

The Vietnamese Question: Multidisciplinary perspectives on the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia

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Vietnamese communities have been residing in Cambodia from the 17th Century, migrating over various waves since then. Historically the Mekong Delta region has been an important space of national contestation, with what is known as 'Kampuchea Krom' now within the border of South Vietnam. In addition to territorial disputes, Vietnamese workers were privileged over the Khmer in administrative roles during the French protectorate. Successive ethno-nationalist leaders of Cambodia from Sihanouk to Pol Pot have represented the Vietnamese, living both within and outside the border, as a political and territorial threat. Literature that explores the experience of the Vietnamese at these historical junctures has detailed the restrictive, violent discrimination, and xenophobic attitudes towards Cambodia's largest minority group. Land concessions to Vietnamese firms and the steady influx of illegal immigrants during the rule of Hun Sen have added to the fear of 'subtle invasion', and the negative perception of Vietnam and the Vietnamese. At the same time, research investigating the complexity and nuances of being Vietnamese in modern-day Cambodia is thin on the ground.

This multidisciplinary panel contributes to the existing literature on this politically controversial topic by addressing the lived experience of Cambodia's Vietnamese through historical, legal, political and anthropological lenses. We seek to identify a range of issues that constitute the problematic contemporary situation of Vietnamese minorities in Cambodia, including questions of contested identity and ethnicity, the dilemma of statelessness, or the impact of political manoeuvring in the national and regional arena.