

# The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea



**Craig Etcheson**

---

Westview / Pinter

# The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea

Craig Etcheson

---

---

Westview Press • Boulder, Colorado  
Frances Pinter (Publishers) • London

*This volume is included in Westview's Special Studies on South and Southeast Asia.*

Map 6.2 adapted from map by Dick Sanderson in *White House Years* by Henry Kissinger (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), p. 248. Copyright © Henry A. Kissinger. Used by permission.

"Sheep" lyrics, Chapter 7, copyright © 1977, 1978 by Pink Floyd Music Publishers Ltd., London. Published and administered in the U.S.A. by Unichappell Music, Inc. International copyright secured. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Copyright © 1984 by Westview Press, Inc.

Published in 1984 in the United States of America by Westview Press, Inc., 5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, Colorado 80301; Frederick A. Praeger, President and Publisher.

Published in 1984 in Great Britain by Frances Pinter (Publishers) Limited, 5 Dryden Street, London WC2E 9NW.

ISBN (U.S.) 0-86531-650-3

ISBN (U.K.) 0-86187-362-9

Printed and bound in the United States of America

5 4 3 2 1

## Preface

---

The sole great truth in politics is that there is no objective Truth in politics. Politics is a world of compromise and doublecross, of alliance and comparative political advantage, of redeemed villainy and corrupted ideals, of victory and sudden death. More is at stake than the survival of particular forms of political institutions.

On the surface, this is a tale of war and death. As many as three million or more human beings perished as a result of the events examined in this study. Frankly, this story is still somewhat beyond my comprehension, too fantastically macabre to understand fully even after long study. Yet, it is important to try to do so, for beneath the glossy, somehow unreal surface sheen of megadeath, there lies another story. Indeed, it is the story of a search for Utopia, and the discovery of something quite different.

This study originated as a paper for a seminar on guerrilla movements in the Third World, under the direction of Gerald Bender at the University of Southern California's School of International Relations in the spring of 1980. My thanks for their comments go to members of the seminar, including Neil Scarth, Kevin McDonnough, Al Zapanta, Leslie Gunn, Ary Aryania, Jason Chao, Shobana Kokatay, Menelek Sessing, Mohamed Diakite, Bernard Wilhelm, Mohammed Mariri, Fesseha Wolde-Emanuel, Sadiq Mehros, Sarah Fishman, and Gorden Townsend.

The bulk of the research and writing for this study was done during the summer of 1981, while the author was employed as a research associate at the University of Southern California's Institute for Transnational Studies. A debt of gratitude is owed to the institute's director, James N. Rosenau, for arranging work schedules flexible enough to permit this "extracurricular" activity, and to the institute's administrative coordinators, Liz Nelson and Carole Gustin, for generous secretarial assistance and unflagging cheerfulness in the face of a summer's worth of exhaustion-induced impatience.

I gratefully acknowledge a special intellectual debt to Neil Scarth, who was my original research partner during the seminar. Our discussions and parallel research efforts both during and after the seminar influenced in no small way the entire direction of the present study. Moreover, Neil has generously allowed me to draw heavily on his unpublished paper, "A Comparative Analysis of Kampuchean Economic Program and Performance." The second section of Chapter 8 ("The 'Precious Model': Implications of the Classless Society") very much reflects Neil's research on comparative models of economic development.

The study was completed in the spring of 1983, and I had a lot of help. Thanks are in order to the School of International Relations at the University of Southern California and to its director, Dr. Michael Fry, for a grant from the Von Kleinsmid Endowment to assist in the final preparation of the manuscript, and to the School of International Relations Machine Laboratory for computing resources used to process the final draft and produce the tables. Michelle Raymond assisted in the preparation of the tables using the Scribe Document Preparation System and a Xerox 2700 Laser Graphics Printer. Maps 6.2 through 6.9 were produced by Engineering Associates, Inc., of Los Angeles.

I would also like to acknowledge helpful comments, criticisms, and contributions by Michelle Raymond, Dan Garst, Jung Il-Hwa, Peter Berton, Stanley Rosen, Jonathan Aronson, James Rosenau, Kanthati Suphamongkhon, Constance Lynch, Gerard Chaliand, Heidi Hobbs, Douglas Pike, William Shawcross, Laura Summers, Walter Aschmoneit, Ben Kiernan, and Chanthou Boua. Special thanks go to Lynn Sipes and Janice Hanks of USC's Von Kleinsmid Library for research assistance above and beyond the call of duty. Thanks also to the editors and anonymous reviewers at Westview Press for helpful input.

Incisive criticism and commentary from David P. Chandler improved the manuscript at many points, and the author is most grateful.

Saving the best for last, I most appreciatively acknowledge the support of Dr. Gerry Bender, whose extensive comments on various drafts of this study proved to be of crucial importance. Without his constant encouragement and advice, this study would not have happened.

Although each of these persons and institutions, and many yet unnamed, improved the final product in some way, they were unable to remedy all of the work's deficiencies. The author alone is solely responsible for those.

Craig Etcheson  
Los Angeles, California

## Abbreviations

---

AAPSO	International Conference on Solidarity with the Khmer People
ADKW	Association of Democratic Khmer Women
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCNL	Cambodian Committee for National Liberation
CCP	Communist Party of China
CECUF	Central Executive Committee of the United Front
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CLF	Cambodian Liberation Front
COSVN	Central Office for South Vietnam
CPK	(See KCP)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DCI	Director, Central Intelligence Agency
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)
FANK	<i>Force Armée Nationale Khmer</i>
FARK	<i>Force Armée Royale Khmer</i>
FLLPK	<i>Front Nationale de Libération du Peuple Khmer</i> (see KPNLF)
FUNK	National United Front for Kampuchea
GRUNK	Royal Government of Khmer National Unification
ICA	Indochinese Communist Alliance
ICC	International Control Commission
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
KCP	Kampuchean Communist Party
KFF	Khmer Freedom Front
KNLC	Khmer National Liberation Committee
KNUFNS	Khmer National United Front for National Salvation
KPLC	Khmer People's Liberation Committee

KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
KPP	Khmer People's Party
KPRP (1951)	(See KPP)
KPRP (1981)	Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party
KSA	Khmer Students' Association
KSU	Khmer Students' Union
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAP	Military Assistance Program
NEZ	New Economic Zone
NIK	<i>Nekhum Issarak Khmer</i>
NLF	National Liberation Front (South Vietnam)
NSC	National Security Council
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PCF	French Communist Party
PFLANK	People's National Liberation Armed Forces of Kampuchea
PLCC	People's Liberation Central Committee
PRA	People's Representative Assembly
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government (South Vietnam)
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
PYA	Patriotic Youth Association
RAK	Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
UFTIP	United Front of the Three Indochinese Peoples
UN	United Nations
USAF	United States Air Force
VC	Viet Cong
VCP	Vietnamese Communist Party
VRYL	Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League
WHY	<i>White House Years</i> , by H. A. Kissinger
WPK	Workers' Party of Kampuchea
WSAG	Washington Special Actions Group
YOU	<i>Years of Upheaval</i> , by H. A. Kissinger
Yuv.K.K.	<i>Sampoan Yuvachun Kampuchea Pracheathibodey</i> , or Alliance of Democratic Khmer Youth

# Contents

---

<i>List of Illustrations</i> .....	xi
<i>Preface</i> .....	xiii
<i>Abbreviations</i> .....	xv
<b>1 <i>Mise en Scène</i></b> .....	<b>1</b>
Notes.....	3
<b>2 <i>Cambodian Politics, Society, and Economy</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
Echoes of Empires.....	6
The Magic Kingdom That Never Was .....	8
Prelude to Pandemonium .....	14
Notes.....	22
<b>3 <i>Evolution of Khmer Rouge Political Thought and Behavior</i></b> .....	<b>27</b>
Roots of Ideology.....	27
Components of Political Thought .....	33
Stages of <i>Khmer Rouge</i> Behavior .....	35
Notes.....	36
<b>4 <i>Gestation (1930–1960)</i></b> .....	<b>39</b>
The Early History .....	39
Sihanouk and Cambodian Communism.....	41
Emergence of the KCP.....	45
Notes.....	52



<b>5</b>	<b>The Early Revolutionary Stage (1960-1967)</b> .....	55
	The Identity of the Party.....	55
	The Deterioration of the Center.....	61
	The Strategy of Revolution .....	66
	Samlaut.....	69
	Notes.....	72
<b>6</b>	<b>The Late Revolutionary Stage (1968-1975)</b> .....	75
	Guerrilla Warfare (1968-1970) .....	79
	The <i>Coup</i> .....	86
	The U.S. Role .....	89
	The Kissinger-Shawcross Controversy.....	95
	Combined Warfare (1970-1975).....	103
	The Components of Victory .....	124
	Notes.....	137
<b>7</b>	<b>Consolidation and Society Building (1975-1978)</b> .....	143
	Utopia Wrought .....	143
	To Kill Two Kings .....	149
	The Transformation of Consciousness.....	157
	The Struggle Within .....	162
	Notes.....	180
<b>8</b>	<b>Utopia and Pandemonium</b> .....	185
	The Postregime Stage (1979-1983) .....	185
	The "Precious Model": Implications of the Classless Society.....	200
	Did They Keep Their Promises? .....	212
	Denouement .....	216
	Notes.....	217
 <b>Appendixes</b>		
	A. The Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea.....	221
	B. A Chronological History of Kampuchea.....	229
	 <i>Selected Research Bibliography</i> .....	253
	<i>Index</i> .....	273

## Illustrations

---

### Tables

2.1	Changing Land Use in Cambodia, 1954-1965.....	14
2.2	Landownership and Cultivation Trends, 1930-1962.....	15
2.3	Cambodian Rural Population Density .....	18
2.4	The Erosion of Purchasing Power in Cambodia, 1953-1966 .....	20
2.5	Critical Economic Indicators, 1955-1966 .....	22
4.1	KCP Leadership Profile .....	48
6.1	Disbursement Schedule: U.S. Military Assistance Program, Khmer Republic .....	94
6.2	U.S. Airborne Bombardment in Cambodia, 1969-1973 ....	101
7.1	Death in Kampuchean War and Peace.....	148

### Figures

2.1	Cambodian Demographic Trends, 1900-1980.....	13
2.2	Food Prices in Cambodia, 1949-1980 .....	19
4.1	Emergence of the Kampuchean Communist Party .....	46
6.1	Evolution of KCP Ties—The Rise and Fall of <i>Angkar</i> <i>Loeu</i> .....	78
7.1	Idealized Representation of <i>De Facto</i> KCP Structure, 1973 .....	169

### Maps

6.1	U.S. Airstrikes in the ARCLIGHT Series, 1973.....	100
6.2	U.S. Airstrikes in the MENU Series, 1969 .....	102
6.3	Geo-Military Situation, January 1970 .....	104
6.4	Geo-Military Situation, June 1970.....	105
6.5	FANK Strategic Concepts for Defense of the Khmer Republic.....	109
6.6	Geo-Military Situation, March 1971 .....	112

6.7	The Decisive Engagement .....	113
6.8	Geo-Military Situation, May 1972.....	116
6.9	Geo-Military Situation, December 1973-June 1974.....	120

*Photographs*

6.1	<i>Khmer Rouge</i> Leaders Plot Final Assault on Phnom Penh.....	122
-----	---	-----

## Mise en Scène

---

*In the course of the struggle since 1970, Cambodia has developed the political consciousness of its people, begun one of the most thorough-going agrarian revolutions in history, rebuilt much of the basic infrastructure necessary to a developing economy, and quickly resumed industrial production.*

—George Hildebrand and Gareth Porter, 1976<sup>1</sup>

*The Draconian rules of life turned Cambodia into a nation-wide gulag, as the Khmer Rouge imposed a revolution more radical and brutal than any other in modern history—a revolution that disturbed even the Chinese, the Cambodian communists' closest allies. Attachment to home village and love of Buddha, Cambodian verities, were replaced by psychological reorientation, mass relocation, and rigid collectivization.*

—Sydney Schanberg, 1980<sup>2</sup>

Revolution is a complex business, but it is not ambiguous. The bottom line is political authority. The structure of social order is at stake in a revolution because the primary functions of political authority are the allocation of societal values and the definition of social reality. Revolution entails a transformation, by definition quite a rapid transformation, of these functions. That is, revolution is a *metapolitical* activity: It is about the structure or the framework—the form of the institutions—through which daily political interactions within a society will be played out.

It is precisely with this metapolitical dimension of revolution that students of the subject may experience their greatest challenge. The challenge goes far beyond the simple elusiveness of facts of time, place, and persons. It derives from a relativity of values, such that an event can have two (or more) entirely different meanings, depending on the point of view. This is illustrated in the case at hand by the two quotations that open this introduction. For Kampuchea, this relativity has been eloquently expressed in François Ponchaud's dialectical appraisal: "A fascinating revolution for all who aspire to a

new social order. A terrifying revolution for all who have any respect for human beings."<sup>3</sup>

Who were the *Khmer Rouge*? Where did they come from? What did they stand for? How and why were they able to achieve victory? Did they deliver what they promised? Why did they ultimately fail? In this study, I offer an answer to these and other questions, but a single study as brief as this cannot pretend to be either definitive or exhaustive when the subject is a historical episode so sweeping and dynamic, and while we are still so close to the events that occurred in Cambodia. A huge gap remains in the literature on revolution, for far too much of what little has been written about the *Khmer Revolutions* has been a search for heroes and villains motivated by a bewildering array of ideological and geopolitical interests. To be sure, there are heroes and villains aplenty in this tale, but these serve best to symbolize the deeper meaning of the revolutions.

In an attempt to gain a more objective perspective on the revolutions, it may be useful to begin by trying to give a more explicit definition to the term "revolution," or at least by looking at how others have tried to do this. As I noted at the outset, revolution has to do with the *form of the institutions* through which daily political interactions are conducted within a society. Thus, one analyst has defined revolution as "abrupt, illegal mass violence aimed at the overthrow of the political regime."<sup>4</sup> This approach focuses on mass violence aimed at the destruction of the existing political institutions. Another analyst defines revolution as the act of rebuilding a society shattered by rebellion.<sup>5</sup> According to this school, then, revolution is society building.

The distinction between revolution *qua* "overthrow" and revolution *qua* "society building" is clear enough in the abstract. First the old structure of political authority must be eliminated. Only then can social relations be reconstituted at the behest of the victors. As a matter of historical fact, however, the two are usually so intimately intertwined that their separation for purposes of analysis is inevitably artificial.

In the present case, for example, the *Khmer Rouge* often boasted that they were a "complete state" years before the actual founding of their state, Democratic Kampuchea, in 1976. In areas where they gained control as early as 1968, the *Khmer Rouge* experimented with forms of social organization even while the most difficult portions of their struggle lay ahead. In fact, the career of the *Khmer Rouge* or the Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP) falls into five phases or stages, none of which corresponds unambiguously with either revolution or society building. Thus, dogmatic adherence to this dichotomy

could distort analysis. Nonetheless, I will at times rely on this dichotomy for the sake of analytical clarity, while attempting to remain conscious of the pitfalls associated with the distinction.

## Notes

1. George Hildebrand and Gareth Porter, *Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), p. 3.
2. Sydney Schanberg, "The Death and Life of Dith Pran: A Story of Cambodia," *New York Times Magazine*, January 20, 1980, p. 44.
3. François Ponchaud, *Cambodia: Year Zero* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), p. xvi.
4. Mostafa Rejai, *The Comparative Study of Revolutionary Strategy* (New York: David McKay, 1977), p. 8.
5. Chalmers Johnson, *Autopsy on People's War* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), p. 8.



## Cambodian Politics, Society, and Economy

---

*When we had proceeded on so far, that it pleased my Guide to show me the Creature which was once so fair, he took himself before me, and made me stop, saying: "Lo Dis! and lo the place where it behooves thee to arm thyself with fortitude." How icy chill and hoarse I then became, ask not, O Reader! for I write it not, because all speech would fail to tell. I did not die, and did not remain alive; now think for thyself, if thou hast any grain of ingenuity, what I became, deprived of both death and life.*

—Dante, *Inferno*<sup>1</sup>

One's understanding of contemporary world events is usually enhanced by taking a look back at those previous developments from which today's events flow. The present chapter offers an introductory look back at three matters essential to an understanding of the Cambodian revolutions: (1) the history of imperial and colonial institutions in Cambodia; (2) the status of Cambodia's pre-1970 image as a jungle paradise; and (3) the role the Khmer peasantry plays in Cambodian politics.

The political economy of any contemporary nation is, of course, a virtually inexhaustible topic. Nevertheless, one can use these three "minitopics" as a context to begin describing how this traditional, agrarian Buddhist country could become the laboratory within which was executed the most radical experiment in social engineering ever conceived. By briefly reviewing the history of the Khmer people, their socioeconomic conditions, and their political institutions, one may gain some insight into the long-term dynamics of the society. Such a look at Cambodian political economy rewards the viewer with glimpses of the prelude to revolution.



## Echoes of Empires

For Westerners, Cambodia was, is, and probably will remain distant, mysterious, unknown. Before 1965, most Americans could not have named the continent containing Cambodia.<sup>2</sup> Those who had heard of it were likely to know no more about the small country (about the same size as South Dakota) than that it has an ancient temple named Angkor Wat. Yet, that famed temple is an echo of a long history of empire. In fact, it is only within the context of the rise and fall of empires—Cambodian, as well as Javanese, Siamese, Russian, Chinese, Mongolian, French, and U.S. empires (to name only the ones of immediate concern here)—that the history of the Khmer revolution from 1960 to 1978 can be properly understood.

In 802 A.D., Jayavarman II cast off the domination of the Javanese warlords and founded the Angkor Empire, becoming the first in a nearly thousand-year succession of Khmer “god-kings.” The union of the Fou Nan Dynasty and the Tchen-la Dynasty, the Angkor Empire was based upon the administrative control of a vast hydraulic system of dikes and canals, enabling a marginally higher level of agricultural productivity. The increased productivity supported the religious state, the imperial armies, and the inevitable bureaucracy that went along with them. As long as the hydraulic system continued to expand, so did the power of the Khmer god-kings continue to expand. The system functioned well over some four centuries.

With time, however, the efficiency of the hydraulic system declined as maintenance failed to keep pace with floods and silt. This failure occurred in direct proportion to the clogging of the Angkor bureaucracy with extravagance. In fact, decline followed Suryavarman II’s immense expenditure to build the magnificent Angkor Wat temple complex. As productivity declined and resources invested in imperial trappings increased in relation to those invested in productive projects, territorial expansion of the empire ceased. “Torn by dissension, it would become vulnerable to the ‘barbarians’ outside the walls, to the armies of neighboring empires, or to its own rebellious people.”<sup>3</sup> After peaking in the twelfth century, the Angkor Empire entered a long period of decline and disintegration. This is a common pattern for societies based on the hydraulic mode of production, and it would not be the last time a Khmer regime’s collapse followed agro-stagnation.

It is a catch phrase of dialectical materialism that “the present order holds within it the seeds of its own destruction.” As with the hydraulic economy of the Angkor Empire, this seemed to be the case for the political economy of the Eurocentric world system of the