

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

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Life after DK – Exploring the History of Pailin Laura Summers

I wish to begin by thanking the Ministry of Education and the Documentation Center of Cambodia for inviting me to participate in this important teacher training program. It is honor for me to be included in a program which has so many distinguished Cambodian and international historians and also to be involved in the modernization of history teaching.

It is also a challenge! Most of my scholarly research focuses on the years from 1940 up to 1979. Some articles focus only on the Sangkum period or the period of Democratic Kampuchea (DK).¹ Researching succeeding political regimes since 1945 has made me very conscious of the weight of the past on each succeeding “present” and I am increasingly conscious of the many kinds of histories that scholars produce: political history, social history, economic history, national history, local history, world history, cultural history and so on. Most of the time, I approach political history from a national level of analysis or perspective. This is also the approach used in *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*.²

Today, and as a training exercise, I wish to propose that we—all of us collectively—adopt a different approach and attempt to examine history from a provincial or local level of analysis. Our documents will be a collection of photographs taken in and around Pailin in April 1992. The idea for this experiment with visual documents comes from Khamboly Dy’s book.³ The DK “administrative” zones (*phumipheak*) described in chapter five emerged slowly and gradually during the 1970-75 war as the National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK) raised its army. Initially, the zones were a collection of military regions or sectors (*tambon*). After April 1975, they were amalgamated and became zones of control, defense and surveillance. Many wartime commanders were also communist party secretaries or deputy party secretaries in the zones, sectors, districts or co-ops. Provincial governments are normally responsible for many public services, including schools, policing, courts and hospitals. By sweeping aside state and provincial government

¹ For examples, see Laura Summers and Justin Corfield, *Historical Dictionary of Cambodia*, 2nd Ed. Oxford: Scarecrow Press, forthcoming, or Laura Summers, “The Sources of Economic Grievance in Sihanouk’s Cambodia,” *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 14:1 (1986) 16-33 and “The CPK: Secret Vanguard of Pol Pot’s Revolution,” *Journal of Communist Studies* 3:2 (1987) 4-18.

² Khamboly Dy, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*. Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2007.

³ *Ibid.* Pp.24-28.

and empowering the army, Democratic Kampuchea instituted a regime of military control and surveillance.

Similarly, the key elements of the DK economy—co-operatives, food rationing, sacrificing for the front lines—were in place by the end of 1973. The use of money was forbidden in some localities in 1974 and a failed siege of Kampong Cham triggered the forced evacuation of some towns in the same year. By 1975, the “base” people were intensely suspicious and hostile towards the “new” people. The suffering that flowed from this unplanned class struggle within the Khmer nation undermined confidence in the communist revolution. In this war-torn context, the appearance in 1976 of a draft four-year plan of DK, hastily discussed and then ignored seems to have been a concession to a minority of leading CPK cadres who believed planning was both essential and possible.⁴ Planning is not just a matter of setting targets that people must meet. In socialist economies, the state directs carefully measured capital resources into agriculture, industry, transport and public health. It then calculates how much food will or can be produced on the basis of the inputs (e.g. land, seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, gasoline), manpower hours worked, likely yields per hectare, and transport capacity (essential for *distributing* the resources and for collecting, processing, redistributing or trading the output). State planning in DK was mediocre but hunger was the result of political discrimination against new people and “depositees” in the rationing system, the mismanagement of agriculture and industry and inadequate attention to health. The deaths resulting from the combined effects of exhaustion, disease and starvation greatly exceed the deaths arising from the violent purges, massacres and border battles.

The history of Pailin from 1992 to 1996 is very interesting because we can observe how divisions within the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK) begin to recognize and to deal with the problems of inadequate government and war economy. The story begins in early 1992 when the NADK reoccupies a deserted city and is ordered to transform it into a “capital” for the use of the Prince, Head of State, and other officials of the National Government of Kampuchea (1990-1993). Pailin was also visited by a delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross and by United Nations officials in early 1992. Outsiders had started to view Pailin as an important, political center even though it was only a military zone and a municipality without people.

[POWERPOINT PHOTOS start here.]

PHOTO 1 (Chantaburi Road Map): Pailin is identified as a “city” just beyond the Chantaburi provincial border. The other province has no name. The map does not say that the other province is Battambang province or that Battambang province is a province in the State of Cambodia (SOC). Nationalists beware! This road map was produced by a Thai hotel near the border. Its existence does not reflect any plan by the state of Thailand to annex Battambang province for the third time. Employees of the hotel said that they supported transforming “battlefields into marketplaces.”

⁴ See David Chandler, Chanthou Boua and Ben Kiernan, editors and translators. *Pol Pot Plans for the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977*. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies Council Monograph No. 33, 1988.

They knew that the NADK controlled Pailin. They did not realize that Pailin had no people.

PHOTO 2 (Pailin in ruins A): Pailin was occupied by the NADK soon after the Vietnamese evacuated from the town in 1989. The SOC army recaptured the town and held it briefly but the NADK recaptured it in late 1991. The DK army had started to assign damaged houses to the families of soldiers and planned to settle 3,000 troops and their families there but the city at only a few hundred residents on April 10, 1992. There was no market and no civilian authority.

PHOTO 3 (Pailin in ruins B): Most houses were in ruins, almost uninhabitable. Soldier families were repairing the houses. NADK commanders told me that providing materials to repairs the damaged houses cost less than building new houses. (They had done their planning and budgeting.) We can see that this house is occupied because soldiers have made a clothesline and hung out their laundry. Notice that all of the doors, door frames and the timbers from windows are missing from the damaged houses.

PHOTO 4 (Pailin in runs C): In these three houses, we can see that families are clearing out the rubble and debris. In the house that has a roof, someone is sleeping in a hammock. There is a new tile floor and at least one child here—we can see the tiny shoes out front. The other two houses have no roof and no floors but there is a cooking pot and cooking fire. We can also see the laundry hanging out to dry. We can see into the houses because once again all of the doors, door frames and window frames are missing

PHOTO 5 (Hillside bunker): The missing timbers have been used to build reinforced, earthen bunkers. This bunker was located on Phnom Yat, to side and back of Wat Phnom Yat, the old and very beautiful kola temple.

PHOTO 6 (Wat Phnom Yat from behind): The bunker was located at the back of the temple looking out over the scrubland, plateau and rolling hills. The Vietnamese built it during their occupation of Pailin in the 1980s.

PHOTO 7 (Wat Phnom Yat A): This side of the temple was not damaged.

PHOTO 8 (Wat Phnom Yat B): This side of the temple was damaged a little bit. Most of the rubble here was from a small building next to the temple, not the main temple which has delicate wall paintings inside. This damage was blamed on “Vietnamese” rocket fire. The NADK claimed they had never fired on the temple or the hilltop. They also believed a spirit protected the temple and the town when THEY were attacking it.

PHOTO 9 (Wat Phnom Yat C): The first leg of the long, uphill staircase was in need of restoration but was not damaged.

PHOTO 10 (Wat Phnom Yat D): The second leg of the staircase had taken a direct hit of some kind. Although the NADK had orders not to fire on the temple at the top of the hill or to return any fire coming from the top of the hill, an artillery bunker had been built alongside and underneath this part of the stairway. They claimed they spotted fire from the bunker several times but when they carefully aimed and tried to return fire, their guns would not fire. But immediately after “the victory” they found the damage. They went to Wat Phnom Yat to take pictures to commemorate the victory but found their cameras would not work. They blamed the spirit. After a few days had passed, they found they could once again take photographs. They saw this as a sign that some sort of reconciliation had been achieved between themselves and the spirit of Phnom Yat.

PHOTO 11 (Wat Phnom Yat E): The main sanctuary suffered no war damage. The wall paintings inside have suffered some damage from damp and water.

PHOTO 12 (Wat Phnom Yat F): This photo is posed. The *barang* had been told by friends in Phnom Penh that Wat Phnom Yat had been destroyed by the NADK when they recaptured the city. The *barang* had also been told that the NADK gave Thai companies permission to dig for gems on Phnom Yat and that the hill had been bulldozed to the ground. These top commanders posed with the *barang* to demonstrate that the temple was still there and that they were protecting the national heritage in Pailin. All cameras worked properly on that day.

PHOTO 13 (Phnom Yat G): The Prince, Head of State and leader of the National Government of Kampuchea (1990-1993) had visited Pailin and received foreign ambassadors there. To receive the Prince properly, Pailin had to be prepared. It had to look like a proper city and it needed to acquire some of the insignia of a capital city. For two weeks and working 24 hours a day, 3,000 soldiers with bulldozers and other construction equipment cleaned up the war damage and other rubbish from ruined houses. Some delicate restoration work near the roadside entrance of Wat Phnom Yat was postponed, but all the pieces were saved for the experts.

PHOTO 14 (Pailin city center, 10 April 1992): The blue and white flag that is flying is the flag of Kampuchea, formerly Democratic Kampuchea. It has a white map of Cambodia on a blue field. There is no Angkor Wat. It is the first state flag in modern Cambodian history to omit Angkor. It replaced the Democratic Kampuchea flag (1976-90) which had a golden Angkor with three towers. Please notice the beautiful landscaping and the carefully laid out, tiled footpaths around the flagpole. This shows us that Pailin is a proper civic center like many others.

PHOTO 15 (Sihanouk’s House): The flagpole and garden are located in front of this beautiful, modern house. The house was freshly painted and redecorated before the visit of the Prince, Head of State. The furniture for the house was rented for one week, all of it coming from the house of a Thai General. The furniture was described as “very beautiful.” (The Thai General’s wife was unhappy but agreed to the deal in

the end.) Until February 1992, this house was the headquarters of the NADK General Staff (*Etat-Major*). Both Son Sen and Ta Mok had worked in this building.

PHOTO 16 (The UNTAC House): Close to the former General Staff building, the NADK had prepared a house for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). The advance mission of UNTAC had visited once or twice but the headquarters is not yet in full use. Please notice that this building seems to have new electrical wiring and there is a new, poured concrete entrance.

PHOTO 17 (Downtown Pailin): The transformation of Pailin from a battle zone into a civic center also involved the widening and smoothing of many city streets. The house on the right was described as privately owned. It was being refurbished as a hotel with three rooms and a ground floor café. The corner shop on the left sold soup (*kuy-tiew*). The only other shop was a small pharmacy.

PHOTO 18 (The old cinema): This magnificent old cinema was not in use but because it was downtown where all the important visitors to Pailin would see it, it was cleaned up and repainted.

PHOTO 19 (The checkpoint): There was one clear sign that Pailin was still the headquarters for an army and not yet a municipality or a province. These two men guarded the checkpoint that Yasushi Akashi claimed prevented him from entering the city. Please notice the National Government arm bands.

PHOTO 20 (The helipad): The NADK had built a helipad together with a large reception hall so as to receive distinguished visitors, especially the ambassadors received by Head of State Sihanouk. The delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross had come by car, a 10 hour journey from Battambang city.

PHOTO 21 (The Ford tractor): Some of the construction equipment owned by the NADK and used in the refurbishment of Pailin was still around. This tractor was described as "very expensive." It is parked temporarily. Disks for leveling plowed fields are attached at the back.

PHOTO 22 (The sand pit): Children play in this sand pit but it is clear that the sand will soon be made into cement. The man in the back, maybe the dad, was clearly part of the army team responsible for Pailin sewage and water works.

PHOTO 23 (The pig): This large pig, a breeding sow, did her best to clean up rubbish from a side street. Pailin also had black chickens roaming freely. One family had a dog, maybe for hunting. It trailed me when I took an early morning walk. A woman ordered her husband to "follow the dog following the *barang*" because it was their dog.

PHOTO 24 (The coffee plantation warehouse): In the 1960s, Pailin was famous for its commercial fruit orchards and its coffee plantation. The plantation was in ruins in

1992. The Vietnamese army occupied Pailin from January 1980 until October 1989 and used the coffee plantation warehouse as their western arms depot. The shell casings are empty.

PHOTO 25 (Coffee processing): The drying area and the equipment used for processing coffee and a large water tower had been left to rust. In this photo, NADK cadres survey the waste. The equipment was too old to be of any use, they said. They had no plans to restore the plantation or to use the plantation land in the near future. They said mines had been laid all around this area to protect the arms depot.

PHOTO 26 (Beef cattle): Pailin had no markets and no running water. All food was brought in. Water was carried in from a well on the perimeter of town, in buckets. The NADK purchased cattle on the hoof in Thailand. This herd would be consumed during the celebration of Khmer New Year just a couple of days later.

PHOTO 27 (New houses and farms A): Families wanting to farm rather than live in town received land grants (2 hectares) and assistance in building new houses. This was part of a plan to produce rice and other food. This was the first planting season.

PHOTO 28 (New Houses and farms B): Some of the new settlers were demobilized soldiers. Others were former prisoners of war who had married local women or the widows of fallen NADK soldiers. Local women took food to the men when they were prisoners.

PHOTO 29 (Wat Mondul): Wat Mondul is the principal Mohanikay Buddhist temple in Pailin. It is an enormous and richly ornate temple. Monks were said to be returning to work and study there (but not one monk was in view). Some women and old people were there to prepare for New Year celebrations. One person said that he thought the monks would reopen a school. One of the NADK commanders said they had not yet agreed on plans for a school. He seemed to prefer a "state" school (but there was no municipal government and no state school system in his Kampuchea).

PHOTO 30 (All weather roads): Roads into and around the city were all being upgraded to all-weather roads. This one had been built by Thai companies in part exchange for access to gem mining areas. No money changed hands in these infrastructure deals. The costing was done in Thai baht.

PHOTO 31 (The "Vietnamese" tank): This tank was put out of action during the 1980s. It had been pushed out of the way off one of the main roads to Thailand. There was a ceasefire, it was useless and no one wanted to display it in the city.

PHOTO 32 (The bird on a globe): This dove or white pigeon with a letter in its beak sits on a replica globe of the world in a small park in the city center of Pailin. It is clearly internationalist. Nobody could explain to me who had put it there or when. It was just there. The commanders said it belonged to Pailin, and so it had a place there and would be kept.

Concluding remarks:

For the NADK, life after Democratic Kampuchea officially began in 1990 when the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea became the National Government of Kampuchea. Their economy was of necessity liberalized when Chinese aid ended (in 1990). After the signing of the Paris Conference accords, a large number of unexpected political demands were placed on the NADK-Pailin commanders who had decided to rebuild the city and to create a more productive local economy. Revenue from the gem mines was “not enough.” The mine clearing equipment cost “too much.” All food was imported; food had to be produced. NADK-Pailin planned as early as 1992 to create corporately owned private enterprises i.e. companies owned by the NADK but with independent, professional management. There was talk of building an electricity generating station and of forming a power company. Field generators were “too expensive” and too noisy for living in a city. Creating a power company would also facilitate the transfer of military skills into industrial development.

When NADK-Pailin was asked in 1996 to renationalize private property including the new farms, renovated houses and privately owned bicycles, the army rebelled. Ieng Sary assumed leadership of a mutiny which involved between 20-30,000 people. There were already reports in early 1992 that he had advocated the formation of a new political party and that he was politically marginalized because of this. As early as 1981, Ieng Sary had claimed the DK “... cannot repeat the policies of 1975-1978.” He was known to be managing the budget in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The Democratic National Union Movement formed in 1996 swiftly installed a civilian municipal government in Pailin. The municipality was recognized by the Kingdom of Cambodia and acquired the status of a province in 1997. The local histories that have been or will be written of Pailin will probably focus on the days before the mutiny and the weeks of failed negotiations with Anlong Veng which followed it. I think historians should not overlook the transformations in political awareness and economic organization in the four years before the mutiny. As Pailin was rebuilt and reorganized, NADK-Pailin acquired a sense of pride in their city. Although conditions were difficult, many families gained a better life. I don't know if there was a plan but there was thoughtful planning, budgeting and management of a kind that armies do not usually attempt. Pailin today continues to have many developmental problems but in spite of this, its history demonstrates lived reconciliation with the past, the built environment and the nation.