

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

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A Khmer Rouge Novel/Performing Arts  
**THE RED HEART OF DAM PHENG**  
By A [possible] Khmer Rouge Senior Leader

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Khmer Rouge soldiers who defected from Democratic Kampuchea to join the resistance at a military base near the Vietnam-Cambodia border, 1978. Source: Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives/Hanoi, Vietnamese Archives.

**PREFATORY REMARKS:**

*Who is Dam Pheng? He is a Khmer Rouge fantasy. And his fictional story, published in a 1973 edition of the Khmer Rouge magazine "Revolutionary Youth," resonates with what some of the former senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge have been saying during Case 002 at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia*

*(ECCC). In particular, these leaders have suggested that they were driven by patriotism -- even as they have pleaded they had little power and were just following orders.*

*Written just two years before the Khmer Rouge rose to power, Dam Pheng provides an example of what the leadership viewed as the ideal Cambodian youth. Dam Pheng has "pure" origins, coming from a poor peasant family that had been exploited even as he is exploited by the "capitalist" and "feudalist" state. Then he meets Angkar and "wakes up."*

*Under the revolutionary organization's political tutelage, Dam Pheng attains "clear vision" about reasons for the oppression of his family and the "imperialist" threat posed by the United States. He takes up the revolutionary struggle and becomes a "role model," embodying the key revolutionary characteristics of gentleness (toward friends and the masses), patriotism, sacrifice, malice (toward the enemy), and, critically, an "absolute stance of struggle."*

*Dam Pheng cannot be swayed from his revolutionary duty, even when his own security is threatened. Indeed, such threats only strengthen his resolve to "build" himself and hone his revolutionary consciousness.*

*This process of self-construction is critical to the ultimate challenge he confronts after his arrest by the "traitorous" Lon Nol state. Despite being severely tortured, Dam Pheng refuses to confess. His last defiant act, performed the night before he dies, is to use his own blood to write a poem in homage of the "Red Heart."*

*As Case 002 unfolds, Dam Pheng stands as a reminder of how the Khmer Rouge leadership viewed their struggle and what they expected of their followers. Even in 1973, Dam Phang had clear undertones of the fervor that would help catalyze not just revolution, but mass murder against a multitude of perceived "enemies." At a time when former Khmer Rouge claim they were "just following orders," Dam Pheng invites us to consider an alternative explanation and a different ending written in the blood of the DK regime's victims.*

### **THE RED HEART OF DAM PHENG:**

Dam Pheng was born to a poor peasant family in Ba Phnom district, Prey Veng province. Like other poor peasants across Cambodia, his parents were suppressed materially and mentally by the French colonials in regard to their political rights and freedom, and were also exploited everyday by local feudalists and capitalists. For that reason Dam Pheng's family and the families of other peasants were constantly suffering and did not have enough food to eat.

Since the day he opened his eyes, Dam Pheng lived in extreme poverty. Due to this extremely difficult life without enough food, clothing or medications, his brothers and sisters died one after another. Later, his parents also died of disease. Finally, only two members of his family were still alive: Dam Pheng and his elder sister. Dam Pheng was about seven or eight years old and his sister was a teenager. The two became orphans without anyone to depend on. His sister was adopted by one of the villagers, while he was adopted by a monk. Dam Pheng then lived at a pagoda where he studied literature and mathematics.

Although young, Dam Pheng was clever, industrious, meticulous and punctual. As a result, all the monks were sympathetic toward him. After completing elementary school, the monks sent Dam Pheng to Saravoan pagoda to pursue his studies in Phnom Penh. He entered the sixth grade at Youkunthor High School.

Dam Pheng had to deal with all of his study expenses on his own because the colonial, feudal, and capitalist state did not support industrious students. They only indoctrinated the youths with oppressive ideology. They adopted strict rules whereby the children of poor peasants could not go to school; only their own children could. Therefore, Dam Pheng and other poor youths who wished to pursue education were forced to sell their labor to the feudalists and capitalist during their school breaks so they could afford school materials, clothing and food.

During the daytime, Dam Pheng went to school; at night, he sold bread or peddled a *cyclo* (tricycle) to support himself. During the long national holiday and school vacations, he worked at a construction site, carrying cement or bricks to get extra money. Studying and working to support his life made Dam Pheng tired both physically and mentally. Exhaustion, lack of food, and insufficient sleep made it difficult for students to earn a diploma or baccalaureate certificate, and their physical health worsen. Some students developed tuberculosis, or became mentally dysfunctional, and others became very weak physically.

In 1960, a revolutionary body then known as the “Youth Alliance of Democratic Kampuchea” was established. Under the leadership of the revolutionary organization (Angkar) of Kampuchea, an enthusiastic student movement began to emerge in Phnom Penh. Dam Pheng became a member of this revolutionary youth organization in 1961. After that, he was educated politically and mentally by the Angkar. He grew up quickly in terms of his physical body, intellectual ideas, political stance, and consciousness under the instruction and support of the Angkar. He started to have a clear vision. The countless hardships of the people under the severe suppression of the imperialists, feudalists, and capitalists became clear. Through this, he understood the reasons behind the suffering of his family and relatives who lost their lives or became separated from each other, and their current hardships. In addition, he saw the danger facing his country – US interference and invasion. Along

the border, the blood of the Cambodian people, male and female, old and young, was shed every day by the US invasion and its entourage – Saigon and Bangkok – both on land and by air.

The beloved motherland calling for the younger generations to stand up to protect [Cambodia's] territory came into the pure and young heart of Dam Pheng and all other Cambodian youths. Dam Pheng began to look at himself and found that it was useless for him to spend time, physical strength, intellect, and his youth to earn a degree, position, and fortune because all of that wouldn't benefit the people. In contrast, such knowledge and understanding served the imperialists, feudalists, and capitalists in suppressing, exploiting, and killing the people.

Through the education and explanatory propaganda provided by the Angkar, Dam Pheng as well as other youths woke up just in time -- for the country was appealing for their help. He then shifted the course of his action to one that would serve the country, people, and poor peasants. He became a role model in regards to sacrifice and solidarity unity amongst the revolutionary youth movements in Phnom Penh because of his gentle attitude, patriotism particularly towards the poor, willingness to sacrifice his personal interests for the shared cause, and absolute stance against the Imperialists and the oppressors as well as against all obstacles both small and large. In Youkunthor High School as well as other high schools and secondary schools in Phnom Penh, Dam Pheng got on well with all other youths. Because of his gentle attitude, understanding, and helpfulness toward others in the areas of study and daily life, he gained the appreciation of other youths.

In late 1963 and early 1964, the Imperialist US and her entourage – Saigon and Bangkok – strongly threatened Cambodia's independence, neutrality and sovereignty. Cambodia was facing the danger of a military coup staged by the Imperialist US dogs with Lon Nol and his cronies as permanent leaders. However, the leaders at that time compromised with the Imperialist US and her entourage in return for peace, regardless of the fact the country had become a slave. Therefore, Revolutionary Youth of Kampuchea, in the name of Cambodia's representative and protecting the interest of the country and Cambodian people as a whole, led Cambodian youths nationwide to struggle using all possible means against the Imperialist US and her entourage – Saigon and Bangkok – and forced and lobbied the leaders not to surrender. Under the leadership of the Angkar, Dam Pheng engaged with the youth circles in Phnom Penh, carried out educational propaganda and unmasked the tricks and crimes committed by the Imperialist US and her entourage – Saigon and Bangkok – which attempted to slay Cambodia's independence, peace, and sovereignty. Dam Pheng courageously mobilized youth movements and led them in struggling enthusiastically against the Imperialist US and her entourage. Acts carried out by the movements included distributing leaflets, demonstrating, rioting, and meeting.

Because Cambodian youths, under the clever leadership of the Revolutionary Youths of Kampuchea, struggled strongly and enthusiastically across the country, the then-leaders were forced to reject the poisonous aid from the Imperialist US in November 1963. This was a tremendous victory of Cambodian people and youths under the great leadership of the revolutionary organization (Angkar) of Kampuchea. And it was such a shameful loss of the Imperialist US and its lackey. With its fascist and stubborn nature, the Imperialist US and her entourage were using black tricks, one after another, in an attempt to kill Cambodia's independence, peace, and sovereignty.

In accordance with the January 1964 instruction from the Angkar, Dam Pheng engaged in mobilizing and leading student movements to organize demonstrations, riots, and meetings at *Veal Maen*, in front of the Royal Palace, and the National Assembly. These actions were done in order to unmask the plots and criminal acts of the Imperialist US and her entourage, who attempted to kill the independence, peace and neutrality of Cambodia. These acts condemned the interference, invasion, and bombing destroying villages, property, crops, and killing innocent people, female, male, young, and old along the border everyday. In addition, the struggle was demanding that the then-leaders cut off diplomatic relations with the Imperialist US and her entourage. However, not only did those reactionary leaders refuse to take into account the people and youths' suggestions, but they also increased their investigations, arrests, and murders threatening the security of the patriotic youths.

Although his personal security was threatened all the time, Dam Pheng continued his revolutionary acts in propagandizing, organizing students, mobilizing, and leading struggle movements in the city. Youth struggle movements in the form of riots, demonstrations, and meetings against the Imperialist US and her entourage were continuously established in secondary schools, high schools and universities in Phnom Penh.

In March 1964, a mass demonstration, staged by youths and other people, particularly workers in Phnom Penh, under the leadership of the Angkar was held in the middle of Phnom Penh, destroying the embassy of the Imperialist US. This was our great victory, which became famous all across Cambodia and the world, while the Imperialist US and its entourage were badly embarrassed.

After this famous demonstration, the leaders once again continued to increase their investigations, threats, and arrests of compatriots. At the same time, our youths' struggle movements sprang up in Phnom Penh, provinces, and provincial towns all over the country. The Angkar appealed to a number of cadres and revolutionary youths to quit school and secretly lead and manage the youth and student movements that were emerging dramatically. At the time, Dam Pheng was studying in grade 2 [baccalaureate] at Youkunthor High School. In response to an appeal by

Angkar, he was gladly willing to give up his education in late 1964 and act secretly under the instructions of the Angkar. Seeing his courage, fighting and sacrificing consciousness, and absolute stance, Angkar promoted Dam Pheng to secretary of the Yuvakok [Youth] Alliance in Phnom Penh. Even in the position as secretary, Dam Pheng still maintained his gentle attitude towards friends and people, and was holding a strong grudge against the Imperialist US, her entourage, and the reactionary leaders. Although he was in a room, unable to move freely as when he was a student, he was not stressed or unhappy with his new lifestyle. On the contrary, he tried to study harder, build and train himself in order to build and strengthen his political stance and consciousness. In the meantime, he tried to understand the instructions given by Angkar in order to improve and strengthen the leadership of youth movements.

Youth movements in Phnom Penh as well as those all over the country grew strong quickly. Movements struggling against the Imperialist US and her entourage, under the leadership of the revolutionary Angkar were growing bigger and bigger all over the country. Voices raised against the US demanding that diplomatic relations with the US be cut off were growing louder and louder, which made the US and her entourage become very concerned in the face of the struggle movements of people and youths. The then-leaders were also concerned and tried all means, both hot and cold, to calm down this national anger. However, this anger would not recede and became stronger and stronger, forcing the leaders to cut off diplomatic relations with the US and her entourage in April 1964. This was another victory that was also famous all over the world.

The Imperialist US and her entourage suffered an embarrassing failure in Cambodia. They then secretly tried poisonous tricks together with reactionary countries in order to destroy all patriotic movements all over Cambodia. For that reason, in late 1966, the gruesome fascist National Assembly was established in Phnom Penh under the instruction of the CIA. Soon after that, this National Assembly appointed Lon Nol as the Prime Minister, as instructed directly by the Imperialist US. This was a coup d'état staged by the Imperialist US, her entourage and Lon Nolists in order to gain control over Cambodia for the first time.

As soon as it was formed, this traitorous government began to cause trouble, large-scale persecution, and suppression of innocent people and compatriots. In March 1967 they waged a civil war in Battambang province under the command of the US. However, the courageous and clever revolutionary Angkar frantically mobilized political struggle movements to cope with [that strike] and destroy the enemy's criminal plot. Particularly in early May 1967, a huge struggle movement of youths in Phnom Penh, close to the enemy's machinery, successfully unmasked and destroyed such plots planned by the US, her entourage and the traitors, Lon Nol, Sirik Matak, Soeng Ngoc Thanh and In Tam, and as a result the traitorous

government and Lon Nol in particular failed suddenly in May 1967. The US Imperialist and her entourage suffered another embarrassing failure in Cambodia. The reactionary leaders, under the orders of the US, tried more tricks in order to calm the sparks of national and class anger. They would move on to destroy the whole patriotic revolutionary force.

They began actively applying the politics of fascism, starvation, and the formation of gangs among people in the city, countryside, and remote areas. Revolutionary organizations led by Cambodian youths were formed to fight bravely against the three criminal policies of the enemy; hence the enemy could not achieve their black plans.

In early 1968, the enemy provoked internal war again in order to destroy the revolutionary forces and our patriotic movement. But on the contrary, under the brilliant and pure leadership of the revolution, people began to fight an internal war against the US imperialists and their cliques. The movement spread quickly from one province to another which vigorously fought the enemy. Throughout Phnom Penh, the revolutionary organization convinced and guided the political struggle movement by all means, publicly, semi-publicly, and secretly. The enemy, which wanted to defeat us in a short time, then fell into difficulty in terms of force, policy and economics. Because of this, they only sought to ultimately politicize fascism by completely destroying, arresting, and killing all sort of people without trial.

In Phnom Penh the enemy also attacked on a large scale, day and night. Even the situation in Phnom Penh was difficult, and Dam Pheng and his friends risked their lives to serve in Phnom Penh; they struggled against all obstacles to complete their appointed tasks. In August 1968, while completing his tasks, he was arrested. The Imperialist lackey had no doubts about arresting Dam Pheng since they knew him well when he was a student at Youkunthor High School. They did not need to ask any further questions; instead, they wanted to destroy the senior leadership.

Therefore, they brought him to be tortured physically and mentally in order to obtain, extract information and an important confession. He was not fearful of being severely tortured by the enemy. Instead, "his revolutionary life was finished, but other friends continued raising the flag to destroy the enemy and finally we succeeded... So comrade died in the name of revolutionary and patriotic youth. This means that he died well and honorably. Comrade did not die as a traitor or coward. He was determined to fight until his final breath." Thinking in that way, he kept his firm stance to attack the enemy in all ways. He bravely entered the torture room. His two eyes stared at the murderer in an extremely hateful manner. When he was first questioned, he angrily replied that "You are traitors and servants of the US imperials, and we are patriotic and Salvationist, and the liberators of people from the US's invasion and exploitation. This is a clear difference between you and me! So I have

nothing to say to you! You can do to me whatever you want. No need to ask me!" After this, he spit on them and stopped talking. The enemy atrociously tortured him for three days and three nights. He did not shout. Every day, he was hit until he became unconscious many times. Every time, he awoke and always condemned the US interference in Cambodia's independence, peace, and neutrality; he also slammed Lon Nol, Sirik Matak, Soeng Ngoc Thanh, and In Tam who supported the US Imperialists to damage and kill our country. He was only quiet when he was unconscious.

The enemy did not know what to do as he was tortured using all means, but they could not get his confession. Then, they used cold methods. They promised to bring him a girl; and they promised to send him abroad to France or the USA if he gave them the names and locations of our senior leaders. Confronted with this cold method, he bravely condemned, unmasked, and attacked the enemy -- making them run out of ideas in dealing with him.

The enemy used both cold and hot methods, but they still could not get answers; then they used a final hot method. Since he had been arrested, the enemy did not put him with other prisoners. He was put in a small dark cell. After several days, his body was damaged, but his soul was still solid. He walked through other prisoners' cells to be tortured. Other youth who knew his background looked at him. He was very tired and almost could not walk, but he was strong when he saw the other arrested youths looking at him with worry. He raised his two hands up and shouted "Bravo prosperous Kampuchean revolution! Bravo brave Cambodians! The Kampuchean revolution will absolutely win! Defeat the US Imperialists and their clique!" At that time, there was shouting from all cells. Then, he smiled at the other youths to reassure them that he would be fine and told them to continue to fight the enemy.

One night after being severely torturing, Dam Pheng was unconscious. The enemy brought him back to his dark cell. When he awoke, he coughed and blood came out. He was sure that he would not live, so he tried to stand against the wall and wrote a poem with his fresh blood on the wall.

"Red heart, I care for you and educate you every day for the valuable revolution, the poor, and the peasants.

This time, Cambodians need my heart urgently to deal with heavy suffering, which (I) a Cambodian child, happily sacrifice."

He expressed his pure and deep sentiment to the revolutionary organization, the people, and the poor who he respected, served and loved more than his life.

The next morning, Dam Pheng died in his cell for the sake of defending and liberating people from the imperialists and suffering.

The enemy could hit his body and even end his life, but they could not destroy his absolute consciousness. With his absolute stance of struggle, though the enemy possessed the modern weapons of fascists, the enemy still lost. But Comrade Dam Pheng won! He died in the name of attackers and winners, and won forever! Other tens of thousands of youth determined to raise the fighting flag just like Dam Pheng will finally liberate Cambodia totally. This is our victory of the revolution and the Cambodian people, but it is also a great victory of Dam Pheng and all other youths who died on the battlefield.

Dam Pheng's life was a life of struggle; he struggled until his final breath. He took the absolute stance of struggle without fear of difficulty and death, and always fought against the enemy in any circumstance even when he was arrested. This is the stance of a revolutionary man who was living honorably, died bravely, and ultimately well.

The End.