>126</sup> For the full text of the law, see “Law on nationality,” in *Laws of Cambodia 1993-1998. Adopted by the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Cambodia Volume II* (Phnom Penh: The Cambodian Legal Resources Development, 1998), pp. 169–178. The text is also reproduced in L. Nguyen and C. Sperfeldt, *A Boat Without Anchors. A report on the Legal Status of Ethnic Vietnamese Minority Populations in Cambodia under Domestic and International Laws Governing Nationality and Statelessness* (2013), pp. 128–131, accessed March 4, 2013, [http://jrscambodia.org/boat\\_without\\_anchors.html](http://jrscambodia.org/boat_without_anchors.html). (hereafter Nguyen and Sperfeldt, *A Boat Without Anchors*)

<sup>127</sup> *British Broadcasting Corporation, Summary of World Broadcasts, Part Three, Far East* (2856) (March 1, 1997), p. B/2; *Ibid.* (2857) (March 3, 1997), p. B/1.

The demise of First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh in July 1997 and the election of Ung Huot to the post did lead to a period of improved bilateral relations. During the second half of 1997 and the first quarter of 1998 there was no Vietnamese reaction to attacks on ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. Then, in April, the PDK claimed that it had killed 45 and wounded “many” ethnic Vietnamese in Kompong Chhnang Province. The precarious situation of the ethnic Vietnamese was also made clear by anti-Vietnamese statements during the election campaign ahead of the general elections held on July 26, 1998. The political tensions between the leading Cambodian parties following the elections and the difficult process in forming a coalition government were marked by anti-Vietnamese actions. First, there was an attack on the “Vietnam-Cambodian Friendship Monument” in Phnom Penh in late August. Second, in two incidents on September 3-4 three ethnic Vietnamese were killed, five wounded, and ten abducted in Phnom Penh.

The formation of a new coalition in Cambodia on November 25 between the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) and FUNCINPEC ushered in a period with a more stable political situation and a decline in anti-Vietnamese actions. It is also noteworthy that in Prime Minister Hun Sen’s presentation to the Cambodian National Assembly of the “platform” of the new coalition government on November 30, 1998, it was stated that the Government “absolutely prevents racial discrimination, which is an activity violating laws and against human rights.”<sup>128</sup> The period from December 1998 to July 1999 saw several high-level meetings and the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese was addressed during these meetings. Despite these high-level meetings and their preoccupation with the issue of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, attacks against the Vietnamese were reported to have taken place in February and March 1999 in the Phnom Penh area. In early 2000 there were renewed displays of anti-Vietnamese sentiment in Cambodia with three demonstrations carried out by Cambodian students in January 2000. Two demonstrations were carried out against the border agreements between Cambodia and Vietnam (signed in the 1980s), while the third demonstration outside the Vietnamese embassy demanded that the Embassy “repatriate Vietnamese nationals” from Cambodia. In March monks, nuns, and students staged demonstrations in front of Chak Angre Leu Pagoda and

---

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* (3403) (December 7, 1998), pp. B/1-2.



in front of the Vietnamese embassy in Phnom Penh urging the Cambodian government to “expel Vietnamese” living in the area of the pagoda.

## Cessation of Attacks in the 2000s

After these incidents, there was a decline in the attacks on the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia.<sup>129</sup> In fact, prior to 2014 there were no publicized reactions by Vietnam regarding negative aspects of the situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia except for a fire that destroyed houses and which affected the Vietnamese in the Cambodian capital in late 2001. Reports from high-level meetings between Cambodia and Vietnam have only general or even no references to the ethnic Vietnamese issue since early 2000s. This can be contrasted by the publicity given to the border issues between the two countries.<sup>130</sup> In addition, the parliamentary elections of July 2003 do not seem to have been marked by the same level of anti-Vietnamese rhetoric by opposition parties as the earlier elections, although it was still apparent. And while there were anti-Vietnamese activities targeting the ethnic Vietnamese in the country, they did not lead to deadly attacks against ethnic Vietnamese.<sup>131</sup> This seems to have prevailed in the aftermath of the elections despite the deep differences between the main Cambodian political parties before a new coalition government was agreed upon between the CPP and FUNCINPEC in the summer of 2004. The 2008 national elections also appear to have been less prevalent in anti-Vietnamese rhetoric than in earlier elections.<sup>132</sup> The campaigning for the 2013 national elections was not free

<sup>129</sup> For details see Amer, “Cambodia’s Ethnic Vietnamese,” pp. 400-402.

<sup>130</sup> R. Amer, “Domestic Political Change and Ethnic Minorities - A Case Study of the Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia,” *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 13(2) (2013), p. 94. On developments relating to border issues, see R. Amer and Nguyen H. T., “Regional Conflict Management: Challenges of the Border Disputes of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam,” *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* 2(2) (2009), pp. 54-59 (hereafter Amer and Nguyen, “Regional Conflict Management”).

<sup>131</sup> On the 2003 elections and anti-Vietnamese activities, see R. B. Albritton, “CAMBODIA IN 2003: On the Road to Democratic Consolidation,” *Asian Survey* 44(1) (2004), p. 106 (hereafter Albritton, “CAMBODIA IN 2003”).

<sup>132</sup> In her analysis of developments in Cambodia in 2008, Hughes does not highlight the dimension of anti-Vietnamese rhetoric during the 2008 national elections campaign, or any upsurge in anti-Vietnamese activities (C. Hughes, “Cambodia in 2008: Consolidation in the Midst of Crisis,” *Asian Survey* 49(1) (2009), pp. 206-212).

from anti-Vietnamese rhetoric, however, and media reports indicate that in some parts of the country ethnic Vietnamese were prevented from voting.<sup>133</sup> In addition, the contested outcome of the elections and the protests that followed the announcement that CCP had retained power has also featured anti-Vietnamese rhetoric from the main opposition party, the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), and its leader Sam Rainsy. Such rhetoric has been linked to attacks against ethnic Vietnamese in early 2014.<sup>134</sup> The lethal attack on an ethnic Vietnamese man in the Phnom Penh area<sup>135</sup> even prompted a reaction from Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>133</sup> On the 2013 national elections and the ethnic Vietnamese, see D. Hruby and M. Dara, "Ethnic-Vietnamese Cambodians Prevented From Voting in Kandal," *The Cambodia Daily [online]* (July 29, 2013), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/elections/ethnic-vietnamese-cambodians-prevented-from-voting-in-kandal-37225/>; K. Kimsong and K. Doyle, "Ethnic Vietnamese Say Enmity Usual Vote Ploy," *The Cambodia Daily [online]* (July 24, 2013), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/ethnic-vietnamese-say-enmity-usual-vote-ploy-39233/>; C. Meyn and K. Narim, "CPP the Clear Choice for Ethnic Vietnamese Voters," *The Cambodia Daily* (July 17, 2013), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/elections/cpp-the-clear-choice-for-ethnic-vietnamese-voters-35209/>; L. Nguyen, "For Cambodia's Ethnic Vietnamese Minority, Election Season a Grim Reminder of their Vulnerability," *Civil Parties Before the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia* (August 14, 2013), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.civilparties.org/?p=1449> (hereafter L. Nguyen, "For Cambodia's Ethnic Vietnamese.")

<sup>134</sup> On anti-Vietnamese sentiments following the elections and attacks in 2014, see M. Blomberg and E. Mengleng, "Political Parties Point Fingers in Racial Mob Killing," *The Cambodia Daily* (February 19, 2014), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/political-parties-point-fingers-in-racial-mob-killing-52594/>; "Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia face Discrimination," *Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)* (September 19, 2013), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/98786/ethnic-vietnamese-in-cambodia-face-discrimination>; F. Greenwood, "How Anti-Vietnamese Racism is Fueling Politics in Cambodia," *UN Dispatch* (January 13, 2014), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.undispatch.com/how-anti-vietnamese-racism-is-fueling-politics-in-cambodia>; E. Mengleng, "Vietnamese Man Killed In Racist Mob Attack," *The Cambodia Daily* (February 17, 2014), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/vietnamese-man-killed-in-racist-mob-attack-52329/> (hereafter Mengleng, "Vietnamese Man Killed"); E. Mengleng and M. Blomberg, "Killing Reflects Danger of Anti-Vietnamese Sentiment," *The Cambodia Daily* (February 18, 2014), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/killing-reflects-danger-of-anti-vietnamese-sentiment-52457/>; A. Seiff and N. Vannarin, "Anti-Vietnamese sentiment boils in Cambodia. Attacks on businesses highlight ethnic divide," *UCANEWS.COM* (January 10, 2014), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.ucanews.com/news/anti-vietnamese-sentiment-boils-in-cambodia/70049>.

<sup>135</sup> On this specific attack, see Mengleng, "Vietnamese Man Killed."

<sup>136</sup> "Remarks by FM Spokesman Le Hai Binh on 20 February, 2014," Viet Nam Ministry of Foreign Affairs (February 20, 2014), accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.mofa.gov>.

## Analysing the Case of the Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia

The situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia cannot be studied in a distinctly domestic context. Consequently, the observations made in the following analysis will attempt to grasp the interaction between the domestic context and the inter-state context, i.e. relations with Vietnam, in order to show the complexity which shapes Cambodia's attitudes and policies toward the ethnic Vietnamese.

Armed attacks against ethnic Vietnamese in the 1990s were often attributed to the PDK, who, until the group's gradual fragmentation and eventual demise in the late 1990s, articulated the most extreme form of anti-Vietnamese propaganda coupled with armed attacks against the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. Some political parties also expressed anti-Vietnamese sentiments during the electoral campaigns in 1993, 1998, and 2003, e.g. FUNCINPEC in all three elections and the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) in the later two, and this further fueled such opinions among the population in general. The rhetoric relating to the "yuon," a pejorative term relating to all Vietnamese<sup>137</sup> as the source of most problems and shortcomings in Cambodia, was evident in the campaign leading to the general elections in 1998<sup>138</sup> as well as in 2003.<sup>139</sup> As noted above, the 2008 national elections appear to have been less afflicted by anti-Vietnamese rhetoric than earlier elections.

---

[vn/en/tt\\_baochi/pbnfn/ns140224115403/](http://vn/en/tt_baochi/pbnfn/ns140224115403/).

<sup>137</sup> The argument here is not that the term "yuon" in itself is necessarily discriminatory, but rather the way it is used in the political rhetoric and the fact that the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia have been under repeated attacks since 1953. See R. Amer, "Cambodia and Vietnam: A Troubled Relationship," in N. Ganesan and R. Amer, eds., *International Relations in Southeast Asia: Between Bilateralism and Multilateralism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010), pp. 102 and 112 (hereafter Amer, "Cambodia and Vietnam"). See also discussion in Albritton, "CAMBODIA IN 2003," p. 106.

<sup>138</sup> For a detailed analysis of how prominently anti-Vietnam and anti-Vietnamese views were propagated by the two main opposition parties in the campaign leading up to the 1998 general elections, see C. Hughes, "International Intervention and the People's Will: The Demoralization of Democracy in Cambodia," in B. Kiernan, ed. *Conflict and Change in Cambodia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 45–68.

<sup>139</sup> Albritton discusses both the elections campaign of 2003 and generally the use of such rhetoric by Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy (Albritton, "CAMBODIA IN 2003," p. 106).

Alarming, however, after the contested outcome of the 2013 national elections, not only has the anti-Vietnamese rhetoric again become more evident, but also physical attacks on ethnic Vietnamese have taken place. It is evident that prejudices against the ethnic Vietnamese persist in Cambodian society and members of the Vietnamese community still perceive that discrimination against them continues.<sup>140</sup>

The controversy regarding the status and rights of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodian society today can basically be attributed to anti-Vietnamese sentiments among Cambodian politicians. These are in no way new features in Cambodian domestic politics. Since independence in 1953, the policies toward the ethnic Vietnamese have been more (e.g. Khmer Republic and DK 1970-1978) or less (e.g. the Sihanouk years 1953-1970) discriminatory. Only the PRK/SOC period was characterized by non-discriminatory policies.

The extreme policies implemented during the Khmer Republic and the DK years led to massacres of ethnic Vietnamese and the exodus of some 420,000 people to Vietnam, leading to the de facto elimination of the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia. Seen in the perspective of the dramatic effects of anti-Vietnamese policies in the 1970s, the repeated armed attacks on ethnic Vietnamese during the 1990s—in most cases attributed to the PDK—presented an evident and real threat to the Vietnamese community at large. This does not imply that all ethnic Vietnamese have been directly targeted in one or more attacks, but with the number of ethnic Vietnamese casualties in their hundreds and with attacks taking place in both rural and urban areas, the threat was real. Furthermore, there is no indication that a differentiation was made between newly-arrived Vietnamese and those who have lived in the country for a longer time.<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> The perceptions of some Ethnic Vietnamese and the sense of being discriminated were highlighted in an article by B. Myers, "Cambodia's Ethnic Vietnamese Continue to Live in the shadow of Discrimination and Hatred," *The Cambodia Daily* (July 6, 2002), accessed October 29, 2012, <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/magazine/cambodias-ethnic-vietnamese-continue-to-live-in-the-shadow-of-discrimination-and-hatred-699/>. This has also been highlighted more recently in L. Nguyen, "For Cambodia's Ethnic Vietnamese." Also relevant is S. Ehrentraut, "Perpetually temporary: citizenship and ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34(5) (2011), p. 791 (hereafter Ehrentraut, "Perpetually temporary").

<sup>141</sup> Bertrand has made an attempt to divide the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia into different categories and one of the major criteria he uses is the length of stay in Cambodia. He argues that the majority ("la plupart") of the Vietnamese born in Cambodia claim to be "Vietnamese of Cambodia" ("Vietnamiens du Cambodge") and that they perceive

The anti-Vietnamese stand displayed by generations of Cambodian politicians seems to transcend ideological differences since royalists, conservatives, liberals, and communists either have been or are currently displaying anti-Vietnamese sentiments.<sup>142</sup> A disturbing pattern of behaviour has emerged within Cambodian society. First, the Cambodian authorities officially display their discontent about the relations with Vietnam, and then popular anti-Vietnamese sentiments are manifested in the form of demonstrations and/or attacks on ethnic Vietnamese. There also seems to have been a connection between the occurrence of anti-Vietnamese actions and political tension between Cambodian political parties in the run-up and in the aftermath of general elections, as exemplified in both 1993 and 1998. The 2003 elections were also characterized by anti-Vietnamese rhetoric, and activities directed at the ethnic Vietnamese (albeit no lethal attacks) took place. The 2008 elections appear to have contained less anti-Vietnamese rhetoric, while following the contested outcome on the 2013 elections there has been an increase in anti-Vietnamese rhetoric and also incidents of physical attacks on Vietnamese, which in one case caused the death of a man in early 2014.

Anti-Vietnamese sentiments are widespread among members of the Cambodian elite as expressed in the political debate and media. It seems that such sentiments are not limited to this social stratum, as evidenced by the attacks on ethnic Vietnamese also by ordinary people in many areas of the country in 1970. However, anti-Vietnamese statements made by the Cambodian authorities and politicians should not be seen as responding to pressure from below, since the events in 1970 were instigated by the anti-Vietnamese rhetoric of the authorities.

---

themselves as belonging to the Khmer people. This category of Vietnamese seems to be those who were living in Cambodia prior to 1970 and who have since then returned as well as their descendants. Bertrand observes that, following their forced exodus, they returned to Cambodia as soon as it was possible. He also argues that they do not have and family links in Vietnam (D. Bertrand, "Les Vietnamiens au Cambodge analyse des représentations et des conditions d'une integration" [The Vietnamese in Cambodia an analysis of the representations and the conditions for an integration], *Aséanie* 2 (1998), pp. 30–32).

<sup>142</sup> Bertrand makes a similar observation relating to the use of anti-Vietnamese rhetoric for political purposes by Cambodian politicians throughout the political spectrum, i.e. "royalistes, républicains et les Khmers Rouge" (*Ibid.*, p. 39).

An additional source of negative sentiments against the ethnic Vietnamese is the migration of Vietnamese to Cambodia during periods of strong foreign influence, e.g. during the PRK/SOC years with extensive Vietnamese influence. Even during the peacekeeping period it can be argued that the migration took place when Cambodia was under strong “foreign” influence. This contributes to reinforce the perception of the Vietnamese as representing something alien and to identifying the Vietnamese community as having foreign interests and influence in Cambodia. The link between foreign influence and Vietnamese migration has not passed unnoticed by those opposing the presence of the ethnic Vietnamese and it has provided an additional factor to be used in the anti-Vietnamese propaganda.

In addition, the ethnic Vietnamese have routinely been accused of refusing to integrate into Cambodian society. Traditionally there has been more Sino-Khmer than Viet-Khmer intermarriages.<sup>143</sup> From the Cambodian viewpoint, this is evidence that the Vietnamese refuse to fully integrate into Cambodian society. However, in view of the widespread anti-Vietnamese feelings in Cambodia, there must be reluctance among the Khmers to marry ethnic Vietnamese, which in turn reinforces the non-integration of the Vietnamese.

Several studies suggest that anti-Vietnamese sentiments have traditionally been stronger in urban than in rural areas.<sup>144</sup> It is of course difficult to make such generalizations but the findings should be taken seriously. One explanation of the differences along the urban and rural divide could be that the propagation of anti-Vietnamese opinions was more thorough in urban areas.

Relations between Cambodia and Vietnam are of great relevance for the situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. Strained bilateral relations can, as exemplified by recent history, have very negative repercussions on the ethnic Vietnamese. Indeed, even during periods with fairly good relations and when efforts are being made to resolve outstanding

<sup>143</sup> Migozzi, *Cambodge faits*, pp. 40–46.

<sup>144</sup> M. Comte, “Rapports de classes et relations inter-ethniques dans le Cambodge précolonial à propos de “Notes sur les relations inter-ethniques au Cambodge du XIXe siècle”” [Relationship between social classes and inter-ethnic relations in pre-colonial Cambodia in response to “Notes on the inter-ethnic relations in Cambodia of the 19th century”], *Asie du Sud-Est et Monde Insulindien* 7(1) (1976), p. 69; Goldblum, “Les relations,” pp. 30–34; Tarr, “The Vietnamese minority,” pp. 34–39.



issues of dispute, there seems to be room for inflammatory statements from high-ranking Cambodians, which can spark anti-Vietnamese manifestations from the public. This is exemplified by the then King Norodom Sihanouk's accusations against Vietnam in 1994 and the ensuing anti-Vietnamese demonstration in Phnom Penh, and by the increase in the number of attacks against ethnic Vietnamese following the accusations made by the then First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh against Vietnam during the first half of 1996.<sup>145</sup> It can therefore be argued that for the wellbeing of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, relations between the two countries have to be cooperative with territorial issues peacefully managed. The official bilateral relationship has remained broadly stable during the 2000s.<sup>146</sup>

The ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia have been an issue on the agenda at high-level meetings between the two countries. Vietnam's ambition has been to ensure that the Vietnamese are not being discriminated against in Cambodia and assurances to that effect have been forthcoming from the Cambodian side. Nevertheless, to give the ethnic Vietnamese full security and protection would be impossible, as the Cambodian authorities cannot fully guarantee the safety of the population at large. With a mutual understanding pertaining to the non-discrimination of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, it should at least be possible for the two countries to fully co-operate in controlling that no illegal migration takes place across the border.

Interestingly enough, in the talks between Vietnam and Cambodia in the post-UNTAC period, both sides agreed on the notion that the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia are to be regarded as Vietnamese citizens. For example Vietnam referred to the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia as "Vietnamese citizens," "Vietnamese nationals," "Vietnamese residents," and "Overseas Vietnamese," all of which refer to people who are citizens of Vietnam.<sup>147</sup> This bilateral understanding does not fully address all aspects of the issue. First, political parties opposing the PRK/SOC alleged that a large number

---

<sup>145</sup> For details, see R. Amer, "The Border Conflicts between Cambodia and Vietnam," *Boundary and Security Bulletin* 5(2) (1997), pp. 82–91; Amer, "Cambodia's Ethnic Vietnamese," pp. 394–396; Amer, "Cambodia and Vietnam," pp. 99–100 and 104–105.

<sup>146</sup> On developments relating to border issues, see Amer and Nguyen, "Regional Conflict Management," pp. 54–59. On overall relations, see Amer, "Cambodia and Vietnam," pp. 92–116 and C. A. Thayer, "Cambodia and Vietnam: Good Fences Make Good Neighbours," in P. Sothirak, G. Wade and M. Hong, eds. *Cambodia. Progress and Challenges Since 1991* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), pp. 62–77.

<sup>147</sup> For more details, see Amer, "Cambodia's Ethnic Vietnamese," pp. 392–400.

of ethnic Vietnamese had been given Cambodian identification papers and were thus naturalized Cambodians. The understanding between the two governments suggests that this process has been reversed so as to regard those persons as Vietnamese citizens again (Or could it be that the CGDK accusations were unfounded or that the naturalization process involved only a negligible number of persons?). Second, an undisclosed but considerable number of the ethnic Vietnamese who lived in Cambodia in the pre-1970s were Cambodian citizens. The present understanding between the two countries presumes that none or only a small number of them have returned to Cambodia. If, on the other hand, a large number of them have returned, the two countries will have to resolve the issue of how to handle their status and their Cambodian citizenship. The line of argumentation pursued in this context is based on notions that those ethnic Vietnamese who can legitimately claim to be Cambodian citizens should be recognised as such. It should not be understood as claiming that only ethnic Vietnamese from the pre-1970s can legitimately claim to be Cambodian citizens.<sup>148</sup>

---

<sup>148</sup> The issue of citizenship is analysed in details by Nguyen and Sperfeldt, *A Boat Without Anchors* and by Ehrentraut, "Perpetually temporary," pp. 779–798.



## Conclusion

The ethnic Chinese in Vietnam were subjected to discriminatory policies in the late 1970s; thereafter, a slow process of reintegration took place. This process gained momentum in the 1990s and by the middle of the decade the reintegration process was officially finalized with the adoption of new CPV and Government decrees in 1995 and 1996, respectively. The impact of three combined factors—socialist transformation, deteriorating relations with China, and increasingly discriminatory policies—led to the mass migration of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam in the late 1970s. Despite the changes in policies, the ethnic Chinese have continued to diminish in numbers due mainly to legal migration during the last three decades. The legal status of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam is not in doubt: the members of the Hoa ethnic group are considered to be Vietnamese citizens. In fact, the Vietnamese authorities have considered the members of the Hoa ethnic group to be Vietnamese citizens throughout the studied period. The latter is important in order to understand why there has been such an emphasis on a formal process of reintegration of the ethnic Chinese into Vietnamese society involving political processes both within the CPV and different levels of administration up to government-level.

The reintegration has been an internal Vietnamese process, which of course involved a shift in policies directly aimed at the ethnic Chinese, coupled with changes in economic policies through the process of “renovation.” However, the China connection still played a role, although it gradually decreased in relevance in influencing Vietnam’s policies toward the ethnic Chinese. The fact that in 1991 the CPV identified that the ethnic Chinese could help “cultivate friendly relations between the peoples of Vietnam and China,” should be understood as the ethnic Chinese being able to make a positive contribution. It does not imply Vietnam pursued a policy of gradual re-integration of the ethnic Chinese in order to show goodwill toward China. The re-integration was primarily motivated by domestic factors and needs.

The gradual normalization of relations followed by the full normalization of relations with China in 1991 removed one of the major factors in the dramatic developments of the late 1970s, namely the deepening dispute

between the two countries and the negative repercussions on the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. Improved and normalized inter-state relations also implied that the ethnic Chinese had ceased to be an issue of contention between the two countries, which, in turn, also had a positive effect on the situation of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam.

The case of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia displays an inter-state dimension through the importance played by Cambodian perceptions of Vietnam and of relations between Cambodia and Vietnam in shaping Cambodia's policies toward the ethnic Vietnamese in the country. This situation, coupled with political competition and crisis in Cambodia, have had far-reaching negative repercussions on the situation of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. The negative impact on the ethnic Vietnamese can be seen from the de facto elimination of the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia in the 1970s, through state-sponsored attacks in 1970 causing a large-scale exodus to Vietnam, and the expulsion of the vast majority of the remaining ethnic Vietnamese from Cambodia in 1975. In the 1980s many ethnic Vietnamese returned to Cambodia. Politically motivated armed attacks on ethnic Vietnamese were carried out on a number of occasions in the 1990s by the PDK. These attacks posed a real threat to the Vietnamese community at large. Although lethal attacks ceased in the early 2000s, the legal status of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia is still unclear. In addition, during periods of political competition the ethnic Vietnamese are often targeted by anti-Vietnam rhetoric, as was displayed following the contested 1998 national elections and also following the contested 2013 national elections in Cambodia. The lack of integration into Cambodian society, the targeting of the ethnic Vietnamese in times of political competition, and the targeting of the minority in times of bad relations with Vietnam create a very vulnerable situation for the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, who therefore remain a minority at risk.

The case of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia displays that relations between Cambodia and Vietnam are indeed important since deteriorating relations fuel anti-Vietnamese sentiments and policies in Cambodia, thus affecting the ethnic Vietnamese in that country. On the other hand, anti-Vietnamese sentiments exist even when relations between Cambodia and Vietnam are relatively normal; and thus the ethnic Vietnamese can be targeted even when there is no inter-state tension between the two countries.

In sum, the study displays that foreign relations matter in the context of the fate of ethnic minorities, in particular when the minority lives in a country bordering their country of origin. Both of the studied cases provide empirical evidence to support such a general observation. Domestic policies are also important in relation to deteriorating inter-state relations, since discriminatory policies toward the ethnic minorities combined with worsening relations caused large-scale migrations from both Vietnam and Cambodia in the 1970s.

The main difference between the two cases lies in the elite perception of the ethnic minority. Vietnam's basic policy is that the ethnic Chinese are Vietnamese citizens and that they should be fully integrated into Vietnamese society, while in Cambodia the status of the ethnic Vietnamese is still one of statelessness with integration not having taken place. In this context, therefore, elite perceptions are important—as evidenced by the anti-Vietnam sentiments of parts of the Cambodian elite, which are projected against the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. A lesson from both two cases is that domestic policy choices and elite perceptions are thus also crucial for the situation of ethnic minorities.

## About the Author

Ramses Amer is Associate Professor and PhD in Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. He is Associated Fellow at the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Sweden. His major areas of research include security issues and conflict resolution in Southeast Asia and the wider Pacific Asia as well as the role of the United Nations in the international system. His most recent book is *The Security-Development Nexus: Peace, Conflict and Development* (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2012) co-edited with Ashok Swain and Joakim Öjendal. He has written widely on his areas of expertise including contributing to international journals and books. He can be contacted at the following email address: [ramsesamer@gmail.com](mailto:ramsesamer@gmail.com).