An Investigation of Conflict Management in Cambodian Villages

A Review of the Literature with Suggestions for Future Research

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Contents

Abstract

This literature review sets out a conceptual framework for the investigation of conflict management in Cambodian villages, and gives suggestions for further research. It places the study of conflict and conflict management in the framework of ideas of a "culture of peace", and argues that this requires examining questions of both active procedures (agency) and their context (structure) in responses to conflict.

Understanding the historical role of the Cambodian village in resolving conflict is limited by the lack of anthropological data from the pre-war years. In addition, the only study to date on dispute resolution in Cambodian villages focuses on agents and agencies, but says little about structures for conflict management. The present paper also highlights the need to understand the broader patterns of relationships which dispose a community towards particular forms of conflict and the cultural norms that influence approaches to conflict and conflict management. Taking such a broader view suggests an approach to the study of conflict management that addresses not only actions explicitly designed to resolve disputes, but also activities that structure relations between villagers, and which thus give conflict management processes force and legitimacy in their eyes.

This approach requires examination of the way that villagers view their own position in the village and their relationships with other villagers. Habits and customs structure the individual's conception of appropriate behaviour towards others in the village, important relationships that must be preserved, sources of authority that must be respected, and the boundaries between what can and cannot be tolerated by the individual or by the group. This is the conceptual framework within which the individual conducts conflicts with others, and the community conducts conflict management.

Relationships between villagers can be understood within a structural framework of class and gender relations, within which individuals pursue strategies to secure their welfare. These strategies can be viewed as a series of investments in economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. The nature and distribution of these are determined, in turn, by cultural factors, including concepts of rightfulness and of legitimate authority.

A study of individual and group investments in these various kinds of assets contributes to the understanding of a culture of peace, while addressing questions both of structure and agency.

Traditionally, the economic well-being of individuals in a small community depends less on impersonal market relations than upon personal relations of status and trust within the village. An investigation of community relations using the conceptual framework outlined, then, focuses on individual strategies in the context of community norms governing the award of status and respect. These apply both to parties in conflict and to conflict managers, awarding them particular resources that can be expended or invested in during conflicts.

The "flexibility" of a power structure based upon personal attributes and identity, rather than upon materially-based and codified institutions also has consequences for the ways in

which villages manage conflict. Impersonal and external methods of social control, such as the rule of law, are still underdeveloped in Cambodian society, and at the same time Cambodian villages continue to undergo changes in response to the impacts of war, state-building, capitalist penetration, democratisation and the increasing spread of national and international media. These developments are likely to bring further adjustments to the social and symbolic structure of the rural village in their wake. Equally, there is a self-conscious effort going on in Cambodia at present to reconceptualise notions of right, informed by Buddhist teachings as well as by Western liberal values such as human rights. These represent part of a movement to rebuild the moral basis of Cambodian society.

Appreciation of the way in which such change is being absorbed by the village is likely to be a key explanatory factor in understanding both the causes of present-day conflict and the success or otherwise of locally practised conflict management.

An Investigation of Conflict Management in Cambodian Villages

The investigation of conflict management in Cambodian villages presents a number of conceptual problems. Firstly, the kinds of responses and attitudes to conflict that can be suitably regarded as "conflict management" must be established. This needs to be informed by a working definition of "conflict." Secondly, the investigation of conflict management at this level presumes that the village is a meaningful site for conflict management, and would be recognised as such by villagers. This is a presupposition that requires examination and reformulation in the context of the changes that are currently affecting Cambodia as a nation.

A. Defining Conflict and Conflict Management

1. Conflict Management

This study investigates conflict management in order to shed light on the underpinnings of the UNESCO concept of a "culture of peace" as it might manifest itself in Cambodian villages. Such an orientation suggests that the definition of "conflict management" must incorporate two aspects. Firstly, it must include the implementation of active processes for adjudicating disputes, often by institutions or agencies of state. Secondly, and importantly, it must also include the functioning of cultural norms to regulate attitudes to conflict and conflict resolution. Thus a handbook on dispute resolution compiled by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights Field Office in Cambodia comments:

> Dispute management processes are not simply "products" to be taken off a shelf and conveniently employed where necessary. Disputes and dispute management processes must be seen as essentially intertwined. They reflect the nature of the social interactions in the dispute itself, especially in regard to the power relations between the various participants.[1]

This second aspect of conflict management creates more problems for the researcher. The functioning of active processes, particularly public ones, is visible and easily articulated. However, the cultural norms that underpin such processes are more difficult to observe and describe, because such norms are frequently taken for granted, as a part of the natural environment, by those who live by them. Investigation into the workings of these forms of conflict management requires distinguishing between *structure* and *agency* in the context of Cambodian villages.

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1. Cambodian Field Office of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights (undated), *Mediating Public Issue Disputes: Managing Land Disputes in Cambodia, Resource Notes in English and Khmer* (Phnom Penh: UNCHR) p. 16

The attachment of conflict management to the development of a "culture of peace" also suggests that conflict management processes generate stable outcomes, conducive to community harmony. With regard to outcome, four forms of conflict management can be distinguished, which comprise different mixes of active and passive response:

- *conflict escalation*, in which conflicts become increasingly confrontational and the possibility of violence increases;
- *conflict avoidance*, in which the cause of conflict remains, and, perhaps, festers, but where one or both sides are unwilling to risk a confrontation;
- *conflict dissipation*, in which one or both sides is unwilling to risk a confrontation and in which, over time, the conflict gradually comes to be viewed as less important, either because of changes in other aspects of the relationship between the parties or because of changes of context;
- *conflict resolution*, in which a series of active steps are taken to find a mutually-acceptable solution and an authoritative outcome.

Conflict escalation represents a form of response to conflict that is clearly not conducive to peace and harmony, and consequently will be considered here as a failure of conflict management. Conflict resolution represents an easily-observable success. The passive aspects of conflict dissipation and, particularly, conflict avoidance are more difficult to research, because they are examples of inaction rather than of action.

It is particularly important to distinguish between conflict dissipation and conflict avoidance, because conflict dissipation represents a successful form of conflict management, whereas conflict avoidance does not. Avoidance in public is often accompanied by what James Scott describes as "routine" or "symbolic resistance." Scott's study of a village in Malaysia documents such "routine resistance" in the relations between rich and poor during a time of economic change.

These forms of resistance are difficult to see. Scott points out that the nature of power relations between the rich and the poor force the poor to keep their resistance hidden much of the time. He comments:

> *That the poor should dissemble in the face of power is hardly an occasion for surprise. Dissimulation is the characteristic and necessary pose of subordinate classes everywhere most of the time – a fact that makes those rare and threatening moments when the pose is abandoned all the more remarkable. No close account of the life of the subordinate classes can fail to distinguish between what is said "backstage" and what may be safely declared openly.*[2]

Scott's comment prompts strategic considerations for researchers of conflict. Power relations between parties to conflict significantly construct responses to that conflict. The weaker party, in particular, is likely to avoid open expression of his or her feelings. Scott's study offers a useful template for the research of hidden forms of resistance, although it was carried out in a village which has seen neither the level of conflict nor the extreme disparity in power relations that has been experienced in Cambodian villages in the recent past. In the Cambodian case, the domination of public transcripts of conflict by the powerful is likely to be even more marked.

2. Conflict
Instead of attempting to produce a single definition of conflict here, it is recommended that

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2   James Scott (1985), *Weapons of the Weak, the Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven: Yale UP) p. 284

further research might seek evidence of the various kinds of conflict which are of interest in terms of their relationship to the forms of conflict management defined above. A preliminary typology of such kinds of conflict is as follows:

- *Offences*: instances of apparently one-sided, anti-social behaviour by an individual, which offends against village society (e.g. drunkenness or violent attack).[3]
- *Disputes*: particular limited disagreements between two or more parties (e.g. domestic disputes or land disputes).
- *Conflicts of interest*: ongoing disagreements between two or more parties, in which any outcome would have a clear effect on the material interests of one or both parties (e.g. mutually incompatible uses of shared water resources).
- *Conflicts of identity*: ongoing situations with respect to two or more parties, in which each sees the existence of the other as an affront or a threat (e.g. conflicts between followers of different political parties or between members of different ethnic groups)
- *Factional conflict*: conflict between two or more groups vying for power (e.g. conflict between followers of different candidates in an election)
- *Relations of domination*: situations involving two or more parties, in which both parties recognise that one party has the power to impose his or her will on the other, to the detriment of the weaker party's interests (e.g. imposition of rent increases by landlords on poor tenants).

The last category in the list – relations of domination – comprises the kind of conflict that Scott investigates in his *Weapons of the Weak.* The first six categories comprise more or less open conflicts – the more equal the relations of power between the two parties, the more open the conflict. Again, following Scott, all the types of conflicts to be investigated are recognised in private, even if they are not pursued in public.

B. The Village as a Site for Conflict Management

1. Understandings of Community
A model of conflict management that includes both active procedures (agency) and their cultural context (structure) requires examination of the way that villagers view their own position in the village and their relationships with other villagers.

Anthropologists have long debated the question of whether the Cambodian village should be viewed as a community linked by lines of solidarity, or simply as a collection of individual units grouped together for practical convenience.[4] One researcher, compiling a literature review of French studies of Cambodian village communities, concluded that, "The studies are unanimous in saying that solidarity between villagers doesn't exist. The base of social structure is the family."[5] Other researchers hold a different view. Paul Davenport *et al.* write that, "Though loyalty is firstly to the family, other patterns of friendship and of obligation are seen."[6]

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3 Peter Swift notes that aggressive or anti-social behaviour in Cambodia is often referred to using the same word, *hingsa*, that is used to translate the English word for "violence." Peter Swift (1999), "Violence in Cambodian Villages," unpublished paper (Phnom Penh: Local Capacities for Non-Violence Project, American Friends Service Committee).

4 For a review of this literature see the report on *The Meaning of Community in Cambodia: Literature Reviews, Khmer, French and English Languages* (Phnom Penh: Working Group on Social Organization in Cambodia, May 1999)

5 Ellie Brown, "The Meaning of Community in Cambodia, French Literature Review," *The Meaning of Community, op. cit.*, p.11

6 Paul Davenport et al.(1995), *Vulnerable in the Village, A Study of Returnees in Battambang Province, Cambodia, with a Focus on Strategies for the Landless* (Phnom Penh: LWS, UNHCR and JSRC) p. 63

An emphasis on the common identity of the villagers and the boundaries to the village is useful in considering the ways that villages might sustain structures for conflict management. Jacqueline Scherer comments:

> *A discussion of community evokes considerations of identity, commitment, processes of interaction such as communication and the handling of conflict, and the tension between the person and the larger whole.*[7]

Habits and customs of identity, commitment and interaction are important in structuring village conflict management. Such habits and customs structure the individual's conception of appropriate behaviour towards others in the village, important relationships that must be preserved, sources of authority that must be respected, and the boundaries between what can and cannot be tolerated by the individual or by the group. This is the conceptual framework within which the individual conducts conflicts with others, and the community conducts conflict management.

2. The Nature of Cambodian Villages

The village has long been a key administrative unit in Cambodian society. William Collins suggests that the village is viewed as the civilised domain of human endeavour, in opposition to the uncivilised world of the "forest." This in turn suggests that the village as a unit is important in providing a sense of security for its members.[8]

For these reasons, the village is an important site for dealing with conflict. More resources are available within the village, in the form of respected elders, state appointees, religious advisors, sorcerers and militiamen, than are available within the family. Yet conflict management at this level still takes place below the formal level of codified state practice.

The "flexibility" of a power structure based upon interpersonal understandings of status and identity, rather than upon materially-based and codified institutions has consequences for the ways in which villages manage conflict. In the context of informal social organisation, informal means of conflict management were preferred historically. David Chandler comments on life in Cambodian villages in the 1830s,

> *Quarrels within a village or among neighbours were settled by conciliation rather than by law, and they often smouldered on for years. Villages were usually "ruled" for ceremonial purposes and for the purposes of relations with higher authorities, by elderly men chosen for their agricultural skill, literacy and fair-mindedness.*[9]

This conceptualisation of Cambodian villages at this time accords with later post-independence descriptions in certain respects. The lack of formal institutions of secular authority and the centrality of ritual in community life remains a prominent feature.

An account of village leadership structures and norms of authority in a Cambodian village in the 1950s is offered by May Ebihara. Ebihara describes the political status of the hamlet of West Sobay, part of the village of Sobay, as follows:

> *The hamlet has a degree of political autonomy within Sobay because of its unofficial system of authority, which grants two 'big' men some measure of power to oversee hamlet affairs.*

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7   Jacqueline Scherer (1972), *Contemporary Community: Sociological Illusion or Reality* (London: Tavistock) p3
8   William Collins (undated), *Dynamics of Dispute Resolution and Administration of Justice for Cambodian Villagers* (Phnom Penh: USAID)
9   David Chandler (1993), *A History of Cambodia*, 2nd edn. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm) p.104

Ebihara describes these "big men" as "having exceptionally "good character", sound judgement and strong personalities" and as being "accorded special prestige and some authority in hamlet affairs."[10] The village of Sobay itself has an elected headman and is part of a subdistrict,[11] which also has an elected chief. Ebihara reports that villagers consult the subdistrict chief ,

> *for many legal-administrative concerns: to report births and deaths, to obtain marriage or divorce certificates, to obtain bills of sale for important items of property, to have serious disputes adjudicated, and so on.[12]*

Beyond this level of government, Ebihara reports that "the formal political structure does little to stimulate extravillage contacts." The next layer of local government - the level of district administration - is visited "infrequently" by villagers. Ebihara writes that:

> *this is due partly to the fact that most matters concerning villagers are handled by the subdistrict chief and partly because the district chief and his aides - professional bureaucrats assigned to their posts by the central government - are considered impersonal, aloof, socially superior individuals whom villagers hesitate to approach. By contrast, the subdistrict chief is a fellow peasant elected to his position by the villagers themselves.[13]*

The district chief was considered "a 'big person' (*neak thom*) demanding respect and distance."[14] Consequently, the district office is consulted "only for matters that cannot be resolved at the subdistrict level, just as various offices of the national government in Phnom Penh are visited only as the last and final resort for very serious concerns."[15]

This account reflects the development of a materially-based state during the colonial period, and offers a hierarchy of institutions that can be contacted for assistance in dispute resolution. A grievance procedure for serious disputes that cannot be resolved locally goes all the way to the national government in Phnom Penh. Yet Ebihara emphasises that such official procedures are used only exceptionally. She emphasises the importance of the village in informal dispute resolution, both in terms of providing resources of authority, in the form of respected "big men," and, crucially, norms of behaviour, constructed and circulated by social practices such as gossip and ostracism.

> *In addition informal mechanisms of social control, such as gossip and ostracism, do more to keep people in line than recourse to police or law courts. (Indeed, villagers tend to shun the latter).[16]*

The importance of gossip and ostracism as a sanction in village society is also described by Bit Seanglim, who writes

> *If behaviour does stray from an acceptable pattern, direct action by other members of society is seldom required. Gossip and rumours are used at a social level as an effective and sometimes very destructive means of indicating displeasure with the individual and are a pervasive feature of society, both urban*

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10 Ebihara (1971) "Intervillage, Intertown and Village-City Relations in Cambodia" *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, pp. 360/1

11 'Subdistricts' (*khum*) are more commonly translated in Cambodia today as 'communes'

12 Ebihara, *op. cit.,* p. 364

13 *Ibid.*, p. 366

14 Ebihara (1968), *Svay, a Khmer Village in Cambodia*, Doctoral thesis (Columbia University) p. 512

15 Ebihara "Intervillage," *op. cit.,* p. 366

16 *Ibid.,* p. 370

> *and rural. Informal social interaction may be withdrawn until the subject is able to either refrain from continuing the offending behaviour or show that amends will be made.[17]*

For rice farmers who owned or controlled their own land, at least, constraints on activities were minimal. Vickery comments that village and family organisation in Cambodia, compared to China, Vietnam or India, was "extremely weak." Consequently,

> *Corporate discipline over the individuals by extended families or by village organisation was weak, and once a person had fulfilled his obligations to the state - as a tax or corvee - there was little constraint in his activities. It is thus likely that a paradoxical situation of great anarchic individual freedom prevailed in a society in which there was no formal freedom at all.[18]*

Clearly, there are important divergences in these accounts of pre-war village life. Other accounts of pre-war life also raise questions regarding the level of social control over individual behaviour in the village, and how this control was achieved, suggesting that the source of authority within the family and the nation was not respect, freely given, but fear. Bit Seanglim writes that:

> *Fear exerts an enormous drag on Cambodian culture in stifling initiative to cultural innovation and operates as a primary means of social control. The need to avoid personal risk extends directly to the avoidance of conflict in resolving differences.[19]*

It is significant that Bit does not suggest here that fear has become prevalent in Cambodian society as a product of the war. Rather he suggests that fear is an aspect of his idea of the Cambodian psychological make-up. The reluctance to admit and resolve conflict peacefully that is a consequence of this fear, leads to "use of power" or "splitting off in a new direction or creating a new alliance" in situations of conflict – tactics that contribute to the factionalisation of society and the use of violence.

3. Approaches to Village Conflict Management
The only study to date on village dispute resolution, that conducted by William Collins, centred on the importance of the village chief as a facilitator between villagers in conflict and the lower reaches of the state. Collins reported that villagers and village chiefs alike were very concerned that conflict resolution should stay at the village level, suggesting that the village is a meaningful level of analysis in terms of the villagers' understanding of their own community.

Collins' study of dispute resolution and Carmen-Maria Lopez Vasquez's narrower study of pre-trial dispute resolution[20] offer accounts of processes engaged in by, primarily, village and commune authorities. Collins comments that the process by which a village chief attempts to achieve reconciliation in a dispute was well-known and widely understood by villagers in the villages he studied.

Other scholars suggest that there is "no cultural tradition for reconciling contrary opinions (or even for the acceptance of the existence of contrary opinions). Nor are there any socially-

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17 Bit Seanglim (1991), *The Warrior Heritage, a Psychological Perspective of Cambodian Trauma*, (El Cerrito: Bit Seanglim) p. 73
18 Michael Vickery (1984), *Cambodia 1975-1982* (Boston: Southend Press) p. 13
19 Bit, *op. cit.,* p. 33
20 Carmen-Maria Lopez Vasquez (1996), *Pre-Trial Dispute Resolution Processes,* (Phnom Penh: Court Training Project)

accepted behavioural rules for resolving conflicts."[21] Bit Seanglim comments that, "there is little semblance of a conflict resolution process in Cambodian culture."[22]

In part, this confusion may emerge from different definitions of conflict. Equally, it may reflect different village practices in different eras and areas of the country. Further, it may reflect different understandings of what is meant by a "process." The understanding of process as comprising a degree of formality or requiring a written manifestation may underlie this difference in view.

In order to capture the full range of approaches to conflict management, it is recommended here that "process" be used in the widest sense. Thus processes studied may range from diffuse pressures upon individuals, arising from social processes of gossip and condemnation, to the formal lodging of a complaint with the court, to the use of violence.

William Collins uses the concept of a "village civil society" as a means to explore present-day conflict management processes in Cambodian villages. He defines village society as "a region of social space between the court and the *wat* [pagoda]."[23] From his study of dispute management in this region emerges a repertoire of procedures used by the main resources he identifies – the village chief and the pagoda – to manage conflict within the village.[24]

In using this model, Collins focuses on agents and agencies, but says little about structures for conflict management. While his account of the procedures followed by conflict managers suggests the deployment of symbols and rituals and the invoking of community norms in order to gain the compliance of the parties, his central interest is in active resolution of conflict, rather than a broader view of a "culture of peace." Collins' conception of the village and its conflict management resources might be illustrated as follows:

Conceptualisation of Collins' Model of Village Civil Society
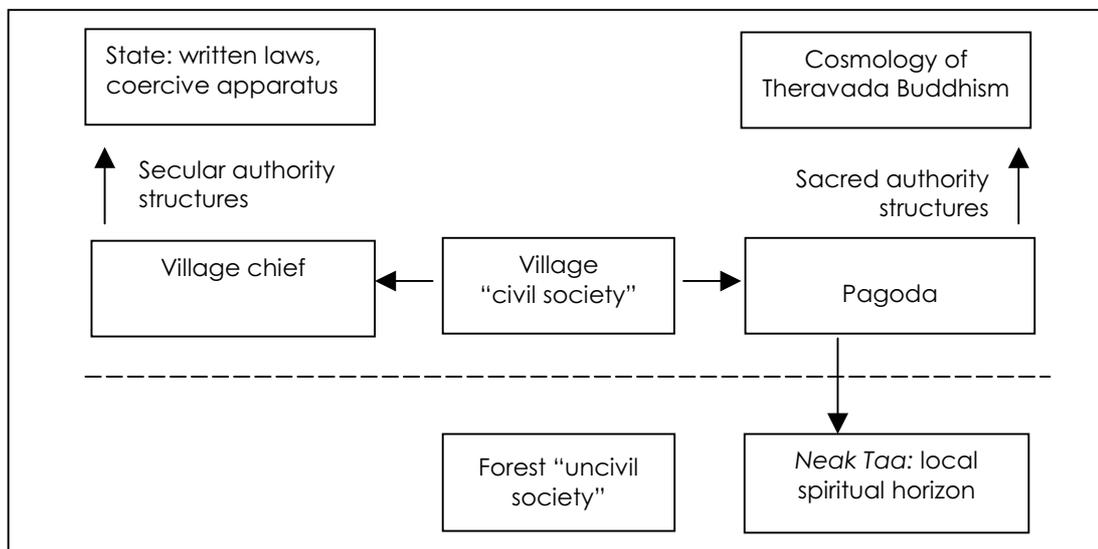
Taking a broader view suggests an approach to the study of conflict management that addresses not only actions explicitly designed to resolve disputes, but also activities that

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21 Jan Ovesen, Ing-Britt Trankell & Joakim Ojendal (1996), *Where Every Household is an Island: Social Organization and Power Structures in Rural Cambodia,* Uppsala Research Reports in Cultural Anthropology No. 15 (Uppsala: University of Uppsala Dept. of Cultural Anthropology) p. 42

22 Bit, *op.cit.*, p. 33

23 Collins, *op.cit.,* p. 6

24 *Ibid.*

operate more broadly to structure relations between villagers, and which thus give conflict management processes their force and legitimacy in the eyes of the villagers. The roles of individuals other than the village chief may be important in this. Collins suggests that religious advisers may have an input into conflict, not through direct efforts to resolve it, but through attempts to influence the attitudes of parties to conflict, and to promote non-violence, compassion and tolerance.

Other actors with specialised roles in the village can also have an impact on the way that individuals perceive their relationships with the rest of the group. These include the so-called *meekyal,* temporary project leaders often associated with the pagoda committee, and *kruu khmer* or traditional healers. One study notes that in the context of traditional medicine,

> *cultural explanations of the causes of illness explains why it is often synonymous with rejection, fear, exclusion and shame, and above all, of "bad karma". This places traditional doctors, the "Kruus," in a strong social position as they have the power to permit to "re-integrate" the victims into society…. The act of treatment is symbolic and takes place in public.*[25]

The use of traditional medicine as a means for correcting relationships between the individual and the community suggests that such practices might also have a bearing on attitudes towards conflict and conflict management.

Furthermore, while productive and useful in the context of a preliminary study, Collins' model is inadequate for a more extensive review of conflict management processes in that the concept of "civil society" is deployed in such a way as to gloss over differences imposed by class, gender or status within the village.

Scott's seminal study of power relations in a village community, *Weapons of the Weak,* is concerned to explicate the hidden tensions between classes in a village undergoing economic change. Scott's study is based in a village in Malaysia, in which open conflict is rare, even though rapid change in agricultural practices has caused a significant shift in relations between rich and poor in the village. In examining why open conflict does not break out, Scott looks at the ways in which the poor, who are the losers in this process of change, are constrained from openly challenging the village order. Scott discovers that a vitally important factor promoting avoidance of conflict is the web of material relations of wealth and dependence between rich and poor villagers. Scott's work, along with the work of Pierre Bourdieu in Algeria, suggests that material needs discourage conflict, because the economic well-being of individuals in a small community depends less on impersonal market relations than upon personal relations of status and trust within the village.

Examples from the literature on Cambodia are useful for understanding this conception of power and community relations. In Collins' study, the village is viewed as isolated from the outside world. The external world is viewed as threatening and competence in dealing with it is viewed as having symbolic, rather than practical importance. He views the intrusion of the outside world, and in particular the intrusion of the state, as providing a symbolic authority to village leaders in their attempts to resolve disputes,

> *acquaintance with the proper way to behave in the spheres neighbouring village civil society is translated into influence in the community. From that position the one whose understanding of propriety crosses the significant cultural boundaries may also play role of mediator.*[26]

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25 Brown, *op. cit.,* p. 10
26 Collins, *op. cit.,* p. 8

Collins maintains that the authority awarded is a symbolic or "magical" form of authority, emerging from the status and respect awarded to those viewed by the community as able to provide a protective know-how in facilitating the community's dealings with the threatening state apparatus. Collins describes a scenario in which a commune chief demands that a miscreant sign a contract promising to mend his ways. He comments,

> *The function of the contract seems to be to alert the entire community to the increased gravity of the matter and thus to enlist community pressure in modifying the behaviour of the offender. A written document purporting to be part of an official procedure is actually being used as a kind of magical threat to an individual to change his conduct and as a challenge to the community to help with the matter, or face the likelihood that their fellow villager may be cast out of the village zone into the dangerous realm of the police and court.*[27]

In this example, Collins is describing the interaction of three different processes of conflict management, of differing formality – the pressure of the community, the contract at the commune office, and the judicial process. It is interesting that in this case the pressure of the community evidently requires a focus point, provided by the ritual of the contract signing, and a background threat, in the form of a possible arrest, in order to be effective in producing conformity. Yet the powers of the commune chief to bring these three forms of pressure to bear upon the individual offender are portrayed by Collins as evidence of a particular status possessed by the commune chief, by virtue of his knowledge of outside affairs. In his study of similar power relations in Algerian communities (and in French universities), Pierre Bourdieu refers to know-how that can award such significant status as "cultural capital."[28]

Collins suggests that the number of individuals in any village who command such cultural capital is relatively few. Yet symbolic relations of status and respect are also important for survival within the village community, determining relationships between the villagers themselves. This is illustrated by Davenport *et al.*'s account of the problems faced by the poorest members of the village and by returnees from refugee camps. As a result of their long absence, returnees lacked the established reputations needed for tapping into relations of mutual assistance and solidarity in the village.

Studies of the experience of returnees, found that those with family support were much more likely to reintegrate successfully, because of their better access to "social networks," including information and practical assistance such as mutual help *(provas dei)*. In describing the marginalisation of new returnees, Davenport *et al.* discuss the question of "assets." They describe how the poorest families in any village "live hand-to-mouth with few possessions." Dependent family members outnumber those able to work, to the extent that they lack "even the asset of an able bodied-labourer," which could permit engagement in mutual help with neighbours. Lack of material assets means that negotiating loans is problematic, and pawning possessions is not an option.

The discussion goes on to examine the importance of investment in intangible assets to facilitate access to social networks in similar terms. Such a family, Davenport *et al.* report, "is unlikely to have well placed family or friends (such as the village leader or others who would have the power to help them)." Shame at their own lack of success prevents members of such families from participating in village life even to the extent that would permit them to gather information to generate ideas for improving livelihood. Many of the reciprocal systems that

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27 Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 17
28 Pierre Bourdieu (1994), "Structures, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power," in Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley & Sherry B. Ortner (eds.), *Culture/Power/History, A Reader in Contemporary Social History* (Princeton: Princeton UP).

form the basis of welfare provision in a Cambodian village comprise "exchange of goods and services based on trust." New families, or families that have a poor reputation in the village, are likely to be excluded from these.[29]

Consequently two further types of capital are important for studying relationships within village society. "Social capital" describes the investment made by the whole community in establishing links and co-operative practices that can help to assure the security and productiveness of all. "Symbolic capital" describes the investment made by the individual or family in the reputation or good name that permits access to the networks of social capital.

Links with family and friends, access to information, and the reputation that permits benefit from reciprocal systems can all be viewed as assets in this sense. Reference to such informal structures explains the following conclusion of a study into the situation of demobilised soldiers returning to their villages. Villagers in returnee settlements in Battambang and Siem Reap told researchers,

> *The key distinction was whether the soldier was from their village or not. If he was, then there was no problem with him coming back because this was his home and he had relatives to take care of him. Even if he had no land, he could work for other families who knew his family. However, soldiers from other villages should not come because there was no land and no jobs and they would have no one to depend on.[30]*

In this case, the intangible asset of the family's good name assists the returning soldier in finding work. The informal structure of such assets is an important aspect of the functioning of relationships within the village.

To sum up, different kinds of capital can be seen as essential to survival in the context of a village community. These different kinds of capital can be defined as follows:

Economic capital: the economic resources of wealth such as land or money.

Social capital: This is a product not of the individual alone, but of the group, since it comprises the collective investment in cooperative activity and attitude within a community. Social capital represents a set of assets that increase the overall productiveness of the community. Krishnamurthy distinguishes further between "structural" and "cognitive" aspects of social capital. The *structural* perspective makes it possible to look at social capital in visible and tangible forms such as events, relationships, networks and associations. The *cognitive* perspective refers to the values, perceptions and intentions that underlie the structural aspects of social capital. These cognitive aspects include positive values such as self-control, cooperation, reciprocity, interdependence, coordination, charity, altruism, "the common good", tolerance, trust, loyalty and many others.[31]

Symbolic Capital: refers to "the prestige and renown attached to a family and a name." Bourdieu remarks that such capital "is readily convertible back into economic capital" because of the importance of good relationships with others for economic success. Bourdieu regards symbolic capital as "perhaps the most

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29 Davenport et al., *op. cit.,* p. 67

30 Prum Sam Ol et al.., *op. cit.,* p. 25

31 Veena Krishnamurthy (1999), *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Social Capital, a Study of Two Villages in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Social Services of Cambodia) p.2

valuable form of accumulation in a society in which the severity of the climate… and the limited technical resources… demand collective labour."[32]

Davenport *et al.* described the difficulty, for researchers, of gaining information about such structures:

> *Informal structures are viewed with suspicion by the village 'authorities' because they are outside the formal system… People are not prepared to talk about them. Unless you stay in the village, you will not see them. However, according to those who do spend time in the villages, they are definitely thriving.[33]*

This account of the importance of informal structures of reciprocity dictated by possession of intangible assets is significant for the study of conflict and conflict management. Individuals who are concerned to invest in symbolic capital will find that this concern constrains their conduct in situations of conflict, and in their engagement in conflict management. This analysis sheds light on the significance of "gossip," "ostracism" and "rumour" as a means of social control, as described by Ebihara and Bit. Such practices are significant in determining the level of symbolic capital that an individual commands. Scott points out that the kind of symbolic capital invested in varies according to class and gender. For the poor, the maintenance of a good reputation for hard work, loyalty and honesty is essential in order to safeguard opportunities for employment and patronage.[34]

For leading village figures, the maintenance of a good reputation is essential to the exercise of authority. To quote Ebihara again, the influence of "big men" emerges from a view of them as "having exceptionally "good character", sound judgement and strong personalities" by virtue of which they are "accorded special prestige and some authority in hamlet affairs."[35] To maintain this position requires continuous efforts to invest in this reputation, and the ability of other villagers to withdraw their respect, through gossip, ostracism and the circulation of rumours, represents a restraint on the power of village leaders – "a kind of democratic 'voice' in conditions where power and possible repression make open acts of disrespect dangerous."[36] Consequently, this is an important question for understanding village relationships, and may be highly pertinent both to understanding the amenability of individuals in the village to conflict management, and the ways in which conflict is pursued.

4. Norms, Structure and Agency in Community Relations

A study of individual and group investments in these various kinds of assets contributes to the understanding of a culture of peace, while addressing questions both of structure and agency. Individual strategies for investment in these kinds of assets during periods of conflict can be observed, allowing an investigation of individual reactions to particular circumstances. To the extent that the nature of the assets invested in are conducive to peace, a culture of peace is more likely to exist, and the overall regime of social control is likely to be effective in avoiding violence. For example, if a reputation for tolerance contributes to influence and status, then investment in such a reputation by parties to conflict is likely to be conducive to the successful mediation of conflict. However, if a reputation for toughness is highly valued, then vigorous attempts to invest in this might exacerbate conflict and limit conflict management options. It is likely that a range of views might coexist within a village – for example, it is possible for one person to be respected for their strength while another is

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32 Bourdieu, *op. cit.,* p. 174
33 Davenport et al., *op. cit.,* p. 60
34 Scott discusses this at length in his *Weapons of the Weak, op. cit.,* p. 241-303
35 Ebihara (1971), "Intervillage, Intertown and Village-City Relations in Cambodia" *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* p. 360/1
36 Scott, *Weapons of the Weak, op. cit.,* p. 282

respected for their tolerance and peacefulness. The different kinds of qualities that are respected in different kinds of people are important for determining how relationships between people contribute to strategies for pursuing and managing conflict.

Khmer culture contains a variety of traditions that give rise to norms of appropriate behaviour. These include laws, customs, local precedent, cultural axioms, folklore, religious texts, and, increasingly perhaps, human rights. Cambodia has a rich tradition of didactic literature upon which to draw, as well as a wealth of proverbs and moral fables.[37] It has frequently been asserted that these are significant in interpreting conflict as well as guiding behaviour, and case study research around ongoing conflicts could help to reveal the ways in which such normative discourses are used to interpret conflict and guide conflict management.

Intertwined with the Khmer literary tradition is the Buddhist tradition, which similarly offers guides to moral behaviour, precedents for action, and admonitory stories. It has been noted that the Buddhist tradition offers primarily a programme for reorienting the individual's reaction to conflict, rather than specific guidelines for dealing with others. A reputation for living in accordance with Buddhist values and practices is likely to contribute to an individual's store of symbolic capital in the village. This appears to be important in identifying potential conflict managers from among the village population.

Indeed, Ven. Heng Monychenda identifies ten qualities necessary for dispute mediators according to the Buddhist tradition: seniority/experience; self-discipline/morality; education; knowledge of law; wisdom/skill in dispute resolution; love of dhamma, knowledge and truth; tolerance; caution; mental stability/concentration; a pure mind free from bias motivated by desire. He comments:

> *Whoever possess the truth, the Dhamma, and is non-violent, self-controlled, intelligent, and upright can be named as mediator.[38]*

Emphasis on the characteristics of individuals is used to explain conflict, as well as to inform conflict management. According to the Ven. Maha Ghosananda:

> *Everything has its cause and its condition... The cause of fighting and war is greed, anger, hatred and ignorance. The cause of peace is morality, concentration, and wisdom. Also truthfulness and gratitude. When we have truth there is no more greed. When there is compassion there is no more anger. When there is wisdom there is no more ignorance. So there is no more fighting. We must keep morality[39]*

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37 See Karen Fisher-Nguyen (1994), "Khmer Proverbs: Images and Rules in Cambodian Culture Since 1975," in May Ebihara, Carole Mortland & Judy Ledgerwood (eds.), *Cambodian Culture Since 1975: Homeland and Exile*, (London: Cornell UP)

38 Ven. Heng Monychenda (1997), "Non-Violence and Conflict Resolution: Buddhism and Conflict Resolution in the Community," in Eva Mysliwiec & Catherine Morris (eds.), *Dispute Resolution in Cambodia: a Road to Peace and Reconciliation,* (Phnom Penh: University of Victoria Institute for Dispute Resolution and CDRI), p.48. See also Om Kem (1998), "Disputes and Dispute Resolution from a Buddhist Perspective," in Alex Grzybowski et al., (eds.), *Building Democratic Institutions and Practices in Cambodia, Proceedings from the Cambodian Commission on Human Rights Capacity Building Project,* (Phnom Penh: Pacific Resolutions and University of Victoria Institute for Dispute Resolution), p.7. It is interesting that similar lists of characteristics were put forward by some interviewees surveyed for their views on the kinds of people who should staff the national and local election committees for the commune election. See Caroline Hughes and Real Sopheap (1999), *The Nature and Causes of Conflict Escalation in the 1998 Election,* (Phnom Penh: CDRI), p.34.

39 The Ven. Mahaghosananda, personal interview, Phnom Penh, May 1996, quoted in Caroline Hughes (1998), "Human Rights in Cambodia: International Intervention and the National Response," PhD dissertation (University of Hull)

Significantly, this attitude was also invoked by a human rights activist working in a Cham organisation, suggesting that such attitudes to conflict have a Cambodian, rather than a specifically Buddhist or even Khmer, flavour:

> *They are all the same - Buddhism, Islam, human rights - they just make people non-violent. One Cham living in the Cham community - he was very aggressive, used obscene language to his neighbours... He is Cham but he didn't understand what it means to be Cham. So the president of this organisation took him to the mosque to pray and after one month everything changed and he ... became a good person in the community... People have to live peacefully and not be aggressive to each other.*[40]

These comments suggest that indigenous or traditional practices of conflict management, insofar as they reflect this tradition, are likely to take a personal rather than a programmatic orientation, focusing on the character of the individual in dispute, rather than upon the nature of the dispute itself.

More broadly, the Buddhist tradition has been seen as a useful basis for the invention and promotion of new approaches to conflict management in Cambodia. The mindful mediation courses offered by CCCR, meditation courses offered by the Centre for Vipassana, the Buddhism for Development initiative in Battambang, and programmes for training Buddhist monks in human rights norms reflect this renewed interest in harnessing reverence for Buddhist teachings to social goals.

An interviewee engaged in conflict management in Banteay Meanchey district, who uses the five Buddhist precepts as the basis for conflict management, commented:

> *Previously people only heard the five precepts in Pali, but they couldn't understand them, and didn't know how to apply them to their everyday lives. We translate the five precepts into Khmer so they understand.*[41]

The drive to bring Buddhist texts into everyday use represents an attempt to bring the norms of the pagoda into the secular life of the village, and by doing so, to alter the understandings of villagers of appropriate values and behaviour. The emphasis on the peaceful aspects of Buddhist teachings encourages villagers to give greater respect to these norms, and less respect to individuals who use violence or threats. Evaluation of the impact of such activities on understandings of conflict and conflict management would represent an important contribution to understanding whether these efforts are changing the structural determinants of symbolic capital in Cambodian villages.

Alongside new uses for Buddhist discourses, in the 1990s debate emerged over the relevance of concepts associated with the incoming liberal ideology of the West, for application to Cambodian society. Recent publications from the Cambodian Institute of Co-operation and Peace, for example, include philosophical meditations on the application of concepts such as "tolerance," "democracy," "leadership" and "shared trust-building" to Cambodian society.[42]

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40 Human rights activist, personal interview, Phnom Penh, March 1996, quoted in *Ibid.*
41 Van Sivon, personal interview, Phnom Penh, July 2000
42 Chhay Yiheang (1999), *The Necessity of Utilizing a Concept of "Tolerance" in Cambodia,* (Phnom Penh: Cambodian Institute for Co-operation and Peace); Kao Kim Hourn (with Samraing Kamsang) (1999), *Grassroots Democracy in Cambodia, Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects,* (Phnom Penh: Cambodian Institute for Co-operation and Peace and Forum Syd); (1999) *Shared Leadership and Trust Building in Cambodia: Learning from the Past, Sharing Experiences, Views and Visions, and Drawing Lessons for the Future* (Phnom Penh: Cambodian Institute of Co-operation and Peace)

The rapid growth of the human rights promotion industry is a further example of this. The question of whether human rights discourses have contributed to the range of norms available to villagers demands further research.

While the term *seth menuh* (human rights) may be invoked more frequently, and understood as possessing particular, especially international power, it is not clear whether invocation of the term in itself implies a new rights-based approach to understandings of conflict and conflict management within villages.

Judy Ledgerwood's study of a conflict among Khmer-Americans in the US suggests that access to the language of the state and familiarity with the norms underpinning American state discourse concerning the matter in dispute were particularly important in empowering one party at the expense of others.[43] Examining the facility of various disputing parties in manipulating and invoking norms and traditions may offer an important insight into the ways in which individuals build up reputations for moral authority that legitimise their behaviour in Cambodian society. The ways in which perceptions of conflict are dictated by the application of familiar sayings and principles to particular situations is an important determinant of what kinds of conflict management processes are likely to be effective. In addition, the power of such normative discourses to discipline recalcitrant individuals into accepting a compromise or even a defeat in a conflict is a question for research.

Together, these traditions comprise a powerful set of principles for action. Indeed, the power of received notions of how parties to conflict ought to behave, as opposed to the way that they actually do behave, is one reason why a case study approach to conflict, employing substantial participant observation, offers greater opportunities for insight than a series of attitude measurements or research interviews. In second-hand accounts, respondents are more likely to slot their experiences or observations of conflict into a pre-existing interpretive and moral framework.

The invoking of norms in situations of conflict comprises two aspects: invoking norms to justify their own standpoint, by parties to conflict; and invoking norms to legitimate solutions by third parties. The term "third party" here may include village opinion as a whole, or may refer to a specific intervener such as a respected lay Buddhist or local official. Similarly, an individual's symbolic capital may be expended either in order to prevail in a particular conflict, or to legitimise that individual to act as a manager of a conflict between other parties.

An investigation of community relations using the conceptual framework outlined, then, focuses on individual strategies in the context of community norms governing the award of status and respect. These apply both to parties to conflict and to conflict managers, awarding them particular resources that can be expended or invested in during conflicts. It is important to note that the kinds of norms that govern action are likely to differ according to differences of class and gender, and are likely to operate in such a way as to fix and legitimise relations of domination between rich and poor, men and women.

C. The Village in the World

1. Forms of External Influence

So far, the analysis has presumed that the village is a separate entity, governing its own affairs largely in isolation from the outside world. Of course, in reality, this is not the case. The ways in which the outside world intrudes upon village life are important in two major respects. Firstly, they increase the range of assets available. All villagers are likely to experience some

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43 Judy Ledgerwood (1999), "Portrait of a Conflict: Exploring Changing Khmer-American Social and Political Relationships," *Journal of Refugee Studies,* 3.2, p. 135-154

increase in options, but for some villagers, the increase will be greater than for others. Secondly, they offer different cultural norms and standards, which can challenge the idea that particular conceptions of the good and the right are self-evident, diluting the framework within which actions are judged by the village community. These changes are likely to significantly alter the ability of the village to manage conflict, because more fluidity in structures and relationships permits the employment of more diverse strategies by parties to conflict.

Paul Stirling comments on the increasing penetration of the Turkish village by outside forces of capitalism:

> *By greatly increasing the range of social relations even the poorer villagers have with people outside the village, it has decreased the solidarity of the village, weakening the strength of social controls on which village conservatism is founded. The villagers are no longer necessarily dependent on their leaders. At the same time they come to depend on the goodwill of a host of other people outside the village with different assumptions and ideas. The village community is pulled apart by multiplying relations between its members and the outside world.[44]*

Similarly Andrew Pearse comments that "the incorporative drive… puts on display… a series of alternative behaviours which may be adopted by peasants," and which thus cause "local leadership [to] diminish in prestige and effectiveness."[45]

Sources of external intrusion into the world of the Cambodian village are diverse. In his study of dispute resolution, Collins looks at the intrusion of the outside world into the village in the form of the state and the pagoda. He generally assumes that this intrusion is neutral *vis-à-vis* village disputes. Collins assumes that external intrusion is facilitated through the person of the conflict manager – usually the village chief – and is used both as a threatened sanction and a source of cultural capital, empowering the village chief in his attempts to resolve disputes.

Collins does not consider the external world as a source of either material resources of power (e.g. guns, cash, protection) or ideological resources of power (e.g. ideas about rights, laws) that can affect the structure of social control (or the culture of peace) of the local community. In particular, he presumes that the village chief is neutral vis-à-vis parties to conflict, and is generally an advocate on behalf of the village in dealings with the outside. Collins does mention that commune chiefs were responsible for meeting conscription quotas in the 1980s, and have been the target of allegations that they connived in land expropriations in the 1990s. He does not examine in detail the impact of such unpopular activities on the ability to manage conflict in the village.

A more critical description of the role of the village chief is offered by Davenport *et al*. They write:

> *Villages are connected to the administrative structure of the province through the village leader [who] is a political appointee. Often the same man has held this role since 1979. Village leaders tend to have much more land than most other villagers. They have the task of ensuring that village recruits are available*

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44 Paul Stirling (1971), "A Turkish Village," in Teodor Shanin (ed.) *Peasants and Peasant Societies, Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin) p. 47

45 Andrew Pearse (1971), "Metropolis and Peasant, The Expansion of the Urban-Industrial Complex and the Changing Rural Structure," in Shanin (ed.), *op. cit.,* p. 76

> *for conscription and for public works tasks. They distribute firearms (20 to 30 to a village) to those men they trust to protect the village from dangers. They control village land where it is still available for newly married couples, demobilised soldiers and others with special needs or deserving special favours.*[46]

This description permits greater appreciation of the discretionary powers entrusted to the village chief, and the scope that this offers for the emergence of relations of domination within the village, from the power that the state invests in its appointees.

Nevertheless, Conway points out, following Ebihara forty years earlier, that as a local power-holder living within the village, village chiefs must invest to some extent in continuing support from villagers. Conway comments that while the village chief is appointed by his superiors, and subject to the same imperatives that guide Cambodian state practice as a whole,

> *he is, unlike Commune, District or Provincial officials, resident among his constituents. While a chief may desire to extract as much as possible from villagers, often driven by demands from higher officials, this desire has to be balanced by a fear of reprisals.*[47]

Building upon the insights of both Collins and Conway, a more nuanced and critical examination of the role of the village chief is indicated. This should encompass both the ways in which external concerns, policies and changes are projected into the village, in terms not only of the cultural capital of the village chief, but also of material resources and state-sponsored discourses, and the ways in which these affect the community's ability to regulate its own relationships.

The state is not the only intruder into village life. National or international agencies such as the various militaries, political parties, national and international NGOs, United Nations programmes, foreign investors and Phnom Penh-based tycoons have also intruded into villages, sometimes with the specific intention of altering village life. It is likely that villages will have widely different experiences of intervention from these different agencies, depending on, among other things, geographical location, historical and political factors, level and form of economic development, ethnic composition and demographics.

Equally, these factors both prompt and inhibit the movement of villagers themselves, away from the village, in flight or to work, and their subsequent return, and thus affect the intensity of relations between the village and the outside world. The presumption that relations with the outside world are facilitated by the village chief and the pagoda may be erroneous in villages that regularly send members to Phnom Penh, Bangkok or elsewhere to work. The impact of villagers' own contacts with the outside world on their understanding of the authority of the village chief is an interesting question for research.

Collins' study suggests that in local cases, the village chief employs the threat of engagement by higher levels of the state as a means to gain compliance from villagers in particular conflict management strategies. He states a strong predilection on the part of villagers to keep conflict management within the confines of the village. He explains this as follows:

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46 Davenport et al., *op. cit.,* p. 65

47 Tim Conway (2000), "Elections and Assassinations: Local Democracy and Rural Development in Cambodia," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, 9-12 March 2000, San Diego.

> *The Cambodian village recognizes that compared to literate city authorities, especially the police and the courts, a villager is piteously weak, and the weak always loses to the strong.*[48]

In my view, this assertion requires further study. It suggests that such external interventions are not actively brought into intra-village conflict or power structures through conscious attempts by villagers to manipulate them to their own advantage in contention with other villagers.

The assumption that all villagers are equally fearful of dealings with the outside world appears suspect. It is an assumption that may overstate the isolation of the village and understate the extent to which villagers can use resources, such as kinship ties with urban relatives, to aid them in dealing with the outside world. Furthermore, differences in education, literacy and wealth within the village are likely to make a significant difference in attitudes to the state and the "official."

Claims that Cambodia has developed into a society of "insiders and outsiders," in which those who maintain "connections" (*khsae*) with powerful patrons are able to prevail over their neighbours, support this view. These relationships are a long-standing feature of society. Martin's pre-war study of Cambodian villagers found that patron-client relationships were a significant form of social organisation, along with kinship structures and age categories. It is highly likely in the context of a society that has experienced powerful forces of national mobilisation, such as militarisation, international intervention, capitalist penetration and democratisation, over the past 30 years, that such relationships are increasingly extending beyond the borders of the village.

Equally, changes within the village entail that traditional patronage links may operate less equitably now than previously. Vijghen suggests that a key feature of rural life is the limiting of ties of solidarity to kin in the village. While in pre-war Cambodia, villages were composed primarily of kin relatives, nowadays villages are larger and contain more outsiders, Vijghen reports. He suggests that this may limit the ability of traditional patronage links, which remain tied to kinship, to cater for the needs of everyone, as some "fall outside the system." Vijghen reports that this pattern emerged clearly from observation of the distribution of development assistance, where those outside the patronage network were unable to claim a share of the resources on offer.[49]

Thus, it is likely that on occasion at least, conflicts arise in which one or both parties sees outside intervention from sympathetic powers as highly beneficial. It might even be expected that such intervention is sought on a regular basis, in order not only to prevail in particular conflicts, but in order to maintain a structure of dominance within the village.

In such situations, conflict avoidance by the weaker party may be a predominant form of conflict management, and some scholars suggest that this is the case.[50] Bit Seanglim suggests that approaches to conflict take only two forms – the beckoning of outside power in order to prevail, or avoidance:

> *Problems in society are generally resolved either by exhibition of the power of the claimant; seeking a more powerful intervener who can prevail on behalf of*

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48 Collins, *Op. cit.,* p. 52
49 John Vijghen (1996), *Decision Making in a Cambodian Village, a Study of Decision Making Processes in a Development Project in Cambodia, Takeo*, Report No. 15 (Phnom Penh: Cambodian Researchers for Development) p. 16
50 E.g. Sorpong Peou, personal communication, Aug. 2000

> *the claimant; or, failing all else, withdrawal from the conflict. Should the dispute remain unresolved, a deep sense of distrust and resentment may block any future attempts at communication or to address the question.*[51]

Similarly, Esther Watts mentions the importance of conflict avoidance, but also points to the increasingly problematic nature of this strategy in a situation where ties to others are becoming increasingly necessary:

> *Patterns of avoidance between the two parties were established... However avoidance was a much more realistic option in the past than present due to the geographical location of compounds... Patterns and physical boundaries have changed dramatically over the last 30 years, and in addition, economic autonomy did not force people to maintain complicated networks of relationships.*[52]

The question of the extent to which broader conflicts and power structures – emerging from the civil war, the fracturing of the Cambodian elite, Cold War ideological clashes, militarisation, and, lately, democratisation – have become linked to intra-village conflicts is a significant question with profound policy implications.[53] Given the significance attached to questions of corruption and "connections" in critiques of conflict resolution measures - such as the court system - offered by the state, the question of how such connections and kickbacks operate in the context of intra-village conflict management is an important question for research.

2. Influence of the War

For some villages, the period of civil war between 1970 and 1998 was highly dislocating. Veena Krishnamurthy's study of two villages in Kompong Speu province documented the experience of the villages during the war, with the aim of evaluating the impact of Cambodia's broader armed conflict on social capital within the two villages. The study was concerned in particular to evaluate the impact of war on the ability of social capital to contribute to the economy of the village, and livelihood of villagers, and to social services and welfare activities at village level.

The study found that the village that had suffered the greatest breakdown in trust was not the village that had seen the most fighting, but the village whose structure had been most severely disrupted, during the DK regime, by the differential classification of some villagers as "new people" and others as "old people" – with concomitant implications for standards of treatment and survival rates. This suggests that the greatest dislocation emerged not from violence *per se,* but from the imposition of an alien value system and the discrimination that accompanied this. The study found that the villagers returned quickly to old rituals, routines and conceptions of status in times of relative peace, but the cognitive aspects of social capital, particularly trust, were slower to re-emerge, where they had been destroyed.

This finding is supported by Meas Nee's account of the impact of the years of war on villages in Battambang province. During the Democratic Kampuchea regime of 1975 to 1979,

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51 Bit, *op. cit.,* p. 68

52 Esther Watts, "The Meaning of Community, English Literature Review," in *The Meaning of Community in Cambodia, op. cit.,,* p. 11

53 The question as to whether political conflicts spread from the local level to the national level, or from the national level to the local level, was included in the survey questionnaire for NGOs in the 1999 study on election conflicts. Respondents were divided in their opinion, suggesting that among NGOs, also, there is no clear or unified understanding of the link between national and local conflict and conflict management. This is a heavily politicised question at the national level, since national (NGO and political party) attitudes to the "grassroots" are frequently highly idealistic. See Hughes and Real, *op. cit.*

particularly, social institutions such as the religious hierarchy, traditionally a central part of village life, the family hierarchy and the general hierarchy of respect for elders within the village were disrupted. Meas Nee describes the particularly dislocating impact of the destruction of the basis for authority in society:

> *All of the respected people in our village were singled out for betrayal. The monks were killed and the [village] pagoda was totally destroyed. All except one of the 'pious laymen', the achar as they are called, were killed at the pagoda. The one who was spared was in league with the Khmer Rouge... When even an achar could be a killer, the people did not know who to trust.[54]*

Meas Nee describes the DK era as particularly destructive because it destroyed trust in the village, through the recruitment of a vast network of spies. The fear of betrayal was ever-present, and particularly in danger were those who had been most respected in former times.

On several occasions in his account, Meas Nee describes the disempowerment of people during the decades of war. This reached a peak in the DK era, when an essential rule for survival was

> *...never to think. Not even to think when people were taken from the road and killed right where I was. I couldn't help so I didn't think. Like drowning, no power at all.[55]*

Yet disempowerment of ordinary people was not only a feature of the DK regime. Throughout the years of war, Meas Nee argues, normal power relations were overturned in favour of gun law. He comments that this was true of different "factions": "Soldiers were strong; village people had no power."[56] The later experience of life as a refugee on the Thai border signalled a new kind of disempowerment:

> *For a long time, the sight of an official, especially an official who would take my papers to check them, left me feeling powerless and totally in danger.[57]*

Feelings of powerlessness, arguably, emerged from the destruction of familiar community relationships, which the individual was accustomed to working within. Beyond the shelter of the community, within which the individual operates with assurance to build up the necessary assets for survival, and in the face of powerful alien forces such as militarisation or refugee camp bureaucracy, villagers find it more difficult to plan strategies for survival. The lingering effects of these experiences on the ability of communities to re-establish relationships of support and social control is an important question for research.
Elsewhere, Meas Nee comments:

> *To establish a civil society in the aftermath of armed conflict is as difficult as to finish the war itself ... Moreover, the formation of a civil society is made more difficult by the fact that trust between individuals has been destroyed and people's motivation for social change has been and continues to be routinely undermined.[58]*

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54 Meas Nee (1995), *Toward Restoring Life, Cambodian Villages,* translated and transcribed by Joan Healy, (Phnom Penh: Krom Akphiwat Phum), p. 21
55 *Ibid.,* pp. 25-26
56 *Ibid.,* p. 24
57 *Ibid.,* p. 30
58 Meas Nee (1999), "The Legacy of Armed Conflict and Community Rebuilding," *The Meaning of Community in Cambodia: Literature Reviews, Khmer, French and English Languages,* (Phnom Penh: Working Group on Social Organization in Cambodia) p. 6

In addition to changes in cognitive understandings of relationships within the village, the war has also engendered real changes in village composition. In particular, the displacement of refugees during wartime has led to a change in village communities that were previously largely oriented around kinship networks. Yet, importantly, even where refugees or demobilised soldiers returned to their home villages, those who had been away for many years could not slot back into village society as if they had never left. Life in the camps, or as soldiers in the various armies, often entailed loss of farming skills and changes in attitudes. One author commented that many returnees have altered conceptions of their own identity as a result of their refugee experience, and that this sets them apart from their counterparts who remained at home.[59] For example, one NGO working with demobilised soldiers found

> *Only a handful have the discipline and ability to make it through training and open a small business… often they do not have the right personality to be businessmen, although this varies from person to person. In general, they lack confidence, are hot-tempered, are used to taking orders rather than making decisions on their own, and are used to taking what they want at the point of a gun.[60]*

The difficulties of coping with individuals socialised to the life of a jungle base, within the confines of a village, is a likely source of conflict. The different resources and norms that these individuals bring into the village with them, and their relative detachment from the informal structure of village control, may render village-based conflict management customs less effective in dealing with these relative outsiders. The investment in symbolic capital which is the basis of village community relationships may not be valued by these individuals, either because they are accustomed to living in military communities which operate according to quite different norms, or because they have other resources, such as weapons, which make investment in intangible assets unnecessary.

3. Impact of the Free Market

Significantly, perhaps, Krishnamurthy's study found that a more sustained trend of changes in social capital in the village emerged from increasing capitalist penetration of the rural economy. Krishnamurthy states:

> *Old networks based on the concept of mutual help are giving way to new networks based on rigid reciprocity and the need to earn cash income, as is evident in the case of provas dei [mutual help]. The willingness to help one another that existed during the pre-conflict period was not destroyed by war because this willingness manifested itself immediately after the conflict in several ways as in the case of the revival of provas dei. The decline in the concept of mutual help in informal networks has clearly been attributed by the people in both villages to the 1990s, to the emergence of the cash economy, the desire to acquire wealth and to the pressures of making a living that force people to worry about their own problems and needs first.[61]*

Increasing capitalist penetration is a stated aim of the government, whose 1996-2000 Socioeconomic Development Plan included the following statement:

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59 Court Robinson (1994), *Rupture and Return – Repatriation, Displacement and Reintegration in Battambang Province, Cambodia,* Occasional Paper no. 7 (Bangkok: Indochinese Refugee Information Centre, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University)

60 Prum Sam Ol et al. (1996), *Starting Over, the Reintegration Experience of Returnees, Internally Displaced, and Demobilized Soldiers in Cambodia,* Cambodian Veterans Assistance Program Executive Secretariat, Background Study, (Phnom Penh: Cambodian Veterans Assistance Program) p. 21

61 Veena Krishnamurthy, *op. cit.,* p. 62

> *As well as reducing poverty, the raising of agricultural incomes can generate the purchasing power necessary for expanding non-farm income and employment opportunities and for developing the internal market. Progress in these directions is also essential to secure integration of the national economy, social cohesion throughout the country and improved security across all areas. Moreover, there is a particular need for the integration of the more isolated and remote regions.[62]*

While the plan emphasises the importance of participation and empowerment in rural development, the agenda here contains two clear objectives. The intention to promote the penetration of capitalist relations of production and the cash economy into formerly subsistence villages is clearly signalled. Integration, through the relations of production as well as through government and non-governmental development activity, of previously isolated settlements is also a key goal. These objectives challenge directly both the importance of investment in social capital in the village, as material capital becomes more important; and the resources of authority that Collins views as paramount for the efficacy of village chiefs in managing conflict. In intensifying relations with the outside world and, perhaps, eroding community relationships concomitantly, processes of economic development significantly weaken the symbolic basis of village chief power, as Collins describes it.

Given this agenda on the part of the Cambodian government, research into the present uses of conflict management must necessarily be located in a dynamic framework, which takes into account long-term changes in village relations with the outside world. Local responses to such processes has formed a key theme in the literature on peasant studies.

Eric Wolf gives a useful account of the effect of capitalist relations upon rural villages:

> *Capitalism is unusual in both the speed and intensity of its operation as it creates "free-floating" resources, previously held fast by a tissue of social and political connections. It mobilises economic resources and renders them amenable to new forms of allocation and use; yet in doing so it also cuts the tie between these resources and any connection they may have had with traditional social prerogatives and political privileges. It proves a powerful solvent of the integument of power, exacerbating tension not only through its own action, but freeing also tensions and contradictions previously constrained by the traditional systems of power…. Social give-and-take, determined by traditional conceptions of obligation and good will, are replaced by the inflexibility of codified laws backed by impersonal force.[63]*

The impersonality of capitalist relations contrasts with the highly personal nature of a social control achieved through the valorisation of particular conceptions of "a good name." In the money economy, symbolic capital loses its power, and consequently the restraints on behaviour associated with investment in symbolic capital lose force also. In the 1960s, this trend was used by modernisation theorists as the basis for promoting "state-building" as a strategy for development. For example:

> *State law… became the means whereby societies lifted themselves above the limits of private justice, small communities and status relationships. Legal order was to overcome the problem of diverse moralities in modern highly differentiated societies by constituting a neutral public forum applying general*

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62 Royal Government of Cambodia (1995), *First Socioeconomic Development Plan, 1996-2000* (Phnom Penh: RGC) Ch.4

63 Eric R. Wolf, *op. cit.,* p. 283

> *rules equally to all. Its autonomy, professionalization and centralization were to function to provide a legal culture with its own logic distinct from economic, political, religious or scientific norms and interest.[64]*

Accounts of peasant responses to economic change in Cambodia were offered by the writings of CPK theorists in the 1960s.[65] These authors offer a class-based analysis of the dialectical, exploitative and conflict-ridden relationship between peasant-producers and other economic actors, particularly money-lenders, landlords, and merchants. These studies should be treated with caution, influenced as they clearly are by ideological concerns as expressed in the dictum, "philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it."[66] Ben Kiernan, however, employs the work of Hou Yuon and Hu Nim to claim that disaffection among the Cambodian farming community was widespread by the end of the 1960s.[67]

Kiernan's further study of the causes of the 1967-8 uprising in Samlot suggests that, in some parts of the country at least, the CPK theorists correctly identified a dislocating impact from capitalist development in the 1960s. Kiernan argues that the Samlot rebellion emerged from penetration of the subsistence economy by capitalist production of cash crops, and use of the military to enforce state rice purchasing policies in formerly isolated areas.[68] Frieson concurs with this explanation, and also notes that processes to manage the conflicts arising from such dislocating developments were not evident. She reports:

> *Poor peasants were helpless when faced with investors who paid officials in the Department of Property Licenses to obtain land titles. When bulldozers arrived to clear the land of its former owners and prepare for the development of plantations, peasants in the area became irate and killed the bulldozer driver.[69]*

These studies confirm the dislocating impact of processes of capitalist penetration and statebuilding, and their importance in prompting conflict.

The DK regime and the subsequent economic isolation of Cambodia in the 1980s, caused a hiatus in the process of monetisation of the Cambodian rural economy. Economic analyses of Cambodia's development trajectory in the 1990s suggest increasing inequalities of wealth and greater intrusion of the free market into rural life, in the form of privatisation of previously free resources such as ponds and forests, and speculation on the price of land. These developments are likely to bring further adjustments to the social and symbolic structure of the rural village in their wake. Appreciation of the way in which such change is being absorbed by the village is likely to be a key explanatory factor in understanding both

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64 A.V. Horwitz (1990), *The Logic of Social Control* (London: Plenum), quoted in Colin Sumner (1997), "Social Control: the History and Politics of a Central Concept in Anglo-American Sociology," in Roberto Bergalli and Colin Sumner (eds.), *Social Control and Political Order, European Perspectives at the End of the Century* (London: Sage) p. 19

65 Hou Yuon (1955), "The Peasantry of Kampuchea: Colonialism and Modernisation," extracts from *La Paysannerie du Cambodge et ses Projets de Modernisation*, Doctoral thesis (University of Paris), translated by Ben Kiernan, in Kiernan and Boua (eds.) (1982), *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1941-1981* (London: Zed Press), pp.31-68; Hu Nim (1965), "Land Tenure and Social Structure in Kampuchea," extracts from *Les Services Publics Economiques du Cambodge,* Doctoral thesis (University of Phnom Penh), translated by Ben Kiernan, in Kiernan and Boua, *op.cit.,* pp.69-86; Khieu Samphan (1959), "Cambodia's Economy and Industrial Development", Doctoral thesis (Paris), translated by Laura Summers (1979), in Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Data Paper No. 111 (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program)

66 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Theses on Feuerbach,," in C.J. Arthur (ed.) (1974), *The German Ideology,* student edn. (London: Lawrence and Wishart) p. 123

67 Kiernan, "Introduction" in Kiernan and Boua, *op. cit.,* p. 13

68 Kiernan, Ben (1975), *The Samlaut Rebellion and its Aftermath, the Origins of Cambodia's Liberation Movement Parts I and II,* Working Paper No. 4 (Melbourne: Monash)

69 Frieson, *op. cit.,* p. 37

the causes of present-day conflict and the success or otherwise of locally practised conflict management.

4. Impact of Political Reform

These kinds of development practices have been the spark for a number of conflicts, some of which have resulted in demonstrations by parties to the conflict in front of the National Assembly building or the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh. The decision by such parties to conflict to take such grievances to Phnom Penh reflects Ebihara's description of the path taken by parties to serious disputes in the pre-war era. Ebihara was writing at the time of Prince Sihanouk's prime minister-ship of the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* regime, and she notes that the Prince was viewed as a close and accessible figure by farmers, despite the highly stage-managed nature of his meetings with the people.

In the 1990s, the path travelled by those wishing to take grievances to Phnom Penh still frequently leads to the Royal Palace, where the King is petitioned for intervention. Yet new political processes constructed as part of Cambodia's efforts to democratise offer three other possible avenues for addressing power – via political parties, via human rights organisations, or via National Assembly representatives.

Human rights organisations in particular, but also to an extent political parties and National Assembly representatives, offer organisational links between the village and the city that are specifically designed to facilitate the representation of grievance and the eliciting of external assistance in village matters. The extent to which these new paths for conflict resolution are viewed as relevant or accessible by villagers, or the extent to which these organisations are drawn into village-level conflict management processes as resources or providers of norms and processes, is a question for further research.

5. Impact of the Media

A further external influence on the Cambodian village is increasingly the availability of information and ideas presented in the form of news and entertainment by way of the broadcast and print media.

Benedict Anderson's study of the origins of nationalism suggests that the development of a national print media was the catalyst for the emergence of the nation as an "imagined community" claiming the primary allegiance of the citizen.[70] This implies a shift in the focus of allegiances of the citizen from the immediate, experienced community of face-to-face relations, mediated by the kinds of personal sanctions described above, to a broader, "imagined" community of impersonal relations facilitated by the market and the state. Such a shift has major implications for ideas and practices of social control.

The impact of the spread of the media in Cambodia is further complicated by two factors. The first of these is the politicisation of, in particular, newspapers, which are highly politically partisan. Because of the sharply divergent accounts and understandings that such newspapers convey, they offer conflicting alternative normative frameworks to that of village custom. Secondly, much of the content of media broadcasting in Cambodia is not national, but international. This ranges from Thai soap operas to Voice of America news broadcasts. The alternative normative frameworks offered may thus represent a fairly abrupt break with past practices and understandings.

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70 Benedict Anderson (1993), *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* revised edn. (London:Verso)

The precise impact of these factors is likely to be difficult to assess, but overall the spread of the media offers alternatives that may threaten the unified norms and structures of understanding and control that operated in the past in Cambodian villages.

D. Conclusions

This review of the literature has attempted to set out a conceptual framework which builds from Collins' study of dispute resolution processes, to move towards locating conflict management in Cambodian villages into the framework suggested by the term "a culture of peace."

In this respect a number of key points have been raised:

1. Villages are important places in which face-to-face relations are conducted, under the supervision of state and religious representatives, and with reference to a framework of conceptions regarding appropriate behaviour.

2. At the same time, many Cambodian villages are currently undergoing a period of change, in response to the impact of national movements such as war, state-building, capitalist penetration, democratisation and the increasing spread of national and international media.

3. Studying conflict and conflict management in Cambodian villages in the framework of ideas of a "culture of peace" requires examining questions of both structure and agency in responses to conflict. Relationships between villagers can be understood within a structural framework of class and gender relations, within which individuals pursue strategies to secure their welfare. These strategies can be viewed as a series of investments in economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. The nature and distribution of these are determined, in turn, by normative factors, including concepts of rightfulness and of legitimate authority.

4. To the extent that villagers view such investment as important, they are amenable to informal controls that govern, in particular, symbolic capital and the associated access to social capital, which in turn can be converted into economic capital.

5. An individual with significant stores of symbolic capital may be empowered to intervene in conflicts.

6. The pace of change, the arrival of relative strangers in the village, and the projection into the village of resources from outside greatly increases opportunities for villagers to pursue economic capital without reference to the symbolic capital necessary in more isolated communities. Increased openness to the outside world makes villagers increasingly immune to the informal sanctions of their neighbours, with profound implications for local leadership and mechanisms of community control. Under these conditions, joint investment in social capital is also likely to decrease.

7. The impact of these changes is likely to be different for members of different classes and genders.

8. The pluralisation of sources of norms and values that is a result of increased openness represents a challenge to the community of understanding that informs effective community sanctions and social control. These also undermine local leadership. They may erode the frameworks of understanding that fixed relations of domination in the past, leading to more open conflict. Equally, there is a self-conscious effort going on in

Cambodia at present to reconceptualise notions of right, informed by Buddhist teachings as well as by Western liberal values such as human rights. These represent part of a movement to rebuild the moral basis of Cambodian society, viewed by many as severely damaged by the years of war.

9. The implications for the ability of the village to act as a key site of conflict management are far-reaching. It is possible that as relations become more impersonal, more impersonal forms of capital, such as access to money or the means to use violence, will become more important in structuring relationships within the village. At the same time, impersonal and external methods of social control, such as the rule of law, are underdeveloped in Cambodian society. Pursuing a culture of peace within the context of the Cambodian village requires a local response to the increasingly complex and impersonal relations between villagers, and between villagers and the outside world. This is the challenge for conflict managers in Cambodian villages.

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An Investigation of Conflict Management in Cambodian Villages

This literature review sets out a conceptual framework for the investigation of conflict management in Cambodian villages, and gives suggestions for further research. It places the study of conflict and conflict management in the framework of ideas of a "culture of peace", and argues that this requires examining questions of both active procedures (agency) and their context (structure) in responses to conflict.

Understanding the historical role of the Cambodian village in resolving conflict is limited by the lack of anthropological data from the pre-war years. In addition, the only study to date on dispute resolution in Cambodian villages focuses on agents and agencies, but says little about structures for conflict management. The present paper also highlights the need to understand the broader patterns of relationships which dispose a community towards particular forms of conflict and the cultural norms that influence approaches to conflict and conflict management. Taking such a broader view suggests an approach to the study of conflict management that addresses not only actions explicitly designed to resolve disputes, but also activities that structure relations between villagers, and which thus give conflict management processes force and legitimacy in their eyes.

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