

its major excuse for intervention in the first place. Some members of the Vietnamese elite had also become Catholics by this time. The most noteworthy of them, Nguyen Truong To (d. 1871), was a modernizing reformer who rather quixotically tried to combine Confucian loyalty to the Nguyen court with a Catholic defense of the (anti-Catholic) Tu-duc emperor as the representative of God on earth. To this he added an admiration for nineteenth-century Europe's rule of law and its independent judiciaries. The rich contradictions in To's thought failed to save the country's independence. Nonetheless they demonstrated the unheralded flexibility of Vietnamese political theory in the 1800s and anticipated Vietnamese anticolonial thinkers' worries, in the next century, about the legitimacy deficits of established Vietnamese institutions.

Further Readings

- Dutton, George Edson. "The Tayson Uprising: Society and Rebellion in Late Eighteenth-Century Vietnam, 1771-1802." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2001.
- Elman, Benjamin, et al. *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam*. Los Angeles, 2002.
- Li Tana. *Nguyen Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Ithaca, 1998.
- McLeod, Mark W. *The Vietnamese Response to French Intervention, 1862-1874*. New York, 1991.
- Nguyen Du. *The Tale of Kieu*. Trans. Huynh Sanh Thong. New York, 1973.
- Nguyen Ngoc Huy and Ta Van Tai. *The Lê Code: Law in Traditional Vietnam*. 3 vols. Athens, Ohio, 1987.
- Taylor, K. W., and John Whitmore, eds. *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts*. Ithaca, 1995.
- Whitmore, John K. "Literati Culture and Integration in Dai Viet, c. 1430-1840." In Victor Lieberman, ed., *Beyond Binary Histories: Reimagining Eurasia to c. 1830*, pp. 221-243. Ann Arbor, 1999.
- Woodside, Alexander Barton. *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*. Cambridge, Mass., 1971; reprint 1988.

Chapter 8



Cambodia, 1796-1884

Politics in a Tributary Kingdom

BY THE END of the eighteenth century, Cambodia had fallen from its days of glory almost a millennium before, when the great monuments of Angkor were built and Khmer kings presided over a realm that included all of Cambodia and much of what is now southern Vietnam, southern Laos, and eastern Thailand. Caught between the expanding powers of Siam and Vietnam, the kingdom had been reduced to the status of a tributary state, fought over by its neighbors.

Between Siam and Vietnam

IN 1794 a young Cambodian prince named Eng traveled to Bangkok, where he was crowned by Siamese authorities and sent back to Cambodia to be king. For the next seventy years, Siam was either an active patron of the Cambodian court or was striving to regain that status, having been displaced by the recently consolidated Vietnamese empire to the east. Rivalries between the Siamese and Vietnamese royal houses, exacerbated by factional rivalries inside Cambodia itself, led to repeated invasions by Siamese forces and to a Vietnamese protectorate over the kingdom in the 1830s. In terms of its paternalism and assumed cultural superiority, this protectorate foreshadowed the later French protectorate and its "civilizing mission." For the first half of the nineteenth century, Cambodia was a battleground between its larger neighbors. In the process, it almost disappeared.

Soon after Eng's coronation, and in exchange for placing him on the throne, the Siamese court installed a pro-Siamese Cambodian official named Ben as governor of the Khmer provinces of Battambang and Mahanokor ("Great City," later known as Siem Reap, which contained the ruins of Angkor). The two provinces soon severed their connections with the Cambodian court. They remained under loose Siamese control, governed by Ben and his descendants, until they were restored to the French protectorate of Cambodia in 1907.

When Eng died in 1797, his eldest son, Chan, was only seven years old, and the Siamese continued to administer Cambodia through local officials loyal to Siam. In 1806 Chan was crowned in Bangkok, where several of his aunts and uncles were held as hostages by the court. When he returned to his own capital of Udong, north of Phnom Penh, Chan swiftly sought recognition from the recently constituted Nguyen dynasty in Vietnam. His precise rationale for doing so is unclear but was probably connected with what he thought was the disdainful attitude of the Siamese court toward him, coupled with the pro-Siamese bias of some rival members of his family. In any case, for the remainder of his reign, which lasted until 1835, Chan displayed a pro-Vietnamese, anti-Siamese bias. The Siamese, for their part, soon welcomed two of Chan's brothers, Duang and Em, to Bangkok, where they stayed more or less as hostages for the remainder of Chan's reign.

From his capital in Hue, the Vietnamese emperor Gia-long, following Sino-Vietnamese diplomatic practice, replied to Chan's request for recognition by sending him a seal of office and Chinese-style court costumes for his supposedly "barbarian" entourage. Cambodia's tribute to the Vietnamese court, sent every four years, consisted of forest products such as lac, ivory, and beeswax, resembling what Vietnam transmitted as tribute to the Chinese court, extracted in the Vietnamese case from the peoples living in the forested mountains that lay between Cambodia and Vietnam. That the Nguyen court viewed Cambodia as a "barbarian" region (just as China viewed Vietnam) must have been galling to Chan and his entourage. Faced with the realities of power and the need to seek a balance against Siamese encroachments on his kingdom, however, the Cambodian king had no alternative but to go along and offer tribute both to Bangkok and to Hue. By 1816 his court had become, in Siamese phraseology, a "two-headed bird." A Cambodian chronicle from the 1850s, allegedly quoting Gia-long, explained these relationships in familial terms: "Cambodia is a small country," the emperor said, "and we should maintain it as we would a child. We will be its mother; its father will be Siam. When a child has trouble with its father, it can relieve its suffering by embracing its mother. When a child is unhappy with its mother, it can run to its father for support."

The next fifteen years receive scanty coverage in Siamese, Cambodian, and Vietnamese chronicles, but in 1833 a large Siamese army, accompanied by Chan's two brothers, swept through the kingdom and on into the Mekong delta

in Vietnam, where an antidynastic uprising was in progress. Fearing for his life, Chan fled his new capital, Phnom Penh, to seek asylum in southern Vietnam. The Vietnamese responded to the incursion by invading Cambodia themselves, routing the Siamese army and reinstating Chan, who died shortly afterward in Phnom Penh. At this point the Vietnamese sought to institutionalize their control over the kingdom, renaming it Tan Tai, or "western commandery," and administering it directly through Vietnamese officials.

Chan had no male heirs, and to maintain a semblance of continuity the Vietnamese installed his teenaged daughter Mei as queen, the first female ruler in Cambodian history. The bewildered, powerless girl stood by helplessly as Vietnamese bureaucrats remodeled Cambodian society and administration along Vietnamese lines. In contrast to the Siamese, who had always been content to work through local institutions, which resembled their own, Vietnamese concepts of government were too different and their disdain for Cambodia's culture was too great for them to temper or delay what they saw as an urgent, thoroughgoing civilizing mission. They encountered resistance to their ideas and their programs at every level of Khmer society. Their frustrations in Cambodia are encapsulated in a memorandum that a Vietnamese official posted there transmitted to the emperor Minh-mang in 1834, soon after Vietnam's victory over Siam:

We have tried to punish and reward Cambodian officials according to their merits and demerits. We have asked the king to help us, but he has hesitated to do so. . . . Cambodian officials only know how to bribe and be bribed. Offices are sold. Nobody carries out orders. Everyone works for his own account. When we tried to recruit soldiers, the king was willing but the officials concealed great numbers of people. When we wanted to compile a list of meritorious officials, the king was unwilling, because he was jealous.

The intrusive Vietnamese programs set off a series of uprisings in the 1830s. At least one of them was led by Buddhist monks. The Khmer objected specifically to the imposition of cadastral records, submitting to a census, and paying taxes on land. Other aspects of the Vietnamese program, such as forcing high-ranking officials to wear Vietnamese costumes, dismantling traditional patronage networks, desecrating Buddhist temples, and renaming provinces (*sruk*) must also have been offensive to the Cambodian elite and to many ordinary people as well.

In 1840, fearing renewed unrest and a Siamese invasion, the Vietnamese secretly exiled the Cambodian queen to southern Vietnam. As the rumors spread that she had been killed, uncoordinated revolts broke out in many parts of Cambodia and among the Cambodian minority in Vietnam. These were put down with difficulty by Vietnamese troops. By this time a massive Siamese expeditionary force was poised in Cambodia's northwest, accompanied by

Vietnamese

Chan's brother, Duang, and skirmishes soon broke out between Siamese troops and Vietnamese forces in the region.

Minh-mang died in 1841, and Vietnamese policies toward Cambodia lost some of their momentum. Minh-mang, after all, had been a firm believer in Vietnam's civilizing mission. His son Thieu-tri (r. 1841-1848) was less committed to this. He began his reign looking for a solution to the Cambodian problem that would be acceptable to the Vietnamese elite and to the Cambodians as well, if not necessarily to the Siamese. Distance, distrust, and the ongoing momentum of the war, however, as well as the ambiguity of Vietnamese long-term objectives in Cambodia, kept the fighting going until 1847. For several years, Siamese and Vietnamese troops, aided by rival Cambodian factions, fought each other and devastated the landscape in a ferocious pattern not to be duplicated until the civil war of the 1970s. Throughout this period, Cambodian chronicles tell us, no rice was planted in much of the country, and the population, reverting to seminomadism, survived to a large extent "by eating leaves and roots." It took the country several decades to regain its balance and momentum.

Negotiations calculated to save face for the two exhausted armies and for the rival monarchies in Hue and Bangkok lasted until 1846, when Siam and Vietnam agreed to withdraw from Cambodian territory and to accept Duang as Cambodia's king. The treaty heralded the resumption of Siamese influence at the Cambodian court and the end of Vietnam's civilizing mission. Duang was crowned in Udong in October 1848 on an astrologically auspicious day, in the presence of representatives sent from Bangkok and Hue, but the Siamese, who took Cambodia's regalia back with them to Bangkok, had clearly become the dominant force in Cambodian politics even though their army had left the country.

A "Two-Headed Bird"

DUANG was a vigorous, popular ruler, fifty-two years old. His ostensibly divided loyalty to Bangkok and Hue, combined with war weariness on the part of those larger powers, freed him to take a wide range of initiatives. Cambodian sources written at the time give the impression that he was unwilling to be anybody's puppet. Although he had spent most of his life in Siam, for example, one of his first official actions was to forbid the use of Thai administrative terminology in Cambodia. He rebuilt and rededicated Buddhist monasteries in Udong and elsewhere that had been damaged or destroyed in the fighting. To his subjects, Duang's timely return from exile, his assiduous performance of rituals, and his prompt and thorough restoration of Buddhism were thought to be proofs of his kingliness, legitimacy, and merit. Several elegant didactic poems that he composed when he was living in Siam are still included in Cambodia's school curriculum.

Duang also tried very tentatively to open up Cambodia to the outside world. In 1853, encouraged by French missionaries at Udong, he secretly com-

municated with the French court, transmitting a letter to Emperor Napoleon III that offered his homage in exchange for the emperor's friendship. The presents that accompanied the letter—four elephant tusks, two rhinoceros horns, and quantities of sugar and white pepper—were lost en route, and Napoleon's reply, if there ever was one, has also disappeared. Three years later a French official named Montigny came to Cambodia to negotiate a full-scale commercial treaty, but Duang backed off, because he knew that Montigny had discussed the treaty with the Siamese court, which disapproved of it. When a French missionary later urged Duang to accept France as an ally, the king replied, "What do you want me to do? I have two masters already, who always have an eye fixed on what I am doing. They are my neighbors, and France is far away."

When Duang died in 1860, his eldest son, Norodom, succeeded him. Over the next few years, the new monarch, still uncrowned, rode out a series of dynastic and religious rebellions in northern Cambodia and along both sides of the frontier with Vietnam. Two of the rebel leaders claimed spuriously to be heirs to the throne; a third was one of Norodom's younger brothers. Meanwhile, as the French consolidated their control over southern Vietnam, where they had intervened in the late 1850s, they began to take an interest in Cambodia. Travelers convinced them that Cambodia's economic potential was enormous and that the unmapped Mekong River would lead straight to central China. In the early 1860s, moreover, French interest in the region was piqued by the published report of the "discovery" by a French explorer, a few years earlier, of the ruins of Angkor, in the Thai-controlled Cambodian province of Siem Reap. The ruins, of course, were well known to local people, who guided the Frenchman to them, but the "discovery" foreshadowed more than a century of French scholarship and restoration.

King Norodom was friendless and uneasy. He welcomed the presents and attention given him by French naval officers who traveled to his court from Saigon in 1863. He soon signed an agreement with them, accepting their protection as heirs to the suzerainty exercised by the Vietnamese court. Several French officers remained in Udong to set the treaty in motion. Norodom prudently tried to neutralize his action by signing a secret protocol with Siam, pledging his loyalty to the Siamese court, which had been angered by his negotiations with the French.

Norodom needed friends in Bangkok because he wanted to be crowned. The Siamese had retained Cambodia's regalia after his father's coronation. Invited by King Mongkut to be crowned in Bangkok, Norodom set off for the coast by elephant early in 1864, only to learn that a French flag had been hoisted in Udong in his absence. Hurrying back to his capital, Norodom apologized to the French, who graciously hauled down the flag. It was the last time that they would do so for nearly a hundred years.

A few months later, following ancient custom, Norodom was finally anointed by court brahmins and crowned himself king of Cambodia. He

received his crown from a French naval officer sent up from Saigon for the occasion and his regalia from a Siamese official. Technically, Cambodia was still a "two-headed bird," but the royal regalia remained in the country, and all subsequent kings received their crowns from French officials. Siamese influence at the court ceased after the Franco-Siamese treaty of 1867, in which France recognized Siam's rights to the Cambodian provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap, while Bangkok accepted the existence of the French protectorate over the remainder the country.

By 1866, the French had moved Cambodia's capital back to Phnom Penh, which was more accessible to the port of Saigon than Udong had been. Over the next twenty years, their efforts in Cambodia consisted largely of ineffectual attempts to curb Norodom's power and to tidy his fiscal practices, with a view to siphoning off some of his revenue to pay for administrative costs. Norodom balked at the reforms, and French investment languished. In 1884, after the king had refused to allow the French to collect Cambodian customs duties, the French governor of Cochinchina, Charles Thomson, arrived in Phnom Penh aboard a gunboat at night, forced his way into the palace and presented Norodom, at gunpoint, with an eleven-point ultimatum, written in French, that drastically expanded French control. The document also abolished what the French referred to as "slavery," permitted the sale of land, extended the French resident's powers, and stated that Norodom was henceforth to accept "all the administrative, judicial, financial and commercial reforms that the French government shall judge, in the future, to be useful." Norodom was signing a blank check. He probably knew that another turning point in Cambodian history had been reached. Facing the pistols of Thomson's bodyguard and knowing that his brother Sisowath was favored by the French to succeed him, Norodom had no choice.

Further Readings

- Chandler, David. "Cambodia before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794-1848." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1974.
- . *Facing the Cambodian Past: Selected Essays, 1973-1994*. Chiang Mai, 1996.
- . *A History of Cambodia*. 3d ed. Boulder, Colo., 2000.
- Ebihara, May. "Societal Organization in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Cambodia." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, 2 (September 1984): 280-295.
- Mabbett, Ian, and David Chandler. *The Khmers*. Oxford, 1995.
- Osborne, Milton E. *The French Presence in Cambodia and Cochinchina: Rule and Response (1859-1905)*. Ithaca, 1969.
- Tully, John. *France on the Mekong: A History of the Protectorate in Cambodia, 1863-1953*. Lanham, Md., 2002.

Chapter 9



Realignments

The Making of the Netherlands East Indies,

1750–1914

THE YEARS 1750 to 1914 can be understood as framing a period of expanding Dutch power within the Indonesian archipelago. In 1750 Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) envoys to the kingdom of Mataram in Java brokered a truce between warring princes that divided the royal domain into two kingdoms, Surakarta and Yogyakarta. Dutch administrative zones hemmed in this dwindling royal space. During the nineteenth century Dutch power expanded across Indonesian seas to draw into one colonial state, called the “Netherlands Indies,” islands and communities that formerly had maintained vassal relations with Java’s kings. Through treaties signed with the British in 1824 and 1871, the Dutch defined a state that in the west cut through Muslim sultanates straddling Sumatra, Borneo, and the Malay Peninsula. Treaties with Portugal in the 1890s determined that the southeastern end of the colony would terminate in the central mountains of Timor. Treaties signed with the sultans of Ternate and Tidore brought their vassal states in western New Guinea into the Indies in 1898.

Boundaries outlined a space in which a colony could be created through conquest, negotiation, expansion of economic zones, and Christian missionary enterprise. By 1914 all of present-day Indonesia had one capital, Batavia. Each region had Dutch administrators, public schools, post offices, banks, commercial companies, factories, plantations, and transport hubs, and a circulating population of laborers, foremen, soldiers, clerks, and students for whom the colony provided a workspace and career path greater than their ethnic base and home

- Greene, Stephen L. W. *Absolute Dreams: Thai Government under Rama VI, 1910-1925*. Bangkok, 1999.
- Kamala Tiyavanich. *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*. Honolulu, 1997.
- Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian. *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957*. Kuala Lumpur, 1995.
- Muscat, Robert J. *The Fifth Tiger: A Study of Thai Development Policy*. Helsinki, 1994.
- Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker. *Thailand: Economy and Politics*. Kuala Lumpur, 1995.
- Suchit Bunbongkarn. *The Military in Thai Politics 1981-86*. Singapore, 1987.
- Wyatt, David K. *Siam in Mind*. Chiang Mai, 2002.
- . *Thailand: A Short History*. 2d ed. New Haven, 2003.

Chapter 25



Cambodia, 1884-1975

ALTHOUGH the colonial era in Cambodia was relatively peaceful, when compared to Burma, Vietnam, and parts of Indonesia, the French encountered serious resistance to their rule in early 1885, when a nationwide rebellion broke out in response to the harsh treaty imposed on King Norodom in the preceding year. In terms of motivation, leadership, and momentum, the revolt resembled the one that broke out in Burma against the British two years later. For a year and a half, the rebellion tied down over four thousand French and Vietnamese troops at a time when France was stretched thin elsewhere in Indochina.

With some justice, the French suspected King Norodom of supporting the rebellion. To rally local support, they called on Norodom's younger brother, Sisowath, who displayed an almost fawning loyalty to France in putting down the revolt. Sisowath probably expected to be awarded the throne for his collaboration, but as the rebellion wore on, the French had to turn back to Norodom to pacify the rebels. In June 1886 the king proclaimed that if the insurgents laid down their arms, France would continue to respect Cambodian "laws and customs"—especially those affecting the patronage networks established by powerful officials, sometimes referred to as "slavery" by the French. Faced with the possibility of a drawn-out war, the French stepped back from the more intrusive of their reforms, which did not come fully into effect until Norodom was dead.

Colonialism and Nationalism

THE REBELLION taught the French to be cautious, but their "civilizing mission" in Cambodia remained the same. Like the Vietnamese in the 1830s and 1840s, they still sought to rationalize Cambodian government, to lessen the king's privileges and power, to instill their own values among the elite, and to gain sufficient revenue from taxes and customs duties to pay for their administration. To accomplish these objectives, they surrounded the increasingly powerless king with pro-French advisers drawn in large part from the small corps of interpreters they had trained in the 1870s.

In the 1890s French control of Cambodia increased inexorably, without significantly altering the patterns of Cambodian elite culture or affecting rural life. In 1892 the French began collecting taxes directly from the population. Two years later, French *résidents* were installed in all Cambodian provinces. Despite the intensification of French control, the countryside, where nine out of ten Cambodians lived, remained a mystery to all but the handful of Frenchmen who ventured outside the towns and were fluent in Khmer.

Many important, poorly documented changes were taking place. By the end of the century, for example, Cambodian farmers, like their counterparts in southern Vietnam, Burma, and Siam, had found overseas markets for their rice. Chinese immigrants played a key role in purchasing and exporting the Cambodian crop surplus. Cities and towns sprang up in response to these markets and to French administrative demands. With a prolonged period of peace, the population rose rapidly. Perched atop the society, the French froze what they called "Cambodge"—the king, the elite, and the rural poor—in place, protecting them not only from their neighbors but also from the perils of modernization, politics, or independence. Day-to-day administration and commerce fell to immigrants from Vietnam and China.

After the 1884–1886 rebellion, France's relatively benign rule met almost no resistance. Nonetheless, until the 1920s most French officials had no idea how many people lived in Cambodia or who had title to land. More important, they had no clear idea of what was going on in people's heads. As a French *résident* noted in the 1920s, "It is permissible to ask if the unvarying calm that the [Cambodian] people continue to display is not merely an external appearance, covering up vague, unexpressed feelings . . . whose exact nature we cannot perceive." French officials could argue, for their part, that they were paid to administer, not to understand, the country.

Beneath the surface, conditions for most Cambodians were grim. Although "slavery" had been officially abolished, servitude for debts, amounting to the same thing, was widespread and often lasted a lifetime. Health care and secular education were almost nonexistent. Most Cambodians were illiterate and died

young. Bandits who preyed on rural populations were seldom caught. What French romantic writers sometimes depicted as a premodern paradise was in fact a poor, sad, and dangerous place for most of the people who lived in it.

After Norodom died in 1904, the piecemeal modernization of his kingdom proceeded under the new monarch, who seemed amenable to change as long as his own interests were taken care of. Sisowath came to the throne at the age of sixty-four. For roughly half his life he had feuded with Norodom and worked to please the French, who repaid him with lavish gifts, including a new palace, a steam yacht, and an allowance of 113 kilograms (249 pounds) of top-grade opium per year.

In 1906 Sisowath made a state visit to France, accompanied by the palace dance troupe and members of his entourage. He was cheered wherever he went and seemed to enjoy his stay, which coincided with Franco-Siamese negotiations that culminated, after his return, in the return of the provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap. Over the next half century, Battambang became Cambodia's leading producer of rice. Siem Reap, housing the ruins of Angkor, became associated with a backward-looking Khmer national identity—a phenomenon some have called “ethnostalgia”—that coincided with French ideas about the country and caused no trouble for the administration.

Two events in Sisowath's reign, however, suggested that violence could break out if the French overstepped the boundaries they had so carefully constructed between themselves and the population. In 1916 massive demonstrations were staged in eastern Cambodia in response to heavy new taxes imposed by France to help defray the costs of World War I. In the process several Cambodian tax collectors were killed. The demonstrations only broke up after Sisowath toured the dissident areas by automobile and promised that the new taxes would be reduced. Nine years later, Khmer villagers in Kompong Chhnang beat a French *résident*, Félix Bardez, to death when he broke into a village New Year's celebration to demand that the villagers remit back taxes. The Bardez affair was soon forgotten, although the French writer André Malraux, who attended the trial of the villagers in Phnom Penh, used the occasion to lampoon colonialism in Indochina; only in the 1970s did the Cambodian scholar Dik Kean reclaim it as a precursor of Cambodian nationalism.

Two years later, Sisowath died at eighty-seven. In his lifetime, he had seen Cambodia “protected” by a succession of foreign powers. The popular old man, who was active in supporting Buddhist constructions throughout the kingdom, had also seen Cambodian culture and identity remain remarkably intact. The king died in the midst of an economic boom that affected all of Indochina. In Cambodia the greatest beneficiaries were the firms engaged in the export of rice and the newly opened French rubber plantations in Kompong Cham. Funds generated by a widening tax base were diverted into public

works that included the beautification of Phnom Penh, the electrification of provincial towns, extensive road construction, and the establishment of a railway linking Phnom Penh with the Siamese border.

Under Sisowath's son, Sisowath Monivong (r. 1927-1941), who had served briefly in the French army, the pace of modernization accelerated and the stirrings of Cambodian nationalism began to be felt. In Phnom Penh the French-sponsored Buddhist Institute, founded in 1930, and the Lycée Sisowath, founded six years later, were gathering places for young Khmer interested in modernization and reform. A mildly nationalistic Cambodian language weekly, *Nagara Vatta* (Angkor Wat), began publication in 1936 and opened a peaceable conversation between the French and their allegedly "dormant" clientele as well as among the Cambodian elite. The paper also gave thousands of Cambodians a chance for the first time to read about events in the outside world in their own language.

In the late 1930s French administrators referred to Cambodia's economic advances and the increased participation by Khmer in the colonial administration as an "awakening." Until the outbreak of World War II, however, Cambodia's elite, small compared to most of its counterparts elsewhere in Southeast Asia, was relatively docile. Nothing that has survived in print (except, perhaps, an underlying anti-Vietnamese bias) seems to foreshadow the wars and chaos of the 1970s.

The period between June 1940 and October 1945, however, must be seen as a watershed in Cambodian history. French policies in the kingdom sprang from weakness. Cambodian responses to them differed sharply from what had gone before. By the end of 1945, Cambodian independence, impracticable and almost unthought of before 1939, had become just a matter of time.

During World War II Indochina differed from the rest of Southeast Asia in that France was the only colonial power in the region to retain control of its possessions for the greater part of the period. French autonomy was restricted after August 1941, when Japan stationed tens of thousands of troops in Indochina, with French acquiescence. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the Japanese jailed colonial officials and encouraged local nationalists, in some cases released from prison, to establish quasi-independent regimes. In Cambodia, in contrast, as throughout Indochina, the French sought to defuse nationalist activity by increasing police surveillance, opening the upper ranks of the administration to local people, and liberalizing some of their policies. Through this mixture of harshness and compromise, France hoped to endure the war and reemerge, regardless of who won, with some of its identity and its colonial empire intact.

In late 1940, after a brief, indecisive war with Thailand (as Siam had been recently renamed), France was forced to cede most of Battambang and parts of Siem Reap to the Thai. (Under intense international pressure, the provinces were to revert to Cambodia in 1946.) This humiliation seems to have hastened the

death of King Monivong in April 1941. For the last few weeks of his reign, the king refused to meet with French officials or to converse with anyone in French.

Faced with an unexpected dynastic crisis, the governor-general of French Indochina, Admiral Jean Decoux, sidestepped Monivong's eldest son, the most likely candidate for the throne, and selected the former king's grandson, Norodom Sihanouk (1922-), then a *lycée* student in Saigon, for the honor. Decoux counted on this timid and studious eighteen-year-old to be a pliable instrument of French policies, which proved to be the case for several years. He never suspected that his choice would dominate Cambodian political life for the rest of the twentieth century.

The (First) Rise and Fall of Norodom Sihanouk

FRENCH POLICIES throughout Indochina became a dead letter on 9 March 1945, when the Japanese interned French officials throughout the colony and told local rulers, including King Sihanouk, that their "countries" were now independent. The Japanese move was intended to forestall French armed resistance to the Japanese and also fit into Japanese plans to form and equip local forces to resist Allied landings in the region. In the seven-months' interregnum between March and October 1945, when the French returned in force, Cambodian leaders toyed with notions of independence, and hundreds of young men joined a green-shirted, Japanese-sponsored militia. Some Khmer nationalists were tempted to ally themselves with the anti-French forces, dominated by the Indochina Communist Party, that had sprung to life in neighboring Vietnam. Others were encouraged by anticolonial factions in the Thai political elite, who financed a Cambodian independence movement calling itself the Free Khmer, or Khmer Issarak.

In early 1946 the French signed an agreement with Cambodian officials, led by Sihanouk's maternal uncle, Prince Sisowath Monireth. The document permitted the Khmer to draw up a constitution and form political parties but was vague about independence. Two important parties almost immediately took shape, both headed by minor members of the royal family. The larger one, the Democrats, drew support from the middle ranks of the bureaucracy, educated young people, and the Buddhist monastic order. Many of its followers had been drawn into politics by the events of 1945. The Liberal Party, secretly financed by the French, was predictably less independence-minded.

The Democrats captured two-thirds of the seats in the consultative assembly that was elected to draft a constitution in 1946. The document, modeled on its counterpart in France, called for a strong legislature and envisaged the king, like the president of France, as playing a ceremonial role. In elections for a National Assembly in 1947, the Democrats again won two-thirds of the seats.

A third election in 1951 returned the Democrats to office with a reduced majority. Ironically these three referenda, monitored by colonial police, were arguably the only free, fair, and pluralistic elections to be held in Cambodia before 1993.

In early 1951 the Vietnamese communists, seeking Khmer support for their fighting in southern Vietnam, secretly formed a Cambodian Communist Party in the eastern part of the country, led by Vietnamese-speaking Khmer. Some young men drawn into the movement, including Chea Sim and Heng Samrin, were to reemerge as senior figures in the pro-Vietnamese government that took power in Cambodia in 1979.

Between 1947 and 1952, meanwhile, the Democrats presided over a series of governments that were powerless to act against the French, who controlled Cambodia's purse strings, defense, and foreign relations. Democrat leaders often quarreled with the king, who resented their popularity and was encouraged by the French to harbor political ambitions of his own. In 1952 Sihanouk dissolved the National Assembly and began to govern by decree. His peremptory move angered many Cambodians then studying in France, and a few of them, including Saloth Sar (later known by his revolutionary pseudonym, Pol Pot), joined the French Communist Party before returning home.

Buoyed up by his popularity and self-confidence, and dissatisfied with the pace of French concessions, Sihanouk embarked on what he called a royal crusade for independence. Calling attention to France's foot-dragging tactics, the king made provocative speeches while traveling abroad in 1953 and threatened to arm the Cambodian population. He was aided in his efforts by the deteriorating military situation in Cambodia. By mid-1953 almost half of Cambodia was controlled by communist-led insurgents operating under Vietnamese supervision. In November the French caved in and granted Cambodia its independence, though with the king's permission they continued to fight insurgents on Cambodian territory.

At the Geneva Conference in 1954, Cambodia resisted pressure from China and the Vietnamese to allow communist-led guerrillas to regroup in Cambodian territory. Agreements reached at the conference required Cambodia to conduct national elections before the end of 1955, coinciding with the three-year time limit Sihanouk had placed on his crusade. Fearful of the Democrats and inspired by what he saw as his "mandate" to run the country, Sihanouk set in motion a shrewd three-act scenario that by the end of 1955 had placed him fully in command of his kingdom.

First, he staged a referendum on his crusade for independence. One ballot, colored white, bore his picture and the word for "yes." The other was black with "no" inscribed on it. Balloting was open, and nearly a million citizens handed white ballots to the government officials who staffed the voting tables. Fewer than two thousand had the temerity to oppose the king.

After toying with the idea of altering the constitution so as to increase his powers, Sihanouk suddenly abdicated the throne and became a "private citizen," while retaining princely rank. Later Sihanouk called this action his "atomic bomb." He allowed the monarchy to survive by placing his father, Prince Norodom Suramarit, an affable bureaucrat, on the throne. Suramarit reigned until his death in 1960. The monarchy fell into abeyance at that point only to be revived thirty-two years later, when Sihanouk, who had single-handedly destroyed the institution, resumed the throne.

Sihanouk's final move was to assume the leadership of a recently formed national political movement, the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, usually translated as People's Socialist Community, which was designed to obliterate and overshadow existing political parties. The statutes of the party were optimistic, claiming that the Sangkum would "attain the aspirations of the Little People, the real people of the Kingdom, whom we love." In the October 1955 elections, marked by widespread violence and fraud, Sangkum candidates, all handpicked by the prince, captured over 80 percent of the roughly one million votes cast and all the seats in the National Assembly. Official statistics gave the Democrats 12 percent of the vote and the pro-communist People's Group another 4 percent.

The 1955 elections ended pluralist politics in Cambodia for the duration of the so-called Sihanouk era, which extended to 1970. The resentment of the Democrats and of pro-communist candidates and voters who had been brutalized by Sihanouk's police strengthened radical and often clandestine opposition to the prince. This opposition, in turn, contributed to Sihanouk's eventual fall from power and foreshadowed the rough and tumble electoral politics of Cambodia in the 1990s.

For the time being, however, Sihanouk basked in overwhelming popular support. For the next fifteen years, he stifled political opposition, controlled the media, quarreled with the leaders of Thailand and Vietnam, scorned the United States, and expanded Cambodia's educational facilities. In his speeches and writings, Sihanouk stressed Cambodia's past greatness, its high status in the developing world, and his own indispensability. He saw himself as a world statesman and identified himself with Cambodia. He also identified himself, as no previous ruler had done, with Cambodia's rural poor, whom he called his children and his "little people." His neutralist foreign policy, which was both risky and courageous, aimed to preserve Cambodia's freedom of maneuver in the smothering context of the Cold War. The policy earned him the enmity of the pro-American regimes in Bangkok and Saigon, whose plots to overthrow him in 1958 and 1959 were unsuccessful.

Sihanouk's popularity, his generally pro-communist foreign policy, and his police hamstrung Cambodia's clandestine communist movement, led by Saloth Sar, who had returned from France in 1953. Sar was driven into exile in Vietnam

in 1963, returning three years later to establish secret bases in Cambodia's forested northeast. For the next nine years, he and a handful of associates perfected radical plans for uprooting most Cambodian institutions and empowering the rural poor. These ideas took effect almost immediately after the communists came to power in 1975.

Sihanouk's popularity seems to have peaked around 1962, before the effects of his haphazard economic policies, the ineptitude of his entourage, and his indifference to advice—to name only three factors—became fully known. Sangkum electoral victories in 1958 and 1962, with slates of candidates selected by the prince, suggested that "Prince Papa," as Sihanouk styled himself, was totally in command, but serious pressures against his rule were building up. An expanding, better-educated population began to press on Cambodia's fragile institutions in search of employment. Because of its isolation from its neighbors, Cambodia failed to benefit from the economic boom that accompanied the Vietnam War. Moreover, by 1965 tens of thousands of Vietnamese communist troops were stationed, with Sihanouk's approval, on Cambodian soil. They paid high prices for Cambodian crops, reducing government revenue normally earned from export taxes.

In 1966 Sihanouk opened up the National Assembly elections to allow Sangkum candidates to compete against each other in electorates. The result was a more representative assembly that owed little allegiance to the prince. By then, hundreds of radical students, teachers, disaffected young men and women, and discontented farmers were becoming susceptible to communist ideas. Many Sino-Khmer, dazzled by revolutionary developments in China, where the Cultural Revolution was in full swing, joined the clandestine communist movement in Cambodia, labeled dismissively by Sihanouk, speaking French, as the "Khmer Rouge," or "Red Khmer." The prince opposed them to the "Blue Khmer" who favored the United States and to his neutralist faction, the "White Khmer." The latter two nicknames never caught hold, but the label "Khmer Rouge" stuck to the Communist Party of Kampuchea, for foreigners at least, until the movement collapsed in the 1990s. In early 1968 they opened up armed struggle against Sihanouk's regime. Following the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, which had been launched to large extent from Cambodia, Vietnamese pressure on Cambodian resources intensified, and the country's export economy began to falter.

During the late 1960s, the prince became increasingly depressed. He spent his time producing sentimental feature films, making speeches, and entertaining foreign guests. He also reversed course and renewed diplomatic relations with the United States, probably expecting military assistance, which was not forthcoming. Cambodia, which he still identified with his own person, had become impossible to manage. In January 1970 Sihanouk embarked on an open-ended foreign tour, leaving ministers he knew to oppose him in charge

of the country. He seems to have expected the situation to deteriorate and hoped to be asked back as a savior.

In March 1970, while he was in the Soviet Union, the Cambodian National Assembly voted to remove him as chief of state. Sihanouk traveled to Beijing, where he was quickly persuaded by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, an old friend, to form a military alliance with the Vietnamese and Cambodian communists in order to return to power. Sihanouk agreed to lead a government in exile and took up residence in Beijing. In Cambodia, thousands of young men and women, including future prime minister Hun Sen, rallied to Sihanouk by joining the Khmer Rouge, led from the shadows by Saloth Sar. In October 1970 the pro-American regime in Phnom Penh named itself the Khmer Republic, with General Lon Nol, an inept and mystical patriot, as its prime minister. The regime received massive doses of aid from the United States, and as military equipment poured in, its bloated, courageous, and poorly organized forces suffered a series of ignominious defeats at the hands of Vietnamese communist forces and auxiliary troops provided by the Khmer Rouge.

For the next five years Cambodia was subjected to brutal American bombardment from the air (which stopped in 1973 at the insistence of the U.S. Congress), a ruinous civil war, and armed incursions, in the course of which hundreds of thousands of Cambodians, many of them civilians, lost their lives. By 1973 the Phnom Penh regime controlled less than a quarter of the country. Corruption was rampant. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, fleeing combat and the bombing, flooded into Phnom Penh and Battambang, as local administration more or less collapsed. In the meantime, U.S. combat forces had begun withdrawing from Vietnam, leaving Cambodia as what one American general called "the only war in town."

Following the cease-fire negotiated between the United States and the Vietnamese communists at the end of 1972, Vietnam withdrew most of its forces from Cambodia, leaving the Khmer to fight each other, unaided, for two more years. In a war to the death, prisoners taken on both sides were routinely killed, and civilians who resisted military units were shot. After three years of combat, the Khmer Rouge army, trained and equipped by the Vietnamese, had become skillful and dedicated fighters. The American bombing campaign of 1973, which created a firewall around Phnom Penh and killed thousands of Cambodian civilians as well as Khmer Rouge soldiers, probably forestalled a communist victory, but the collapse of the Khmer Republic was already only a matter of time.

In August 1973 the U.S. ambassador to Cambodia, Emory Swank, ended his tour and gave his first press conference, noting succinctly that the war was "losing more and more of its point and [had] less and less meaning for any of the parties concerned." It was to last for another year and a half.

Further Readings

- Chandler, David. *A History of Cambodia*. 3d ed. Boulder, 2000.
- . *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War and Revolution since 1945*. New Haven, 1991.
- Edwards, Penny. *The Cultivation of "Cambodge."* Honolulu, 2004.
- Jeldres, Julio A. *The Royal Family of Cambodia*. Phnom Penh, 2003.
- Kiernan, Ben, and Chanthou Boua, eds. *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981*. London, 1982.
- Martin, Marie Alexandrine. *Cambodia: A Shattered Society*. Translated by Mark W. McLeod. Berkeley, 1994.
- Osborne, Milton. *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness*. Honolulu, 1994.
- Shawcross, William. *Sideshow: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Destruction of Cambodia*. New York, 1979.

Chapter 26



Laos to 1975

IN 1904 the political geo-body we call Laos was confined for the first time in its history almost entirely to the eastern bank of the Mekong River, united for the first time since 1693, and had three of its four principalities ruled (without princes) by the French. The concoction formed a new entity in Southeast Asia by virtue of the lines that France, with Siam's reluctant approval, had drawn around it.

French Rule

UNTIL the end of World War II, Laos was, for the French, a congenial back-water governed under relatively casual ad hoc arrangements. In the north was the principality of Luang Prabang, where a single monarch, Sisavangvong, reigned over several provinces, under French protection, from 1905 until his death in 1959. The French ruled the three other Lao principalities—Xieng Khouang, Vientiane, and Champassak—more directly. A French *résident* in Vientiane monitored both forms of governance and Laos as a whole.

The burden of French colonialism in Laos was lightened by the cooperation of traditional leaders, the mildness of French economic involvement, the country's isolation, and the compliance of the Lao population. French novels about Laos, unashamedly Orientalist in tone, alternate between rapture and torpor, and fail to suggest the administrative affairs that occupied much of a typical

colonialist's day. Financially the French ran its operations in Laos at a deficit, balanced by the profits from their taxes in Cambodia and Vietnam.

Laos remained overwhelmingly rural. In 1943 fewer than fifty thousand of the population, estimated very roughly at one million, inhabited provincial towns, including the capital, and three-fifths of these urbanites were immigrants from Vietnam, who dominated the commercial sector. As in Cambodia, the French arrived just in time to remove the Lao from the mixed blessings of Siamese patronage and protection. By drawing lines on the map, freezing the Luang Prabang dynasty in place, and securing the loyalty of the Lao regional elite, the French bought time for the Lao and for themselves, time in which to proceed slowly with what they perceived as their "civilizing mission" there and elsewhere in Indochina. For Laos, as for Vietnam and Cambodia, the idea of independence did not enter the collective mentality of the French until after World War II.

In the 1930s, however, French administrators in Laos, as in Cambodia, hinted that the kingdom was approaching an unspecified kind of renaissance. To speed the process, the French concentrated their resources on extending all-weather roads and on cultural projects pleasing to French savants and the Lao elite. The generation of leaders that matured in the 1930s and 1940s worked comfortably with the French. Because the largely rural population was politically passive and geographically dispersed, these leaders were unchallenged, while the rudimentary condition of the French-controlled educational system (Laos had no high school until 1947) delayed the appearance of a qualified non-royal elite.

In any formal sense, Laos was swamped within the larger unit of French Indochina. It contained only 7 percent of the federation's people, generated only 1 percent of its foreign trade, and in the 1930s employed fewer than five hundred French administrators. The commercial and administrative work, such as it was, fell largely to Vietnamese immigrants. However, the French political and emotional commitment to Laos seems to have been stronger than these quantitative indices suggest. The commitment was based on the sense of helplessness that beset the Lao elite at the end of the nineteenth century and perhaps on a feeling among the French that they owed more to the Lao than they could deliver, given their limited colonial budget and limited power.

By saving and in a sense inventing Laos—a process that they had followed earlier in Cambodia—the French froze Lao politics in place. Their attitude toward Lao culture was ambivalent. The Lao elite naturally resorted to Thai newspapers, books, and radio, all in a language that they could understand, and many Lao monks sought higher education in Siam. At the same time, no members of the Lao elite, it seems, supported the idea that the Siamese state should absorb Laos. To counter Siamese influence in the sangha, the French encouraged

Lao monks to attend the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh or a similar body established in 1937 in Vientiane.

When France fell to Germany in 1940, the French and Lao were defenseless against the pan-Thai ambitions and irredentist claims of the pro-Japanese Phibun regime in Bangkok. After a brief war, aimed primarily to regain provinces in northwestern Cambodia ceded to France in 1907, Thailand (as Siam had renamed itself in 1939) took over those parts of Laos that lay on the west bank of the Mekong. Stung by the loss and seeking to ride out the war, the French sought to strengthen the prestige of the Lao monarch in Luang Prabang by adding to the territory under his alleged dominion and formalizing French control. In 1941 a treaty establishing a full-blown protectorate was signed, replacing the informal agreements reached by the French diplomat Auguste Pavie and the Lao monarch in the 1890s. At about this time, a handful of Lao intellectuals, encouraged by the French, launched the Movement for National Renovation, designed to counter pan-Thai pressures emanating from Bangkok. The group published a weekly newspaper and sponsored radio broadcasts in Lao. Fearful of Thai pressure, France constructed more schools in Laos during World War II than they had built since the 1890s. French sponsorship of a nationally focused Lao identity was easily absorbed by those few Lao, led by Prince Phetsarat, who envisaged a Lao nation independent from France. They benefited from several months of quasi-independence in 1945–1946, between the Japanese seizure of power and the French return to control.

A Lao Nation

THE POLITICAL history of Laos since March 1945, when the Japanese interned French officials throughout Indochina, has been dominated by the efforts of Lao and foreign groups to construct a nation-state named “Laos” where none had existed before. In 1946 the French administration named Sisavangvong the ruler of the “kingdom of Laos,” which now encompassed all the French-controlled area. Until 1975, when a communist regime came to power in Vientiane, these would-be nation-builders were thwarted in their efforts to unify the country by embedded habits of regionalism and family rivalries among the Lao elite, by poor communications throughout the country, and, most important, by the pressures and devastation of the fighting that swept across all of Indochina between 1946 and 1954 and again between 1960 and 1975.

Like Cambodia and parts of Vietnam, Laos was drawn into the First Indochina War (1946–1954) at a time when few of its people gave strong support to either the French or their communist-dominated opposition. In Laos the few who did were to be found either in the ranks of the Indochina Communist Party (ICP) and its successor parties or in a less well organized nationalist

movement known as the Free Lao, or Lao Issara. This was created in the mid-1940s by the quasi-independent Phetsarat regime, with the support of the recently installed anticolonial Pridi government in Bangkok.

What differentiated the Lao communists, supported by the Vietnamese, from their less doctrinaire domestic rivals was that they were optimistic about gaining and holding power throughout the country. For thirty years, their optimism seldom wavered, though in the 1940s the communist victory of 1975 would have been almost impossible for dispassionate observers to predict. French negotiations with noncommunist Lao in the late 1940s weakened the Lao Issara. Several of its leaders, including Prince Souvanna Phouma, returned from Thailand to Laos. Prince Souphanouvong, a member of the ICP, remained in the maquis, allied to the communist resistance known as the Pathet Lao (Lao Nation), all of whose leaders had close connections with Vietnam.

In late 1953 France granted Laos conditional independence, but under the terms of the Geneva accords in 1954, Pathet Lao forces were allowed to "regroup temporarily" in two northern provinces, which soon became communist strongholds. The regrouped forces probably numbered fewer than two thousand men, but the disarray of the Lao government, the collapse of French military power, and the Vietnamese insistence on the regroupment areas meant that the Lao communists benefited far more than their counterparts in southern Vietnam or Cambodia did.

For the remainder of the 1950s, the United States sought persistently but with little success to assemble and shore up regimes in Vientiane that would be capable of preventing a communist takeover of the country. Some of these regimes were more pro-American than others, but none captured more than fleeting loyalty from the predominantly rural population. None of the regimes had the time or inclination to concentrate on rural issues. The benefits and cash that flowed from U.S. economic and military aid—roughly U.S.\$300 million in 1972 alone, considerably more than the official GNP of Laos—never got very far from Vientiane. By the mid-1960s, corruption permeated official Lao society, while the Cold War itself, of consuming interest to American bureaucrats, seemed far away from the lives of most Lao men and women.

In 1960, perhaps with French connivance, a Lao army captain named Kong Le staged a neutralist coup d'état that attracted widespread popular support and made both the Americans and the Pathet Lao nervous about the possibility of their ever "winning" Laos. Communist offenses following the coup caught U.S.-financed Lao forces off guard. To salvage what it could, the United States agreed in 1961 to attend a second international conference at Geneva the following year, convened ostensibly to declare the neutralization of Laos but in fact to buy time for the patrons of the warring factions. Kong Le by this time had faded from the scene. Although neither the United States nor the Soviet Union was willing to go to war over Laos, U.S. policy after 1962, like that of the com-

munists, was to undermine the viability of any neutralist regime while seeking to place its own allies in power. Because of bad faith on both sides, the agreements reached at Geneva came apart, and by 1963 Laos was engulfed in the Second Indochina War, alongside neighboring Vietnam.

Increased Vietnamese support for the Pathet Lao and their use of Laos to funnel men and equipment into southern Vietnam (along the so-called Ho Chi Minh trail) led to a prolonged and ruinous U.S. bombing campaign. By 1970 an estimated seventy thousand Vietnamese troops were stationed or in transit through Laos. Nearly a million men, women, and children, particularly from the contested highland provinces and the largely anticommunist Hmong minority, flocked into refugee camps, while thousands of Hmong soldiers, funded by the CIA, continued to fight the communists even after their victory in 1975. (In the late 1970s and 1980s, many of these combatants and their families were to emigrate to the United States, following the example of their leader, General Vang Pao.) Morale throughout the country reached a low ebb. By the early 1970s Laos was only nominally a nation-state.

The U.S.-Vietnamese agreements of 1973 led to a cease-fire in Laos and the establishment of a coalition government in which Pathet Lao delegates had a veto over all decisions. The next two years were relatively free of full-scale fighting, as they were in Vietnam (though not in Cambodia). Neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma, Lao prime minister throughout most of the 1960s and 1970s, had struggled courageously since the early 1960s to preserve Lao independence, but in 1975 he was outmaneuvered and cast aside. The period also saw the gradual eclipse of the six-hundred-year-old Lao monarchies.

In the months following the communist victory in southern Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge victory in Cambodia, Lao communists in the coalition government increased pressure on their colleagues until the coalition collapsed, more or less peacefully, and the monarchy was abolished. Throughout 1975 tens of thousands of Hmong and middle-class Lao fled to Thailand. Scholars have drawn parallels between what happened at that point and events in Czechoslovakia in 1948; in both cases the communists came to power without violence but not without threatening to use it. In the Lao case, they received widespread support at first because of a reservoir of disillusionment, bitterness, and fatigue that affected all strata of society.

Further Readings

- Evans, Grant. *A Short History of Laos*. Crow's Nest, N.S.W., 2002.
- Ngaosrivathana, Mayoury, and Kennon Breazeale, eds. *Breaking New Ground in Lao History: Essays on the Seventh to Twentieth Centuries*. Chiang Mai, 2002.
- Stevenson, Charles A. *The End of Nowhere: American Policy toward Laos since 1954*. New York, 1972.
- Stuart-Fox, Martin. *A History of Laos*. Cambridge, 1997.

domestic market and allow Vietnam to compete for foreign investment funds on more equal terms with south China. Here Vietnam's discovery of its "South-east Asian" identity could serve as a new weapon in the very old struggle against Chinese domination.

For such reasons, Vietnamese propagandists, in 1995, celebrated the virtues of what they called "the great ASEAN family" as robustly as they had once celebrated those of the Soviet trading bloc. Entering ASEAN was a gamble. Vietnam's legal system was still underdeveloped, compared to its neighbors, and the country lacked a body of English-speaking business managers of the sort found in Bangkok or Manila. The Vietnamese revolution's whirlwind changes in its chosen geographic allegiances showed how modern doctrines of progress could reduce notions of space and region to contingent categories. But Vietnamese leaders had finally and apparently unconditionally embraced the promising postcolonial vision of "Southeast Asia," which had gone unrecognized for so many years right under their noses.

up to the
narrative

Further Readings

- Beresford, Melanie. *National Unification and Economic Development in Vietnam*. London, 1989.
- Bui Tin. *Following Ho Chi Minh: The Memoirs of a North Vietnamese Colonel*. Translated by Judy Stowe and Do Van. Honolulu, 1995.
- Chan, Anita, Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, and Jonathan Unger, eds. *Transforming Asian Socialism: China and Vietnam Compared*. Canberra, 1999.
- Fforde, Adam, and Stefan de Vylder. *From Plan to Market: The Economic Transition in Vietnam*. Boulder, 1996.
- Kleinen, John. *Facing the Future, Reviving the Past: Social Change in a Northern Vietnamese Village*. Singapore, 1999.
- Kolko, Gabriel. *Vietnam: Anatomy of a Peace*. London, 1997.
- Pelley, Patricia M. *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past*. Durham, N.C., 2002.
- Tai, Hue-Tam Ho, ed. *The Country of Memory: Rethinking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*. Berkeley, 2001.
- Templer, Robert. *Shadows and Wind: A View of Modern Vietnam*. New York, 1999.
- Werner, Jayne, and Danièle Bélanger, eds. *Gender, Household, State: Doi Moi in Vietnam*. Ithaca, 2001.

Chapter 35



Cambodia since 1975

CAMBODIA, which as late as the 1960s was still characterized by some observers as a “sleepy” country of “peaceful” people, had by the mid-1970s shown itself capable of as much radicalism and violence as any other society in the world. In Phnom Penh in early 1975 the ineptitude of the Lon Nol regime and the disintegrating military situation were exacerbated by the influx of perhaps two million refugees from rural areas who had poured into Phnom Penh and Battambang since 1972. By March 1975 most public services in both cities had broken down. Food was running low. Khmer Republican forces, despite massive infusions of U.S. aid, were unable to loosen the grip of Khmer Rouge units encircling the towns. On 17 April, soon after Lon Nol and the staff of the U.S. embassy had flown out to safety, the communists seized control of Phnom Penh. Battambang fell a day later.

Democratic Kampuchea

THE APPEARANCE of the victorious troops was disturbing to urban dwellers, who welcomed an end to the fighting. The newcomers were silent, unfriendly, and dressed in peasant black. They were also heavily armed and in many cases very young. Within twenty-four hours in Phnom Penh and a week in Battambang, the Khmer Rouge ordered all the inhabitants of these cities—close to three million people in all—to walk away from their homes and take up

agricultural work in accordance with a doctrine, derived from Maoist China, that poor peasants and unskilled manual workers were the only worthwhile members of society. Swift and total ruralization fit closely with the utopian ideas that Saloth Sar and his colleagues had developed in their years in hiding and at war. For the time being, perhaps because he feared a renewal of the fighting, Sar kept the existence of the Communist Party and his own role secret from outsiders.

Thousands of Cambodians died in the exodus and thousands of others, particularly former soldiers, were executed at this time en masse. As millions of people criss-crossed the country, they soon discovered that money, markets, private property, schools, and organized religion had ceased to exist. They were told that a faceless "higher organization" (*angkar loeu*), probably a pseudonym for the Communist Party's central committee, was in command of Cambodian life. Children old enough to work were often separated from their parents for weeks or months at a time. Supposedly peasant-based reforms in linguistics, clothing, female hair styles, adornment, and courtship, to name a few, also came into effect in 1975, and in early 1976 a party spokesman proudly declared that "two thousand years" of Cambodian history had ended. By "history" he probably meant the lopsided, exploitative relationships that had characterized Cambodian society for millennia. Official broadcasts promised a society in which there would be "no exploiters and no exploited," but these relations persisted, with new victims and beneficiaries, in the top-down style favored by the regime.

Amid all this turmoil the leaders of the revolution were happy to remain concealed. As "new people" (evacuees) were absorbed, often painfully, into populations of "base people" loyal to the regime and as the nation took up unpaid agricultural work, Saloth Sar and his colleagues took up residence stealthily, under heavy guard, in the abandoned capital.

Cambodia's third constitution was promulgated in early 1976, naming the country Democratic Kampuchea (DK). DK's flag, like all others in independent Cambodia, bore a stylized image of Angkor Wat. Soon afterward, following elections for a rubber-stamp National Assembly—undoubtedly carried out for overseas consumption—an unknown figure named Pol Pot was "chosen" as DK's prime minister; only a year later would he be identified by outsiders as Saloth Sar. Prince Sihanouk, hitherto the nominal chief of state, was pushed aside into nearly three years of house arrest. Democratic Kampuchea had some of the trappings of a socialist state and received warm recognition from many communist countries, but the local Communist Party kept its existence a secret until October 1977 and also concealed its fruitful alliances with China and North Korea. The party's leaders relished working in secret, and by not calling themselves communist, they were able to pretend, in public, that the revolution had no precedents in history and was a purely Cambodian affair.

The party's four-year plan, scheduled to begin in September 1976, was shelved, but the 110-page text provides interesting insights into the utopian thinking of the regime. The document called for a "super great leap forward," a phrase borrowed from China, and promised that within the lifetime of the plan, DK, by mastering the laws of history, would leapfrog several phases of social evolution and arrive at the supposed pinnacle of socialism. The goal could be achieved, the plan suggested, by increasing agricultural production to the point where export earnings from crops, especially rice, could pay for imports of farm machinery and for a long-term program of industrialization. The plan called for yields and exportable surpluses more than twice as high as any in prerevolutionary times. The text ignored the facts that Cambodia was emerging from a devastating war, that the expansion would have to rely on an inexperienced, poorly motivated work force (for the brunt of rice cultivation fell on "new people" evacuated from the towns), and that the country faced severe shortages of livestock, seed, herbicides, and tools. To override these difficulties, which it failed to mention, the plan called on the liberating energies of the people's collective, revolutionary will.

Farmers were enjoined throughout the DK era to harvest "three tons [of rice] per hectare," another slogan borrowed without attribution from China. The goal was nearly three times higher than average yields in earlier times and proved impossible to attain, except in a few districts that had good soil, a well-fed labor force, and sufficient water. In order to provide water on a national basis for year-round rice cultivation, huge reservoirs and dams were constructed throughout the country without heavy machinery or engineering expertise. People worked on them and on cultivating rice for as much as fourteen hours a day, twenty-seven days a month. Years later, asked about the DK era, the first thing that many Cambodians recalled, besides inadequate food, was having been made to "dig earth and raise embankments." Between 1975 and 1979 tens of thousands of men and women, especially former urban dwellers, died of undernourishment and exhaustion. Few people except soldiers and party cadres ever got enough to eat. The high quotas for rice production could rarely if ever be met, and serious malnutrition occurred in much of DK, where cadres cut people's rations, but seldom their own, to obtain the "surpluses" demanded by the state. Cambodia also spurned Western medical practices (except for high-ranking cadres), with the result that tens of thousands of people also died from untended or misdiagnosed diseases.

At least two hundred thousand others, and probably more, were executed by DK as enemies of the state. At first victims were drawn from the ranks of Lon Nol's army and from the so-called exploiting classes of prerevolutionary Cambodia. By mid-1976, however, the party leaders began to suspect that plots were being hatched against them in the army and in the eastern part of the country,

with Vietnamese connivance. Pol Pot and his colleagues began to purge suspected military units and party members on a massive scale. To receive many of the suspects, a secret interrogation facility known by its code name S-21 was established in May 1976 on the grounds of a former high school in Phnom Penh. By January 1979, when a Vietnamese invasion drove the Khmer Rouge from power, over fourteen thousand men, women, and children, including many high-ranking party cadres, had passed through S-21. Almost all of them were interrogated and tortured. All but half a dozen were put to death. Some four thousand of their so-called confessions, along with masses of documentation from the prison, have survived. In the confessions some prisoners admitted to working simultaneously for the CIA, the Vietnamese communists, and the Soviet secret service. Others confessed to hiding Vietnamese in tunnels dug inside Phnom Penh, though no such tunnels were ever found. High-ranking cadres confessed to having betrayed the party from the day they had joined it. Elsewhere in the country, tens of thousands of men and women were held in "education halls," or prisons, where conditions were harsh and most died of mistreatment or execution.

Pol Pot and his colleagues believed that enemies surrounded them. What mattered most to them was that all of these people, whether they were innocent or guilty, admitted their guilt before being put to death. The number of people targeted and the obvious horrors of the regime meant that at least some of those locked into S-21 and other prisons had indeed plotted against DK. However, most of the charges were spurious. Thousands of people were put to death because they were named by other people, rather than because they had done anything themselves. The purges tore apart the administration and placed new burdens on an exhausted, sick, and terrified population.

The exact number of regime-related deaths in the DK era will never be known, but informed estimates suggest that nearly two million people, or a quarter of the population, died in less than four years from malnutrition, overwork, untreated diseases, or execution. Since most of the victims were ethnic Khmer, the French writer Jean Lacouture coined the term "autogenocide" to describe what had taken place. There is no evidence that Pol Pot and his colleagues set out to preside over so many deaths, but when the regime collapsed, none of them expressed sustained regret, and all of them were quick to blame traitors and Vietnamese for everything that had gone wrong. DK delivered few benefits to its supporters, many of whom were purged. Its dogmatic and heartless policies bore little relation to Cambodian reality; they made no sense to most Khmer. The traumas that survivors suffered later on and the long-term effects of so much violence, distrust, and fantasy on the population as a whole are impossible to calculate.

Cambodian communists had been hostile toward Vietnam since 1973, when Vietnamese troops withdrew from Cambodia, under the terms of a cease-fire arranged with the United States, leaving the Khmer Rouge forces on their own.

After 1975, DK had sought the patronage of Maoist China, already at odds with Vietnam, because Vietnam was allied with the USSR. The Chinese provided military equipment to DK for defensive purposes, but Pol Pot and his colleagues assumed that China would support them if they made war against Vietnam. This miscalculation led them onto an intrinsically suicidal policy of extended confrontation.

Until the end of 1976, relations with Vietnam were chilly but correct. Skirmishes along the land and sea frontiers soon broke out, however, provoking brutal incursions by Khmer units into Vietnam. By mid-1977 Vietnam had become Cambodia's "enemy number one." Following Pol Pot's state visit to China in October of that year, Vietnamese forces invaded eastern Cambodia. They remained there for several months before withdrawing in an orderly fashion. The campaign led Pol Pot to declare victory in public and then secretly purge thousands of cadres, soldiers, and military leaders from the affected region. In 1978, as these purges intensified, several hundred Khmer, to save their lives, sought asylum in Vietnam, where the Vietnamese quickly formed them into a government in exile. Throughout 1978 DK's leaders tried desperately to open up their country to outside recognition while continuing both their war with Vietnam and the purges that swept through the party.

On Christmas Eve 1978 Vietnam, using more than one hundred thousand troops, launched a massive invasion of Cambodia. To the outside world, they claimed that the fighting was being carried out by a Cambodian liberation front. Despite fierce resistance by DK troops, the country cracked open like an egg. Phnom Penh was occupied on 7 January 1979—Pol Pot had fled the day before to Thailand on a helicopter—and the DK regime disappeared almost overnight. In its place the Vietnamese swiftly installed a sympathetic cabinet composed of Khmer Rouge defectors, like Cambodia's future prime minister, Hun Sen, then only twenty-seven years old, and Cambodian communists who had been living in Vietnam for many years. Soon afterward, Vietnam's prime minister, Pham Van Dong, flew into Phnom Penh and signed a treaty of friendship with the newly installed regime, which called itself the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). Its new flag bore an altered image of Angkor Wat.

Recovery and Repression

THE LEADERS of the PRK and their Vietnamese advisers moved quickly to restore institutions destroyed or abandoned under the Khmer Rouge, including cities, money, schools, markets, and freedom of movement. Political controls remained severe, however, and it soon became clear that some form of top-down socialism would be imposed on the bone-tired population. Many Cambodians came to believe that Vietnam's supposedly temporary occupation fit into a long-term strategic plan to join the components of Indochina into a Vietnam-dominated federation.

Famine conditions and uncertainty about Vietnamese intentions pushed hundreds of thousands of Cambodians into Thailand, where refugee camps opened up in 1979 and 1980. Tens of thousands more wandered around the country, looking for work or relatives and trying to reoccupy their former homes and plots of land. In the ensuing chaos, few crops were planted, and tens of thousands of people starved. By 1981 over three hundred thousand refugees, passing through the Thai camps, had found new homes in France, Australia, the United States, and elsewhere. A similar number remained in the camps, often for longer than ten years, fed and housed under the auspices of the United Nations. Many were unwilling to go home. The PRK, in any case, considered the refugees unreliable and did not welcome any of them back.

In the meantime, remnants of the Khmer Rouge army that had stumbled across the border were welcomed, fed, and refitted by Thai military authorities fearing a Vietnamese invasion. Pol Pot also received continuing support from China and indirectly from the United States, which was eager to punish Vietnam both for its invasion of Cambodia and for defeating the United States. With such powerful allies, DK forces were able to pursue their fight against the Phnom Penh government, and throughout the 1980s DK held onto Cambodia's seat at the United Nations, the only government in exile able to do so.

As news about the DK era reached the outside world via refugees and the PRK, the United States and its allies sought to save face by backing the formation of a "coalition" government on the Thai border. The coalition consisted of the Khmer Rouge and factions made up of refugees who were loyal to Prince Sihanouk (who in 1979 had returned to live in Beijing) and others loyal to a former prime minister, Son Sann, who had at one time sided with the Khmer Republic. The factions represented successive phases in Cambodian political history. Each of them hated the other two, and all three, united in their hatred for Vietnam, were despised by the PRK.

Throughout the 1980s fighting continued between the Khmer Rouge forces and their relatively inactive allies, on the one hand, and the Vietnamese army and their Cambodian protégés on the other. In the course of the war, Vietnam lost over twenty thousand men, and casualties on the Khmer Rouge side were also high. In the 1980s and early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of anti-personnel mines were planted along the Thai-Cambodian border and around army units, which then moved on without leaving maps of the minefields. For over a decade, thousands of Cambodian civilians have been maimed or killed as they stepped on mines while going about their daily lives,

The international stalemate in Cambodia began to alter in the late 1980s, following the loosening of Soviet power in the communist bloc. One effect of the process was to deprive Vietnam and Cambodia of substantial Soviet aid. Vietnam could no longer sustain its army in Cambodia. The last units were withdrawn in September 1989. Shortly before their departure the PRK introduced a series of popular reforms. These included legalizing private property, altering

the flag, changing the country's name to the State of Cambodia (SOC), and amending the constitution to restore Buddhism as Cambodia's state religion. The death penalty was also abolished.

Although the regime now claimed to be a "liberal democracy," its unelected leaders, under Prime Minister Hun Sen, remained in place; there were few laws on the books; party members were favored above other citizens; and opposition parties were banned. Economically, Cambodia opened up in the early 1990s to foreign exploitation. Hundreds of thousands of tons of timber and millions of dollars worth of gemstones were exported, without any controls, to Thailand and Vietnam. The exports enriched entrepreneurs and officials on both sides of each border as well as Khmer Rouge forces, who had seeped into the gem fields of northwestern Cambodia after the Vietnamese withdrawal. The benefits to the population as a whole were nil.

In Phnom Penh lifting restrictions on real estate led to a boom in speculation and construction. A more permissive atmosphere now allowed government officials to pocket large sums of money from informally levied charges for service, verdicts, contracts, or favors. The safety net provided by Vietnamese-style socialism was abandoned. The boom produced a "black economy" in much of the country. Rampant official corruption, which had been absent from the country since 1975, reemerged.

Because of the ongoing fighting, military expenditures had dominated the PRK budget, and no national tax system was in place to provide revenue for basic services. There was also little incentive to punish corruption by high officials. This woeful situation continued into the twenty-first century, when the gap between Cambodia's small elite and the masses of rural poor became much wider than it had been in the 1960s.

Outside Phnom Penh the population was generally poorer, less healthy, and worse served than at any time since the 1920s. The rate of infant mortality was one of the highest in the world; so was the birthrate. Malaria and other fevers were endemic in some parts of the country, as was malnutrition. By the late 1990s the incidence of HIV-AIDS in Cambodia was the highest in Southeast Asia. The frequency of mental illness, traceable to the traumas of the 1970s and the absence of medication, was also high. Schools and hospitals were poorly equipped, poorly financed, and poorly staffed. The judicial system was poorly trained and its employees so poorly paid that most judges were susceptible to bribes.

Compromises

AFTER A DECADE of confronting economic, military, and political problems, the leaders of the SOC had failed to solve most of them. To some extent, the ruling party and its Vietnamese mentors were to blame, but many of Cambodia's problems in this period were imposed from outside the country. Perhaps this has always been the case. By 1990, as the Cold War drew to a close, it became clear

that without drastic changes in the foreign support that the SOC and the government in exile were receiving, Cambodia's problems would remain unsolved. After a series of complex diplomatic moves by the United States and other interested parties, many hoped for the massive intervention of the United Nations, which would preside over a caretaker regime pending national elections.

An international conference convened in Paris in October 1991 to formalize these arrangements. Under the terms of the agreement, a temporary government was established in Phnom Penh made up of representatives of the incumbent SOC and the three components of the government in exile. The factions formed a Supreme National Council (SNC) under Prince Sihanouk, who returned home briefly in November 1991 after twelve years in exile. The SNC's decisions were monitored by U.N. officials on the spot.

In effect the agreements withdrew the patronage of larger powers from the contending Cambodian factions before reinserting the factions (in theory) into a nonaligned Cambodia, where they would be free to compete for political advantage. Vietnam, to be sure, had all but ended its patronage of the SOC. In Paris the United States and its allies formally ended their support for the so-called noncommunist resistance, while China withdrew its patronage of the Khmer Rouge. Pol Pot's faction reentered Cambodian politics not as a component of a government in exile, but as an indigenous, fearful, and discredited faction. Many observers inside the country and overseas were dismayed by what they saw as granting legitimacy to a group considered to be guilty of genocide or crimes against humanity. However, the change in status for the Khmer Rouge as well as their squalid history ultimately proved fatal to the movement, which was unable to function in the open.

The arrangements made in Paris called for the four factions to disarm and to assemble in collection points known as cantons. They also envisaged the repatriation of some three hundred thousand Khmer in refugee camps in Thailand and national elections for a constituent assembly that would be charged with drafting a new constitution. While all this was taking place, the day-to-day functions of government were to be monitored by the United Nations. To achieve these goals, the United Nations established a short-term, multinational protectorate over Cambodia known as the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, or UNTAC.

UNTAC arrived too late and moved too cautiously to gain the respect it needed from the Cambodian factions. In May 1992 the DK faction expanded the territory under its control and refused to disarm, asserting that the Hun Sen regime and its armed forces were still controlled, from hiding, by the Vietnamese. The DK faction also refused to be monitored by UNTAC. For these actions, they were neither punished nor chastised. The SOC also refused to disarm or to allow UNTAC officials to oversee the daily operations of most of its ministries or the national police, as envisaged by the Paris agreements.

UNTAC embarked on its unprecedented, utopian, and multifaceted mission sluggishly and with foreboding. Its mandate was ambiguous, its time was limited, and most UNTAC personnel knew nothing about Cambodia. All were conscious that the civil war might resume at any time. By the time the mission ended in October 1993, it had cost over U.S.\$2 billion, making it the most costly operation to date in U.N. history. Much of the money went into inflated U.N. salaries. The extravagance and insensitivity of many UNTAC personnel were widely criticized. Phnom Penh became more crowded and more prosperous in these years, but the rural economy stagnated, the country's infrastructure remained abysmal, and security was marred by over two hundred politically motivated killings. Khmer Rouge forces, claiming that Vietnam remained secretly in control of Cambodia, massacred more than a hundred Vietnamese civilians in 1992–1993. The SOC's police, for its part, targeted activists from other political groups. None of the offenders was arrested or brought to trial.

More positively, the Cambodian media in 1992–1993 enjoyed unaccustomed freedom that outlasted the UNTAC era. Local human rights organizations, unthinkable in any previous regime, also flourished and remained a powerful force in Cambodia in the early twenty-first century. Other positive developments included the peaceful repatriation of over three hundred thousand refugees from Thailand and the national elections themselves, which took place in July 1993, following a massive voter registration campaign conducted by UNTAC staff. Although the DK faction refused to take part, the elections were freer and fairer than any in Cambodia's history. At least four million men and women—over 90 percent of registered voters—went peacefully to the polls. The message they delivered was ambiguous. A royalist party, under the French acronym FUNCINPEC, won seven more seats for the constituent assembly than did the government's Cambodian People's Party (CPP). An anticommunist, anti-Vietnamese party won ten of the remaining eleven seats. For the first time in their history, a majority of Cambodians had voted against an armed, incumbent regime. They had courageously rejected the status quo. What they were voting for, besides peace (which remained elusive), was less clear.

The SOC refused to accept the election results and by the end of the year had imposed a fragile compromise on FUNCINPEC whereby Cambodia would have two prime ministers: Prince Norodom Rannaridh, FUNCINPEC's leader, and the CPP's Hun Sen, who had held office since 1984. Over the next few years, thanks to Rannaridh's indecisiveness and several shrewd moves by Hun Sen, the royalist party was marginalized and lost its voice in decision making. The 1993 constitution restored the monarchy and placed Sihanouk on the throne he had abandoned in 1955. Becoming a king again pleased the seventy-one-year-old monarch, but without access to funding or weapons, he was unable to influence events. Throughout the 1990s, pleading poor health, he spent long periods of each year outside the country.

The losers in 1993, aside from those who had voted against the government, were the Khmer Rouge. The movement was outlawed in 1994, and thousands of its followers soon defected to the government. Efforts to dislodge the remaining military units were unsuccessful, but as Thai government support for the Khmer Rouge faded and defection from the movement increased, the Khmer Rouge leadership split between those looking for a modus vivendi with Phnom Penh and those wanting to rekindle the revolutionary conflict. In August 1996 Ieng Sary, DK's former foreign minister, defected to Phnom Penh. He received a royal pardon and was allowed to establish a base, with several thousand followers, in the relatively prosperous enclave of Pailin in Cambodia's northwest. Over the next few months, the remnants of the Khmer Rouge came apart. Pol Pot, in ill health, was sidelined by a brutal military commander named Ta Mok, and in June 1997 he was put on trial by the new ruling faction of the Khmer Rouge for trying to restart the civil war. Subjected to the same kind of winners' justice that had sent hundreds of thousands of Cambodians to their deaths in DK, Pol Pot was condemned to life imprisonment in his two-room house. Ten months later he died in bed, an apparent suicide.

In Phnom Penh the coalition was under strain. FUNCINPEC efforts to recruit Khmer Rouge defectors to protect the party's leaders angered Hun Sen, who had recruited thousands of them into the national army. In July 1997 he launched a preemptive coup against his partners. In the surprise attack, over a hundred FUNCINPEC officials and security personnel were killed. CPP casualties were minimal. Widespread looting accompanied the coup. Several donor nations, appalled by these events, suspended aid, and Cambodia's entry into ASEAN was postponed. After he had consolidated power in his own way, Hun Sen found himself and Cambodia treated as pariahs. Donor nations and U.N. officials urged him to sponsor honest elections in 1998, as scheduled, for the National Assembly.

Despite some violence against opposition party workers before the elections, the elections themselves were relatively free and fair. Parties opposed to the CPP gained 60 percent of the vote but were unwilling to form an alliance, so a neutralized FUNCINPEC and the CPP agreed to form another coalition, with Hun Sen as the sole prime minister. By the end of 1998, Cambodia was at peace for the first time since 1970. For the first time in decades, the government was not the subject of foreign concern nor dependent on a single foreign patron. Instead, generous aid poured into Cambodia from over twenty countries, and the kingdom, via its membership in ASEAN, was participating as fully as it could in the affairs of Southeast Asia.

The 1998 elections revealed the sophistication and enthusiasm of the voting public. As Cambodia's bloated, underpaid army slowly demobilized and as opposition pressures against the CPP became less worrisome to Hun Sen, there were encouraging signs that the government might begin to direct some of its

attention and more of its revenues to the social sector neglected for so long. Whether the endemic corruption among high officials could be curbed remained doubtful, given that Hun Sen seemed to feel that the continuing support coming from these figures and their followers was more important than their unethical behavior. In the 1990s Hun Sen, for his part, abjured his socialist past, was proud of his modernity, and was eager to learn more. He relished the title "strongman" and spent much of his time, as Sihanouk had done, outmaneuvering and neutralizing opposition, occasionally resorting to force.

In January 2003 anti-Thai riots broke out in Phnom Penh, sparked by a line of dialogue in a Thai TV drama suggesting that Angkor Wat should revert to Thai control. As police and foremen stood by, mobs burned down the Thai embassy and a Thai-owned hotel before being brought under control. The riots revealed the deep resentment felt by many Khmer toward Thai domination of Cambodia's economy and also drew on convenient readings or misreadings of the Cambodian past. In the wake of the riots, there were perhaps as many grounds for optimism of a cautious kind about Cambodia as there were for pessimism. The grounds for pessimism, unfortunately, seemed more persuasive, given that Cambodia has so many people, so few resources, and such a self-confident, self-serving ruling party. The prospects for responsive, transparent governance, given the low priority placed on the concept by those in power, were still dim. In facing the future, however, Cambodia no longer suffered from its perennial concerns, including interference by its neighbors, the patronizing disdain of international backers, and its partly self-imposed isolation from the outside world.

Further Readings

- Becker, Elizabeth. *When the War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution*. Rev. ed. New York, 1998.
- Brown, Frederick Z., and David Timberman, eds. *Cambodia and the International Community: The Quest for Peace, Development, and Democracy*. Singapore, 1998.
- Chandler, David. *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*. 2d ed. Boulder, 1999.
- . *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison*. Berkeley, 1999.
- Chandler, David, Ben Kiernan, and Chanthou Boua, trans. and eds. *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977*. New Haven, 1988.
- Gottesman, Evan. *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building*. New Haven, 2002.
- Hinton, Alexander Laban. *Why Did They Kill? Cambodia under the Shadow of the Khmer Rouge*. Berkeley, 2004.
- Jackson, Karl D., ed. *Cambodia, 1975-1978*. Princeton, 1989.
- Ponchaud, Francois. *Cambodia Year Zero. 1977* (in French); trans. Nancy Amphoux. New York, 1978.
- Vickery, Michael. *Cambodia, 1975-1982*. Boston, 1984; reprint Chiang Mai, 1999.

Chapter 36



Laos since 1975

FOR NEARLY thirty years the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) has been governed by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), an offshoot of the Indochina Communist Party founded by the Vietnamese during the First Indochina War. The party came into the open after the communist victory in 1975, abandoning the pretense of their previous "united front," the Pathet Lao. It was deeply unpopular among most educated Lao and among the Hmong minority, and numbered only twenty-five thousand members in 1982, but it displayed extraordinary survival skills, rarely resorting to high levels of popular repression.

Vietnamese Patronage

THE LPRP was less harsh and inflexible than its counterparts in Vietnam or Cambodia. Indeed, what Grant Evans has called Laos' "peripheral socialism," which hints at this flexibility, was one reason for the party's remaining in power for so long. Another was the exhaustion that the Lao people felt at the end of the Second Indochina War and the failure of any group opposed to the LPRP to make headway against the Lao police or among the population. A more decisive reason, however, was the party's long-standing and fruitful reliance on Vietnamese assistance and advice. This relationship, which had deep roots, contrasted

sharply with the antagonism between the Cambodian and Vietnamese communist parties before 1979. The leaders of the LPRP all enjoyed close ties with Vietnam, and several, including Prince Souphanouvong and the party secretary, Kaison Phomvihane, who became prime minister after 1975, were married to Vietnamese. A twenty-five-year treaty of friendship was signed with Vietnam in July 1977 (when Cambodia and Vietnam were at war with each other) and subsequently augmented by dozens of bilateral agreements, which bound Laos more closely to Vietnam than it had ever been bound to Siam in the precolonial era or to the other components of French Indochina. Throughout the period, Vietnam also guaranteed Lao security (thus protecting itself from capitalist Thailand) by stationing some forty-thousand troops in Laos.

The LPRP's leaders construed this subordinate relationship as crucial to their survival as a ruling party and also to the survival of Laos as an independent state. They welcomed Vietnamese guidance on education, fiscal policies, and agricultural collectivization—which soon failed. They also followed Hanoi's initiatives in foreign policy. These included Vietnam's estrangement from China in the late 1970s (as well as its rapprochement with China later on) and the arrangements put in place by Vietnam after 1979 that sought to bind the constituent parts of Indochina even more closely to each other. Ironically, by 1979 Vietnam, despite its anti-imperialist rhetoric, had effectively replaced France in its eagerness to "protect" Cambodia and Laos not only from outsiders, but also from their own worst instincts, exemplified for Hanoi by the excesses of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. There are many resemblances, in fact, between Vietnam's policies toward its neighbors and France's lofty notion of its own "civilizing mission."

From 1975 to the early 1990s, Laos continued to be a theater of the gradually deescalating Cold War. In this context continuing Vietnamese patronage was seen by the Vietnamese and probably by many Lao as well as a high but perhaps acceptable price to pay to retain Laos' independence vis-à-vis its other hereditary protector, Thailand. Vietnamese assistance to Laos was supplemented by generous infusions of funds and technical assistance from the Soviet bloc. Because the LPDR retained Laos' seat at the United Nations continuously after 1975, Laos also received assistance from the United Nations and other donors who were prevented from assisting Cambodia in the 1980s by its effective exclusion from that organization.

The Lao communists had come to power via a bloodless coup; after the late 1970s they were never seriously challenged. Nonetheless, the first years of communist control were grim for many noncommunist Lao, as well as frustrating for the communists, who assumed that prosperity would follow from their coming to power. In the late 1970s thousands of former government workers, members of the elite, and Lao army veterans fled the country to avoid the "reeducation" camps, which were scarcely distinguishable from prisons. The

Hmong minority, most of whom had taken up arms against the communists all through the 1960s and 1970s, was especially targeted for punishment, and tens of thousands of them fled the country. So did many Sino-Lao shopkeepers and entrepreneurs in Vientiane as well as noncommunist Vietnamese whose families had lived in Laos for generations.

These were losses in skilled labor that the new government could ill afford. The LPRP in these years set in motion some poorly thought out, utopian programs, spearheaded by agricultural collectivization, from its new headquarters in what had been until 1975 a capacious U.S. embassy housing compound. Many socialist policies were adopted without considering their applicability in the Lao context or their cost. Nonsocialist conduct and "decadent" Western culture were condemned, and the activities of the Buddhist sangha were sharply curtailed; ordinary Lao were expected to assume new, revolutionary personalities. A five-year plan, launched in 1981, set unachievable targets, relied heavily on foreign capital, and achieved few of its goals.

At the LPRP's third congress in 1982, the party's leader, Prime Minister Kaison, blamed the nation's shortcomings on "subjectivism and oversimplification." A more pressing problem, mentioned obliquely at the time, was the resurgence of corruption and patronage networks at all levels of the regime. Problems that Kaison failed to mention included the dead hand of single-party rule and the suppression of dissent. Despite the LPRP's dogmatism, however, it was surprisingly flexible when compared to its counterpart in neighboring Democratic Kampuchea. The agricultural cooperatives established in 1978, for example, were unsuccessful and widely resented but were drastically modified after less than a year in operation. By the mid-1980s, it was estimated that 90 percent of Lao farmers worked their own land.

In 1985 the LPRP celebrated its first ten years in power. Its leaders were justifiably proud to have maintained Lao independence and something resembling socialism in the face of continuing pressures from Bangkok and the West. At the anniversary celebrations, Kaison and his colleagues predictably praised Indochinese solidarity, the empowerment of the people, and the country's economic advances. For the first time in its recent history, Laos was self-sufficient in rice and some other commodities, though its rice yields were still among the lowest in the world. Behind the façade, Laos was desperately poor, deeply dependent on foreign aid, and unable to finance even the most basic social services on its own. Educational statistics were particularly disheartening: in the mid-1980s, 80 percent of Lao primary students in 1985 failed to complete the fifth grade, and national literacy hovered around 50 percent. Outside the capital and a few larger towns, health services were almost nonexistent. Most statistics classified Laos as one of the ten poorest countries in the world. These conditions continued to apply in the early 2000s, despite a range of reforms. The price

for Lao independence and the costs inflicted on the people by one-party rule were high.

Global Connections

BY THE late 1980s, as the Cold War drew to a close, the top-down economic guidance by the LPRP gradually relaxed, and more pragmatic policies were put in place. Kaison was the moving force behind these changes, battling more conservative factions in the party. Market forces were tentatively allowed to reemerge, and relations with Thailand and other ASEAN states improved. During these years the withdrawal of Soviet bloc aid, Vietnam's decision to put less emphasis on Indochina, and a perceived need on the part of the aging Lao leadership for the country to join a wider, more integrated world led to a flurry of liberalizing activity that would have been impossible to predict a decade before. Vietnamese troops withdrew in 1989. In rapid succession elections, a new constitution, and legal reforms laid some of the foundations for a modern state. Kaison died in 1992, and leadership was passed, successively, to other elderly members of the party. The 1992 constitution made no mention of socialism, but the LPRP kept its name and remained firmly in power. In elections for the National Assembly in 2002, all the candidates but one were party members. Newly negotiated bilateral agreements with countries like Japan and Australia as well as less formal openings to China and Thailand signaled a new flexibility in Lao foreign relations. Laos became a member of ASEAN in 1997.

In April 1994 the first bridge across the Mekong, connecting Laos to Thailand, was inaugurated. The bridge symbolically opened a new era in Lao history, as globalization and the market forces that came with it replaced Cold War animosities in the politics of the region. The LPRP sought to slow the pace of change, and in this respect differed from the formerly communist Cambodian People's Party to the south, but its leaders were only partly successful. Tourism boomed, and Thai popular culture spread rapidly in urban areas. The depletion of Lao forest resources continued at an alarming rate. In the 1980s, policy-makers in Beijing and entrepreneurs in southern China came to perceive Laos as one of several gateways for Chinese trade goods, and perhaps settlers as well, to enter Southeast Asia. Chinese aid financed the construction of a network of highways in northern Laos, linking southern China with the region. The long-term consequences of these linkages are difficult to predict, although it is clear that Laos has no real bargaining power in its evolving relations with China.

None of these connections could have been foreseen in 1975, when Laos was deeply entangled in the Cold War and the rivalry between Thailand and Vietnam, with Laos as the bone of contention, resembled the rivalry between these countries in precolonial times. The end of the Cold War had far-reaching,

unpredictable effects on the way Laos related to the outside world. Globalization in Southeast Asia tended to defuse antagonisms—often funded from abroad—that had characterized relations between nation-states and, ironically, had played a major role in the French creation of “Laos” at the end of the nineteenth century.

With its political independence no longer under threat, Laos found itself for the first time in its history as a small but permanent entity within an increasingly integrated region. Although the LPRP remained in power, traditional politics was losing command. To oversimplify the issue, Laos had exchanged the contentious patronage of Vietnam and Thailand for the corporate protection of ASEAN and the benefits, such as they were, of globalization. Whether ASEAN or any other body could keep Laos, in the longer term, from becoming an informal annex of southern China or a disempowered extension of Thailand remained to be seen. The resilience and creativity of the Lao people and the political skills of some Lao leaders provided limited grounds for optimism, but available statistics and precedents from elsewhere suggested, as they had for many years, a crowded, gloomy, and impoverished future.

Further Readings

- Brown, MacAlister, and Joseph J. Zasloff. *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930–1985*. Stanford, 1986.
- Evans, Grant. *Lao Peasants under Socialism and Post-Socialism*. Chiang Mai, 1995.
- . *A Short History of Laos: The Land In Between*. Chiang Mai, 2002.
- Evans, Grant, and Kelvin Rowley. *Red Brotherhood at War: Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos since 1975*. 2d ed. London, 1990.

Chapter 37



Burma Becomes Myanmar

THE MILITARY COUP of March 1962 that ended the civilian government of U Nu took place during an era of strident nationalism and fears of neocolonialism in much of Asia and Africa. Far from immune to this atmosphere, Burma was driven in on itself; most of the international linkages that had brought it into the global economy during the previous hundred years were cut off. The army began by dismantling the political structures that had arisen in the first fourteen years of independence and replacing them with others that the Revolutionary Council, as the coup group named themselves, could supervise. The two chambers of the legislature were dissolved, the president was removed, the separate state governments were abolished, and the courts were centralized under a new supreme court. More gradually, many of the administrative arrangements first introduced in the colonial period were also removed or modified along lines advocated by radical nationalists in the 1930s. The chairman of the Revolutionary Council, General Ne Win, was given full executive, legislative, and judicial powers. At the state or divisional and local level, control of the implementation of government policies was unified under Security and Administration Committees, usually led by a military commander, which supervised the activities of the civil bureaucracy and political life as well.

The Burmese Road to Socialism

INITIALLY the Revolutionary Council attempted to form a national unity party with the leaders of the political parties that had been active in the 1950s. How-