

Sopheak Chann, Ph.D.
sopheak.chann@uky.edu

Current position

Full-Time Instructor,
Geography Department,
University of Kentucky

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Human Geography	University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia	2017
Thesis: "The production of space and the construction of frontier: contesting a Cambodian resource landscape."		
M.S. Geographic Information Sciences	University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia	2009
Thesis: "Examining land cover change in the upstream region of Stung Chinit Catchment, Cambodia, and the potential impact on hydrological processes."		
B.Sc. Environmental Studies	Royal University of Phnom Penh, Phnom Penh	2006

ACADEMIC POSITIONS

2024 – Present	Full-time Instructor	University of Kentucky Department of Geography
2022 – Present	Mekong Culture WELL Fellow Mekong NexGen Fellow	Michigan State University James Madison College of Public Affairs
2023 – Present	Affiliate Faculty	University of Michigan Center for Southeast Asian Studies
2017 – 2022	Lecturer	Royal University of Phnom Penh Faculty of Development Studies
2018 – 2021	Honorary Associate	Royal Holloway, University of London Department of Geography
2017 – 2018	Honorary Associate	University of Sydney, Australia School of Geosciences
2013 - 2017	Field Teaching Assistant	University of Sydney, Australia Geography and Mekong Fieldschool
2010 – 2013	Lecturer	Royal University of Phnom Penh Department of Environmental Sciences

FELLOWSHIPS & AWARDS

- 2025 [Winner of the Holland Prize for 2024](#) for the best article of the year, “Squeezed between Land and Water: Rupture, Frontier-making, and the Resource Conflicts at Cambodia’s Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Dam,” published in Pacific Affairs: \$1000 Canadian
- 2022 Mekong Next Gen Fellowship; \$20,000 through MCW project at Michigan State University
- 2020 Time Higher Education – [THE Awards 2020 Research Project of the Year: Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences](#)
- 2018 Association of Southeast Asian Studies (UK) Research Impact Award
- 2016 Sydney Southeast Asia Centre Travel Grand AUD 1000
- 2015 Outstanding presenter, Institute of Australian Geographers (IAG)
- 2013 AusAID Development Scholarship, Ph.D. program at the University of Sydney AUD 330000
- 2011 US Department of State, International Visiting Leadership Program (IVLP), Mekong Learning Initiative.
- 2009 AusAID Scholarship, Master Program AUD 55000
- 2002 Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, Undergraduate Scholarship to attend a BSc, Environmental Studies

GRANTS ACQUIRED

- 2020-Present Co-PI LuceSEA USD1,000,000 Mekong Cultural Well Project.
<https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2020/1m-grant-from-luce-foundation-launches-interdisciplinary-program-on-mekong-sustainability>
- 2018-2022 Co-PI ‘Rupture: nature-society transformation in mainland Southeast Asia’ with Australian National University (ANU) AUD49,950.00. The research investigates the socioecological impacts of hydropower dam developments in the Mekong Region, particularly Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. For more details of the project at <https://www.newmandala.org/introducing-rupture/>
- 2019-2022 Co-PI: ‘Depleted by debt? £820,759 Focusing a gendered lens on climate change resilience, credit, and nutrition in trans-local Cambodia and South India with Royal Holloway, University of London. <https://gtr.ukri.org/person/33E1035A-D557-48D9-8F81-9B03C69AC7F7>
- 2017-2019 Co-PI: “Blood Brick”, Royal Holloway, University of London.
<https://www.projectbloodbricks.org/team>

PUBLICATIONS

Writing in-progress **Chann, S.** Towards an Affective Geography of Decoloniality: Space, Body and Agency. *Progress in Human Geography*.

Under review A. Flaim, **S. Chann.**, A. Beban, J. A. Wang, D. B. Ahlquist. “The Political Ecology of Southeast Asia/n (Im)mobilities: Materialities, E/motion, and Embodied Borderscapes.” *Journal of Asian Studies*. (Invitation to contribute to special forum on new themes in political ecology)

Under review **Chann, S.**, Yong ML., H Faxon., and J Dicarlo (2026). An Introduction to Special Issue in *Journal of Political Ecology (JPE)/Grassroots: Roots, Resistance and Decoloniality: Political Ecology by, for, and of Southeast Asia, Grassroots/Journal of Political Ecology*.

- 2025 **Chann, S.**, A. Beban, W. Wisesjindawat-Fink. (2025). Grasping onto land: The emotional political ecology of land on the Tonle Sap Lake wetlands. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*.
- 2024 **Chann, S.**, Mahanty, S., & Chamberlin, K. (2024). Squeezed between Land and Water: Rupture, Frontier-Making, and Resource Conflicts at Cambodia's Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Dam. *Pacific Affairs*, 97(2), 313-342.
- 2024 **Chann, S.**, Beban, A., Flaim, A., Gorman, T., & Vouch, L. L. (2024). Disorientations: The political ecology of “displacing” floating communities from Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake. *Antipode*, 56(5), 1535-1559.
- 2023 **Chann, S.** (2024). A geographer's place matters: Reflections from a ‘local scholar’ and the politics of North/South knowledge production. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 49(2), e12661.
- 2023 Mahanty, S., **Chann, S.**, & Suong, S. (2023). The emotional life of rupture at Cambodia's Lower Sesan 2 hydropower dam. *Environment Planning E: Nature Space*, 25148486231162087.
- 2021 **Chann, S.** (2021) Migration in post-conflict state beyond climate change narratives: Exploring land and migration dynamics in Cambodian “last frontiers”, *Area*, Special Issues 2021, 1-10.
- 2021 Jack, M., **Chann, S.**, JACKSON, S and DELL, N., (2021) Digital Tools as Bureaucratic Documents: Multiple Meanings of Technologically-Mediated Governing. *The Journal of Collaborative Computing and Work Practices*, Vol. 5, No. CSCW1.
- 2019 **Chann, S.** (2020) Making place and creating frontiers: Examining land and resource struggles in Cambodian post-conflict resource landscapes. *Geographical Journal*, 185, 4.
- 2019 Parsons, L., & **Chann, S.** (2019) The Impact of Past and Present Water Regimes on Current Migration: Climate Adaptation, Debt Bondage and Hydrosocial Power in Cambodia. *Political Geography*, 75, 0-31.
- 2014 Frewer, T. & **Chann, S.** (2014) GIS and the ‘Usual Suspects’-[Mis]understanding Land Use Change in Cambodia. *Human Ecology*, 42, 267-281.

JOURNAL EDITING:

- 2025 Guest Editor for a special issue in Journal of Political Ecology (JPE)/Grassroots: Roots, Resistance and Decoloniality: Political Ecology by, for, and of Southeast Asia, *Grassroots/Journal of Political Ecology*.

WORKING PAPERS & REPORTS

- 2022 Iskander, D., Brickell, K., Natarajan, N., Parsons, L., Guermond, V., Zanello, G., ... & **Chann, S.** Relationship Between Climate Change, Debt, Nutrition and Health During COVID-19 Pandemic, 2022.

- 2022 Milne, S., Mahanty, S., Lamb, V., Barney K., To, P., Ironside J., Wells-Dang, A., Thuon, T., Hirsch, P., and **Chann S.** CSO in the Mekong What can we learn from environmental struggle, the rapture project, New Mandala. <https://www.newmandala.org/author/rupture/>
- 2019 Brickell K., Parsons L., Natarajan N., and **Chann S.** Blood Bricks: Untold Stories Of Modern Slavery And Climate Change From Cambodia. <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/blood-bricks-untold-stories-of-modern-slavery-and-climate-change-from-cambodia>
- 2018 Brickell, K., Parsons, L., Natarajan, N., and **Chann, S.** 2018. Blood Bricks: Department of Geography, Untold Stories of Modern Slavery and Climate Change from Cambodia. Royal Holloway, University of London. <https://www.projectbloodbricks.org/publications>
- 2018 **Chann, S.** 2018 Land and legal status of six urban poor communities in Bueng (Lake) Tompun Area. People In Need (PIN): Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- 2017 **Chann, S.** & Frewer, T. 2017. Commodity frontiers: An ethnographic study of the social-environmental interaction of Upper Stung Prek Thnot River Catchment, Eastern Cardamom Mountains. A situational analysis report, UNDP: Phnom Penh, Cambodia. https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/KHM/Ethnographic%20Study%20Stung%20Prek%20Thnot_Final.pdf
- 2013 **Chann, S.**, & Kong, S. Climate change vulnerability mapping: commune level assessment in Kampong Speu Province. In N. Chhinh, N. Heng & S. Chann (Eds.), Climate change vulnerability assessment in Kampong Spue Province, Cambodia (pp. 23-52). Royal University of Phnom Penh: Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- 2011 **Chann, S.**, Wales, N. & Frewer, T. 2011. An investigation of land cover and land use change in Stung Chrey Bak catchment, Cambodia. Working Paper No 53, Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI): Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- 2011 **Chann, S.**, Wales, N & Griffiths, K. 2011. Investigating land cover change in Cambodia. Policy Brief N.04, Cambodia Development Resource Centre (CDRI): Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- 2008 Chem, P., Hirsch, P., Kim, S., Suon, V., Khiev, D., Neave, M., Griffiths, K., Wales, N., Gillespie, J., Ham, K., Nong, K., Chea P., **Chann, S.** 2008. Framing Research on Water Resources Management and Governance in Cambodia: A Literature Review. Working Paper, No 37, Development Resource Institute (CDRI): Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

SELECTED INVITED TALKS & PRESENTATIONS

- 2025 **Chann S:** Grasping onto land: the emotional political ecology of land on the Tonle Sap Lake Wetlands, AAG (Association of American Geographers), Detroit, Michigan, March 24, 2025.
- 2024 **Chann S:** Grasping onto land: the emotional political ecology of land on the Tonle Sap Lake Wetlands (A finalist job talk for a tenure-track assistant professor at the Department of Geography, University of Washington).
- 2024 **Chann, S:** The Political Ecology of “Displacing” Floating Communities from Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake, Southeast Asia Studies Center, University of Michigan, February 2, 2024. <https://events.umich.edu/event/116646>
- 2024 **Chann, S:** The Political Ecology of “Displacing” Floating Communities from Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake, RGS-IBG Annual Conference, London, August 2024: <https://scgrg.co.uk/rgs-ibg-annual-conference-2024-sponsored-sessions>
- 2023 **Chann, S:** Damming Rivers in Cambodia: Impacts of Water-Grabbing on Land and Resource Access, East-West Center and the University of Hawaii, March 1, 2023. <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/events/damming-rivers-cambodia-impacts-water-grabbing-land-and-resource-access>
- 2023 **Chann, S:** Socio-ecological Impacts of Environmental Displacements of Communities Living on the Tonle Sap Lake, North Carolina Asia Center, and Geography Department at the

- University of North Carolina, January 27 2023. <https://carolinaasiacenter.unc.edu/event/talk-by-professor-sopheak-chann/>
- 2022 **Chann, S:** Chinese investment and construction working conditions in Cambodia at James Madison College, Michigan State University, 16 November 2022. <https://vipp.isp.msu.edu/eventsdepartment14/?id=52804>
- 2022 Mahanty, S., and **Chann, S:** the Emotional Life of Rupture at Cambodia's Lower Sesan 2 dam at Political Emotional Ecology Symposium (POLLEN 2022).
- 2022 **Chann, S., & Mahanty, S:** Shaping water, grabbing land: local experiences of the rapture of Lower Sesan II Dam, ICIRD7, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- 2022 **Chann, S. & Mahanty., S:** Shaping water, grabbing land: local experiences of the rapture of Lower Sesan II Dam, Rupture Workshop, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- 2020 **Chann, S:** Frontier Construction and Place-Making in Cambodia Post-Conflict Resource Landscapes, Gatty Lecture, Global Connell. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHT5NmyV8Yg>
- 2020 **Chann, S:** The history and present-day realities of place-making in post-conflict resource landscapes, especially Cambodia. Episode 36, the Gatty Lecture Rewind Podcast. <https://gattyrewind.libsyn.com/episode-36-sopheak-chann-lecturer-department-of-natural-resource-management-and-development-royal-university-of-phnom-penh>
- 2018 **Chann, S:** Shaping the Water and Grabbing the Land: Elite Land Grabbing in Bueng Tompun "Lake", Phnom Penh. Association of Southeast Asia Studies – UK (ASEAS-UK) University of Leeds, UK, September 2018.
- 2018 **Chann, S:** Labour and land in the post-war frontiers: Exploring the dialectical relationship between ecological, political and economic changes and rural migrations in Cambodia. Royal Geography Society (RGS), Cardiff University, UK, September 2018.
- 2016 **Chann, S:** Critical cartography and understanding the construction of Cambodia's resource frontier. Association of American Geographers (AAG), San Francisco, April 2016.
- 2015 **Chann, S:** Sustaining nature, developing the state v's simplification of local land use on the edge of Cambodia's last frontier. Institute of Australian Geographers (IAG), ANU, Australia, July 2015.

CONFERENCES ORGANIZED

- 2024 Southeast Asia in Transition Spring Semester 2024: Decolonizing Southeast Studies Webinar Series –the University of Hawaii at Manoa and Michigan State University.
- 2022 Beban A., Mahanty S., and **Chann S.** Political Emotional Ecology Symposium (POLLEN 2022), exploring how emotions influence resource access, use, and control and shape people's everyday lives and relationships with each other and the state. <https://perc.ac.nz/wordpress/emotional-ecologies/>
- 2022 Discussing Development: Forest and Field Webinar at Southeast Asia in Transition Fall 2022 Webinar Series. <https://www.luce.cseashawaii.org/2022/09/12/southeast-asia-in-transition-fall-2022-webinar-series/>

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 2024-Present Full-Time Instructor at the Department of Geography, University of Kentucky

Courses:

Undergraduate: “Development and Environment”, “Global Climate Change,”
“U.S Cities.”

Graduate: “Environmental and Sustainability: Issues and Ideas,” “Environmental
Policy and Governance,” “Environmental Policies and Governance,”
“Communicating Environment and Sustainability Studies,” and “Decolonizing
Political Ecology.”

2022-2024 Co-instructor at James Madison College, Michigan State University

Courses:

Undergraduate: “Political Ecology of the Mekong,” and “Politics of
displacement: borders, refugees, and problems of asylums” Michigan State
(MC399)

2020-2022 Lecturer at the Department of Natural Resource Management, Royal University of Phnom
Penh

Courses:

Undergraduate: “Sustainable Wetland Management”, “Development and
Environment”, “Introduction to Geographic Information Systems”, and “Field
School: Academic Research and an Introduction to Methods in Geography”
Graduate: “Geographic Information System (GIS) and Climate Change”

2015-2016 Teaching Assistant at the Geography Department, University of Sydney

Courses:

Undergraduate: “Environment and Natural Resources”, and “Mekong Field
School”

2010-2013 Lecturer at the Department of Environmental Science, Royal University of Phnom Penh

Courses:

Undergraduate: “Introduction to Geographic Information Systems” and
“Introduction to the Environment”

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

2024-Present	Association of American Geographers (AAG)
2019-Present	Committee member of the Cambodian Scholar Network
2011-Present	International Visiting Leadership Program (IVLP) with the US Department of State
2020-Present	Association of Asian Studies
2018-Present	Association of Southeast Asian Studies in the UK (ASEASUK)
2013-Present	Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSAEC) with the University of Sydney
2013-Present	Australian Award Scholarship (AAS) with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
2004-2017	Australian Mekong Resource Centre (AMRC) with the University of Sydney

FIELDWORK & RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- 2020-Present Research Team Leader for Mekong Culture WELL (MCW) at Michigan State University
2021 Researcher, E&S due diligence (ESDD) for preparing funding from the legacy landscape fund, Cardamom Mountains, NP Cambodia, Preparation for KFW Development Bank, Community Insight Group (CIG).
- 2021 Researcher, conducting a study on responses of relevant agencies on the impacts of COVID-19 on people with disabilities in Cambodia, UNDP
- 2020 Researcher, Chinese Investment and Construction Working Condition in Cambodia, AMRC
- 2020 Researcher, Investigating labor rights issues of a palm oil plantation in Southwestern Cambodia, SWISS Solidarity
- 2019 Researcher, Investigating labor rights issues of a Rubber Plantation in Northeastern Cambodia, SWISS Solidarity
- 2019 Researcher, ethnographic study on climate change and people with disabilities in Cambodia, UNDP
- 2017 Researcher, studying land use and land cover changes and their impacts on local livelihoods in Cambodia, UNDP
- 2017 Researcher studying land grabs in Phnom Penh's remaining biggest wetland lake and urban poor communities, People In Need (PIN).