

Violence and Resistance in the Context of Land Grab in Present-day Cambodia

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Land grabs occurred in many places in Cambodia since early 2000s. Following the end of armed conflicts with resistance groups in late 1990s, the Cambodian government adopted 'neoliberal' economic strategy in order to promote 'market activities' with an expectation for faster growth and development in the country. Land, then, has become the 'primary means' of the government to attract foreign direct investment and local business people to invest in agro-industries, real estates, constructions of hotels, resorts and ports. Land concession and many forms of incentives were launched in following years. Rampant land grabs also started to occur since then. For about fifteen years, a large number of people lost homes and farms – the only things they have owned since the fall of the Pol Pot's regime of "*Killing Fields*" in

1979. As observed, this becomes one of the root causes of poverty in the country today, resulting in mass migration of villagers from their birth places to look for jobs in cities and other countries in the region. Despite many legal complaints and protest actions against violations and evictions of people (from their lands, their homes and farms) have been conducted by affected people and many Cambodian general public, but no real solutions have been provided for the victims. Although a 'land law' was made in 2001, a 'sub-decree of state land management' was passed in 2005, and a committee was created in the same year to deal with land disputes for the people, but land grabs and violent disputes still exist in a large scale. The aim of my paper is to explore the recent phenomenon of land grab in Cambodia. It seeks to answer two main questions: 1) how the land was grabbed? What makes it possible for the land to be grabbed? 2) How do people resist against the violations? This part will also examine 'what are the consequences of their resistance'? This paper bases on data I collected from fieldwork interviews with people in different affected communities since 2009. It also bases on documentary data, and my personal observations, discussions and exchanges with different scholars and researchers in a number of workshops and conferences on land issues in Cambodia since 2005.

Sreang Heng is a Cambodian scholar and writer, who worked as a university lecturer in Cambodia since 2004. Sreang has research interests both in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences. Over the years, Sreang has authored several academic articles relating to 'Justice in Cambodia', 'Buddhist Monks' Participation in Social and Political Affairs in Cambodia', and 'Influence of Korean Pop Culture on Cambodian Society today'. Since 2009, he has carried out an independent research project looking into 'politics of land concessions and economic development in Cambodia' focusing mainly on how deforestations and land clearances affect Cambodia in the long run. And he recently started a research into 'Cambodian diaspora communities in the US' focusing mainly on their social and political activities in the reconstruction of their homeland following the end of civil war in early 1990s.

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