

កម្ពុជា in Perspective

An Orientation Guide



Technology Integration Division
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DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

CHAPTER 1 PROFILE	4
INTRODUCTION	4
FACTS AND FIGURES	4
CHAPTER 2 GEOGRAPHY	9
INTRODUCTION	9
NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES AND AREA	9
CLIMATE	10
TOPOGRAPHICAL FEATURES	10
BODIES OF WATER	11
MEKONG RIVER	11
TONLE SAP	11
GULF OF THAILAND	11
MAJOR CITIES	12
PHNOM PENH	12
BATTAMBANG	12
KAMPONG CHAM	13
SIHANOUKVILLE	13
SIEM REAP	13
ANGKOR	13
ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS	14
DEFORESTATION	14
WILDLIFE AND CONSERVATION	15
NATURAL HAZARDS	15
MONSOONS	15
FLOODING	16
CHAPTER 3 HISTORY	17
INTRODUCTION	17
THE EMPIRE OF FUNAN (100 B.C.E.–500 C.E.)	17
THE GOLDEN AGE OF KHMER CIVILIZATION: THE ANGKOREAN PERIOD (802–1432 C.E.)	18
FRENCH COLONIALISM AND THE INDOCHINA UNION	19
WORLD WAR II AND THE COLONIAL VICHY GOVERNMENT	20
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT CAMBODIA	21
CAMBODIA AND THE VIETNAM WAR	22
POL POT AND THE KHMER ROUGE	23
THE ZERO YEARS: 1975–1979	24
THE END OF THE ZERO YEARS	25
NEW COALITIONS: 1980–1985	26
MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY IS ESTABLISHED IN CAMBODIA	27
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	28
CHAPTER 4 ECONOMY	34

INTRODUCTION	34
STANDARD OF LIVING	34
AGRICULTURE	35
BANKING	35
FOREIGN INVESTMENT & TRADE	36
NATURAL RESOURCES	38
GOLD	38
OIL AND NATURAL GAS RESERVES	38
INDUSTRY	39
TOURISM	39
CHAPTER 5 SOCIETY	41
<hr/>	
ETHNIC GROUPS AND LANGUAGES	41
RELIGION	41
GENDER ISSUES	42
CUISINE	43
TRADITIONAL DRESS	43
ARTS	44
DANCE	44
MUSIC	45
SPORTS	46
CHAPTER 6 SECURITY	47
<hr/>	
INTRODUCTION	47
U.S.-CAMBODIAN RELATIONS	47
NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES	49
VIETNAM	49
THAILAND	49
LAOS	50
CHINA	50
ISSUES AFFECTING STABILITY	51
GENOCIDE AND JUSTICE	51
POVERTY	53
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	53
HIV/AIDS	53
ARMED FORCES	54
POLICE	54

Chapter 1 Profile

Introduction

Cambodia's architectural legacy, particularly the temple complex of Angkor Wat, attests to the country's powerful past. Since its independence from French colonial rule in 1953, the nation's history has been less glorious; Cambodians are still recovering from decades of conflict. Under the tutelage of the international community, elections have led to the formation of a democratic government. But efforts to establish a tribunal to bring the leaders of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979) to justice have yet to result in trials. Although oil and natural gas reserves have been discovered in the Gulf of Thailand, the government remains heavily reliant on the international community for aid and assistance. Most Cambodians are subsistence farmers who eke out a living from the land.



© Trey Ratcliff
Sunrise in Angkor Wat

Facts and Figures¹

Area:

Slightly smaller than Oklahoma

total: 181,040 sq km (69,899 sq mi)

land: 176,520 sq km (68,154 sq mi)

water: 4,520 sq km (1,745 sq mi)

Land Boundaries:

total: 2,572 km (1,598 mi)

border countries: Laos 541 km (336 mi), Thailand 803 km (498 mi), Vietnam 1,228 km (763 mi)

Population:

14,241,640 (July 2008 est.)

Age Distribution:

0–14 years: 33.2% (male 2,389,668/female 2,338,838)

15–64 years: 63.2% (male 4,372,480/female 4,627,895)

65 years and over: 3.6% (male 193,338/female 319,421) (2008 est.)

Median Age:

total: 21.7 years

male: 21 years

female: 22.5 years (2008 est.)

¹ All statistics are from 2008 unless otherwise noted. All statistics in this section are taken from the following source: Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Cambodia." 20 November 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html>

Population Growth Rate:

1.752% (2008 est.)

Life Expectancy at Birth:

total population: 61.69 years

male: 59.65 years

female: 63.83 years (2008 est.)

Total Fertility Rate:

3.08 children born/woman (2008 est.)

HIV/AIDS Adult Prevalence Rate:

2.6% (2003 est.)

Nationality:

noun: Cambodian(s)

adjective: Cambodian

Ethnic Groups:

Khmer 90%, Vietnamese 5%, Chinese 1%, other 4%

Religions:

Theravada Buddhist 95%, other 5%

Languages:

Khmer (official) 95%, French, English

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over can read and write

total population: 73.6%

male: 84.7%

female: 64.1% (2004 est.)

Country Name:

conventional long form: Kingdom of Cambodia

conventional short form: Cambodia

local long form: Preahreacheanachakr Kampuchea (phonetic pronunciation)

local short form: Kampuchea

Government Type:

Multiparty democracy under constitutional monarchy

Capital:

Phnom Penh



© Azhar Elmiza
Sunset in Phnom Penh

Administrative Divisions:

20 provinces (*khaitt*, singular and plural) and 4 municipalities (*krong*, singular and plural)
provinces: Banteay Mean Cheay, Batdambang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Spoe, Kampong Thum, Kampot, Kandal, Kaoh Kong, Krachen, Mondol Kiri, Otdar Mean Cheay, Pouthisat, Preah Vihear, Prey Veng, Rotanah Kiri, Siem Reab, Stoeng Treng, Svay Rieng, Takev
municipalities: Keb, Pailin, Phnum Penh (Phnom Penh), Preah Seihanu (Sihanoukville)



© ToTof / flickr.com
Cambodian mountain landscape

Independence Day:

9 November 1953 (from France)

National Holiday:

Independence Day, 9 November (1953)

Constitution:

Promulgated 21 September 1993

Legal System:

Primarily a civil law mixture of French-influenced codes from the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) period, royal decrees, and acts of the legislature, with influences of customary law and remnants of communist legal theory; increasing influence of common law; accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction with reservations.

Suffrage:

18 years of age; universal

Executive Branch:

chief of state: King Norodom SIHAMONI (since 29 October 2004)

head of government: Prime Minister HUN SEN (since 14 January 1985) [co-prime minister from 1993 to 1997]; Permanent Deputy Prime Minister MEN SAM AN (since 25 September 2008); Deputy Prime Ministers SAR KHENG (since 3 February 1992); SOK AN, TEA BANH, HOR NAMHONG, NHEK BUNCHHAY (since 16 July 2004); BIN CHHIN (since 5 September 2007); KEAT CHHON, YIM CHHAI LY (since 25 September 2008)

cabinet: Council of Ministers in theory appointed by the monarch; in practice named by the prime minister.

elections: the monarch is chosen by a Royal Throne Council; following legislative elections, a member of the majority party or majority coalition is named prime minister by the Chairman of the National Assembly and appointed by the king.

Legislative Branch:

Bicameral; consists of the National Assembly (123 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms) and the Senate (61 seats; 2 members appointed by the monarch, 2 elected by the National Assembly, and 57 elected by parliamentarians and commune councils; members serve five-year terms).

elections: National Assembly—last held 27 July 2008 (next to be held in July 2013); Senate—last held 22 January 2006 (next to be held in January 2011)

election results: National Assembly—percent of vote by party: CPP 58%, SRP 22%, others 20%; seats by party: CPP 90, SRP 26, others 7; Senate—percent of vote by party: CPP 69%, FUNCINPEC 21%, SRP 10%; seats by party: CPP 45, FUNCINPEC 10, SRP 2



© Lorna87 / flickr.com
Royal Palace, Phnom Penh

Judicial Branch:

Supreme Council of the Magistracy (provided for in the constitution and formed in December 1997); Supreme Court (and lower courts) exercises judicial authority

Political Parties:

Cambodian People's Party or CPP [Chea Sim]; National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia or FUNCINPEC [Kev Put Reaksmei]; Norodom Ranariddh Party or NRP [Norodom Ranariddh]; Sam Rangsai Party or SRP [Sam Rangsai]

Political Pressure Groups:

Cambodian Freedom Fighters or CFF; Partnership for Transparency Fund or PTF (anti-corruption organization); Student's Movement for Democracy; The Committee for Free and Fair Elections or Comfrel

other: human rights organizations; vendors

International Organization Participation:

Agency for the French-Speaking Community (ACCT), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), East Asian Summit (EAS), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Group of 77 (G-77), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Conference on Communication Technology (ICCT), International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (ICRM), International Development Association (IDA), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Finance Corporation (IFC), International Federation of Red Cross and Crescent Societies (IFRCS), International Labor Organization (ILO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Maritime Organization (IMO), Interpol, International Olympic Committee (IOC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), International Organization for Standardization (ISO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), Nonaligned

Movement (NAM), International Organization for the French-Speaking World (OIF), Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Permanent Court Arbitration (PCA), United Nations (UN), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United National Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Universal Postal Union (UPU), World Customs Organization (WCO), World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), World Trade Organization (WTO)

Diplomatic Representation from the U.S.:

chief of mission: Ambassador (vacant); Charge d'Affaires Piper AW CAMPBELL

embassy: #1, Street 96, Sangkat Wat Phnom, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh

mailing address: Box P, APO AP 96546

telephone: [855] (23) 728-000

FAX: [855] (23) 728-600

GDP Per Capita:

\$1,900 (2007 est.)

Labor Force:

7 million (2003 est.)

GDP Composition by Sector:

agriculture: 31%

industry: 26%

services: 43% (2007 est.)

Unemployment Rate:

2.5% (2000 est.)

Telephone—Main Line in Use:

37,500 (2007)

Telephones—Mobile Cellular:

2.583 million (2007)

Internet:

hosts: 1,230 (2008)

users: 70,000 (2007)

Airports:

total: 17

airports with paved runways: 6

airports with unpaved runways: 11 (2007)



© Michael Brown
Public telephone booth

Chapter 2 Geography

Introduction

Located in Southeast Asia, Cambodia possesses a range of geographical features, including lush expanses of forest and bountiful water resources. In terms of topography, the country is dominated by an expansive low-elevation plain that covers most of its central interior. In the north and southwest, this plain is rimmed by mountain ranges that form natural boundaries with Thailand, Cambodia's neighbor to the west and north. The terrain also rises to higher elevations in the east, in the country's borderlands with Laos and Vietnam.



© shinkusano / flickr.com
Small lake near Siem Reap

In the southwest, the nation has a stretch of coastline on the Gulf of Thailand. Because the coast is separated from the central plain by difficult terrain, Cambodia's access to the sea did not historically play an important role in the country's overall economy. Of greater historical and cultural significance are the Mekong River, known as Tonle Thom or "the great river," and the Tonle Sap, a large freshwater lake.² These important bodies of water have long provided the country with water and freshwater fish. Approximately half of the country is covered by tropical forest, although an extremely high rate of deforestation threatens to reduce these already diminishing areas.³ Roughly one fifth of the country consists of arable land, which is used to grow rice, tropical fruit, and other agricultural products.⁴

Neighboring Countries and Area

Cambodia shares land borders with three countries: Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Thailand lies to the west and north of Cambodia, with the border between the two countries measuring 803 km (499 mi). To the east of Thailand and directly north of eastern Cambodia lies Laos, from which the vital Mekong River flows into Cambodia. The Cambodian-Lao border is 541 km (336 mi) long. Cambodia shares its entire eastern and southeastern border (1,228 km, or 763 mi) with Vietnam. Aside from landlocked Laos, Cambodia has the shortest stretch of coastline (443 km, or 227 mi) in mainland Southeast Asia. Adjoining the Gulf of Thailand, the coast runs generally northwestward from the southern point of mainland Cambodia to the country's western border with Thailand. Overall, Cambodia comprises a total area of 181,040 sq km (69,900 sq mi), making it approximately the same size as Oklahoma.⁵

² There are maps and guide books in which the Tonle Sap is called the Tonle Sab, just as the Sap River may be referred to as the Sab River.

³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Cambodia: Economy: Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing." 2008. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/90520/Cambodia>

⁴ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Cambodia." 20 November 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html>

⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Cambodia." 20 November 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html>

Climate

Cambodia lies within the tropics. The weather is warm year-round, with temperatures ranging between 20°C (68°F) and 40°C (104°F). January is the coolest month and April is the warmest.⁶ There are two monsoon seasons. From mid-May to October (the rainy season), the southwest monsoon brings heavy daily precipitation. From November to March (the dry season), the northwest monsoon brings drier air and some rain, but in considerably less amounts. Rainfall levels vary according to region. The southwestern area can receive up to 500 cm (200 in) of rain, while the central plains may receive only 140 cm (55 in). Typhoons are a potential threat in Southeast Asia, but they typically do not affect Cambodia directly. However, they can cause exceptionally heavy rainfall, resulting in landslides and flooding. The intervening periods between the two monsoon seasons are brief and characterized predominantly by changes in humidity.⁷

Topographical Features

In terms of relief, the Cardamom Mountains are one of the most significant features of the Cambodian landscape. Located in the southwest region of the country, this mountain range runs in a generally northwest–southeast direction. The range claims Cambodia’s highest point, Phnom Aural, which rises to 1,771 m (5,810 ft) in elevation. This peak is found in the eastern arm of the range. In addition to containing rubies and sapphires, the Cardamom are home to many endangered wildlife species.⁸ In the past, the range also served as a refuge for Khmer Rouge guerrillas, who, after being ousted from power in 1979, based themselves in the densely forested mountains. During this time, they laid landmines in the area.⁹



© Mark / flickr.com
Forested plateau in Cambodia

Extending southward from the eastern end of the Cardamom Range are the Elephant Mountains. This mountain chain ranges from 500–1,000 m (1640–3280 ft) in elevation, and it forms part of the natural barrier separating Cambodia’s coastal region from its central plain. The Dangrek Mountains, with an average elevation of 500 m (1640 ft), run west to east along the country’s northern border with Thailand. On the southern side of this range a steep escarpment rises sharply from the northern Cambodian plain. Consisting of the Tonle Sap Basin and the Mekong Lowlands, most of which are no more than 100 m (328 ft) above sea level, the central lowlands cover approximately three

⁶ Asia Web Direct. “Cambodia Climate and Geography: Weather in Cambodia.” c.2008. <http://www.visitmekong.com/cambodia/geography.htm>

⁷ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Environment: Climate.” *Cambodia: A Country Study*. April 1987. <http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/37.htm>

⁸ Water Conserve. Rainforest Portal, Ecological Internet. “Action Alert: Cambodian Cardamom Mountain Wilderness to Be Dammed.” 27 May 2008. http://www.waterconserve.org/shared/alerts/send.aspx?id=cambodia_cardamom

⁹ The New York Times. Mydans, Seth. “Cambodia’s Mountains Hide a Wildlife Refuge.” 8 April 2000. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C07E2DA113FF93BA35757C0A9669C8B63>

quarters of the country.¹⁰ In the west, between the Cardamom and Dangrek ranges, the low-elevation terrain extends across the border into Thailand, allowing easy overland travel between the two countries.¹¹

Bodies of Water

Mekong River

The Mekong River originates in Tibet and, at 4,184 km (2,600 mi); it is the world's 12th longest river. The river flows into northeastern Cambodia from Laos and runs through the country for about 500 km (300 mi). When it reaches Phnom Penh, the capital, the river splits in two; the southern arm is known as the Bassac River. At Cambodia's southern border, the Mekong passes into Vietnam, and it eventually flows into the South China Sea. The river is home to an estimated 1,000 aquatic species and may rank second only to the Amazon River in terms of bio-diversity.¹²

Tonle Sap

The other major waterway in Cambodia is Tonle Sap, or the Great Lake, which is located in the central northwest. When unflooded, its area is approximately 2,500–3,000 sq km (950–1,160 sq mi). The Tonle Sap is a rich source of aquatic life, and serves as the backbone of Cambodia's fishing industry. Water usually flows southward from the lake through the narrow Tonle Sap River and down into the Mekong River Basin toward the South China Sea. However,



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Boat on the Tonle Sap

heavy monsoon rains produce a seasonal reversal in the flow direction of the Tonle Sap. Specifically, when the monsoonal flow from the Mekong exceeds the capacity of its tributaries, the water is forced backward up the Tonle Sap, thus increasing the size of the lake by more than 500%.¹³ Only when the rainfall subsides in October and the river's levels reach a more manageable volume does the southward flow resume.

Gulf of Thailand

Located off Cambodia's southwestern coast, the Gulf of Thailand is a semi-enclosed body of water connected to the South China Sea. It is relatively shallow, with depths ranging from 45–80 meters (147–262 ft). A total of 23 rivers (5 of them major waterways) from 3 countries drain significant amounts of fresh water into the gulf. The discovery of offshore oil and gas fields in the gulf has further complicated Thailand and

¹⁰ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. "Country Profile: Geography." *Cambodia: A Country Study*. December 1987. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kh0005\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kh0005))

¹¹ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Environment: Topography." *Cambodia: A Country Study*. December 1987. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kh0050\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kh0050))

¹² BNET, CBS Interactive. International Wildlife. "Taming the Mekong, Killing the Past – Proposed Hydroelectric Projects in Southeast Asia." January 1999. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1170/is_ai_53731236

¹³ NPR. Sullivan, Michael. "Tonle Sap: The Flowing Heart of Cambodia." 6 December 2005. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5039980>

Cambodia's overlapping territorial claims.¹⁴ The origins of this dispute can be traced to the colonial period, when the French government drew up a border agreement with Siam, as Thailand was then known.¹⁵

Major Cities¹⁶

Phnom Penh

Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital, is located at the confluence of the Mekong, Tonle Sap, and Tonle Bassac Rivers. The Khmer name for this waterway union is *chatomuk*, or "the four faces." The local waterways have long served as the backbone of Phnom Penh's economy. Indeed, some of the Cambodian capital's main thoroughfares were once canals.¹⁷ French colonial rule bequeathed the city with wide boulevards and a grid-like street layout, making for easy navigation.¹⁸ River trade has been replaced by industry and commerce (including tourism) as the engine of urban growth. As a result, forced evictions are commonly performed in order to clear residential land for more lucrative commercial uses.¹⁹ Some of those who have been evicted were previously displaced when the Khmer Rouge regime came to power in the 1970s and, were again displaced as a result of a decade of civil war. After peace was restored, these people ended up in Phnom Penh, becoming members of sprawling squatter colonies.²⁰ (Population, 2008 estimate: two million.)²¹



© Bart Geesink
View of Phnom Penh

Battambang

Battambang, also known as Bat Dambag or Bat Dambong, was founded in the 11th century along the banks of the Tonle Sap. It has grown primarily through trade. This development is attributed to the city's proximity and transportation connections to Bangkok, Thailand, which is located about 175 km (109 mi) to the northwest. In fact, the governments of Thailand and Cambodia both had sovereignty over the city at different times as a result of border changes brought about through military conquest. The surrounding province is a fertile farming area that leads the country in rice production. It is sometimes called the "rice basket" of Cambodia. In addition, the region is the site of ruby and garnet mines. (Population, 2008 estimate: 80,000.)²²

¹⁴ Suite101.com. Walsh, John. "Cambodia's Oil: Resources Located in Disputed Territory in the Gulf of Thailand." 23 July 2007. http://cambodia.suite101.com/article.cfm/cambodias_oil

¹⁵ Asia Times Online. Symon, Andrew. "Cambodia, Thailand Struggle over Petroleum." 13 June 2007. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/IF13Ae05.html

¹⁶ The capital cities of each of Cambodia's provinces have the same name as the province, causing frequent confusion when consulting population statistics.

¹⁷ New York Times. Kinetz, Erika. "36 Hours in Phnom Penh." 21 September 2008. <http://travel.nytimes.com/2008/09/21/travel/21hours.html>

¹⁸ International Herald Tribune. Emmrich, Stuart. "Today's Phnom Penh: A City of Contrasts." 13 February 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/02/13/travel/trambo.php>

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch. "Cambodia: Phnom Penh's Poor Face Forced Evictions." 1 August 2006. <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2006/08/01/cambodia-phnom-penh-s-poor-face-forced-evictions>

²⁰ International Herald Tribune. Mydans, Seth. "Progress for Some Means Eviction for Others in Cambodia." 17 July 2008. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/07/17/asia/cambo.php>

²¹ Asianventure Tours. "Destination Cambodia: Phnom Penh City Overview." No date. http://www.cambodiaventure.com/guide/phnom_penh.html

²² Vietnam Sunshine Travel. "Cambodia Tourism: Battambang." No date. <http://www.vietnamsunshinetravel.com/cambodia/attractions/battambang-attractionsite.html>

Kampong Cham

Kampong Cham lies about 120 km (75 mi) northeast of Phnom Penh in an area populated by rubber plantations. Architecturally, Kampong Cham still reflects some of its French colonial history, as well as its ancient Khmer past. Located 2 km (1.24 mi) northwest of the town are the ruins of Wat Nokor Bayon, an 11th century Buddhist temple. A modern temple has been constructed within the ruins, and the city is beginning to develop its tourism opportunities. (Population, 2008 estimate: 64,000.)²³

Sihanoukville

Sihanoukville, also called Kampong Saom, is located in the southwest coastal region of Cambodia. The city is a major beach resort and a significant target area for the government's efforts to expand its tourism industry. It is also Cambodia's primary seaport, as it has the nation's only deep-sea port, which was constructed during the 1950s. As a result, the area has developed into a major textile export processing zone.²⁴ (Population, 2001 estimate: 187,688.)²⁵



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Fishing boats in Sihanoukville

Siem Reap

Siem Reap is located on the Siem Reap River, and consists of a cluster of old villages that developed around individual pagodas. The city was an important center for the French during the colonial period, and its combination of Chinese and French architecture reflects its diverse history. Siem Reap has a high concentration of foreign-owned businesses, primarily restaurants, bars, and craft boutiques. The city draws many tourists, mostly because it is located only slightly south of the famed Angkor temple complex, the most visited attraction in Cambodia. (Population, 2000 estimate: 75,000.)²⁶

Angkor

Angkor is the ancient capital of the Khmer kingdom. In 1992, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.²⁷ The temples and huge monuments at Angkor are the pride, and some would say, the heart of Cambodia. The city is estimated to have had as many as one million residents during its zenith. Such a large population required that the surrounding forests be cleared in order to grow sufficient food crops. This intensive exploitation of the land destroyed the area's delicate ecological balance. As a result, when flooding occurred, the area's intricate water management system became clogged with sand and sediment.²⁸ This, in the view of some historians, is what doomed this early urban

²³ Cambodia Information. "Kampong Cham, Cambodia." 2008. <http://www.cambodiai.com/kampongcham-cambodia>

²⁴ Asian Development Bank. "Bringing Cheap and Reliable Electricity to Sihanoukville." 23 October 2006. <http://www.adb.org/media/Articles/2006/10838-Cambodia-electricity/>

²⁵ HotelsCambodia.org. "Sihanouk Ville Information (Kampong Som)." c.2005–2008. <http://www.hotelscambodia.org/index.php?page=sihanouk-ville>

²⁶ The Courier, UNESCO. Luco, Fabienne. "Timeless Angkor." May 2000. http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000_05/uk/signer.htm

²⁷ World Heritage Centre, UNESCO. "Angkor." No date. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/668>

²⁸ CTV News. Associated Press. "Development Pressures Threaten Angkor Wat Ruins." 13 February 2008. http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20080213/angkor_wat_080213/20080213

civilization. Ironically, history may be repeating itself as the area continues to be developed as a major tourist destination. Luxury hotels now dot the perimeter, necessitating the drilling of many new wells. These wells have affected the water table and destabilized the earth. This has placed great stress on the ancient building complex.²⁹

Environmental Concerns

Deforestation

In the past, deforestation in Cambodia was the result of warfare and unsustainable farming practices promoted by the Khmer Rouge. It is now increasingly linked to the expanding resource requirements of other countries. Specifically, Thailand, a country that is more developed than Cambodia, implemented controls on its own logging industry in 1989, making it attractive to seek replacement sources in neighboring countries such as Cambodia. During the early 1990s, Phnom Penh introduced a moratorium on logging, partly to deny the Khmer Rouge (then in control of the Thai–Cambodian border region) revenue from the industry.³⁰ The government, however, lacks the ability to enforce its own laws, and illegal logging continues to flourish given the demand for wood. Poachers are often armed, and they may include members of the Cambodian armed forces.³¹ Reporters investigating illegal logging have received death threats.³²



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Deforestation

Deforestation has dramatically affected wildlife, many species of which are endangered. It also threatens the welfare of farmers whose homes and crops are more likely to sustain damage from flooding owing to loss of ground cover and soil erosion. Furthermore, many rural residents rely on various forest products for their livelihood. For example, the sustainable practice of tapping resin from trees can account for as much as one third of a household's income. For a family, this may represent the difference between subsistence and hunger.³³

The development of commercial shrimp farms on Cambodia's coast has also resulted in deforestation. To create shrimp ponds, farmers must clear the existing mangrove trees. Fertilizer is then added to the water, thereby injecting chemicals into the ecosystem and rendering it uninhabitable for wildlife. When subjected to these techniques, the area itself

²⁹ The Independent. Sharp, Rob. "Heritage Site in Peril: Angkor Wat is Falling Down." 14 March 2008. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/heritage-site-in-peril-angkor-wat-is-falling-down-795747.html>

³⁰ Trade Environment Database, American University. "Cambodian Timber Export Ban." 30 April 1996. <http://www.american.edu/TED/camwood.htm>

³¹ Voice of America. "Children's Drawings Depict Deforestation in Cambodia." 5 March 2007. <http://www.voanews.com/english/About/2007-03-05-voa60.cfm>

³² Reporters Without Borders. "Cambodia - Annual Report 2008." 2008. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=25631

³³ PEPY. "Quick Facts about Logging and Deforestation." No date. http://pepyride.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=133&Itemid=312

becomes unproductive after four years. At that point, more mangroves are destroyed to create new farms.

Wildlife and Conservation

Cambodia was once home to a diverse and plentiful range of mammals, including elephants, tigers, leopards, wild ibis, and ox (banteng). Throughout years of conflict, many of these animals were killed by bombs, slaughtered to feed troops, or sold to raise funds. Such practices led to drastic declines in the regional wildlife population.³⁴ However, there is evidence that these large mammals, as well as many rare and almost extinct birds, are returning. Furthermore, there are now conservation projects, such as the Sam Veasna Center for Wildlife Conservation, in place to protect them.³⁵

Nevertheless, Cambodians still hunt and fish for food. One of the species indigenous to the area, the Irrawaddy Dolphin, is, in fact, an endangered species in part because of gill net fishing. Although gill net fishing was banned in 2006 in the eastern provinces of Kratie and Streung Treng—where the dolphin can be found, gills are still used to catch fish.³⁶ The Ministry of Tourism promotes the Irrawaddy dolphin, and the bottle-nosed mammal has increasingly become a tourist attraction. The government is also entertaining the possibility of allowing hunting safaris on a limited scale, in order to attract tourists. In the government's point of view, controlled hunting is preferable to illegal poaching.³⁷

Natural Hazards

Monsoons

As with any natural phenomenon, monsoons are not always predictable—they produce more rainfall in some years than they do in others. The “normal” flooding of the monsoon season provides the basis for the planting season in areas on either side of the Mekong River. It is during this time that river flooding expands Tonle Sap, the Great Lake, to more than five times its normal size.³⁸ The overflow increases the yield of freshwater fish and other aquatic species. However, it also displaces people who live near these bodies of water during the dry season, and it makes daily life more difficult for poor urban squatters.



© Michael Brown
Flooded street in Phnom Penh

During the height of this season, transportation to and within the more remote regions of Cambodia is done by boat. Meanwhile, a low level of rainfall in any given year decreases the productivity of the crops, thereby creating food scarcity for the people.

³⁴ ARKive. “The Return of Cambodia’s Wildlife.” 3 June 2008. <http://www.arkive.org/news/20080603-return-of-cambodias-wildlife.html>

³⁵ Sam Veasna Center for Wildlife Conservation. “Sustaining Cambodian Wildlife and Communities through Ecotourism.” No date. <http://www.samveasna.org/home.php>

³⁶ Mekong Dolphin Conservation Project. “Conservation.” No date. <http://www.mekongdolphin.org/conservation.htm>

³⁷ Environmental News Network. Madra, Ek. “Cambodia Plans Hunting Safaris for VIP Tourists.” 11 December 2007. http://www.enn.com/top_stories/article/27015

³⁸ Mekong River Commission. Annual Flood Report 2005. “Chapter 7: Impact of the 2005 Flood – Country Reports.” 2005. http://www.mrcmekong.org/flood_report/2005/impact_cambodia1.htm

Flooding

Flooding also occurs in the deforested areas of Cambodia (primarily in the northeastern regions), often creating impassable landslides. In addition, there has been flooding along the Mekong River as a result of the construction of hydroelectric facilities upstream in Thailand. This is a phenomenon that may increase as the Cambodian government is itself considering developing their water resources for hydroelectric purposes.

Chapter 3 History

Introduction

The modern Southeast Asian state known as Cambodia, or Kampuchea, has evolved through a diverse combination of cultural, political, and economic influences. Knowledge of Cambodia's ancient history comes from archaeological evidence, rather than written records. The ancient ancestors of Cambodia's majority ethnic group, the Khmer, may have originally migrated from southeastern China before the first century C.E.³⁹ Trade with ancient China and India introduced both Buddhist and Indian religious ideas; it also brought to the region aspects of the Indian legal system, which the early Khmer kings adopted. Though Buddhism ultimately prevailed as the state religion, the Indic influence dominated for a long time, as evidenced in the archaeological remains at Angkor Wat.



© sivanette / flickr.com
Detail of a carving at Angkor Wat

Cambodia was embattled throughout both its ancient and modern periods. The region was subject to continuous invasions from its neighbors, Siam (now Thailand) and Vietnam, as well as the once powerful kingdom of Champa, which was located in central and southern Indochina. The Cham brought with them a Muslim tradition. Though they were ultimately vanquished, the Cham remained as an independent cultural presence—one that remains evident in modern times.

The Empire of Funan (100 B.C.E.–500 C.E.)

The earliest recorded organized state in this region was the empire of Funan, which was centered in what is now the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. The available evidence suggests that these people were traders. Early contact with traders and traveling Brahmans from India introduced enduring cultural and political influences to the area. Immigration from India in the 4th and 5th centuries increased the influence of Hinduism and other elements of Indic culture. This cultural absorption process did not provoke ethnic backlash from the Khmer. As scholar David Chandler writes, “if individual Indians enjoyed high social status, as they often did, it was partly by convincing local people they deserved it.”⁴⁰ The Indian influence in the region, including the adoption of the legal code, was partially responsible for the emergence of an organized administrative entity.

The Funan Empire held power for almost 500 years, until an invasion reduced it to a vassal state of Chen La, its northern neighbor. Chen La, however, suffered internal

³⁹ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. *Cambodia: A Country Study*. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Prehistory and Early Kingdoms.” 1987.

<http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/4.htm>

⁴⁰ *A History of Cambodia*. Chandler, David. “Chapter One: The Beginnings of Cambodian History [p. 12].” 2000. Boulder: Westview Press. http://books.google.com/books?id=IIEJ8rGpk-YC&pg=PA12&lpg=PA12&dq=cambodia+india+chandler&source=web&ots=gqaxTAhpcp&sig=VTqckDrFebAbyaU6TP60nAb5MY&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result#PPA12,M1

disputes, which resulted in a split between the northern and southern factions. The north became known as Land Chen La, while the south became Water Chen La. Knowledge of this era comes primarily from the writings of Chinese travelers to the region. They described Land Chen La as a thriving, wealthy, and centralized kingdom by 700 C.E. The southern region was subject to continual attacks of piracy, and it finally fell to a small Khmer state located north of the Mekong Delta. The ensuing 300 years were a time of instability, with surrounding states striving to control the area. It ultimately became a vassal state of the Java-based Sailendra Empire.⁴¹

The Golden Age of Khmer Civilization: The Angkorean Period (802–1432 C.E.)

The reign of Jayavarman II (ca. 802–850 C.E.) signaled the beginning of a unified Khmer state. The center of political authority shifted to the north (Land Chen La) in order to render the seat of power less vulnerable to conquest by water. Jayavarman II proclaimed himself “god-king” (*devaraja*). This is an Indian concept that would fall out of favor a century later in Cambodia. In practice, the use of the *devaraja* concept merges the personality cult of a monarch with the deification of royalty to consolidate religious and political control.⁴² Many of the temples built during the reign of Jayavarman II were dedicated to Hindu gods.

Successive monarchs commissioned or built many temples which still dot the Cambodian landscape. Surayavarman II (1112–1150), who is considered to be one of the great Angkorean monarchs, commissioned the construction of the temple city of Angkor Wat, the world’s most extensive religious complex.⁴³ He was succeeded by King Dharanindravarman II (1150–1160). While his reign was brief, the fact that Dharanindravarman was a Buddhist reflected the growing importance of the religion in Cambodia. Jayavarman VII (1181–1219), under whose auspices Angkor Wat was actually built, dedicated the temple to both himself and the Indian God Vishnu. A mix of Hinduism with Buddhism is evident throughout the complex, specifically in the form of Buddhist statues that rest on Hindu plinths.⁴⁴



© Trey Ratcliff
Angkor Wat in Siem Reap

These kings’ territorial expansions were essential to the eventual consolidation of a unified kingdom. Surayavarman II waged campaigns against Vietnam and Champa. He also established diplomatic relations with China. The military conquests of Jayavarman VII were equally important. The Cham, a people in the central and southern part of the

⁴¹ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. *Cambodia: A Country Study*. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Prehistory and Early Kingdoms: The Successor State of Chenla.” 1987. <http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/6.htm>

⁴² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Devaraja.” 2008. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9030146>

⁴³ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. *Cambodia: A Country Study*. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Angkorian Period.” 1987. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kh0016\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kh0016))

⁴⁴ Nine Dragons Travel & Tours. “Useful Information about Cambodia.” No date. <http://www.nine-dragons.com/cambodia.htm>

Indochinese Peninsula, reached the height of their power around 900 C.E. They invaded Cambodia—by both land and water—in 1177–1178. Jayavarman defeated the Cham on the Tonle Sap. Upon assuming power in 1181, he expanded the kingdom and initiated a wide variety of programs, including the construction of roads, public rest houses, and reservoirs.

The Khmer Empire of Angkor became known as the Kingdom of Cambodia around 1340, although it was consistently involved in struggles with its neighbors. Beginning in 1369, the kingdom was occupied by Siam for the next two decades. Siam remained in control of the area through 1620. Between that time and 1863, even though there were a series of Khmer kings, Cambodia was in reality a vassal state to either Vietnam or Siam.⁴⁵ This would not change until 1 August 1863, when the French, in their colonial bid, established a protectorate over the country.

French Colonialism and the Indochina Union

As part of its colonial ambitions, France sought to establish a base in Southeast Asia in order to pursue both political and commercial interests in the region. Meanwhile, Cambodia sought assistance in defending itself against neighbor armies. In the 1850s, Ang Duong, King of Cambodia (1841–1844; 1845–1860) had been persuaded to appeal to Napoleon III for protection against the Vietnamese. A decade later, in 1863, the French used this appeal as a pretext to send a French naval delegation to Phnom Penh in order to conclude a treaty with the Cambodian King Norodom (1859–1904). Thus began the French presence in Cambodia.⁴⁶

However useful the French might have been to preserving Cambodia's territorial integrity, their services did not come without a price. In June 1884, the French demanded the King's approval of an agreement that would set limits on monarchical authority, abolish slavery, codify land ownership, and establish the residence rights of colonial officials in the countryside. The King had little choice but to agree to these demands. In October 1887, the French established the Indochina Union, comprising Cambodia and three regions of a fractured Vietnam: Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina. Laos was added to the union in 1893.⁴⁷



Courtesy of wikipedia.org
French troops in Indo-China, 1888

France's hope that Cambodia would prove to be a rich source of natural resources never materialized. Cambodian farmers were heavily taxed, a practice that forced them into perpetual indebtedness to Chinese money lenders. While rice was a commercial export, the onset of the world-wide depression in the late 1920s destroyed the market. The French were, however, able to develop rubber plantations. Yet it was Vietnamese

⁴⁵ Open Democracy. Osborne, Milton. "Preah Vihear: The Thai-Cambodia Temple Dispute." 25 August 2008. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/preah-vihear-the-thai-cambodia-temple-dispute>

⁴⁶ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. *Cambodia: A Country Study*. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Cambodia's Struggle for Survival, 1432–1887: The French Protectorate." 1987. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kh0019\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kh0019))

⁴⁷ First Battalion Infantry 50th Infantry Association. Sarlin, Ray. "Leadup to French Colonization." 2003. http://www.ichiban1.org/html/history/bc_1964_prewar/pre_colonialism_1427_1893.htm

immigrants, not Cambodians, who obtained work as field laborers. They occupied many administrative posts as well. Colonial authorities perceived the Khmer as a “lazy and simple” people. In return, the Khmer detested the colonial authorities⁴⁸ who preferred to hire and promote Vietnamese, whose Confucian heritage emphasized respect for authority and the value of education.

During this period, and up until about 1940, the basic structure of Cambodian society remained unchanged. The colonial government built a few roads to connect the capital to outlying regions where it had economic interests. It also embarked on a renovation of Angkor Wat, Cambodia’s architectural jewel. The French did not, however, promote education or encourage literacy. Village life remained essentially untouched by their presence, with traditional forms of leadership retained. The monarchy continued to function, with the kings and queens holding official duties, but they were primarily figureheads rather than powerbrokers.

World War II and the Colonial Vichy Government

World War II threatened the colonial power structure of Southeast Asia. Specifically Japan became the primary power seeking to expand its dominance in the region. However, the Vichy administration—the Parisian government under General Petain—was a supporter of Germany and, therefore, Japan. These circumstances tempered the Japanese relationship with the French colonial administration in Indochina. In fact, Japan lobbied Germany to pressure the Vichy Administration in Vietnam to grant it the use of various transportation centers for its troop movements.⁴⁹

During this time, Thailand sensed that the regions previously under direct French control had been weakened, and it chose to invade Cambodia. Thailand might have been successful except for an unexpected encounter with a French naval fleet, which defeated the Thais. This assault, however, prompted the Japanese to intervene, and they demanded territorial concessions from the colonial administration. Japan sent 8,000 troops into Cambodia with plans to take over from the French. On 9 March 1945, the Japanese overthrew the French colonial administration several months before they lost the war.



U.S.Navy photo
Japanese battle ships, WWII

After World War II, various internal and external entities sought to gain control over the country. The French wanted to restore their colonial authority in Indochina. The Thais, however, did not want the French to return, so they backed a nationalist group of Khmer insurgents, the Khmer Issarak, in its attempt to seize power. Meanwhile, a Vietnamese

⁴⁸ *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building*. Gottesman, Evan. “Chapter Two: Turning Waters: The Patterns and Myths of Cambodian History [p. 15].” 2004. New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁴⁹ The Society for French Historical Studies. *H-France Review*, Vol. 7, No. 54. Nguyen, Thu Huong and Frances Gouda. Review of Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and its Legacies, 1940–1970*. 2005. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books. May 2007. <http://www.h-france.net/vol7reviews/huongandgouda.html>

communist group, the Viet Minh, crossed the border with the objective of building a coalition government with the Khmer Issarak.⁵⁰

The Establishment of an Independent Cambodia

While the French sought to regain their foothold in Indochina, their subjects did not desire a restoration of colonial rule. In March 1945, the Kingdom of Cambodia proclaimed its independence, although it remained a French-associated state. In June 1952, King Sihanouk, who had been crowned in 1941 as essentially a figurehead monarch, suspended the constitution. The nascent Cambodian army moved against the Khmer Issarak, driving them across the border into Thailand. In November 1953, the Kingdom of Cambodia again proclaimed its independence. In the face of mounting Khmer resistance and the growing power of King Sihanouk, France finally recognized Cambodia's independence.

The country's French-drawn borders were recognized by the 1954 Geneva Accords, which called for elections in the former French Indochina colonies. This presented a challenge for Sihanouk since few Cambodians had experienced any improvement in their lives during his reign. He feared communists and left-leaning groups could exploit public discontent to win seats in the National Assembly. In a stroke of genius, he abdicated the throne and henceforth carried the royal title of Prince. This freed him to enter politics as a private citizen, whereupon he founded the People's Socialist Community (*Sangkum Reastr Niyum*), which was more akin to a mass movement than a political party. He began referring to himself as *Samdech Sahachivin* (Prince Comrade) and *Samdech Ou* (Prince Daddy). The *Sangkum* won every seat in the National Assembly. A referendum on his leadership offered a "Yes" ballot with his smiling face, while the "No" ballot was simply a black piece of paper. In the 1950s, Cambodians overwhelmingly approved of their former monarch's leadership.⁵¹



Courtesy of SEASite.niu.edu
King Norodom Sihanouk, 1950s

Over time, however, the people of Cambodia became disenchanted with Sihanouk. His personal vanity was often on full display, particularly in the form of feature films starring himself and his wife. More importantly, his policies proved harmful to the economic welfare of many ordinary Cambodians. The government's decision to nationalize trade destroyed the livelihood of entrepreneurs, who then created a parallel black-market economy. Violence intruded in the spring of 1967, when approximately 200 farmers protested against a rice tax in Samlaut, Battambang Province. In the scuffle, two government soldiers were killed. Although this was a spontaneous outburst of unrest, Sihanouk attributed it to various bands of guerrillas, whom he referred to as "Khmer Viet

⁵⁰ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. *Cambodia: A Country Study*. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The French Colonial Period, 1887–1953: The Struggle for Independence." 1987. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kh0023\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kh0023))

⁵¹ *Patriots and Tyrants: Ten Asian Leaders*. Marlay, Ross and Clark Neher. "Chapter Six: Norodom Sihanouk: The Populist Prince [pp. 166–67]." 1999. Connecticut: Rowan and Littlefield. http://books.google.com/books?id=7i0jGxysUUcC&dq=prince+sihanouk+approved+cambodia+bombings&source=gbs_summary_s&cad=0.

Minh” in order to associate them with the hated Vietnamese. He later renamed them the “red Khmer” to differentiate them from his right-wing opposition, the “blue Khmer.” Planting himself in the middle of the color-coded political spectrum, Sihanouk represented the “white Khmer,” who refused to make any permanent alliances and instead tried to keep his rivals off balance by playing favorites.⁵²

Cambodia and the Vietnam War

Aware of his tentative hold on power, Prince Sihanouk attempted to cultivate outside powers to keep them from interfering in Cambodian internal affairs. Thus, he allowed the North Vietnamese, whom he thought were likely to unify their country by toppling the American-backed South Vietnamese government, to establish bases in the Cambodian borderlands adjoining South Vietnam.⁵³ The permission was granted on the condition that they would not assist the Cambodian communists. This arrangement, however, drew Cambodia into the Vietnam conflict after U.S. military officials identified the bases as important enemy targets.⁵⁴ On 18 March 1969, the U.S. began a series of secret air strikes against bases in Cambodia that were thought to be either Viet Cong or NVA (North Vietnamese Army) strongholds.

The bombings often hit villages, thereby producing a substantial number of civilian deaths. In response, many affected citizens sought refuge in the capital, Phnom Penh, while others joined the Khmer Rouge guerrilla faction. Some Cambodians took revenge by massacring hundreds of ethnic Vietnamese. The secret bombings continued until a



Courtesy of SEAsia.nyu.edu
Lon Nol

congressional order halted the practice on 14 August 1973. By that time, more than two million tons of bombs had been dropped on Cambodia, resulting in large-scale casualties.⁵⁵

On 18 March 1970, Prince Sihanouk was overthrown in a coup led by General Lon Nol and Prince Sirik Matak. The dominant figure in the coup, Lon Nol was anti-communist and hostile to the Vietnamese. Accordingly, this new government was recognized by the U.S., who remained involved in the Vietnam conflict. Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge saw an opportunity to gain power by persuading Prince Sihanouk to unite forces with them in order to overthrow Lon Nol. In turn, Lon Nol accepted military aid from the U.S. in an attempt to drive out North Vietnamese troops. Nol’s

⁵² *A History of Cambodia*. Chandler, David. “Chapter Eleven: From Independence to Civil War [p. 197].” 2000. Boulder: Westview Press.

⁵³ *Dirty Little Secrets of the Vietnam War: Military Information You're Not Supposed to Know*. Dunnigan, James. “Chapter Seven: War in the Shadows [p. 186].” 2000. New York: Macmillan. http://books.google.com/books?id=7t-XPOvtWUkC&pg=PA186&lpg=PA186&dq=sihanouk+north+vietnamese+support&source=web&ots=ytNQUEA5wz&sig=QHTqsk2-dE0RG3j3cbVVOFh5jVQ&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=5&ct=result

⁵⁴ Mekong.net. Sharp, Bruce. “The Banyan Tree: Untangling Cambodian History: Part One: The Seeds.” 26 February 2008. <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/banyan1.htm>

⁵⁵ The Walrus, Yale University. Kiernan, Ben and Taylor Owen. “Bombs Over Cambodia.” October 2006. http://www.yale.edu/cgp/Walrus_CambodiaBombing_OCT06.pdf

leadership proved ineffective, both politically and militarily, and his time in power was marked by widespread corruption.⁵⁶ Nol did little to impede the steady advance of Khmer Rouge troops, who, in April 1975, after five years of fighting, took control of the capital and proclaimed the founding of Democratic Kampuchea. Those associated with the Lon Nol government who had not fled the city were executed.

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge

Pol Pot was the infamous leader of the Khmer Rouge, and his policies led to the deaths or displacement of millions of Cambodians. Originally known as Saloth Sar, Pol Pot came from a well-to-do landowner family. His family's wealth exempted him from the need to do farm labor and enabled him to gain an education. Fluent in French, he was one of a small number of Cambodians who were selected by the colonial government in 1949 for advanced study in Paris. While in France, he neglected his studies in radio electronics and instead focused on Marxism. During this time, he met many other young Cambodian nationalists, most notably Ieng Sary, one of his future associates in the Khmer Rouge.

Upon his return home in 1953, he joined the Indochinese Communist Party. He secretly nurtured his membership in the Cambodian Communist Party, of which he later became General Secretary in 1962. He then devoted himself to building the communist guerrilla faction that Prince Sihanouk later labeled the red Khmer, or "Khmer Rouge." Beginning in 1970, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge forces waged a fierce civil war against Lon Nol's Cambodian government.



© Alan Chan
Khmer Rouge soldiers

Immediately after seizing power in 1975, the Khmer Rouge attempted to emulate China's "Great Leap Forward," a radical collectivization scheme that the Chinese implemented between 1958 and 1961. The Chinese program was a disaster, resulting in as many as 30 million deaths from starvation.⁵⁷ Having visited China as an insurgent, Pol Pot had been advised by Chinese leaders to proceed slowly with his plans to radically transform Cambodia. Yet he discounted the need to proceed cautiously, as he was confident that his government would be able to rapidly enact major social reforms.⁵⁸ Toward this end, the Khmer Rouge proceeded with a plan to create an egalitarian society with a swift and merciless hand.

⁵⁶ Mekong.net. Sharp, Bruce. "The Banyan Tree: Untangling Cambodian History: Part Two: Descending. 26 February 2008. <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/banyan2.htm>

⁵⁷ *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*. Becker, Jasper. 1998. New York: Holt Books.

⁵⁸ *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*. Kiernan, Ben. "Chapter Four: Cleansing the Frontiers: Neighbors, Friends, and Enemies, 1975-76 [p. 126]." 2002. New Haven: Yale University Press.

http://books.google.com/books?id=18TVTCJSJKcC&dq=pol+pot+ben+kiernan+great+leap+forward&source=gbs_summary_s&cad=0

The Zero Years: 1975–1979

By 1975, many Cambodians had sought refuge in Phnom Penh from the fighting that had ravaged the countryside. An estimated two million people were living in the city when the Khmer Rouge army arrived on 17 April 1975. Initially, many residents thought that they would be liberated from the conflict, social strife, and hunger that had plagued Cambodia for several years. Change came quickly, but not in the manner that many had hoped. The Khmer Rouge ordered everyone to immediately evacuate Phnom Penh on foot; this included the infirm, the young, and even bedridden hospital patients. The evacuation was carried out under the false pretext that the U.S. was planning to launch a bombing attack on the capital. However, those forced to flee soon realized that they were being permanently exiled for other reasons. Approximately 20,000 people lost their lives during the evacuation of the city.⁵⁹

The four years that followed were dubbed “the Zero Years,” as Pol Pot had named the beginning of this revolutionary period “Year Zero.” During this time, the Khmer Rouge enacted an eight-point program. The program called for the evacuation of people from towns to rural areas in an effort to create an agrarian society. It also aimed to remove the influence of religion in the country by defrocking all Buddhist monks and sending them to work in the rice paddies.



© flydime / flickr.com
Victims of the Khmer Rouge regime

According to the new government, “rice fields were books, and hoes were pencils.”⁶⁰ The monetary currency of the old regime was withdrawn from circulation and ordered to be replaced with a new revolutionary currency, which was never issued. In any case, ordinary citizens had no use for money since the nation’s markets had all been closed. Farming cooperatives—with obligatory communal dining—were established.

While the declared intent of the program was to destroy social classes and make everyone equal, it actually created a new set of divisions: the “old people” and the “new people.” The former were rural people who had lived under the control of the Khmer Rouge before they seized power. The “new people” were those who had been forced to leave the cities after 17 April 1975. While almost no one was exempt from the rigors of the new system, as well as the lack of food, it was the new people who bore the brunt of the hard labor, long hours, and draconian punishments. Those known as “intellectuals,” such as teachers or artists, were most likely to be killed. It was not unusual for Khmer Rouge troops to club people to death with sticks, stones, and farm implements. Weapons were in short supply and the enforcers were encouraged not to use them. “As many as 100,000 ethnic Vietnamese were executed, and about 225,000 ethnic Chinese and 90,000 Chams are believed to have died of disease, starvation, or execution.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Mekong.net. Sharp, Bruce. “The Banyan Tree: Untangling Cambodian History: Part Three: Toppling the Past.” 26 February 2008. <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/banyan3.htm>

⁶⁰ Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University. Ledgerwood, Judy. “Education in Cambodia.” No date. <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/khmer/Ledgerwood/education.htm>

⁶¹ Mekong.net. Sharp, Bruce. “The Banyan Tree: Untangling Cambodian History: Part Three: Toppling the Past.” 26 February 2008. <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/banyan3.htm>



© Peter Ganhum
Khmer Rouge victim, Tuol Sleng

Many interrogations and tortures were carried out at the infamous prison of Tuol Sleng, which translates as the “hill of a poison tree.” Formerly a Phnom Penh high school, it was converted into the Pol Pot regime’s largest prison facility. All Khmer Rouge cadres who fell out of favor with the regime were brought to the compound. Officially known as “S-21,” it was informally referred to as “the place where people go in but never come out” (*konlaenh choul min dael chenh*). Indeed, nearly 20,000 people are known to have been detained in Tuol Sleng; but there are only six documented survivors. The bodies of the rest of the victims were dumped into mass graves on the outskirts of nearby Choeng Ek village, the infamous “killing fields.”⁶²

The constant fear, brutality, and deprivation took a heavy toll on the Cambodian people. Over this nearly four-year period, more than a quarter of the country’s population of eight million people perished. A minority, among them former Khmer Rouge members who no longer supported Pol Pot, escaped to Vietnam. At that time, Vietnam was engaged in constant border clashes with Cambodia as each of their armies made incursions into the other’s territory.⁶³ Two of these political refugees, Heng Samrin and Hun Sen, who had been young commanders in the Khmer Rouge, would later head the new Cambodian government.

The End of the Zero Years

On 25 December 1978, a military force of 90,000 Vietnamese and 18,000 Cambodians, led by Heng Samrin, crossed the border and fought their way to Phnom Penh, where a weakened and demoralized Khmer Rouge army put up little resistance. The Khmer Rouge who survived retreated into regions near the Thai border. The Vietnamese-supported coalition chose Heng Samrin to lead the new government.

Meanwhile, the Cambodian people faced new struggles. Caught in the middle of the fighting, some were killed or captured. Others faced famine as military forces on both sides either confiscated agricultural harvests or destroyed them to prevent them from being eaten by enemy troops. As the Khmer Rouge retreated and their socialist utopia fell apart, thousands of Cambodians were rendered homeless. Many tried to either return to their villages or cross the border into Thailand. Bedraggled and starving, with few or no belongings, these refugees garnered the attention of the international community. Various charity groups and foreign governments wanted to send aid to ease their plight.

However, the international community, including the UN, did not recognize the Cambodian government, which was known as the People’s Republic of Kampuchea.

⁶² EdWeb. Carvin, Andy. From Sideshow to Genocide: Stories of the Cambodian Holocaust. “S-21: The Horrors of Tuol Sleng.” 1999. <http://www.edwebproject.org/sideshow/khmeryears/s21.html>

⁶³ *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States*. Chan, Sucheng. “Chapter One: Cambodia’s Darkest Hour [p. 30].” 2004. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. http://books.google.com/books?id=eJW99ZgCWtQC&pg=PA30&lpg=PA30&dq=vietnamese+support+he+ng+cambodia&source=web&ots=aYrs2C_LJJ&sig=VJIVzycTw9qPntwDZgoHGY8U2NY&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result

Headed by Heng Samrin, the administration was seen as a puppet state of the Vietnamese. These circumstances made it difficult for Cambodians within the country to obtain the food and medical assistance that they desperately needed. In addition, the refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border were often controlled by the Khmer Rouge, and many charitable organizations did not want to support them. Nor did they want the aid to be confiscated by Vietnamese soldiers.

In addition, the Vietnamese, essentially in control of the Phnom Penh government, often impeded efforts to distribute aid. They allowed few relief workers into Phnom Penh, but those who could enter were placed under many restrictions. Relief workers could not, for example, maintain radio communications with anyone outside the city, nor could they speak to anyone on the street. Furthermore, aid could only be distributed by government officials, not relief personnel. In spite of these constraints, the situation nevertheless improved.⁶⁴

New Coalitions: 1980–1985

At the beginning of 1980, the Vietnamese had almost 225,000 troops in Cambodia. Hanoi claimed that the troops were only intended to be a “transitional” force in charge of ensuring order, but many suspected that the Vietnamese desired a long-term presence. At the same time, most of the officials of the new government, which was led by Heng Samrin and backed by Vietnam, were former Khmer Rouge.



Courtesy of SEAsia.nyu.edu
Heng Samrin

The U.S. and its western allies were confronted with a dilemma. They did not want to support the Vietnamese and Heng Samrin, nor did they want to support any one of the three newly formed political factions. One of these factions was a new, re-grouped Khmer Rouge, which still had strong support in the country and was backed by China. But the international community could not support them, given the known devastation they had brought to the country. There was also a resistance group led by Prince Sihanouk, and another group led by a former prime minister under Lon Nol.

None of the opposition groups had enough support to govern independently. The U.S. wanted a coalition government of all four groups. In 1982, this coalition took power with Prince Sihanouk at the head as Chairman of the Supreme National Council and Heng Samrin as Prime Minister. On 14 January 1985, Hun Sen became Chairman of the Council of Ministers, replacing Heng Samrin.

⁶⁴ Mekong.net. Sharp, Bruce. “The Banyan Tree: Untangling Cambodian History: Part Four: Twists and Uncertainty.” 26 February 2008. <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/banyan4.htm>

Multi-Party Democracy is Established in Cambodia



Courtesy of SEASite.niu.edu
Burned Khmer Rouge tank, early 1990s

In September 1989, Vietnam withdrew its troops from Cambodia. In 1991, at the Paris Peace talks, three of the political groups met to discuss the terms of the new peace. The Khmer Rouge refused to participate and, meanwhile, continued its intermittent guerrilla attacks. Control of the government was transferred to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1991, with elections for the National Assembly to be held every five years.

In the first election, which took place in May 1993, the royalist FUNCINPEC Party (FPC), led by Prince Sihanouk's son, Norodom Ranariddh, received the most votes. Under threat of renewed national unrest, the FCP formed a coalition with the communist Cambodian People's Party (CPP). Yet the power-sharing arrangement created rifts in the bureaucracy, as two ministers, one from the FCP and one from the CPP, were placed within each government ministry.⁶⁵ Corruption was also a problem; those in the business community noted that while previously "they had to pay off officials of one party, now it was necessary to pay off two."⁶⁶

In 1997, CPP leader Hun Sen gained control of the government in a violent coup. The 1998 elections were marred by voter intimidation, as Hun Sen wanted to legitimize his seizure of power through the ballot box.⁶⁷ The opposition National United Front (NUF), comprised of four anti-government parties, was at further disadvantage due to a lack of media coverage, which was controlled by Hun Sen's government. Ultimately, none of the parties earned the mandatory two-thirds majority that was required to establish a new government. A coalition brokered between the CPP and FCP put Hun Sen in power, once again. The only opposition party in the National Assembly, the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), was headed by its namesake. Rainsy had previously served as the FCP finance minister under the royalist government formed in 1993, before being ousted from the position by Hun Sen.

⁶⁵ Cambodia Policy Study Group, Asia Society. Dalpino, Catharin E. and David G. Timberman. "Cambodia's Political Future: Issues for U.S. Policy." 26 March 1998. http://www.asiasociety.org/publications/cambodia_policy.html

⁶⁶ Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University. Ledgerwood, Judy. "Cambodia since April 1975." No date. <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/khmer/Ledgerwood/Part6.htm>

⁶⁷ International Crisis Group. Asia Report, No. 2. "Cambodia's Flawed Elections: Why Cambodia Will Not Be Ready for Free and Fair Elections on 26 July 1998." 16 June 1998. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=1427>

Again, elections in 2003 failed to produce a requisite majority winner, with the CPP earning the most votes. After a brief alliance with the SRP, the FCP ultimately cooperated with the CPP to form another coalition government in 2004.⁶⁸ Hun Sen was chosen as Prime Minister, and Prince Norodom Ranariddh became the President of the National Assembly. That same year, an ailing Norodom Sihanouk, who had reclaimed his title of King after the 1993 constitution accorded the monarchy a ceremonial role, abdicated the throne owing to poor health. His little-known son, Norodom Sihamoni, who had spent many years abroad, was crowned King on 29 October 2004.⁶⁹



Courtesy of wikipedia.org
King Norodom Sihamoni

Recent Developments

In the last decade, there has been some closure to the infamous “Zero Years” and the reign of the Khmer Rouge. Pol Pot, the leader of the Khmer Rouge, was reported dead on 16 April 1998, a little over a week after U.S. President Bill Clinton had laid out plans to arrest him.⁷⁰ He reportedly died of a heart attack, although there were suspicions that he may have been poisoned. Ta Mok, Pol Pot’s second-in-command, sometimes referred to as “The Butcher,” died in military custody on 21 July 2006, before he could be tried.⁷¹ On 31 July 2007, Kang Kek Ieu (alias Duch) was charged with crimes against humanity. Duch was the prison chief at Tuol Sleng. In September of that year, Nuon Chean (the top surviving leader of the Khmer Rouge), Ieng Sary, Ieng Thirith, and Khieu Samphan, all important members of the group, were charged as well.

Meanwhile, Hun Sen has gained the support of most Cambodians. His party, the formerly communist CPP, won 73% of the votes in the July 2008 elections, with 75% of eligible voters participating. Solid economic growth since mid-decade has spurred increased support for the CPP. The party has also benefited from Hun Sen’s response to a stand-off with Thailand concerning the ancient temple complex, Preah Vihear, over which both governments claim sovereignty. When UNESCO added the complex to the list of World Heritage sites shortly before the Cambodian election, Bangkok dispatched hundreds of soldiers to the border. In turn, Phnom Penh responded by sending its own troops to the disputed area, a move that brought great national pride to many Cambodians, who appreciated the government’s protective stance against its more developed neighbor.⁷²

⁶⁸ International Republican Institute. “Cambodia: Cambodia’s Road to Democracy.” c.2007.

<http://www.iri.org/asia/cambodia.asp>

⁶⁹ Los Angeles Times. “Ailing Cambodian Monarch’s Son Chosen to Succeed King.” 15 October 2004.

<http://articles.latimes.com/2004/oct/15/world/fg-cambodia15>

⁷⁰ CNN Interactive. “Reviled Pol Pot Cremated by Khmer Rouge Comrades.” 18 April 1998.

<http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/asiapcf/9804/18/pot.cremated/>

⁷¹ Los Angeles Times. Lamb, David. “Ta Mok, 80; Key Figure in Cambodian Genocide.” 21 July 2006.

<http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jul/21/local/me-tamok21>

⁷² International Republican Institute. The Christian Science Monitor. Montero, David. “In Cambodia Vote, Stability Wins.” 29 July 2008. <http://www.iri.org/newsarchive/2008/2008-07-29-News-CSM-Cambodia.asp>

Hun Sen, who turned 56 in 2008, has stated that he would like to stay in power until the age of 90.⁷³ Toward this end, he has tightened his grip on power by placing relatives in key positions and establishing additional connections through strategic marriages within his extended family.⁷⁴ In summing up the emerging status quo in national politics, a Cambodian commentator observed, “If a democracy is when a nation is ruled by a government chosen by its people, yes, Cambodia is democratic. But in terms of governance, Cambodia is a different story. There is no check and balance on the executive branch, the judiciary or the monarchy.”⁷⁵

Indeed, in February 2005, Sam Rainsy, the leader of the opposition SRP and a member of parliament, was stripped of his immunity against prosecution and forced to flee the country to await a pardon.⁷⁶ More recently, in April 2006, the prime minister asked the UN Human Rights representative to leave Cambodia after he criticized Hun Sen’s crackdown on dissent.⁷⁷ The political challenge, then, is to complete the process of democratization without sacrificing the country’s hard-won stability, which is vital to its continued economic growth.

⁷³ International Herald Tribune. Associated Press. “Cambodian Leader Says He Hopes to Stay in Power for Three More Decades.” 9 January 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/01/09/asia/AS-GEN-Cambodia-Politics.php>

⁷⁴ Asia Times Online. Lintner, Bertil. “One Big Happy Family in Cambodia.” 20 March 2007. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/IC20Ae03.html

⁷⁵ Asia Times Online. Guthrie, Craig. “Toward Hun Sen’s Cambodia.” 23 July 2008. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/JG23Ae01.html

⁷⁶ BBC News. “Military Court Tries Cambodia MP.” 8 August 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4130858.stm>

⁷⁷ Asian Political News, BNET, CBS Interactive. “Hun Sen Seeks Removal of U.N. Envoy for Human Rights in Cambodia.” 3 April 2006. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0WDQ/is_/ai_n26832676

Timeline of Cambodia, 4000 B.C.E–2008

4000 B.C.E. Archaeological remains demonstrate the existence of an early Neolithic culture in what is now Cambodia.

100 B.C.E.–500 C.E. Trading empire of Funan established.

500 C.E. Funan Empire invaded and conquered by Chen La to the north.

802–850 C.E. Javayarman II overthrows Javanese rule and begins to form a unified Khmer nation.

1112–1152 C.E. The famous temple of Angkor Wat is constructed.

1181–1219 C.E. Jayavarman VII takes back Angkor from the Chams. He constructs the Banyon temple at Angkor Thom.

1296–1432 C.E. Under continual military assaults from neighboring kingdoms, Angkor is abandoned. Capital is relocated. A period of decline begins that lasts for centuries.

1863 - France signs a treaty to protect Cambodia from its neighbors, Siam and Vietnam.

1887 October France proclaims the beginning of the Indochina Union: Cambodia and three regions of Vietnam. Laos is added in 1893.

1931–1939 Japan extends military control into Southeast Asia and becomes an ally of Germany in World War II.

1941 Japan occupies Cambodia until the end of World War II in 1945.

1945 Prince Sihanouk proclaims Cambodian independence as the Kingdom of Cambodia.

1946 France again imposes a protectorate. Thais are expelled. Communist guerrillas (the Khmer Rouge) begin a military campaign against the French.

1953

9 November France relinquishes control and Cambodia celebrates full independence under King Sihanouk. This ends the French colonial presence in Cambodia.

1954

7 May French lose the decisive battle at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. As the French withdraw, the United States takes over governmental responsibility in South Vietnam.

1960–1963 Prince Norodom Sihanouk represses the Communist Party in Cambodia and Pol Pot, general secretary of the party, and other leaders, flee to the jungle.

1960–1965 King Sihanouk turns toward North Vietnam, not the United States, for support. Sihanouk allows North Vietnamese guerrillas to establish bases in Cambodia.

1969

18 March President Richard Nixon authorizes B-52 “carpet bombing” of Cambodia to eradicate North Vietnamese forces who have base camps there.

1969 General Lon Nol, the prime minister, overthrows Prince Sihanouk and assumes power, supporting U.S. efforts in fighting the North Vietnamese.

1973 United States begins to withdraw from Vietnam. Bombing of Cambodia continues until 14 August 1973, when it is stopped by a U.S. congressional order.

1975

17 April Khmer Rouge occupation of Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge declare a new revolutionary society, Democratic Kampuchea.

1975–1979 Pol Pot becomes prime minister. An estimated 1.7 to 4 million people die from starvation, disease and exhaustion during these “Zero Years”

1979 January The Vietnamese army, with defectors from the Khmer Rouge, march into Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge army, with Pol Pot, retreat to Thai border areas.

1979 February Heng Samrin, former Khmer Rouge officer, is picked to head the new Vietnamese-backed government. Hun Sen, another former Khmer Rouge member, becomes foreign minister.

1982

22 June Cambodia’s coalition government formed from four factions: Sihanouk’s group; remnants of Lon Nol’s Khmer Republic; the Khmer Rouge, and Vietnamese-supported Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Party.

1989 Vietnamese troops withdraw from Cambodia. The government name is changed to the State of Cambodia. Buddhism becomes the state religion again.

1991

23 October At Paris talks, a peace agreement is signed by all factions.

1992

11–16 Mar UNTAC, the United Nations Transitional Authority, arrives in Phnom Penh to oversee elections. Prince Sihanouk becomes head of state.

1993

23–24 May General elections held. Coalition government formed with two co-Prime Ministers, Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen. Sihanouk is king but has no political power.

1997

5–6 July Hun Sen overthrows his co-prime minister, Prince Ranariddh.

1997

25 July Pol Pot's men denounce him for treason and sentenced him to house arrest.

1998 Pol Pot reportedly dies in his sleep of natural causes, having never been brought to formal justice.

1999

6 Mar Ta Mok, known as “the butcher,” and “Brother Number Five,” the last outstanding senior Khmer Rouge leader, is captured.

1999

30 April Cambodia becomes a member of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

2001

15 January United States Senate approves a law to create a tribunal to prosecute former Khmer leaders for war crimes, particularly, genocide.

2002 3 Feb First multi-party local elections held. Cambodian People's Party wins. Hun Sen continues as prime minister.

2004

8 July Hun Sen (CPP) and Prince Ranariddh sign an agreement to share power. Hun Sen remains Prime Minister, and Ranariddh becomes speaker of the National Assembly.

2004

13 July Prince Ranariddh is overthrown by police loyal to Hun Sen. Hun Sen is reappointed Cambodia's Premier by King Sihanouk.

2004

October Cambodia's legislature approves agreement to put surviving Khmer Rouge leaders on trial for atrocities committed during their rule in the 1970s.

2004

October King Sihanouk abdicates because of poor health. His son, Prince Norodom Sihamoni, succeeds to the throne.

2006

July Ta Mok dies in a military hospital after spending seven years in jail awaiting trial for his Khmer Rouge crimes.

2007

31 July During Khmer Rouge Regime, Kang Kek Ieu (alias Duch), former prison chief at Tuol Sleng, (infamous torture and interrogation center) is charged with crimes against humanity.

2008

15 July Cambodia and Thailand move troops to the Preah Vihear temple area near the Thai border. Both countries dispute ownership of the temple and surrounding areas.

2008

29 July Prime Minister Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party wins national election by an overwhelmingly large number of votes..

2008

14 August Cambodia and Thailand both agree to withdraw most troops from the Preah Vihear temple area while talks are in process to resolve the dispute.

Chapter 4 Economy

Introduction

After the decade-long Vietnamese occupation ended in 1989, Cambodia initiated a sweeping transformation of its economy. This process involved transitioning from an isolated, agrarian economy dominated by subsistence production to an integrated, international economy based on the market allocation of goods. Cambodia remains among the least developed countries (LDC) in the world. Within that category, however, it is one of the fastest growing in Southeast Asia. Since 1998, the economy has expanded an average of 9% per year.⁷⁸ This is primarily due to the country's textile and garment industry, a growth in tourism, and an attendant real estate and construction boom. The country, however, remains dependent on substantial sums of foreign aid; approximately 50% of the government budget is provided by international aid donors.⁷⁹

Standard of Living

Thirty-five percent of Cambodians live in poverty or near poverty.⁸⁰ This represents an incremental decrease from 1994, when the rate was 39%.⁸¹ In calculating this figure, food requirements and indicators such as quality of housing, ownership of consumer durables (such as bicycles and radios), and access to primary schooling are considered.

Ironically, economic growth can adversely affect the standard of living because land—be it used for squatter settlements or farming—can be appropriated in Cambodia for commercial development, without compensation.⁸² Inflation has also eroded the standard of living. Specifically, the prices of rice and other consumption necessities rose sharply in 2008.⁸³ Stagnant factory wages for garment workers, coupled with inflation, have made the option of working in entertainment clubs catering to foreign tourists more attractive to young women.⁸⁴ With over 50% of the population under the age of 20, job creation remains a pressing concern.⁸⁵



© flydime / flickr.com
Vendors at a market in Phnom Penh

⁷⁸ Forbes.com. Gluckman, Ron. "Bringing Commerce to Cambodia." 11 February 2008. http://www.forbes.com/global/2008/0211/030_print.html

⁷⁹ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Cambodia." November 2008. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2732.htm>

⁸⁰ The World Bank. "Frequently Asked Questions About Poverty in Cambodia." c.2008. <http://go.worldbank.org/T2890U8730>

⁸¹ The World Bank. "Cambodia: Country Brief." c.2008. <http://go.worldbank.org/Z2DL0RV640>

⁸² Radio Free Asia. "Violent Land Disputes Flare Across Cambodia." 27 December 2007. http://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/cambodia_land-20071227.html

⁸³ Voice of America. Byrne, Ron. "Cambodia Hit Hard by Inflation." 21 April 2008. <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2008-04/2008-04-21-voa21.cfm?CFID=48120825&CFTOKEN=46172486>

⁸⁴ International Herald Tribune. Associated Press. "Inflation Driving Cambodia Garment Workers to Quit." 10 September 2008. <http://www.ihrt.com/articles/ap/2008/09/10/business/AS-Cambodia-Inflation-Woes.php>

⁸⁵ Marketing Strategy and Development. "About Cambodia." No date. http://www.msd.com.kh/about_Cambodia.htm

Agriculture

Agriculture has historically been the backbone of the Cambodian economy.⁸⁶ Rice remains the primary crop, covering approximately 88% of the country's cultivated land area. However, rice yields account for only about 54% of total crop value, equivalent to 9% of the nation's GDP.⁸⁷ Accordingly, most farmers are subsistence cultivators who realize low yields. Access to fertilizer and better farming techniques would help them increase their output, but would not create many new jobs. For the most part, Cambodian farmers lack access to credit. This prevents them from purchasing tree seedlings, for example, which take several years to bear fruit, a cash crop that could be marketed. Few are willing to make such an investment, especially if they do not have title to the land that they cultivate. Under Khmer Rouge rule, land maps and titles were destroyed, making it difficult to determine which household owns which parcel of land in the local village. Even farmers in communities where land rights have been clarified are not fully secure. The local government can still appropriate their property and sell it to another party.



© Frederic Poirot
Rice field near Siem Reap

The Cambodian transportation system is also primitive, making it difficult for farmers who do not live near cities or towns to market fresh produce to urban consumers. Finding domestically grown food to be of inferior quality, international standard luxury hotels typically import their food from Thailand or Vietnam.⁸⁸ As a result, Cambodian farmers have not benefited much from the development of the country's tourism industry.

Banking

Under the Khmer Rouge, money was taken out of circulation and banks in Phnom Penh were destroyed. In late 1979, the state-chartered Foreign Trade Bank was established to handle all banking transactions, which were largely limited to receipt of foreign aid. The expansion of the banking sector was stymied by the lack of financial infrastructure, such as standardization of accounting procedures and a court system with the judicial authority to enforce contracts.⁸⁹

In 1994, the Cambodian government began to license commercial banks, which by the end of 2007, included 24 institutions. Seventeen of them are commercial banks, three of which are foreign-owned, and the other seven are specialized banks with some 320

⁸⁶ Department of Economics, University of California, Berkeley. Ear, Sophal. "Cambodia's Economic Development and History: A Contribution to the Study of Cambodia's Economy." 22 March 1995. <http://www.csua.berkeley.edu/~sophal/whole.html>

⁸⁷ Scandinavian Working Papers in Economics. Stockholm School of Economics. Sjoberg, Orjan and Fredrik Sjolholm. "The Cambodian Economy: Ready for Take-Off? [p. 15]" April 2005. <http://swopec.hhs.se/eijswp/papers/eijswp0209.pdf>

⁸⁸ U.S. Meat Export Federation. Choon, Eric. "Insight: USMEF Makes First Foray Into Cambodia." 15 March 2007. http://www.usmef.org/TradeLibrary/files/Insight07_0316_Cambodia.pdf

⁸⁹ Asian Development Bank. "Technical Assistance to the Kingdom of Cambodia for Capacity Building for Banking and Financial Management." November 2001. <http://www.adb.org/Documents/TARs/CAM/R23101.pdf>

branches and offices throughout the country. The four largest, which account for 70% of the market, have begun to introduce electronic banking services. As of early 2008, approximately 6,000 credit cards had been issued by two of the foreign banks.⁹⁰

Cambodians remain leery of opening bank accounts; only 6% of the population uses formal financial sector services. Moreover, they prefer to keep their savings in U.S. dollars, or gold, rather than in *riel*, the local currency. As a result, the Cambodian economy is “dollarized.” Roughly 95% of transactions are conducted in U.S. dollars, and all bank loans are made in U.S. dollars as well.⁹¹

Foreign Investment & Trade

One of the ways in which developing countries can participate in the global economy is by supplying consumer goods (such as clothing) to developed markets. The commonly seen label identifying a garment as “Made in Cambodia” reflects the kingdom’s successful integration into the international economy. It is even clearer in statistics: in 2003, the value of Cambodian exports to the U.S. crossed the billion-dollar mark, while exports to the European Union (EU) exceeded USD 407 million.⁹² The garment sector has become Cambodia’s largest industry, worth USD 2.5 billion in 2006. Overall, it accounts for nearly 80% of Cambodia’s exports and employs 330,000 people.⁹³

This type of business has frequently been found to exhibit “sweatshop style” abuse of workers, almost all of whom are young females, including minors, who lack experience in the paid workforce. Yet it has been pointed out that these jobs pay better and offer superior benefits than many other employment opportunities, be they in the informal economy or the sex industry.⁹⁴ Garment factory jobs, in fact, have been in such demand that applicants typically agree to forego the equivalent of their first month’s salary—in the form of a bribe—to get hired.⁹⁵



© Asian Alliance / flickr.com
Worker at a silk factory

What has muted the debate over factory workplace conditions was Phnom Penh’s decision to voluntarily comply with labor standards established by the

⁹⁰ Forbes.com. Gluckman, Ron. “Bringing Commerce to Cambodia.” 11 February 2008. http://www.forbes.com/global/2008/0211/030_print.html

⁹¹ International Financial Corporation, The World Bank. Sereivathana, Pak and Houm Thy, Margarete Biallas. “Cambodia: Financial Center Diagnostic [pp. 3–5].” August 2008. [http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/mekongpsdf.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/Financial-Diagnostic-CAM/\\$FILE/Financial-Diagnostic-CAM.pdf](http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/mekongpsdf.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/Financial-Diagnostic-CAM/$FILE/Financial-Diagnostic-CAM.pdf)

⁹² Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund, Asian Development Bank. “Securing Employment for the Poor Women in Cambodia’s Garment Industry.” October 2006. <http://www.adb.org/PRF/Cambodia-Garment-Industry.pdf>

⁹³ The World Bank. “Garment Sector Competes and Thrives in Cambodia.” 5 August 2007. <http://go.worldbank.org/2KQOXCX0V0>

⁹⁴ Library of Economics and Liberty. Powell, Benjamin. “In Defense of ‘Sweatshops.’” 2 June 2008. <http://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2008/PowellSweatshops.html#>

⁹⁵ The New York Times. Kristof, Nick. “Inviting All Democrats.” 14 January 2004. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940DE0DD1330F937A25752C0A9629C8B63>

International Labor Organization (ILO). This entails a cumbersome certification process, including monitoring by ILO staff and physical inspection of finished goods by representatives of several different government agencies. All of this has to be done before the garments can be shipped out.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, adherence to these regulations enabled Cambodia to survive in the marketplace after the Multi-Fiber Arrangement, which set national production quotas to ensure distribution of business throughout various countries, ended in 2005.



© byline / flickr.com
Making silk in Siem Reap

The phase-out of the arrangement was expected to favor China, which can offer the same goods at a lower price.⁹⁷ Yet in a world where international “brand name” retailers and garment manufacturers have had their supplier networks put under the microscope with respect to workplace conditions, the nation’s adherence to ILO standards remains a selling point for Cambodia.⁹⁸ Ultimately, success is contingent on the global consumer’s willingness to pay more for these higher standards.⁹⁹

At the same time, this heavy reliance on garment exports makes the Cambodian economy susceptible to downturns in the international economy. Moreover, with no indigenous textile industry, virtually all of the inputs needed for garment manufacturing are imported, creating few linkages with the domestic economy.¹⁰⁰ This is a narrow base for sustained growth, and it remains contingent upon market demand in industrialized countries. A slowdown in the U.S. economy will reduce the demand for Cambodian-made garments.¹⁰¹

Cambodia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2003, the first LDC to be admitted. The country’s accession to the organization was intended to enable it to reach more markets. It also necessitated Phnom Penh to drop tariffs on many imported items, its major source of revenue. For Cambodia to gain the benefits of WTO membership,

⁹⁶Asian Pacific School of Economics and Government, Australian National University, Working Papers. Naron, Hang Chuon. “Trade Liberalization: A Cambodian Perspective [p. 21].” 2003. <http://dspace.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/40120/2/WTO03-8.pdf>

⁹⁷The New York Times. Becker, Elizabeth. “Cambodia’s Garment Makers Hold Off a Vast Chinese Challenge.” 12 May 2005.

http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/12/business/worldbusiness/12cambodia.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&oref=slogin&adxnnlx=1222961384-1Wk0Xo2ham3L9D9x7eD

⁹⁸Salon.com, How the World Works. Leonard, Andrew. “The Black Hole of China.” 30 June 2006. http://www.salon.com/tech/htww/2006/06/30/china_textiles/index.html

⁹⁹Slate. Snyder, Rachel Louise. “Dispatches from Cambodia.” 23 February 2004. <http://www.slate.com/id/2095638/entry/2095639/>

¹⁰⁰Foreign Direct Investment. Freeman, Nick. “The right materials.” 6 August 2007. http://www.fdimagazine.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/2111/The_right_materials.html

¹⁰¹Agence France-Presse. “Cambodian Economic Growth to Slow in 2008: UN.” 8 April 2008. <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hl0CG0widOwr0XkwKiu6RsPeVOPQ>

foreign investors will require the country to develop a transparent legal system and make efforts to rein in corruption, which can add significantly to costs.¹⁰²

Natural Resources

Gold

Although Cambodia's gold mining industry is relatively small, it has expanded in recent years. Several decades ago, twelve gold mines were identified by French geologists, ten in Cambodia's western territory and two in the northeast. An additional seven sites have since been discovered in the north. They are owned either by the government, which grants mineral concessions, or the military. Mining settlements, with up to 1,000 residents, have sprung up around the remote mines. While some miners are professional gold prospectors, most are indigent farmers who have migrated to seek work. The conditions are typically dangerous; workers are provided with little training or safety equipment to enter poorly ventilated tunnels and shafts, which extend as deep as 80 m (262 ft) into the earth. Abandoned shafts, which pose a hazard to humans and wildlife, are left uncovered and quickly concealed by vegetation.¹⁰³ Heavy metals and chemicals used in gold processing are also not disposed of properly, thereby causing damage to the local ecosystem.



© joannenh / flickr.com
Golden figurines for sale in Siem Reap

Oil and Natural Gas Reserves

Cambodia may lay undisputed claim to as much as two billion barrels of oil and nearly three trillion cubic m (ten trillion cubic ft) of natural gas off its coast in the Gulf of Thailand. According to some estimates, these reserves could potentially account for revenues of as much as USD two billion per year.¹⁰⁴ Such projections are contingent upon the actual extent and recoverability of the reserves and the fluctuating market value of oil. Nevertheless, such deposits present a major source of potential revenue for the country. Indeed, Chevron's public announcement in December 2004 that it had struck oil in four wells generated excitement that oil and gas production could spur a profound transformation of the Cambodian economy.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² The Christian Science Monitor. Pocha, Jehangir. "Little Cambodia Looks to Trade Up in the World." 2 September 2003. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0902/p09s01-woap.html>

¹⁰³ Oxfam America. Sotham, Sieng. "Small-Scale Gold Mining in Cambodia: A Situation Assessment." July 2004. http://www.oxfamamerica.org/newsandpublications/publications/research_reports/research_paper.2004-09-20.9108673524/camb_gold_report.pdf

¹⁰⁴ World Politics Review. Lees, Graham. "Cambodia Set for Oil and Gas Development Bonanza." 4 December 2006. <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=382>

¹⁰⁵ Asia Times Online. Symon, Andrew. "Not Enough Oil Troubles Cambodia's Waters." 20 November 2007. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/southeast_asia/ik20ae01.html

Yet there is a concern that the government, hobbled by corruption, lacks the means to absorb such a potential windfall, which could, in turn, lead to social unrest.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, “the explosive mix in Cambodia of a young population—many of whom did not experience Pol Pot’s regime and are therefore less fearful—a high youth joblessness rate, rising inflation in the energy, food, and real estate sectors, and new opportunities for corruption” does not bode well.¹⁰⁷ The revenues could enrich a favored minority rather than improve the lives of the majority through public investment in transportation infrastructure, education, and health care.

Industry

One advantage of Cambodia’s low level of development is that the country lacks an inefficient state industrial sector in contrast to its formerly state socialist neighbors, Vietnam and China. Moreover, since the fall of the Khmer Rouge, there has been little attempt by the political elite to develop business conglomerates whose activities are protected from both foreign and domestic competition, an arrangement Cambodia’s accession to the WTO would have made difficult to sustain.



© Lomax7 / flickr.com
Elephants in Ratanakiri

Nonetheless, the future for industrial development beyond foreign-invested garment manufacturing does not look bright. There is a potential for Cambodia to experience a phenomenon known as the “natural resource curse,” in which a country actually becomes worse off after discovering and exploiting natural resource deposits. In Cambodia, this could occur in the form of energy revenues, which open the door to the importation of high quality consumer goods, but could, in turn, inhibit the development of indigenous industry.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the low level of education among the Cambodian citizenry makes it difficult to develop any competitive industry with a high-tech component.

Tourism

Remnant members of the Khmer Rouge kidnapped and killed foreign tourists up until the mid 1990s, with the killings usually occurring after the government failed to pay the demanded ransom. This trend understandably scared away potential visitors.¹⁰⁹ Now that visitor safety from such attacks can be better assured, tourism in Cambodia has boomed.¹¹⁰ The tourism industry has become the country’s second highest source of

¹⁰⁶ Foreign Affairs. Ross, Michael L. “Blood Barrels: Why Oil Wealth Fuels Conflict [p. 3].” May/June 2008. <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/ross/BloodBarrelsFA.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ Fairer Globalization, Policy Innovations, The Carnegie Council. Stewart, Devin. “Mekong Times Interview on Cambodia’s Oil and Gas Prospects.” 31 March 2008. <http://fairerglobalization.blogspot.com/2008/03/mekong-times-interview-on-cambodias-oil.html>

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh, Cambodia, U.S. Department of State. Remarks by Ambassador Joseph A. Mussomeli, “Avoiding the Resource Curse: Managing Cambodia’s Extractive Industries.” 23 February 2007. http://cambodia.usembassy.gov/sp_022307.html

¹⁰⁹ International Herald Tribune. Liden, Jon. “Cambodia Works Hard to Overhaul its Image.” 10 April 1995. <http://www.iht.com/articles/1995/04/10/cambcon.ttt.php>

¹¹⁰ The New York Times. Higgins, Michelle. “Staying One Step Ahead of the Crowd.” 21 September 2008. <http://travel.nytimes.com/2008/09/21/travel/21prachotspot.html?scp=1&sq=asia%20tourism&st=cse>

revenue, and the number of annual visitors now tops two million. While many countries in the region offer similar topography, Cambodia has an unrivaled draw: Angkor Wat.

Angkor Wat and the dozens of other temples built between the 9th and 14th centuries represent the main draw in the Siem Reap region. In an effort to encourage well-heeled visitors to linger longer, the area is being transformed into a diversified resort with an array of shopping and recreational activities.¹¹¹ Such development may be environmentally unsustainable; the large number of wells that have been dug to supply the local luxury hotels and golf courses has caused parts of Angkor Wat to sink.



© joannarah / flickr.com
Tourists in Angkor Wat

Other parts of the country are seeking to attract tourists as well. The coast around Sihanoukville is being developed into a beachfront resort that will include a casino, a popular destination for Asian visitors. Eco-tourism, which appeals to those concerned with sustainable development, offers the prospect of earning a return by maintaining the natural environment. Trips for exploring hill tribe communities in Rattanakiri, a northern highland province, as well as extreme hiking adventures in the unexplored Cardamom Mountains, appeal to other segments of the market. Since Cambodians do not celebrate the lunar New Year holiday, which is spread across several weeks in other parts of Asia, the country attracts an annual influx of regional expats who seek a respite from the festivities.

While revenues from tourism are expected to continue to grow, friction with neighboring countries can adversely affect the market. Specifically, until July 2008, tourists coming from Thailand could visit Preah Vihear, an ancient Hindu temple complex over which both the Cambodian and Thai governments claim sovereignty. Located along the northern Cambodian border, the complex rests atop a rugged cliff which is more accessible from the Thai side than from the Cambodian side. In the past, both countries admitted visitors who paid entry fees. But a UNESCO World Heritage designation prompted Phnom Penh to end this shared arrangement in order to capitalize alone on the anticipated influx of visitors.¹¹² Border clashes, several of which occurred during the latter half of 2008, will likely keep them away, however, particularly with soldiers patrolling the temple itself.

¹¹¹ Business Week. Postlewaite, Susan. "Angkor Wat: A Temple to Tourism?" 21 April 2008. http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/apr2008/gb20080418_508927.htm

¹¹² The Christian Science Monitor. Montlake, Simon. "Why Thai-Cambodian Temple Dispute Lingers." 22 July 2008. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0722/p06s02-wosc.html>

Chapter 5 Society

Ethnic Groups and Languages

Cambodia is the most ethnically homogenous nation in Southeast Asia.¹¹³ The Khmer comprise approximately 90% of the population.¹¹⁴ The majority of them are rice farmers who live in their ancestral villages. In addition, Chinese, who live largely in towns and cities where they dominate commerce, and Vietnamese, who are evident in all sectors of the economy, have migrated to Cambodia. The highlands are home to hill tribe minority groups (*Khmer Loeu*) who mostly eke out a living as slash-and-burn subsistence farmers.



© Cambodia Trust
Khmer women planting rice

Khmer is the official language of Cambodia. It is part of the Mon-Khmer language family, which subsequently incorporated words from Sanskrit and other regional languages. Khmer lacks verb tenses and a distinction between plural and singular forms. The script is derived from the Indian Brahmi alphabet and is written from top to bottom and left to right, with no spaces between the words. There are three styles of writing: one used for books (upon which handwriting is modeled), a block form used for newspapers, and a rounded form which appears on signs and formal documents.¹¹⁵ Older Khmer may use French for business transactions. English is used as well, particularly by the younger generation.

Religion

During the 12th century, Buddhism became the state religion of Cambodia. Today, the vast majority of Khmer practice the Theravada form of Buddhism. The highest ranking Buddhist monk in the country, known as the Grand Patriarch, traditionally served as a counselor to the King.¹¹⁶ In 2004, Cambodian monks were enlisted to chant and perform traditional music to commemorate the coronation of King Norodom Sihamoni, who received the monastic community's "blessing."¹¹⁷ However, the fact that the monarch is now a figurehead—in this case someone who grew up outside the kingdom—has been linked to the decline of Buddhism's role in the nation's social morality. This is reflected in frequent stories of monks indulging in materialist practices, which are at odds with traditional monastic discipline. Struggles within the Cambodian Buddhist community are not surprising given the level of devastation that it experienced during the reign of the Khmer Rouge; they destroyed much of the country's religious infrastructure and severely

¹¹³ AsiaInfo.org. "People of Cambodia." c.2000. <http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/cambodia/people.htm>

¹¹⁴ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Cambodia." 20 November 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html>

¹¹⁵ Sihanoukville, Cambodia. "Khmer, The Language of Cambodia." c.2008. <http://www.sihanoukville-cambodia.com/about-sihanoukville/language.html>

¹¹⁶ Cambodian Information Center. "Buddhism and the Party Line in Cambodia." 17 May 2008. <http://www.cambodia.org/blogs/editorials/2008/05/buddhism-and-party-line-in-cambodia.html>

¹¹⁷ Independent Online. "Cambodia to Celebrate Coronation of New King." 25 October 2004. http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=126&art_id=qw1098695520302B251

restricted the practice of Buddhism. Once highly influential, the Buddhist community has never fully recovered from its persecution during this period.

Christianity was introduced to the Khmer people by Roman Catholic missionaries in the 17th century, but it was never widely embraced among Buddhists.¹¹⁸ While the monastic community is generally tolerant of other religions, the Cambodian government recently put forth a mandate instructing Christians not to proselytize outside their churches.¹¹⁹

Gender Issues

The image of the ideal Cambodian woman is widely represented in the culture's mythological and literary traditions. As in many cultures, the exemplary woman is pictured as a virtuous, soft-spoken, supportive wife and mother. Pre-marital chastity and marital fidelity are highly valued, as is a strong sense of propriety and honor.¹²⁰ Yet, in the wake of longstanding social upheaval and hardship, such an ideal must be balanced with the practical needs of survival and the realities of gender-based discrimination.



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Chopping firewood in Phnom Penh

Eighty percent of Cambodians live in rural areas, and the agrarian way of life remains difficult and labor intensive. Much of this labor falls to women. Specifically, women supply an estimated 65% of agricultural labor and 75% of fishery production labor. Based on custom, women also shoulder household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing.

Gender inequalities are common in Cambodia, with men typically having higher social status and increased access to education. In terms of education, approximately 71% of Cambodian women cannot read and write, and 50% of men are illiterate. Women's opportunities for advanced education are limited, as only 12% of Cambodian women over the age of 25 have attended school beyond the elementary level.¹²¹ Because boys traditionally seek paid employment outside the home, parents continue to prioritize their sons' educations over their daughters'.¹²²

The bulk of the Cambodian sex trade involves females, although young males, too, can be victims. The practice of patronizing prostitutes and taking mistresses, commonly

¹¹⁸ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R, Ed. *Cambodia: A Country Study*. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Religion: Christianity." 1987.

<http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/51.htm>

¹¹⁹ International Herald Tribune. Associated Press. "Cambodia Issues Directive Limiting Activities of Christian Groups." 17 July 2007. <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/07/17/asia/AS-GEN-Cambodia-Christians.php>

¹²⁰ Mekong.net. Chey, Elizabeth. "Cambodia: The Status of Khmer Women." 30 July 2008.

<http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/women.htm>

¹²¹ Asia Culture Forum 2006. Khun, Keasa. "Gender Issues in Cambodia [p. 1]." 2006.

http://www.cct.go.kr/data/acf2006/aycc/aycc_1105_Keasa%20Khun.pdf

¹²² UNICEF. Stark-Merklein, Brigitte. "For Cambodian Girls, Education Is the Antidote to Poverty and Sexual Exploitation." 9 August 2005. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cambodia_27896.html

referred to as “second wives,” is commonplace.¹²³ In some cases, wives respond by carrying out nitric acid attacks on their husbands’ mistresses.¹²⁴ Scores of teenage Cambodian girls have been disfigured or blinded in this way. According to an American volunteer at a shelter for homeless women in Phnom Penh, the perpetrators, who are rarely prosecuted, want their victims to live so people will look at them and say, “Oh, she took someone else’s husband.”¹²⁵

Cuisine

Jayavarman II, who unified the Khmer Empire, instituted the Indian tradition of the *devaraja*, or divine ruler, in Cambodia in 802 B.C.E. The practical application of this concept required a separation of earthly items and practices from those that were considered divine. Following this practice, a god-king could not eat the same fare as his subjects. As a result, the successive Angkorean courts developed fine cuisine, which was served and consumed in a ritualized manner.¹²⁶

The main staple of a Khmer meal has always been rice, typically combined with vegetables and both fish sauce and *prahok*, a salty, fermented fish paste. “*Prahok* is the taste of Cambodia,” explained a government official. “If there is no *prahok*, we are not Cambodians. *Prahok* is the Khmer identity.”¹²⁷



© flydime / flickr.com
Vegetable sauce

Fish is the primary source of protein in the Khmer diet.¹²⁸ Meat is used more for flavoring than consumption. Fresh fruits, grown in abundance, are also used for flavoring, as are lime juice, coconut milk, galangal, turmeric, garlic, lemon grass, tamarind, and ginger. The French legacy is reflected in the Khmer consumption of bread (baguettes in particular), a practice that is rare in the region outside of colonial Indochina.

Traditional Dress

Traditional Khmer clothing is still worn in various settings, particularly in rural areas and on special occasions. For women, a customary ensemble consists of a shirt or blouse matched with a tube skirt-like garment known as a *sampot*. The *sampot* is a lengthy,

¹²³ Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights. “The Situation of Women in Cambodia [p. 13].” July 2004. http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/kh2004_women-en.pdf

¹²⁴ The Cambodia Daily Weekend. Smith, Jeff and Kay Kimsong. “Acid-Laced Vengeance.” 5–6 February 2000. http://www.camnet.com.kh/cambodia.daily/selected_features/acid_laced_vengeance.htm

¹²⁵ The New York Times. Mydans, Seth. “Vengeance Destroys Faces, and Souls, in Cambodia.” 22 July 2001.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9902E5DA133AF931A15754C0A9679C8B63&sec=&spn=&pagewanted=all>

¹²⁶ Salon.com. Fishbane, Matthew. “Will Cambodian Food Ever Catch On in America?” 26 June 2007.

http://www.salon.com/mwt/food/eat_drink/2007/06/26/khmer_food/index.html

¹²⁷ ThingsAsian. “Got Fish? It’s Prahok Season in Cambodia.” 19 January 2007.

<http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/20712>

¹²⁸ UN Special, No. 602. Rioukhina, Evelina. “Cambodian Food.” December 2001.

http://www.unspecial.org/uns602/UNS_602_T20.html

circular piece of fabric that is wrapped around the body and tied with a belt.¹²⁹ These garments are usually made from cotton or silk, and they come in a range of styles and patterns. Women typically wear elaborately decorated *sampot* to special events, while they may wear a cheaper fabric version around the house. For men, the *sarong*, the male version of the *sampot*, is the traditional garment. It is also matched with a shirt.¹³⁰

The most common form of traditional dress, however, is an accessory known as the *krama*. The *krama* is a colorful, checked cloth which is used primarily as a head scarf. Due to its length, it can be wrapped around the head or neck several times. The *krama* has a variety of uses; it may function as a sarong, a towel, a baby carrier, a pillow cover, or a neck ornament.¹³¹ Made from cotton or silk, these scarves are usually red-and-white or blue-and-white. They are worn by almost all rural Khmer, and they can be seen on urban residents as well. When the Khmer Rouge was in power, the black-and-white *krama* came to be identified with the regime.¹³²



© flytime / flickr.com
Woman wearing a scarf

Overall, dress varies according to a person's location and socioeconomic status. For men and women who do agricultural labor, baggy pants and shirts are the norm. Western-style clothing, such as pants and shorts, are also widely seen, especially on men and children.¹³³

Arts

Cambodian music, dance, and drama performances were traditionally held in honor of deities, ancestors, and teachers. The carvings on the walls of Cambodian temples, particularly those depicting dancers and orchestras, attest to the important role of the arts in ancient times. Foremost, artistic practices and performances served as a means for people to reach out to the supernatural realm.¹³⁴

Dance

¹²⁹ BookRags. *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*. "Clothing, Traditional—Cambodia." c.2001–2006. <http://www.bookrags.com/research/clothing-traditionalcambodia-ema-02/>

¹³⁰ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. *Cambodia: A Country Study*. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Social Structure and Organization: The Khmer." 1987. <http://www.country-studies.com/cambodia/the-khmer.html>

¹³¹ Cambodian Silks, Handicrafts, Khmer Art, Cambodian Goods and Cultural Products. "Krama Scarves." c.2008. http://ksilks.com/fairtrade/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4&Itemid=29

¹³² BookRags. *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*. "Clothing, Traditional—Cambodia." c.2001–2006. <http://www.bookrags.com/research/clothing-traditionalcambodia-ema-02/>

¹³³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. *Cambodia: A Country Study*. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Social Structure and Organization: The Khmer." 1987. <http://www.country-studies.com/cambodia/the-khmer.html>

¹³⁴ The Kennedy Center. "Cambodian Classics Ensemble with Chum Ngek." No date. http://www.kennedy-center.org/programs/millennium/artist_detail.cfm?artist_id=CAMCLASS#

Between the 10th and 14th centuries, the Angkorean Kingdom dominated much of mainland Southeast Asia. During this time, ritualized dances served as a method of communication between the monarch and celestial deities. On behalf of the King, dancers asked the gods for prosperity within the kingdom through their performance of a ceremony called *buong suong*. It was only after King Sihanouk was deposed in 1970 that dancers ceased to be used to communicate with celestial deities.¹³⁵ Under the Khmer Rouge, dance was considered a decadent art form and banned. After the country was liberated by the Vietnamese in 1979, public performances were resurrected as a means to introduce Cambodians to socialist morality.



One ancient story narrated through dance involves two deities, the God of Thunder and the Goddess of the Ocean, who tussle over control of a crystal ball. The dance was originally meant to showcase the difference between ignorance and enlightenment. But in the 1980s, it was updated to dramatize the difference between communism and capitalism. However, the majority of Cambodian audiences did not pick up the play's new political implications. Rather, they merely viewed the dancers as acting out a familiar story. The performers revealed their intentions to the government, but they could not ensure that their interpretation would be understood by the general public.¹³⁶

One form of dance performance that has been more difficult to revive is the classical masked dance known as *lakhaon kaol*. This performance features an all-male, masked troupe who present the Hindu literary epic, the Ramayana. Known in Khmer as Reamker, the epic depicts gods and monkeys battling evil ogres. A typical performance includes 4,000 specific gestures, which were traditionally passed down from master to apprentice. The Khmer Rouge regime, which targeted artists, threatened to destroy the specialized knowledge of this traditional practice.¹³⁷

Music

During its early formation, classical Khmer music was heavily influenced by Indian musical forms and techniques. These techniques, including the use of certain Indian instruments, were synthesized with indigenous musical forms to create the basis of a rich tradition. For the most part, this fertilization process occurred between the 6th and 12th centuries C.E., when the Khmer also drew religious influence from India. (During this time, they practiced a regional variant of Hinduism.) Historically, Khmer music has been

¹³⁵ Southeast Asia Program Outreach Office, Cornell University. Shapiro-Phim, Toni. "Tradition and Innovation in Cambodian Dance: A Curriculum Unit for Post-Secondary Level Educators [pp. 6–9]." C. February 2004. <http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/SoutheastAsia/outreach/resources/DanceUnitComplete.pdf>

¹³⁶ Center for Southeast Asian Studies, UCLA. Meneses, Rashaan. "The Near Extinction of Cambodian Classical Dance." 7 May 2004. <http://www.international.ucla.edu/cseas/article.asp?parentid=10982>

¹³⁷ The New York Times. Turnbull, Robert. "Dance; Reconstructing Khmer Classics From Zero." 25 July 1999. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=950CE7D91F3FF936A15754C0A96F958260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=1>

preserved as an oral tradition rather than through notation or other written records. It is thus passed down from teacher to student, like many Khmer dance practices.¹³⁸

Early Khmer orchestras are depicted within the iconography at Angkor Wat. Historically, music was an integral part of both court and village life, as it served both entertainment and ritualistic purposes. *Pinn peat*, an ancient form of musical ensemble, includes wind instruments, xylophones, gongs, drums, and cymbals.¹³⁹ Traditionally, these ensembles accompany court dances, masked dances, shadow plays, and religious ceremonies. Within the ensemble, each instrument is associated with a particular physical activity. For example, drum patterns are used to convey fast movement.¹⁴⁰

Sports

Khmer Bokator, also known as Labokator, is an ancient Cambodian form of martial arts. Meaning “to fight like a lion,” Labokator uses an extensive repertoire of moves, including strikes, drags, trapping, locking, and grappling. Some moves use unconventional parts of the body—such as the shoulder, hip, or jaw—to strike an opponent. Elbows, knees, and the head are also used. Certain sets of moves are associated with specific animal styles, such as that of the horse, dragon, lion, crab, or monkey. Submission moves are common, and some strikes can be deadly.¹⁴¹

As opposed to sport fighting styles, such as boxing and kick boxing, Bokator was created for soldiers to use in battle. Because of this tradition, Bokator fighters still don the uniforms of ancient Angkor warriors who, fighting hand to hand, vanquished the kingdom’s enemies. Before fighting, a Bokator practitioner ties a *krama* around his waist; the color of his *krama* signifies his skill level. Also, blue and red silk cords (*sangvar day*) are wrapped around the fighter’s head and arms. Traditionally, these cords were thought to endow the fighter with increased strength. Cambodians believe that Jayavarman VII, who built Angkor Wat, was skilled in the art of Bokator.¹⁴²



¹³⁸ National Geographic Society. “Cambodia: Cambodian Artists.” c.1996–2008.

http://worldmusic.nationalgeographic.com/worldmusic/view/page.basic/country/content.country/cambodia_527

¹³⁹ Ethnomusicology Online, University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Sam, Sam-Ang. “Cambodian Music History.” No date. <http://www.umbc.edu/eol/cambodia/histcmus.htm>

¹⁴⁰ AsiaSource. Dance: The Spirit of Cambodia. Sam, Sam-Ang. “Khmer Music.” No date.

<http://www.asiasource.org/cambodia/khmermusic.htm>

¹⁴¹ Tales of Asia. Graceffo, Antonio. “Bokator Khmer: The Ancient Form of Cambodian Martial Arts.” No date. <http://www.talesofasia.com/rs-99-bokator.htm>

¹⁴² Articlesbase. White, Sydney. “An Introduction of Bokator.” 7 May 2008.

<http://www.articlesbase.com/martial-arts-articles/an-introduction-of-bokator-473770.html>

Chapter 6 Security

Introduction

Sandwiched between Thailand and Vietnam, Cambodia occupies an important geographical position in mainland Southeast Asia. However, the Cambodian government has received international attention and assistance far out of proportion to its size and geopolitical importance. This is because two million people perished during Khmer Rouge rule from 1975 to early 1979. The extensive loss of life during this period was one of the worst human tragedies of the 20th century. The fact that Cambodians were responsible for virtually all of the killing lent urgency to the need for the international community to better understand the country. Scholars maintain that “the roots of the Cambodian tragedy are to be found...in the centuries of national and ethnic rivalry among Khmers, Thais, and Vietnamese; and above all in a culture of zero-sum absolutism that refuses to admit the possibility of a ‘loyal opposition’ in political life.”¹⁴³



© Trick Kid / flickr.com
Floating house on the Tonle Sap

U.S.-Cambodian Relations

While the U.S. established relations with Cambodia after it gained independence in 1953, the subsequent relationship between the two countries was largely driven by developments in Vietnam. During the Vietnam War, U.S. President Richard Nixon acted on the belief that North Vietnam was using Cambodia as a transshipment zone to move troops and supplies into South Vietnam. In March 1969, the U.S. military initiated a secret bombing campaign in Cambodia to disrupt those supply lines and put pressure on Hanoi—which was then trying to overthrow the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese government—to reach a peace agreement with Washington. The bombing of Cambodia continued until a congressional order halted the practice on 14 August 1973. Estimates of the number of Cambodian casualties resulting from the bombing campaign vary widely, but they typically number in the hundreds of thousands.¹⁴⁴ In addition, an estimated two million Cambodians were rendered homeless.¹⁴⁵

In April 1970, U.S. troops entered Cambodia in order to clear out communist bases used for attacks on South Vietnam. This was justified on the grounds that South Vietnam’s security would be enhanced both during and after the anticipated U.S. withdrawal.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Asia Society. *Cambodia and the International Community*. Brown, Frederick Z. and David G. Timberman. “Introduction: Peace, Development, and Democracy in Cambodia—Shattered Hopes.” 1998. <http://www.asiasociety.org/publications/cambodia/intro.html>

¹⁴⁴ Frontline/World, PBS. *Cambodia—Pol Pot’s Shadow*. “1969–1974: Caught in the Crossfire.” October 2002. <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/cambodia/tl02.html>

¹⁴⁵ Ohio Historical Society. *Ohio History Central: An Online Encyclopedia of Ohio History*. “Bombing of Cambodia.” 1 July 2005. <http://ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=1611&nm=Bombing-of-Cambodia>

¹⁴⁶ The American Presidency Project, University of California at Santa Barbara. “Richard Nixon: Address to the Nation on the Cambodian Sanctuary Operation.” 3 June 1970. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2530>

American soldiers did not remain in Cambodia for long. However, their presence and the corresponding bombing campaign served to widen the power vacuum in the country. The U.S. mission in Cambodia was evacuated on 12 April 1975, shortly before the Khmer Rouge, led by an enigmatic figure named Pol Pot, took control of Phnom Penh.¹⁴⁷ Washington condemned the brutal nature of this regime, which was allegedly inspired by both the golden age of Cambodian history—the Angkor Wat period—and China’s rural commune movement in the 1950s.¹⁴⁸

However, the U.S. opposed Vietnam’s subsequent military occupation of Cambodia, a stance that must be viewed through the context of the Cold War. Hanoi’s intervention was seen as extending the influence of the Soviet Union, Vietnam’s primary patron, rather than overthrowing a genocidal dictatorship. With the support of the U.S. and China, the Khmer Rouge was able to retain Cambodia’s seat at the UN. This served to deny its Hanoi-installed successor the opportunity to garner legitimacy from an international body. Ultimately, Washington backed the Association for Southeast Asian Nation’s (ASEAN) efforts to achieve a comprehensive political settlement for the future of the war-torn country. An agreement was reached in 1991 under which all warring factions, including the Phnom Penh regime set up by the Vietnamese and the Khmer Rouge, were to disarm and participate in a UN-sponsored election. The Khmer Rouge did not disarm, and thus ceased to be a formal player in Cambodian politics.¹⁴⁹



U.S. Army photo
Mao Zedong, Prince Sihanouk & Le Duc Tho, Beijing

The U.S. has supported Cambodia’s democratization, although bilateral aid was cut-off after Prime Minister Hun Sen ousted his government coalition partners in 1997. The country’s transition toward democracy has been a slow process, as several elections have been seriously flawed.¹⁵⁰ Specifically, voting has been marred by violence and pay-offs.¹⁵¹ However, a stable government has emerged under the leadership of Hun Sen, Asia’s longest serving head of state.¹⁵²

Washington reached an agreement with Phnom Penh in 2002 with respect to the repatriation of Cambodian nationals who have been convicted of aggravated felonies in

¹⁴⁷ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Cambodia.” November 2008. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2732.htm>

¹⁴⁸ *Cambodia, 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death*. Jackson, Karl, Ed. and Kenneth Quinn. “Chapter Eight: Explaining the Terror [p. 219].” 1992. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁴⁹ *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide*. Etcheson, Craig. “Chapter One: The Thirty Years War [p. 9].” 2005. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

¹⁵⁰ The Brookings Institute. Los Angeles Times. Dalpino, Catharin. “Democratization Isn’t an Overnight Process.” 31 August 1998.

http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/1998/0831southeastasia_dalpino.aspx?rssid=southeast+asia

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch. “Coercion, Vote-Buying Taint Cambodia’s Elections.” 18 July 2003.

<http://www.hrw.org/press/2003/07/cambodia071803.htm>

¹⁵² The Age. Baker, Mark. “Hun Sen Tightens Grip on Power.” 30 August 2003.

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/08/29/1062050665742.html?from=storyrhs>

the U.S.¹⁵³ In order not to overwhelm Cambodia with returnees who may not speak the language or have memories of living in the country, the number of repatriated felons is limited to 10 per month, thereby creating a backlog of some 1,500 felons eligible for deportation.

Neighboring Countries

Vietnam

Relations between Cambodia and Vietnam are colored by long-standing grievances, in particular a history of Vietnamese appropriation of Cambodian lands. This began, most notably, near the end of the 17th century, when Vietnam took over the Mekong Delta region after establishing a presence in the area. In the process, Cambodia not only lost the fertile land found in the delta, it also lost its direct access to the South China Sea. Similar Vietnamese appropriation of Cambodian lands occurred through the first half of the 19th century. During this time, the Vietnamese made efforts to assert political and cultural dominance over the Khmer.¹⁵⁴ Only colonization by the French in the late 1800s prevented Cambodia from being wholly absorbed by Vietnam.



© Chris Lowe
The Mekong near the Vietnam-Cambodia border

While communist governments came to power in both South Vietnam and Cambodia in 1975, ancient ethnic animosities trumped shared ideology.¹⁵⁵ Vietnam's decision to invade Cambodia in late 1978 was in part a response to repeated border incursions by the Khmer Rouge. The presence of Chinese military personnel, who were training and supplying Khmer forces, as well as constructing roads and military bases close to Saigon, also posed a threat to Vietnam's security.¹⁵⁶ After quickly routing the Khmer Rouge from Phnom Penh, Vietnamese troops remained as an occupying presence in Cambodia for ten years, to the displeasure of most Khmer, as well as the international community. Boundary issues continue to generate an emotional response from the Cambodian public, with many Khmer clinging to historic claims to a large swath of southern Vietnam, which they call "Kampuchea Krom."

Thailand

Many Thai historical narratives represent the country's neighbors through a prism of Thai nationalism. Cambodia is often depicted as an inferior, unreliable neighbor whose loyalty historically alternated between the Thai and the Vietnamese courts depending upon

¹⁵³ The Christian Science Monitor. Unmacht, Eric. "A Bumpy Road Ahead for US Deportees to Cambodia." 21 January 2003. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0121/p08s01-wosc.html>

¹⁵⁴ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. Ross, Russell R., Ed. *Cambodia: A Country Study*. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting." 1987. <http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/3.htm>

¹⁵⁵ *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War*. Morris, Stephen. 1999. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

¹⁵⁶ Center for Security Studies, ISN. MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, Yale University. Mosyakov, Dmitry. "The Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists: A History of Their Relations as Told in the Soviet Archives." No date. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0C54E3B3-1E9C-BE1E-2C24-A6A8C7060233&lng=en&id=46645>

where its short-term advantage lay.¹⁵⁷ Since Cambodia's independence in 1953, internal instability and repeated regime changes in Cambodia have posed security concerns for the Thais. After the Vietnamese army liberated Cambodia from Khmer Rouge rule, for example, the Thai military mined its shared border with Cambodia in order to deter a potential influx of retreating Khmer Rouge soldiers.¹⁵⁸



Courtesy of wikipedia.org
Aerial view of Preah Vihear temple

Today, commerce dominates cross-border traffic between the two countries. Thais make the daily trek to gamble in casinos that Phnom Penh has set up in close proximity to the border. Yet unsettled boundary disputes between the two countries ignited a series of border clashes throughout the latter half of 2008, resulting in some casualties. The immediate cause was a decision by UNESCO to grant World Heritage status to Preah Vihear, a 900-year old Hindu temple complex. In 1962, the International Court of Justice ruled that the temple was part of Cambodia, while the status of the Thai-administered area that surrounds the complex was not delineated. The UNESCO designation provoked the Thais to amass troops on the border, which the Cambodians subsequently claimed was breached. Politicians in both countries used the incident to improve their domestic political standing.¹⁵⁹ As a professor of Southeast Asian history observed with respect to the dispute: “On both sides...there are individuals who are trying to whip up a sense of hysteria over this particular issue.”¹⁶⁰

Laos

Laos and Cambodia have both made efforts to restructure their respective economies in accordance with market-oriented practices. To this end, the number of border crossing points between the two nations has been expanded to facilitate tourism.¹⁶¹ The two Indochinese nations have also cooperated through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Mekong River Commission, which promotes sustainable river development among the countries through which it passes.

China

China has played a prominent role in Cambodia's foreign relations since Cambodia attained independence in 1953. The goal of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been to limit U.S., Thai, and, particularly, Vietnamese influence in Cambodia. Toward this end, Beijing has acted as a patron to a succession of Cambodian leaders. During the

¹⁵⁷ Genocide Studies Program, Yale University. Rungswasdisab, Puangthong. “Thailand's Response to the Cambodian Genocide.” No date. http://www.yale.edu/cgp/thailand_response.html

¹⁵⁸ IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Cambodia: Landmine Challenge to Development.” 11 September 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=80292>

¹⁵⁹ The Christian Science Monitor. Montlake, Simon. “Why Thai-Cambodian Temple Dispute Lingers.” 22 July 2008. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0722/p06s02-wosc.html>

¹⁶⁰ Global Security. Voice of America News. Poch, Reasey. “Negotiations Planned in Cambodia-Thailand Dispute.” 31 October 2008. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2008/10/mil-081031-voa02.htm>

¹⁶¹ The Phnom Penh Post. Kimsong, Kay. “Laos, Cambodia Firm Up Investment, Tourism Ties.” 1 September 2008. <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2008090121457/Business/Laos-Cambodia-firm-up-investment-tourism-ties.html>

1960s, the PRC supported Prince Sihanouk. Later, the PRC allowed him to establish a government-in-exile in the Chinese capital after Lon Nol, the Prince's premier, deposed him in 1970 when he was out of the country.¹⁶² After Lon Nol's government collapsed and he received asylum in the U.S., China backed the victorious Khmer Rouge.

During the decade-long Vietnamese occupation, Beijing did not recognize the government in Phnom Penh because it viewed it as a puppet of Hanoi. Since 1997, Prime Minister Hun Sen has been lavished with Chinese foreign assistance, which has, in turn, helped him consolidate his authority. When Western donors cut off assistance to the Cambodian government in 1997 after Hun Sen ousted his co-premier, the son of Prince Sihanouk, the Chinese continued to provide financial support. In return, China has received a number of important political and strategic benefits, including access to the port at Sihanoukville, which it has paid to upgrade. A Chinese warship docked there for five days in November 2008 as part of a goodwill visit.¹⁶³ In recent years, Cambodia has become one of China's closest allies in Southeast Asia, ranking only behind Burma.¹⁶⁴

Issues Affecting Stability

Genocide and Justice

Prosecution of those responsible for the genocide that occurred in the latter half of the 1970s has yet to happen. One theory holds that the many former Khmer Rouge, including Prime Minister Hun Sen, who now occupy important positions in the government are not eager to revisit the days of the killing fields.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, there is little public pressure for disclosure and prosecution. Prominent senior leaders have led undisturbed lives in their hometowns for the past several decades.¹⁶⁶ This could be due to the fact that while the death toll of nearly two million is well known outside the country, many Cambodians, two-thirds of whom were born after the regime was toppled, remain ignorant of the horrors that were inflicted on their elders. "Most survivors living in rural communities have only isolated memories of atrocities," explained a Cambodian. "Many don't even know what happened in neighboring provinces."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Institute of South East Asian Studies, Viewpoints. The Straits Times. Mathews, Verghese. "China-Cambodia Ties: A Special Bond Blooms." 23 October 2004.

<http://www.iseas.edu.sg/viewpoint/vm23oct04.pdf>

¹⁶³ Voice of America News. Heng Reaksmeay. "Chinese Warship Makes Friendly Port of Call." 6 November 2008. <http://www.voanews.com/khmer/2008-11-06-voa3.cfm>

¹⁶⁴ The Jamestown Foundation. *China Brief*, Vol. 6, No. 9. Storey, Ian. "China's Tightening Relationship with Cambodia." 26 April 2006.

http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=cambodia&tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=31623&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=a7e37b8959

¹⁶⁵ Salon.com. Walt, Vivienne. "Cambodian Justice." 18 December 2000.

<http://archive.salon.com/news/feature/2000/12/18/cambodia/index.html>

¹⁶⁶ Los Angeles World Affairs Council. Pike, Amanda. "Pol Pot's Shadow." 19 February 2003.

<http://www.lawac.org/speech/pre%20sept%2004%20speeches/pike%20amanda%202003.htm>

¹⁶⁷ The Christian Science Monitor. Krausz, Tibor. "Backstory: Cambodia's Healing Lessons." 11 December 2006. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/1211/p20s01-lign.html>

Though vanquished by the Vietnamese in 1979, the Khmer Rouge acquired control of a valuable timber and gem trade in the remote border region adjoining Thailand. Local Cambodian government officials became business partners with them. Khmer Rouge defectors to the government were promised amnesty as well as continued proceeds from this lucrative enterprise, thereby blurring the lines between the two until the Khmer Rouge ceased to exist as a separate entity in the 1990s.¹⁶⁸



© Peter Gammum
Skulls at Choeung Ek

In 1997, Washington, along with the UN, began pushing for an international tribunal to prosecute former Khmer Rouge leaders. Sen initially opposed convening a tribunal on the grounds that dredging up the past would only cause further rifts within Cambodia. China backed his stance, fearing that the tribunal would reveal the extent of Beijing's support for the genocidal regime. Yet the Prime Minister eventually sought assistance from the UN to form tribunals after international pressure failed to abate. Initially, he also demanded that other alleged crimes against humanity in Cambodia be investigated, with the implication that the U.S. carpet bombing of the Cambodian border during the Vietnam War should fall under such a scope. Sen's demands were not accepted by the UN, but his acquiescence to the idea of tribunals enabled the process to move forward, albeit slowly.¹⁶⁹

In 2003, the UN and Phnom Penh reached an agreement on the composition of the tribunal body in charge of conducting the trials. The trials were expected to last three years and cost approximately USD 56 million.¹⁷⁰ While the U.S. contributed nearly USD seven million to document Khmer Rouge atrocities, it could not contribute financial assistance to the trials until the Secretary of State determined that Cambodia's judiciary met international standards of transparency and independence. However, in September 2008, Washington agreed to provide USD 1.8 million to the tribunal because of the judiciary's efforts to address corruption.¹⁷¹ The court still faces a shortfall of USD 40 million, and it remains unclear when the trials, now set for 2009, will actually commence. In addition, only five defendants have been arrested and question remains about how many defendants will be alive when the trial begins. Pol Pot passed away in 1998, while Ta Mok, a former military commander known as "the butcher," spent seven years in custody before dying in 2006 while awaiting trial.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸The Santa Fe Institute. Liu Institute for Global Issues and Department of Geography, University of British Columbia. Le Billon, Philippe. "'War Commodities' and the Settlement of Civil Conflicts [p. 15]." No date. <http://www.santafe.edu/files/gems/obstaclestopeace/lebillon.pdf>

¹⁶⁹ Harvard International Review. *Failed States*, Vol. 29, No. 4. Yang, Allen. "No Redemption: The Failing Khmer Rouge Trial." Winter 2008. <http://www.harvardir.org/articles/1694/>

¹⁷⁰ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. CRS Report for Congress. Lum, Thomas. "Cambodia: Background and U.S. Relations." 18 July 2007. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32986.pdf>

¹⁷¹ Voice of America News. "U.S. Supports Cambodia Tribunal." 25 September 2008. <http://www.voanews.com/uspolicy/2008-09-25-voa8.cfm>

¹⁷² Suite101.com. Nicholson, Mari. "Khmer Rouge Wants to Fight Again." 28 July 2008. http://cambodia.suite101.com/article.cfm/khmer_rouge_fighters_want_to_fight_again

Poverty

Cambodia remains a very poor country. Impoverished households typically have more dependents than laborers, a familial authority figure who is marginally educated, and an overall lack of access to services, which are often only available to those with increased financial means. In urban areas, the garment industry offers jobs to those with limited educations and skills. In rural areas, there are few jobs available outside of the agricultural sector.



Some impoverished Cambodians have turned to gambling, both licit and illicit, in an attempt to improve their fortunes. They wager on such random happenings as the minute and hour that rain will start, as well as the resulting amount of precipitation.¹⁷³ As is true elsewhere, gambling in Cambodia typically leads those who are looking for riches into deep debt.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a serious problem in Cambodia.¹⁷⁴ Men, women, and children are all vulnerable. Men usually become the equivalent of indentured servants as they are forced to pay off exorbitant fees to those who trafficked them. Women and children in the countryside are often lured into the sex trade by promises of a better life, which may take them to the Middle East. Others end up toiling as domestic servants, both within Cambodia and abroad, or working in factories or on ships. Minors found working in the sex trade during police raids have sometimes been arrested, rather than offered assistance. This has caused consternation among foreign donors who have provided Phnom Penh with money to combat sexual exploitation.¹⁷⁵

HIV/Aids

The first case of AIDS in Cambodia was diagnosed in 1993. The country now has the highest rate of infection outside sub-Saharan Africa. The most common form of transmission is from sex workers to male patrons, who then transmit the disease to their wives. When pregnant, the wives may in turn infect their unborn children. Many of those infected are ultimately forced to sell their property to pay for treatment or basic survival needs. They often take up residence in Buddhist temples, which also provide care for orphaned children, some of whom are HIV positive.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Cambodia: Gambling Fuels Poverty." 2 September 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=80114>

¹⁷⁴ The Asia Foundation. "Combating Human Trafficking in Cambodia." April 2006. <http://asiafoundation.org/pdf/CBtrafficking.pdf>

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch. "Cambodia: Young Trafficking Victims Treated as Criminals." 21 June 2002. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2002/06/22/cambod4056.htm>

¹⁷⁶ George Street Journal, Brown University. Men, Makna. "HIV/AIDS in Cambodia: Graduate Student Makna Men Travels to His Native Country and Finds a Group of People Living with Little More than Hope." 22 October 2004.

http://www.brown.edu/Administration/George_Street_Journal/vol29/29GSJ04c.html

Armed Forces

Cambodia's armed forces consist of around 100,000 troops, making them roughly one-third the size of Thailand's forces, with whom they sparred in 2008. The army's size is large, however, for the country's low level of economic development.¹⁷⁷ International donors have attempted, without success, to compel Hun Sen's government to demobilize thousands of older soldiers in order to redirect funds to educational and social welfare programs. Many of such soldiers are former members of the Khmer Rouge.

Both China and Vietnam supply significant military assistance to Cambodia. With a contribution of over USD five million per year, China supplies the largest aid package, while Vietnam offers more assistance in training troops.¹⁷⁸ Direct military assistance from the U.S., which had ceased in 1997 after Hun Sen staged a coup, was restored in 2006. Washington has committed to giving the country nearly USD 3.2 million in aid.¹⁷⁹ In terms of allocation and expenditure of funds, the U.S. package is much more transparent than the larger Chinese aid package.

Police

A policeman's salary in Phnom Penh is around USD 30 per month. Cambodian law enforcement officers are forced to pay for many of their own operating expenses, including gasoline.¹⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, many of them accept bribes to increase their incomes, and they often require victims to pay for much of the cost of investigating their cases. Members of the Cambodian National Police have provided assistance to their American counterparts in apprehending suspected pedophiles who are U.S. nationals and thus eligible for prosecution in the U.S. This occurs even when the alleged crimes take place outside of the U.S.¹⁸¹



¹⁷⁷ Reuters UK. Madra, Ek. "Cambodia Doubles Military Budget After Thai Clash." 29 October 2008. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKTRE49S23V20081029>

¹⁷⁸ International Press Service Asia-Pacific. The Phnom Penh Post. Rith, Sam and Liam Cochrane. "Cambodia's Army: Best Friends with China, Vietnam." October 2005.

http://www.newsmekong.org/cambodias_army_best_friends_with_china_vietnam

¹⁷⁹ MSNBC.com. Associated Press. "U.S. Donates Military Trucks to Cambodia." 30 May 2008. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24892889/wid/7468326/>

¹⁸⁰ Expat Advisory Services. Sloan, Bronwyn. "Fear and Loathing: Dealing with Cambodian Police." 11 March 2008. <http://www.expat-advisory.com/cambodia/phnom-penh/fear-and-loathing-dealing-with-cambodian-police.php>

¹⁸¹ U.S. Embassy, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, U.S. Department of State. "Accused Pedophile Faces U.S. Charges for Molesting Underage Girls in Cambodia." 27 April 2006. http://cambodia.usembassy.gov/pr_042706.html