



សាកលវិទ្យាល័យកម្ពុជា
THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBODIA

UC OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES



Volume 1
Issue 2

The University of Cambodia Press
September 2017

To cite this article:

Heng, K., & Po, S. (2017). Cambodia and China's Belt and Road Initiative: Opportunities, challenges and future directions. *UC Occasional Paper Series, 1(2)*, 1-18.

Cambodia and China's Belt and Road Initiative: Opportunities, Challenges and Future Directions

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Abstract

This article analyzes opportunities and challenges for Cambodia as it embraces China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This paper observes that Cambodia can benefit enormously from this highly ambitious Chinese initiative in such areas as physical infrastructure development, foreign direct investment, economic development and integration, regional and international linkages, people-to-people exchanges, bilateral and multilateral ties, and national and international connectivity. However, this paper also argues that Cambodia is facing a number of major challenges which need to be addressed if the country wishes to reap as many benefits as it can from the BRI. Key challenges for Cambodia include, but are not limited to, the possibility of falling into the Chinese debt trap and China's sphere of influence, environmental degradation, lack of independent foreign policy decisions, and the follow-on probability of having strained relations with the US and ASEAN fellow countries. This paper concludes by discussing future directions Cambodia should take to enhance long-term prospects for economic, social and national development whilst enthusiastically accepting China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative; Cambodia-China relations; Cambodia and the BRI

I. Introduction

Cambodia has enjoyed an average 7% annual economic growth over the last two decades. This has transformed Cambodia from a low income to a lower-middle income country, with per capita income increased from below US\$500 in the early 2000s to US\$1,163 in 2015 and US\$1,269 in 2016 (World Bank, 2017). Should this positive trend continue, the kingdom will become an upper-income or high income country in the next few decades. In addition to its outstanding economic success, Cambodia is seen to have generally good relations with its close neighbors, ASEAN counterparts, and major powers, particularly China, although its relations with Thailand and Vietnam have been strained over border issues. Cambodia's relationship with the world's most populous country, however, could not be better. Cambodia has been viewed as one of the most reliable friends of China, while China is Cambodia's most generous economic and military benefactor.

Cambodia-China long-term relations have recently been strengthened. On the one hand, Cambodia has been strongly supportive of China on the regional and international stage, as seen in 2012 when Cambodia blocked an ASEAN joint communiqué for the first time in ASEAN's 45-year history in favor of China over the South China Sea issue. Cambodia has also been in full support of many Chinese initiatives, including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. On the other hand, China has recognized ongoing support by Cambodia and has awarded this small state millions of US dollars each year through its unconditional aid and loans. In particular, China has greatly contributed to Cambodia's infrastructure development, economic growth and improved foreign direct investment and trade.

Taking the mutually beneficial Sino-Cambodian bilateral ties and the launching of China's OBOR initiative into account, this paper aims at offering an analysis of opportunities and challenges for Cambodia as it embraces OBOR. Although it is obvious that Cambodia is going to greatly benefit from this ambitious Chinese initiative, this paper argues that Cambodia is also going to face a number of challenges which need to be tackled if the country wishes to reap as many benefits as it can from the OBOR. Accordingly, this paper will discuss future directions for Cambodia so that the country can take full advantage of the OBOR initiative as it is beginning to take shape.

II. What is the Belt and Road Initiative?

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR), is China's highly ambitious development project aimed at resurrecting the Chinese ancient Silk Road and realizing the Chinese dream. Launched in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping, the OBOR is a short term for the Silk Road Economic Belt (One Belt) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (One Road). Since its inception, this initiative, supported by the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), has become the centerpiece of China's economic, cultural and strategic diplomacy under Xi Jinping and has the potential to shape the global economic order.

Regarded as China's grand strategy for the 21st century, the BRI is aimed at connecting China and the rest of the world with a network of roads, high-speed rail, power lines, ports, pipelines, and other infrastructure networks. The project also seeks to foster five key cooperation areas, including policy coordination, connectivity, trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds (Chheang, 2017a). Moreover, it is based on three key pillars, such as utilizing industrial capacity, nurturing a network of economic interdependence, and fostering regional stability and prosperity (Wijaya, 2016). It is envisioned that the BRI, supported by more than 60 countries across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa, will include a population of over 4 billion people and account for one-third of the world's gross domestic product (Fallon, 2015).

Although it has attracted a lot of attention in the economic and political world, the BRI has been both positively and negatively perceived. To some, this Chinese project is China's strategic plan to dominate the world and therefore it is a threat to the liberal Western global order. For others, the BRI is a welcoming project which will promote regional and intercontinental connectivity between China and Eurasia. According to Copper (2017), major opponents of BRI are the former Obama administration, the Western media, Europe, India, and possibly Japan, whereas main supporters of BRI include the Trump administration, Russia, many developing countries, and countries along the two routes of the Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road.

As a strong supporter of the BRI, Cambodia stands to gain immense economic benefits. According to Chheang (2017b), the BRI offers Cambodia great opportunities to drive its economic development so that it can catch up

with other countries in the region. Moreover, as it is complementary to Cambodia's national development strategy, the BRI will help Cambodia to realize its vision to become a middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050. Although economic gains for Cambodia seem to prevail, the BRI is also raising concerns among critics. There are pressing issues related to China's growing influence in Cambodia, Chinese exploitation of Cambodia's natural resources, and other social and human rights issues arising from Chinese aid and investment. In what follows, this paper will address in detail opportunities and challenges for Cambodia as it embraces President Xi Jinping's "project of the century".

III. The BRI and Opportunities for Cambodia

The BRI presents many potential opportunities for Cambodia. An obvious advantage for Cambodia is a substantial improvement to its physical infrastructure. As quoted in the *Khmer Times* (2016), the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation issued the Transport Master Plan, estimating that Cambodia will need USD 9 billion by 2020 to build 850-kilometre expressways and USD 26 billion to build 2230-kilometre expressways by 2040. By embracing the BRI, Cambodia will be able to access the massive infrastructure fund provided by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The country is more likely to have access to other infrastructure loans, supported by such Chinese institutions as the Export-Import Bank of China, the China Development Bank and the Silk Road Fund.

To fund these extremely ambitious infrastructure projects involving 65 countries in Asia and beyond, President Xi Jinping pledged USD 79.4 billion in the Belt and Road Forum in May 2017. These investment plans could be worth as much as USD 502 billion, as estimated by Credit Suisse Group AG in *Bloomberg* (Burgess & Foley, 2017). However, Tom Miller in his new book *China's Asian dream: Empire along the new Silk Road*, argued that these funding sources are just a small proportion compared to China's investment to buttress its infrastructure diplomacy (Miller, 2017). This argument appears to be valid because of the massive inflow of Chinese economic assistance into Cambodia, as well as other countries, that existed even before the launch of the BRI.

Moreover, under the framework of the BRI, Cambodia and China have agreed on several infrastructure projects, with China pledging to offer a USD 2 billion supporting fund (Sum, 2016). Seven major bridges have been built,

one of which is named “Cambodia-China Friendship Bridge” crossing the Mekong River. Another bridge linking Steng Trang district to Krouch Chmar is being constructed, while the first 190-kilometre expressway connecting the capital Phnom Penh to the coastal Sihanoukville in the southwest is also in progress, all of which are facilitated by Chinese economic and technical assistance (Sum, 2016). The Cambodian government has also signed an agreement with Yunnan Investment Holdings, China’s state-run enterprise, to build a new airport 30 km outside of the Siem Reap town at a cost of USD 880 million (Gaudemar & Cheng, 2017). Also within the BRI framework, China has proposed several railway infrastructure developments and renovation projects. Some of these are (1) the 405-km-long railway stretching from Preah Vihear province through the southern provinces of Kampong Thom, Kampong Chhang, and Kampong Speu to Koh Kong province, (2) the rail link between Phnom Penh and Preah Sihanouk province, (3) between Phnom Penh and Poipet and Thailand, (4) between Phnom Penh and Snoul and Vietnam, and (5) between Phnom Penh and Phnom Penh Autonomous Port (de Carteret, 2014; Rose, 2017). All of these physical infrastructures will enhance connectivity and promote people-to-people exchanges in Cambodia and in the region.

In addition, the BRI will help Cambodia improve its electricity generation infrastructure that is required to drive Cambodia’s social and economic development. China has done a great job in fulfilling Cambodia’s needs of power supplies through construction of hydropower dams, several of which are already in operation. Kemchay Dam, for example, was constructed in 2016 with Chinese assistance, and possesses an electricity capacity of 194 megawatts, covering a vast area of the country such as Kompot and Takeo province. The biggest hydropower dam, called Lower Sesan II Hydropower Plant, is located in Cambodia’s northern Stung Treng province. This USD 928 million plant is a joint venture between China’s Hydrolancang International Energy, Cambodia’s Royal Group and Vietnamese EVN International Joint Stock Company, each of which own 51 percent, 39 percent and 10 percent, respectively. When fully operational, this power plant is expected to generate 400 megawatts per hour at the fixed price of 6.95 cents per kilowatt-hour (Chea, 2016). Ratanak Keo, the current president of Cambodia’s Electricity Authority, stated that due to the increasing number of plants to generate electricity, Cambodia would have more stable supplies of power, contributing to creating more job opportunities and improving people’s daily lives (Chea, 2016).

In addition to the infrastructure development projects discussed above, Cambodia and China, through the Belt and Road Initiative, have also focused on constructing Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and ports. Cambodia's largest special economic zone, Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone (SSEZ), which was established in 2008 even before the official launch of the BRI, will greatly benefit from this Chinese grand project because it provides a platform for cooperation between the two countries. This cooperation has immensely benefited Cambodia's developing economy and will also help Cambodia achieve its industry development goals, as set out in its Industrial Development Policy 2015-2025. Moreover, to further facilitate the smooth operation of SSEZ, China has also assisted Cambodia to upgrade its deep water Sihanouk Autonomous Port. This port could serve as a "string of pearls" as China aims at exerting its influence in the Asia Pacific region and extending it to the Middle East. The string of pearls under Chinese leadership extends across the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Pakistan's Gwadar Port, and in islands within the Arabian Sea and into the Persian Gulf (Kaplan, 2013). In light of this, Cambodia will no doubt be able to significantly benefit from this massive maritime trade route.

The BRI will enable Cambodia to accelerate its economic integration into the region and the wider world. Since the BRI is comprised of both land and sea routes that span 65 countries, Cambodia is very likely to improve its regional and international economic integration by acting as a connecting point along the route between China and the rest of world. It is worth noting that China remains the biggest investor, trading partner and aid provider of Cambodia. The bilateral trade volume between Cambodia and China has augmented rapidly, on average 26% annually for the past 10 years, rising to USD 4.8 billion with Cambodia's exports to China valued around USD 830 million and imports from China valued at USD 3.9 billion (May, 2017a). The Chinese investments in Cambodia mainly go to the manufacturing, construction, textile, and power sectors. Up until 2017, Cambodia has received approximately USD 4.2 billion of China's Official Development Assistance in the form of grants and loans; the development assistance has targeted physical infrastructures, agriculture, health and education.

In addition, there are many more development projects to be undertaken under the BRI framework. During his remarks at the 2017 Cambodia-China Trade and Tourism Promotion Forum, for example, Prime Minister Hun Sen reiterated that Cambodia and China have agreed on establishing a Cambodia-China Cultural Village in Beijing and opening Cambodia's Trade

Center in certain provinces of China to promote mutual exchanges of culture, trade, and information for the benefit of Chinese people, traders and investors (Office of the Council of Ministers, 2017). The Cambodian Prime Minister also stated that the fundamental purpose of these Cultural Villages and Trade Centers is to exhibit samples of Cambodian products, books and other documents related to trade, tourism, culture and investments in Cambodia (Office of the Council of Ministers, 2017). The Memorandum of Understanding on Enhancing Industrial Investment Cooperation between Cambodia's Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) and China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) was signed to allow both countries to realize maximum mutual benefits and promote investment cooperation on industrial development between both sides (Office of the Council of Ministers, 2017).

In view of these opportunities for Cambodia's current and future development, and regarding this phenomenon as a win-win scenario, both Cambodian politicians and analysts have echoed their appreciation of the BRI. During a press conference at the World Economic Forum on ASEAN in Phnom Penh in mid-2017, Prime Minister Hun Sen praised the initiative and the wisdom of Chinese President Xi Jinping by stating that the AIIB and the Silk Road Fund operating under the BRI would offer alternative sources of capital for many countries, especially the ASEAN countries, for infrastructure connectivity development. The AIIB and other funding sources should not be seen as a challenge to the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, rather as being complementary to fulfill the needs of all countries, especially ASEAN member states, which have so many ideas about connectivity development but face financial constraints to implement these ideas (Rui, 2017).

Similarly, the long-term advisor and the chairman of Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), H.E. Dr. Sok Siphanna, has also underpinned and given his appreciation to the Belt and Road Initiative by opining that while the BRI generally promotes peace and development, the bilateral ties between Cambodia and China would be even stronger in terms of political and economic development (Xinhua, 2017a). In addition, Chheang Vannarith, a prominent Cambodian scholar and co-founder and chairman of the Cambodian Institute for Strategic Studies, also agreed that Cambodia would benefit greatly from the Chinese investment in terms of driving infrastructure development, such as roads, rail, ports and hydropower

plants, and achieving the country's vision to become a middle-income and high-income country by 2030 and 2050 respectively (Xinhua, 2017b).

Thus, it is becoming apparent that the BRI is a welcome infrastructure development project for Cambodia. Therefore, by embracing this large-scale development and connectivity project, Cambodia as a small and developing country will be highly likely to reap considerable benefits, rather than suffering from these Chinese initiatives. As Leng (2017) noted, the rapid growth of the Cambodian economy is to some extent supported by its good relations with China and Chinese assistance.

IV. The BRI and the Challenges for Cambodia

Given the fact that the BRI has demonstrated well-documented opportunities for Cambodia, this vision should not obscure the potential challenges that also exist. One of the obvious pitfalls of Cambodia's embracing of China's BRI could be the phenomenon most analysts have called a "debt trap". This concern is applicable in the context of Cambodia. Early this year, the Ministry of Finance and Economy released the Cambodia Public Debt Statistical Bulletin, describing the country's debt situation. The report notes that the bilateral loans of aggregate USD 5.3 billion, of which USD 3.9 billion is from China, making it the largest creditor, four times more than that of Japan, and Cambodian national debt is about one third of the country's total GDP (Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2017). Despite the debt, Chan Sophal, director of the Center for Policy Studies, commented "the level of debt currently is not a concern if compared to other countries in similar stages of development. With increasing revenue, mobilization and exports, Cambodia's capacity to service debt has also increased significantly" (Kotoski, 2017).

However, drawing on the experience of Sri Lanka, where the Sri Lankan government made up its mind to convert state property into equity to pay off its debt owed to China, as evident in the 99-year leasing of the Hambantota port to China and the granted control of Mattala Airport to Chinese firms, Var and Po (2017a) have warned that Cambodia is likely to move into a similar scenario as its debt continues to rise. Professor Brahma Chellaney, who is usually critical of China, has also argued that with the low-interest loans to countries desperately in need of infrastructure, China is likely to pull those countries into its economic and security sphere (Chellaney, 2017), epitomizing the fact that, while China has acquired several ports in Greece,

Seychelles, Djibouti, and Pakistan on purely commercial grounds, there is a direct link to Chinese military expansion (Chellaney, 2017). Such awareness should ring alarm bells in Cambodia about being extremely cautious in dealing with Chinese loans.

Another challenge is related to environmental impacts related to Chinese investments in hydropower dams. Radio Free Asia reported that the first major hydropower Kamchay Dam built by China's Sinohydro Corporation had flooded 2000 hectares of Bokor National Park in southern Cambodia's Kampot province, home to several endangered species and an important resource for local communities (San, 2017). In addition, the dam construction by the Chinese was also accompanied by the forced eviction of local communities. The *South China Morning Post* also reported that nearly 5000 people were liable to be evicted from their local villages when the dam's reservoir fills, and almost 14000 living along the banks of the Sesan and Srepok stand to lose most of the fish they rely on for food (Jing, 2015). However, a senior Cambodian government official rebutted these claims. Sim Vireak, who is First Secretary at the Cambodian embassy in Japan, defended the construction of hydropower dams in a *Phnom Penh Post* article by arguing that no matter how environmentally conscious and technologically advanced a country is, building a hydropower dam without environmental impact is impossible (Sim, 2014). He asked, "If China doesn't invest in hydropower in Cambodia, who will?"

Besides the debt trap and environmental cost, Cambodia's enthusiastic acceptance of the BRI is likely to guarantee that this small state will fall into the Chinese sphere of influence. Cambodia has been criticized for having a less independent foreign policy, a policy largely designed to serve the political and diplomatic interests of China to gain some short-term benefits at the expense of its good relations with its ASEAN counterparts and other regional and global powers in the region and beyond. There are some recent developments in Cambodia's foreign policy that lead many Cambodian and international analysts to perceive that Cambodia is moving into the Chinese sphere of influence. Good examples include the ban on the Taiwan flag being hoisted, the continuous support towards China's position on the South China Sea issue, the cancelation of the Seabee program, also known as the UN Navy Mobile Construction Battalion, and the delay of the Angkor Sentinel, a joint military exercise between Cambodia and the US (Var & Po, 2017b).

Furthermore, considering bilateral relations between Cambodia and the US under the Sinocentric world, Carl A. Thayer, emeritus professor at the University of New South Wales, argues that Chinese support will buffer Cambodia under Prime Minister Hun Sen's leadership against domestic pressure by civil society groups and external pressure from the US to address inadequacies of democratic and human rights issues (Thayer, 2012). Such action has led former US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton to advise Cambodia not to be too dependent on any country. Therefore, Cambodia must raise important matters related to the Mekong issues with China (Pomfret, 2010). However, Bae and Kim (2014) argue that such a pattern will be likely to continue even without Chinese assistance.

Many scholars also believe that Cambodian actions to underpin China's position on the South China Sea have called into question ASEAN centrality. Through its decision not to issue the joint communiqué in 2012 when it was the chairman of ASEAN and not to agree upon the strong words in the ASEAN joint communiqué in 2016, Cambodia has undermined the relevance of ASEAN. Moreover, during the ASEAN Ministers' Meeting early August 2017, the perception has arisen that Cambodia is acting on China's behalf. This perception arose following Cambodia having sought alterations to the wording of the final ministerial statement on the section on North Korea - this is because China is viewed as North Korea's most influential neighbor and trading partner (Calla, 2017). Terence Chong, deputy director at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, pointed out that the reason is because Cambodia sees no practical use for the regional grouping, evidenced by the country's conflict with Thailand over the Preah Vihear temple several years ago (Chong, 2017).

All in all, as Var (2016) argues, Chinese engagement in Cambodia presents both opportunities and challenges. As discussed above, major benefits include physical infrastructure development, substantial foreign direct investment, economic development and integration, and enhanced regional and international linkages, whereas key challenges for Cambodia are the possibility of falling into the Chinese debt trap, the formulation of foreign policy to favor the diplomatic interests of China, and the deterioration of its relations with its ASEAN fellow states and other countries, particularly the US and US allies.

The following section will discuss future directions that Cambodia should take in order to enhance long-term prospects for economic, social and national development while embracing the BRI.

V. The BRI and the Way Forward for Cambodia

To reap maximum benefits from this highly ambitious infrastructure development and investment initiative, Cambodia needs to work to expedite its reform processes and ensure its political stability. First and foremost, Cambodia must make sure its 2018 national election will not scare investors too much. Reports have shown a noticeable drop in real estate investment over the first quarter of 2017 prior to the Cambodian commune election in June this year and the much-anticipated and much-feared national election in July next year (May, 2017b). Should something go wrong, say, a civil war as frequently warned by Prime Minister Hun Sen, Cambodia will be at a disadvantage and lose out on what the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative has to offer, not to mention other investment prospects.

Second, Cambodia has to continue to fully address many burning social issues ranging from corruption to nepotism and impunity to social injustice. Although China's aid and loans have often arrived in Cambodia in a no-strings-attached fashion and this practice is most unlikely to cease anytime soon, it is imperative that the Cambodian government be willing to tackle the issues head-on if it wishes to see and enjoy real economic prosperity throughout the country. With corruption and other contentious issues still looming large, perhaps it could be that Cambodia will seriously lag behind its neighboring countries in terms of economic growth, public engagement and trust, social solidarity, and national reputation on the global stage. In this respect, the exciting prospects of China's OBOR initiative would be challenged, if not diminished.

Third, Cambodia would stand to lose if it does not begin to aggressively and heavily invest in building its human capital. Having been the unfortunate victim of genocide for nearly four years from 1975 to 1979, followed by the Vietnamese occupation and protracted civil war, this war-torn country has begun its national restoration process from scratch as almost all of its intellectuals were liquidated or forced to flee the country. Although remarkable improvement has been made to its human resources over the past decades, Cambodia is still facing serious challenges regarding its skilled labor force. The lack of skilled labor could translate into employing foreign

professionals or technicians for high-paying jobs, while many Cambodian workers perform the unskilled ones. Thus, Cambodia would not be able to derive benefits as substantial as it should from China's 'project of the century'.

Fourth and importantly, Cambodia has to seek to diversify its foreign policy to avoid falling completely within the Chinese sphere of influence. Jumping on the Chinese bandwagon at the expense of its relations with its Southeast Asian neighbors and the US as well as the US allies would definitely not be the best option for Cambodia, although China is Cambodia's largest foreign investor and its most generous economic and military supporter (Va, 2017). An option for Cambodia to ensure its prosperity, sovereignty, and foreign policy autonomy could be to enhance its relations with all the countries in the region and beyond. If Cambodia does not adopt an omnidirectional foreign policy – making as many friends as possible – this small state would risk losing its independent foreign policy to China and become a true Chinese patron. Thus, it is vitally important for Cambodia to restrain itself from alienating others while relying solely on China's unconditional aid and loans. This Chinese inclination may seem effective in the short term, but it would not be beneficial for the country in the long run.

Finally, in addition to ensuring political stability, tackling critical social issues, building up human resources, and forging flexible self-reliant foreign policy, Cambodia has to take its relationship with its ASEAN counterparts seriously and do whatever it possibly can to enhance ASEAN unity and centrality. As a member of ASEAN, Cambodia has garnered great economic and geopolitical benefits from this regional organization. Cambodia's value and leverage ability are enhanced, Mahbubani and Sng argue, with its current ASEAN membership, without which this small state would be less capable, if not incapable, of taking advantage of its geopolitics and ASEAN privilege (Mahbubani & Sng, 2017). In this regard, Cambodia not only needs to settle its domestic affairs but also improve its foreign policy by fostering good relations with its neighboring countries and strengthening its role and relevance in ASEAN.

VI. Conclusion

It is undeniably true that Cambodia-China relations have gone a long way, dating back more than two thousand years, and therefore both countries have regarded each other as "close friends," at least from the Cambodian side.

The fact that Cambodia chooses to bandwagon with China should be seen as a common form of Cambodia's diplomatic behavior (Leng, 2017). As a small state in its developing stage, Cambodia is in desperate need of support and investment from all corners of the world. Embracing the BRI is apparently and rightly what Cambodia should do as the project aligns with the kingdom's national development strategy, in particular, the Rectangular Strategy and the Industrial Development Strategy 2015-2025. In this regard, the BRI is a grand development plan Cambodia can take advantage of to realize its national aspirations to become a middle-income and high-income country in the next few decades.

However, Cambodia's total acceptance of China's Belt and Road Initiative can be a mixed blessing, considering a strong likelihood that Cambodia may fall into the Chinese debt trap and China's sphere of influence. In addition, Chinese investments and development assistance, outside or inside the BRI framework, which very often target the few Cambodian elites, not the general public, may facilitate corruption and nepotism, further the exploitation of natural resources, and worsen human rights records in Cambodia. More importantly, as Cambodia enthusiastically supports China's BRI and continue to receive China's "no string attached" aid and loans, its foreign policy will be undermined and formulated in favor of China's broader interests and influence in the regional and international arena.

Recognizing these challenges, this paper recommends that Cambodia actively engage in its many reform agendas, including legal, educational and health reforms, preserve and enhance political unity and stability, strive to resolve key domestic issues, strengthen human resources, and pursue independent foreign policy. To move forward and remain relevant in the Southeast Asian region, the wider Asia-Pacific region, and the global community, Cambodia needs to enhance its relations with countries in ASEAN and work hard to foster ASEAN unity and centrality, while also adopting a pragmatic open-door foreign policy – making as many friends as it possibly can.

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