

Marxist Regimes

Kampuchea

Politics, Economics and Society

Michael Vickery

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Popullore Socialiste e Shqipërisë ★ República Popular
Angola ★ République Populaire du Benin ★ Narodna Republika
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Konghwa-guk ★ Saathiaranagroat Prachhathippa
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KAMPUCHEA

Politics, Economics and Society

Michael Vickery

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Editors Preface

For many years now Kampuchea (also known as Cambodia) has been a battle zone for local as well as superpower interests. The consequences of these ongoing rivalries have had a devastating effect on the Khmer people, their ancient civilization and culture. In recent times Kampuchea has seen more dramatic changes than most countries in the region. The country even has the doubtful distinction of being the only one where the Marxist regime (that of Pol Pot) was overthrown by another Marxist government with the help of a Marxist neighbour (Vietnam). This book describes and analyses the present as well as the past in this small and backward country with its peasant economy, and suggests the type of lessons that might be learnt from the Kampuchean experience by other smaller states in the developing regions of the world.

The example and experience of Kampuchea is particularly interesting to the study of Marxist regimes, which has commonly been simply equated with the study of communist political systems. For many years it was not difficult to distinguish the eight regimes in Eastern Europe and four in Asia which resoundingly claimed adherence to the tenets of Marxism and more particularly to their Soviet interpretation—Marxism–Leninism. These regimes, variously called 'People's Republic', 'People's Democratic Republic', or 'Democratic Republic', claimed to have derived their inspiration from the Soviet Union to which, indeed, in the overwhelming number of cases they owed their establishment.

To many scholars and analysts these regimes represented a multiplication of and geographical extension of the 'Soviet model' and consequently of the Soviet sphere of influence. Although there were clearly substantial similarities between the Soviet Union and the people's democracies, especially in the initial phases of their development, these were often overstressed at the expense of noticing the differences between these political systems.

It took a few years for scholars to realize that generalizing the particular, i.e. applying the Soviet experience to other states ruled by elites which claimed to be guided by 'scientific socialism', was not good enough. The relative simplicity of the assumption of a cohesive communist bloc was questioned after the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Communist Information Bureau in 1948 and in particular after the workers' riots in Poznań in 1956 and the Hungarian revolution of the same year. By the mid-1960s, the totalitarian model of communist politics, which until then had been very much in force, began to crumble. As some of these regimes articulated

demands for a distinctive path of socialist development, many specialists studying these systems began to notice that the cohesiveness of the communist bloc was less apparent than had been claimed before.

Also by the mid-1960s, in the newly independent African states 'democratic' multi-party states were turning into one-party states or military dictatorships, thus questioning the inherent superiority of liberal democracy, capitalism and the values that went with it. Scholars now began to ponder on the simple contrast between multi-party democracy and a one-party totalitarian rule that had satisfied an earlier generation.

More importantly, however, by the beginning of that decade Cuba had a revolution without Soviet help, a revolution which subsequently became to many political elites in the Third World not only an inspiration but a clear military, political and ideological example to follow. Apart from its romantic appeal, to many nationalist movements the Cuban revolution also demonstrated a novel way of conducting and winning a nationalist, anti-imperialist war and accepting Marxism as the state ideology without a vanguard communist party. The Cuban precedent was subsequently followed in one respect or another by scores of regimes in the Third World who used the adoption of 'scientific socialism' tied to the tradition of Marxist thought as a form of mobilization, legitimization or association with the prestigious symbols and powerful high-status regimes such as the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and Vietnam.

Despite all these changes the study of Marxist regimes remains in its infancy and continues to be hampered by constant and not always pertinent comparison with the Soviet Union, thus somewhat blurring the important underlying common theme—the 'scientific theory' of the laws of development of human society and human history. This doctrine is claimed by the leadership of these regimes to consist of the discovery of objective causal relationships; it is used to analyse the contradictions which arise between goals and actuality in the pursuit of a common destiny. Thus the political elites of these countries have been and continue to be influenced in both their ideology and their political practice by Marxism more than any other current of social thought and political practice.

The growth in the number and global significance, as well as the ideological political and economic impact, of Marxist regimes has presented scholars and students with an increasing challenge. In meeting this challenge, social scientists on both sides of the political divide have put forward a dazzling profusion of terms, models, programmes and varieties of interpretation. It is against the background of this profusion that the present comprehensive series on Marxist regimes is offered.

This collection of monographs is envisaged as a series of multi-disciplinary textbooks on the governments, politics, economics and society of these countries. Each of the monographs was prepared by a specialist on the country concerned. Thus, over fifty scholars from all over the world have contributed monographs which were based on first-hand knowledge. The geographical diversity of the authors, combined with the fact that as a group they represent many disciplines of social science, gives their individual analyses and the series as a whole an additional dimension.

Each of the scholars who contributed to this series was asked to analyse such topics as the political culture, the governmental structure, the ruling party, other mass organizations, party-state relations, the policy process, the economy, domestic and foreign relations together with any features peculiar to the country under discussion.

This series does not aim at assigning authenticity or authority to any single one of the political systems included in it. It shows that depending on a variety of historical, cultural, ethnic and political factors, the pursuit of goals derived from the tenets of Marxism has produced different political forms at different times and in different places. It also illustrates the rich diversity among these societies, where attempts to achieve a synthesis between goals derived from Marxism on the one hand, and national realities on the other, have often meant distinctive approaches and solutions to the problems of social, political and economic development.

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Bogdan Szajkowski

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Facilities for writing this book were provided by the Centre for Asian Studies and the Thai Ceramics Archaeological Project, University of Adelaide.

Within the People's Republic of Kampuchea arrangements for travel and research were made by the Press Section, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the guide assigned to me for my visit in November 1984, Miss Chea Chan Nakry, was particularly helpful. I would also like to thank the various PRK officials who gave time to answer my questions about their departments.

In Phnom Penh, Fred and Minh Kauffman of the Mennonite Central Committee provided hospitality and photocopying facilities; and Jake Buhler of the same organization has also been very helpful.

During the 1984 trip, Otome Hutheesing collaborated in the collection of data, and she has aided me in the preparation of the text.

David Chandler, Noam Chomsky, Stephen Heder, Serge Thion and, in particular, Ben Kiernan have provided me with information from their own research or published material of which I had not been aware; and Ben Kiernan corrected several errors in the first draft of Chapter 3. None of them, of course, is responsible for any errors which may remain.

Preface

The Name of the Country

The name 'Kampuchea', or *kambuja* in conformity with traditional orthography, first appears in Cambodia in tenth-century inscriptions to refer to the people, the *kambu-ja*, 'born of Kambu'—a figure of Indian mythology. Eventually, via the expression *kambuja-desa*, 'Kambuja-country', or 'country of those born of Kambu', the term came to mean the country itself; and in early modern times it passed into European languages as Camboxa (Portuguese), Cambodge (French), and Cambodia (English). Since at least the sixteenth-century 'Kampuchea' has been part of the country's official name in Khmer, except under Lon Nol who preferred 'Khmer' (Khmer Republic), another native ethnic term of perhaps greater antiquity than 'Kampuchea'. The term 'Khmer' is still current and appropriate as an ethnonym or language name, both within Cambodia and in foreign languages.

The name 'Cambodia' then, like 'Italy', 'Spain', and 'Turkey', is a well-established English equivalent of the native name, and I prefer to use it when writing in English, except when emphasizing proper titles, such as People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and Democratic Kampuchea (DK).

Sources and Their Use

This book is based as far as possible on material from within Cambodia—written material provided by the government; the local press; my own observations, including interviews and informal conversations with Cambodian officials and people met in casual encounters; and information provided by foreign aid personnel working there. This has been supplemented by the work of other scholars and by reports in the international press.

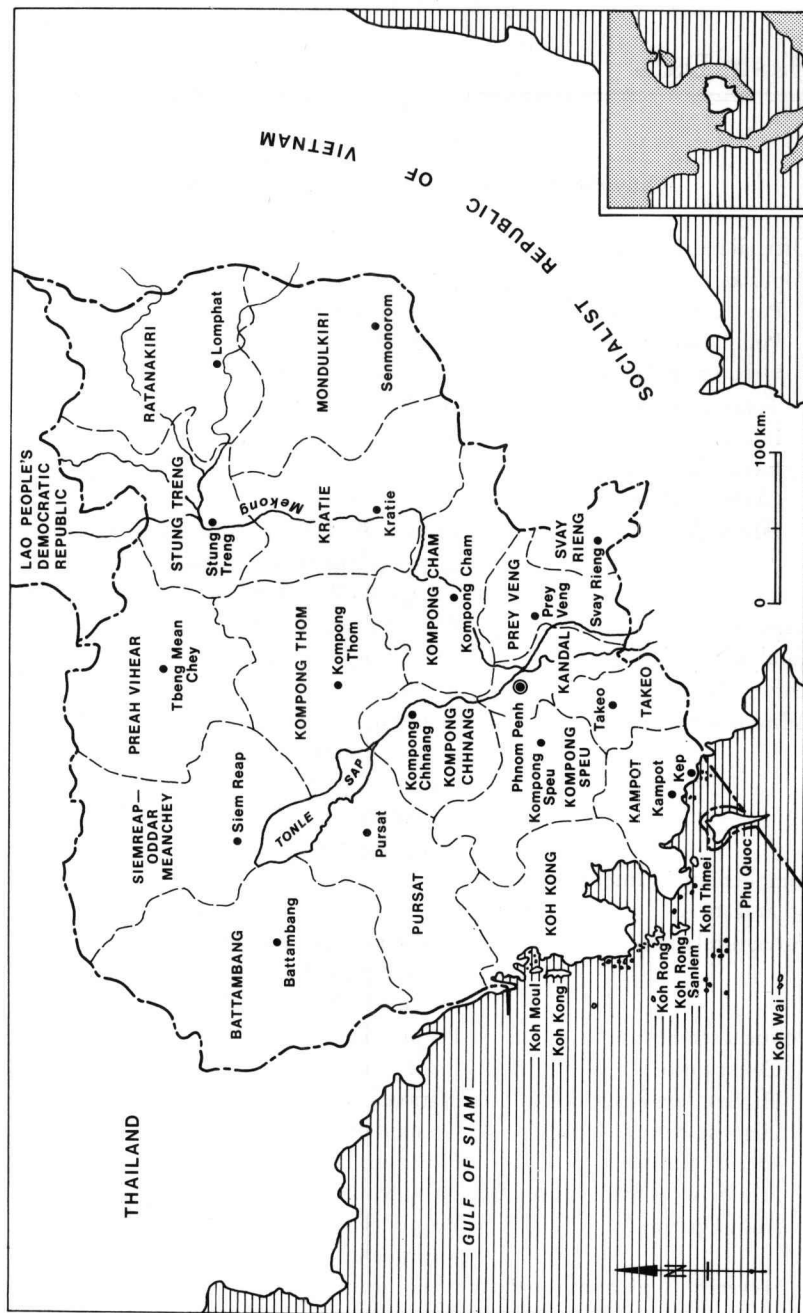
I have also occasionally made use of information from refugees on the Thai border, or published accounts of other writers based on such material. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Vickery 1984), however, such information may be very useful only if the source can be interviewed independently and analytically. The raw statements of refugees about PRK wrongdoing and Vietnamese iniquities are too frequently exaggerated or patently false.

The political and international situation of the PRK makes research difficult, much more difficult than in most of the European Marxist states.

The PRK, after replacing a regime almost universally recognized as loathsome, has found itself subjected to more, and increasing, sustained political and military opposition fuelled by prestigious foreign support than the regime that it replaced. The foreign support has come from China, the ASEAN states and the United States, and with respect to the last represents continuing destructive interest by that power in Cambodia for the past ten years.

Cambodia is thus at war, with normal wartime restrictions on travel and research, particularly by foreigners. Since 1979 I have made two visits—for three weeks in August–September 1981 and for five weeks from the end of October through November 1984. The last visit I was told by both PRK officials and by foreigners working in Cambodia, was unusually long. It is nevertheless not long enough to investigate everything that should go into a book like this one. Normal descriptive documentation of state organization, and normal statistical documentation in available published form do not yet exist in the PRK. All such information must be obtained through interviews with people who are usually overworked. Moreover, even though I emphasized that I did not insist on meeting cabinet ministers, that I would be satisfied with anyone who could provide the information I required, in most cases it was only a minister who was willing to talk about the work of a ministry. For the formal acquisition of information, one must reach the top to get anything at all. Thus, much detailed information on organization, and most statistical information I wanted, was placed on my agenda for a meeting with the Planning Ministry, which in the end never took place because of other commitments by its officials during the period of my visa.

I consider that these difficulties arise from the country's objective situation, and are not due to ill will or a desire to disguise the true picture. Given Cambodia's experiences with the West, in particular with the United States, Cambodia has been quite generous in according travel and research facilities to Americans.



Basic Data

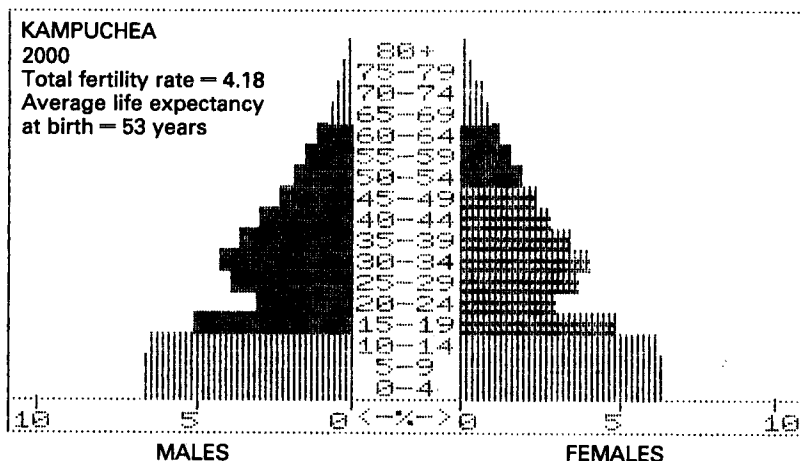
Only PRK, post-1979 data have been considered

Official name	People's Republic of Kampuchea
Population	7.2 million (1984)
Population density	100 per sq. km. in heartland
Population growth (% p.a.)	2.5-3,000 (1979-85)
Urban population (%)	6.95 (1985)
Total labour force	145,000 (state employees)
Life expectancy	n/a
Infant death rate (per 1,000)	150-200
Child death rate	n/a
Ethnic groups	Khmer, 90%; ethnic minorities include Chinese, Vietnamese, Cham, Brao, Tampuan, Pear, Kachak, Stieng, Lao, Thai
Capital	Phnom Penh, 500,000 (1985)
Land area	181,000 sq. km.
Official language	Khmer
Administrative divisions	18 provinces (<i>khét</i>), divided into 122 districts (<i>srok</i>), 1,325 sub-districts (<i>khum</i>), and 9,386 villages (<i>phum</i>), plus two municipalities—Phnom Penh and Kompong Som
Membership of international organizations	None
Foreign relations	Diplomatic and consular relations with 27 states; representatives of 10 countries residing in Phnom Penh (November 1984)
Political structure	People's Republic
Constitution	As of July 1981
Highest legislative body	National Assembly of 117 members
Highest executive body	Council of State
Prime Minister	Hun Sen (since January 1985)
President (of State Council)	Heng Samrin
Ruling party	People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea
Secretary General of the Party	Heng Samrin (since December 1981)

Party Membership	10,000 est.
Growth indicators	n/a
National income	n/a
Food production per capita	n/a
Exports	\$4-5 million (1983)
Imports	\$200 million (1983)
Exports as % of GNP	n/a
Main exports	Rubber, beans, timber, kapok, tobacco
Main imports (% n/a)	Food, consumer goods, fuel, raw materials, equipment
Destination of exports (%)	Socialist countries 95. Non-socialist countries 5
Main trading partners	Vietnam, Soviet Union, Eastern Europe
Foreign debt	n/a
Foreign aid	\$150 million p.a., est.
Food self-sufficiency	Est. 310,000 ton deficit (1985)
Foreign investment	n/a, probably none
Armed forces	30,000 est.
Education and health	
School system	10 years (7-17)
Primary school enrolment	1,689,690 (1983-4)
Secondary school enrolment	6,969 (1983-4)
Higher education	Faculty of Medicine, Denistry and Pharmacy; Kampuchea-Soviet Higher Technical Institute; Language School; teacher training institutions
Adult literacy	n/a
Population per hospital bed	n/a
Population per physician	n/a
Economy	
GNP	n/a
State budget	n/a
Defence expenditure as % of state budget	n/a
Main crops	Rice, rubber, beans, kapok, tobacco
Land tenure	State ownership with family allotments of 1,500 sq. m.
Main religions	Buddhism (90%+), Islam, folk religion

Population Forecasting

The following data are projections produced by Poptran, University College Cardiff Population Centre, from United Nations Assessment Data published in 1980, and are reproduced here to provide some basis of comparison with other countries covered by the Marxist Regimes Series.



Projected Data for Kampuchea 2000

Total population ('000)	10,610
Males ('000)	5,315
Females ('000)	5,295
Total fertility rate	4.10
Life expectancy (male)	51.9 years
Life expectancy (female)	55.0 years
Crude birth rate	30.7
Crude death rate	12.8
Annual growth rate	1.79%
Under 15s	38.49%
Over 65s	3.62%
Woman aged 15-49	24.27%
Doubling time	39 years
Population density	59 per sq. km.
Urban population	23.7%

Abbreviations

DK	Democratic Kampuchea
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
ICP	Indo-China Communist Party
KPRC	Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Council
KPRP	Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (founded 1951)
NLF	National Liberation Front
PRC	People's Revolutionary Committee
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
PRPK	People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea (1981-)
RGNUC	Royal Government of National Union of Cambodia
Sangkum	Sangkum Reastr Niyum (Popular Socialist Community), Sihanouk's political movement from 1955 to 1970
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
SWB	<i>Summary of World Broadcasts</i>
UIF	United Issarak Front

Glossary of Khmer terms

<i>cau sanghat</i>	ward chief
<i>corvée</i>	a tax
<i>dong</i>	unit of Vietnamese currency
<i>Khet</i>	province
<i>khmer loeu</i>	upland Khmer
<i>kret-chbap</i>	Decree-Law
<i>krom pracheachon</i>	citizen's group
<i>krom samakkei</i>	Solidarity Groups
<i>protean</i>	president
<i>riel</i>	unit of Cambodian currency
<i>sangharaja</i>	'Sangha King', title of the head of the Buddhist Monkhood before 1975
<i>sanghat</i>	ward
<i>srok</i>	district (sub-division of a province)
<i>wat</i>	Buddhist temple