Cambodian Demographics, Cultures, & Languages

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Demographics

- Cambodia is located at the southern region of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia.
  - Total population as of 2018: 16,202,422
  - Population density of 82 people per square kilometer (212 per square mile)
- Largest city and capital of Cambodia is Phnom Penh.
  - Population of 1.5 million

(“Cambodia Population”, 2018)
Demographics

Racial & Ethnic Origin:

- 90% of the country is of Khmer origin and speaks the Khmer language.
- 96.3% of the population practices Theravada Buddhism
  - Muslim = 1.9%
  - Christian = 0.4%
  - Other = 0.8%

(“Cambodia Demographics”, 2018)

Marital Status:

- Never married = 31.1%
- Married = 61.9%
- Widowed = 5%
- Divorced = 1.8%
- Separated = 0.2%
- Women in Cambodia tend to marry earlier than men, 50% are married by age 20.5 and median age for males is 23 years.
- Age at first marriage increases with education for both males and females.
Demographics

Age of Population:

- The civil war and genocide has greatly impacted Cambodia’s population
  - 0-14 years = 31.01%
  - 15-24 years = 18.36%
  - 25-54 years = 40.68%
  - 55-64 years = 5.69%
  - 65 and older = 4.25%
- Median age = 25.3 years old

Gender of Population:

- Current male population:
  - 7,979,528 (49%)
- Current female population:
  - 8,321,284 (51%)

(“Cambodia Demographics”, 2018) & (“Cambodia Population Clock”, 2018)
Demographics: Street View of Population
Language

- Khmer is the official language
  - Used in government administration, education, and the mass media
- Spoken by approximately 7 million people living there, 90% of the population
- Modern Khmer is also used throughout the nation, widely understood
- Khmer vocabulary used in literature, the military, and administration is borrowed from Sanskrit, or Pali
- Many French words have been incorporated into the language due to years of French colonial rule

(Cambodia Guide, 2017)
How to Greet Others in Khmer

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8szISoUWzU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8szISoUWzU)
- The traditional Cambodian way to say hello and goodbye is to place palms together with hands touching and bow the head. This is called a “sampeah” and is typically used when Cambodians greet each other for the first time.
  - Hello = “Choum reap sor”
  - Good bye = “Choum reap lear”
- The higher the sampeah and the lower the bow is the more respect that is showing.

Culture

- Collective society
  - Individuals take second place to the “group”, family, neighborhood, etc

- Concept of face
  - “Dignity” or “Prestige”, public reputation
  - Protecting one’s own face and other’s face is very important
  - Face is lost when someone is criticized, embarrassed or exposed in public
  - Face can be given by complimenting someone publicly

- Foreigners need to be aware of face so they do not cause anyone to lose face due to unintentional actions

(Cambodia Guide, 2017)
Culture Cont.

- Greetings
  - Traditional greeting is a bow combined with bringing hands together at the chest
    - Shows greater respect if the bow is lower
  - With foreigners, Cambodians have adopted the Western practice of shaking hands
    - Women still use the traditional Cambodian greeting

- Way of life
  - Birth of a child is a happy event
  - Confinement and childbirth expose the family; harm from the spirit world
  - A woman who dies during childbirth is believed to cross the river in Khmer and become an evil spirit
  - Death is not viewed with as much grief as in Western society
    - End of one life and the beginning of another life that will hopefully be better

(Cambodia Guide, 2017)
Culture Cont.

Way of life Cont.
- Cambodian children may be nursed until 2-4 years of age
- Children around 5 years are expected to help look after younger siblings
- By age 10, girls are expected to help their mothers with household tasks while the boys help care for the livestock and do farm work
- Premarital sex is disapproved
- Typically there is an arranged marriage that involves the parents and their friends to help choose the spouse
- Divorce is uncommon, but it is legal
  - Woman must wait 10 months to remarry

(Cambodia Tradition & Culture, 2011-2018)
Culture Cont.

- **Social Organization**
  - The greater the person’s age, the greater the level of respect
  - When a person becomes too old to support themselves they invite their youngest child to live with them
  - Husband is the head of the family but the wife also has authority
    - Husband is responsible for providing shelter and food for the family
    - Wife is in charge of the family budget and is a ethical and religious model for her children

- **Customs**
  - Head is believed to contain the person’s soul
  - Taboo to touch or point your feet at a person’s head
  - Not polite to make eye contact with someone who is older or considered a superior

(Cambodia Tradition & Culture, 2011-2018)
Culture Cont.

- **Clothing**
  - Cambodians traditionally wear a checkered scarf called a “Krama”
    - Separates Cambodians from the Thia and Vietnamese
    - Scarf is used for style, protection from the sun, aid for feet when climbing trees, hammock for infants, or as a “sarong”

- **Cuisine**
  - Similar to Thai, Vietnamese, and Teochew cuisine
  - Common use of fish sauce in soups, stir fry and dippings
  - Stir fry with rice noodles, curry dishes, and pork broth rice noodle soup are popular dishes
  - Almost every meal is eaten with a bowl of rice
  - Typically have 3-4 separate dishes with their meals

(Cambodia Tradition & Culture, 2011-2018)
References