

REVOLUTION AND ITS AFTERMATH IN KAMPUCHEA:  
EIGHT ESSAYS

*Editors*

David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan

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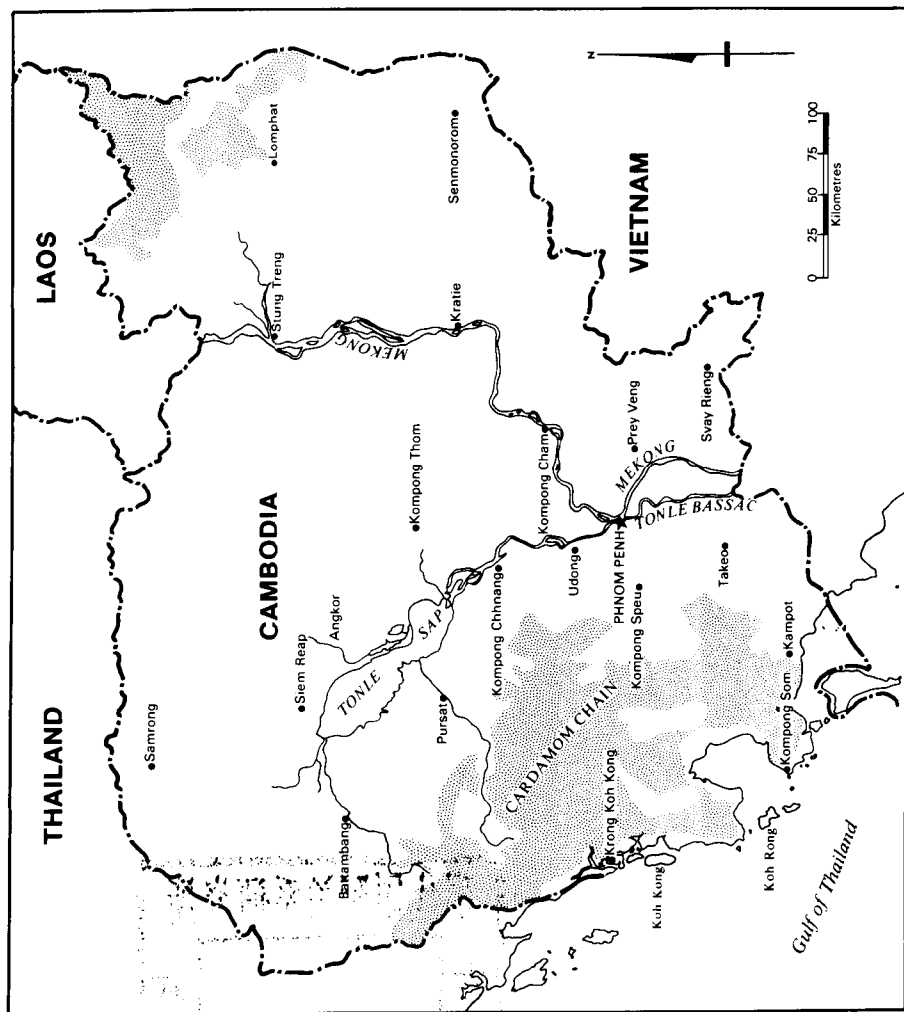
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# REVOLUTION AND ITS AFTERMATH IN KAMPUCHEA



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## ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CPM	Communist Party of Malaya
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (UN)
ICP	Indo-Chinese Communist Party
KPNLF	Khmer Peoples' National Liberation Front
KPRP	Khmer Peoples' Revolutionary Party (1951-1960); Kampuchean Peoples' Revolutionary Party (1979- )
KR	Khmers Rouges; Khmer Republic
NLF	National Liberation Front
NUFK	National United Front of Kampuchea
P-36	Training Center for Khmer revolution- aries in Vietnam, 1966-1970
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PCK/KCP/CPK	Communist Party of Kampuchea
PRC	Peoples' Republic of China
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government (of South Vietnam)
PRK	Peoples' Republic of Kampuchea
PRPK	Peoples' Revolutionary Party of Kampu- chea (1979- ); same as KPRP, above
RGNUK	Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea
RKG	Royal Khmer Government
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
UFNS	United Front for National Salvation of Kampuchea
UIF	United Issarak Front
VCP/CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
VWP	Vietnam Workers' Party
WPK	Workers' Party of Kampuchea

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Five of the papers that follow spring directly from a three-day seminar which was held in Chiangmai, Thailand, between August 11 and 13, 1981. The seminar was sponsored by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), and brought together an assortment of people interested in the recent history of Kampuchea. Five of the papers presented at that time reappear now in revised form — those by Boua, Kiernan, Shawcross, Thion and Vickery. The other three, by Barnett, Chandler and Porter, were prepared specifically for this collection.

It is a pleasure to record our gratitude to the people who made the seminar a success and to those who helped us turn the papers into a book. David and Cristina Szanton were marvellous hosts to all of us in Chiangmai, and David's support for the project, on behalf of the SSRC, has been crucial since its inception in 1980. Arrangements for our stay in Thailand were capably handled by Chai-anan Samudvanija of Chulalongkorn University, and by his two assistants, Thanya Onwimon and Saisamorn Chanklin. Chai-anan's father, Major General Chana Samudvanija, who participated in the seminar, was generous in sharing his deep knowledge of Kampuchea during the seminar and afterwards, over several delicious meals in Bangkok. Laura Summers, who attended the seminar but was unable to submit a paper for this collection, enlivened our discussions both in Chiangmai and in Bangkok.

Before and after the seminar also, we benefitted greatly from discussions with Timothy Carney and Stephen Heder (prevented from attending by overwork and illness, respectively), Milton Osborne, Anthony Malcolm and Nayan Chanda.

For over a year Pam Sayers typed and kept track of a small archive of correspondence related to the seminar and the book. The manuscript itself was typed by Sally Brennan; the maps were drawn by Margaret Kamenev and Susan Tomlins. We're grateful also to Serge Thion, who has allowed us to include as an appendix, an abridged and translated version of the helpful chronology which he prepared for Khmers Rouges! (Paris, 1981). We also need to thank Jim Scott of Yale University, who expressed an



interest in publishing the papers sight unseen. We hope he has no reason to regret his generosity; his colleague, Marvel Kay Mansfield, has worked hard to shepherd the manuscript into print.

It should seem clear from the papers that we have been unwilling, not to say unable to impose our political views (which differ in any case) on other contributors; evidence for this perhaps, is the fact that the authors have not been required to call the country by the same name. They have had the final say about the form in which their contributions appear, and the responsibility for the views expressed rests with the author of each one.

Finally, it seems wrong to suggest that our own gratitude to Susan and Chanthou goes without saying; and so it won't.

DPC  
BK

Melbourne, Australia  
December 1982

## CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations		viii
Acknowledgements		ix
Introduction	DAVID P. CHANDLER and BEN KIERNAN	1
The Cambodian Idea of Revolution	SERGE THION	10
Seeing Red: Perceptions of Cambodian History in Democratic Kampuchea	DAVID P. CHANDLER	34
Vietnamese Communist Policy Towards Kampuchea 1930-1970	GARETH PORTER	57
Democratic Kampuchea: Themes and Variations	MICHAEL VICKERY	99
Wild Chickens, Farm Chickens and Cormorants: Kampuchea's Eastern Zone Under Pol Pot	BEN KIERNAN	136
Democratic Kampuchea: A Highly Centralized Dictatorship	ANTHONY BARNETT	212
Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster	WILLIAM SHAWCROSS	230
Observations of the Heng Samrin Government, 1980-1982	CHANTHOU BOUA	259
Chronology of Khmer Communism, 1940-1982	SERGE THION	291
Notes on the Contributors		

## INTRODUCTION

There are several ways to answer the question: What happened to Cambodia, or Kampuchea, in the 1970s? Looking back at the tumultuous decade, it is easy to say that coups, bombs, civil war and revolution all produced significant changes in the country's institutions; they also led to the deaths of a million or more Kampucheans, roughly one-eighth of the estimated population in 1970. This easy answer, of course, is also the most important, and some of the essays which follow deal directly with the results of these events.

From another perspective, and one that affects scholarship about the country, the 1970s witnessed an "information explosion" about Kampuchea. A comparison of citations to the country which appear in the New York Times Index for 1969 with similar entries for 1979 makes this point clear, and so does the vastly expanded quantity of periodical literature and books dealing particularly with the country's recent past. Literally thousands of refugees from and inhabitants of Kampuchea have been interviewed by scholars, journalists, and relief workers, especially since 1979; for the 1960s on the other hand, we are not aware of any extensive interviews with Kampucheans in Kampuchea or overseas. For this reason, we know a great deal more about the texture of daily life in Democratic Kampuchea, supposedly a "hermit" regime, than we do about the ostensibly open regimes of the Khmer Republic (1970-1975) or the Sihanouk era (1954-1970) which preceded it. As the essay by William Shawcross shows, Kampuchea became "news" in the 1970s and this has had an effect on what has been written about it in terms of both scholarship and journalism. Scholars have been jostled into relevance; journalists have been forced back onto scholarly literature when they attempt to put Kampuchea into context.

The essays in this book deal with selected aspects of the recent history of Kampuchea. Because we asked the authors to write about subjects which interested them (and followed our own advice), there are serious gaps in what follows, particularly in the realms of economics, psychology and foreign affairs.

Little has been written (and nothing here) about the economic performance of Democratic Kampuchea (DK).<sup>1</sup> This is partly because so little is known about the economy that was transformed so many times in the 1970s by warfare and by design. Even if it is safe to describe Kampuchea's economy in 1982 as "post-revolutionary," it is difficult and perhaps impossible to write at length about the DK revolution itself in economic terms.

From refugee reports, Communist Party documents, broadcasts over Radio Phnom Penh and interviews with survivors, however, we know a good deal about the pace of economic change in DK and about the economic priorities pursued, at least in theory by the regime. But it is hard to say how these priorities worked themselves out in practice. Many projects begun under DK were never completed; others appear to have collapsed; still others were abandoned after 1979, by the very people they were designed to serve. None of this is surprising, given the fact that DK lasted less than four years between the two liberations of Phnom Penh, and the haste with which the national transformation, such as it was, was carried out. At the same time, the stresses the regime placed on economic matters, and the relation of this to practice, remain to be discussed. The four-year development plan, promulgated at the beginning of 1977 (typewritten copies survive), for example, would probably repay detailed analysis, and may shed some light on the economic realism (if any) of the regime.

Gareth Porter's essay examines Vietnamese relations with Kampuchea from the 1930s to 1970. From the Kampuchean angle, these relations have been studied elsewhere by other scholars.<sup>2</sup> The final phase, however, from 1975 to 1978, needs to be analyzed in more detail, and so does the military history of the DK-Vietnam war.

Aside from Porter's essay, however, the book has little to say about DK foreign relations. For this reason, it may give the impression that DK was exceptionally free from outside influence or advice. The resolutely autarkic and xenophobic stance of DK in its early stages at least, confirms this impression; so does the cavalier way the regime chose to deal with diplomats accredited to it.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the spectrum of DK foreign relations, open and clandestine, is an important component of

the history of the regime. This is particularly true of the special relationship which endured for so long between DK and the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC). China's economic, technical and military aid to Kampuchea has not been examined by scholars or journalists in detail; nor has the issue of PRC encouragement of the war against Vietnam, which, it is now generally agreed, began at DK initiative. Did the PRC agree to support Kampuchea's war, or was DK fighting a proxy war for China? More importantly, would Pol Pot have embarked on such an extensive war with less Chinese military assistance or without Chinese agreement? What did the two regimes, working together, hope to accomplish in Vietnam? Or, approaching PRC-DK relations from another angle, who was "using" whom?

If DK-PRC relations overshadow any others, the ways in which DK was perceived elsewhere in the Third World would make an interesting subject for research, as would the successful DK campaign for diplomatic approval, particularly in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries before and after the Vietnamese attack.

The psychology of the leaders of DK and the psychological methods they employed await informed analysis. Why did people join the revolution? What happened to their previous beliefs? What were dissidents from the revolution, at least those who were subjected to interrogation in Tuol Sleng prison, expected to confess? How far can we go in attributing the behavior of DK leaders, and particularly the actions of Pol Pot, to earlier experiences in their lives? By 1978 we know that the rudiments of a cult of personality honoring Pol Pot had begun to take shape throughout the country. Why this happened when it did remains unclear. Throughout 1978, in fact, Pol Pot spoke frequently with foreigners about himself, but he remained evasive about many biographical details, including his pre-revolutionary name, Saloth Sar.<sup>4</sup>

The forces which shaped Pol Pot's character and the question of his intellectual debts need to be dealt with, as do the life-stories of other DK leaders such as Ieng Sary, Son Sen and Khieu Samphan, as well as the more elusive Vorn Vet, Nuon Chea, Mok and Pauk, to name only four. The interplay among these figures and others at the "top" of DK is crucial but almost impossible to study —

partly because of the dearth of internal documentation which affects any discussion of DK decision-making, and partly because the role of individual personalities was deliberately and vehemently played down throughout most of the history of the regime. Had DK remained in power in Phnom Penh in 1979, it is likely that at least one personality — Pol Pot's — would have been rescued from this enforced anonymity; but it is not clear that we would have been much wiser about the patterns of his life and thought.

Similarly, the psychological aspect of the great purges which swept through Kampuchea like a prairie fire in 1977-1978 are difficult to assess. The purges tell us a good deal about the praxis of victimization, but what is difficult to determine can only be called the sincerity of the regime. Why did "dissidence" spring up when and where the Center claimed it did? What political ideas — if there were any beyond the survival of the leadership itself — separated the "Party Center" — probably no more than half a dozen people — from those it selected to interrogate, torture and kill? In other words, was the threat real, convenient or imagined? Does the Center's response to dissidence reflect its power or a sense of insecurity? These are crucial questions, but all that confidential DK documentary material provides, when analyzed, is the perfect academic answer, i.e. yes and no.

Serge Thion's essay discusses the idea of revolution in the context of Kampuchean history and examines the gaps that exist, in Thion's view, between a rather rudimentary theory and national practice. Democratic Kampuchea, he writes, was a regime in a hurry, going too fast to perceive or care about Kampuchean society and politics. To the regime, everything that had preceded DK needed to be destroyed or at the very least transformed.

Lest we generalize about Kampuchea too quickly, however, Michael Vickery's essay, based on extensive interviews, warns that DK praxis varied enormously from time to time and from place to place — a theme which he examines in depth in a forthcoming book.<sup>5</sup>

The theme of regional differences has been treated elsewhere by Ben Kiernan, Stephen Heder, and others.<sup>6</sup> Kiernan's paper here, also drawn

from interviews, concentrates on the Eastern Zone of the country where Kampuchean radicalism had its deepest roots and where purges by the Party Center in 1977-1978 were by far the most severe. Whereas Vickery and Thion argue that the Center often exercised little control over the zones, Kiernan demonstrates that in the Eastern Zone at least, the Center was able in 1977 and 1978 to decimate the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK).

Anthony Barnett takes up the notion of center-periphery relations in his analysis of the preceding papers. He also deals with the question of the centralization of power under DK, and suggests that the regime was more centralized and pursued its goals more effectively than Vickery and Thion contend.

Using DK radio broadcasts and documents circulated inside Kampuchea by the CPK, David P. Chandler's paper looks at DK perceptions of Kampuchean history. DK spokesmen often talked of "2,000 years of history" coming to an end in a sense with the liberation of Phnom Penh in April 1975. This event left DK with the problem of constructing a politically usable past. Ironically, the regime did so by emphasizing several ideas (such as the grandeur of Angkor and animosity toward Vietnam) that had shored up earlier, anti-Communist regimes, including the one that DK overthrew.

Porter's essay argues that it is useful to perceive the Kampuchean revolution from the perspective of Vietnam, even though Pol Pot attempted to deny any relations between the revolutions and regimes. The symbiosis of the revolutions should not imply that Vietnamese policies toward Kampuchea have been consistent, however, since they have fluctuated since 1930 with changing Vietnamese perceptions of national interest.

The two final essays in the book, those by William Shawcross and Chanthou Boua include material about the Peoples' Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). Shawcross' paper also deals with the question of the way DK was perceived in the Western media.<sup>7</sup> Boua's paper, based on ten months of residence in the PRK in 1980-1982, reveals a regime seeking to gain the loyalty of a population, in sharp contrast with the politics and behavior of DK.

The historiography of Kampuchea in the years since 1970 is hampered by the DK's contempt for documentation, the disarray of Khmer Republic archives, the deaths and emigration of so much of the country's population, and the shortage of "base-line" economic and social studies — to say nothing of reliable statistics — dealing with earlier periods. We know a good deal, for example, about "politics at the top" in the Sihanouk era (1954-1970); but how did the economic and social changes that swept over Kampuchea in these years affect the majority of its people? As far as we know, only half a dozen ethnographic studies of villages in Kampuchea were written before the 1970s, and no serious studies were undertaken of Kampuchean urban life. We know very little about local-level politics or about networks of patronage in the countryside, although there is some work on the origins of Kampuchean radicalism.<sup>8</sup> We know even less about the effects of formal education on the Kampuchean people and of the role which school-teachers appear to have played in the last ten years of Sihanouk's regime, in providing radical explanations for the nature of Kampuchean society. Because of these difficulties, writing the history of the 1970s is hazardous but not impossible, partly because of the masses of interview material which have now become available. These supplement printed data from the early 1970s, as indeed they must, for printing all but disappeared in Kampuchea between 1975 and 1979. From these interviews and from published memoirs, such as those of Pin Yathay, we can know a good deal about the texture of daily life in DK;<sup>9</sup> what is lacking, as we have suggested, is a bureaucratic dimension which might tell us why certain policies were put into effect and why others changed at certain times. When Kampuchea "opened up" to Western journalists in 1979, a wealth of material became available about the transition between DK and the PRK.<sup>10</sup>

Ironically then, the years 1975-1978, which seemed a few years ago to cover one of the most inaccessible periods of Kampuchean history, have now become the most systematically studied, particularly in terms of everyday rural life — a dimension notably lacking from nearly all earlier studies of the country.

What needs to be studied now, among other things, are the effects of the revolution on the



thinking and behavior of these ordinary people. For example, it seems unlikely that Kampucheans will be able to reconstruct a consensus model when they describe society. Too many of them have seen and have been reminded of too many conflicts. They have been introduced to the concept of "classes" and the concept will probably prove impossible to forget.<sup>11</sup> The urban elite of the early 1970s has been killed or has emigrated to other countries; for this reason Phnom Penh at least, has lost its somewhat Western flavor. Monastic Buddhism has also faded in relative importance and the effects of removing entrepreneurial ethnic minorities (Chinese, Chams and Vietnamese) from active roles in the society are not yet clear. Phnom Penh has become, for the first time in its history, in ethnic terms, a Khmer city.

Most of these changes are the direct result of DK policies. The pace of change in Kampuchea which transformed the country in the 1970s has slowed somewhat under the PRK regime, which has shown an interest in reviving and strengthening a wide range of pro-revolutionary institutions. Because the PRK sees itself as a revolutionary government, however, it would be imprecise to refer to it merely as an "aftermath" to DK. The title we chose for this book reflects the subject-matter of the essays; the country itself has now entered another revolutionary phase. Despite the relative flexibility that the leaders of PRK have displayed so far, it is unlikely that they will ever permit the resurgence of confrontational politics, an entrepreneurial economy, or allow national elections in Kampuchea to be supervised by outsiders. For the next few years at least and probably longer, a pro-Vietnamese Communist government will remain in power in Phnom Penh. The regime so far has repudiated the policies of DK; but it will certainly be unwilling to relinquish what it perceives to be its own socialist achievements or the advantages that accrue from continuing patronage from Vietnam.

What the essays in this book attempt to do, therefore, is to examine some aspects of Kampuchean history in the 1970s. In ten years' time, a similar collection concerned with what has happened since will be able to say more precisely what the effects of the 1970s have been.