

## **“យួន” ជាឈ្មោះប្រពៃណី** **“Yuon”, a Traditional Appellation**

**ដោយ ទូច ប្ញរ៉ា**

**យួន** or “yuon” is not a racist term as Mr. Meas Sokchea suggested in, “Sam Rainsy Declares Border Victory”, *The Post*, 02/02/2010, although since the date of that article Meas Sokchea advised the Khmerization that he “did not use the word Yuon and did not add in phrase ‘racist epithet for the Vietnamese.’ This word and this phrase were written by the [foreign] editor. I have requested him to use the word Vietnam in the bracket [Vietnam] instead of Yuon but he did not listen to me”

Part of its war propaganda, the characterization and propagation of **យួន** or “Yuon” as a pejorative term was started by the Vietnamese army in late 1977 when Vietnam was preparing for its invasion of Democratic Kampuchea.

Historically, the Vietnamese/Yuon, as a French historian, Etienne Aymonier (1893) pointed out, did not have their own ethnic name. The Chinese called them, variously, *Giao-Tchi*, *Lac*, *Yueh*, (pronounced by the Vietnamese **យ៉ៃក** or “Dyoek”, “Dyeh” **យ៉ៃ** or **យ៉ៃក** “Viet”), *Viet Thuong*, etc. Again, in 756 AD, the Chinese Emperor Ning Hoang Ty established in Tonquin a military command post formally called *An Nam* (pacified south). The Vietnamese used or were called this name “*An Nam*,” or the Anamites, basically till the 20th century. In 1803, an *An Nam* envoy was sent to establish diplomatic relations with the Chinese (Emperor). The diplomat told the Chinese that An Nam wanted their new country to be called “*Nan Viet*”. The Chinese objected and in turn imposed the name “*Viet Nan*” (Viet Nam). Gradually, the Chinese-imposed appellation acquired acceptance among the Vietnamese: (Taylor, 1983)

Nor did/do the Vietnamese have their own language really and the claim that “Vietnamese” is in the Austro-Asiatic/Khmer-Mon language group is also a myth. The German linguists Himly and Kuhn thought it was in the Thai group. Fr. Souvignat thought it was in the Indo-Malay group. The French Henri Maspero opined that it was of Thai origin. A. Haudricourt, misled, perhaps, by regular correspondence between the Austro-Asiatic and certain phonemes of *Yuon* language, concluded that it was in the Austro-Asiatic family. In fact, it is none of the above and it is not a language of its own “pure form” either: (Nguyen Kham, 1961). It’s a blend of different languages. 1/3 of the

vocabulary is borrowed from Chinese, with the balance being Indonesian, Cham, Tai/Thai, French, Khmer, etc.

“Viet Nam” only rather recently entered Khmer vocabulary. “Yuon” has been used by the Khmer and Chams since probably the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to refer to a people recently known as “Viet Nam”, the Vietnamese.

Since ancient times, like the Sanskrit **चीन**: “Cina” or *Chen*/**चिन** which the Khmer (and Indian) used to call the Chinese and the Chinese did not call themselves as such), the Khmer called “Vietnamese” **យួន** or “yvan”: (see Inscriptions K407, K669, K208, K273, and K485, K208, K662, K663 for *Cina*, and K105; K908 for **យួន**/yvan as listed by Coedes, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*). **យួន**/yvan is of Sanskrit **यवः**: “yavana”, the term the Indian used to refer to the ancient Greek or strangers. **យួន**/yvan resembled the Chinese “Yuan”, which the Vietnamese pronounced “Nguyen”: (Aymonier, 1893) In fact, the Vietnamese Emperor Tu Duc (r.1847-1883) was officially called by the Chinese Youan Fou Tchen: (Abbé Launay, 1884). It is thus possible the Khmer **យួន**/yvan is of Yuan (Ma), the Chinese military commander who ruled the Vietnamese in 2<sup>nd</sup> century. David Thomas, in his “a Note on ‘Yuan’” believes that *Yuon* is from *Yueh*, “*The viet: yueh correspondence would seem fairly secure and indeed Viet is the Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation for the Chinese character yueh “Vietnam”. The nang tone in viet would be from a Rising Tone in old Sino-Vietnamese, borrowed from the Chinese Rising Tone. In several Min dialects the Rising Tone has a final glottal stop, such as we suggest for yuan, and in Hainan the n sounds like nt. Add to this also the fact that alternation between –n and –t was reasonably common in Old Chinese, and n/t shifts also occur in Mon-Khmer, with the result that the viet: yueh + yuan equation is not as farfetched as it might seem at first glance*”, (JAOS, 94(1) 1974).

In the Khmer national (Chhuon Nath) *Dictionary of the Khmer language* published 1967, “Viet Nam” was not yet a Khmer vocabulary, while **យួន** “Yuon” was defined as meaning people who live in Tonquin, An Nam and Cochin China, (p.955). **រាជកិច្ចព្រាហ្ម** the *Reachkech reachkar* or the Official/State Gazette/Journals, where state laws, regulations, circulars, appointments of State functionaries, grants of citizenship etc were published, was first published in Khmer in 1911 (to 1974), **យួន** “Yuon” was used officially and singularly in the Journal. Post-Angkorianly, **យួន** “Yuon” was used officially such as in **ក្រមស្រុក** *kram srok* or *Law on the District Governors* (1693) and **ក្រមអង្គរាជរាជ** *kram anha luong* or *Law on Royal Emissaries* (1877). In Khmer literature, whether they were or are didactic poems, popular songs, history textbooks, “Yuon” was or still is used. Both CPP-affiliated (**កោះសន្តិភាព** *Kohsantepheap Daily News* 22/12/2009, 11/2/2010, and **ដើមអំពិល** *Deum Ampil Newspaper* 2/2/2010, 25/12/2009,) and Opposition newspapers and the

government spokesmen, Mr. Khieu Kanharith, Mr. Phay Siphon and opposition leaders Mr. Sam Rainsy use “*Yuon*” and “Vietnamese” interchangeably.

Khmer language or “literature”, as argued by Chea Sim, then the President of the National Assembly in March 1985 in a debate on whether to continue to use Chhuon Nath’s Dictionary “is an old aged tradition. It can’t be changed easily”.

~~ឃ្លា~~*Yuon* has been used by the Khmer continuously for over a thousand years. We can not change and we will not change.

***Bora Touch – February 2010***